Career Decision-Making: An Emirati Female Perspective

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This original research purpose was to assess the career decision-making behavior of female Emirati college students. More specifically, this study sought to examine the perceptions these students hold regarding their career decision-making ability. This descriptive study employed the Career Development Self-Efficacy Scale Short Form (CDSE-SF) and a focus group to examine the perceptions Emirati female students hold regarding their ability to make career decisions. Undergraduate students (n=230) from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) participated in this study. The results indicated participants had moderate confidence in career decision-making ability. No significant differences in students' career decision-making self-efficacy (CDSE) were found whether students attended private or public high schools. Through the utilization of a focus group, researchers found that friends and family were essential in the career decision-making process. Themes from the focus group also revealed that taking introductory courses helped to increase CDSE. There is limited literature on the career perceptions on female Emirati college students. This paper offers insight into concrete practices on how to serve this population in career development and labor market preparation. Exploring a variety of social and cultural experiences of students are core to being able to boost career decision-making confidence. The authors suggest that effective culturally appropriate resources to promote student engagement in the career decision-making process are needed.

Keywords: self-efficacy, career decision-making, United Arab Emirates

Boasting a robust economy and home to some of the wealthiest people in the world, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has seen phenomenal growth since its inception in 1975. This growth can be witnessed in all aspects of society, including an increasing focus on preparing its citizenry to join the workforce (Gaad et al., 2006). The country's patriarchal society has traditionally seen males and expatriates dominate the workforce. However, Emirati women are making great strides to enter the workforce. According to Al Awad (2018),

> "(male) dominance has decreased substantially from around 40 national males for each national female in 1975 to around 2 males per female in 2015. Similarly, the ratio has decreased for expatriates from around 28 in 1975 to less than 6 in 2015" (p.20).

Al Awad also notes that increases in educational attainment, social acceptance, and an increase in the value of Emirati females' work are all factors that contribute to women's increased participation in the labour force (2018). Based on a report from the Dubai Women Establishment, Emirati women now comprise 28% of the labor force amongst the local population (2018). This same report also notes that Emirati women are now exercising the power of choice regarding when and how they enter the labor force.

Over the years, academics have spent significant efforts researching the dynamic and changing roles of women in Arab countries (Beitler & Martinez, 2010; Crabtree, 2007; Oraimi, 2011; Schvaneveldt et al., 2005; Zuhur, 2003). In many of these countries, the roles of women have undergone significant evolution. Many women have decided to step out of the traditional roles of mother, wife, and caretaker and enter the workforce. Research examining the career decision-making behavior of this population is emerging as well (Abdalla, 1995; Al-Darmaki, 2012; Dubai Women Establishment, 2018; Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Omair, 2010).

The purpose of this explanatory mixed-methods study was to examine the career decision-making behavior of female Emirati students. The quantitative strand of the study sought to examine the perceptions these students hold regarding their own career decision-making ability. In the qualitative strand of the study, researchers sought to understand Emiratis' perceptions of career decision making in their own words. It is likely the results will provide some insight into the issues these students encounter when making such important decisions. This information could influence faculty, practitioners, and administrators when developing programs and/or policies regarding the career development needs of this

population. The following research questions by strand of the study guided the researchers in this study:

<u>Quantitative Strand</u>

RQ1. What level of confidence do Emirati females have about their ability to make career decisions?

RQ2. Are there differences in Emirati females in career development self-efficacy (CDSE) based on attending private vs. public high school?

RQ3. Are there differences in Emirati female students' perceptions of CDSE based on family involvement in career decision making?

<u>Qualitative Strand</u>

RQ4. How do Emirati females describe their experience with career decision making in their culture?

Changing Roles of Emirati Women

The role of the Emirati females has and continues to change over the years. In reference to Emirati women, Oraimi (2011) notes that,

> "historically, women played multiple roles in traditional societies and helped to support the family. However, after the discovery of oil and the region's entry into a new era of production, society's need for women's labor decreased" (p.80).

