UNIVERSITY TO WORK IN THE UAE: GRADUATE IDENTITY PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

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This study explored the employability behaviours, experiences and outcomes of Emirati graduates as they transitioned from education to work through the lens of graduate identity. A main aim was to gain insights into issues related to localisation of the UAE work force by examining subjective understandings of graduate employability and the interactions of these with the socio-cultural and labour market context. The study drew on conceptualisations of graduate identity as socially constructed, emergent and underpinning the behaviours of graduates and their employability. The study takes a qualitative approach and made particular use of Holmes' (2001) claim-affirmation model of emergent graduate identity as a framework through which to study employability in a non-Western cultural context and to facilitate a deeper examination of the processes leading to different transition outcomes. Five main themes emerged from the data on how the Emirati graduates in the study conceptualised their graduate identity and five specific employability, or claiming and warranting, strategies were identified from examination of their transition experiences. The emergent identity trajectories experienced by the participants in the study were grouped into four main patterns: direct, progressive, arrested, and non-starter. The link between graduate identity and national identity that emerged from the study was explored as well as the gendered nature of the identity positions adopted by the participants. The processes of resolving tensions arising from these identity links were found to be important in understanding the employability behaviours and outcomes of the study participants. The study contributes to understandings of higher education to work transitions in non-Western contexts and supports positional and processual models of employability. It also offers a fresh perspective on graduate employability issues in the UAE, in the context of workforce localisation.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1. Introduction

This is a study into how Emirati graduates conceptualise and manage their employability as they transition from higher education into the workforce, using graduate identity as a framework to explore the ways in which they engage with and experience the labour market and investigate the employment outcomes they achieve. An important aim of the study is to provide insights into some of the challenges being faced in the process of workforce localisation in the UAE, known as 'Emiratisation' and also to inform understandings of the influence of socio-cultural and labour market contexts on graduate identity and the social construction of graduate employability in the UAE.

Since most studies on the topic of employability have taken place in Western countries, the study is useful in developing knowledge of how the concept may be applied in other settings. Unlike many studies into employability which focus on notions of graduate skills and attributes, here the focus is on subjective understandings and social processes underlying the employability strategies, experiences and outcomes of Emirati graduates. Adopting a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews to elicit their transition narratives, I first explore the meanings and understandings that Emirati university graduates attach to their graduate status and compare these to employers' conceptualisations of graduate identity. I then examine the routes into work experienced by the graduates, in terms of graduate identity trajectories (Holmes, 2001), and the ways in which they manage their graduate identity, in relation to their employability, as they transition from higher education into the labour market.

In this introductory chapter, I briefly explain the contextual background to the study, the practical issues that it addresses, and its significance. I then outline the conceptual framework, research questions and methodology used in the study. Lastly, I set out the structure of the thesis.

2.Background to the study

This study grew from a desire to undertake research through which to deepen current understandings of graduate employability in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and a dissatisfaction with the dominant 'skills approach' to this both in the UAE and in the West. Issues related to graduate employability are prominent in the UAE as the country faces the challenges of integrating its young nationals into an expatriate dominated workforce. However, research into these issues has been limited and has largely failed to move discussions forward or provide solutions (Kijo, 2011).

By looking at employability through the lens of graduate identity, my study examines the transitions from education to work in the early career period of Emirati graduates. The transition from education to work is seen as a key stage in the lives of young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Jones, 2009) and while there is a body of research stretching back over several decades (Rudd, 1997) in the West, this important transition and early career period has been largely ignored as a research focus in the UAE. The notion of employability has received more attention in the UAE, mostly with respect to graduate skills and attributes and choice of university major (CF Barhem et al, 2008; Forstenlechner et al, 2012; Gallacher et al, 2010), but research based on sociological understandings of young people's employability choices, experiences, and outcomes is very sparse.

Linked to notions of a knowledge-driven economy, more protean, boundaryless careers and individualized life courses (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Brown and Hesketh, 2004), the concept of *employability* has taken centre stage in understandings of the encounters of young people with the labour market as they leave higher education and similarly functions as a key concept in my study. However, while there has been a heavy focus on notions of employability "skills" and "attributes" in models such as that proposed by Hillaje and Pollard (1998), I draw on other models which have attempted to explain differing employment outcomes among young people with similar educational backgrounds in terms of social processes and have highlighted the subjective and relative aspects of employability. In seeking deeper understandings of the employability strategies and lived experiences of young Emirati university graduates during their transitions from education to work, my research approach was initially

inspired by Brown and Hesketh's work on the social construction of employability, and ideal typology of graduates' approaches to their own employability (Brown et al, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004). Later, I draw heavily on Holmes' emergent graduate identity framework (Holmes, 2001; 2013), and espouse the view expressed by Tomlinson (2013: 133) that 'identities constructed around work and career underpin future action orientations and the ways in which they personally and actively mediate the wider economic context'. In taking this approach my aim is for this study to contribute to discussions around how Emirati graduates should be prepared for and supported through their transitions into the workforce and to move discussions of workforce Emiratisation forward through better understanding of the social processes involved.

3. Context of the Study

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a young nation with a local population of less than a million (UAE Yearbook, 2013). Formed in 1971, the UAE has experienced remarkable growth and development since its foundation, based largely on oil revenues (Vine, 2010) and facilitated by a large expatriate work force making up to eighty per cent of the population. Within the space of a few decades, the labour market and the education system have changed out of all recognition. In 1971, for example, only forty-six UAE nationals held degrees, obtained from universities abroad, and as late as 1980 half of men in the UAE were illiterate (Kirkwood et al, 1995). However, only thirty years later, in 2010, over thirteen thousand young Emiratis, of whom approximately sixty per cent were women, took up places in higher education (Vine, 2010) and it is estimated that fifteen to twenty thousand young Emiratis are entering the work force each year (Al Abed et al, 2008). With this shift in labour market demographics and policy, issues relating to the employment, underemployment, and unemployment of young nationals, have been receiving increasing attention.

One issue that has been central to these discussions is the reluctance of young Emiratis to take up employment in the private sector. The public sector has been a traditional destination for many young Emiratis (also referred to as UAE nationals); however, with this sector becoming increasingly saturated (Vine, 2010), there has

been increasing emphasis on preparing and encouraging young people to take up employment in the private sector, and the introduction of localization policies and programmes known under the umbrella term 'Emiratisation'. There have been challenges to this and Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, has acknowledged that there are 'many complications connected with social, economic and technological considerations that affect the placement of nationals seeking employment' (Vine, 2010:164). It has been suggested that these include a reluctance to enter the private sector, choosing to remain unemployed when expectations are not met in terms of salary and status, and high turnover rates of Emiratis within organisations (Vine 2010). Many young Emiratis show resistance to working in the private sector, citing inconvenient working hours, lower salaries and negative stereotyping of UAE nationals as reasons for this (Vine, 2010; ICOSD, 2010). In 2010, a survey found that fifty-six per cent of young Emirati males and fifteen per cent of young Emirati females were unemployed by choice (ICOSD; 2010). Reasons proposed for high turnover include a lack of career progression and career paths, lack of mentoring within organizations and cultural insensitivity from non-Emirati colleagues (ICOSD, 2010).

A further important issue related to localization of the workforce in the UAE is the low participation of Emirati women (Samulewicz et al, 2012; Marzouqi and Forster, 2011; Randaree, 2009). Although Emirati women considerably outnumber young men in tertiary education (UNDP, 2009; Hausmann et al, 2011), their labour force participation is only 28 per cent. This is problematic in two ways. First, since the UAE government provides free tertiary-level education, it is an enormous investment for the country with low economic return; and second, it has been shown that women's participation in the labour force is an important factor in national development (Hausmann et al, 2011).

4. Rationale for the Study

The social change taking place in the UAE has been described as a move from a Gemeinschaft society, where social life and work are interconnected through personal relationships largely based on family and birth position and life is lived 'according to a limited range of consensual norms that are shared and understood by others in the

society' (Whiteoak et al, 2006:78), to a Gesellschaft society where work, family and education are more clearly delineated and separated (Whiteoak et al, 2006:78). Within this context of profound social change, young Emiratis are faced with numerous challenges in making the transition from education into the work force; social frameworks are strained, traditional values are questioned, and Emiratis feel isolated from their economy (Al-Ali, 2008: 365).

However, research in the area is scarce. Themes in the sparse literature which does exist include a comparison of the Islamic Work Ethic and Protestant Work Ethic (Ali, 1988), research into the continued role of 'wasta', a type of social capital particular to the Middle East (Whiteoak, et al, 2006; Wilkins, 2001), comparisons of values between students and employers (Simadi, 2006; Pech, 2009; Gallacher et al, 2010) and a typology of female managers' careers (Omair, 2009). These studies are discussed in Chapter Two of the literature review. However, as will be seen in the literature review, there are still enormous gaps in our knowledge about the experiences and understandings of young Emirati graduates transitioning to work and about the processes and factors affecting their labour market outcomes.

My study, therefore, has several aims. My first aim is to understand how graduate identity is socially constructed in the UAE and specifically to gain insights into the meanings that Emirati graduates attach to their graduate status, conceptualised as graduate identity. My second aim is, through the lens of graduate identity, to investigate the graduates' actions, experiences and outcomes with respect to their employability as they transition to work; and my third aim is to examine the interplay of graduate identity and culture in order to understand the influence of the cultural and labour market context on the UAE graduates' employability strategies, lived experiences of the labour market and employment outcomes. In order to achieve these aims, I use a graduate identity framework as a means of gaining understanding into issues of graduate employability in the context of workforce localisation (known as Emiratisation), and to provide a stimulus and direction through which to move discussions on these issues forwards. I study graduates in particular because they are a sector of the UAE population that receives considerable investment from the government in terms of their higher education and because of the high number young Emiratis who enter higher education every year, comprising a significant proportion of the population (Vine, 2010). Furthermore, although Emiratisation includes all Emiratis,

it seems to be aimed particularly at the younger generation who make up the majority of unemployed UAE nationals (UAE Yearbook, 2013).

5.Contribution of the study

My study, therefore, provides revealing insights into UAE graduates' subjective experiences of managing their graduate identity and employability as they interact with the labour market and contributes to discussions about the nature of graduate identity and its relationship to employability, specifically to graduate employability in contexts other than Western labour markets. In undertaking a 'testing out' of Holmes' (2001) model of emergent graduate identity as a framework for investigating and understanding UAE graduates' employability behaviour as they transition from education to work, the findings provide depth to Holmes' model and support the use of emergent graduate identity as concept through which to examine the interaction of structure and agency in the employability processes and outcomes of graduates.

The study is significant in that it focuses on a non-Western context in a field where existing research has been largely limited to developed, Western nations. It addresses a paucity of research into what happens when higher education systems and employment selection processes developed in the West are imported into non-western cultural contexts. It also addresses a lack of research into the role of culture and cultural context in employability experiences and outcomes. In this respect, the study responds to, and supports, the suggestion that graduates' may understand and manage their employability differently in different national labour market contexts (Tomlinson, 2012: 408), influenced by values, beliefs and understandings that prevail in the locality (Tomlinson, 2012, Brown and Hesketh, 2004). Importantly, the study is also an addition to the very sparse local literature in this area and serves to inform practitioners and decision-makers in higher education in the UAE, and selection and training units of organisations recruiting Emirati graduates. The study comprises a significant reconceptualization of and understanding of some of the issues and challenges of Emiratisation.

6. Conceptual Framework

On the basis of the aims outlined above, two key research questions were formulated:

1. How is Emirati graduate identity, as it relates to employment, conceptualized and understood by UAE graduates and employers?
2. How do Emirati graduates manage their graduate identity, as it relates to employment, in their transition from education into the labour market?

Implicit in both of these questions is an examination of the ways in which their graduate identity, related to their employability, interacts with the socio-cultural and labour market context. The first of the questions focuses on exploring the meanings that young Emirati graduates construct around their status as graduates. What does it mean to them to be a university graduate? What is the value to them of the credential? What other elements are present in their conceptualisations of graduate identity? Although the primary focus is on the ways in which Emirati graduates conceptualise their graduate identity, data was also sought from employers in order to compare and identify any mismatches and differences of understanding. The second question is concerned with the ways in which they manage their graduate identity in their interactions with the labour market, in terms of their employability strategies, and how they experience their transition trajectories and outcomes. Holmes' model of emergent graduate identity (Holmes, 2001) has not been widely used in empirical studies. However, the proposition underlying my study is that graduate identity, and Holmes' model in particular, could provide a useful concept for seeking insights into graduate employability and transitions from education to work in the UAE. The conceptual framework adopted in order to achieve the aims of the study and address the research questions is now introduced.

Studies investigating employability beyond lists of skills and attributes provided the initial theoretical impetus for this study. In particular, Brown and Hesketh's research into graduates' approaches to their employability and of employers' ways of evaluating graduate job seekers (Brown and Hesketh, 2004) supported a view of employability that goes beyond the skills and attributes 'possession' approach (Holmes, 2013), and explored employment outcomes in terms of cultural capital and positional conflict theory. Brown et al (2003) and Brown and Hesketh (2004) provided evidence to

suggest that employability is not only relative but also subjective and that study of the subjective dimensions of employability could provide useful data to understand the processes involved in transitioning to work and entering the labour market. Leonard Holmes (2001) model of emergent graduate identities modalities provides a framework for understanding the interaction processes involved in graduate-employer encounters. Particularly useful for this study is the conceptualisation of employability as graduate identity and the notion that graduates *claim* and try to *warrant* their graduate identity to employers, who then affirm or disaffirm the claim by awarding or not awarding a graduate-level position. Holmes' work (2001, 2013) on emergent graduate identity modalities is further illustrative of a growing recognition in employability research of the subjective dimension of employability (Brown *et al*, 2003) and an understanding that young people's work-related identities and dispositions 'derive from wider aspects of their educational and cultural biographies, and these exercise some substantial influence on their propensities towards future employment' (Tomlinson, 2012: 422).

The ultimate overarching framework of graduate identity as a possible way to bring together the different approaches to employability and to act as a lens through which to investigate graduate employability and transitions to work in the UAE draws on constructivist and interactionist models of identity. These understandings of graduate identity underpin the methodological approach to the study, which is now introduced in the next section.

7. Methodology

The methodology employed in the study in order to answer the research questions is a qualitative, ethnographic approach drawing on multiple case study design features. This design was chosen to facilitate in-depth exploration of 'a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context' (Yin, 1994:13) where the phenomenon is graduate employability behaviour in the UAE. The main method of data collection was interviews with young Emirati graduates and with recruiters/selectors from organisations employing Emirati graduates. The participants included twelve Emirati higher education graduates and representatives from five organisations in the UAE that employ Emirati graduates. An episodic-type interview format (Flick, 2009) was used to elicit both narrative accounts of the participants' graduate identities (Lawler, 2014;

LaPointe, 2010) and lived experiences and also semantic knowledge of the issues under examination, specifically those related to Emiratisation. The interviews were carried out face-to-face, by telephone and by email. The process consisted of one main interview for each participant, preceded and followed by email correspondence as deemed necessary. A largely inductive approach was applied to analysis of the data, drawing on constructivist grounded theory techniques (Charmaz, 2003) and thematic analysis, and using theoretical concepts drawn from the literature on identity and employability to make comparisons across cases. The study draws on and is derived from extensive literatures in the fields of transitions to work and employability which are discussed in the next two chapters.

8. Thesis Outline

In this chapter I have outlined the genesis of this study and provided background information about graduate employability issues in the UAE. I have also set out my research questions and the aims of the study, and introduced the conceptual framework employed. The study, its findings and its significance is presented over the next six chapters. Immediately following this introduction, there are two literature review chapters which first explore the literature on transitions from education to work and then on employability. Chapter Two introduces the approach taken to the review and then focuses on the literature on issues of higher education, work and employability in the UAE, with particular attention to the labour market context of Emiratisation. This is followed by a review of the literature on transitions from education to work in the West, and a consideration of the insights that this offers into the UAE situation. The following chapter, Chapter Three, then focuses on the notion of employability and discusses the three main theoretical approaches, all of which contribute to this study through the unifying concept of graduate identity. Chapter Four contains a detailed account of the research methodology used in the study, including the qualitative approach and multiple case study-type design, data collection and analysis, ethical issues and the approach taken to ensuring rigour in the research process. The research participants are also introduced in this chapter. Following this, the findings are presented, also in two chapters. In Chapter Five themes emerging from the study with respect to meanings and understandings of graduate identity on the part of the graduate participants and

employers are outlined and discussed; then in Chapter Six the graduates' employability strategies, experiences and outcomes as they transitioned to work are analysed using an emergent graduate identity framework (Holmes, 2001). Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter, reviews the study, discusses the relevance, implications and contribution of the findings, and lays out an agenda for further research in this area.

CHAPTER TWO

Transitions from Education to 'Emiratisation"

1. Introduction

This study seeks to gain insights into the employability strategies and behaviours, experiences and outcomes of Emirati university graduates as they transition from higher education to into the workforce within the socio-cultural and labour market contexts of the UAE. In order to do this, the concept of graduate identity is used as a lens through which to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which the actions of Emirati graduates are linked to their wider socio-cultural and economic context. The discourse on graduate identity is mapped onto shifting perspectives on transitions from education to work where the notion of employability has become a dominant factor in understanding the links between education and work, and the labour market experiences of young people. Approaches to graduate employability which focus primarily on skills and attributes are critiqued as being ideologically loaded (Brown et al, 2003) and the concept of graduate identity (Tomlinson, 2010; Holmes, 2001) is posited as a useful framework for exploring socially sensitive accounts of graduate transitions from education to work in the UAE.

The purpose of this literature review is to explore understandings of education to work transitions in the existing literature, to evaluate the extent and limitations of current knowledge, and to assess the potential usefulness of different approaches in order to develop the conceptual framework of the study. Searching and reviewing the literature was an iterative process which continued throughout the study. However, there were two main stages of search and review: first, prior to designing the study and collecting the data; and then during the data analysis and writing up of the findings and conclusions. The initial literature search and review was undertaken with the purpose of gaining a thorough overview of the field and existing knowledge pertinent to the planned study (Booth et al, 2012) while in the later stages of the study the literature was reviewed in order to compare particular findings emerging from the data with those from previous studies and to explore and evaluate how the emerging findings supported and could be explained by existing theory. Relevant literature was identified by means

of Boolian searches, by perusing major disciplinary journals and by a snowball approach of following up references in key articles. Articles and books were selected for consideration based on number of citations, source of reference, relevance to the topic based on key words provided, content according to the abstract, reputation of the author, and date of publication. Relevancy criteria varied throughout the study due to emerging needs; however, cultural relevance, age of study participants, education level and career stage were among the criteria used. Refworks software and Excel were used for citation management

The literature review is presented in two chapters (Two and Three) which are structured around the key concepts framing the study, specifically transitions from education to work, and employability, and outlining the theoretical relevance of identity in both. Chapter Two comprises four sections including this introductory section. The second section explores issues of education, work and identity in the UAE with an examination of the limited scholarly work that has been undertaken there and a particular focus on issues of workforce localization, known as Emiratisation. In the following section, themes and perspectives in the Western and international literature on transitions from education to work are discussed, and the approaches taken to understanding and explaining the social factors influencing the experiences, choices, and outcomes of young people making this important transition are critically explored. The role of identity in accounts attempting to integrate the influences of both social structure and agency is highlighted. The final section then explores how the research, concepts and theories discussed in the chapter relate to this study of Emirati graduates.

Chapter Three addresses the literature on employability, particularly graduate employability, and also contains four sections. After a general introduction to the concept of employability, the first main section discusses the limitations of the dominant 'graduate skills' or 'possession approach' (Holmes, 2013) to employability. This is then followed in the second and third sections with an examination of approaches which problematize the graduate skills agenda and propose models of employability that attempt to account for differences in graduates' experiences and outcomes, and facilitate analysis of power inequalities, of relativities, and of subjective understandings of the concept. In the second section 'positional' and conflict approaches (Brown et al, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004) are considered; and the third section concentrates on the emergent graduate identity or 'processual' approach

advocated by Leonard Holmes (2001; 2013), in which employability is conceptualised as emergent graduate identity, constructed and managed in interaction with the labour market. The chapter concludes with an application of the conceptual framework drawn from the literature to the research questions addressed in my study.

The main review of the literature now begins in the next section which examines research into issues of higher education, work and identity in the UAE. It should be noted here that, as mentioned by a number of researchers (Barhem, Saleh and Yousef, 2008; Rutledge, 2009; Al-Jenaibi, 2010; Randaree, 2009), the academic literature on employability issues in the UAE is sparse and fragmented, with data difficult to obtain and often contradictory. Furthermore, the literature that is available tends to focus mainly at the descriptive level with limited attempts to theorise the employability behaviour of young Emiratis. In terms of the literature reviewed, this means that although the focus of my study is specifically on education to work transitions and employability behaviour in the UAE, given the lack of specific research in this area, the range of topics considered in the review of the UAE literature is quite broad. However, despite the limitations, several themes and issues can be identified in the literature which can contribute to understanding the socio-cultural and labour market context existing in the UAE.

2. The UAE: higher education and graduate employability in the context of Emiratisation

Chapter One introduced some of the socio-historical and economic characteristics of the UAE which over a period of several decades has transformed itself from a group of emirates relying on small scale agriculture, fishing, pearl diving and trade, through a period during which it was dominated by the oil and gas industry (UAE Yearbook, 2013), to where it is now diversifying its economic base, looking forward to a post-oil economy and positioning itself as a progressive, modern nation on the world stage. Over a period of four decades, working practices and careers available to Emiratis have changed out of all recognition. Much as the labour market has changed, so have the educational opportunities available to Emiratis, with the exponential growth of federal higher education which is free to all UAE nationals. Emirati women have been the main

beneficiaries of this, comprising 70% of higher education students (UAE Yearbook, 2013).

However, while reaching outwards and moving forwards, community leaders in the UAE have also taken care to nurture a strong sense of national pride among the Emirati population and to stress the continued importance of traditional socio-cultural and religious norms. As a Muslim country, religion pervades all areas of Emirati life with modes of dress (the traditional black abayas and hair covering shaylas for women and white dishdasha with headdress for men) and gender segregation being two of the most obvious manifestations of this. Emirati society is generally classified as a collective society (Hofstede, 2001) with large, extended families being the norm and, according to Davidson (2008) tribal affiliations still play an important role in social relations and career opportunities.

A major feature of the UAE workforce, in common with other oil-rich Gulf states is the high proportion of expatriate workers. With some variations between Emirates, expatriates are estimated to comprise around eighty per cent of the overall labour force in the UAE (UAE Yearbook 2013), brought in to provide the labour and expertise necessary for the rapid development of the nation. Since the 1990s, however, localization of the work force has increasingly been a priority of the government, and 'Emiratisation', as policies and strategies related to this are termed, has become a fundamental issue in graduate employability. As noted by a number of researchers (Barhem, et al, 2008; Rutledge et al, 2009; Al-Jenaibi, 2010; Randaree, 2009), the academic literature on employability issues in the UAE limited. However, the following section critically examines the sparse literature on Emiratisation and related issues that does exist and makes the case for several research problems addressed in my study.

- Emiratisation Challenges

As suggested above, and outlined in Chapter One, the term 'Emiratisation' is used to refer to a number of policies and strategies which aim to privilege Emiratis in the competition for employment and enhance their participation in the workforce. These policies include imposing quotas for numbers of Emiratis employed, reserving

particular professions for Emiratis (for example, HR managers), and the provision of careers advising and placement services for Emiratis (Al-Ali, 2008; Forstenlechner et al, 2012). Although Emiratisation is a popular topic in the local media, academic studies on the topic are few and suffer from a lack of clear, agreed upon definition or conceptualization of the term and of its characteristics and as Koji (2011) asserts, discussions around the issues appear to have gone on for decades with little progress or development.

Godwin (2006:8) offers a definition of Emiratisation as 'an affirmative action quota driven employment policy that ensures UAE nationals are given employment opportunities in the private sector'. However, this is a rather narrow description and a broader perspective has been taken by other scholars. Tracing the history and evolution of workforce nationalisation in the UAE, Koji (2011) notes that discussions around Emiratisation have focused on three main elements: the economy; the attributes of Emirati workers; and issues of labour force supply and demand. Similarly, Forstenlechner, et al (2012), identify three main aims which correspond somewhat to Koji's elements: first, an aim to reduce dependence on the oil industry sector (economy); second, an overhaul of the education sector to better serve the labour market (attributes); and lastly, labour market interventions to increase nationalisation (labour force supply and demand). Emiratisation, therefore, is highly implicated in the approaches to state higher education and the higher education experiences of Emirati students, as well as their employment opportunities and experiences.

It is the second and third of these elements and aims that have been most debated and, therefore, concern my study. Challenges to increased nationalisation which have been identified in the literature include a reluctance on the part of Emiratis to take up employment in the private sector, and high turnover of those who do; low participation of Emirati women in the workforce; and the phenomenon of Emiratis choosing to remain unemployed rather than accept employment not meeting their expectations (Vine, 2010; ICOSD, 2010; Gallant and Pounder, 2008). Explanations offered for these challenges tend to focus on one of three main areas: structural barriers; a mismatch between the skills and attributes of Emirati job seekers and the needs of employers (linked to the education system); and factors related to culture.

- Structural Barriers

Focusing on structural factors, Koji (2011) argues that the rigid social structure existing in the UAE and the inconsistencies of Emiratisation policies are largely to blame for the failings of Emiratisation, noting that both the state and the family provide safety nets to UAE nationals meaning that they do not have to fear unemployment and suggesting that the social structure is also involved in forming both the 'work ethics' and 'vocational preferences' of Emiratis, and the 'economic gap between the government sector and the private sector' (Koji, 2011:48). Al-Ali (2008) highlights the ways in which private sector companies are structured and suggests that they are less able to offer a nurturing environment to young Emirati workers in the same way that many government and semi-government organisations do.

Al-Ali (2008) is one of the few researchers into Emiratisation issues to problematize some of the dominant themes. Defining Emiratisation as a 'focused social capital program', and using the concept of *social capital* as a framework, he focuses on notions of trust, gender and nepotism to explain the difficulties of Emiratising the private sector in particular. According to Al-Ali (2008), employers indicated a lack of trust in the work readiness of young Emiratis, leading to a reluctance to employ them. Further barriers were what he terms 'traditionalist' view of gender and the system of 'wasta' (nepotism) which meant that employment was not merit-based and unsuitable candidates were often placed in positions due to their social connections, confirming and perpetuating perceptions of inadequate preparation of Emirati workers. Importantly, Al-Ali (2008) also found that many Emirati women were only willing to work in the public sector and if this kind of employment was not available, they preferred to remain unemployed. However, he also reports on the strategies of HR managers to enhance employment of UAE nationals, which included offering higher compensation, better opportunities for career advancement, professional development and the creation of a work environment supportive of traditional values and norms.

- Skills and Attributes

In a survey of HR managers, Al-Ali (2008) reported that respondents cited personal attribute barriers to Emirati workforce participation including deficits in training, skills

and experience, along with poor motivation and communication skills, although it was noted that university graduates are more likely to find suitable employment than those holding lower level qualifications (Al-Ali, 2008). Barhem et al (2008), required business leaders to rank the employability skills that they valued. Top rated skills included the ability to: work in a team, motivate and energise people, work effectively in upper management, think and act strategically, act effectively under time pressure, provide leadership, think critically and creatively, appreciate, understand and leverage diversity, communicate orally, and act responsibly. Although useful, their study does not attempt to explore areas of mismatch between these highly rated skills and those offered by graduates.

Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2010) also explore issues related to Emiratisation in some depth, using the concept of stereotyping. Rees et al (2007) suggest that nationalisation programs in the Gulf have been instrumental in the emergence of negative stereotypes of nationals and evidence of this was found by Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2010). In a survey of Emirati and ex-patriate employees, they found evidence of stereotyping of Emiratis among expatriates and internalized negative stereotyping among Emiratis themselves with respect to their skills, competencies and cultural disposition to work. Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2010) draw on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and self-categorisation theory (Turner, 1999), to suggest that this stereotyping serves as a simplified way of making judgements about others and may cause Emiratis not to be evaluated as individuals, as employees or as co-workers. Surveying employers on factors influencing their willingness to hire Emiratis, Forstenlechner et al (2012) found that social, cultural, regulatory and motivational factors all correlated negatively with willingness to employ and only education was found to have a positive influence. An interesting finding of Forstenlechner et al's study (2012) was that employers who were UAE nationals themselves expressed their reluctance to recruit fellow nationals to positions that they felt were beneath their social status. Also addressing the issue of stereotyping, Abdulla (2010) suggests that negative stereotyping cannot be eliminated and should, instead, be replaced by creating new positive stereotypes. She views this as largely the responsibility of schools. Abdulla (2010) suggests that negative stereotypes can hinder national development by undermining the motivation and achievements of young Emiratis. Research on potential negative consequences of affirmative action programs elsewhere confirms that a possible danger of leaving negative perceptions of

Emirati workers unchallenged is the development of negative self perceptions and disincentivization to acquire skills (Resendez, 2002; Loury, 1992; Holzer and Neumark, 2000). It is clear, therefore, that further research of a qualitative nature is needed in order to gain deeper insights into deepen our understandings of the employability needs and perceptions of both employers and Emirati job seekers. My study addresses this important need.

- Culture

The third area on which researchers have focused with respect to Emiratisation and the participation of UAE nationals in the workforce is cultural context. Several cultural factors have been investigated but the aspect of UAE culture that has probably received the most attention is that of gender. Specific gender-related factors identified as influencing female participation in the labour market in the UAE have included role expectations and an avoidance of careers requiring high commitment, traditional views on the suitability of specific careers for women, the notion of risk to a woman's reputation by coming into contact with men, and the notion that a man's reputation may be harmed if his wife or daughter works.

The literature suggests that traditional cultural norms govern women's behaviour in the UAE in several ways that influence their employability. Metcalf (2006), for example, points to the system of gender segregation, which prevails in the UAE, as restricting deployment, training and promotion opportunities for Emirati women. Al-Jenaibi (2010) explains this by the cultural notion of women as 'keepers of morality' notes a prevailing unease about mixed gender work environments, while Gallant and Pounder (2008) speculate that women who are too highly educated may be difficult to control. The letter claim, however, seems to be contradicted by the high participation of Emirati women in higher education. According to Al-Jenaibi (2010) women must make a show of their religiosity and there is a fear of Western influence on their behaviour. Hashim (1999) notes that in Islam men and women are seen as equal but different and the gender regime in the UAE assigns women to caring for the household and the children while men are assigned the role of breadwinner (Omair, 2005; Neal et al, 2005; Mostafa, 2005; Hashim, 1999). According to Gallant and Pounder (2008), this results in a reluctance by women to consider careers requiring high commitment. Based on her

reflections of seven years teaching at a women's university in the UAE and discussions with her students there, Bristol-Rhys (2008) highlighted some of the dilemmas faced by female Emirati graduates. While many of them felt daunted by the prospect emerging from an all-female university environment into a mixed gender environment, some of them faced the prospects of restrictions on their working lives placed by their families. They also described the necessity to protect their reputation at all times and explained that they could never argue with a male colleague, for example, for fear that he would take offence and, in revenge, deliberately besmirch her reputation (Bristol-Rhys, 2008). Gallant and Pounder (2008)

Another way in which gender influences the employability of Emirati women, according to the UAE literature, is in the educational and vocational choices available to and made by them. For example, investigating the lack of Emirati women choosing a career in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths) fields, Samulewicz et al (2012) found that factors included a lack of role models and awareness of the field, resistance from families who were against their female family members working in a mixed gender environment and a preference for working in the public sector while many of the STEM career opportunities were in the private sector (Samulewicz, Vidcan and Aswad, 2012) Despite this, in the same study, STEM fields were viewed as having a high social status, being creative and challenging, and offering good opportunities for employment with high remuneration. The study of education as a subject at university has been found to be strongly favoured by Emirati women, although it is often chosen not for its worth in employability terms but rather for the social status conferred (Gallacher et al, 2010, Rutledge et al, 2011). Al-Harthi (2011), suggests that education is considered to be a socially appropriate career for a woman and offers the opportunity to work close to the home (Al-Harthi, 2011). In general, studies have shown a preference for art and social science subjects in the UAE (A-Misnad, 1985; Abdelkarim, 1999; Muysken and Nour, 2006), while according to Gallacher et al (2010) business as a subject also has highly elevated status in students' minds and is considered the best major for employability prospects and jobs (Gallacher et al, 2010). Kemp et al (2013) suggest that Emirati women have made more gains towards equality in educational achievements than in employment and that subject choice and a narrow range of acceptable occupations tends to limit their employment opportunities.

A further finding from Gallacher et al's (2010) study was the influence of the family on the choice of major among the female university students studied. Family is further implied as a factor in career positioning through the influence of another cultural factor which is the existence of 'wasta', or nepotism, in which family name and tribal affiliation imparts social status and privilege (Godwin, 2006; Al-Ali, 2008). This was highlighted in Al-Ali's (2008), study discussed earlier, and is illustrated in small qualitative study of the careers of women managers in the UAE by Omair (2009). Omair proposes a typology of progressive, moderate, facilitated and idealistic careers, and suggests that social status, family connections and themes of safety, respectability and philanthropy play a role in the career development of women managers. The 'facilitated' careers in Omair's study referred to women who worked as managers in family owned companies. As well as highlighting the continuing influence of 'wasta', Whiteoak et al (2006) make the interesting observation that Emiratis seem to be broadening their loyalties from their families to include their work. The role of the family in Emirati culture is clearly important and its role in employability and transitions from education to work is an under-researched area. My study aims to address this by examining the role of the participants' families in the construction and management of their graduate identities as it emerges from their transition narratives.

As well as providing 'wasta' and facilitating the careers of Emirati women, the role of the family has been implicated in the development of attitudes and dispositions towards work (Koji, 2011) such as notion of a 'work ethic'. One of the criticisms aimed at Emirati workers is their apparent lack of 'work ethic'. Whiteoak, Crawford and Mapstone (2006) investigated this using the notion of the Islamic Work Ethic, which is rooted in the teachings of Sharia (Ali, 1988), and Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions of *individualism* and *collectivism* to look at generational and gender differences. Their findings suggested that UAE nationals adhere to the Islamic Work Ethic as an ideal, if not always in practice. Other findings were that younger nationals appeared to demonstrate higher levels of individualism than older nationals, while at the same time viewing 'wasta' (operationalised in their study as 'both the act and the person who mediates or intercedes on the behalf of another party or parties' (Whiteoak et al, 2006:80) as more important than the older generation. Williams (2002) similarly found that students at an HEI in the UAE took an individualistic view of career progression but found that they stressed personal disposition, attitudes and characteristics as key

factors, rather than 'wasta'. These issues are both investigated in my study through examination of Emirati graduates' narratives of their education to work transitions.

Cultural values have also been examined as being potentially useful as explanatory factors in the work behaviours of Emiratis. Simadi (2006) investigated the values of UAE university students in a quantitative study, finding that they considered culture, success and aspiration highly important, and smartness, achievement, technology and discovering of lower importance. In value domains, the religious domain was the first priority. Interestingly, the economic values domain was the least priority. This clearly raises the question of how these apparently incompatible values influence the attitudes and behaviours of Emirati workers and how they are perceived by employers. How, for example, do Emiratis reconcile the value of success with the lack of value assigned to smartness or achievement? Possibly through the continuing influence of nepotism or 'wasta'. Again, this is an area my study aims to explore through the use of the concept of graduate identity as socially constructed, contingent and emergent.

Pech (2009) suggests that discussions of values should be included in education and training of young Emiratis, claiming that 'At the moment, a considerable contingent of Emirates [sic] who want to work are confronted by disparate values, cultures, work habits and English language issues that congeal into a form of alienation in which they feel abandoned, perhaps even discarded in the maelstrom of the UAE's rush towards achieving economic prowess.' (Pech, 2009:60). Pech (2009) called on education and training in the UAE to assist students in consciously aligning their values to employability and suggested that since students do not necessarily automatically do this, and may not be capable of doing this, educators and trainers should intervene. My study aims to provide insights to help facilitate such discussions and interventions.

In summary, challenges to Emiratisation identified in the literature include an apparent reluctance on the part of young Emiratis to enter the private sector, low participation of Emirati women in the work force, and negative perceptions of Emiratis on the part of employers. Culture, in the form of gender, values, and nepotism, has been found to be a factor in the kinds of employments that are considered appropriate for Emiratis, and particularly Emirati women, in the choice of subjects studied in higher education, the ways in which employment is attained, and in feelings of 'alienation' in the labour market. As we have seen in the discussion of the UAE literature, while university

students have been studied and employers have been surveyed, the transition experiences of graduates entering the labour market have been largely ignored. As my study aims to address this deficit, I, now examine the literature from the West on transitions from education to work, in order to explore approaches, themes and concepts which may be illuminating in the UAE context, and in order to locate my study within the current body of knowledge in this field.

3. Education to Work Transitions Elsewhere: perspectives, themes and debates

My study focuses on a particular transition in the lives of the participants; specifically the transition from higher education to post graduate employment in their early career years. I focus on this transition in part because although education to work transitions have been a major focus of research in the UK and other Western countries, it is an area that has not been studied at all in the UAE. Furthermore, although Emiratisation includes all Emiratis, it seems to be aimed particularly at the younger generation, who make up the majority of unemployed UAE nationals (UAE Yearbook, 2013). In this section, therefore, I critically examine some of the perspectives and themes found in the literature on education to work transitions in the West. Principal among these are studies of routes into work and concerns about whether or not these have changed over time, and differing perspectives on the relative influence of structure and agency in young people's education to work transition experiences and outcomes. Key approaches and concepts are explored in order to build an appropriate and useful conceptual framework through which to investigate the behaviours, experiences and outcomes of Emirati graduates making this important transition.

- *Social Reproduction to Individualisation*

In the Western literature on education to work transitions there seems to be some consensus that over several decades, the focus of scholarly work has moved from the socialization model and focus on social reproduction, through to an increasing emphasis on agency and interaction between structure and agency, and on the notions of individualization, risk, and identity (Rudd, 1997; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Furlong, 2007; Jones, 2009, Tomlinson, 2013). According to Evans and Furlong (1997) this has been reflected in changes in the metaphors used to refer to the routes into work

experienced by young people. The term *niches* was used in the 1960s which became *pathways* in the 1970s and *trajectories* in the 1990s (Evans and Furlong, 1997). Most recently, the term of choice has been *navigation,* suggesting greater choice, agency and individualization in the transition (Evans and Furlong, 1997).

For much of the twentieth century, economies based on large scale manufacturing industry were associated with the notion of linear, highly predictable school to work transitions where young people largely followed in their parents' footsteps on career trajectories that were prescribed and clearly assigned according to socio-economic class (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Baumann and Vecchi, 2004; Rudd, 1997). Influential studies in the UK by Ashton and Field (1976) and Paul Willis (1977) provided strong evidence and illustration of socialization processes. Ashton and Field (1976) identified three main routes into work in the United Kingdom (UK) for which young people were apparently prepared by anticipatory socialization. Young people who embarked upon a *careerless* route usually left school at the minimum age, with no or minimal qualifications and entered jobs which provided immediate income but with few or no opportunities for further development. The *short career* route required a slightly higher level of training, such as an apprenticeship, and offered some opportunity for development but this was fairly limited with peak earning potential quickly realized. *Extended careers* were for those who stayed on in post-compulsory education and entered a career in which they would progress according to the experience, knowledge and skills they achieved. The concept of socialization was used by sociologists to understand and explain how social institutions such as the family and educational entities inculcate certain values and customs in young people and prepare them for particular occupations and workplace roles, thus reproducing social structures and inequalities through successive generations (Rudd, 1997). Willis' (1977) seminal work on socialization was an ethnographic study of how working class boys in the UK became accustomed to the idea of and prepared for jobs in manual labour.

In a later study, using a life course perspective, Evans and Heinz (1993) undertook a longitudinal comparative examination of transition biographies of young people entering the workforce from VET (Vocational Education and Training). They usefully identified four types of what they termed 'transition action' and four 'passages' to employment experienced by the participants in their study. The transition actions were:

strategic, step-by-step, wait and see, and taking chances; and the passages to employment were categorised as: progressive, upward drift, stagnant trajectory, and repaired trajectory. They proposed the concept of 'self socialization' to describe the ways in which the participants learned to manage and respond to the challenges of their transitions, influenced by the social resources available to them and their BAOs (Biographical Action Orientations). Their BAOs were categorised as: optimising career, company identification, and personal autonomy. Walther and Plug (2007), reviewing the evidence for individualisation of education to work transitions and drawing on data from a range of sources, suggest slightly adapted versions of Evans and Heinz (1993) transition patterns. They found that large numbers of young people still made what they called 'smooth' transitions from education to work that were continuous and predictable. However, alternative patterns included 'institutionally repaired transitions' in which young people needed to undertake further training or retraining of some kind of compensatory measures due to interruptions in their transitions. Young people who followed non-standard routes into work by seeking further education or becoming self-employed, for example, were classified as making 'alternative' transitions, while those taking temporary or precarious jobs or becoming unemployed were said to experience 'stagnant' transitions. A few individuals also make 'downward' transitions to employment of lesser status than their parents as a result of difficult life events and circumstances (Walther and Plug, 2007). Studying education to work transition patterns offers a way to view social change and a way of framing the differences in labour market entry experiences and outcomes experienced by young people. The education to work transition patterns of Emirati graduates have not been studied to date and this is one area that my study aims to address.

The studies by Evans and Heinz (1993) and Walther and Plug (2007) were temporally and theoretically located in a different environment from those by Willis (1977) and Ashton and Field (1976). At the time of the later studies, a major challenge to approaches focusing on socialisation and social reproduction had arisen in the form of the individualisation thesis which holds that in this period of late, or 'liquid' modernity (Beck , 1992), the forces of socialization have weakened and social changes have led to greater individualization of life experiences (Beck, 1992). According to the individualization thesis, individuals are now less constrained by social structures such as class, family, marriage and occupation and are being forced into agency and self-

determination (Giddens (Beck 1992, Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Dawson, 2012) Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2006). According to Bauman (2000a), this is due to a societal transition from producer capitalism to consumer capitalism, while Beck (1992) attributes the change to the way the modern welfare state is structured, and Giddens refers to increased individual knowledge and reflexivity (Giddens, 1991). Du Bois-Reymond (2009) suggests that new technologies are acting as a driving force transforming traditional societies into risk societies. According to Du Bois-Reymond (2009) the rapid development and deployment of new technologies is causing structural changes, increasing heterogeneity and changing attitudes to time, all of which contribute to increased individualization.

Although Beck, Bauman and Giddens approach individualization from different perspectives and attribute different causes and processes, their versions of individualization commonly propose that it is characterized by choice and reflexivity in identity formation and a reassigning of social and political issues to the level of the individual (Dawson, 2012). When the individualization thesis is applied to education to work transitions, it is claimed that young people no longer have prescribed pathways into work and are forced to 'navigate' their own way through the transition (Evans and Furlong, 1997; Furlong, 2007) or design their own lives (Guichard, 2009: 251), unconstrained by traditional social structures such as class, race and gender (Cieslik and Pollock, 2002).

As Shanahan (2000) argues, empirical investigation of individualization is difficult as it would require time sequenced analysis of transition indicators over time starting in the middle of the last century (Shanahan, 2000: 671). However, Goodwin and O'Connor (2003) have challenged the claim that education to work transitions have become more individualized over time, not by arguing that transitions now are not individualized but by arguing that they have never been standardized. By undertaking secondary analysis of data from a large scale study undertaken in Leicester in the 1960s, they found data suggesting that young people's routes from education into the workforce were never as straightforward and pre-determined as claimed. Many of the young people who participated in the study had made at least one job move in the early years of employment, and for many of them the preparation for the transition had been somewhat ad hoc 'largely dependent on the whims of the teachers, schools and unemployment officers' (Goodwin and O'Connor, 2003a:15). Furthermore, rather than

following directly in the footsteps of family members or friends, approximately half of the respondents had no family members or friends in a similar occupation. In the UAE there is no doubt that considerable social change has taken place over the last few decades. However, the notion of routes into work becoming de-standardised through a process of individualisation is problematic in the UAE context since no 'standard' pathways have been previously established. As the UAE has never been industrialised and large scale manufacturing has never formed a significant portion of its economy, mass school to work transitions have never featured in its labour market. Furthermore, since higher education has only been available in recent decades, careers have not been historically associated with particular categories of society. Hence one of the aims of my study is to examine the employment routes and destinations experienced by Emirati graduates.

On a theoretical level, as Brannen and Nilsen (2005) note, the individualization thesis tends to over-emphasize agency and downplay the continuing influence of social structures on the nature of young people's education to work transitions. In particular, the availability of resources, with which individuals can design their lives, is ignored (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005). Therefore, although research provides support for non-standard, or individualised, transitions from education to work, as will now be discussed, there is also substantial evidence in the education to work literature suggesting the continued influence of social structures on the processes and outcomes of young people's labour market entries.

- The continuing influence of social structures on education to work transitions

In the extreme view of individualization, social categories such as race, class, gender are no longer considered meaningful and become zombie categories (Dawson, 2012). However, studies have continued to provide sound evidence of the continued salience of these categories and of the socialization processes inherent in reproducing them. Family background, for example, has been associated with different youth employment outcomes. Banks et al (1992) brought together data from ethnographic studies of young people in vocational training and claim the findings show clear evidence of socialization processes at work and of the existence of *career trajectories.* They

suggested that 'cultural preparation' in the form of allocation of domestic duties and oppression within the family 'orientated them in the direction of working class, gender-stereotyped jobs' (Banks et al, 1992:9) and that the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) in Britain acted as a mechanism of social reproduction with the trainees 'constructing a subjective career trajectory, socializing themselves into becoming labourers' (Banks et al, 1992:13). Anyadyke-Danes and McVicar's (2003) longitudinal study of career paths and clusters found a strong correspondence between certain individual characteristics, family background and environment and the likelihood of experiencing unemployment. These included difficulties with maths at age 10, parental characteristics and environment. Looking at social predictors for unsuccessful entry into the labour market, Ek et al (2005) found evidence that occupational socialization starts in early childhood. Their findings suggested that by watching and listening to their parents, children learn about the world of work. They found that by the age of 7 or 8 children can report on their parents' level of job satisfaction, for example, and that in particular, the attitude of the mother was found to be important for men. Similarly, ter Bogt, Raajmakers and van Wel (2005) found a correlation in work ethic between mothers and their children but not with fathers. In particular, they found that lower educated parents working in less flexible environments tend to prepare their children according to their own experiences with the children being less self-directed as a result. They suggest that the children of middle class, educated parents tend to be more self-directed with parental aspirations influencing their children's expected employment outcomes and choice of occupation (ter Bogt, Raajmakers and can Wel, 2005:424).

Other studies have confirmed the continuing influence of socialization and social structures but also found evidence of perceptions of personal agency among young people undertaking the transition from education to work. For example, Rudd and Evans (1998) found in their study of students in vocational education that their respondents demonstrated feelings of control and stressed their personal agency in their perceptions of their employment prospects. However, the authors caution that the students could have been '"socialized into" a belief in choice' (Rudd and Evans, 1998:57). Similarly, a study by Roberts (2006) aiming to gain insight into the effects of major economic and labour market changes, involved 1800 young people in the former USSR and produced mixed findings. Roberts found that while individuals believe that

under the new system they are in control of their working lives, in fact, old structures have been replaced by new, although less obvious, ones (Roberts, 2006). Gender was found to be the most reliable predictor of career pathways, with family background and education having less predictive salience. However, Roberts cautioned that 'Weakened links between family and educational backgrounds on the one hand, and labour market achievements on the other hand, are consistent (but not necessarily proof of) young people's own agency gaining in strength in directing their career development.' (Roberts, 2006: .425).

Undertaken at a time when the notion of individualization was becoming influential, Evans and Heinz (1994) study, described earlier, belongs to a body of work in which the focus of scholars has been to develop understandings of how context and social structures frame and restrict the processes of transition navigation and choices in the education to work transition (Furlong, 2009 Indeed they also offer the concepts of 'active individualisation' to describe agentic occupational choices, and 'passive individualisation' where decisions are delayed or individuals lack a clear sense of transition destination (Evans and Heinz, 1994). Heinz (2009) also offers the concept of *self-socialization* to explain the integration of agency and opportunity contexts in training and employment. Another way of conceptualizing the structure-agency relationship is suggested by Roberts (2009) in his *opportunity structure theory*.Taking a clearly structuralist position and emphasizing social reproduction, Roberts (2006; 2009) argues that young people are forced into exercising agency within existing opportunity structures and that individualization is itself a form of structure (Roberts, 2009:362). Drawing on Goldthorpe's Rational Action Theory, which posits that actors behave rationally according to their personal circumstances and the cultural context, Roberts (2009) developed *opportunity structure theory* to explain how education to work transitions are accomplished. According to Roberts (2009), opportunity structures arise from the ways in which social background and education interacts with labour market and selection processes. Roberts labels ascribed statuses such as those related to family origins, gender, race, and so on, as 'push factors', while labour market conditions and the selection practices of employers are 'pull factors'. According to Roberts' theory, the interactions between these 'push' and 'pull' factors results in opportunity structures within which young people make career decisions. However, notably absent from the

opportunity structures model is any account of the subjectivities of the young people making these decisions.

Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) useful notion of 'pragmatically rational decision-making' starts from a similar position to Roberts (2009) and focuses on the processes of decision-making. They draw on Bourdieu's notions of *habitus* and *field* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and the idea that action and belief are culturally and socially situated. *Habitus* consists of the dispositions that underlie our perceptions and behaviour (Wacquant, 2011), and which are transmitted in the home, while a *field* is microcosm of social life with its own rules, norms and authority structures (Wacquant, 2011). Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) conceptualise habitus as culture plus identity and suggest that pragmatically rational decision-making in education to work transitions takes place within a socially and culturally grounded habitus interacting with the education and employment fields. Based on their study in which surveys were administered to four hundred participants, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest that young people's early career decisions are based on experience, which may include advice from friends and relatives; are pragmatic rather than systematic and may be based on partial information and favour the familiar and known; are context related and embedded in family background, culture and life histories; are opportunistic, based on fortuitous contacts and experiences; are made when able, as reactions to opportunities as perceived and encountered; are only partially rational as they are also influenced by emotion and feelings (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Pragmatically rational decision-making provides a useful model to understand and explain young people's decision – making processes in the education to work transition.

Bourdieu's work has been influential in offering alternative ways of conceptualising social life that avoids the structure-agency duality (Jones, 2009). Bourdieu focuses on social reproduction, or cultural reproduction, and in particular on the ways in which the middle class French privilege their own children through the use of social and cultural capital and at the same time exclude the working class from opportunities for upward social mobility (Roberts, 2009; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 2006(1986)). Roberts (2009) suggests that Bourdieu's work is complementary to socialization theory in that while socialization theory explains how and why working class youths seek working class occupations, Bourdieu's theory focuses on how they are excluded from

opportunities for upward social mobility. Rather than socialization, Bourdieu's theory is based on the idea that the prevailing social structures at any particular time, can be explained in terms of different types of capital (Bourdieu, 2006(1986): 105), and that in order to fully understand the ways in which the social world is structured and functions, all forms of capital must be considered. According to Bourdieu (2006 (1986)) there are three fundamental forms of capital, which are interdependent and may be convertible into other forms of capital. These are *economic capital* which can be converted into money and may also take the form of property; cultural *capital*, which may take the form of educational qualifications, 'dispositions of the mind and body', and art, literature and technology, and which can be converted into economic capital; and *social capital* (Bourdieu, 2006(1986):106). *Social capital* consists of social connections and obligations, which can also be converted into economic capital. As we saw earlier, in this chapter, the concept of social capital was used by Al-Ali (1998) to explain some of the challenges of Emiratisation of the UAE workforce, in particular the absence of trust in the abilities of Emirati workers, and the use of social capital to select applicants for jobs and for job seekers to attain potentially unsuitable positions. The role of social capital in Emirati graduate employability is not directly examined in my study but is indirectly investigated through the Emirati graduates' narratives.

A criticism of Bourdieu's theory is the lack of clarity and specificity in the definitions of the central concepts, making them difficult to operationalize (Sullivan, 2002). However, Bourdieu's work has been influential in demonstrating the ways in which educational success is not simply an issue of effort or economic resources but dependent on possessing the appropriate cultural capital and habitus. This idea has been carried over into the positional approach to employability (Brown et al, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004) and applied to interactions between job seekers and the labour market. This will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

A further criticism of Bourdieu's work is that the concept of *habitus* is limited in its usefulness as a means of analysing social embeddedness (Adams, 2006). This is because according to Bourdieu (1977), *habitus* is pre-reflective and enacted unthinkingly. *Habitus* is, therefore, more useful for its original purpose, which was to explain social reproduction, and is problematic in understanding social change. McNay (1999) goes as far as to suggest that the generative nature of *habitus* combined with its

unreflective character, is one reason why entrenched gender identities persist. However, McNay (1999) uses the concept of reflexivity to suggest that *habitus* can evolve when a forced change in field takes place, problematizing the maintenance of an existing habitus and allowing space for *reflexivity*. Sweetman (2003) claims that is late/post modernity, in the context of individualisation, this kind of field disruption has become normal and therefore reflexivity has become habitual. Adams (2006) defines reflexivity in terms of the ability to reflect on aspects of social life normally taken for granted and unquestioned and proposes a conceptualisation of individualisation as reflexive identity. He also offers an understanding of identity as a hybridization of habitus and reflexivity. Adams (2006) conceptualisation of identity lacks the interactive aspect of identity as it is used my study. As implied in my research questions, in my study, I adopt a conceptualisation of graduate identity as reflexively managed in interactions with graduates' social world and labour market context.

Reflexivity is closely associated with the work of Giddens and is a key element in his influential *structuration theory* (Giddens, 1984; 1991). In this theory, social structures and their contexts give rise to actions and behaviours while these actions and behaviours also help shape structures or at least people's relationships to them by generating new contexts which may carry particular forms of experiences and outcomes (Giddens, 1984). Individuals draw on agency to navigate social structures and those social structures also set parameters for their actions. Structuration theory is therefore concerned with the relationships that individuals have with the social and economic world and their resulting actions, behaviours and identities (Giddens, 1984; 1991) Fundamental processes in structuration involve how people construct identities and how these identities influence actions and behaviours, hence functioning as a link between the individual and society (Giddens (1991). The notion of reflexivity to conceptualise the ways in which individuals adapt their identities to their life experiences. Giddens (1991) conceptualizes *structure* in a particular way, specifically in terms of *rules* and *resources* that enable as well as constrain. He also uses the notion of *social praxis* as knowledgeable ways of behaving and interacting, through which social collectivities are formed and structured (Giddens, 1991). According to Giddens (1991), in knowing how to act, individuals call upon discursive consciousness (reflexivity), practical consciousness and unconscious knowledge. In Giddens' theory, life transitions such as

the transition from education to work are fundamental to self-construction which occurs within structured social contexts through what he calls *structured individualization* (Giddens, 1991). For Giddens, the exploration and construction of self and altered self in transition is a reflexive process which connects personal and social change (Giddens, 1991: 33). Identity, then, in post-traditional and individualizing societies, such as that of the UAE, is consciously developed and managed through reflexivity; people have to choose their values and priorities and make sense of their own lives (Adams, 2006).

Dawson (2012) draws on both Gidden's structuration theory and on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital in the notion of *embedded individualization,* according to which individualization takes place within social constraints and is located within forms of social stratification. Dawson (2012) conceptualises identity formation as a process of reflexive identification of habitus and utilization of forms of capital and argues that positioning within any field requires reflexivity in order to recognise the appropriate habitus. In other words, position taking involves reflecting on how one should act in the field and Dawson argues that reflexivity is not just individual since the ways in which others in the field perform gives information about the forms of behaviour considered authentic (Dawson, 2012). These notions of identity, reflexivity, performance and position taking relate to both the positional and processual approaches to employability (Holmes, 2013) which are key to my study and which are discussed in the next chapter.

Studies which have examined education to work transition from identity perspectives have largely focused on the development of career or professional identity. Leong and Crossman (2015), for example, studied the transitions of new nurses and found that processes of 'fitting in' and aligning multiple identities were important. Ng and Feldman (2007) suggest that a role-identity approach is useful to studying education to work transitions and that work role identity is particularly implicated in transition outcomes. Mahadevan & Zeh (2015) studied the experiences of foreign graduates transitioning from education into the German labour market and found that the participants reported structural hurdles and problems of matching formal requirements, and negative incidents related to ascribed 'strangerness' and to lack of German language skills. The foreign graduates constructed an emic identity category of 'nomadic in-betweenness' which served to break down the dichotomies of native and

foreigner also demonstrated rational decision-making influenced by previous decisions and experiences. The use of graduate identity, therefore, as a framework through which to study the education to work transitions of UAE graduates contributes to a developing body of work in this area.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on the issues highlighted in the UAE literature, a number of issues to be investigated through my study emerge. Specifically, further illumination is needed with respect to the lack of participation of Emiratis in the work force, and particularly, the phenomenon of choosing to remain unemployed when jobs are available (ICOS, 2010). Other areas include reasons for choosing public over private organisations, choice of subject and occupation. The role of social capital has been shown to be a key area for examination (Al-Ali, 1998), as well as the issue of stereotyping (Abdulla, 2010; Forstenlechner et al, 2012).

Phenomena identified as salient to education to work transitions elsewhere are also evident in the UAE context. The notion of individualization, for example, as discussed in this chapter, is highly salient given that the labour market and higher education have drastically changed over the course of a few decades. Jenson, Arnett and McKenzie (2011) conceptualise individualization as a kind of cultural gap emerging in traditional cultures as a consequence of globalization and with respect to work, there is certainly a cultural gap between the generations in the UAE. Drawing on Giddens (1984; 1991), Tomlinson (2013) continues this theme and proposes an understanding of individualization in terms of changes to the ways in which identities are constructed and to their salience in education to work transitions. Whereas in traditional and industrial societies social identities were built around biographical and lifestyle commonalities, and based on systems of norms and values, individualization moved the emphasis to the individual and divorced processes of identity formation from traditional narratives (Tomlinson, 2013).

In the literature on education to work transitions, therefore, the concept of identity has emerged as an important framework for understanding the interaction of structure and agency in this transition. As we will see in the next chapter, emergent graduate identity

has also been proposed as a way of conceptualizing graduate employability (Holmes, 2001). As asserted by Brooks (2009) and Tomlinson (2013), the notion of employability has become dominant in understandings of the relationship between higher education and the labour market and is therefore a key factor in higher education to work transitions. The literature on employability will now be critically examined in the next chapter, with particular attention paid to the concept of graduate identity.

CHAPTER THREE

Graduate Transitions to Employability

1. Introduction

In this chapter, we turn to the literature on employability. The concept of employability is central to the main research questions of this study because of the increasing emphasis by employers, policymakers and HEIs on how employable graduates are when they enter the labour market (Tomlinson, 2013). Associated with notions of a knowledge-driven economy and a change from the pre-defined and established career structures and patters of the past (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005) to more protean, boundaryless careers and individualized life courses (Brown and Hesketh, 2004), the notion of employability is linked to vocationalism in education, a focus on acquisition of skills, human capital theories and lifelong learning. Employability has been defined variously as:

> 'the possession of the understandings, skills and personal attributes necessary to perform adequately in a graduate-level job' (Knight and Yorke, 2002: 261)

> 'the relative chances of finding and maintaining different kinds of employment' (Brown et al, 2002: 11)

> 'a form of identity; it is relational, emergent and influenced largely by graduates' "lived experiences" of the labour market' (Tomlinson, 2007: 286)

These three definitions exemplify the different approaches to conceptualizing employability apparent in the literature and it is the last of these which form the basis of the conceptual framework used in my study. Holmes (2013) suggests that these approaches can be classified into three categories: the possession approach which is characterized by a focus on skills and attributes and how they can best be developed, the positional approach which focuses on the ways in which social inequalities are reproduced in employability and proposes the concept of personal capital and a typology of approaches to employability, and the processual approach developed by Holmes (2001) which focuses on the interactions involved in employability and proposes an emergent model of graduate identity based on processes of claiming and

affirmation. The chapter is organised around discussions of each of the three main approaches and then concludes by revising the research questions and aims within the conceptual framework developed through the literature review.

The concept of employability can be seen as a product of social and political change where individualisation appears to be increasingly taken for granted and where agency is assumed in choosing, preparing for, and entering employment. Employability is a notion that applies to an individual's entire working life and not just to the transition from education into work; however, it has been at the forefront of discussions as to the purpose of education and higher education, and its role in preparing young people to enter the labour market (Tomlinson, 2013). The socio-historic, socio-economic and socio-cultural context of the UAE is vastly different from that of the Western nations where the notions of knowledge economy and employability originate; however, despite this, the UAE government has declared its intention to create a knowledge-based economy and has adopted a skills and attributes type approach to higher education (Randaree, 2009). Therefore, it is important to study the ways in which employability is understood and enacted in the UAE.

Early models of employability such as that proposed by Hillaje and Pollard (1998) focused on the product of education in terms of skills and attributes and largely ignored issues of social inequality and social reproduction. However, approaches based on conflict rather than consensus in society, and focusing on processes and interactions, have started to address this issue. For the purposes of this study, it will be argued that a subjective, constructionist approach using an identity framework is important to increasing our understandings of employability processes, strategies and outcomes during young Emirati graduates' transitions to work.

2. Limitations of the 'Skills Agenda' and 'Possession' Approach to Graduate Employability

It can be seen in the discussion of issues related to Emiratisation in Chapter Two that a major focus on employability in the UAE has been on questions of 'mismatches' between graduates' skills and attributes and those required by employers (Al-Ali. 1998;

Forstenlechner et al, 2012; Abdulla, 2010). It appears that in the UAE, as in the UK, as far as employers are concerned, graduate employability is understood in terms of 'work-readiness' (Al-Ali. 2008), defined by Mason et al (2009: 1) as the 'possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable new graduate to make productive contributions to organisational objectives soon after commencing employment'. An early framework of employability exemplifying the skills approach is that of Hillaje and Pollard (1998) which lists *assets,* categorised into three types: *baseline assets* (basic skills and attributes such as reliability), *intermediate assets* (generic occupational skills such as communication skills), and *high level assets (*skills which contribute to organizational performance, such as team work and self-management), but also includes the *ability to deploy assets, presentation,* and *context.*

In both the UK and in the UAE, higher education has been under pressure to focus on and develop the type of skills considered necessary in 'graduate' jobs, leading to much discussion and emphasis on what have been termed variously as 'key', 'core', 'transferable' and 'generic' skills (Mason et al, 2009) and the 'possession' approach to employability. In keeping with the UAE government policy to develop a knowledge economy (Randaree, 2009), universities and colleges in the UAE publicise the employability attributes of their graduates. For example, one of the federal universities, Zayed University, lists the Zayed University Learning Outcomes as: critical thinking and quantitative reasoning, global awareness, information literacy, language, leadership, and technological literacy (www.zu.ac.ae). Another federal HEI, the Higher Colleges of Technology declares eight 'Graduate Outcomes' comprising: communication and information literacy, critical and creative thinking, global awareness and citizenship, technological literacy, self management and independent learning, teamwork and leadership, vocational competencies, and mathematical literacy (www.hct.ac.ae).

However, there are a number of unresolved issues related to conceptualising graduate employability as a list of graduate skills and attributes. The first of these concerns the problem of differences in understandings, interpretations and values of these so called 'graduate skills and attributes', that have been found between the actors involved, including students, professors and employers (Barrie, 2006; Atkins, 1999; Holmes, 2001). Barrie (2006) adopts what Hinchcliffe (2002) calls the *techne* approach to employability skills and explores the understandings of skills of professors in various disciplines, finding significant differences in their conceptualisations of graduate skills

(Barrie, 2006). A related issue concerns the extent to which graduate employability skills can be considered generic. Are the interpersonal skills, for example, that an engineer needs the same as the interpersonal skills that a lawyer needs? Addressing the theoretical and conceptual issues relating to the skills agenda, Hinchcliffe (2002) categorises approaches to employability skills into the *behaviourist* approach which views skills as operations which can be repeated and have a measurable outcome, the *techne* approach which explores different interpretations, and *situational* understanding, defined as 'interpretive understanding allied to a series of actions' (Hinchcliffe, 2002: 194). Hinchcliffe goes on to argue the skills are context-related and therefore 'the concept of a generic skill is incoherent' (Hinchcliffe, 2002: 196).

Two further problems are apparent which indicate that a 'possession approach' (Holmes, 2013) or a focus purely on generic graduate skills and attributes is not sufficient to understand the employability experiences and outcomes of Emirati university graduates as they transition from education to work. The first concerns the theoretical underpinning of the possessions approach. Influenced by human capital theory (Becker, 1976), the 'possessions' approach privileges the notion of agency. Human capital theory (Becker, 1976) posits that the primary role of education is to develop the human capital, conceptualised as knowledge and skills, of future worker. It holds that workers are allocated to jobs based on their human capital and therefore increased human capital results in increased productivity and higher earnings. Therefore, the 'possessions' approach works on the assumption that students and graduates make educational and career choices based purely on perceived economic benefits, operating independently of their socio-cultural context. It ignores inequalities of opportunity and the influence of existing power structures. The assumption is that students will invest in their education to the extent that they believe it will benefit them economically. Hence, in the UK considerable attention is paid to the so-called 'graduate premium', or the long-term economic value, in terms of remuneration, of a university degree (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Elias & Purcell, 2004). A difficulty with simply transposing this notion of employability to the UAE context is the fact that Emirati students do not pay for their higher (or indeed any) education and so the costs of higher education are indirect ones such as loss of potential earnings during the time it takes to earn a degree. Important questions explored in my study, therefore, are the

ways in which their university degrees and the associated generic graduate attributes promoted by their institutions are meaningful to Emirati graduates and how these meaning influence their employability behaviour as they transition into the work force.

Another major issue with the graduate skills approach is that if all Emirati graduates from these HEIs possess the same attributes, how can differences in their behaviours, experiences and outcomes in the labour market be explained. According to the 'possession approach', these differences are attributed to differences in accomplishment in the various skills and to some personal circumstances such as child care responsibilities (Hillaje and Pollard, 1998). In the positional approach to employability (Brown et al, 2003; Brown & Hesketh, 2004), skills are viewed as types of capital. Degrees and credentials are categorised as 'hard currencies' and attributes such as personal skills, dress and appearance are categorised as 'soft currencies'. Like Hinchcliffe, in his processual approach, Holmes (2001, 2013) argues that it is difficult to talk about skills in general without a frame of reference since any activity has to be interpreted according to the situation and compared with a set of social practices in order to become a performance. Holmes gives the example of lifting an arm, which is an activity that becomes interpreted as the performance of bidding only when the activity is carried out in the context of an auction (Holmes, 2013).

This interpretative view of skills problematizes the issue of skills definitions and potential differences in understandings, conceptualisations and rankings between graduates, HEIs and employers. Studies have found differences in understandings (Barrie, 2006), in priorities (Wickramsainghe and Perera, 2010) and in expectations (Tran 2015). Despite this, a number of attempts have been made to survey employers and produce ranked lists of required skills. Hesketh (2000), for example, examined employers' evaluations of nine key skills and found that all were rated as important but IT and technical competency were considered of lower importance. Employers considered verbal communication, learning and written communication to be the top three skills in terms of importance, followed by problem solving, teamwork and self-management Similarly, investigating the experiences of engineering students during the transition to work, Edvardsson & Jungert (2010) found that characteristics, such as acceptance of responsibility for self and others, openness and commitment, and self-efficacy, proved to be more important than they had expected in the graduates' job search process.' Hinchcliffe and Jolly (2011) found that employers' understandings of

graduate attributes could be grouped into the categories of intellect, values, performance and engagement. However, Edvardsson & Jung, (2010:431-2) and Holmes (2001; 2013) claim that rather than using 'skills' terminology, employers talk in terms of type of person, 'proactive', 'self-started'. Atkins (1999) goes as far to suggest that it is this lack of common definitions and agreement that is the source of the so called 'skills gap', where employers claim that graduates do not have the skills they require.

If employability is viewed as positional and processual, as it is in the current study, a non-substantialist view is implied in which graduate skills and attributes are socially constructed and relational, and, therefore, the subjective understandings of these which underpin the interactions between graduates and potential employers become key. Taking this perspective, Bailly (2008) offers a useful model of the development of employers' beliefs concerning educational output which draws on signalling (or screening) theory (Arrow, 1973; Spence, 1973). Whereas in human capital theory, education itself is posited to increase productivity (Becker, 1964), in signalling theory, educational qualifications are viewed as signals of an individual's innate ability to be productive. In Bailly's model (2008), employers' beliefs about the potential of a job seeker are based on their experiences of the performance of similarly qualified individuals previously employed. Cai (2013) further developed the model, using notions of *private learning* and *public learning* (Farber and Gibbons, 1996) where *private learning* results from direct experience and *public learning* refers to more generalised public observations and experiences; and added exogenous factors to the model of employers' subjective employability beliefs. The importance of researching and developing understandings of this subjective and relative aspect of employability was highlighted by Brown and Hesketh's (2004) study of graduate selection interviews in the UK context in which employers were found to base their subjective evaluations of job candidates' *soft* and *hard currencies* on presentation elements such as dress and demeanour. The study found that candidates were mentally categorised as "stars", "geeks", "safe bets" and "freezers" by the interviewers.