Due to this weakened economic position, women were strongly encouraged to follow traditional roles such as homemaker, wife, and mother (Crabtree, 2007; Schvaneveldt et al., 2005). The opportunity to pursue higher education was limited. Literature states that families placed little value on investing in the post-secondary education of women as the female would eventually leave the household and join another family (Harfoush-Strickland, 1996). Historically, the idea of educated Emirati women entering the workforce may have been fleeting at best.

The value that women add to a country's economy has become increasingly evident. Hajeri and Vammalle (2020) posit that "women typically account for half of a country's talent base, which leads to faster economic growth through boosting productivity and diversification of the economy" (p. 7). The UAE has and continues to set precedence in encouraging Emirati women to enter the workforce. To help strengthen the voice of Emirati women, the UAE government has imposed a quota that mandates 50% of seats in national parliaments and local governments be held by women. Emiratization, a governmental intervention that seeks to restore the imbalance of an increasing expatriate workforce, has also aided in the addition of Emirati women in the workforce (Pech, 2009). Today Emirati women can be found in many diverse occupations. The UAE Gender Balance

Council notes that Emirati women account for more than 40% of employees in the education sector, 35% in the health sector, and approximately 20% in social affairs (2019).

Despite these significant achievements, overall Emirati female participation in the UAE workforce remains low when compared to the international average (UN, 2018). Composed of seven emirates, employment rates vary from one emirate to the next. The Statistics Center of Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, records its overall unemployment rate as 5.2% with the 20-24 years age group accounting for the largest proportion of this number at 25.9% (2019). The national female unemployment rate is slightly higher than that of local men at 12.1%. The UAE is also home to a host of international businesses and a constantly growing skilled expatriate workforce. EdArabia (2021) reports that the expatriate community constitutes 88.5% of the total UAE population. This highly diverse community may provide even more insight into reasons for low female Emirati employment; that of competition. Traditionally organizations often use the baccalaureate degree as a screening tool for those wanting to enter professional careers with the promise of career growth (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Such may be the case in the UAE as well. To address these challenges, many Emiratis are seeking baccalaureate degrees in order to gain access to professional careers. This access requires confidence in selecting majors and careers appropriate for the current market.

According to the Statistics Center for Abu Dhabi, approximately 44,000 UAE nationals are enrolled in college (2019). Of the 44,000+ nationals enrolled in university, approximately 66% are female. According to Sherif (1999), the increase in female college attendance is due to several factors including: females' personal desire to attend college to help obtain career goals, a realization by some in society that an educated woman can contribute to the rising costs of modern living and in essence make her a better prospect for marriage. Crabtree (2007) echoes this sentiment as she notes that,

> "Families view an education at this level as providing the final polish to a young girl's life, that marks her out as being successfully poised on the brink of adult life, commensurate with Islamic and cultural expectations of womanhood" (p.577).

Encouragement from the country's leadership regarding the education of its citizenry coupled with the country's need to reduce its dependency on foreign labor are also reasons for this increase in female college attendance (Crabtree, 2007; Gallant & Pounder, 2008). Attendance at the nation's public institutions of higher education is also free for UAE citizens. This too may provide some impetus for increased attendance.

Metcalfe (2007) posits that this increase in attendance has a direct impact on women's increased participation in the labor market.

Career Decision-Making

Today Emirati women can be found in many fields including both public and private sectors. Although this is a monumental achievement, the question remains "How are these women confidently able to make appropriate career choices with limited generational knowledge regarding careers outside the home"? Researchers note that deciding one's career path is one of the most daunting tasks that many college students will encounter on their journey to career success (Alsop, 2009; Gordon, 2007). This task is made even more daunting as "most college students have not been exposed to a range and variety of career options before choosing an academic major or a career direction" (Orndorff & Herr, 1996, p. 633). Many of these students are first-generation college students with limited knowledge of the nature of non-traditional work environments. Add to this the patriarchal society in which these women live, the task of making career decisions confidently may prove to be even more challenging for Emirati females.