A major sociological critique of the 'possessional' approach to employability is that it is based on a consensus view of society (Boden & Nedeva, 2010) in that it assumes equality of opportunities and access to education and an unproblematic, merit-based evaluation by employers. However, young people themselves recognise that this is not the case. Students in a study by Morrison (2014) identified class and gender as

barriers to certain jobs and rejected the discourse of graduate skills as unproblematic. Similarly, Tomlinson's participants declared that 'the degree is not enough' (Tomlinson, 2007/8). Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2006) argue that the ways in which employability skills are acquired, valued and applied is a manifestation of individualization and a symptom of the 'acid bath of competition' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2006) which results from individualization. This recognition, then, that employability skills are problematic and employability relative and relational is taken up in the positional approach (Brown & Hesketh, 2004) and the processual approach (Holmes, 2001) as discussed below.

3. Theorising Inequalities of Opportunity: The 'Positional' Approach

The skills approach to employability has been criticized as being ideologically loaded and failing to take into account labour market conditions and the fact that skills are socially constructed, gendered, classed and racialised (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006:306). Clearly emphasizing agency over structure, there is an assumption of equal access to resources and opportunity. This approach to employability is underpinned by several problematic assumptions including the assumptions that individuals are responsible for their employability, that individuals want to be responsible for their employability and career development and that individuals have the appropriate career and employability management skills (Clarke and Patrickson, 2008). In order to address this issue McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) propose a hugely complex framework of interacting factors which incorporates social and structural factors, , demographic factors, personal circumstances, access to resources, and demand factors. The framework stands as an attempt to highlight the issue of inequalities of opportunity within the concept of employability which Brown et al (2003) label as the 'relative' dimension. however, it is somewhat unwieldy and does not offer any cohesive theory as to how these factors influence employability. The 'positional' approach to employability (Brown et al, 2003; Brown and Hesketh, 2004), therefore, proposes an explanation for differences in relative employability using sociological theory.

Underpinning their 'positional' approach, Brown et al (2003) identify three different dimensions of employability: a political dimension consisting of assumptions and dominant voices, human capital assumptions, labour market outcomes and social

inequalities; subjective employability which refers to the ways in which individuals 'construct and manage their employability as they enter the labour market' (Brown et al, 2003:6); the employers' perspective including recruitment processes and practices. They also suggest that employability can be both absolute, in terms of an individual's basic credentials, and relative, in terms of an individual's competitive position in the labour market. Brown et al (2003) examine contrasting consensus and conflict theories and their influence on the way employability is conceptualised. According to consensus theory, knowledge is capital and is linked to technological progression. Therefore, technology changes the nature of work and capitalism. Brown et al (2003) suggest that this theory influences much of official discourse on employability. In contrast, according to conflict theory 'employability represents an attempt to legitimate unequal opportunities in education and the labour market' (Brown et al, 2003:16). Brown et al (2003) therefore propose positional conflict theory as analytical framework for employability. Influenced by Weber's idea of social closure, which argues that distinctions between groups are socially constructed in order to perpetuate and justify social inequalities, positional conflict theory 'remains firmly grounded in the neo-Weberian tradition which rejects the consensus view of a politically neutral, open and fair contest within education and the labour market in the advanced economies' (Brown et al, 2003:26). According to Brown et al (2003), positional conflict theory allows for 'significant variations in the way competition rules are drawn up and how they relate to labour market opportunities in different countries' and 'recognises differences in the power of individuals and social groups to deploy their material, cultural and social capital in the competition for credentials and jobs.' (Brown et al, 2003:26). The notions of *rigging* of the labour market to optimise the chances of certain social groups, and the *ranking* of individuals within the labour market are used to describe inequalities of opportunity. Brown et al (2003) argue that this approach 'can throw conceptual light on the relative chances of individuals, groups and classes have in finding and maintaining different kinds of employment. It encourages us to extend our focus from the way university graduates manage their employability with different degrees of success, to investigate the social structure of competition. What are the rules of the game? Who makes the rules and whose interest do they serve?' (Brown et al, 2003:26).

Brown and Hesketh's conceptualisation of employability (Brown and Hesketh, 2004) includes the concept of *personal capital* into which employability skills are

incorporated as 'hard' and 'soft' currencies where 'hard' currencies comprise credentials and educational qualifications, and 'soft' currencies comprise personal attributes such as interpersonal skills and ability to work in a team. The other component of *personal capital* is the 'self' which in Brown and Hesketh's model includes elements such as family and gender. Based on interviews with graduates undertaken as part of a larger study to 'explore the way young knowledge workers socially construct and manage their employability' (Brown and Hesketh, 2004: 9), Brown and Hesketh also produced a typology of approaches to employability based on the ways in which individuals deployed their *personal capital* in the competition for graduate employment. The typology consists of two ideal types: *players* and *purists*. *Players* viewed employability as a position game, marketed themselves using social contacts and careers information, and educated themselves on how to perform in interviews and assessment centres; purists viewed employability as a meritocratic race based on innate abilities and effort. Brown and Hesketh (2004) found that the ways in which graduates approach the labour market 'is saturated in social meaning. It is an expression of social being that reflects personal, cultural, and social resources that vary in terms of social background, gender, ethnicity, race, age, and educational background' (Brown and Hesketh, 2004:9) They noted that 'virtually all those interviewed shared an expectation of work as a source of personal achievement and career development' and that they had 'bought into a view of work as challenging, exciting and as a source of self-development' (Brown and Hesketh, 2004:116). The graduates interviewed believed that they deserved 'tough entry' jobs ahead of non-graduates and that a degree would place them above routine work. However, there was also and awareness of the competitive nature of the job market as well as the influence of factors such as social class, accent, gender and physical appearance on job attainment (Brown and Hesketh, 2004).

Drawing on the positional approach in the current study offers ways of understanding the labour market opportunities and experiences of young Emirati graduates (Kupfer, 2011) beyond the graduate skills and attributes approach. Sensitising concepts and questions used in my study that emerge from the positional approach to employability include the notions of rigging and ranking, in which, according to Brown and Hesketh (2004) the labour market is rigged to make it more accessible to certain (usually the dominant and privileged) social categories and individuals are ranked within it. My

study explores how, according to the perceptions of young Emirati graduates, the labour market in the UAE is rigged and how are they ranked. It also examines the rules and resources by which the graduate labour market in the UAE is structured (Kupfer, 2011) and investigates whether the typology of *players* and *purists* (Brown and Hesketh, 2004) is relevant and useful in the case of Emirati graduates? However, the positional approach to employability is not used as the main conceptual framework in my study. This is because although the positional approach goes some way to deepen understandings of the social processes of employability, it is limited in its explanations of why graduates adopt certain strategies. Certain aspects of the theory also may not be useful in other cultural contexts; the typology of *players* and *purists*, for example, was not found to be applicable in the context of China, in a study by Wang and Lowe (2011). Therefore, I argue that for the purposes of my study the notion of positioning in the framework of graduate identity offers the potential to gain useful insights into the employability behaviours of Emirati graduates. In the following section, I now critically discuss the processual graduate identity approach to employability and how this relates to the positional approach.

4. Graduate Identity and the 'Processual' Approach

While the positional approach to employability, a**s** posited by (Brown et al, 2002; Brown and Hesketh, 2004), argues for the need to include a subjective dimension in concepts of employability and incorporates the 'self' as a component of personal employability capital, the processual approach to employability, advocated by Holmes (2001, 2013), privileges identity as a central concept, while Tomlinson (2007) actually conceptualizes employability as 'a form of identity; it is relational, emergent and influenced largely by graduates 'lived experiences' of the labour market.' (Tomlinson, 2007:286).

Both Holmes' (2001) and Tomlinson's (2007) approaches are processual, viewing employability in terms of ways of engaging with the labour market and drawing on notions of identity as relational, formed in interaction with others (Coupland and Brown, 2012). Tomlinson (2007) proposes a model with four ideal types is proposed: c*areerists* who build strong identities around future careers with an emphasis on self-development and fulfilment; *ritualists* who take a passive approach to career

management and view work as a means to an end; *retreatists* who have a passive, non-market orientation and tend to develop identities outside the arena of work; and *rebels* who are highly active but with a non-market orientation.

Tomlinson (2013) views employability as a negotiated process linked to individuals' engagement with the social and economic world and draws on Gidden's (1984; 1991) structuration theory as a way of understanding employability in this way as it brings into focus the actions of individuals as meaningful, purposeful, intentional and based on their reflexive understanding of the social world. As Tomlinson (2013) suggests, this view of employability offers the possibility of gaining insights into the social processes of how people construct, negotiate and manage their employability and also a way of analysing the interaction between individuals and the labour market.

Holmes (2001), however, takes the processual approach further, proposing the claim-affirmation model in which employability is conceptualized as emergent graduate identity arising from the processes of graduates' interactions with the labour market. Holmes (2001) draws on Goffman's (1961) study of the moral careers of individuals progressing through mental institutions. In Goffman's study, the patients had to negotiate a series of "hazards" in which they could be ascribed the position of being sane/ cured or not, according to how they presented themselves. Harré (1983) conceptualised this as an identity project of maintaining uniqueness and individuality while also gaining social affirmation and he identified four stages to the project: appropriation by the individual of characteristics of socially and culturally legitimated identities; transformation, the process of making personal sense of socially acquired understanding in terms of personal experience; publication of the individual's claim to a particular identity, where the characteristics of the identity are publicly expressed; and conventionalisation of the successful identity into the personal biography of the individual (Harré,1983).

In Holmes' model (2001, 2013) graduates *claim* their graduate identity to employers and employers need to accept the identity claim, or *affirm* the identity in order to an *agreed identity* to be achieved. According to Holmes' model, other outcomes, or modalities, include an *imposed identity* where the graduate does not fully claim the identity but it is in any case affirmed by others, a *failed identity* where the graduate's claim is rejected and they are not selected for a graduate level position, and an

underdetermined identity where graduates are successful in gaining and temporary or probationary position such as an internship (Brooks and Everett, 2009), or a position in which graduate-level skills and attributes are not essential. In the UK, Blenkinsopp and Scurry (2007) termed these GRINGOS (Graduates in Non-Graduate Occupations). According to Holmes' model, such identity outcomes are not permanent and graduates often progress through several different identity modalities. In a pilot study of graduates transitioning from education into small businesses, Holmes (2013) identified three common stages of transition: from graduate to an initial job, initial job and moving on, and the current job. He also found that the reasons for *not gaining* a graduate job and the experiences of *not gaining* were different among the participants.

It can be argued that Holmes (2001) claim-affirmation model provides a link to the positioning approach to employability by suggesting the processes by which positioning works. In their analysis of interviews, Brown and Hesketh (2004) note the interviewers attention to the outward symbols of social and cultural capital such as ways of dressing and speaking and the role that these play in the outcome of the interview. This can be understood in terms of Holmes' (2001, 2013) notions of claiming and affirming in action; the interviewers recognize the 'graduateness' of the candidates from the ways in which they perform their graduate identity. In Holmes' model, skills become situated practices which form part of the performance of graduate identity. Holmes (2001) links skills and identity through the practice identity model of the interpretation of performance. In this model graduate identity is a social identity (Jenkins, 1996) in which a claim of identity is made by an individual and this is affirmed or disaffirmed by significant others. Different modalities of emergent identity arise from the interaction between the self-identification and social ascription. According to Holmes (2001) 'Situated identities are associated with sets of practices that may be specified in carrying degrees, and may change over time or between different contexts.' Therefore, students can be helped by giving them opportunities to rehearse the identity and practices associated with it on work placement and specially designed activities.

As Jackson (2014) notes, scholarly work on graduate identity specifically, as opposed to career, professional or vocational identity, is scarce and suffers from the issue of poor definition and conceptualisation. Synthesizing the characteristics of graduate identity suggested in a number of works (Henkel, 2005; Nicholson et al, 2013; Reid et al, 2008; Bridgstock, 2009; Jackson, 2013a), Jackson produces a list of characteristics of graduate

identity comprising: a sense of meaning and self-esteem; confidence; an understanding of disciplinary knowledge; a focus on personal development and lifelong learning; and a capacity to transfer skills across contexts (Jackson, 2014:3). However, importantly, Jackson (2014) blurs the delineation between professional identity, student identity and graduate identity. Jackson's study also highlights the continuing overemphasis on the notion of 'graduate skills' being conceptualized as identity.

The term 'graduateness' has been contentious. Steur et al (2012) suggest that as a notion it is lacking in theorization and consensus on meaning and in a study of four hundred graduates, they identify four main attributes associated with the concept, specifically scholarship, moral citizenship, lifelong learning, and reflective thinking. Steur et al (2012) conceptualise 'graduateness' as a stage in the intellectual development of students which implies a transformation from non-graduate to graduate, and warn that this transformation may coincide with end of studies but may not. However, for Holmes (2013) the term 'graduateness' encapsulates the realist view of identity, differentiating the concept from his notion of graduate identity which is relational, interactionist and emergent. Similarly, Holmes is strongly critical of Hinchcliffe and Jolly's (2010) study of employers' conceptualisations of graduate identity which claims to draw on Holmes' model of emergent graduate identity. Holmes (2013) accuses Hinchcliffe and Jolly of confusing realist and relationist conceptualisations of graduate identity. Graduate identity in Holmes' (2001) model is neither internal nor external but exists in the ways in which graduates' and employers' understandings interact and influence each other, and in the ways in which other identities interact with graduate identity. The term 'graduateness' is clearly problematic but is also central to the interactions of graduates and employers in Holmes' model as a way of conceptualising the expectations that employers require graduates to fulfil in order to meet their criteria on an 'agreed' graduate identity with respect to employment. The use of narratives in my study is intended as a way to gain an understanding of graduate identity with respect to employability in Emirati graduates' interactions with their social world and labour market context while avoiding a realist, substantialist view of the concept.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the three main approaches to employability found in the literature. I now argue that a conceptual framework is needed which combines the three approaches to employability, as each make a contribution to understandings of the notion; in other words an integrative framework of employability. My study will show that deeper understandings of the complexities of graduate employability, specifically in the UAE, can be achieved through the framework of graduate identity as it relates to employment practices. Graduate 'skills' comprise an element in all three approaches to employability. Capital, currencies or practices cannot be ignored since, clearly, certain skills are essential to being able to complete the tasks involved in a particular job. However, the positional and processual approaches both demonstrate that skills and behaviours are subject to interpretation and that interpretations are both context dependent and filtered through the identities, of the individuals involved. Objective employability, it can be argued, is at best a purely theoretical construct, and in reality employability is entirely subjective, socially constructed and discursive. Tomlinson (2010) argues persuasively that the examination of graduate identity, underpinned by the notion of structuration provides a means of investigating the understandings and perceptions of individuals as graduates which are constantly negotiated and contingent on different aspects of their lives, including their life, education, and work experiences. Through using a graduate identity perspective, specifically drawing on Holmes' (2001; 2103) emergent modalities framework, my study, therefore, aims to contribute to filling a gap, identified by Tomlinson (2007), in empirical studies which examine how graduates understand and manage their employability in the context of labour market change. In order to do this, I use an understanding of socially constructed graduate identity because it offers an analytical lens through which to explore the meanings that Emirati graduates construct around their memories, experiences and outcomes in their employability and transition narratives, which orient them to the social world of the labour market and guide their actions (Fevre, 2003). This understanding of graduate identity, therefore has three main precepts: first, that identity acts a framework of meaning and action for individuals (Fevre, 2003); second, that it is produced through social relations and is both shared and unique (Lawler, 2014); and third, that identity making as an active and ongoing process. I also use the notion that an individual may

construct and manage multiple, co-existing, varying and even possibly contradictory identities and different categories of belonging (Lawler, 2014). Fundamental to this study is the understanding, expressed by Tomlinson (2013: 5) that identities are contingent 'on the social and cultural contexts through which individuals' lived experiences are framed.' For the purposes of my study, graduate identity, then, is located in the meanings and understandings constructed around an individual's status as a university graduate in their interactions with the labour market. In my study graduate identity is operationalised in two ways, both of which draw on Holmes' (2001) claim-affirmation model in which employability is located in graduates' 'claims' and employers' affirmation of graduate identity. First, I study the narratives that graduates construct around their graduate status as they transition from higher education into the labour market (LaPointe, 2010; Lawler, 2014; Furlong, 2009) in order to understand their 'claims'. Second, in order to gain insights into affirmation by employers, I operationalise graduate identity from their perspective in terms of their employment practices, specifically graduate selection criteria and processes, such as interviews and tests.

In Chapter One, I outlined the research questions that are addressed by my study and in Chapters Two and Three, I have discussed the literature on higher education and work in the UAE with particular respect to 'Emiratisation, themes and debates around the concept of education to work transitions, and approaches to employability taken in research to date. In the next chapter, I now critically discuss the methodology employed in my study in order to address the research questions and achieve the aims of the study within the conceptual framework developed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into the employability behaviours, experiences and outcomes of Emirati graduates as they transition from higher education into the labour market in the context of 'Emiratisation'. In particular, through my research questions, I aim to develop understandings of issues that have been identified in the UAE literature related to Emirati workforce participation, including social capital, gender, stereotyping and cultural values. In doing so, the study contributes to knowledge about graduate employability in their education to work transitions in non-Western contexts and develops understanding of subjective employability (Brown et al, 2003).

In order to do this, I use the concept of graduate identity as it relates to employment, and particularly Holmes' (2001) concept of emergent graduate identity, as discussed in the previous chapter, to investigate Emirati graduates' understandings of their employability as something that is negotiated and contingent on their life, education and work experiences (Tomlinson, 2013). I frame the study around two key research questions:

1. How is Emirati graduate identity, as it relates to employment, conceptualized and understood by UAE graduates and employers?
2. How do Emirati graduates manage their graduate identity, as it relates to employment, in their transition from education to the labour market?

This chapter describes the methodology adopted in order to provide answers to these research questions and to achieve the aims of the study.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998:4) methodology is 'a way of thinking about and studying social reality' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 4) and in designing a research project and deciding on the methodology to be used, the researcher faces a number of questions concerning ontology, epistemology, the role of theory in the research, goals and

expected outcomes of the research, and practical considerations such as access to participants (Bryman, 2008; Cresswell, 1998; Flick, 2009; Marshall and Rossman, 2006). These issues are addressed in this chapter which consists of nine main sections to describe the process of designing and carrying out the research. In this chapter, I aim to provide an explicit and transparent description of the research methodology and in doing so make an important contribution to establishing the credibility of the study (Mason, 2002; Yin, 1994; Bassey, 1999). The chapter consists of twelve sections. The next section begins by looking at the methodological approach taken to the research and the ontological and epistemological positions underlying the methods chosen. This is followed by an account of how the research design and strategy were developed, and a description of the pilot study which was carried out as part of the process and used to test the data collection method. The setting in which the study took place and the ways in which the participants were selected is described in the fifth section before reflecting on my own role as researcher in the next section. Then the methods of data collection, processing and analysis are discussed. Finally, ethical considerations, issues relating to quality and rigour, and the limitations of the research design are examined.

2. Research Approach

This section begins by discussing the research paradigm adopted in the study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), a paradigm is a human construction forming 'a set of beliefs that guide action' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:157). This set of beliefs is comprised of ontology or beliefs about what constitutes reality; epistemology, or beliefs about what constitutes knowledge and how we know; and methodology, or beliefs about how we can find out (Guba, 1990; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The paradigm adopted in this study is based on an a social constructionist ontology which takes the position that social phenomena do not have an existence independent of actors but are the result of social interaction (Bryman, 2008). The epistemological basis of the study is both constructivist and interpretivist (Schwandt, 1994; Bryman, 2008; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). A constructivist epistemology denotes the idea that knowledge through research is itself socially constructed and thus data collection is viewed more as a process of generating than excavating and the role of the researcher

becomes active and reflexive (Bryman, 2008; Mason, 2002) . This is complementary to the interpretivist perspective that human action is meaningful and which puts an emphasis on the contribution of subjectivity to knowledge (Schwandt, 1994). A point of difference between the two epistemologies is that while interpretivists argue that it is possible for the researcher to understand the meaning of action objectively, constructivists reject this notion of objectivity and view the researcher as a participant in the construction of knowledge. For the purposes of this study, the researcher is acknowledged as a participant in the construction of the findings but this participation and interaction between the researcher and participants does not form a central focus of the study; rather, a more constructivist-interpretivist approach is adopted in order to explore the participants' 'individual and collective understandings, reasoning processes, social norms, and so on.' (Mason, 2002:56) from a subjective perspective.

Since a paradigm is concerned with beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge and 'how we know what we know' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008), adopting a particular paradigm clearly has implications for the way in which research is carried out. Adopting a social constructionist paradigm facilitates the use of a qualitative approach to explore graduate identity in the UAE and through the lens of graduate identity to gain insights into the employability experiences and outcomes of Emirati graduates as they transition from higher education and engage with the labour market. A qualitative, inductive approach facilitates a focus on the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman, 2008) and is therefore adopted for this study which aims to investigate the subjective dimension of graduate employability, through the meanings attached to being a graduate in the UAE. An inductive approach is adopted because the researcher does not start from a position of testing a hypothesis but rather aims to develop a particular conceptualisation of employability (Bryman, 2008; Mason, 2002; Flick, 2009) and to answer open questions such as "What..?" and "How..?" (Silverman, 2006).

The social constructionist paradigm and qualitative approach adopted, therefore, are compatible with the conceptual framework of the study, which includes a focus on the notion of employability as emergent graduate identity (Holmes, 2001) and on understandings of both education to work transitions and employability as identity projects (Harré, 1983). As suggested by Patton (2015), in the research approach adopted, my study sought to elicit the perceptions of different actors and to explore how social constructions of graduate identity emerged from the cultural and labour market

contexts and social relationships in which education to work transitions take place in the UAE.

As discussed in the literature review, fundamental to the study is an understanding of graduate identity related to employment as relational, interactionist and emergent; as being produced through social relations and as an active and ongoing process (Holmes, 2001; Lawler, 2014) Also important are the notions that identity acts as a framework of meaning and action for individuals (Fevre, 2003), therefore underpinning employability strategies, and that individuals may construct and manage multiple co-existing identities (Lawler, 2014; Bauman and Vecchi, 2004). For the purposes of the study, the graduate identities of the graduate participants are operationalised in terms of the narratives that they construct around their experiences and understandings of having a university education and of transitioning into, and interacting with, the labour market. Narratives were used in this way as they are not only a useful way to gain insights into the ways in which young people interpret their experiences (Furlong, 2009), but they are also a means by which people organise, connect and make sense of experiences and in doing so produce identities (LaPointe, 2010; Lawler, 2014). With respect to the employer participants in the study, their perspective on graduate identity was operationalised in terms of graduate selection criteria and processes. This draws on Holmes' (2001) conceptualisation of employability in which emergent graduate identity modalities are the outcomes of the claim-affirmation processes that take place in the interactions between graduate job applicants and employers. As noted in the literature review, alternative approaches considered included Brown and Hesketh's (2004) ideal types of *players* and *purists* and Tomlinson's (2007) *careerists*, *ritualists*, *retreatists* and *rebels*. These typologies were ultimately not used because it was felt that using either of them would have imposed a more deductive approach on the study whereas a more inductive approach was required given the lack of previous UAE research in this area, the research questions, and the aims of my study. However, the implications of insights provided by findings of my study for these two typologies were also considered and are discussed in the Findings and Conclusion chapters.

The next section will describe the research strategy and design that was developed in order to carry out this study within the adopted theoretical framework.

3. Research Strategy and Design

Within a social constructionist paradigm, as described above, this study was undertaken using a qualitative research strategy, and drew on case study design. A qualitative research strategy has been described by Bryman (2008) as a strategy 'that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.' (Bryman, 2008:366) and, as suggested in the section above, is often associated with a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm such as that adopted in the study. More than just a focus on words, qualitative research can be said to be concerned with 'concrete cases in their temporal and local particularity' (Flick 2009: 21), or 'an emic, ideographic, case-based position' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:10). Therefore, as well as being consistent with the theoretical framework of the study, it was an appropriate approach through which to achieve the aims of the investigation, which were concerned with exploring the meanings that Emirati graduates construct around their graduate status (graduate identity), gaining an understanding of their actions, experiences and employability outcomes as they transition from education to work, and gaining insights into the ways in which these actions, experiences and outcomes are influenced by the sociocultural context in which they take place.

Having decided on a research approach and strategy, the next stage was to consider design. The choice of design or even the fact of developing a design prior to conducting the research can be controversial when using an inductive, qualitative approach. According to Mason (2002), adopting a qualitative approach 'means rejecting the idea of a research design as a single document which is an entire advance blueprint for a piece of research', along with the notion that strategic and design decisions should be made before or at the beginning of the process (Mason, 2002:24). However, in any research project, practicalities usually require that decisions are made relatively early in the process on issues such as data collection methods, sampling and data analysis and the research design provides a framework for this. The research design, as Yin (1994) suggests, is 'the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of the study' (Yin, 1994: 18). However, consistent with the exploratory nature of the research and the inductive approach taken, the research design allowed for flexibility and an iterative approach

was taken to data collection and analysis in particular (Flick, 2009; Mason, 2002). For example, the interviews used for data collection were semi-structured and designed to allow for follow up of themes and issues which arose during the individual interviews. The data was also analysed using a variety of techniques and approaches, while the codes and categories used in data analysis to a large extent emerged from the data and evolved during the process of analysing the cases. This is described in more detail later in the chapter.

As with the paradigm adopted, the starting points for the research design for this study were the aims of the study, the research questions, and the conceptual framework. In order to thoroughly explore the issues in an inductive way, the research design needed to provide a framework through which to generate rich, detailed data and examine this from different perspectives, to enable thorough investigation of the research questions, and to produce 'thick description' of the context (Geertz, 1973). In order to do this, the study was largely conceived drawing on the principles of a multiple case study design. According to Yin (1994), 'case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being used, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.' (Yin, 1994: 1), making a case study-type design a suitable framework for my study which addressed 'how' questions and real-life context (Yin, 1994; Bassey, 1999; Thomas 2011). In my study, the research questions were 'how' questions and the real life context in which the participants were experiencing their transitions from education to work and managing their employability was fundamental to the study.

As Savin-Baden and Major (2013) note, there are challenges to defining what a case study is exactly. They identity three different views of what a case study is in the methodology literature. According to the first perspective, taken from Stake (2005), a case study is defined by its boundaries; the second view, drawn from Creswell (2007), is that it is a research approach; and the third view is of a case study as a way of writing up and presenting a qualitative study. My study draws upon all three of these perspectives. For the purpose of achieving my research aims, and following the advice of Patton (2015) to examine the smallest unit of analysis possible, multiple cases were studies as a means of illuminating through a group of cases. In other words, the cases of a number of typical individual cases, or individual participants, were examined. However, overall, the individual cases were all bounded by their

location, which was the city of Abu Dhabi, by their nationality, Emirati, by their status as graduates from only federal institutes of higher education, and by the fact that they were all currently in the process of transitioning from higher education to the work force, or were in the initial stages of their careers (Patton, 2015; Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). Fundamental to understanding this conceptualisation is the fact that Emiratis are a small minority within their own country, comprising only ten to twenty per cent of the population (Vine, 2010).

My study was conceived in terms of an *instrumental* multiple case study, as defined by Stake (2005). According to Stake (2005)*,* in an *instrumental* case study, the case is a tool through which to examine a particular phenomenon, although the case itself is still of interest (Stake, 2005; Thomas, 2011). This is contrasted with *intrinsic* case studies*,* in which the case itself is the object of interest. The current study constitutes an instrumental case study since the cases involved are being used to study the phenomenon of employability in the UAE. The study also incorporates elements of other types of case study suggested in the literature, such as the rich, detailed description characteristic of a *descriptive* case study, according to Yin (1994), contribution to theory as in an *interpretive* case study (Merriam, 1988). However, most importantly, the study aims to be holistic in its perspective, to include contextual description and accounting, and to provide concrete examples (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013)

Case studies are a flexible form of research design since they are not based on any particular epistemological or ontological paradigm, may use a quantitative or qualitative approach, or both, and can be used for a range of purposes (Yin, 1994; Bassey, 1999; Stenhouse, 1985; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011). However, according to Yin (1994) an effective case study requires certain components. How these components were incorporated into the study is now described.

- Components of the Design

Yin (1994) proposes five important components of case study design: the research questions, propositions to guide the data collection, a clear unit of analysis, logic

linking the data to the propositions, and clear criteria for interpreting the findings. These components, as they were applied to the current study, will now be examined.

Research questions are the first component, according to Yin (1994). The research questions for the current study are outlined in the introduction to this chapter. The main questions are 'how' questions which were drawn from consideration of the issues to be examined and from exploration of the relevant literature as described in the literature review. The questions were tested and refined by means of a pilot study which is described later in the chapter.

Propositions are the second component. Consistent with Yin (1994), in my study, propositions were drawn from the study of the literature and were used as sensitising and guiding concepts to guide the data collection. These were: first, that self and identity are fundamental to employability (Tomlinson, 2007; Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Holmes, 2001); second, that identity, including graduate identity is socially constructed, emergent and contingent on context (Lawler, 2014; Holmes, 2001; Tomlinson, 2014); and third, that the experiences and outcomes of UAE graduates' transitions from education into the labour market can be usefully investigated and understood through the conceptual framework of emergent graduate identity. Therefore, adoption of a graduate identity perspective offers a lens through which to gain insights into issues related to graduate employability in the UAE and into our understandings of subjective employability.

Yin's third component (Yin, 1994) is a clear unit of analysis, which, as Yin suggests, in a case study can be challenging (Yin, 1994). Bryman (2008) and Thomas (2011) both give examples of research categorised as case studies but which they claim do not really meet the criteria of a case study. However, Yin (1994) suggests that it can be useful to think in terms of what the case study is about and what the boundaries are. This study is about graduate identity, and employability actions and experiences, with respect to a specific section of the population, (university graduates) in a particular place (the UAE), at a particular life and career stage (the transition from education to work). The units of analysis are individual typical cases selected on criteria based on these boundaries, as will be described later in this chapter.

Yin's next component (Yin, 1994) is the logic linking the data to the propositions. This raises issues relating to the role of theory in the research and to matters of generalisation from the research, which again can be potentially contentious issues in case study research (Yin, 1994; Bassey 1999; Thomas, 2011). According to Yin (1994) case study research can be used to expand theory through analytic generalisation. Rather than relying on statistical sampling and statistical analysis of the data as in quantitative research, case study research uses a previously developed theory 'as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study' (Yin, 1994:31). Therefore, in my study I use apply the concept and model of emergent graduate identity to an under-researched context as a means of gaining understandings of the behaviours, lived experiences and outcomes of Emirati graduates.

Yin's fifth component is the criteria for interpreting the findings. According to Yin (1999), in case study research, this involves referring to the overall purpose of the investigation, identifying the how the data needs to be compared to the theoretical propositions, and establishing the criteria for demonstrating quality or rigour in the study. In this study, the research questions, the aims of the study and the conceptual framework described were used as the criteria for interpreting and presenting the findings.

As mentioned, in order to evaluate the usefulness of the research design, a pilot study was carried out. This will now be described in the following section.

4. Pilot Study

A pilot study has been described as a core area of research design (Mason, 2002) and a 'cornerstone of good research design' (Hazza and Maldaon, 2015). Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) list sixteen reasons for qualitative researchers to incorporate a pilot study into their methodology, four of which apply to my study. One of the reasons I decided to conduct a pilot study was to give myself practice in interviewing (Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001; Janghorban, Roudsari and Taghipour, 2013). I also wanted to collect preliminary data to gain a preview of possible themes emerging and to evaluate the data to see if it was appropriate to answer the research questions (Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). Related to interview practice, a further reason for the pilot study was

to test questions suggested in the interview guide to ensure that they were linguistically appropriate for the graduate participants and to adapt them where necessary (Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). Lastly, the pilot study was carried out in order to anticipate any problems and logistical issues with the data collection (Janghorban, Roudsari and Taghipour, 2013; Hazzi and Maldaon, 2015). Therefore, interviews with two graduates were conducted and these are now discussed.

The first pilot interview was face-to-face and the second pilot interview took place by email, at the request of the participant. This was useful in that it gave the opportunity to evaluate the kind of data which could be produced in this type of interview. Both interviews were conducted using an episodic-type approach, advocated by Flick (2009), which uses questions both to generate a narrative and also to elicit data on specific areas of focus (see Section 7 for further discussion of this type of interview). The face-to-face interview was transcribed using standard conventions and the email interview was re-formatted to make coding easier. The face-to face interview generated slightly over two and a half thousand words of data and the email interview generated one thousand, three hundred words. Both methods of interview worked well with the pilot study participants and generated rich, interesting data. While in the face-to-face interview, the researcher was able to conduct the interview flexibly, following-up, probing and clarifying, the email interview consisted of the participant answering the basic series of questions in the interview guide. Despite this, the responses provided by the email participant were rich and detailed. This gave assurance that this could be a useful way to collect data from potential participants who preferred to respond by email rather than in person.

Each transcript was read through several times and a case summary was written up. The data was analysed using open coding in order to gain a preview of the kind of themes which might emerge from the main data and to draw up a provisional list of codes. Initial themes which emerged from the pilot study related to personal development and vocation as strong elements of the participants' identity as graduates, tensions between traditional roles for women and employability, and notions of national and cultural identity being linked to employability and employability strategies through a desire to contribute to the community and participate in nation building. Social relationships and social capital emerged as important in the employability strategies adopted by the participants and in their experiences of the labour market. The data

generated in these pilot interviews confirmed that the planned approach to data collection would produce relevant and useful data. The themes which emerged were also reinforced and expanded during the later process of analysing the data using a method of constant comparison.