The process of career decision-making is one that has been explored for several years. As early as the 1950's, researchers were exploring the factors that contribute to career indecision among college students. These factors include: (a) the opinions and attitudes of family and friends, (b) the inability to accept the role a particular occupation represents although it may be appealing, (c) sex-role stereotyping, (d) being a multitalented individual and unable to narrow down the alternatives, and (e) the inability to accept realistic limitations and obstacles (Tyler, 1953). According to Rowland (2004), high school type is yet another factor that can influence one's confidence in the career decision-making process. Mtemeri (2017) further explores this sentiment and reveals that access to career and academic content varies based on school types. This access to information, or lack thereof, inevitably impacts the career preparation and choices of students enrolled. As there has been a shift from public to private education amongst many Emirati families according to the Dubai Women Establishment (2018), further exploration of this topic is warranted.

When examining the Emirati female's ability to make confident career choices, it is possible that her decision may be influenced by many of the factors listed above. As a society that relies heavily on the family for support, encouragement, and influence, the first factor that references the opinions and attitudes of family and friends is sure to appear. As such, one may confidently deduce that without the support of family, Emirati women may have low confidence in the career decision-making process.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) as a Theoretical Framework

While engaging in this study, it was important to find an appropriate framework from which to understand the experiences and perspectives of this population. As such, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) model was chosen. According to researchers Lent et al. (2000),

> "SCCT was based on Bandura's social cognitive theory and examines several cognitive-person variables, (e.g., self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals), and on how these variables interact with other aspects of the person and his or her environment (e.g. gender, ethnicity, social supports, and barriers) to help shape the course of career development" (p. 36).

The model suggests that career development is influenced by objective and perceived environmental factors. Lent et al. (2000) noted quality of educational experiences and financial support as examples of possible objective factors that have the potential to affect one's career development regardless of whether one ascertains their influence. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy affects patterns of thought and partly determines one's actions and decisions to engage in a particular task, extend the effort, and persevere. He defined self-efficacy beliefs as expectations concerning one's ability to successfully perform a given behavior. Although Bandura traditionally conceptualized self-efficacy as task specific, further research has been found to support the concept of generalized self-efficacy. Lindley (2005) defines this concept as "the tendency to feel capable of mastering a variety of diverse tasks and activities" (p. 273).

Unlike other models such as Holland's Vocational Personalities and Work Environments and Super's construct of Self-Concept, SCCT encompasses two components that address cultural dynamics. The first addresses early experiences that shape and influence career self-efficacy and outcome expectations. According to Lent et al. (1994), self-efficacy expectations influence choice, performance, and persistence in career-related areas. The second component relates to the continual effects of external contextual factors such as labor market status, racism, sexism, and perceived barriers.

We sought to explore two primary issues. First, to learn about female Emirati career decision self-efficacy in relation to their contemporaries around the world as measured by CDSE. Second, to explore the perceptions of Emirati female students on their career decision-making processes. The results

could provide insight into what is being done or needs to be done in order to help these students succeed in this process. Utilizing a model that allows for the examination of perceived and actual barriers may allow for the development of effective strategies.

Methodology

Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory and conducted in 2018, the researchers employed the Career Development Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form (CDSE-SF) in the quantitative strand of this explanatory mixed-method study. The scale was used to examine the perceptions female Emirati students hold about their ability to make career decisions. In the qualitative strand of the study, students from the quantitative phase were recruited via email to participate in a focus group. The intent of the focus group was to gain insight into the reasons why these students held their current perceptions.

Participants

The participants were female students enrolled in an undergraduate career development course at a medium-size federal university in the UAE (n = 214). After removing incomplete surveys, 211 valid surveys remained in the study. The sample was comprised of only Emirati respondents. There were participants between the ages 18-19 (75.3%) and 20-38 (23.2%). Table 1 summarized the sample's demographic variables. Students who attended public school composed 69.1% (n = 146) of the sample, while students who attended private schools made-up 30.8% (n = 65) of the participants. Out of this number, six decided to participate in the focus group phase of the study.