As is common in qualitative research, the data from the pilot interviews was incorporated into the main study (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001; Kim 2010). As Holloway (1997) notes, in qualitative research the pilot study is less distinct from the main research than it is in quantitative research and this phase often consists of reading through the first few transcripts and making small improvements to the interview or data collection protocol. In quantitative research it is usually argued that data from the pilot study must not be used since it could be flawed or inaccurate if major changes were made to the research protocol or instrument (Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001); however, this argument does not apply to my study because although data analysis was an iterative process (Mason, 2002), no major changes were made to the interview protocol for data collection subsequent to the pilot study. As Kim (2010) suggests, data from a pilot study in an iterative, qualitative study can make an important contribution to the whole study. Ultimately, the data obtained in my pilot study was substantial, rich, and consistent with the data generated in the main study. Therefore, it was treated as initial data and formed part of the study (Mason, 2002).

5. Setting and Participants

- Graduate Participants

Selection of participants was informed by the nature of the research problem, the study design and practical issues. The approach taken to participant selection was a purposive one in which the participants were chosen specifically for being typical cases relevant to the purpose of the research, for providing some diversity in experiences and outcomes, and for their ability to contribute relevant data on the complexities of their cases within the context being studied (Patton, 2015). Since the main purpose of the research was to investigate graduate identity, employability strategies and transitions to work of Emirati graduates, the main criteria for selection of participants was that they were Emirati nationals, graduates from a federal UAE

HEI and working for less than five years from the point of graduating (in one case this was extended to six years). A starting point of 2006 was therefore chosen because it was the earliest graduating date of the graduate participants, expanding the criteria slightly from the initial plan to interview graduates within five years of leaving higher education. The age bound of the graduate participants was determined by admissions criteria for the UAE federal HEIs and the length of time taken to progress through higher education, given the need for the majority of students to undertake at least a year of English language instruction prior to proceeding to their main degree programs. According to admissions information, entry to the federal HEIs is normally direct from high school, aged eighteen or nineteen. 'Old' high school diplomas are only accepted for admission within a specific number of years, varying from three to ten, depending on the HEI. Graduates in a range of degree subjects were included in the study and no specific subject areas were included in the participant recruitment criteria. This was because my aim was to gain understandings of generic graduate identity rather than vocational identity or specific vocational graduate identity.

There are three UAE state HEIs and these were all represented in the sample. The first HEI is the smallest institution and was initially founded as a university for Emirati women although it now also has male students. At the time of conducting the research, around 1300 students per year were graduating from the institution. The second HEI is the oldest institution with a wider range of degree courses, including medicine and engineering. This HEI has a current population of 14,000 students. HEI3 was initially more vocational in character, offering certificate and diploma courses but began offering degrees approximately seven years ago. The final HEI is the largest of the federal HEIs with over 20,000 students. I have worked in two of the federal HEIs and have contacts in the third.

In keeping with the qualitative approach taken in the study, the participants were not selected in order to form a statistically representative sample (Thomas, 2011; Mason, 2002; Fick, 2009) but rather with the aim of achieving a balance of range and depth in the data collected. Data collection interviews were undertaken between September and December 2012. A purposive sampling technique was used whereby participants were sought according to criteria related to the research questions (Bryman, 2008), specifically with respect to nationality, study history and career stage. However, the precise number of participants was not predetermined and recruitments of participants

was ongoing in parallel with data analysis until it was felt that sufficient data had been generated with which to address the research questions and achieve the aims of the research (Mason, 2002). Participants were recruited through university alumni associations who agreed to send an email explaining the aims of the research and inviting alumni to participate. Initial contact was made through the researcher's own university alumni association, who also reached out to the alumni associations of the other federal institutions. Of approximately two thousand potential female participants contacted, fourteen positive responses were received and ultimately ten took part in the study, with the others self-deselecting in the early stages of correspondence, by failing to respond to the invitation to take part, after the study had been described to them.

Two hundred male graduates were also approached, through alumni associations, employers and Emirati contacts; however, only three agreed to be interviewed and one of those did not return a signed consent form. To try to increase the number of male participants, in particular, other recruitment methods were used. These included making 'word of mouth' contact through Emirati friends and acquaintances, and also asking the employer participants to inform their graduate employees about the study and invite them to participate. Only one male graduate employee responded to the invitation, but he dropped out of the study in the initial stages of contact. I also approached the graduate department of my own university to ask for permission to contact graduate students about the study but unfortunately this was not granted.

In recruiting participants, I used all the methods that seemed available and appropriate at the time. Despite these recruitment strategies, only two male graduate participants were included in the study. This was due to the fact that their recruitment was so challenging and ultimately time constraints meant that further recruitment attempts had to be discontinued. The distribution of female to male graduate participants, although unequal, does, however, reflect the statistical gender distribution of Emirati graduates (Vine, 2010; Hausmann et al, 2011). Challenges relating to recruiting study participants for social research in the UAE have not been examined; however, El Obaid et al (2016) investigated low participation in medical research in the UAE and found a general lack of awareness about research and fears related to confidentiality to be factors inhibiting Emiratis from taking part in research.

A possible consequence of the self-selective nature of the graduate participant sample may be that the accounts given and opinions expressed are those of graduates who felt confident communicating in English and in expressing their opinions, and graduates who felt less confident of their language skills excluded themselves from the study, meaning that their experiences and opinions were not heard. Despite this, a range of outcomes and experiences were described by the participants, and the data does not appear to be biased towards only positive accounts of transitions or only positive attitudes towards Emiratisation. As discussed above, it also meant that the range of degree subjects included was not in the control of the researcher, and this is consistent with the focus on generic graduate identity.

Table 1. below provides a profile of the ten female and two male participants. All were graduates from government sector HEIs in the UAE (of which there are only three) and the group had achieved a range of employment outcomes. With the initial selection criteria for participants within five years of graduating, this became slightly expanded with the earliest graduation date of the participants was in 2006 and the latest in 2012. They had attained bachelor's degrees in a variety of subjects including Education, HR, IT and Business Sciences and were working in a range of public or semi-public sectors. At the time of data collection, two of the participants were unemployed. However, one of these later entered her first paid position. Of the others, most of them were employed in what they considered to be graduate level posts and one was employed in a low entry level administrative position. Reflective of an overwhelming preference for public sector employment among Emiratis (Vine, 2010; Forstenlechner et al, 2010; Al-Ali, 1998), all of the participants were employed in government or semi-government organisations. The names used in the study are all pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 1: Profiles of Graduate Participants

Participant	Age	Graduation Date	Degree	Employment Status	Job Type	Sector
Suhaila	30	2006	Education, MEd, EdD in progress	employed	Graduate occupation	Education
Maryam	28	2008	International Studies	employed	Graduate occupation	Culture & Tourism
Aisha	24	2011	Public Relations & Advertising; Masters in Art of Diplomacy	unemployed	N/A	N/A
Hind	30	2006	Communication & Media Studies	employed	Non-graduate occupation	Higher Education
Mona	25	2010	Human Resource Management	Employed	Graduate occupation	Culture & Tourism
Noora	24	2010	Education	Employed	Graduate occupation	Education
Yasmin	27	2008	Information Technology	unemployed/ employed	Graduate occupation	Higher Education
Amr	23	2010	Networking	employed	Graduate occupation	Higher Education
Abu Bakr	23	2012	Business Science (HRM)	Employed	Graduate occupation	Investment/ Development
Elham	26	2010	Communication & Media Studies	Employed	Graduate occupation	Culture & Tourism
Eman	25	2011	Education	Employed	Non-graduate occupation	Higher Education
Loulwa	26	2012	Project Management	Employed	Non-graduate occupation	Telecom

- Employer Participants

Although the main focus of my study was on graduates' understandings and management of their graduate identity, Holmes' (2001) claim-affirmation model of graduate employability, which I drew upon in the study, emphasizes the interaction between employers and graduates and, therefore, UAE employers' perspectives were also sought. This data was used in order to investigate any conflicts or mismatches in the ways that graduates and employers in the UAE understand graduate identity, and to further understand how graduate identity is socially constructed in the UAE from a different perspective. Access to the employers was gained through the Careers Department at my home university and one employer was a professional contact of mine. The Head of Careers Guidance put me in communication with selected

professional contacts in a range of organisations. The intermediary (Head of Careers Guidance) selected specific organisations based on my expressed objective to gather data from employers across industry sectors that recruited and employed both Emirati and non-Emirati graduates, using purposeful variation (heterogeneity) sampling (Patton, 2015). This was in order to investigate both the diversity and similarities of the employers' conceptualisations of graduate identity, operationalised in graduate selection criteria and processes (Patton, 2015). Five organisations were approached and included in the study. One key informant, or knowledgeable (Patton, 2015), from each organisation was sought to take part in the employer interviews. A key selection criterion was that they had to be directly involved, at managerial level, in the selection of graduates for positions within the organisation. Details of the employer participants are given in Table 2. below.

In considering the effects of the employers' sample on the data collected the fact that the employers were mostly referred by a specific university, although contacted by me directly, could have influenced the data. In particular, the employers might have felt constrained in their responses by a wish not to be critical of graduates and potentially spoil their relationship with the university, so that the picture presented by the data could be unrealistically positive. Counteracting this possible limitation is the fact that not all of the employers employed graduates from the specific HEI through which they were contacted.

Of the employer participants, only one was a native English speaker. However, all had very strong English language skills and English was the language commonly used in their organisations and in their selection procedures. This meant that the data could be taken to reliably reflect their views. One was female and the others were all males, meaning that the data collected could be dominated by male employer conceptualisations of graduate identity. This is not explored in my study

Table 2: Employer profiles

Industry	Sector	National/ International	Emiratisation Program?	Graduate Recruitment Program?
banking	semi-private	National	Yes	yes
management consultants	private	International	No	yes
education	public	National	Yes	no
maritime	Semi-private	National	Yes	yes
Investment/ holding	Semi-private	National	Yes	yes

6. The Researcher

A qualitative, social constructionist approach to research considers that knowledge is constructed in social interactions. In this research the knowledge that emerged was constructed through the processes of designing the research, conducting the interviews and analysing and interpreting the data, with the researcher as an active participant in these processes (Mason, 2002). The research process, therefore, involved a reflexive approach to make explicit my positionality in the research, the influence of what Patton (2015) refers to as reflexive screens (such as culture, age, gender, and so on) on the findings of the study, and the researcher's voice. I consider such reflexivity as a strategy in conducting ethical research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). In acknowledging my role in the study, and in common with other qualitative researchers, I use the first person "I", which Patton (2015) calls the 'reflexive voice' in reporting on this study and I now outline a number of ways in which my identity as the researcher may be implicated in the construction of the findings of this study, and which should be borne in mind when considering the findings and the conclusions drawn from them.

Having lived in the United Arab Emirates since 1995, working as a teacher and administrator in both higher education and corporate recruitment and training, I have participated in the university education of many Emirati women and men and have found them bright, engaging and competent. Therefore, I entered this research from a position of sympathy to the challenges they face in their transitions into the labour market. However, working as a training manager on an Emiratisation program, I have also experienced issues in recruiting and retaining young Emiratis and dealing with what are often conceptualised and reported as performance issues, poor work ethic

and/or lack of skills. Therefore, this study derives, to a large extent, from my experience in both of these roles and a curiosity to understand how young Emiratis view their employability and the role that culture plays in the employability strategies they employ during the transition to work. My decision to use a framework of graduate identity as a means of moving beyond narratives of graduate skills, is also undoubtedly a product of my education, my professional identity and the value I place on a holistic view of higher education with a broader purpose than that of simply developing skills for employment.

Culture is an issue on a list of reflexive screens suggested by Patton (2015) and a particular challenge in the study related to cultural differences between the participants and the researcher and the researcher's status as a cultural 'outsider'. The participants in the study were all Emirati nationals, while the researcher is a British national. Howarth (2002) notes that the issue of differences between the researcher and participants is a common dilemma in research and a topic of debate with no clear answers. Using the example of the sociology of "race", Howarth describes the debate 'as to how far white researchers can understand and empathise with black experiences' (Howarth, 2002:4). I argue, though, that while it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of understanding when the researcher is not a member of a specific group being researched, there is validity in the view that 'in-group' or emic research can be superficial and fail to penetrate 'taken-for-granted relationships', while differences between researcher and participants, such as in this study, can lead to 'rich and insightful narratives' (Howarth, 2002:4). In my study, my long residence in the UAE and professional background assisted in developing rapport with the participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) and the narratives resulting from the interviews with the Emirati graduates were rich and full of interesting insights. However, it also meant I had to be particularly vigilant against making assumptions about the participants based on my experiences rather than what they actually said.

I noted above the influence that my professional background had on the choice of topic for this study and my profession also had an effect on the data collection stage, in particular in the ways in which the graduates interacted with me. The preamble to the interviews included an introduction to the researcher including my professional background and while this helped to develop rapport and trust, in that I shared familiarity with various higher education institutions with the graduates, there were instances where the graduates, knowing that I was a university faculty member,

appeared to confuse my role as a researcher with of an instructor and asked me to evaluate their English or their 'performance' in the interview. Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that this confusion between roles can occur when a researcher conducts a study in their own setting. It must also be considered that it may have made them less willing to be critical of their higher education experiences.

Language is another of Patton's suggested reflexive screens (Patton, 2015) and was an issue in that I am a native English speaker and most of the participants in the study were not. However, my background as an English language teacher and examiner, and long experience of communicating with young Emiratis was useful in designing the interview questions. I was sensitive to the ways in which Emiratis tend to say things and to things that are not said (Fontana and Frey, 1994), and, in particular, I focused on constructing questions that were not intimidating linguistically or conceptually to the participants.

As a female researcher, several issues related to my gender influenced data collection in the study (Patton, 2015; Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). It was probably a factor making recruitment of male graduate participants difficult. Although Schwedler (2006) suggests that Western female researchers in the Middle East have privileged access to both male and female research participants, giving them a status as a kind of 'third gender' (Schwedler, 2006), in the context of UAE social norms regarding gender segregation (Metcalf, 2006), male graduates may feel less comfortable being interviewed by a female researcher than they would with a male researcher. On the other hand, the female participants appeared to be very comfortable but I had to guard against them making assumptions of a shared female identity or at least assuming that I had an understanding of their female identity, that in fact I did not. Oakley (2016) warns against this kind of assumption which she refers to as a naïve notion of "sisterhood"' (Oakley, 2016) which does not take cultural differences related to race, age, class, and so on, into account.

In order to adopt a reflexive approach to my position as researcher in the study, I adopted several strategies. Disclosure of my purpose and of my professional background to the participants was one such strategy. Other strategies included free writing of notes, ideas and comments and of case summaries of the participants (Savin-Bader and Major, 2013). Adopting these strategies contributed to making the

research ethical and also acknowledged and made transparent my role as the researcher in the construction of the findings.

7. Data Collection Methods and Procedures

In order to answer the research questions and in keeping with the research approach adopted, qualitative interviews with the Emirati graduate participants and the employers were the main method of data collection, or data generation (Mason, 2002) used in this study.

Interviews are a common method of generating data in qualitative research (Mason, 2002; Bryman, 2008; Flick, 2009) and were used in this research as a way to gain access to the participants' constructions of their perceptions and understandings of their graduate identity, employability and transitions to work experiences (Mason, 2002). The aim of using interviews was to give voice to the participants, to focus on processes as well as outcomes, and to gain a deeper understanding of the issues being explored (Blustein et al, 2005). The interviews were conducted in English although the participants were all Arabic speakers. The main advantage of this was that English is the *lingua franca* of the workplace in the UAE and recruitment processes are often in English, as was the case with all of the employing organisations in the study (although this was not a criterion for inclusion). Therefore, it was more authentic to interview both graduates and employers in English as their 'English graduate identity' is the most salient and was the one explored in my study. The main disadvantage was that the participants might not have been able to explain themselves as comprehensively as they could have done in their native language. However, this was mitigated by my experience in interviewing and communicating with non-native English speakers.

- *Graduates*

The interviews for the graduate participants were semi-structured in design and based on Flick's (2009) episodic interview technique which seeks to elicit both *episodic knowledge* and *semantic knowledge.* According to Flick (2009) *episodic knowledge* is 'organized closer to experiences and linked to concrete situations and circumstances' while *semantic knowledge* is 'based on assumptions and relations,

which are abstracted from these and generalized' (Flick, 2009:185). Episodic interviews were chosen as a data collection method since they are designed to both elicit narratives relating to experiences and to explicitly explore some of the theoretical concepts involved (Flick, 2009). The episodic interviews were operationalised through questions designed to elicit 'data on perspectives of salience to respondents' (Barbour, 2008), such as the meaning of their degree credential, attributes gained through higher education, and understandings of Emiratisation, as well as narrative-type accounts of the participants' experiences of higher education and the transition to work, and their employability strategies. A narrative or biographical-type approach is suggested by Furlong (2009) as 'an effective way of learning about young people's interpretations of their experiences and of discovering the ways in which they attempt to plan their futures and put together the pieces of life's jigsaw.'(Furlong, 2009:7). In my study, narratives were elicited and examined as a culturally enabled way in which individuals understand, organize and connect events and construct their graduate identities (Chase, 2008; LaPointe, 2010; Lawler, 2014). Additionally, in order to link the data to the propositions stated in the study design (Yin, 1994) the use of Flick's technique (2009) also allowed the use of specific questions to explore specific concepts found in the literature on graduate employability. Although not designed as simulations, the structure of the interviews was not dissimilar from a selection interview in that the participants were encouraged to present their narratives in the way that they might in a job interview. Since Holmes' model (2001) of emergent graduate identity modalities focuses on the claim-affirmation process of graduates' interactions with employers, this approach to interviewing was a way of gaining insights into the manner in which the graduate participants might present their claims on graduate identity to prospective employers.

In order to implement an episodic approach, the interviews with the graduate participants were semi-structured with an interview guide developed and tested and refined in the pilot study. As Barbour (2008) suggests, in using an interview schedule, or indeed in any strategy of formulating interview questions the researcher is to a certain extent anticipating analysis of the data and shaping the analytic possibilities (Barbour, 2008) and therefore, the use of such a guide provides some consistency between interviews (Bryman, 2008) and a means of linking data to the propositions stated in the study design (Yin, 1994) while still allowing flexibility for the

interviewer to follow up on themes and topics over the course of the interaction (Bryman, 2008; Rapley, 2004). Each interview started with some general conversation in order to put the participants at ease and also with a brief explanation about the research. The interview questions were designed to be clear, understandable and answerable (Patton, 2015) as well as sensitive to their needs (including linguistic needs as non-native English speakers). To explore their perspectives on graduate identity, participants were asked about their understandings of their graduate status, as opposed to being a high school leaver, the meaning of their degree credential, the personal attributes developed through their university education, and their approaches to their university and labour market experiences (Mason, 2002), as indicated by the operationalisation of graduate identity used in my study. I did not use the term "graduate identity" as this could have been conceptually and linguistically difficult for them. They were also not asked about other identities since the focus of the study was specifically on their graduate identity with respect to employment. See Appendix 1 for the interview guides used for the graduate participants in the study.

The interviews used in the study were conducted face-to-face, by telephone and by email. Participants were given the choice of which of these modes they preferred, along with the time and place of the interview, where relevant. This was a way of giving them some control and ownership of the research process, consistent with a qualitative, social constructionist approach to research (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). It was also a strategy to make it easier for the participants to take part in the study by giving them the opportunity to fit the interviews in with their work and lives. All of the interviews were preceded by email correspondence with the researcher in which the aims of the study were explained and a copy of the interview guide provided. The face-to-face and telephone interviews were recorded and transcribed. The email interviews were saved as Word documents and reformatted into a structure consistent with the transcripts of the verbal interviews. See Appendix 4 for an extract from a transcript of an interview with a graduate participant.

Each type of interview used had strengths and weaknesses as well as presenting different ethical challenges. Face-to-face interviews were the preferred method in this study as this kind of interview usually results in the richest data (Meho, 2006; Opdenakker, 2006). According to Opdenakker (2006), face-to-face interviews are the

only type of interview that are synchronous in both time and place. Among the advantages claimed for face-to-face, or in-person interviews, are more accurate responses due to 'contextual naturalness', more self-generated and thoughtful responses enhanced by access to visual clues, and better interviewer-participant interaction (Shuy, 2003; Opdenakker, 2006; Rapley, 2004). Participants were invited to choose the location for the face-to-face interviews and with the graduates these took place in spare offices and meeting rooms on the campus of the researcher's university. Seven of the graduate interviews were face-to-face.

Telephone interviews were also offered as an option to potential participants in this study as a way of accessing participants who might find it difficult to find time for a face-to-face interview or who might feel more comfortable with the more anonymous form of communication (Bryman, 2008; Mann and Steward, 2000). In Opdenakker's categorisation, telephone interviews are synchronous in time but asynchronous in place. Bryman (2008) suggests that compared to face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews have been found to elicit data of equal quality and depth. The telephone interviews in the study were preceded by email contact and in some cases telephone contact which allowed some development of rapport between the interviewer and interviewee before the telephone interview. A disadvantage of telephone interviews is that the interviewer is unable to observe the body language of the interviewee which might provide valuable additional data (Bryman, 2008; Opdenakker, 2006). On the other hand, the influence of the interviewer's non-verbal signals is reduced. In my study, telephone interviews provided access to participants who were unable or reluctant to undertake a face-to face interview. Again, the participants chose the time of the interview and were able to choose a location in which they felt comfortable. Two of the graduate interviews were by telephone.

The option to participate in an interview by email was done at the request of some of the participants. Email interviews are asynchronous in both time and place (Opdenakker, 2006). The advantages of this include the fact that participants can respond in their own time, that participants can be included who may otherwise be difficult to access; the interviews do not have to be transcribed, contributing to accuracy of the data (Rapley, 2004), and saving time; and they do not have to be recorded which may encourage potential participants who have concerns about this aspect of the interview (Bryman, 2008). Email interviews also facilitate interviewing

of 'shy people who do not or cannot express themselves as well in talking as they do in writing, especially when the language used in communicating with participants is their second one' (Meho, 2006: 1288) as was the case in the present study. Similarly, while an email exchange may reduce the effects of race, age, gender, etc. on the interviewer-participant relationship and may lead to greater disclosure given the reduced potential for embarrassment (Meho, 2006), the corresponding disadvantage is that the interviewer will have less opportunity to develop rapport with the interviewee and is less able to confirm the identity of the person being interviewed. For this reason, the participants were engaged in some email preamble of a friendly and general nature in order to set a relaxed tone and engender trust in the researcher. James (2007) also questioned whether email narratives may be less authentic or whether the extra time allowed for reflection may have positive consequences in that the participants may be able to work on the text to ensure their meanings are accurately presented (James, 2007). The email interviews in my study produced rich and interesting data, and despite the lack of opportunity to develop rapport with the researcher, the participants gave extensive and explicit responses to the interview questions. Although the role of the researcher in the construction of the interview data may have been less in the email interviews, this role was present through the design of the questions and in the interaction of the participants' identities with my own as the participants were still aware of my non-Emirati nationality, gender and profession. The quality of the responses received suggests that although in some cases the data may have lost depth and complexity through the reduced ability to probe and extend questions, the additional time that the participants had to construct their answers compensated for this to an extent (James, 2007) and the credibility of the data may have been enhanced by the reduced effect of the interviewer's verbal and non-verbal cues (Meho, 2006; Shenton, 2004).

As suggested by Meho (2006), in conducting email interviews, the questions must be self-explanatory and clear in order to reduce the potential for miscommunication or misinterpretation. Since, in this case, there was no pre-existing relationship with the participants, the questions were sent out together in the form of an interview guide and further emails were exchanged to probe, clarify and seek further data (Meho, 2006). Two of the graduates were interviewed by email. See Appendix 5 for an extract from an email interview (raw data).

-   *Employers*

Interviews were also used to collect data from the five employers. Of these, one interview was face-to-face, two were conducted by phone, and two were by email. As with the graduate participants, the employer participants were offered a choice of time, place and format of their interview. The reasons for their choices were not explored in the study. Prior to the interviews, the websites of the organisations taking part in the interviews were also examined for contextual/background information. The employers' perspectives on graduate identity were operationalised in terms of their selection criteria and processes, including the credentials they asked for and the strategies they used to evaluate graduates, such as interviews and tests. The employer interviews were semi-structured and pragmatic (Savin-Baden & Major, 2015), focusing specific questions to draw out employer conceptualisations of graduate identity through their descriptions of what they look for in graduate recruits and how they look for it. Episodic interviews were not used. The aim of the interviews with the employers was to collect data on how they expected graduate candidates to 'be' and to present themselves and what they were looking for in order to affirm an individual's claim about graduate identity with respect to employment. As with the graduate participants, the research was explained to the employers using non-technical terminology. The questions to the employers were direct in that they were not designed to elicit a narrative, but specific information. The questions were designed based on the principles that they should be clear, understandable and answerable (Patton, 2015). See appendix 2 for the interview guide used for the employer participants. In general, the employers tended to be succinct and direct in their responses, with the bank employer providing the most expansive responses to the questions.

8. Data Processing and Analysis

As Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) note, in qualitative research analysis is done with words which the researcher can assemble, reorganise, compare, contrast and analyse (Miles et al, 2014: 9). In my study, the words of the graduate and employer participants formed the raw data for analysis and interpretation. The process of analysis and interpretation of the data in the study incorporated elements of two models from the methodology literature. Marshall and Rossman (2006) list seven phases of data analysis:

organizing the data, immersion in the data, generating categories and themes, coding the data, offering interpretations through analytic memos, searching for alternative understandings, presenting the study (Marshall and Rossman, 2006:156). Alternatively, Miles, et al (2014) propose three stages: data condensation which includes coding, data display, in the forms of matrices, graphs, charts, etc. as part of the analytical process, and the drawing and verifying of conclusions. In my study, the analysis process started with organising the data followed by immersion in the data (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). Generating categories and themes took place both before and during coding, with data display forming part of this process (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014). The final part of the process was the drawing and verifying of conclusions. Each of these stages is now discussed in more detail.

The first task undertaken was to organise the data. This was done by transcribing the interviews using a standard transcription format (Flick, 2009) with the text aligned to allow annotations at the side. The researcher personally transcribed the interviews as a means of becoming familiar with the data. Although not transcribed as such, the email interviews were organised in a similar way by reformatting the data as a transcription. This organisation of the data revealed a total of approximately fifty thousand words of data. Immersion in the data took place through the transcription process and by a further reading through of each transcription several times and noting down initial thoughts in the form of mini memos (Flick, 2009; Miles et al 2014))

Following Patton (2015), I first analysed each case before looking for patterns across the cases and then themes associated with the patterns. The data from each participant was analysed separately and then cross-case comparisons were made using an iterative process. There were two stages to coding each transcript (Flick, 2009; Charmaz, 2006); Miles, et al, 2014). The first stage used both a deductive and inductive approach (Miles, et al, 2014)) as a provisional list of codes was drawn up based on the conceptual framework being used (Miles, et al, 2014) in order to ensure focus on the research problem; however, during the first stage of coding emerging codes were also added to the list since an aim of the study was theory development rather than testing. A line-by-line approach to coding, advocated by Charmaz (2006) was used to ensure fine analysis of the data. As well as focusing on particular concepts drawn from theory, initial coding was sensitive to data relating to values, attributions, causation, processes and

emotions (Miles et al, 2014). In order to answer the first research question, I was looking in the data for the meanings and understandings around graduate status constructed by the graduates and employers. Further, and particularly in the cases of the graduate participants, I was looking for the processes through which these came about and the influencing factors. To answer the second research question, I specifically examined the transition trajectories of the graduate participants before examining the relationships between these and the meanings and understandings identified in addressing the first research question. In doing this, I was using basic questions such as what?, who?, how? why? to identify patterns, themes and concepts occurring in particular cases and across the cases, looking for how the participants' stories could illuminate UAE graduate employment and employability issues, and what factors could explain the participants' responses to the interview questions (Flick, 2009; Miles, et al, 2014; Patton, 2015).

In analysing the narratives of the graduate participants, verbatim coding was also used. I called on methods advocated by LaPointe (2013) such as looking specifically for evaluative language, including negatives and metaphors, to signify identity positioning and examining key episodes for signs of identity work. The second stage was focused coding, clustering codes into categories and themes, making comparisons across the cases (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013: Miles et al, 2014). Matrices and tables were used to do this. The final stage of the process was to abstract key themes and issues from the cases that appeared to be significant (Holmes, 2013). Table 3. below gives some examples of codes from the data analysis

Table 3: Examples of codes

Category: Graduate Identity Warranting	Abbreviation
IW: Credentials – Degree	IW – C/D
IW: Credentials – Other Qualifications	IW – C/OQ
IW: Experience	IW – Exp
IW: Skills Use	IW – Skill
IW: Personal reference/testimonial	IW - Pers

Although some initial use was made of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS), specifically the nVivo software, the decision was taken quite early in the process to do the analysis by hand rather than continue with the software. There were three main reasons for this. First, because of a personal preference to work with data in concrete form (Patton, 2015), which in this study meant paper copies of transcripts, and the fact that the amount of data was such that it was manageable to code by hand (Patton, 2015). Second, was a personal dislike for the decontextualizing of the data that the software imposed (Bryman, 2008) and a desire to have greater control over and deeper familiarity with the data (Bryman, 2008). Lastly, was a desire to gain experience and better understanding of the processes of data analysis through doing it by hand (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). Tables in Word and Excel were also used to produce matrices and charts which contributed to the analytical process (Miles et al, 2014).

9. Ethical Considerations

In conducting and reporting on this study, I strove to ensure integrity and quality, to safeguard the interests of the participants and to present the findings accurately, calling upon guidance from the literature and in accordance with the ethical guidelines provided by the University of Leicester (www.le.ac.uk). The study was awarded ethical approval by the University of Leicester and ethical approval had to be gained at the University where the researcher worked as this was a contractual obligation. Research ethics have been defined as 'the moral principles guiding research, from its inception through to completion and publication of results and beyond' (ESRC, p.7) and possibly the overarching concern of research ethics is the issue of protecting research participants from harm (Diener and Crandall, 1978). Harm can include 'physical harm, psychological stress or discomfort' (University of Leicester Code of Practice for Research Ethics) and can be caused by data gathering procedures, by identification and by the information obtained itself. Harm to individual research participants can include stress or anxiety caused by the process itself, and by concerns about the data being traced to individuals and harming their career or relationships with others (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Patton, 2015; Bryman, 2008).

In adhering to the principle of causing no harm, two main strategies were used. The first of these was a rules-based approach to ensuring that the study was conducted in an ethical manner (Bryman, 2008; Heath et al, 2009), and the second was the use of reflexivity as means of connecting the rules and the situated practices, or what Guillemin and Gillam (2004) terms the 'procedural ethics' and the 'ethics in practice'. A rules based approach was adopted because it is consistent with a qualitative, social constructionist approach to research in which the participants are considered as active participants in creating the knowledge that emerges in the study (Mason, 2002; Gergen, 2015; Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Flick, 2009; Rapley, 2004). While there are issues and limitations associated with some of the processes and instruments of a rules-based approach (which will be discussed later in this section), it does provide a framework through which to make ethical procedures transparent and clear to the participants. The use of rules-based procedures, combined with reflexivity ensured that the 'microethics', or situated ethics were also considered (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Heath et al, 2009). Specific issues which were considered as ethical issues relevant to this research included relevance of the study, informed consent, confidentiality, quality of the research, trust, and language of the participants. These are now discussed.

Flick (2007) suggests that relevance of the research is a prerequisite for ethical research. My study meets this requirement as it addresses issues which are important in achieving the goal of Emiratisation of the UAE workforce and in helping young people to achieve their career and life aspirations. In terms of the parties potentially affected, the study aims to inform practice in higher education and graduate recruitment in order to benefit young Emirati graduates generally, thus meeting the ethical principle of beneficence and not just non-maleficence (Green and Thorogood, 2004; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Describing the methodology of the study in this chapter is also part of the researcher's responsibility of reflexivity to ensure sound methodology and transparency (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

An important focus in rules-based research ethics is the issue of informed consent (Diener & Crandall, 1978; Ryen, 2004; Bryman, 2008). According to Ryen (2004), 'research subjects have the right to know that they are being researched, the right to be informed about the nature of the research and the right to withdraw at any time.' (Ryen, 2004:231) 'Informed consent' means that participants should be made aware of the

topic and purpose of research in which they are participating (Bryman, 2008; Thomas, 2011) and their rights as voluntary participants (Bryman, 2008). In order to fulfil this ethical requirement, participants in the study were requested to sign consent forms outlining the purpose of the study and their rights as participants, including the right to refuse participation, the right to withdraw from the study, and the right to withhold or withdraw information and reject use of recording devices. While, as Heath et al (2009) assert, it is questionable the extent to which consent can ever be considered fully informed given the challenges of explaining research processes and potential outcomes to participants, this can probably be considered less of an issue in my study than in other studies where there is more potential for harm to participants. Furthermore, this study did not present any particular challenges such as requiring any form of deception or invasions of privacy (Diener and Crandall, 1978). See appendix 6 for the consent form used.

When considering ways in which research participants may be harmed, confidentiality is a key consideration. Ryen (2004; 233), argues that researchers 'are obliged to protect the participants' identity, places and the location of the research.' (Ryen, 2004:233). Strategies used to protect the identity of the research participants in my study include the use of pseudonyms. However, it has to be born in mind that this does not always guarantee anonymity and the researcher should be careful in presenting information which when added together may be used to identify a particular participant. The same care needs to be taken with information relating to specific organizations.   The three different types of interview used in the current study raised different ethical challenges with respect to the issue of confidentiality, although, giving the participants choice in type, time and location of their interview was one of the strategies used in the study to ensure that the research was carried out ethically. While confidentiality was taken into consideration when deciding on the location of the interviews, there remained a possibility of the participants being seen at the interviews attended face-to-face or overheard while participating in a telephone interview. However, it is unlikely that being known participants in the study would cause harm, given the topic and giving the participants choice in which kind of interview they preferred gave them some control over the circumstances of their interview. Email interviews present the challenge of being traceable; however, all identifying information was removed when the emails were stored. The participants

who were interviewed by telephone were allowed to choose a convenient time for them and the participants who agreed to face-to-face interviews were given the choice of interview venue and all chose to come to the researcher's home campus.

A further ethical issue concerns the role of the researcher, trust between the researcher and the participants (Ryen, 2004; and a responsibility on the part of the researcher not to 'spoil the field' (Ryen, 2004:234 ;) for subsequent researchers by behaving in a way which will make populations reluctant to participate in later research. The latter relates to Flick's ethical criterion of quality (Flick, 2007). It can be argued that the issue of trust is closely linked with confidentiality and informed consent. It is also related to questions of the researcher's credibility. The researcher must demonstrate high professional standards at all times and must be as informed as possible before commencing the research with regard to the background of the participants, current knowledge in the field of study, and the research methods being used. Following the advice of Savin-Baden & Major (2013), care was taken to treat all of the study participants with respect. One way of doing this and involving them in the study as active participants was to offer them a copy of their transcribed interview so that they could confirm or dispute any of the contents. Two of the participants took up this offer and did not ask for any changes or additions to be made. In the spirit of reciprocity (Patton, 2015), the graduate participants were also offered a subsequent career coaching session as a way of thanking them for their time and input. None of them availed themselves of this offer.

A further ethical issue in conducting this research was that of language. Since qualitative research is based on words, the decision had to be made on whether to conduct the research through interpreters and translators, or to use English which is the researcher's first language and the participants' second language. It was felt that using interpreters/translators would impinge on the researcher-participant relationship and contribute to the possibility of error. Furthermore, since all of the participants had been educated in English up to at least first degree level, it was felt that the participants would be able to express themselves sufficiently in English. Therefore, English was the language used during the research. The advantages and disadvantages of this, and possible effects on the data, are discussed in Section 7 above.

In writing up and presenting the findings from qualitative research, consideration was given to the role and voice of the researcher and the voices of the participants. According to Rapley (2004) interview data can be viewed from two major perspectives. In the first, the data are viewed as reflecting the 'interviewees' reality outside the interview' and in the second, a constructionist perspective, the data are seen as 'reflecting a reality jointly constructed by the interviewee and interviewer' (Rapley, 2004: 16). My study adopts a constructionist perspective and therefore takes the position that data is generated rather than excavated (Mason, 2002). It is therefore acknowledged that the design and implementation of the study will have influenced the findings, as will the questions asked, the relationship and interaction between the researcher and participants, and the pre-existing knowledge and assumptions that the researcher brings to the study. An ethical consideration in research adopting this paradigm is to ensure that the voices of the participants are also heard. Therefore, in presenting the findings extracts from the interviews are included to illustrate and exemplify the interpretations made.

10. Strategies to Ensure Rigour through Trustworthiness

Following on from the section on ethical considerations, this section discusses the strategies adopted in this study to ensure quality and rigour, which, as Flick (2007) argues, are also ethical issues in any qualitative research. The notion of quality or rigour in research using qualitative methods is not a straightforward one. Associated with positivism and the 'scientific method', qualitative researchers have struggled with issues related to rigour on philosophical, methodological and even political grounds (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Tobin and Begley, 2004). In quantitative research rigour is ensured by means of statistical techniques which enable reliability and validity of the research to be demonstrated. In a qualitative approach, where words, meanings and different 'voices' are central, problems with the positivist notion of rigour become immediately apparent as the statistical techniques used in quantitative research are often not appropriate and notions such as generalizability may be considered irrelevant.

Two main approaches have been taken with respect to rigour criteria in research using qualitative methods. One approach taken is to apply that the notions of reliability and

validity, usually associated with quantitative research and the 'scientific method', to qualitative research by taking a wider or different view of the concepts (Mason, 2002; LeCompte and Goetz, 1982; Bryman, 2008; Seale and Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 2006). However, in my study I used the second approach, based on alternative criteria and concepts which fit better with the social constructionist paradigm adopted for the study (Patton, 2015). In order to establish rigour in my study, I used the notion of 'trustworthiness', proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and consisting of four criteria: *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *confirmability*. Each of these criteria will now be discussed.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the criterion of *credibility* can be considered the qualitative equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research. Merriam (1988) suggests that *credibility* refers to the congruence of a study's findings with the reality of the participants. Graneheim and Lundman (2004) propose that this can be achieved through the focus of a study, selecting the context, choosing participants and the approach to data gathering including appropriate meaning units, categories and themes. In my study, I endeavoured to ensure that my data and findings were credible by using well established research methods (Shenton, 2004), such as qualitative interviews, appropriate operational measures (Yin, 1994) based on an explicit conceptual framework, 'thick description' in presenting my findings (Shenton, 2004), and comparison with other studies examining similar phenomena (Silverman, 2001). The adoption of these strategies, and transparency and detail in describing them in the Methodology chapter, increased the chances that my findings were accurately reflective of the socially constructed 'reality' of my participants.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose *transferability* as a qualitative alternative to generalizability and external validity and that is the terminology used here to describe the approach taken in this study. In qualitative research, rather than establishing generalizability through representative sampling, the aim is to provide sufficient information for the reader of the research to make judgments about the extent to which the findings can be transferred to different contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Therefore, in order to facilitate this kind of evaluation of the *transferability* of my findings, I designed my study to provide a 'thick description' of culture and context through in-depth analysis of a relatively small number of cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As asserted by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) and Bryman (2008), 'thick description' refers to 'detailed accounts of a social setting that can form the basis for the creation of general statements about a culture and its significance in people's social lives' (Bryman, 2008:700). In accordance with Graneheim and Lundman's (2004) suggestion, I also enhanced the potential *transferability* of my findings through a clear and transparent description of the research methods and techniques used so that readers have sufficient data on which to critically evaluate the *transferability* of the research.

The criterion of *dependability (*Lincoln and Guba, 1985)*, which is equated to reliability in quantitative research, is addressed in my study by means of establishing a detailed account of the research, and an audit trail through which the research strategies and techniques, and the data collected, can be verified and evaluated against the findings. The records kept include sources of data, research protocols, interviews held, and transcripts (Mason, 2002; Yin, 1994; Bassey, 1999). An additional strategy used to demonstrate *dependability* of the data was the use of multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1994). The multiple case design enables triangulation of data collection through multiple semi-structured interviews with participants purposively selected (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Further triangulation enhancing the *dependability* of the data was provided through data collection from a different group of participants, the employers.

The establishment of an audit trail was also one way in which the final criterion of *confirmability* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the data was met in the current study. A further important means of demonstrating the *confirmability* of my data was the use of verification strategies in which there was an ongoing process of moving back and forth 'between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis' (Morse et al, 2002:17). The data and research processes were also checked to ensure focus and consistency of conceptual approach, analysis and interpretation (Morse et al, 2002). The use of propositions, as suggested by Yin (1994), is one way in which this was facilitated in the current research. The pilot study, described in section 4 of this chapter, was another strategy used to verify the appropriateness of the methodology being used in the study. Finally, confirmation of the data was sought by sending transcripts to the participants, and of the findings by presentation to an audience of graduates and employers in a conference discussion.

Quantitative/ Positivist Approach	Qualitative/ Interpretivist-Constructivist Approaches	Suggested Strategies	Strategies used in the current study
Construct/ Internal Validity	• **Credibility** (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)	Multiple sources of evidence and correct operational measures (Yin, 1994) Well established research methods and thick description (Shenton, 2006) Comparison with other studies (Silverman, 2001)	Multiple case study design Different sources of data (graduates and employers) Well established research methods Thick description
External Validity	• **Transferability** (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) • Fittingness (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) • Applicability (Sandelowski, 1986)	Thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004)	Thick description of methodology and findings Case study design; interview design; data analysis methods
Reliability	• **Dependability** (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) • Auditability (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) • Consistency (Sandelowski, 1986)	Research protocol, database; record of sources of evidence (Yin, 1994)	Audit trail including interview schedule & guide; transcripts, memos, researcher notes, coding list
Objectivity	• **Confirmability** (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) • Neutrality (Sandelowski, 1981)	Verification strategies, audit trail (Bassey, 1999; Mason, 2002)	Audit trail/records (as above); analysis linked to propositions/conceptual framework Confirmation of data with some participants and findings with other Emirati graduates

Table 4: Criteria for rigour proposed in the literature and summary of the strategies adopted in this study

Table 4. above lists the alternative rigour criteria proposed for qualitative research in the literature against the corresponding criteria for positivist/quantitative research. The table includes strategies proposed in the literature for fulfilling these criteria and summarizes the strategies used in this study to ensure rigour in the final column.

In summary, in conducting and writing up this study, I have addressed the issue of internal and external validity by using the alternative, qualitative criterion of *trustworthiness* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In order to do this, I employed a range of strategies, as described above, in order to make my findings and conclusions credible, dependable and confirmable and to enable evaluation of the transferability of the findings by the readers.

11. Limitations of the Research Design

While a strength of qualitative research is that it provides ways of exploring subjective understandings of social phenomena from a variety of perspectives (Mason, 2006; Berg, 2009; McMillan and Schumacher, 1993; Marshall and Rossman, 2006), a common criticism is that the findings cannot be generalized (Berg, 2009; Merriam, 1988). It is acknowledged that, as a small scale, qualitative investigation with only twelve graduate participants and five employer participants, the findings of this study cannot be generalised in quantitative, probabilistic terms (Mason, 2002). However, the methodological approach taken was done so on the basis that, as Berg (2009) argues, 'there is clearly a scientific value to gain from investigating some single category of individual, group, or event simply to gain an understanding of that individual, group, or event' (Berg, 2009: 330). Despite this perspective, since the study was context bound and context focused, some degree of context-bound generalization should be feasible (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993) and follow-up studies such as those suggested in the final chapter, offer the possibility to examine aspects of the findings quantitatively. Within these limitations, the design of the study should enable some degree of theoretical transferability or translatability by the use of theoretical frameworks (Mason, 2006; McMillan and Schumacher, 1993).

12. Conclusion

This study, then, explored Emirati graduate employability during the transition from education to work, through the lens of graduate identity. The methodology employed in the study was qualitative in nature, based on an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm and using a multiple case study-type design. This methodology was informed by the aims of the study and the research questions and was used as a means of eliciting the subjective understandings and lived experiences of young Emirati graduates and of employers of young Emirati graduates in order to explore the social construction of graduate identity and graduate employability. For the purposes of the study, graduate identity with respect to employment was understood as one identity among others, as relational and interactive, and as contingent on social and cultural contexts. It was operationalised in terms of graduates' narratives around their higher education and labour market experience and employers' selection criteria and processes. Selection of participants was based on typical-case or concept/theory, based sampling (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993) and the study included twelve young Emirati graduates and five employers. Interviews were used as the main method of data generation and data analysis was undertaken using concepts drawn from the conceptual framework and analytical techniques drawn from constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003), interpretivist approaches and analysis of narratives (LaPointe, 2010). The research approach allowed for a research design that enabled the interactions between myself, the researcher, and the study participants, through which the data was constructed. This also meant that the claims made in my study are based on rich, trustworthy data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Yin, 1994). The claims are not intended to be generalizable to, or statistically representative of, a wider population (Mason, 2002). However, the 'thick description' provided should enable the readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings to other contexts (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004; Bryman, 2008). The findings of the study will now be presented and discussed in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

Emirati Graduate Identity: graduates' and employers' perspectives

1. Introduction

This study aims to explore the employability strategies, experiences and outcomes of Emirati graduates as they transition from education to work and navigate the early years of their careers using a graduate identity framework. My intention is to bring to light subjectivities of employability in the UAE context and to contribute to 'thick' understandings of employability issues there. In order to do so, I explore the use of emergent graduate identity, related to employment, as a conceptual framework through which to undertake socially nuanced analysis of the employability actions of Emirati graduates in interaction with their context. Studies into employability generally have continued to be dominated by the graduate skills approach and positional and processual approaches, including those focusing on identity, (Brown and Hesketh, 2004: Holmes, 2001, Tomlinson, 2007) have been under-utilised as a means of understanding and conceptualising graduate behaviours, experiences and outcomes. In the UAE literature, issues of identity in relation to work have not been addressed at all. My study, therefore, is designed to develop understandings of Emirati graduate employability through the lens of graduate identity, as it relates to employment, and to move discussions of graduate employability in the UAE forward.

My study draws on positional and processual understandings of identity and employability, and, in particular, on the concepts used in Leonard Holmes' model of emergent graduate identity modalities (Holmes, 2001; 2013). In this model, employability is conceptualised as the outcome of interactions between graduates and employers and key concepts are the *claiming* and *warranting* of graduate identity by graduates. Therefore, this chapter examines the understandings of graduate identity that each party brings to the interaction, with the main focus being on the graduates. In order to *claim* and *warrant* graduate

identity, as proposed in Holmes' model (Holmes, 2001) an individual must have a conceptualisation of what they are claiming. Likewise, the employers must have an idea of what it is that they are seeking in their interactions with graduate job seekers. The participants' narratives of constructing and managing their graduate identity were therefore sought and analysed in order to gain understandings of their employability decisions, choices and strategies.

The findings of the study are presented in two chapters (Chapter Five and Chapter Six). Chapter Five addresses the question "How is Emirati graduate identity, with respect to employment, conceptualised and understood by UAE graduates and employers?" and Chapter Six focuses on the question "How do Emirati graduates manage their graduate identity, as it relates to their employability, in their transition from higher education to the labour market?".

This chapter (Chapter Five) therefore presents the findings with respect to the Emirati graduates' and UAE employers' understandings of graduate identity and comprises six sections including the introduction and conclusion. The second section introduces the themes which emerged from the interviews with Emirati graduates, exploring the meanings they construct around their graduate status, while the third section examines the ways in which the employers conceptualise graduate identity. In the next section a comparison of the two perspectives is undertaken. Finally, the findings are summarized and their contribution placed in theoretical context. Chapter Six then focuses on the ways in which Emirati graduates manage their identity as they transition from education to work and the interaction of identity and context in their employability strategies, experiences and outcomes.

As well as prompting questions to elicit their narratives of becoming and being graduates, the graduate participants were asked the following questions:

- What makes a university graduate different from a high school leaver?
- What do you think were the most important things you gained from going to university?
- What do you think are your most marketable skills, qualifications and attributes?

The questions were formulated with the intention of eliciting an identity narrative, invoking a construction of graduate identity as distinct from a high school leaver identity, and of accessing semantic knowledge of so-called graduate skills and attributes.

Five main themes emerged from the data with respect to graduate participants' understandings and conceptualisations of their graduate identity. The themes were related to possession of the credential, to notions of vocation, understandings of the personal attributes connected to being a graduate, experiences of being at university, and the linking of their graduate status with notions of social engagement and citizenship. The theme of completing was possession of the degree while finding or choosing a vocation entailed narratives of suffering and overcoming adversity. In understandings of their personal graduate attributes, the participants were keen to distinguish themselves from non-graduates and viewed their experiences and achievements at university both as part of becoming a "graduate" and of practising being a "graduate". The participants also understood their graduate status in terms of the contribution they could make to their community and to the development of their nation, clearly linking their graduate identity with their national identity.

The employers involved in the study were asked about their recruitment and selection procedures and also the following questions:

- Can you tell me what you look for in the Emirati graduates you recruit in terms of skills and attributes?
- How are these different from non-graduates?

Like the graduates themselves, the employers clearly distinguished between their expectations of high school leavers and university graduates. Their concepts of graduate identity were not dissimilar to those of the graduates except for the theme related to community engagement and citizenship.

The findings in both chapters emerged from analysis of the data generated through interviews with twelve Emirati graduates in the process of making the transition to work or who had recently made the transition. Extracts from the interviews with the participants are included in order to support and illustrate my interpretations and to give the participants

voice. As a means of protecting the anonymity of the participants, the names used are all pseudonyms. Since the participants in the study were not native speakers of English, some minor language mistakes, which did not impede meaning, have been left in the extracts. We now turn to the findings on the graduates' perspectives on their graduate identity.

2. Graduate Identity: Emirati Graduates' Perspectives

This section explores the findings of the study with respect to meanings, understandings and constructions of graduate identity as they pertain to employment and addresses the question: How do Emirati graduates conceptualise and construct their graduate identity as it relates to employment?

- Credentials: "completing"

As discussed in the literature review, possibly the most influential approach to employability has been what Holmes (2013) terms the *possession* approach which focuses on the notion of 'employability skills' and it was apparent in the data that the possession of particular credentials was one aspect of the graduate identity of the graduate participants in the study. For the graduates in the study this meant their degree and also other credentials such as international certification in English language skills. In Holmes' claim-affirmation model of emergent graduate identity (Holmes, 2013), the degree is conceptualized as a means of *warranting* graduate identity to potential employers and all of the participants included the 'possession' of a university degree in their concept of graduate identity. This 'possession' of credentials corresponds to what are conceptualized as 'hard' currencies in Brown and Hesketh's model of personal capital (Brown and Hesketh, 2004) and was also a key element in the employers' concept of graduate identity.

From the Emirati graduates' perspective there was a belief that a university degree was necessary for their education to be 'complete' and that an education to high school level, was in some way incomplete. It appears that with the massification of higher education which has taken place in the UAE, university has become a taken-for-granted progression

on the educational ladder and possession of a university degree has become the norm. The extracts below illustrate this notion of 'complete' or 'incomplete':

'You know it doesn't stop in the high school degree, so you have to complete what you started.'[Amna]

'I wanted to complete my study. I don't want just for …study and school and finish and stay home. No, I wanted to be educated; for that I join university.' [Hind]

'Why did I choose to complete my studies by going to the university? Well, my whole life was studying, that's it! This is how I (and my family) view the world. We should go to university/college after graduating from high school.' [Mona]

The actual degree, therefore, symbolises this notion of completion. Consistent with studies carried out in the UK (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Tomlinson, 2008; Brooks and Everett, 2009), however, several of the participants seemed to believe that their degree was only baseline and a 'given' in the claim for graduate identity and, in order to position themselves to advantage in the graduate labour market, they recognised a need for further *warranting* (Holmes, 2001, 2013) in the form of a high Grade Point Average (GPA), masters and doctoral degrees, and other educational qualifications. As Abu Bakr claimed:

'They look at GPA. And once you..if you get accepted into a company and you don't have such a good GPA it would motivate you to do something more, get further accreditation because people do look at GPA, no matter what they say, people do look at GPA.' [Abu Bakr]

If, as the participants suggest, employers are looking beyond the degree, it suggests that not all degrees are equal or not all graduates are considered equal. At the time of study, nine of the participants had already gained, were currently studying towards, or were planning to undertake a higher degree as a means of gaining advantage in the labour market. Noora was planning to study for a master's degree in education and took the notion of going to university in order to 'complete' one's education even further with the idea of needing a master's degree in order to 'finish'. The following extracts indicate the belief that further

warranting, or *'augmented' warranting* is one way in which some graduates seek to distinguish themselves in the job market.

> *'I'm going to finish in education. I'm going to study a masters in educational studies'* [Noora]

> *'After I finished my baccalaureate degree I commenced my masters degree at [HEI] in Leadership in Education. I finished that in 2011, and changed jobs around the same time…I will start my PhD next academic year insha Allah'* [Suhaila]

> *'Erm. Actually I'm also now thinking about a PhD…what about doing a PhD. Because my plan is … when I reach the twenty…the age of 26, at least I have something that erm…there is no end for learning, I know that, but at least I have something that when I'm young I can still have the energy to work and experience more and I have the knowledge and still I can learn from experience and try to make a combination between both.'* [Amna]

At the time of data collection, both Suhaila and Amna had already completed masters degrees and as the extracts show, were planning to start PhDs.

Noticeably absent from the participants' qualifications, however, were any vocational-type certifications. They tended to focus only on academic degrees. A notable exception to this was that English language certifications were considered highly valuable. These certifications, particularly the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) are part of the higher education process in the UAE (as entry and graduation requirements) but and provide further warranting in this area. Consistent with the extract from Loulwa's interview below, the graduates in the study believed their English language skills to be an important part of their graduate identity and this certification, and others was considered important.

> *'I have three certificates: TOEFL, IELTS Academic, IELTS General. 6, 6.5, and 5.0.'* [Loulwa]

Finally, as suggested by Brown and Hesketh (2004) in their notions of *rigging* and *ranking*, there was a belief that universities are ranked by employers and that the university attended would influence the employability value of the degree and the graduates' employment opportunities. Maryam, for example, explained that one reason for her choice of HEI was that it had a reputation for being rigorous and producing graduates with good knowledge and work ethic:

> *'it's well known that…if you graduate from this university it's mean that you are really smart. People said OK this is like Oxford, something like that, but in the region not abroad. So that's why it's for the elite. If you survive, if you graduate, it's mean that you are hardworking.'* [Maryam]

This clearly suggests that not all graduates are considered equal and, for Maryam at least, the narrative of having 'survived' a 'tough' university and being part of an 'elite' formed part of her graduate identity.

The second theme with respect to the graduate participants' concept of graduate identity was related to their degree but also distinct from the credential aspect. The *vocation* aspect of their graduate identity referred to their major, or subject studied at university.

- *Vocation: triumphs and tribulations*

The vocation dimension of the participants' concept of graduate identity was largely concerned with their choice of subject and was connected to their beliefs about their role in society, the nature and purpose of work, and the needs of their society.

The participants had studied Business, Human Resource Management (HRM), Education, International Studies, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Communications and Media, and Public Relations (PR). An issue related this was an apparent lack of any vocational guidance related to choosing a subject. Abu Bakr floundered considerably before settling on HRM, Loulwa took advice from her dentist, Hind simply followed her sisters and chose the same subject, while Yusra abandoned her original aspirations and chose a specialism based on availability at her preferred HEI.

The theme of vocation was also closely related to the notion of social engagement and citizenship (discussed later) and appeared to be influenced by collectivist social values and other identities such as national identity, with several of the graduate participants commenting that they chose their subject based on a perceived 'need' for a particular profession within their society. Finding a vocation was a significant episode in the narratives of becoming a graduate, often presented as having to overcome adversity and challenges such as chosen subject not being available or searching for something to fit with other roles and identities.

Suhaila was possibly the most passionate of the graduates in the study concerning her subject and sense of vocation. She constructed a narrative of initially rejecting the identity of a student and then, due to the attention of a particular teacher, and the insistence of her mother, triumphing in her academic efforts and deciding to become a teacher herself. As shown in the extract below, she expressed altruistic and social reasons for choosing to major in education:

> *'I decided to be a teacher. I chose to be a teacher because of the bad schooling experience I had. Because I wanted our kinds to have better learning experiences than a lot of people, including me. I wanted to encourage, motivate and above all believe in students' abilities and skills. '* [Suhaila]

Abu Bakr was another participant for whom the choice of major was very important, and who narrated a tale of searching and suffering. He changed not only major but also university in his search for a major and vocation congruent with his sense of self and that met his interests. He tried both engineering and accounting before finally settling on Human Resource Management.

> *'I was convinced that I wanted engineering. I wanted to be an engineer. I liked…I excelled calculus and physics and that was something that made me interested in engineering. Then I moved to accounting. Based on my mother's recommendation. I spent a year and a half until I realized that this is not for me. I was searching for myself. Who I wanted to be, where I wanted to study. And I read about [HEI] that*

they are opening their doors for male students. I looked at their majors and I was interested in HR. It was based on my previous experiences I noticed that I am more interested in Human Resource Management.' [Abu Bakr]

This vocational aspect of their graduate identity had both positive and negative implications for the graduates in the study. On the positive side, it appeared to be associated with a proactive attitude/approach to seeking opportunities and experiences and developing employability skills related to the vocation. On the negative side, strongly identifying with a particular vocation meant that two of the participants found it hard to change direction and pursue employment in other fields when they were unable to find anything in their original field. Loulwa ended up studying project management. However, she noted that she found this challenging because she identified herself as an 'IT person':

> *'This was hard for me at the beginning because I am an IT person…The most important thing that I am completely an IT person'* [Loulwa]

Loulwa later explained that she intended to find a job that was *'at least relating to IT'*.

This was also demonstrated in Noora's case. Although an Education graduate, Noora succeeded in finding a graduate-level position in an unrelated field; however, at the time of the study, she had not relinquished this aspect of her graduate identity and retained aspirations of returning to work in the education field in the future.

> *'I have to go back to Education. I'm going to finish in Education. I'm going to study a Masters in Educational Studies.'* [Noora]

Despite her strong sense of vocation with respect to education, Noora was disillusioned with the lack of jobs in her field and expressed a tension between the vocational aspect of her graduate identity and her beliefs about the job market. She felt that education as a specialisation did not have much employability value and asked:

> *'but then what's the point of anyone going into the College of Education now if they're not going to get a job later?'* [Noora]

Abu Bakr also related that part of his struggle to find an appropriate major was to reconcile his identity with his beliefs about the labour market. As well as searching for a major which fit his sense of 'self', Abu Bakr's ultimate choice of major was instrumental in that he showed an awareness that some majors have more employability value than others. In fact, he lists all the majors that he tried out as being in demand in the labour market:

> *'Well, major is important. I mean there are a few majors in the country which are wanted by companies. They look for them. The most important ones are finance and engineering. And HR, of course. But these are the things that companies focus on when employing students'* [Abu Bakr]

However, the choices of other participants appeared to have been made largely for pragmatic reasons with little commitment to this aspect of their graduate identity. In Yasmin's case, she joined university with a career in the medical field in mind but when that programme was not available, she changed subject and altered her career aspirations. For Yasmin, as she describes below, the choice of university was more important than the major.

> *'I was looking for a job in the medical section, medical fields but when I ask her to ask if there is any specialisation* [at her chosen university] *in the medical she told me no. So I change my mind to take computer field, just to work as an administration officer or assistant instead of medical field.'* [Yasmin]

Hind's choice was also pragmatic to a certain extent. However, lacking in a sense of vocation and self-confidence, she chose her university and major based on being able to stay close to her sisters. The following extract illustrates the salience of her identity as a sister and how she used it to help her to construct her identity as a graduate:

> *'two of my sisters were studying here so I want to be with my sisters because at that time my personality was different, like I'm shy, I didn't like to talk, I want to be with my sisters, so…'I like Communication when I saw one of my sisters, she*

Communication graduate, she holding the cameras and going around. Their classes for design and photoshop. I like this.' [Hind]

Hind's case highlighted an issue which can be conceptualised as lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), or knowledge about higher education, majors and their value in employability terms. While the participants' immediate family were involved in decisions regarding choice of major, in some cases the courses offered at university and related careers have no tradition or familiarity in UAE. The fact that Business retains a highly elevated status as a major in students minds, as discussed in Chapter Two, and is considered the best major for employability prospects and jobs (Gallacher et al, 2010) may be at least partially due to lack of knowledge about other options. The findings in my study also suggest that there is a similar lack of familiarity with some majors among potential employers. Maryam, a graduate in International Relations, describes the challenges related to this experienced in her job search:

'we found it very difficult [to find a job] and people are actually didn't understand what does our major mean so we had to explain for them what does it mean' [Maryam]

My findings with respect to the vocation element of graduate identity also support the notion of pragmatic rational decision making (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) in the ways that the graduates called upon the resources available to them and making decisions within the constraints of their circumstances and knowledge, or lack thereof, of particular professions and subjects. Loulwa, for example, sought the advice of her dentist, while Hind adopted the strategy of studying the same subject as her sisters, having gained some knowledge through them and lacking knowledge of other options. Yasmin was pragmatic in choosing to stay at her preferred HEI and study a subject available there, while Abu Bakr went to the other extreme of changing both HEIs and subjects in order to find something that fit his self-identity.

The findings in this section are consistent with those of other studies carried out in the UAE and discussed in the literature review. In common with those studies, the majors of

Education, IT, Business and Economics emerged as popular (Gallacher et al, 2010; Rutledge et al, 2011). Human Resource Management was not mentioned in the most popular choices according to Rutledge's study, but may be becoming a more popular major as HR is a professional identified by the government for priory Emiratisation. In my study, three of the graduates had majored in Human Resource Management, including one male, and two of the graduates had majored in Education, both females. These are important findings as the overall employability of the population of Emirati graduates is potentially affected. If Emiratis are choosing to graduate in a limited range of specialisations, competition for related jobs increases and the relative employability of individual graduates in a particular major decreases.

The possession of a degree in a particular major is conceptualised by Holmes (2001) as a *warrant* or evidence of graduate identity and by Brown and Hesketh (2004) as a 'hard' employability currency. The next theme that emerged from the data can be related to Brown and Hesketh's notion of a 'soft' currency.

- *Personal Attributes and Skills: <u>not</u> being a high school leaver*

The next theme concerns the notion of personal attributes and skills development as part of the graduate identity constructed by the graduates in my study. These are the types of skills and attributes often listed in possession approaches to employability (Holmes, 2013) as 'generic', 'transferable' or 'key', and conceptualized by Holmes as 'generalised ways of talking about practices' (Holmes, 2013: 550). The graduates in the study believed that these 'soft currencies' (Brown and Hesketh, 2004: Tomlinson, 2008) were an important part of their identity as graduates, distinguishing university graduates from high school leavers, and also understood them to be important in terms of *warranting,* or providing evidence of, their graduate identity to employers. Particular personal skills and attributes identified as important by the participants included communication and interpersonal skills, self-knowledge, confidence and a sense of responsibility.

Communication skills and interpersonal skills featured highly in both the graduates' and the UAE employers' understandings of graduate identity and were valued highly. In

particular, the graduate participants also valued their English language ability very highly with seven of the graduates stating explicitly that they considered it to be their most important employability attribute. Maryam, for example, suggested that it was English language ability that was sought by employers more than any other skill or attribute:

> *'So people are looking for the English. Unfortunately, something in the workplace, when we talk with each other about people, workplaces are really looking for the English. Sometimes, okay, you don't have this specific thing but you have other qualification; but people are not looking for the other qualifications, they are really looking for the English. If you have English, it's going to be very easy for you. Otherwise, no.'* [Maryam]

Several of the graduates in the study used the term 'responsible' to describe an aspect of their graduate identity and to distinguish themselves from high school graduates. For them, the term appeared to carry the meaning of being conscientious, serious about work, and able to work on their own initiative and manage themselves. Aisha, described this attribute in the following way:

> *'I think we are more…what can I say? More…we care more, responsibly. We know more the meaning of responsibility, serious more than school. And to me, I think I learned that I have to deal with people I like and dislike. I have to care about my own things, there's no-one who just tracking me and do this, do that. I think relations. It's mostly about relations and being more responsible.'* [Aisha]

This appears to be similar to the concept labelled as 'maturity' by the banking sector employer and described as knowing 'how to treat people'.

In common with female higher education students who took part in a study by Madsen (2009) in the UAE, looking at the forms of learning experienced in higher education, the participants in the present study understood their higher education experience in terms of both personal and professional development they had gone through at university, with an

emphasis on gaining confidence, taking responsibility for their own learning and the development of skills and competencies (Madsen, 2009). As Elham explained:

'The most important qualification and attribute I gained is the ability to recognise my strengths and weakness points and the ability to learn and develop myself and adjust to new situations.' [Elham]

One aspect of their graduate identity mentioned by the participants was being 'open-minded'. Three of the participants suggested that 'open-mindedness' was one attribute which differentiated them from high school leavers. Maryam described herself as becoming more 'open-minded' through her higher education experiences, giving and example which related to the traditional taboo which prohibits Emirati women from being photographed.

'Well, studying and [HEI] actually really changed my mind. Like I will not take a picture and be in the newspaper, I will not do that. But when I joined the university and actually the student council, it's actually my picture was in the internet and my picture is in the newspapers and now people are taking pictures of me when I'm giving a lecture or something like that so, yeah, it's really changed my mind.' [Maryam]

Other valued attributes contributing to their graduate identity included having a love of learning, leadership ability, work ethic, ability to work in a team and honesty.

'I strongly believe that I got my second job because of my "honesty" in describing what the field was going through and for my willingness to work for/with the change.' [Suhaila]

These findings are again consistent with those of an earlier study involving Emirati female students in higher education by Madsen (2009) who found that the skills and attributes most commonly mentioned by students were determination, responsibility, time

management, open-mindedness, self-discipline, professionalism, leadership, self-knowledge and communication, which fit mostly into the 'personal attributes' category above.

In this aspect of their graduate identity the Emirati graduates can be seen to be vulnerable since rejection in the job market could signify a perceived lack of these highly personal aspects of graduate identity. In the extract earlier in this section, from Maryam's interview, putting the focus on English language skills can be interpreted as a way of deflecting any attack on or injury to their graduate identity since losing a job because of a lack of a skill is less potentially damaging than losing a job because a personal quality or attribute is found lacking. It is noteworthy that the graduates clearly had very positive views of their skills and attributes, in contrast to the negative stereotyping reported by Forstenlechner et al (2012) and Abdulla (2010).

The graduates also were clearly at pains to distinguish themselves from high school leavers, even taking into account that the question they were asked required that they reflect on this. They had a clear image of what a high school leaver was like and what a university graduate was like, stressing personal development in particular. In this sense, their graduate identity had characteristics of a social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and they viewed themselves as belonging to an elite with specific attributes signifying (or warranting) membership of the group.

The next theme on graduate identity emerging from the data concerned the experiences and achievements of the graduate participants during their time at university. These are examined in the next section.

 - Experiences and achievements: practising and becoming

The graduates believed that the social experiences of university were important to their self-development and conceptualised these as part of their graduate identity. They talked about the changes in their personality and outlook that took place as a result of their interactions and experiences at university. They also talked about achievements that were

distinct from their academic achievements. The change in cultural identity experienced by some of the graduates was described earlier. Amna also put a high value on the intercultural experiences she gained through interactions with foreign students at the university she attended, which was a non-federal HEI.

> *'Erm and also you know [X] university it wasn't like only for UAE nationals, it was like international…there were a lot of international students so it was like a great experience. I had a friend from UK, US, a lot of places. Plus I learnt from them a lot. Yeah.'* [Amna]

In this extract, Amna is clearly presenting herself as being cosmopolitan and someone who is open-minded and values knowing about other cultures, particularly Western cultures. It could also be that she is indirectly signifying that she understands and adheres to Western ways of working.

Interactions with faculty and staff were also mentioned by the participants as contributing to their personal development into 'graduates'. In Mona's graduate identity narrative, for example, two of her teachers contributed to her developing a love of learning and an identity as a lifelong learner:

> *'Dr J. leaded [sic] me to understand what this phrase means: knowledge is power. Since that day, all I want is to learn, and enjoy learning.'* [Mona]

Suhaila also talked about the role of a teacher at university in changing her beliefs about herself as a learner and student, and replacing negative self-beliefs with positive ones.

> *'I had two great teachers in my life: my mother and Ms C. I learnt that they taught me what's far way important than academics. They taught me that a 'try' can make a big difference in your life. They taught me to believe in myself and my abilities.'* [Suhaila]

According to Holmes model of emergent graduate identity, experiences and achievements while at university are important in both *rehearsing* and *warranting* graduate identity

(Holmes, 2001; 2013), and the participants in the study appeared to understand this. In particular, extra-curricular activities and internships or work placements are important opportunities to *rehearse* practices associated with graduate identity (Holmes, 2013) and provide graduates with concrete examples of these practices to discuss in interview situations in order to *warrant* their 'graduateness', as confirmed by the UAE employers studied. They provide graduates with a means to stand out in a competitive graduate labour market (Tomlinson, 2008), to practise 'being', or 'doing' their graduate identity, and to demonstrate the skills or practices, described in terms of skills, required by graduate employers over and above the possession of a university degree.