Table 1 *Demographics: Nationality, Age, and High School Type*

Variable	Category	n	%
Nationality	Emirati	211	100
Age	18-19	159	75.3
	20-21	49	23.2
	22-38	3	1.4
High School	Public	146	69.1
Type	Private	65	30.8

Quantitative Instruments

Two quantitative instruments were used in the first phase of the study. First, a demographic survey was developed by the researchers to obtain information about the age, educational, and familial characteristics of the participants. The second instrument, the English version of the Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy Scale–Short Form (CDSE-SF), was utilized to measure students' perceptions regarding their career decision-making. The CDSE-SF, developed by Betz and Taylor (2012), is a 25-item questionnaire developed to determine students' perceived career decision-making self-efficacy. The five tasks explored in the CDSE-SF were: (a) accurate self-appraisal, (b) gathering occupational information, (c) goal selection, (d) making plans for the future, and (e) problem solving.

According to Betz and Taylor (2012), the Self-Appraisal scale measures the ability to accurately appraise one's own abilities, interests, and values as they relate to educational and career decisions. Occupational Information gauges the ability to locate sources of information about college majors and occupations. Goal selection estimates the ability to match one's own characteristics to the demands and rewards of careers. Planning is defined as knowing how to implement an educational or career choice, including enrolling in educational programs, job search, resume writing, and job interviewing. The final task of problem solving is defined as being able to figure out alternative plans or coping strategies when plans do not go as intended.

The CDSE-SF uses a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (no confidence at all) to 5 (complete confidence). According to Betz et al., (1996), the internal consistency reliability coefficient for the 5-item scale is .94 for the 25-item total score. The content validity of the CDSE-SF has been evidenced by several studies (Miller et al., 2009; Peterson & delMas 1998; Walsh & Betz, 2001). The CDSE-SF was also analysed by an English as a Second Language expert to identify possible words and/or phrases that could be confusing to the participants. Once identified, these words were defined and given to each student on a separate hand-out in both Arabic and English.

Qualitative Instrument

The study also sought to gain insight into the experiences of participants that may influence perceptions of their career decision-making process. This information would serve to supplement the quantitative results of the CDSE-SF, as well as give rise to the Emirati female voice regarding career decision-making. To assist with the collection of this information, we chose to conduct a focus group. Volunteers were solicited from participants that completed the CDSE-SF. Of the volunteers, four were studying International Relations and

appeared to be friends. The remaining two students were studying Integrated Strategic Communications. Apart from one first-year student, all were second-year students and attended public school before enrolling at the university.

At the beginning of the focus group, a signed consent form was collected from the participants. The researchers also agreed to use pseudonyms to maintain participant confidentiality. A semi-structured interview method was utilized. The researchers developed a 5-question interview protocol to guide the interview. The focus group was scheduled from 45 minutes to 1 hour. A video recording was made per the students' consent and transcriptions were created based on the recording. The transcripts were later analyzed for possible themes. Review of demographic information, member checking, and triangulation were also used to verify recurrent themes. Merriam's (2009) definition of saturation was used to identify repeating themes. Although derived from a limited number of participants, key themes emerged that may provide insight into the career decision-making process of the participants. The discussion of results and emergent themes have been organized around the five questions of the focus group.

Analysis

We sought to examine the relationship between career decision-making, age, parental and high school involvement. Independent t test sampling and descriptive statistics were utilized to measure the differences in means between the quantitative variables. No attempts to manipulate the variables were utilized. In this study there was no attempt to assert causation. The statistical significance of the findings was made using a criterion alpha level of .05. An Interpretive analysis approach provided the researchers with a way of exploring the data collected via the focus group. Smith and Osborn (2008) further explain that the focal point of this approach is to try to understand the content and complexity, focusing on the

meanings of the participants' experiences through a deep examination of interview data rather than measuring their frequency.

Results

Career Decision Making Subscale

In this subscale, we sought to measure the participants' perceptions of their ability to make career decisions. Two hundred and eleven students responded to the CDSE-SF. Respondents' reported confidence in their ability to accurately appraise their own abilities was close to much confidence (M = 3.91). Participants had moderate confidence in their ability to find occupational information (M = 3.82). The respondents declared that they had moderate confidence in matching their characteristics with career choices (M = 3.78). Students reported moderate confidence in knowing how to implement educational and career choices (M = 3.85). Being able to make alternative plans when plans do not go as envisioned was the lowest of the mean scores, but students still reported moderate confidence on this task (M = 3.59). Overall, the Emirati students were as confident in their career decision-making abilities as their global colleagues noted in Betz and Taylor (2012).

Research Question # 1, What level of confidence do Emirati females have about their ability to make career decisions?

The average overall CDSE-SF mean score for participants around the world is 3.80 (Betz & Taylor, 2012). There was no statistically significant difference between the Emirati female students' overall self-efficacy means score (3.79) and other CDSE-SF participants mean scores. Table 2 depicts the descriptive statistics of the 5 CDSE-SF subscales and overall score. Research question #1 findings suggests that Emirati students had a similar level of career decision-making confidence as CDSE participants globally.

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics: Career Decision Making Subscale*

		Self- Appraisal	Occupation Info	Goal Selection	Planning	Problem Solving	Overall Score
N	Valid	211	211	211	211	211	211
	Missing	1	1	1	1	1	1
Mean		3.9069	3.8259	3.7866	3.8509	3.5901	3.7927

Research Question #2, Are there differences in Emirati females in career development self-efficacy (CDSE) based on attending private vs. public high school?

Independent-sample t-tests were conducted to compare overall career decision-making ability mean scores of public high school graduates and private high school graduates. There were no significant differences in the scores for public (M = 3.8042, SD = 0.56) and private (M = 3.8049, SD = 0.58) high school graduates; t (221) -.009, p = .993. These findings suggest that there were no confidence differences found in Emirati female students based on high school type (see Table 3).

Research Question #3, Are there differences in Emirati female students' perceptions of CDSE based on family involvement in career decision making?

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare mean scores of students' whose families were involved in their career decision-making process. Respondents attending public schools did have a higher mean score of CDSE than those attending private school. However, the difference was not statistically significant. Those who reported family involvement in their career decision-making process had similar overall self-efficacy scores as those whose families were not involved in their decision-making process. As shown in Tables 4 and 5, there were no significant differences in the scores for the family involvement (M = 3.7938, SD = .59097) and the non-family involvement (M = 3.8660, SD = .59097) conditions; t (189) = -.759, p = .449. The third research question findings suggest that family involvement did not influence the students' decision-making.

Qualitative Results

Research Question # 4, How do Emirati females describe their experience with career decision-making in their culture?

Question 1 of the focus group sought to determine the biggest influence on the participants' abilities to make decisions regarding their career choice. Discussions with family and friends emerged as the foremost theme. Mariam, a second-year student like most of her peers in the focus group, was the first to respond. When speaking of her biggest influence, she revealed "Being with friends, knowing them and being supportive; they encouraged me with my decision which made me feel stronger and more determined". Amal echoed this revelation as she stated that, "For me discussions with family and friends made me look around at all the different areas and majors I want. That was my reason for

International Relations". Although Fatma shook her head in agreement with her peers, she offered a different insight into the biggest influence on her ability to decide on her career choice. She stated,

> The classes I took in university. It opened my mind when I entered the university. The global class opened my mind about history, philosophy, and politics. That was my biggest [influence].

To put her comment into perspective, the global class she mentioned is an introductory course taken by all students. The class is typically taken within the first year and exposes students to various cultures around the world. Students gain an in-depth knowledge of social, political, and economic development on a global scale. As an International Relations student, it is likely that taking this course would have been influential in one's decision to pursue this area of study. Along with discussion with family and friends, taking introductory courses may also be influential on students' career choice.

Table 3 *Independent t-test: CDSE-SF Overall Score and High School Type*

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
CDSE Total	Equal variances assumed	-.009	221	.993
	Equal variances not assumed	-.009	162.368	.993

Table 4 *Descriptive Statistics: CDSE-SF Overall Score and Family Involvement*

	Family Involvement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
CDSE Overall Score	Yes	154	3.7938	.55850
	No	37	3.8660	.59097

Table 5 *Independent t Test: CDSE-SF total and Family Involvement*

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
CDSE Total	Equal variances assumed	-.759	189	.449
	Equal variances not assumed	-.737	74.685	.463