However, the approaches taken by the graduates in the present study to participation in these activities and the value given to them varied. Abu Bakr, Suhaila and Amna participated keenly in extra-curricular activities both for hedonistic reasons and as a clear employability strategy. For Abu Bakr, these activities represented an opportunity to 'practise' and to warrant his 'graduate skills'. He described his strategy to develop his interpersonal skills and gain experiences above those of other graduates:

> *'It is what I'd planned to do. And what I'd planned to do was in the university, like I said, the Student Council, joining other…I was the Vice President also of the Business Council. And all these things, I mean interactions with VIPs, with royalty, with presidents…this gave me an experience that a fresh graduate does not have. This is what I planned to do.'* [Abu Bakr]

Suhaila also took a similar approach and deliberately set out to develop and demonstrate her graduate attributes. She was highly active as a student and clearly linked these activities and experiences with employability development:

> *'I was a member of the student council for three years in a row. I served as a "vice president, public relations officer and a member at large". I was a student ambassador. I was a member of the Education College Club, president of the Literature Club. I had a part time job as an assistant in the Athena Leadership Program. After that I worked with a professor as research assistance and joint the WOW (world of work) program. The experiences I gained from the above*

participations are invaluable. Every experience made me sharper strengthened my interpersonal, public speaking, leadership, work ethics, and team work skills. Those experiences prepared me very well for my career.' [Suhaila]

However, other graduates in the study failed to either recognize the employability opportunities of participating in extra-curricular activities or rejected such an instrumental approach. Mona did not participate in extra-curricular activities and Hind only participated in those mandated by her course.

'We have to join clubs. It's like classes but it's club. So I joined cross-stitch and photography' [Hind]

As well as extra-curricular and intra-curricular activities, internships and work placements were another important source experiences and achievements that were highly valued by the graduates as part of becoming and being a graduate. In Mona's case, despite her lack of participation in extra-curricular activities, she used the experience of her internship to considerable advantage. She described how she demonstrated her skills and attributes and used it as a networking opportunity, then strategically linked her final project to the company. She clearly understood the employability implications of the internship.

'After being accepted as an intern, I linked my capstone project with the company itself - they participated through answering the project survey. I helped when I was asked to, and initiated when I wasn't asked. I used some motivational activities that the teachers used at [university] ...The main factor to being employed is using the internship course by making connections and knowing people, by helping the organization itself, by working hard even without salary.' [Mona]

The graduate participants clearly valued their university experiences and achievements in different ways and positioned them differently with respect to their employability. It will be seen in the next chapter that most of the graduate participants who actively sought out developmental and 'warranting' experiences, had more positive labour market experiences and transitioned into graduate level jobs

The next graduate identity theme emerging from the data was concerned with the ways in which the graduates positioned their higher education and employability with respect to their positions as members of a community.

- *Social Engagement: being a good citizen*

The theme of *social engagement and citizenship* that emerged from analysis of the Emirati graduates' cases was related to beliefs about their national identity, and about their position in their community. Brooks (2007) propounded the notion of the 'active citizen' which resonates with the participants' conceptualization of their graduate identity. It can be speculated that this might be influenced by the collectivist nature of UAE society (Hofstede, 2001) and by the government's focus on propagating and maintaining traditional Emirati culture. However, the Emirati graduates in the study clearly claimed contributing to their community and society as an important element of their graduate identity influencing their choices and decisions with respect to major, occupation and job opportunities.

Amna's remarks below were typical of the desire expressed by a number of the participants to help their community through their studies and their work.

> *'I want to do something for my society, you know. I want to do something*
> *remarkable for me, for society, for the place that I work with, for my family..'*
> [Amna]

For Mona and Suhaila, their choice of major was explicitly linked to their sense of social engagement and citizenship. Mona chose to study HR, viewing it as a vocation in which she could help people and contribute to her community and country:

> *'I have studied Human Resources Management - Business Sciences College. This*
> *major was chosen because I have simply thought that I like helping people and HR*
> *was all about caring/improving/supervising the employees in a company, I though I*
> *have to and I can help the employees by analysing their needs in an organisation.*
> *Once I help them, they would be productive enough to work through achieving the*

vision/mission/goals of the company, then improving the community and the
country as well.' [Mona]

'I chose to be a teacher because of the bad schooling experience I had. Because I
wanted our kids to have better learning experiences than a lot of people did,
including me.' [Suhaila]

Noora also chose education based on her perception of its usefulness to her society:

'My dad wanted me to go abroad and study medicine but I saw a need for more
teachers in the UAE and the change in the education system.' [Noora]

The connection between national identity and employability was illustrated in Amr's
understanding of Emiratisation. To him, it was connected with national pride and living up
to the expectations of his ruler.

'It means that we should ... that we have to be in each government sector or each
company or private company, we must Emiratisation to be ...we are leading our
government. And Sh. Mohammed he say we don't want ...only number one to be.
And he expect from his country, especially from our side, to be his vision, to be
number one in the world. So he want that from Emiratis.' [Amr]

Overall, the *social engagement and citizenship* dimension of graduate identity appeared to
provide a strong motivation to engage with the labour market for Emirati graduates for
whom economic factors did not feature highly. It was clearly linked with their notions of
national identity, a link which is encouraged by the existence of 'Emiratisation'.

Having examined the understandings and conceptualisations of the graduate participants in
the study with respect to their graduate identity, the next section explores the
understandings of the employers, before going on to compare the two perspectives.

3. Employers' Perspectives

- Graduate selection

As outlined in the methodology chapter, the employers included in the study came from five different industry sectors: education, banking, management consults, maritime logistics and an investments/holdings company. Only the management consultancy organisation was international and belonged to the private sector. The other organisations were government or semi-government. All of the organisations employed Emirati graduates although their approaches to the specific recruitment of Emiratis differed. The banking sector and maritime logistics organisations both had formal 'Emiratisation' programmes whereby cohorts of Emiratis were recruited onto graduate training programmes. The education organisation recruited individual Emirati graduates and was in the process of developing a specific development programme for Emirati employees. However, they did not take the cohort approach and instead had a policy of giving priority to Emirati applicants for all positions. The financial services company did not adopt either of these approaches and Emirati graduates were subject to the same selection processes and criteria as all other applicants.

Selection procedures at all of the four organisations were rigorous and similar. The process included more than one interview in all of the organisations, as well as skills testing and psychometric testing. Selection was multi staged at all of the organisations. Success at the first stage was based on the presentation of the applicants' CV, the actual credentials held, a record of extra curricular activities and recommendation letters from professors or internship supervisors. At subsequent stages, judgement was based on strong interview performance and appropriate psychological profiling. The most in-depth data was provided by the interview with the banking sector employer who provided some valuable insights including the notion of being able to 'see' the candidates in the positions for which they were applying. This employer also talked about the beliefs of their departmental managers with respect to the attitudes and abilities of UAE nationals affecting the ability of the HR department to place Emirati graduate trainees:

'the first thought that comes into people's minds is that they won't work; we will have to work extra time because they won't care. Number two is they will make mistakes and who will be on. Number three will be, I think, that if you tell them anything they will get you…frightened to tell them' [banking sector employer]

He then went on to describe strategies used to overcome these beliefs and develop more confidence in Emirati employees.

The next section presents the understandings of graduate identity that emerged from the analysis of the data from the interviews with these graduate and employer participants.

- Employers' concepts of graduate identity

The concepts of graduate identity described by the employers in the study corresponded largely to those of the students, with the important absence of the dimension of social engagement and citizenship. Despite studies in other countries suggesting that qualifications 'no longer seem to be the primary focus for many employers'(Clarke & Patrickson, 2008:265), in the multi-stage recruitment and selection processes described by the employers in the present study, the degree was an essential criterion in successfully passing the first stage. In effect, the degree was the gate pass to enable graduates to enter the competition. Beyond that, the employers evaluated job seekers in a number of areas. As suggested by some of the graduates, Grade Point Average (GPA) was confirmed as a key criterion by all of the UAE employers in the present study and one of the employer organisations included in the study admitted to having a ranking of HEIs; however, the recruitment manager concerned was not willing to give further details. The employers in the study all sought majors specific to the field of work and one employer from the banking sector commented that there appeared to be too many graduates in majors such as media and communication and not enough in areas such as finance and accounting:

'media and communications…we have so many people coming in…and I mean, I like them but we can't put them in specialised … for treasury we need mathematics' [Banking Sector Employer]

Although this suggests an instrumental view of higher education, the same employer also listed maturity, learning and ambition as valued attributes that he thought distinguished university graduates from high school leavers. He went on to explain that by maturity he meant knowing how to deal with different people; by learning, he meant that they wanted to continue learning; and by ambition, he meant that they know what they want in life or they are close to knowing what they want in life. This corresponds to the graduates' notions of being more 'responsible' and 'mature'.

As also suggested by the graduates, the UAE employers all placed English language skills alongside possession of a degree as a key criterion in the initial stages of recruitment and selection and included English language testing in the selection process. The employers interviewed listed maturity, desire to learn, work ethic, ambition and responsiveness to change among their concepts of graduate identity. Graduate applicants were expected to demonstrate these attributes in their performance in psychometric tests and in interview and to be able to show evidence through experiences and achievement at university and on internships. This was consistent with an earlier study in the UAE, (Barhem et al, 2008), which also found these to be important attributes to UAE employers. One employer indicated that a range of core competencies were sought in both university graduates and high school leavers with additional skills and attributes added for specific roles:

> *'It is different from position to another but there are some core competencies like Communication, Customer Focused, Action Orientation, Effective Interpersonal Relationships and knowledge and technical competencies…these are core competencies which are required for all types of positions. If in a leadership role, then few more competencies will be added such as leadership, people management and strategic planning.'* [Education Sector Employer]

An orientation towards further learning was a graduate attribute mentioned by the banking sector employer interviewed for the study. He named it as one of the three attributes differentiating university graduates from high school leavers, suggesting that they 'want to learn more'. This suggests that for the UAE employers, the degree is considered as a *warrant* that an individual will be more productive, as in Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) but that they also hold the view that possession of the degree shows that an

individual has the innate ability to be productive, as in Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973) and seek further evidence or 'warranting' of this in their selection process.

A good record of extra-curricular activities was mentioned by all of the employers in the study as a key component of a successful CV. The advantages of internships from the employer's perspective were also mentioned by the banking sector employer. He believed that internships or work placements were advantageous to both the employers and to students as a way of getting to know each other:

> *'you get a very good advantage of people who come for work placement… er kids…and they work for you for two months and they know you and you get to know them'* [banking sector employer]

The banking sector employer referred to the notion of potential in the graduate selection process and described his method of trying to visualise the graduate in a management role in the future.

> *'there are three main things I look for. Number one is attitude, number two is how they structure their thoughts, and number three is their personality. And I'll tell you why there is a difference between personality and attitude – I know you know – I picture them as I'm talking that, er, where would they be in five years' time, you know. I think this person is looking like a manager sitting in the chair, or I can see this guy standing up and talking or this woman trying to do research work, you know.'* [banking sector employer]

The implication of this, of course, is that the employer clearly has a belief of what a manager looks like and how a manager behaves and job seekers who do not conform to that image will be rejected.

The major aspect of the graduates' conceptualisation of their graduate identity that was missing from the employers' conceptualisation was that of social engagement and citizenship and it can be speculated that this gap in understandings and beliefs about graduate identity in the UAE could be an important one. The similarities and differences between the graduates and employers' perspectives are now further discussed.

4. Comparing UAE graduates' and employers' perspectives on graduate identity

Diverse 'values, cultures and work habits' (Pech, 2009: 60) and disparity in organisational culture between the private and public sectors (Al-Ali, 2008) have been identified as impediments to Emiratisation, particularly in the private sector. Therefore, it is useful to compare the Emirati graduates' and employers' beliefs about graduate identity to identify any evidence of this in terms of understandings of graduate identity. As has been found in UK studies such as one by Hinchcliffe and Jolly (2010), drawing on Holmes' emergent identity model (Holmes, 2001,2013), both the employers and the graduates in the present study tended to describe their conceptualisations of graduate identity in terms of 'skills talk' and this use of 'skills talk' by both the graduate participants in the study and the employers facilitates comparison. Table 5. below uses the themes related graduate identity as understood by the graduate participants in the study to compare the graduates' and employers' perceptions about what constitutes graduate identity in the UAE, based on the findings of my study.

Table 5: Comparison of Graduates' and Employers' concepts of Graduate Identity

Themes related to Conceptualisations of Graduate Identity	Graduates' Perspective	Employers' Perspective (selection criteria)	Employers' Selection Procedures
Credentials	Degree, certifications (e.g. IELTS), GPA	Degree, GPA, IQ, major	CV
Vocation	Major (subject)	Major (subject) specific to position	CV
Personal Attributes & Self-Development	Communication skills, maturity, responsibility, teamwork, etc.	Maturity, desire to learn, ambition, work ethic Customer focused, action oriented, committed to results Communication and interpersonal skills, teamwork, etc.	Psychometric testing; interviews; IQ testing
Experiences & Achievements	Extra-curricular and internship experiences and achievements	Extra-curricular and internship experiences and achievements	CV; interviews
Social Engagement & Citizenship	Nation building, contributing to community	Not mentioned	Not mentioned

The table shows that the findings of my study are broadly consistent with an earlier study in the UAE (Barhem et al, 2008) which is discussed in Chapter Two. Skills emphasized by employers in their study included the ability to: work in a team, motivate and energise people, work effectively in upper management, think and act strategically, act effectively under time pressure, provide leadership, think critically and creatively, appreciate, understand and leverage diversity, communicate orally, and act responsibly. Similar attributes were identified as important by employers in my study. The employers' concepts of graduate identity were also largely consistent with those of the graduate participants;

however, the absence of consideration in the area of social engagement and citizenship on the part of the UAE employers is an significant gap, as suggested above, since this had important meaning for the graduates in their employability decision-making.

In comparing the findings of the study with research undertaken in the UK, an interesting difference is the absence in the UAE of mention of other graduate attributes such as cultural awareness, interest in current affairs, environmental awareness and interest in sport. In Hinchcliffe and Jolly's (2011) study, diversity awareness was strongly endorsed as important and the employers interviewed explained that this was a business issue for them. However, interestingly given the diverse nature of the UAE work force, this was not mentioned at all by the UAE employers. This attribute was included in the graduates' dimensions of both *personal attributes and self-development* and *experiences and achievement.* Interest in sport was not endorsed by the UAE employers or graduates. Among the UAE employers, the only one mentioning interest in current affairs as a concept in graduate identity was the bank which mentioned that graduates were expected to have informed opinions on current issues. The bank had a high proportion of female UAE national employees and suggested that this was because it was viewed as an 'easier' option for advancement with less competition:

> *'if you are in a group of ten thousand people and nine thousand nine hundred of them are UAE nationals, you have a big fight to go forward, but if you are in a group of ten thousand people and only one or two thousand are UAE nationals, you have a good chance to go forward.'* [banking sector employer]

One issue that became clear from the data gathered from the UAE employers was the highly competitive nature of the UAE graduate labour market despite the privileging effects of Emiratisation. In three of the organisations studied, Emirati graduates were recruited separately from graduates of other nationalities, while in the international accounting firm, Emirati graduates were in direct competition with non-Emiratis. While at the accounting firm, Emiratis comprised only a very small percentage of applicants, at the other organisations undertaking recruitment under the umbrella strategy of Emiratisation,

applicants numbered approximately fifty per position available. This appears to be consistent with Holzer and Neumark's (2000) finding that affirmative action programs tend to increase the number of applications from the targeted group. However, in general the UAE employers' beliefs about graduate identity seem to coincide with studies undertaken with employers in other countries but may be slightly narrower in focus. There is also some consistency in the concepts of graduate identity between the graduates and the employers, with the exception, noted earlier, of the graduates' theme of *social engagement and citizenship*.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings of my study with respect to the question: How do Emirati graduates and UAE employers' construct and conceptualise graduate identity? Five themes emerged from the data with respect to the ways in which the young Emiratis in the study understood their graduate identity and these themes were similar to the concepts of graduate identity held by the UAE employers in the study. A significant difference, however, concerned the theme of *social engagement and citizenship* since the notion of being a good citizen through their choice of subject at university and vocation or career, was highly salient to the graduates but did not figure at all in the employers' understandings of what it means to be a graduate. Subject choice was an issue with one of the employers who asserted that they were looking for graduates in specific fields and felt that far too many graduates were specialising in subjects such as communications, which was considered too generic.

Other themes which emerged from the data included the idea of *completing* their education through the attainment of a university degree, defining themselves as not being high school leavers, practising and becoming graduates through their university experiences and achievements. The graduates' narratives contained stories of overcoming adversity in finding a vocation, and of personal transformations through their higher education experiences. Their ways of making decisions were consistent with Hodkinson & Sparkes (1997) notion of pragmatically rational decision-making as they reflexively adapted to

circumstances and constraints while making use of resources, particularly sources of knowledge, available to them.

Compared to Brown and Hesketh's model of *personal capital* (Brown and Hesketh, 2004), the concept of *graduate identity* as it emerges in my study appears closely related but structured differently. The *credentials* dimension of the participants' graduate identity corresponds with the concept of 'hard currencies' in Brown and Hesketh's model (2004) while the *personal attributes and self-development* and *experiences and achievements* dimensions are close to Brown and Hesketh's 'soft currencies'. The 'self' which forms an element of the personal capital model, is apparent in several of the dimensions. To an extent, the graduates in the present study used a 'discourse of skills and attributes mirroring the language of university documents' (Brown et al, 2003: 316 – 7) to describe their graduate identity; however, considering the graduate identity approach offers a richer, deeper and more nuanced description of what Emirati graduates bring to their encounters with the labour market. Brown and Hesketh's concept of personal capital (2004) presents graduate job seekers as much more than a list of skills and attributes and a graduate identity perspective takes this further. Brown and Hesketh (2004) argue that in the race for graduate jobs 'who you are' is of central importance. A graduate identity perspective enables us to explore more fully *who Emirati graduates are* as well as *who employers think they are or should be*, a question which in Holmes' (2001) emergent graduate identity model of employability, underpins the interactions between graduates and employers and determines transition outcomes.

Having examined constructions and conceptualisations of graduate identity in context, we now turn to the processes by which the graduates managed their graduate identity as they transitioned to work and how this related to their employability. The next chapter now examines the behaviours and experiences of the Emirati graduates and their graduate identity trajectories as they transitioned from education to work.

CHAPTER SIX

Managing Graduate Identity: Employability strategies, experiences and outcomes

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the emergent graduate identity trajectories and employability strategies of the graduate participants as they made the transition from higher education to work. While the previous chapter explored *what* the graduate participants in the study were claiming, or their understandings of, and meanings they attached to, their graduate identity, this chapter focuses on the ways in which they managed their graduate identities and the emergent identity trajectories they experienced.

The chapter comprises six sections. The next section after this introduction presents a description and discussion of the trajectories of the graduate participants using Holmes's emergent identity modalities (Holmes, 2001) as an analytic framework. Although four main patterns were identified, a deeper examination using concepts from Holmes' model, shows the individualised nature of the transitions from a subjective perspective. The third section, discusses the claiming and warranting strategies used by graduate participants. In the fourth section, the links and interactions between the graduates' graduate identity and national identity are examined and in the following section, the ways in which Emirati graduate identities are gendered, and the implications of this, are discussed. The sixth section comprises the conclusion of the chapter.

2. Higher Education to Work Transitions: Trajectories and Experiences

This section examines the patterns of education to work transition trajectory experienced by the graduate participants in the study, conceptualised as emergent graduate identity

trajectories (Holmes, 2001). At the time of the study seven of the graduates were employed in graduate-level positions, four were employed or volunteering in non-graduate positions, and one remained unemployed. Four patterns of emergent identity trajectory emerged from the data. These can be described as *direct, progressive, arrested,* and *non-starter*. The first two patterns were completed trajectories where the participants had achieved a graduate-level position. The term *direct trajectory* is suggested to describe the pattern experienced by three of the graduates who made an apparently straightforward transition to a graduate-level position and achieved an *agreed* graduate identity (Holmes, 2001; 2013). Although there were some differences in the way they made the transition, these graduates were immediately successful in *claiming* graduate identity and having this *affirmed* by an employer. The term *progressive trajectory* is used for the second pattern in which the graduates took voluntary and/or non-graduate positions as a stepping stone to achieving a graduate position. Four of the graduates adopted this strategy. The other two patterns identified were incomplete graduate identity trajectories where the participants had not yet achieved an *agreed* graduate identity. The first of these concerned participants who were also on a progressive trajectory but whose progression had stalled at a particular stage, either by choice or circumstances. This is described as an *arrested* trajectory. The final pattern concerned one graduate who had failed to find employment at all and who had experienced what can be called a *non-starter* trajectory. However, it should be remembered that these graduates all held the potential to resume their trajectory towards an *agreed* graduate identity at any time. In fact, this happened in the case of one of the participants who achieved a graduate position after interview and during the writing up of this study. The four identity trajectory patterns identified will now be described and discussed in more detail. It will be seen that although four clear patterns emerged from the data, there was also considerable variation within each pattern in terms of the graduates' rationales and experiences.

- Direct Trajectory

There were three participants in the study who succeeded very quickly in achieving an *agreed* graduate identity in a graduate level position after graduating from university: Abu

Bakr, Suhaila and Mona. As the extracts below show, these participants made relatively quick and straightforward transitions from university into graduate-level positions.

> *' I managed "thank God" to get my first job a week after I graduated'* [Suhaila]

> *'Actually the place that I work in is also the place that I do my internship so it was also the last place that I applied because I said I don't want to work in the same place. My internship was here so I said I don't want to spend my whole life in the same place. But at the end, with the conference in this place, my boss, my supervisor said just give me the CV and I was hired there.'* [Mona]

Both Mona and Abu Bakr were HR graduates and Suhaila was an education graduate. However, the means by which these participants achieved *agreed* graduate identity status (Holmes, 2001; 2013) were quite different and demonstrate that a graduate identity trajectory is not the same as a route into work. The cases of these graduates show that a *direct* identity trajectory can be achieved through different job search strategies and routes into employment. However, a commonality that can be seen is that all of these participants were highly strategic in claiming their graduate identity.

In Abu Bakr's case, his claim on graduate identity was made before graduation and affirmed immediately upon graduation. While at university, Abu Bakr, was involved in a university activity involving a visitor from a government-owned investment and development company. It seemed that Abu Bakr made a good impression on the visitor who acted as an intermediary and advocate by recommending him to decision-makers in the company. Upon graduation, Abu Bakr was offered a position.

> *'It was some research we were doing at the university and during…in this research we were interviewing a business…an entrepreneur and she came to the university for us to perform the interview with her. My professor was there and during the interview…and after that she highly praised me in front of my professor…And when she got wind that I had graduated or that I was very close to graduating she had*

already recommended me to the employment…to the recruitment department in HR'
[Abu Bakr]

Although, he was recruited through a university activity and subsequent recommendation, Abu Bakr was also highly strategic in his approach to the selection interview for the position, approaching the recruitment department for information He explained how, based on that he prepared possible responses and also prepared himself psychologically to present himself in the best light.

> *'Well, first I asked the recruitment officer what kind of questions would I be expecting. Yeah. I mean I can't get the full list of questions. And based on that I prepared myself mentally for any question which comes towards me and when answering I answer it in a way that makes me look confident and know what I'm talking about.'*   [Abu Bakr]

The graduate participants who made direct transitions all held clear ideas about the best strategies to attain employment, even when the actual means by which they were recruited differed from their ideal strategy

Mona was also very strategic in her approach to claiming graduate identity. In Mona's case this was a process started during her internship and carried over to graduation. As she recounts below, Mona linked her capstone project to the company where she had done her internship. She made this known to a highly place manager in the company and was offered a post shortly after graduation.

> *'After graduation, my capstone was among the best five projects in Business Development, so I have addressed this to the director by email, she replied and asked "Do you want to work with my team?" Clearly it was an opportunity for me and [I] replied "Yes" without even asking my family, friends, or myself!'* [Mona]

In this way Mona's internship offered her the opportunity to *warrant* her graduate identity with evidence of her ability to work at graduate level and demonstrate that she could apply her graduate attributes to the work of a specific organization.

Suhaila made her claim on graduate identity by the more traditional route of applying by means of her CV and performance at interview. However, she was strategic in the posts she applied to and focused on vocationally appropriate positions. She attributed her success to her passion for her vocation and also to God's intervention. While the use of the phrase 'Thank God' carries little meaning in many contexts, in the UAE where religion pervades all aspects of life, it is often a genuinely held belief in divine intervention.

> *'I only applied for what I truly wanted to work I, for what I was most passionate about. I managed "Thank God" to get my first job a week after I graduated.'*
> [Suhaila]

Other similarities between the three graduates who experienced a *direct trajectory* to an *agreed* graduate identity (Holmes, 2001;2013) were that they all had very supportive families, and they were all able to clearly conceptualise their graduate identity in terms of their skills, attributes, and vocation. All of these graduates also took advantage of social capital in obtaining their graduate level positions. In the case of Suhaila this was a friend who worked for the organization she joined. The friend made sure that her CV reached a decision-maker and performed the role of *warranting* her claim on graduate identity by vouching for her graduate skills and attributes. In the other two cases, the graduates gained useful social capital in the form of a supporter within an organization through an internship or university activity.

Notably, cultural capital, or knowledge about higher education or the labour market, on the part of the graduates' families did not seem to be a significant factor in the study since the families of Abu Bakr and Suhaila were polar opposites in this respect, with Suhaila's family having no tradition and little knowledge of higher education while Abu Bakr came

from a family of professionals, all of whom had experienced higher education. The other similarity is that all of these graduates were highly *reflexive*, consciously assessing their employability and basing their strategies on feedback and evidence.

The next trajectory pattern identified, and discussed below, was a *progressive* trajectory and applies to graduates who attained a graduate level position but not directly.

- Progressive Trajectory

As outlined in the previous section, the three graduates who enjoyed a *direct* emergent identity trajectory in their transition to work were highly strategic in their ways of *claiming* and *warranting* their graduate identity. Four of the graduates in the study, Amr, Maryam, Noura, and Yasmin, were also strategic in their claiming of graduate identity but all employed a strategy of *reduced claiming* and *incremental claiming* as part of a 'stepping stone' approach to achieving a graduate-level position. They all achieved *agreed* graduate identity in graduate-level positions after taking at least one other non-graduate level position and their emergent graduate identity trajectory can be described as a *progressive trajectory* to achieving *agreed* graduate identity status (Holmes, 2001; 2013). Amr, for example, took low level administrative positions, while Noura took a position unrelated to her major and vocation and worked her way up to a position of responsibility. Yasmin was working in an unpaid voluntary position at the time of initial data collection, but was later offered a graduate level position in the same organization.

As with the case of UK 'Graduates in Non Graduate Occupations' (Blenkinsopp and Scurry, 2007), discussed in Chapter Two, the UAE graduates took, in some cases, full-time, permanent positions but viewed them as a temporary step on their way to a graduate-level position. Adoption of this strategy by young Emiratis may be one cause of the frequent complaint by employers that young Emiratis are difficult to retain (McDermott and Neault, 2011). In the case of the graduates in the present study, this trajectory appeared to be the result of a combination of circumstances and strategy.

For the graduate participants in my study, there appeared to be three main rationales for taking a non-graduate level position: the 'foot in the door' approach, a way to maintain skills and *augment* their graduate identity by gaining work experience, and a desire to be outside of the home combined with a belief that work offered the only alternative to staying at home. Two of these, the 'foot in the door' approach where the graduates took a lower level position in a target organization with a view to obtaining a better position in the future, and the skills maintenance and work experience approach, have also been documented in studies of GRINGOs in the UK (Scurry, 2005; Blenkinsopp and Scurry, 2007).

Yasmin was one of the participants who took a non-graduate position when she failed to secure a graduate status job. She took a voluntary position in a target organization as both a way to get her 'foot in the door' and a way to maintain her skills in English. After eight months she succeeded in being appointed to a full-time, non-graduate level position at the university and a year later after that, she achieved a graduate-level position and an *agreed* graduate identity. She described her decision to accept an opportunity to work in a voluntary capacity at a local university after her initial attempts to enter the labour market failed. According to her account, she had a very positive experience in this non-graduate post and successfully improved her English language skills which she viewed as an important employability asset.

> *'I search for a job. I applied I think to five companies and there is no response. They didn't answer me. And after that D. sent a message asking for a volunteer in the alumni association and I response to her email. I told her I want to work as a volunteer as you know one year without working and without practising your English…you will lose some of skills in English. So I told her about my attention in this joining her and right now I just doing some updating graduate information. My English become improved because I always speak with all the staff here so it's been a fun time.'* [Yasmin]

Amna explained that she took her first job in order to gain experience even though it was not related to her degree or a graduate-level position.

'I first work…my first job in a some..in a private company that belongs to Abu Dhabi municipality. Er..the salary wasn't good. The job, you know, it wasn't like suit my degree. I have a bachelor degree. I accept that because I need an experience, you know. Something I need to know. How do people work, to operate, you know, to enter myself into this unknown world. It was unknown for me but halas, yani, I got experience.' [Amna]

For each of the three female graduates who experienced a *progressive trajectory* to *agreed* graduate identity status, the desire to not have to stay at home all day was a further motivation for taking a non-graduate level position.

'I don't like to be..I like to be active. I don't like to sit at home doing nothing, so I had two choices, either to take some course or to work part-time and the offer of working part-time, and the environment…I just liked the environment, so I worked with them part-time.' [Maryam]

The findings of my study support other studies which suggest that work environment is an important gender issue in the UAE (Al Jenaibi, 2010; Bristol-Rhys, 2008). A factor in taking a non-graduate position for these female participants was that they felt comfortable in the environment. The genderized character of Emirati graduate identities is discussed further later in this chapter.

While the female graduates all took up these non-graduate positions after graduating from university, Amr's case stands apart in that he worked in non-graduate posts while studying and progressed to a graduate-status position upon graduation. While this phenomenon has also been documented in the UK (Blenkinsopp and Scurry, 2007), Amr's case appears to differ from working students in the UK who were found to work mostly for money in order to maintain their student lifestyle and who work in jobs such as bar tending (Blenkinsopp and Scurry, 2007). Amr's job, while studying, was a 'serious' administrative position for a semi-governmental organization. Amr's reasons for work and study were due to his family responsibilities as an eldest son, consistent with the notion of male family members in the UAE being solely responsible for providing financially for the family (Mostafa, 2005; Neal et al, 2005).

While the graduates in my study who experienced *progressive trajectories* all achieved graduate-level positions, in the cases of Amr and Noura these were not related to the subject of their degrees. This suggests that an *agreed* graduate identity (Holmes, 2001;2013) need not be the original graduate identity claimed but that the outcome can be an *adapted agreed* graduate identity where the graduate who is claiming the identity and/or the employer who is affirming the identity have to adapt their understanding of the graduate identity of the individual concerned. The findings also suggest that a non-graduate position can provide similar opportunities to work-placement and internship positions for graduates to warrant their graduate identity or demonstrate their 'graduateness' to prospective employers. Therefore, the phenomenon of graduates in non-graduate positions should not necessarily be seen in a negative light. However, for some of the graduates in the study, this kind of *reduced claiming* of graduate identity was not congruent with their sense of national identity as Emiratis which may be a factor in young Emiratis choosing to remain unemployed (ICOS, 2010). This is discussed further later in this chapter.

We now turn to the less successful transition trajectories experienced by four of the graduate participants in the study.

- Arrested trajectory

As outlined above, the study participants who experienced a *progressive* trajectory all eventually achieved an *agreed* graduate identity in a graduate level position. However, three of the graduate remained in non-graduate jobs either by design or due to circumstances, at the time of writing. In these cases, unlike the graduates who experienced a *progressive trajectory* but eventually reached *agreed* graduate identity status, the graduates on an *arrested trajectory* had failed to progress, by choice or circumstance, and remained in non-graduate level positions. Therefore, their graduate identity trajectory can be described as *arrested.* Hind, Loulwa and Amna came into this category with what Holmes' (2001; 2103) conceptualizes as an *underdetermined* or even *failed* graduate identity.

As with the *progressive trajectory* graduates, the graduates who experienced an *arrested* trajectory had also employed the strategy of *reduced* claiming but had failed to progress. Their response to the situation of an *arrested* trajectory varied although none of them had entirely given up their claim on graduate identity. Amna and Loulwa saw their positions as temporary and transitory and described their situations in similar terms to the *progressive* graduates who had finally achieved a graduate-level position.   However, Hind took a different view and 'talked up' her administrative position, differentiating it from other administrative positions and attempting to claim it as a graduate-level position:

> *'Okay. This is my dream. It's my position now, it's AA [Administrative Assistant] but I'm do more much than AA. I see the other AAs in other departments, they just do admin stuff but for me I am doing like communication coordinators, and use letter, surveys, communicate with alumni, I'm communications coordinator in the alumni board so I don't want to put myself here as AA.'* [Hind]

The way in which Hind presented her non-graduate position supports Gallant's (2011) findings that UAE women tended to adapt the way they described their careers to fit with society's expectations. It is also consistent with the suggestion by Knight and Yorke (2006) that 'staying put' requires considerable reflexive work. Hind's case may provide a further example of the ways in which graduate identity can be adapted during the transition to work. Holmes (2001) uses the concept of 'accounting', to describe the ways in which some graduates in non-graduates positions continue to make a claim on graduate identity even though this is not fully affirmed by employers in terms of the positions they hold. Holmes' (1998) respondents, like Hind, found ways to rationalise or account for their position. Thus, their current identity could be seen as an *agreed* identity that is not fully a graduate identity from an objective or external perspective but was a type of adapted graduate identity from their own subjective viewpoint, potentially placing their graduate identity as somewhere between *under-determined* and *agreed* identity or suggesting the need for a further category of *adapted agreed* identity.

- Non-starter Trajectory

The final pattern identified, which concerned only one of the graduates in the study, was the *non-starter trajectory*. At the time of data collection only one of the participants, Aisha, remained unemployed and had not undertaken any kind of employment in the three years since she had graduated.   This is described as a *non-starter* trajectory. At the time of the study, therefore, in terms of Holmes (2001; 2013) model of emergent identities, Aisha's graduate identity was a *failed* identity, in that she continued to attempt to claim graduate identity but the labour market continued to disaffirm her claim by turning her down for the graduate level positions for which she applied. Aisha appeared unwilling to adapt her identity claim in any way and take a non-graduate status position. Instead, she had attempted a strategy of *augmented warranting* and had returned to university to complete a master's degree. At the time of writing Aisha had withdrawn from the labour market and was contemplating studying for a doctoral degree. Aisha held the belief that her university and the government had some responsibility for assisting her in obtaining employment and she blamed both the university and the government employment agency for her failure to find appropriate employment. She also expressed a belief that, for the university, each cohort of new graduates superseded their predecessors in priority.

> *'we find it hard very hard. We suffered a lot. And we also sometimes put the blame on [the university] because it's like the graduates of January, some of them they have the case, they are looking for them for a job, but there is other graduates in June. And there is graduates in January, they forget about the ones in June. And that's what happens.'* [Aisha]

Aisha had a very negative attitude to the idea of graduates taking non-graduate level positions and felt that this was not an option for her. In her case, linking her Emirati identity to her employability created a barrier to accepting employment that she considered unacceptable for an Emirati. Aisha had also tried to elicit the support of a member of the ruling family in the local tradition known as 'wasta' (discussed in Chapter Two) but this strategy had also failed. At the time of my study, Aisha was feeling very frustrated and

unable to come up with any other claiming or warranting strategy other than to continue to increase her level of education as a means of gaining an advantage in the labour market over the general cohort of university graduates.

As described above, within the different trajectories, the graduate participants in the study adopted a number of employability strategies based on their understandings of their graduate identity and of the labour market. These are now examined in more detail.

3. Claiming and warranting graduate identity: positions and strategies

From the examination of the participants' routes into work, conceptualised as graduate identity trajectories (Holmes, 2001), five main graduate identity *claiming* and *warranting* strategies emerged.. The *claiming* strategies were: *strategic claiming*, where the graduates actively marketed themselves to employers and exploited opportunities to do so; *reduced and incremental claiming*, where the graduates sought and accepted non-graduate level employment; and *withdrawal*, where the graduates deliberately withdrew from the labour market for a period of time. The *warranting strategies* were: *personal warranting*, in which social capital was utilised in order to attain a position; and *augmented warranting*, where the graduates sought advantage in the labour market by achieving higher educational credentials such as advanced degrees. According to Holmes' (2001) model, these are the elements that are brought to the interactions between graduates and employers and are framed in terms of the selection procedures used by the employers to evaluate the graduate identity of job applicants against their own understandings and expectations of graduate identity. These interactions lead to the four types of transition outcome experienced by the graduates at the time of the study.

The participants who claimed their graduate identity strategically were those who were most like Brown and Hesketh's (2004) *players* in that they reflexively considered the needs of the labour market and specific employers and agentically set out to develop their employability and demonstrate that they met those needs. Both Suhaila and Abu Bakr were strategic in building their employability related experience through participating in college societies. Abu Bakr was strategic in his interview approach, researching possible

questions and practising his answers, while Mona cleverly tailored her capstone project to her target organisation and then made the organisation aware of it.

The participants who experienced a progressive transition were also strategic. Although they may have preferred to transition directly into a graduate-level position, they saw an opportunity to develop their graduate employability and strengthen their claim on graduate identity through gaining experience in non-graduate positions. This strategy was related to *reduced* and *incremental claiming* in that the participants claimed an identity that was not yet a fully formed graduate identity. In taking non-graduate positions, they were able to acquire additional *warranting* capital in order to later make a claim on full graduate identity and have this affirmed.

Hind adopted a position of *reduced claiming* in which settled for a non-graduate position but rationalised this using the strategy of what Holmes (2001) calls *accounting* to distinguish her position from that of run-of-the-mill administrative positions that would be occupied by non-graduates. Both Hind and Yasmin used the strategy of *withdrawal* from the labour market as a response to their lack of success in attaining a graduate position. This seems to have been a protective action as they found the labour market environment challenging

In addition to the warrant provided by their degree, the two main strategies used by the participants to warrant their graduate identity to employers were *personal warranting* and *augmented warranting*. *Personal warranting* was apparent where the participants used their personal contacts to gain access to an organisation and the decision-makers. In other words, they used their social capital to boost their claim to graduate identity. This was apparent in all of the cases of participants who achieved some kind of employment. The use of social capital in this way can be seen as one form of *wasta, Aisha* unsuccessfully tried to use a more serious kind of *wasta* when she attempted to use a chance meeting with a member of the ruling family as a means to achieve advantage in the labour market. The phenomenon of *wasta* in the cases studied is discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

Augmented warranting was also highly prevalent among the graduates studied. This was the strategy of seeking further education and higher qualifications as a means of gaining advantage in the labour market. All of the participants were either studying for post-graduate qualifications, had already achieved these, or were considering doing so.

Conceptually, *claiming* and *warranting* graduate identity (Holmes, 2001) appears to be close to Brown and Hesketh's (2004) notion of positioning and employability strategies. However, consistent with other cross-cultural research in this area (Wang and Lowe, 2010) the *claiming* and *warranting* strategies used by the participants in the present study do not fit Brown and Hesketh's (2004) typology of *purists* and *players,* even taking into consideration the fact that Brown and Hesketh's model is an ideal typology rather than a real typology and therefore an exact fit cannot be expected. In Brown and Hesketh's typology (2004), *purists,* base their approach to employability on meritocratic grounds such as having a high GPA and a good record of participation in extra-curricular activities, while *players* base their approach on presenting themselves in a way to fit the requirements of a job or culture of an organization even if this means adapting their values and attitudes. A previous cross-cultural study (Wang and Lowe, 2011) found that this typology did not fit well in the different socio-cultural context of the graduate labour market in China and, similarly, the approaches of the graduate participants in the my study do not meet the descriptions of the types. While some of the graduates in the present study were quite strategic in their approach to finding a job, none of them could be described as '*players*'; rather, they all took, to varying degrees, a '*purist*' approach believing in being authentic in their presentation of their 'selves' and taking a meritocratic view of their chances in the labour market. A possible exception to this could be seen in their approach to using social capital.

The findings of my study also suggest that Tomlinson's (2007) ideal typology of graduates' ways of engaging with the labour market is culturally dependent. In Tomlinson's (2007) model *careerists* developed a strong identity around future career and emphasized self-development and fulfilment in their work-related values; ritualists took passive approach and viewed work as a means to an end; *retreatists* were also passive, demonstrated a non-market orientation and built identities based on their lives outside work; finally, rebels were

active in their resistance to taking a market orientation. Although some of the Emirati graduates took what could be seen as a *careerist* approach, this was still associated with a strong sense of social engagement and not purely individualistic. Some of the graduates could be seen as *retreatist* in that they appeared to prioritise other identities over their graduate identity or understood their graduate identity in ways which extended beyond employability. None of the graduates in the present study could be seen as *rebels* or *ritualists.* Since national identity and social engagement featured highly in their graduate identities, and working was seen as contributing to nation building and helping the community, to rebel against engaging with the labour market would be to go against powerful social norms. The lack of *ritualists* may be due to the fact that state support lessens the economic need to work for many Emiratis.

I now further examine two key findings from the study: first, that for the graduates in my study, their graduate identity is closely connected to their understandings of being Emirati, their national identity: and second, that Emirati graduate identity appears to be highly gendered.

4. Linking Graduate Identity and Emirati Identity

One difference in perception or perspective on graduate identity between the graduates and employers in the UAE is that the employers appear to consider graduate identity as a fixed, stand-alone identity. However, the findings of my study suggest that for the participants, their graduate identity was closely connected to their understanding of their national identity and being an Emirati. They saw themselves not just as graduates but as Emirati graduates. This linking of Emirati identity to graduate identity manifests in a number of ways in the graduates' accounts of becoming and being a graduate. It is highly salient in the theme of social engagement and citizenship, or 'being a good citizen', which highlights the graduates' consciousness of being part of a society in which collectivist values dominate (Hofstede, 2001; Whiteoak et al, 2006). It can be speculated that this aspect of the ways in which Emiratis 'do' their graduate identity is part of their socialized habitus, that it comes from an understanding that this is an expected attitude and behaviour in

Emirati society, or both. This linking of national and graduate identity also links the rules and resources associated with both identities and while it appears to constitute a strong motivational element in graduate identity in the UAE, it also leads to tensions and conflicts.

One area of tension apparent in the accounts of the participants in my study was between the collectivist values of Emirati culture and the individualised labour market. As discussed in Chapter Two, collectivism has been described as an important characteristic of Emirati culture (Hofstede, 1981; Whiteoak et al, 2006) and this appears to be borne out by the focus on *social engagement* and contribution to the community that was found to be important in the graduate identity of the participants in the my study. However, while demonstrating collectivist influences on their beliefs about the purpose of working and their roles in society as workers, the graduates in the study also appeared able talk about their employability and graduate identity in very individualistic terms. As well as wanting to contribute to her society, Amna also, for example, described her personal ambitions which included the desire to 'stand out from the crowd' in some way but within the boundaries of doing it 'for' others.

> *'I want to do something for my society, you know. I want to do something remarkable for me, for society, for the place that I work with, for my family, for the students, anything. I don't want to end up just doing something normal'* [Amna]

Aisha was another participant who demonstrated this ability to express her individualism within the context of collectivist values.

> *'I have an ambition and I'm thinking a lot about my future, how to be…to be proud of myself and it will be a good return or a reward for myself , my family and my country and its also to be a part of the society, in building something, putting something new, leadership in the country'* [Aisha]

This finding corresponds to Williams (2002) study in which it was found that students at an HEI in the UAE took an individualistic view of career progression and stressed personal disposition, attitudes and characteristics. The findings are also consistent with the suggestion that individualism is increasing among Emiratis (Whiteoak et al, 2006).

Although mass higher education has become the norm in the UAE, as with elsewhere in the world (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2006), young Emiratis, as with young people elsewhere, have to succeed individually in their exams and have to 'advertise the individuality and uniqueness of their work and of their own accomplishments' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2006: 145) in order to succeed in a competitive labour market. Therefore, the Emirati graduates appeared to exhibit a kind of 'bounded individualism' with respect to beliefs about their graduate identity. They were unafraid to express their personal ambition but placed this in the context of their national identity and service to their country. They claimed the right to personal ambition but the rule seemed to be that this must be in the context of participating in nation building and expressing gratitude to their nation and its rulers. This was one of a number of areas in which the graduates appeared to experience tensions between aspects of their graduate identity, or in the area of hyphenation.

A second area of tension was located in the graduates' understandings and experiences of Emiratisation and their position in the labour market. National identity was implicated in the graduates' conceptualizations of their graduate identity primarily in the dimension of *social engagement and citizenship* but collectivist values and beliefs about the needs of their society influenced their decisions with respect to their choice of major and vocation. The participants' perceptions of Emiratisation and how Emiratisation has been implemented and/or has affected them are consistent with what Narayan (2008) refers to as idealized cultures and cultural values, constructed in terms of opposition to 'Westernization' and 'Western culture' (Narayan, 2008: 383). Also consistent with Forstenlechner's findings (2010), several of the participants had negative perceptions of Emiratization and appeared to believe that 'westerners' were their main competitors in the labour market. Connotations of 'shame', a very powerful notion in Emirati culture (Whiteoak et al, 2006) were attached to the notion of Emirati graduates taking non-graduate positions under the guise of Emiratisation.

> *'The fact that a lot of Emiratis managed to get a job because of Emiratisation is great. But the kind of jobs many Emiratis got is shameful. It is sad that Emiratis are filling the jobs of assistant, receptionist, archivist and when they are promoted they become an 'executive assistant'. I am not undermining people who work in the*

previous jobs; I just think a westerner with a baccalaureate degree isn't better than an Emirati with the same degree. From my experience, I don't think there is a good reason to give westerners a higher grade and better titles just because of the 'experience and knowledge' many of them claim to have, especially that in many cases that 'experience and knowledge' is irrelevant in our context.' [Suhaila]

This notion of discrimination against Emiratis was also raised by Noora. She described an incident that she understood in terms of blatant discrimination against Emirati teachers. When attending an interview for a teaching position at a private school she caught sight of some salary information in which teachers were categorized according to nationality with native English speakers in the top category.

'I had a conversation with the principal of the school and she brought out the schedule. On top there was type A, type B. I asked her what's type A, what's type B? Like type B is for the UAE nationals and all other Arab countries and type A is for Australians, Americans, British people, like all the native speakers. And type A get paid more than type B and, oh my God…(laughing)' [Noora]

Noora also described her reservations about the way in which Emiratisation policies were being applied in the labour market, suggesting that companies were implementing Emiratisation strategies that were more in the character of PR exercises than real attempts to employ nationals.

'I am not sure Emiratisation has helped me personally. However, it did help a lot of other UAE nationals that I work with. I believe that Emiratisation is more of a 'marketing' word than an action. [Noora]

Of all the participants, only Abu Bakr believed that his competitors in the labour market were other Emirati graduates. This is consistent with statistics provided by the recruitment managers interviewed which suggest that they receive on average fifty applications for every position available under Emiratisation programs. The fact that graduates may hold inaccurate beliefs about the nature of the labour market and the competition is an important

issue that needs to be addressed in HEIs when preparing students for the transition into the labour market.

On a positive note, none of the participants in this study showed any negative consequences of preferential treatment afforded by affirmative action programs, in which particular sectors of a population are awarded a privileged status in the labour market based on demographic characteristics other than educational credentials, skills and experience. Other studies have found such progams to be associated with negative self-perception or disincentivization to acquire skills (Resendez, 2002; Loury, 1992; Heilman, Simon and Repper, 1987). In particular, my study did not find any evidence of internalized negative stereotyping of Emiratis with respect to their skills, competencies and cultural disposition to work, such as that found by Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2010). On the contrary, the graduates in the study strenuously resisted this as an ascribed identity.

A third area of tension experienced by the graduates with respect to their '*Emirati* graduate identity' concerned the tradition of 'wasta'. As discussed in the literature review, according to Whiteoak et al (2006: 80), in UAE society the term 'wasta' 'refers to both the act and the person who mediates or intercedes on the behalf of another party or parties' (Whiteoak et al, 2006: 80) and having 'wasta' usually means having high social status or power or having access to others with high social status and power. Whiteoak et al (2006) found that younger nationals viewed 'wasta' as more important than the older generation and the graduates in my study appeared to share this perception. However, they also saw 'wasta' as being a negative phenomenon, voicing similar criticisms to Al-Ali (2008) who suggests that it 'produces negative social capital, acting as a barrier to reform and good governance' (Al-Ali, 2008:373). In the extract below, Maryam describes her view on 'wasta':

> *'It's sad to say that in Abu Dhabi we have wasta more than in the other Emirates.*
> *Yeah. I believe, I actually believe. Because here we have this wasta and who's*
> *your father and what's your family name. It will be affect your job. Because I*
> *remember one of my friends, she only write her first name and she didn't get a job.*
> *Then her other friend said you have to write the last name. So when she write her*
> *last name and apply again, they gave her the job. So, it's really make a difference.*

Like a wasta. It's really unfortunately it's more in Abu Dhabi than in the other Emirates in Dubai and Sharjah, no question of that. ..It's a disadvantage because it happens that...we know that in some government places you know that a specific tribe...like the majority of people are from this tribe in a specific qualified to take this job and this is going to make the work going down, not going up.'[Maryam]

However, despite this general disapproval of 'wasta' all of the participants in the study used social contacts in the process of achieving employment. Intermediaries were apparent and important in all of the cases studied and all of the participants who had achieved employment, or some kind of *agreed* identity, had been assisted by a facilitator in some capacity. In some cases, facilitation consisted simply of passing on information that a particular company was recruiting. In others, the facilitator took an active role in passing the individual's CV to a decision-maker, and in one case, the facilitator actually arranged an employment offer for the individual (Abu Bakr). Suhaila described how in her case, a friend was able to introduce her to the appropriate manager before she officially applied to the organisation.

> *'I am at my current job because of a friend who was already employed by this organization, who introduced me to the Executive Sector Manager. The manager interviewed me and encouraged me to officially apply for the post.'* [Suhaila]

Although most of the graduates in the study had used 'wasta' to positive effect, Aisha described an incident in which she attempted and failed to gain some 'wasta' to help her in the job search process through an incidental meeting with a member of the ruling family.

> *'You know one of my stories: I was in a café. I saw Sheikh M. I gave him a letter that I am ending now my master's degree and it's my pleasure to work in any of the government or semi-government companies or whatever. And he told the guy who was with him "Take care of this lady and her story." And he give them that they have to end my finding job and my thing. After that, they call me once, twice and they didn't care about it...because you can't reach...the sheikh know about it they'd*

be in trouble. But because these people who are under the sheikh, they are not doing also their job in a good way.' [Aisha]

It can be seen then, the graduate participants expressed conflicting attitudes towards, and experiences of, the Emirati cultural tradition of 'wasta' that underpinned their employability strategies. 'Wasta' was viewed as a phenomenon with negative effects on their society, creating inequality of opportunity and also affecting the development of the country by removing the competitive element from job recruitment processes so that jobs go to the person with the most 'wasta' rather than the most capable person for the position. However, the participants also believed that 'wasta' still works and therefore used it, or tried to use it, as a personal employability strategy. The graduates also suggested that there is a societal shift taking place and 'wasta' is becoming less essential and less effective. These beliefs about 'wasta' appeared to be based both on personal experiences and on collective beliefs. The role of 'wasta', therefore, in the process of claiming and affirming graduate identity appears to be a complex one and worthy of further research. It is an issue that should not be ignored when preparing Emirati graduates to enter the labour market but rather should be explored in discussions of graduate identity and job search strategies.

In the next section, now turn to the issue of gender in Emirati graduate identity which is also connected to the linking of graduate identity and national identity.

5. Emirati Graduate Identity as Gendered

The second significant finding apparent in the understandings of graduate identity expressed by the Emirati graduates was gender and this was closely linked to national identity so that being (doing) a graduate was not just being (doing) a *'female* graduate' or a *'male* graduate', but rather a *'female Emirati* graduate' or a *'male Emirati* graduate'. Consistent with the existing UAE literature, discussed in Chapter Two, beliefs about gender roles and behaviour featured prominently in the accounts of the graduates in my study. The specific issues they mentioned ranged from beliefs about gender and time, to gender and space or location, and to cultural norms related to marriage and Islamic dress.

Again, there appeared to be a number of areas of tension or conflict between aspects of identity that had to be negotiated and reconciled by the graduates in order to succeed in the labour market.

One of the ways in which this finding manifested was that the female and male graduates in the study had different notions of time with respect to higher education and employment, reflecting some of the gender issues existing in their sociocultural context. The two male participants were very conscious of age, of time passing and of wanting to progress through their studies and find work quickly. Amr worked while studying and Abu Bakr was highly conscious that he was 'behind schedule' and needed to 'catch up' with his peers. As he explained:

> *'Usually a university graduate is twenty-two or twenty-one years old and so I know that I have this gap that I need to make up for. This gap where the experience shows. I mean graduates, they join the work field, they have a year's experience but I just joined and I don't have that experience so I need to find something to boost me up to their level.'* [Abu Bakr]

This preoccupation with time was associated with the recognition by the male participants that they had financial responsibilities to their families. Both of these participants were the eldest sons in their families which in Emirati culture carries special responsibilities (Pascarella et al, 2004).

The female participants, on the other hand, appeared to have no pressure upon them to earn a living and were free to continue their studies or to take a break from job hunting as they desired. Yasmin and Hind both took a year out from job hunting to stay at home, rest or read the Koran.

> *'And then stopped for one year, first from studying project…I want to just sit in the place, rest from the troubles of studying…one year…and after that one year, I search for a job.'* [Yasmin]

> *'I stay at home. I apply for many jobs but there is no. Then I study Koran for one and half year.'* [Hind]

These two participants clearly believed that there was no onus on them to contribute financially to the family or to support themselves, and also believed that the only two available lifestyles available to them were to stay at home or to work. However, several of the female participants in the study also cited not wanting to stay at home as a motivation for taking jobs which were less than what they aspired to. As Noora explained:

> *'Because I'm so active, I couldn't stay at home, so I just started applying in different places'* [Noora]

As we saw in the literature review, in the UAE strong social norms associated with female gender identity impose limitations on who women are permitted to associate with, how far they are allowed to travel, and where they are allowed to work (Metcalfe, 2006; Al Jenaibi, 2010; Gallant and Pounder, 2008). Several of the female graduates described examples of how this had affected them in their choice of HEI and in their search for work. Maryam gave an example of turning down a job because, having accompanied her to see the place, her father objected to the environment, particularly her prospective male colleagues:

> *'I got one offer to work in a place. The salary was really low but I said no, the place is really good. But at the end I just refused because my dad refused. He didn't like the environment of the place. He said "No, don't go there." So I didn't go there. We went there, I remember that. First of all, it was a villa…more than one villa. OK but it was fine. But when we got there he don't like attitude of the men there. They were sitting smoking in the office and some of them were talking loudly on the phone in a very high voice and he don't like them. And because we enter the office, they don't actually even said sit. So, we just don't like the place, although it was one of the higher place, but he don't like the place. He said, "Don't go there." So I refused.'* [Maryam]

In Maryam's case, not only was her Emirati gender identity invoked in this situation but also her Emirati daughter identity and the expectations, understandings and meanings of these identities in relation to her graduate identity.

In a similar case, Loulwa's family objected to a job offer because of the location, the nationality of the staff and the nature of the job, which involved having to deal with the public:

> *'They called me one day and they find a job on me in Mussafah, if you know, in the insurance of health. But my family disagrees because it's this area. I wish I found even foreign people but it's only from Asia, only, and it's dealing with customers and it's hard place, you know, for my culture.'* [Loulwa]

As Samulewicz et al (2012) found that in their study of the barriers to a career in STE for Emirati women, family prohibitions against working in a mixed gender environment were an issue for the female graduates in my study, bringing their national, gender and graduate identities into tension, at best, or conflict, at worst, and requiring identity work to reconcile or align these identity needs in order to be employable. The findings from my study are also consistent with the assertion by Bristol-Rhys (2008) that female students studying in a segregated federal HEI were afraid of working with men, deferred to them and disliked competing with them.

However, as well as the above examples where the female graduates strove to reconcile the different elements of their graduate identity, there were also cases where societal or personal beliefs about gender roles, connected to national and cultural identity as Emirati women conflicted with the graduates' personal beliefs about their graduate identity. Possibly the most dramatic example of this was Loulwa's case. Having started university, Loulwa then married and then decided to withdraw from her studies. The marriage only lasted a short time and when she became divorced, Loulwa was very keen to resume studying in higher education. Loulwa expressed great regret at having withdrawn from her studies and attributes this to what she describes as 'traditional thinking'. She also emphasized that this was her decision and was not at all supported by her family.

> *'I am starting the second year…I am starting to face other outside problem. Not problem - I got married even I left the university. I don't want to say it's stupid decision but halas it's happened. I left the schools, universities, studies, and sit at home. My family were not speaking to me because I left university because they are*

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caring about education - three of my brothers are graduating from USA and Australia - then when I get divorced, I am trying to face myself again. I don't want to focus in like thinking about what happened in the past, so I want to register [at HEI]again.' [Loulwa]

It appears that for Loulwa, at least for a period, her student identity was incompatible with her gender identity as a wife and she therefore suspended her student identity for the period of her marriage. Loulwa's behaviour is consistent with studies in the UAE which have found that the male breadwinner model is prevalent (Omair, Neal, et al, 2005; Mostafa, 2005) and that the house and children are still largely believed to be a woman's main responsibilities. This is linked with Islamic beliefs that men and women are equal but have different roles in life (Hashim, 1999). However, the cases in this study demonstrate that, as Abdallah (1996) suggested, Emirati women are willing to take responsibilities outside the home (in politics, education and work).

A final illustration of identity tensions involving gender, and cultural/national and graduate identity in the UAE, raised by the graduate participant Maryam, is the wearing of Islamic dress and beliefs related to this. Maryam suggested that this has effects on the employability of Emirati women. She explained:

'There is something until now some people they consider it: idea of not wearing the niqab or wearing the niqab, if you know? To cover the ...yeah, okay. This is something make it difficult for people to work. Some women they actually wear niqab and they don't want to remove it even if they are working but this is make it difficult for them also to work, and make the chance of getting job very difficult. I remember n one of the places, like the director was saying that most women who are wearing the niqab are actually...they shouldn't be working' [Maryam]

The wearing of the niqab and segregation of the genders in the UAE is related to the cultural notion of *qiwama,* which refers to the notion of men protecting women's honour, and *aib*, or shame, and these beliefs have been identified as detracting from the employability of Emirati women (Rutledge et al, 2011). According to Metcalfe (2008) the *aib* is considered to be less for women working in the public sector than in the private

sector and is one reason for their preference for government jobs. As Bourdieu (2001) suggests, the symbolic violence of patriarchal practices imprint deeply into identities and issues relating to gender identity and this was apparent in the accounts of some of the graduate participants in this study.

The coinciding of cultural or collective beliefs, family beliefs and personal beliefs regarding gender and the home, or gender and the public and the private, in the UAE is a complex and interesting area which is worthy of further future study, particularly as it pertains to women's employability and participation in the work force.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, the ways in which the graduate participants managed their graduate identity during the transition from education to work were examined, drawing on Holmes' (2001) model of emergent graduate identity modalities. Four transition patterns emerged and specific employability strategies, conceptualised as graduate identity claiming and warranting strategies were identified. Importantly, it was found that graduate identity in the UAE is both gendered and linked to national identity, and therefore subject to the associated rules but advantaged by the associated resources. The employability of the Emirati graduates emerged from the complex tensions and interplay of these elements and their interactions with the labour market. Therefore, employability in the cases of these UAE graduates can be conceptualised as a process of identity reconciliation and alignment.

The findings reinforce the notion that employability is socially constructed and highly subjective in nature and that conceptualising it as emergent graduate identity, interacting with other identities, offers a framework through which to gain important insights into the decisions and behaviours of graduates as they transition from education to work.

As we saw in the previous section, conceptualising and studying employability as emergent graduate identity provided insights into areas of tension and conflict between different identities or identity elements. However, it also highlighted the ways in which employability, for the graduates in the study, involved processes of aligning and

reconciling these different aspects of their graduate identity and other life roles. The graduates responded reflexively to their experiences, as suggested by Cai (2013) and Farber and Gibbons (1996). Some examples of this include Maryam's account of changing her belief about having her photograph taken (see Chapter Five) and also her account of how she and her friends adapted the way they approached employers when they found a general lack of familiarity with their degree subject. The participants' beliefs in the power of 'wasta' also varied according to their experiences and several of them changed their beliefs about the most effective employability strategies to adopt. Noora completely 'repackaged' herself in order to become employable in a wider range of occupations, Yasmin changed her choice of subject when her first choice was not available and prioritised studying at a particular HEI over her choice of subject; Loulwa actually left her marriage! The graduates' accounts demonstrate that their process of transitioning from education to work, and becoming employable, was one of ongoing adjustments and adaptations to their graduate identity and to the way that identity interacted with and aligned with other life roles and identities.

In the next, and final, chapter, the study will be reviewed and its contribution to knowledge in the areas of transitions to work and employability will be discussed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

1. Introduction

This study examined the employability behaviours, experiences and outcomes of Emirati university graduates as they transitioned from education to work in the context of work force localisation, known as 'Emiratisation'. Two main research questions were addressed:

1. How is Emirati graduate identity, as it relates to employment and employability, conceptualized and understood by UAE graduates and employers?
2. How do Emirati graduates manage their graduate identity, as it relates to their employability, in their transition from higher education to the labour market?

The first research question initiated a study of the meanings attached to graduate identity in the UAE, the findings of which are presented in Chapter Five. With the second research question, the focus turned to an examination of Emirati graduate employability behaviours, experiences and outcomes during the transition from education to work, through the lens of graduate identity. The study is underpinned by an understanding of graduate identity as relational and interactive, as contingent on social and cultural contexts, as framing meaning and action, and as an active and ongoing process. The findings of the study, framed by these two questions, offered insights into the ways in which Emirati graduates interact with the UAE labour market and to some of the challenges with 'Emiratisation' identified in the literature. The study represents a significant reconceptualising of graduate employability in the UAE and makes a scholarly contribution to the scarce research in this area.

As this chapter shows, the study fills a gap in research on the experiences and understandings of young Emirati graduates as they make the transition to work and applies a theoretical and empirical approach to the issues frequently mentioned in the national press in the UAE. The study drew on the work of Leonard Holmes on emergent graduate identity (Holmes, 2001; 2013) as the principal investigative framework and as a means of

gaining a deeper understanding of the graduates' employability behaviours and experiences within the socio-cultural context of the UAE. Taking a social constructionist, qualitative approach, the design used elements drawn from a multiple case study design (Yin, 1995) with twelve participants. Analysis was an iterative process and involved cross-case analysis in order to identify key patterns and themes.

This, the final chapter, comprises six sections. After this introductory section, there follows a section comprising a summary of the findings of the study. The third section then focuses on the contributions and implications of the study and places the findings in theoretical and empirical context by relating them to other research. This is followed, in the fourth section, by a consideration of the implications of the findings for higher education institutions and organisations employing Emirati graduates, and recommendations are made based on my findings. In the next section, a number of suggestions for further study are made, and then, in the final section, the chapter concludes with final comments and reflections on the study.

2. Summary of the Main Findings

The study first explored the social construction of graduate identity in the UAE through an examination of the ways in which Emirati graduates and UAE employers conceptualise graduate identity with respect to employment. From the interviews with the graduates five main themes emerged with respect to the meanings and understandings attached to their graduate identities. These were the meaning of the credential itself and the notion of 'completing' their education; the graduates' sense of vocation and the challenges they faced in this area; personal attributes and skills which held the meaning of '*not* being a high school leaver'; experiences and achievements while at university, conceptualised as 'practising and becoming a graduate'; and social engagement, related to the meaning of 'being a good citizen'. The UAE employers' concepts of graduate identity were similar except that the important element of social engagement and citizenship was entirely missing from their understandings. The significance of this omission can be seen through the findings presented in Chapter Six that focus on the education to work transition

experiences of the graduates, conceptualised as emergent graduate identity trajectories (Holmes, 2001). Four patterns of trajectory emerged from the graduates' accounts; however, further analysis highlighted the fact that these trajectories were quite individualised. Five identity *claiming* and *warranting* strategies used by the graduates were identified: strategic claiming, reduced claiming, withdrawal, personal warranting and augmented warranting. Importantly, these strategies were used in reflexive response to the graduates' labour market experiences and identity tensions or conflicts. This interpretation led to my assertion that for the graduates in my study, graduate identity interacted significantly with national and gender identities in the construction and management of their employability as they transitioned from education into the labour market. Further, it appeared that employability, in the cases examined here, could be conceptualised as a process of reconciling and aligning co-existing salient identities.

The study provided insights into several issues related to Emiratisation of the UAE workforce. In particular, it highlighted the identity challenges that female Emirati graduates face with respect to the working environment. The problem of retaining Emirati recruits is possibly at least partly explained by graduates adopting a 'foot in the door' approach and attempting to achieve a *progressive* transition trajectory to a graduate level position. Notions of national identity and what it means to be Emirati were shown to be implicated in the type of job that the graduates considered appropriate and this also has implications for Emiratisation. In the graduates' accounts, there were even hints of an Emirati graduate identity as a type of 'suffering' identity (Lawler, 2014) when it came to their labour market opportunities.

3. Contributions and Implications of the Study

As Jackson (2014) notes, the notion of graduate identity is still at the stage of conceptualisation in the literature. My study, therefore, contributes to this process and the findings show how this identity is conceptualised by Emirati graduates, and employers, and how it relates to the graduates' employability and mediates their employability choices, strategies and experiences. As a 'testing out' of an identity approach, and specifically

Holmes' emergent graduate identity approach (Holmes, 2001; 2013) as a framework for researching graduate employability and labour market experiences in diverse socio-cultural contexts, the findings of the study demonstrate that this approach can lead to rich, socially nuanced understandings of Emirati graduates with the labour market. My study, therefore, makes a theoretical contribution in three main areas: first, as mentioned above, it contributes to developing conceptualisations of graduate identity and understandings of how this relates to graduate employability; second, it illustrates both the need for culturally sensitive understandings and models of graduate employability, and shows how the concept of emergent graduate identity, and particularly Holmes' (2001) model of emergent graduate identity modalities can be used to explore and develop these; and lastly it confirms the usefulness of a graduate identity framework as a way of reconceptualising graduate employability issues in the UAE related to workforce localization, known as Emiratisation.

- Conceptualisations of graduate identity and how it relates to employability

Through analysis of Emirati graduates' narratives of their transitions from education to work, my study examined their emergent conceptualisations of their graduate identity through their higher education experiences and early interactions with the labour market. As summarised above, the findings demonstrated that there were five main themes related to the graduates' understandings of their graduate identity, emerging from their interactions with their educational, labour market and social contexts. These themes comprise new knowledge about graduate identity as it relates to employment in the UAE and contribute to developing understandings of how graduate identity is fundamental to the ways in which graduates interact with the labour market in the UAE. The graduates in my study undertook considerable identity work in making decisions related to employability, such as choice of major, deciding on which jobs to apply for and to accept, and in producing their graduate identity in an appropriate form for the purposes of making their identity claim, and warranting it, to the labour market. In some cases, repackaging skills and attributes was necessary, in others issues related to the work environment had to be taken into account, for example. This was in addition to having to align their graduate identity claims with the expectations and understandings of employers. The findings show the tensions and

conflicts that the graduates had to navigate in order to reach an employment outcome that met their identity needs. From this it can be seen that the process of identity reconciliation and alignment is fundamental to employability, and particularly to the graduate identity claims that the graduates make to the labour market.

- Using and developing Holmes' (2001) emergent graduate identity modalities

The adoption of Holmes' (2001, 2013) claim-affirmation model of emergent graduate identity as a framework for this study enabled contextually sensitive issues to emerge while also facilitating comparison with research carried out in other contexts, particularly the UK. The UAE higher education system appears to be largely based on Human Capital Theory (HCT) assumptions which hold that individuals will be selected for jobs based on their human capital (skills and knowledge) and that they will invest in higher education to the extent that they perceive a return on their investment in terms of economic capital (Becker, 1976); however, the findings of the present study suggest that HCT is inadequate for understanding the complex understandings and relationships that Emirati graduates have with the labour market and that an emergent graduate identity approach offers a useful framework for investigating these issues. The influence of socio-cultural context emerged in the study through the interactions of graduate identity with other salient identities and the tensions and conflicts arising from these. Consistent with other UAE studies, gender, in particular was found to be an important factor. Notions of national identity were also found to be significant in the employability behaviours and perceptions of the graduates in the study, again through the linking and interactions with graduate identity.