Question 2 of the focus group inquired about possible obstacles to the students' ability to make decisions regarding their career choice. To our surprise, one of the biggest influences on participants' career decision-making abilities was also one of their biggest obstacles. Several participants agreed that family members were often obstacles to their career decision as they misunderstood or did not agree with their career choices. Pondering the question for a moment, Amal stated "When I first told my family that I wanted International Affairs, they thought I'd be working in mixed environments or at the embassy with boys". Nodding her head in agreement Mariam stated, "For me, it's family also. Because they misunderstand and they have these stereotypes about certain majors. They don't know exactly what it is, and they get very sensitive because I'm a girl". As noted earlier, males traditionally dominated the workforce in this region. Although this dominance has decreased significantly over the years, some families may still hold conservative views regarding the roles of women and the way their daughters are to function in society. Agreeing with these participants, Noof commented that her family's uncertainty regarding her major was an issue to overcome. She reflected:

> Their concern was what am I going to do? Are you going to be an Ambassador? So that had me thinking over and over again about the major. But then I think when we explored the major more, we found out that you don't have to be an ambassador or work in the Foreign Affairs or whatever. You can do other things like in tourism and other areas.

Question 3 of the focus group inquired about the sources that aided in increasing the confidence of these students regarding their career choice. Responses were split on this question. Again, it appeared that discussions with friends and taking introductory courses were recurring themes. When responding to this question Noura enthusiastically stated:

> My friends really helped me because they know me on a personal level and on an educational level. They're not like my family that just know me personally. They know what I like, what I don't like. The way we discuss the subject after finishing class really helped me to choose what I want.

Although Fatma agreed that discussions with friends were important, she reiterated her perspective regarding the impact of taking an introductory course. Not only was taking the global course the biggest influence on her decision, it also aided in increasing her confidence in her decision. She recaps, "Taking global classes the first year and when I started studying more about the major, I was interested in the topics". Listening intently and somewhat reserved, Reem simply replied "both of them" referring to the responses of her peers when questioned about sources that increased her confidence.

Question 4 of the focus group asked participants to describe their feelings regarding the process of deciding on a career. The overwhelming majority of participants expressed difficulty with the process. Fatma recounted,

> It was kinda hard because International Affairs wasn't my first choice. Even wasn't in the back of my mind to take International Affairs at all. I chose IT [Information Technology] and my second option was Art. But then again it all comes to what I took in the first year. Global, loving history, politics, and everything related to them.

Noof added "Even knowing yourself, what I like the most, knowing your abilities. It's all a difficult thing to figure out". Agreeing with her peers, Reem states that simple tasks such as "choosing what you like" proved to be difficult. Mariam also agreed that the process was difficult. However, unlike her peers that mentioned dealing with internal conflict, much of the difficulty she encountered seemed to stem from external factors. She states,

> Because sometimes family expectations are…They say you have to have a job but when you present something new to them, they're like is it gonna work? Will you have a career? It's confusing. Even in high school I wanted to be something different.

Question 5 of the focus group asked participants where they saw themselves in the future. Overwhelmingly participants noted their desire to continue their education and join the workforce. When asked about her plans, Noura responded, "Studying and working". Agreeing with her, Reem says "Yeah. Basically studying and working". When contemplating her future, Mariam agreed with her peers but added more depth to response. She states,

> Getting more degrees. I think our mindset, especially our generation, is so different from our parents. Because in five years [after graduation], they wanted to have a job that provides. We just want to explore more and more. Have more experiences.

Clearly pondering and supporting Mariam's perspective, Amal added that her generation wanted to be "Creating something new. Changing the world". Adding to this view, Fatma states "It's not all about working. It's about what we know. The knowledge we're getting. It's more like that".

Summary of Results

The quantitative results indicated that the participants in this study have similar career decision-making confidence levels as compared to CDSE participants globally. Respondents attending public schools did have a higher mean score of self-efficacy than those attending private school. However, the score was not statistically significant. The purpose of utilizing the explanatory mixed-methods design was to allow the

second strand, focus group or qualitative strand of the study, to help explain the surprising findings of the lack of significant findings in the first phase of the study (Creswell & Plano, 2017). Those who reported family involvement in their career decision-making process had similar overall self-efficacy scores as those whose families were not involved in their decision-making process. Although we found no statistically significant data related to family involvement and career decision-making confidence, it's important to note that previous research references the influence of family on one's career decision-making process in Emirati culture (Crabtree, 2007; Dubai Women Establishment, 2018; Hajeri & Vammalle, 2020; Oraimi, 2011; Schvaneveldt et al., 2005).