Although Holmes' claim-affirmation model was useful as an analytical framework in the study, the findings highlighted a number of gaps in the model, particularly in terms of graduate identity and education to work transitions in the UAE. This was in three main areas. These are: first, the research demonstrates a need for expansion of understandings of *affirmation* as it relates to emergent Emirati graduate identity; second, alternative and additional modalities of Emirati graduate identity emerged from the data in my study; and,

third, the findings identify specific strategies for claiming and warranting graduate identity that further develop the model. These are discussed below.

With respect to the notion of identity affirmation, Holmes (2001) considers this in terms of labour market affirmation of graduate identity. Holmes' model is concerned specifically with the graduate-labour market (employers) interaction and the 'best' outcome in employability terms is that of an 'agreed' identity in which the graduate makes a recognisable claim on graduate identity which is affirmed by the labour market in the form of attainment of employment in what is considered to be a graduate level position. It emerged from the study, however, that the graduates sought and received affirmation of their graduate status in different forms and from different sources, other than employers. For example, the notion of the degree credential as 'completion' suggests that it acts not just as a warrant (Holmes, 2001) but also as a source of affirmation of graduate identity.

In terms of the modalities in Holmes' (2001) claim-affirmation model, my findings show that, in the context of Emirati graduate employability, the conceptualisation of what is considered an 'agreed' graduate identity needs to be expanded to include the notion of an 'adapted agreed' graduate identity or maybe an 'alternative agreed' graduate identity. There were graduates in the study who had their graduate identity affirmed to an extent that was acceptable to them in employment that they did not consider graduate level employment. Holmes' (2001) modality of 'underdetermined identity' is also less than satisfactory for describing the *progressive* education to work trajectory of several of the graduates in the study. The addition of a modality of 'provisional', 'transitory', or 'interim' identity would enhance the model to better explain the education to work trajectories of the graduates in my study.

The notions of *claiming* and *warranting* graduate identity are key components of Holmes' (2001) model or emergent graduate identity modalities. According to Holmes (2001), graduates are required to *claim*, or produce, their graduate identity in a form recognisable and acceptable to employers in order for the identity to be 'agreed'. *Warranting* is conceptualised as providing proof or evidence to support the claim and increase the chances of affirmation. As discussed in Chapter Six, the graduate participants in the study employed five specific strategies to claim and warrant their graduate identity, which can be

added to enhance the model as it applies to Emirati graduates and the UAE labour market. Of particular interest are the strategies of *reduced claiming* in which the graduates applied for and accepted what they considered a non-graduate job, for a variety of reasons. In some cases this resulted in a kind of 'adapted agreed' identity as proposed above. The use of social capital, or 'wasta' in the job search can be conceptualised as *personal warranting* and was used by most of the graduates. The strategy of seeking higher and higher qualifications as a means of gaining advantage in the labour market is conceptualised in my study as *augmented warranting.*

- Implications for other related theories and models of employability

As well as Holmes' (2001) claim-affirmation model of emergent graduate identity, the findings of the study have implications for other models and theories of employability, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six. Considered particularly salient to the study were Brown and Hesketh's (2004) ideal types of *player* and *purist*, Tomlinson's (2007) typology of *careerists, ritualists, retreatists* and *rebels,* and Brown and Hesketh's (2004) model of personal capital. The understanding underlying the two typologies developed by Brown and Hesketh (2004) and Tomlinson (2007) in which employability is viewed as a subjective, socially constructed concept was strongly supported in my study; however, the two typologies themselves were not found to be applicable cross-culturally to the cases of the Emirati graduates.

According to my findings, a further issue with Brown and Hesketh's (2004) model of personal capital is the absence of social capital. While Brown and Hesketh suggest that 'who you are' is an important component of employability, meaning the cultural capital that you carry, in the UAE context, 'who you are' in terms of which family and tribe you belong to, or 'wasta', was believed to be an important employability factor by the graduate participants in the study. Additional to this is the issue of 'who you know'. Social capital is missing from Brown and Hesketh's model of personal capital (although possibly inherent in the notion of 'soft currencies' but the accounts of the graduate participants in my study appear to support the suggestions by Al-Ali (2008) that in the UAE context 'who you

know' is as important as 'what you know' and 'who you are' in gaining an advantage in the graduate labour market. As shown in the discussion of Al-Ali's (2008) study in Chapter Two, and in the findings of my study, this is a controversial area. The graduates generally had a negative perception of 'wasta', or nepotism, , and none of the recruitment managers interviewed mentioned it at all. Despite this, the graduate participants maintained a strong belief in its continuing influence of their employability outcomes and, in fact, most of them had used some form of social capital in attaining their employment. Employer-university relationships can also be seen as providing a form of social capital to graduates and, in my study, the cases of the graduates who enjoyed a *direct* trajectory and obtained a graduate level position, or achieved an *agreed* graduate identity with relative ease upon graduation were all facilitated through employer-university relationships. All of the graduates in the study highly valued their work placement experiences.

My study did not look at social class explicitly as a factor in employability issues since social class in the UAE is structured differently and based on different factors than in the UK. For example, tribal origins, religious affiliations and geographical origins appear to be significant in social classifications in the UAE but are beyond the knowledge and expertise of the researcher. However, cultural capital and habitus, in the form of knowledge of 'how to get on' in both higher education and the labour market, appeared to be a major issue in the cases of some of the Emirati graduates in the study. The issue is apparent at the level of individuals and families and at the societal level. At a family level, there were considerable variations in the involvement of families in higher education and employability-related decision-making and in the knowledge held within the family relating to these fields. This suggests intra-class variation as well as inter-class variation (Brooks, 2003a). As will be suggested below, this needs further investigation in order to be understood and addressed by both HEIs and employers. It also appears that UAE society as a whole has not yet built up a collective knowledge of how higher education and the labour market works, of what it means to be a student or employee and what the expected behaviours are. This is unsurprising given the fact that higher education did not exist in the UAE forty years ago and is compounded by the need to function in a multi-cultural, multi-national environment.

- Reconceptualising issues of 'Emiratisation'

A key finding in this study concerns the linking of graduate employability to national identity through the social engagement and citizenship aspect of graduate identity and the positive and negative implications of this. This provides a reconceptualising of issues of Emiratisation from challenges related to skills and work ethic, to the challenges of taking into account the ways in which graduates produce and align their graduate identity and other salient identities. The policy of Emiratisation appears to have made the link between national and graduate identity purposefully in order to encourage the labour market participation of young Emiratis and it certainly appears to provide a strong motivation to the Emirati graduates in the study. However, it also invites both affirmation and ascription in that the meanings attached to it by employers may be different from the meanings it has for the graduates themselves. The graduates seem to think of themselves as specifically *Emirati* graduates and so do the employers, particularly the employers with Emiratisation programs in which Emirati graduates are recruited in cohorts. This makes the graduates potentially more vulnerable to stereotyping such as that identified by Forstenlechner et al (2012) than where they compete simply as graduates. There also needs to be an awareness of other the potentially negative repercussions, such as disincentivisation, and, as recommended below, strategies should be put in place to manage these. The 'being a good citizen' aspect of Emirati graduate identity could also be implicated in the preference of Emiratis for work in the public sector since this can be seen as serving the community and participating in nation building.

The other important interaction was between graduate identity and gender identity and, again, this meant that other socially constructed meanings related to being an Emirati man or woman were attached to the graduate identity. As discussed in Chapter Six, this created a number of tensions which had to be negotiated by the graduate participants as they transitioned to the labour market. Privileging the link of national identity with graduate identity activates norms, values and social practices associated with traditional gender roles in the UAE. The ways in which these identities interact constitute the most important findings to emerge from my study and this is an area which offers considerable potential for further research, as discussed below.

4. Recommendations Arising from the Study

One of the aims of the study was to provide insights into some of the challenges being experienced in attempts to localise the UAE workforce, known as 'Emiratisation', specifically lack of participation in the workforce, the choice of public over private institutions, stereotyping of UAE nationals with respect to their skills and attributes, choices of occupation and degree subject, and the role of social capital in labour market interactions.

The findings with respect to the links and interplay between graduate, national and gender identities offer understandings of these issues. The link with national identity and the notion of being a good citizen was related to choosing a helping profession and participating in nation building. Irrespective of factors such as remuneration and working conditions, this immediately makes public service more appealing than the private sector. As mentioned above, a link is also formed with traditional gender roles which restrict the career choices of both men and women in different ways, men by having to provide financially for the family, and women by seeking situations which do not carry risk to their reputation. There was evidence of social capital assisting some of the graduate participants in attaining a position but there were also negative perceptions of 'wasta' expressed by the graduates. Although under Emiratisation, simply being Emirati should be to possess considerable social capital in the labour market, some of the graduates believed that this was not so and suggested that the labour market was manipulated, or rigged, against them. My study demonstrates that the linking of national identity with graduate identity can be both problematic and advantageous and that this should be kept in mind when designing and implementing Emiratisation strategies.

In order to better support Emirati graduates in their education to work transitions and employers in their efforts to Emiratise their organisations, there are a number of recommendations arising from the findings of the study. These are now discussed.

- UAE HEIs: career counselling and extra-curricular activities

The findings showed that the vocational aspect of graduate identity appeared to be important in building employability in the cases in this study. The graduates who had developed a strong vocational identity during university had been the most proactive at participating in extra-curricular activities and taking advantage of opportunities for self-development. The late development of this in some of the graduates, and the challenges they faced in obtaining information and aligning their vocation with other identities suggests that career counselling provisions may not be sufficiently robust. Several of the graduates would have benefitted from career counselling prior to joining university, or in the very early stages rather than later on nearer graduation. Counselling in preparation for the transition to work needs to take into account emergent graduate identity and explore possible trajectories with students

The findings of the study confirm Holmes' (2001) conceptualisation of extra-curricular activities as a way of rehearsing graduate identity. Participation in these activities provides opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and 'ways of being' that are recognisable to employers as graduate attributes. It also provides warranting in that graduates can describe real performance and achievements from these activities. The graduates in the study who participated most in these kinds of activities were those who made quick and easy transitions to work.

Similar to extra-curricular activities, work placements and internships provide opportunities to rehearse and warrant graduate identity. However, they also allow employers to see students performing as graduates in their organisation and provide an opportunity to employers of recruiting with minimal risk that a candidate may not perform as hoped.

- Employers: structure, selection and training

Organisations recruiting Emirati graduates need to take into account graduate identity and beliefs about this when designing jobs and organisational structures. Work environment and location appears to be particularly important for female graduates and clearer career development structures within organisations might reduce attrition when recruiting

graduates who are adopting a progressive approach to entering the labour market. Where opportunities for advancement are minimal, designing jobs to fulfil the graduate identity needs of graduates may be sufficient for those who are less ambitious but need to maintain 'face'.

Selection procedures for Emirati graduates also need to be considered. Some of the graduates in the study lacked persistence in their job search and also showed a lack of understanding with respect to the competitive nature of the labour market for Emirati university graduates. Therefore, organisations that are serious about wanting to recruit and develop UAE nationals should be prepared to build more feedback and personal interaction into their recruitment and selection processes. While potentially adding to recruitment time scales and resources needed, this could have a pay-off in terms of the quality and 'fit' of graduates employed. At least in the short to medium term, recruitment and selection processes need to be adapted to reflect the fact that participation in higher education, the labour market and the work force is still a relatively new phenomenon in the UAE and that these elements of society have changed and developed very quickly. Recruitment and selection methods which work in developed Western countries may not be currently appropriate in the UAE.

Training and development programs would be useful for Emirati recruits entering employment. As many Emirati graduates are first generation graduates and often first generation entering the labour market, particularly female Emiratis, organisations need to compensate for a lack of knowledge and understanding of how to be an employee or how to get on within an organisation. Therefore, ongoing training and development are essential. Mentoring or coaching programs may be particularly valuable in this area (McDermott and Neault, 2010).

Motivation to participate in such professional development can be derived from graduates' sense of community engagement and nation building. Also drawing on this notion of 'being a good citizen', private sector employers might be more successful in recruiting Emirati graduates if they find ways to stress the contributions of their organisations to the national development of the UAE.

5. Suggestions for further research

A number of questions arise from my study, both from the process of conducting the study, and from the findings. From these several areas of further research are suggested.

From the implementation of the study methodology, questions arise regarding research participation in the UAE, and choice of interview mode. Recruitment of participants for the study was challenging; therefore, following on from El Obaid et al's (2016) research into factors influencing participation in medical research, a similar study into why Emiratis choose to participate or not participate in social research would be very useful in developing research methods in the UAE. This would also contribute to knowledge about conducting research in different cultural contexts. In my study, the participants were given a choice of interview mode; however, I did not investigate the reasons for the choices they made. Again, it would be useful to conduct follow-up research into this aspect of methodology to inform future research in the UAE and elsewhere.

From the findings, several follow-up questions emerged which provide an agenda for further research into graduate employability issues in the UAE. These are now discussed.

1. How does gender impact labour market participation over time? The findings from the present study suggest that time, with respect to work force entry and participation may be a gendered issue in the UAE related to cultural values and norms and economic structures. A longitudinal cohort study involving both quantitative and qualitative data on labour force participation over at least ten years would provide useful data for government policies and interesting insight into social change in the UAE.

2. How does individual graduate identity change as a result of labour market experiences in the longer term? The present study identified five themes related to graduate identity at the time of the transition to work and the ways in which graduate identity was presented or claimed. It would be informative to investigate changes over time in graduate identity, and in particular elements of graduate identity, such as vocation or notions of social

engagement and citizenship, as a result of labour market experiences and as a result of changes in family circumstances through the life course.

3. What is the role of families, and particularly mothers, in their children's higher education choices, graduate identity development and employability approaches? The findings of the present study suggest that social change is taking place at the family level in the UAE as a result of participation in higher education and the labour market of family members. Further longitudinal data on this, again both quantitative and qualitative, would be useful to understanding the processes of social change in the UAE.

4. What is the role of social capital in the long term employability and career development of Emirati graduates? Social capital, in the form of 'wasta' was believed to be important by the graduate participants in the present study. While 'wasta' has been found to be a local tradition in this part of the world (Whiteoak et al, 2005: Al-Ali,), the use of social capital in recruitment and selection has also been identified as a widespread trend outside the UAE and the Arabian Gulf. A study of its long term effects on the employability and career development of individuals in the UAE would provide further useful data for Human Resources and Organisational Development professionals.

5. How do young Emiratis construct their student identities and how do their student identities relate to their graduate identities and employability? Although it was beyond the scope of the present study, rich data was generated during the process of the study regarding the participants' experiences of becoming and being students. Analysis of this data could contribute to existing knowledge in this area and it is suggested that Holmes' claim-affirmation model of emergent identity (2001, 2013) could be extended and tested as a possible theoretical framework for this.

6. Are there differences in the way graduate identity is conceptualised, produced and managed between graduates from federal, single nationality, gender segregated HEIs and other types of HEI (e.g. international local campus, private Emirati, overseas universities)? A replication of the present study with graduates from other types of university could be carried out in order to investigate the effects of different university environments and academic approaches. Further to this, a study into subject specific or vocational graduate

identity would also be interesting. Although, this was not specifically addressed in my study, vocation was found to be an element in the generic graduate identity of the participants in my study. A comparative study of graduate identities between graduates in different disciplines could extend the findings in my study.

7. How do UAE employers (recruiters and selectors) evaluate and categorise graduate applicants? As the data from employers in the present study was very limited, a study replicating the participant observer approach used by Brown and Hesketh (2004) to investigate graduate interviews would generate interesting and useful data in this area, although access would be a major challenge to overcome. The effects of employer gender on their understandings of graduate identity is also an area for further investigation. Further data in this area could inform the selection processes used by organisations and such factors as the gender composition of interview and selection panels.

8. Finally, research into the notion of what constitutes a 'graduate level' position for Emirati graduates and UAE employers would be informative for policy makers, employing organisations and HEIs in the UAE.

6. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the study described here provides a scholarly contribution to the scarce knowledge in the area of graduate employability as they transitions from education to work in the UAE, through the lens of graduate identity. It is an important area of study given the short history and fast-paced development of higher education and the graduate labour market in the UAE, the social changes taking place in this young country, and the political changes taking place in the region. The study also has value as a cross-cultural study, contributing to knowledge of the role and influence of contextual factors on graduate employability, and a relevance to culturally diverse societies such as that in the United Kingdom with the insights it offers into the influences of cultural norms and values. New knowledge is contributed in the form of social constructions of Emirati graduate identity, Emirati graduates' trajectories from university into the labour market, and in the interactions of Emirati graduate identity with the social world and the labour market

context in the UAE. Finally, the study makes a theoretical contribution by illustrating the application of an emergent graduate identity framework in understanding these important issues. The findings suggest a number of possible questions for a research agenda in this area and on a practical level should be of interest to higher education and Human Resources professionals in the UAE. Overall my study undertakes a significant reformulation of issues of graduate employability and transitions to work in the UAE.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide for Graduate Participants

Appendix 2: Interview Guide for Employers

Appendix 3: Extract from Transcript

Appendix 4: Example of Case Summary

Appendix 5: Example of Memo

Appendix 6: Consent Form

Appendix 1: Interview Guide for Graduate Participants

Interview Guide – Graduates

1. **Demographic/background information**

- Can you tell me about yourself? (age, graduation date, major, job, etc.)

- Do your parents work? What is their job? What about siblings?

- Has anyone else in your family been to university?

2. **Education narrative**

- Describe your education to me? Tell me about your education?

- Why did you choose to go to university? What was your major and why/how did you choose it?

- What do you think were the most important things you gained from going to university?

- In what ways do you think a university graduate is different from a high school leaver?

- Can you tell me about any other studies or professional development activities you have undertaken?

- What do you think are your most marketable skills, qualifications and attributes?

3. **Career/job search strategies/narrative**

- How would you describe the job market for Emirati graduates?

- Can you explain Emiratisation to me/tell me about Emiratisation?

- Describe to me your career to date?

- [If employed] Can you describe to me how you got your first/current post? What do you think were the main factors in your success in becoming employed? What were your reasons for taking this job?

- [If not employed]Can you describe to me some of the strategies you have used in seeking employment?
- What do you think are the main barriers to getting a job for you? /What has helped you to get a job?
- What are the factors/criteria you consider when you look for a job? What are the reasons for these criteria

Appendix 2: Interview Guide for Employers

Interview Guide – HR/Recruitment Managers

- Can you tell me about the ways in which Emiratisation is implemented in your organisation with respect to the recruitment of graduates?

- Can you describe your recruitment process?

- What are the kinds of post for which you recruit Emirati graduates?

- Can you tell me what you look for in the Emirati graduates you recruit in terms of skills and attributes?

- How are these different from non-graduates?

- How are these different for the various types of position?

- How do you evaluate the skills and attributes of Emirati graduates during the recruitment process?

- How do you distinguish between Emirati graduate applicants? What makes some graduates more attractive to you than others?

Appendix 3: Extract from Interview Transcript

81   complete your dreams

82   I: Why do you have to?

83   P: If you have a dream. Because some of them, halas,
84   high school that's the end. No, no, I want to do
85   something in my society, you know. I want to do
86   something remarkable for me, for society, for the place
87   that I work with, for my family, for the students,
88   anything. I don't want to end up just doing something
89   normal for that, you know. So, yes…

90   I: So when you were in high school you had a goal?

91   P: Yes, I had a goal. I want to study something that will
92   make me be something in the future. I want something
93   strong, to just enter in my society with a confidence,
94   with a personality, with a clear mind, with a good
95   background in English as a second language, er, to
96   understand the foreign people, to understand, yani, the
97   work, the world of the work, you know, and, er, yeah

98   I: OK. So, why did you choose English?

99   P: As I said it was a challenge for me. Because I
100   remember when I was in a high school …and I repeated
101   this story several times ….when I was in a high school the
102   teacher, an English teacher, she was like she didn't
103   encourage us, she was like surprised by our level of
104   English. But what we can do? Halas. You know we were
105   like having six classes a week and that wasn't enough for
106   us and she was like that class I remember she was like

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Appendix 4: Example Case Summary

Case Summary - Suhaila

"I only applied for what I truly wanted to work in, for what I was most passionate about."

Suhaila was 30 at the time of the study, having graduated in 2006 with a bachelor's degree in Education and English Studies. She went on to achieve a master's degree in Leadership in Education and is currently working on a doctorate in Education. Suhaila studied for her first two degrees at a UAE federal university and is undertaking her doctoral studies at a UAE-based British university. Suhaila got her first job as a teacher a week after graduating and has been continuously employed since. She is now in a leadership position in a government education department.

Suhaila's Employability Narrative

Suhaila's presented her account of constructing her employability and making the transition from school, through university, to work, as a story of personal transformation, relationships, morality and patriotism.

School to university

'I did not choose to go to university. I was forced to do so by my family.'

Suhaila's account starts at the critical juncture of school to university. She presents herself as a reluctant student, noting that: 'I wanted to drop school every [sic] since I was in grade 6. My school experience was awful, for lots of different reasons.' It appears that the intervention of her family at this point was critical to her entering university and that she did not do so with any notion of qualifying for a particular career: 'I did not choose to go to university. I was forced to do so by my family.' Suhaila later specifies her mother as 'the reason behind every academic success I had', explaining that her mother 'never went

to school, she never went through formal schooling' and suggesting that her mother values education more because of this: 'She always tells me that "those who lack a thing – a certain skill or ability – are the ones who truly know how valuable that "thing" is"'. Interestingly, Suhaila juxtaposes the terms 'forced' and 'continuous encouragement' when describing her mother's intervention, suggesting that the relationship is not a straightforward, uni-dimensional one. It is unclear in Suhaila's account, whether or not she had a real choice at this juncture or felt that she had a choice. However it is clear that in entering university Suhaila was obeying her family, or at the very least acquiescing to their wishes and that she was without any career aspirations or conscious intention to acquire employability assets.

Becoming a student and finding a vocation

 'It was an overwhelming feeling that went through my body.'

Suhaila's transition to university, however, was not easy: *'my first year at uni was not the best and I still had the idea of "dropping off uni" [sic] dominating me.'* It could be speculated that although her mother was able to "force" and "encourage" her into higher education, her own lack of formal schooling meant that she was not able to pass on the knowledge of how to operate within the field of higher education. Suhaila admits *'I needed guidance. I needed help'* and that her response was to turn to her religion *'I prayed so many times'*.

According to Suhaila, her prayers paid off in the form of encouragement from one of her teachers: *'She gave me a book called "a child called it" an autobiography and said try to read this book. And to my surprise I read my first book in English'*. Suhaila presents this as a transformative experience*: 'It was an overwhelming feeling that went through my body'*. The experience appears to have increased her self-efficacy in skills areas and habits that would contribute to her academic success and to the acquisition of further employability assets: 'After that book, after that reading experience I started speaking, reading and writing in English.' This episode also resulted in/contributed to her decision to study education as her major and to make this her career: *'The above story led to my major*

choice. I decided to be a teacher.' It also marked the start of Suhaila consciously seeking to acquire employability skills and assets. For the rest of her time at university she was highly proactive in seeking ways to do this:

> *'I was a member of the student council for three years in a row.' 'I was a student ambassador. I was a member at the Education College Club, president of the Literature Club. I had a part-time job as an assistant in the Athena Leadership Program. After that I worked with a professor as research assistance [sic] and joint [sic] the WOW (world of work) program.'*

According to Suhaila, these experiences 'strengthened my interpersonal, public speaking, leadership, work ethics, and team work skills' and 'prepared me well for my career'.

Entering the labour market and developing her career

'I only applied for what I truly wanted to work in, for what I was most passionate about.'

At the next critical juncture, the transition from university to work, Suhaila's main strategy was to apply 'for what I truly wanted to work in, for what I was most passionate about' and she was successful in gaining employment a week after graduating. Changing jobs two years later, however, Suhaila appears to have made use of her social connections, or 'wasta'. She attributes her success in securing a more senior post to the assistance of a friend who *'introduced me to the Executive Sector Manager'*. However, she also attributes her success at interview to her *'"honesty" in describing what the field was going through and for my willingness to work for/with the change.'*

While in employment, Suhaila continued to seek opportunities for further personal and professional development, including studying for a masters degree, undertaking specialist training in Japan, and most recently, embarking on a PhD.

Key Themes from Suhaila's Case

Understanding and conceptualizing Higher Education

From Suhaila's account there are several key aspects to the way she understands and conceptualizes higher education. The first is that going to university is a possibility or life option for her, indeed it appears to be an expectation of her family. This implies that several key conditions are met.   The first is that the family has sufficient economic resources that Suhaila is not required to produce an income. While in many countries going to university entails being able to pay fees, in the UAE, higher education is free to Emiratis, and this is one of the ways in which the state privileges Emiratis in terms of their employability.   However, despite the generosity of the state, there are variations in the socio-economic circumstances of different Emiratis and there are families which need the income of their children. There is also a cultural consideration I this, however, in that in traditional Emirati society economic responsibility for the family falls upon the males. Freedom from this responsibility may be a contributing factor in the greater participation of women in higher education. A cultural consideration which could counteract this advantage, however, is that participation in higher education by young Emirati women could be perceived as risky for traditional families where the honour of the family is seen as residing in the behaviour and reputation of the women. In the UAE this is mitigated by the fact that state universities are segregated by gender.

Suhaila clearly understands that university is a means to acquire of employability assets (skills, attributes, cultural knowledge) and has a clear idea of what these are, but she also sees higher education in terms of self-development as well as a desirable and valued end in itself. For Suhaila, it appears that the self-development and personal transformation she undergoes at university is as important, if not more important, than the knowledge and skills she acquires. Indeed, her self-development and acquisition of skills and knowledge appear to be highly interdependent.

Understanding the labour market for Emirati graduates

Suhaila expresses the view that the job market for Emirati graduates is *'not very promising'*. She describes the jobs available for Emiratis as *'twisted'* and that the *'role of Emiraties [sic] is marginalized'*. She goes on to explain that *'employers make it difficult for an Emirati job seeker to apply or meet the requirements. However, they do make it easy for Emirates [sic] to get "assistant" kind of jobs'*. Suhaila notes that although she is not sure that Emiratisation has helped her personally, *'it did help a lot of other UAE nationals that I work with.'* However, she goes on to say that *'the kind of jobs many of the Emiraties got [sic] is shameful'*. Suhaila appears to consider Emiratis as being in competition for the best jobs or graduate-type jobs with westerners and appears to believe that the cultural knowledge of Emiratis should make them superior candidates, claiming that *'in many cases [their] "experience and knowledge" is irrelevant in our context.'*

Significant Others in Suhaila's Account

There are four main significant others identifiable in Suhaila's account: her mother (and by extension her family), her university English teacher, God and an heterogeneous group she conceptualizes as 'Westerners'. In traditional UAE society the family and family roles are very important and sometimes lead to cultural dilemmas in higher education. It is not uncommon, for example, for female students to have to miss important exams due to family commitments. Some families are unwilling to allow their daughters to participate in field trips and off campus events, or work placement. However, Suhaila's case demonstrates the positive side of family relationships in that the family was the instigating factor in her going to university. Her family also appears to have been relatively open in allowing her to study abroad.

The kinship that Suhaila apparently feels towards her mother and her female teacher, and the way she projects her identity as a woman, in her account, also demonstrates a side of Emirati culture. In a society where gender segregation exists in many domains, female

relationships tend to be strong, and this can be seen in Suhaila's account. The fact that God appears in Suhaila's account as a significant actor is also not surprising and demonstrates the central role of religion in the lives of Emiratis.

In identifying 'Westerners' as her main competitors for employment, particularly what she perceives as graduate level employment, Suhaila appears to conceptualise national identity as a dimension of employability. This may be at least partly influenced by the notion of Emiratisation in which national identity is promoted, and which seems to both offer opportunities based on nationality and impose expectations on Emiratis in terms of their participation in nation building.

Identities

Suhaila appears to adopt a number of different identities throughout her account, with each identity performing a different role. Early in her account, Suhaila portrays herself as an obedient daughter, an identity which is positively promoted in UAE culture. Likewise, the identity of pious Muslim could be seen as essential in Emirati society, and Suhaila demonstrates this several times in her account. She also portrays herself as an obedient student. However, simultaneously, she projects the identity of reluctant student and appears to lack any kind of career identity. Only after her transformative experience at university does Suhaila take on the identity of keen and successful student, driven by her identity as teacher-to-be and a sense of vocational fervour. This is augmented by her sense of national identity and being a good citizen which makes her want to contribute to the development of her country and which also influences her perspective on the labour market for Emiratis.

Suhaila's Strategies

Linked to the identities she adopts, are the strategies that Suhaila uses in constructing and managing her employability. As she makes the transition from school to university she appears to take a somewhat passive role, accepting leadership from significant others such as her mother and later her teacher. It is only after finding her vocational identity that Suhaila appears to deploy agency is actively seeking to acquire employability assets. She presents her strategy as following her passion, or seeking opportunities congruent with her identities. She makes use of 'wasta' or social capital, to further her career and she also appears to view her identity as an Emirati and the cultural capital she possesses as part of that identity as an important employability asset in the competition with 'Westerners'.

Valued Employability Assets & Currencies

When listing the skills and attributes she considers most important for getting a job, Suhaila emphasizes personal attributes such as work ethic, self-confidence and honesty, and what are sometimes referred to as 'generic' graduate skills such as interpersonal skills and leadership. Interestingly, she does not mention her degrees or any career-specific skills. She considers the work experience she gained from her extra-curricular activities at university to be very important: 'I believe that a combination of the practicum as well as the extracurricular experiences prepare students better for the real life work experiences.'

The Nature of Employability

Suhaila appears to conceptualise employability in several different ways. She seems to see employability as a moral obligation. It is her moral obligation to repay her mother and teacher for the positive roles they played in her self-development; it is her moral obligation to participate in the development of her nation; and it is her moral obligation to help her community. Suhaila also very much appears to view employability in terms of self-

development as well as a way to assert her national and cultural identity. She also views it as a competitive arena in which her rivals are 'Westerners'.

Summary of Key Themes from Suhaila's Case

The key themes from Suhaila's case are summarized in the table below.

Higher Education as…	- a life option - an expectation of the family - a desirable & valued end in itself - a source of self-development - a source of employability assets (skills, attributes, cultural knowledge)
Significant Others in the construction of employability	- Mother (family) - God - Teacher - Self

Identities	
	• Reluctant student • Obedient daughter • (education) (keen) student • pious Muslim • Woman • Emirati • Good citizen • Grateful daughter • Professional • Teacher/educator
Identity as…	• an employability asset/currency • a source of social and cultural capital • a 'navigation' aid • a condition for social actions
Employability Strategies	• Accepting leadership from significant others (mother, teacher) • 'Following her passion' seeking education experiences and work congruent with her self-identities • making use of 'wasta' (social capital) • promoting identity as Emirati & cultural knowledge (capital)
Employability as…	• moral obligation - nation building, helping the community, repaying her mother & teacher • self-development

	- way to assert national and cultural identity - competition with 'Westerners'
Perceptions of the labour market & Emiratisation	- Twisted - Low level jobs for Emiratis as shameful - Westerners as competition - Emiratisation as marketing
Valued assets	- Self-confidence - 'Authentic' UAE knowledge and experience - Interpersonal skills - Honesty - English language skills - Public speaking - Work ethic - Team work - Leadership

Appendix 5: Example Memo

Suhaila -Memo 1

Identity as currency and capital

Suhaila's identity as an **obedient daughter** was a key factor in acquiring employability assets and capital. Acquiescing to the wishes of her family, more specifically her mother, gave her access to the opportunities of higher education. Once at university, the fact that she agreed and made the attempt to read the English book given to her by her teacher suggest that she adopted the identity of '**obedient student'.** This facilitated the transformative experience she describes where she apparently experiences success for the first time in her academic endeavours and realizes her self-efficacy in this area. This leads her to abandon her previous identity as '**reluctant student'**. She takes on identities of '**successful student'** as well as '**teacher-to-be'** which provides her with the motivation and direction to actively seek out learning opportunities or opportunities to acquire employability assets or capital in the form of qualifications, skills and attributes**.** She conceptualizes this as following her passion. The fact that she was an **obedient student** to her English teacher and had her transformative experience, acquiring self-efficacy in the subject of English, meant that she developed important skills in English which then became a tool with which she was able to acquire other skills and knowledge more effectively (in an English-medium university). Acquiring a **career identity** as a 'teacher-to-be' was also key in Suhaila's account as this identity provided her with a kind of navigation aid with which to acquire and deploy her employability assets.

Suhaila's **national identity** is also prominent in her account.

Suhaila's identities as an **Emirati,** a **woman,** and a **Muslim** are also apparent in her story.

Suhaila is able to expand her cultural identity to encompass operating in a new language and adopting new customs, appropriate for studying working in a culturally complex and diverse environment while at the same time still maintaining and indeed promoting a clear identity as an Emirati.

Appendix 6: Consent Form

<div align="center">

Consent Form

The Transition to Work of Emirati Graduates: employability perspectives

</div>

This study is an investigation into the employability strategies of recent Emirati graduates. The project has been reviewed and approved by the Zayed University Ethical Clearance Committee and the University of Leicester. The information provided below is so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in the study. It is important that you understand that your participation is considered voluntary and that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

For the purposes of the research you are invited to participate in an interview (face-to-face, by telephone or by email) with the Principal Investigator (Debra McDermott) which will last approximately 60 minutes.

With your agreement, the interview will be recorded and stored digitally, under password protection. These will be transcribed (put into written form) by the Principal Investigator and will then be destroyed. It is not anticipated that any of the data collected in this study will be of a potentially damaging nature. However, in reporting the findings, identifiers will be removed and pseudonyms (fake names) will be used.

If you have any questions not addressed by this consent form, please do not hesitate to contact the Principal Investigator (Debra McDermott) or the Office of Research at Zayed University (Email: research@zu.ac.ae).

We thank you for your time and your contributions to this project.

Debra McDermott

Principal Investigator

Email: debra.mcdermott@zu.ac.ae

Tel: 050-9002730

_____

_____

Signature(s) for Consent:

I agree to participate in the research project entitled, ***The Transition to Work of Emirati Graduates: employability perspectives.*** I understand that I can change my mind about participating in this project, at any time, by notifying the Principal Investigator.

Your Name (Print): _____

Your Signature: _____

Date: _____

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