Upon analyzing the qualitative results, we identified experiences indicative of significant cultural influence. Experiences with family were found to be a significant influence in the career decision-making process of several participants. In contrast, we also found that experiences with family members tend to serve as obstacles as well. Some participants were questioned by family about the validity of unfamiliar majors such as International Relations and available employment opportunities upon graduation. Participants also made remarks regarding the hesitancy of family members to support the pursuit of majors that led to careers predominately occupied by men. This may in part be due to stereotypes that some may hold regarding women and the roles they play in society (Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Oraimi, 2011; Soliman, 1986). Themes from the focus group also revealed that engagement with friends and introductory courses helped to increase confidence. Overall students in the focus group felt as if the process of deciding on a career was difficult. However, there was also a desire to be innovative and to do something different than their parents before them.

Practical Implications

The results of the study have important implications for both students and career practitioners. Based on the CDSE scale results, many of the participants have garnered a sense of CDSE that would allow them to make decisions regarding their career. Upon further analysis through facilitation of a focus group, we found that students would benefit from a more purposeful and multi-faceted approach to career decision-making. When possible, career practitioners should involve family members when engaging students in the career exploration process. Jeffery (2018) posits that the choices of unmarried women are directly influenced by parents, while married women are directly influenced by their husbands. She also notes that a woman's willingness to work outside the home is directly related to her role models. As family members yield much influence on the decisions of these students, career practitioners should also work to educate and

demystify stereotypes that families may hold. It is also imperative that practitioners advocate for the development of introductory courses that further engage students in the career decision-making process.

It is suggested that universities work to develop policies and/or initiatives to enhance the career guidance that is provided to the student body. This guidance can come in several forms; including but not limited to adding career preparation information to undergraduate curricula. In their work on the effects of career development courses on CDSE, Reese and Miller (2006) found that career courses based on theory can increase CDSE. Research also notes that there is a positive correlation between confidence in one's career decision-making ability and academic satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2015). As such, it is likely that students may be more apt to finding academic success due to increased CDSE as a result of completing these courses. Universities should also consider engaging students in practical experiences early in their academic career. These experiences not only provide first-hand knowledge and increase students' confidence but could also lessen the burden of deciding amongst the various majors. Pearson and Dellman-Jenkins (1997) noted that the ability to select a realistic major appropriate to career aspirations is one of the most important contributors to student satisfaction, success, and retention. These efforts could be particularly beneficial as universities are researching ways to retain students and are also considering curriculum reviews to enhance students' experiences.

As more Emirati women continue to engage in the workforce in increasing numbers, the need for effective career guidance is paramount. This study found that Emirati women are confident in career decision-making. However, this confidence is based on their ability to access career guidance. The UAE should continue to provide access and resources to young women to continue the development of these women's career decision-making self-efficacy.

Scope and Limitations

The purpose of this explanatory mixed-methods study was to examine the career decision-making behavior of female Emirati students. We chose this method of study to allow the second strand, the qualitative strand of the study, to inform the lack of significant findings in the quantitative or first strand of the study. All strands of data were collected and analyzed in the Fall of 2016 through the Spring 2018 at a government university in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Although we utilized both quantitative and qualitative instruments in this study, there were some limitations that should be acknowledged:

1. The data for this study was collected before the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Ali (2021), a significant

number of students now prefer working and studying in a remote environment. This shift in attitude may also influence students' career choice as students may choose careers that are more likely to allow this type of work.

2. As female Emiratis in the UAE are more likely to attend a government university due to factors that include free tuition (Dubai Women's Establishment, 2018), participants in the study were limited to those that attend public university. Female Emiratis living and attending university outside of the UAE were not included.

3. The sample size of the qualitative strand was relatively low. It is possible that a larger sample could produce more comprehensive findings.

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