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Explore the factors affecting students' success in the first-year of college

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ABSTRACT

The United Arab Emirates invests great resources in the education of their youth to ensure they can continue and improve the legacy of the nation's founding fathers. As such, the government pumps in billions of dirhams annually to build an innovative, learned, and globally competitive society (MOE Website, 2021). However, at a crucial transition point, something is missing. Studies found out that, in some parts of the country up to 45% of high-school seniors, young Emirati nationals are not interested in pursuing higher education (Bayoumi et al., 2016). This and probably other elements contribute to a disturbingly common phenomenon of Emirati students struggling to succeed in their first year of college. In light of this problem, this exploratory research seeks to analyze the factors that affect freshmen year success within Emirati students in particular. A qualitative method is suggested to identify the main challenging factors that hinder the success of the demographic studied and address those challenges to maximize success.

Keywords: Student Perceptions, College readiness, High School

1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of evaluating the readiness of the first-year undergraduate student has been covered several times by scholars, from several angles. The most studied angles were how focusing on the personality and motivation of students can help them prepare more and be eager for college. Indeed, Patrick C believed that the motivation and personality of students could be accessed to determine their level of readiness for college. What usually motivates students to pursue college is indeed the fact that they have been persuading the community that only your degrees can get you far financially in this world. Everyone is always in the search for a better tomorrow.

While this study was quite instructive, the logic behind it would probably not match the target of this study: Emiratis students. Commonly, Emiratis tend to want to avoid college at all costs and prefer being sent for military duties rather going to college. No matter the amount of self-motivation you give them as an instructor, it often does not help set their mind to the college choice. Emiratis, especially the ones from well-monetized families, on average, have this specialty of viewing college as a waste of time. This is because, as they grew up already very fortunate, they see going to college as defeating the entire purpose of it. Going to college is usually only done to have a degree at the end, a degree that will help you get that big cheque at the end of the month. But what is the purpose if you already have everything you need and can always get the cheque without college? So well, that is the exact mentality/personality and perception of Emiratis toward college. The other approach taken by scholars on this topic is the lack of preparation during the high school years. As per this study, students having poor CGPA throughout high school years are more likely to be failing their freshmen years of college (Kanagi et al).

In other words, the lack of readiness portrayed throughout high school always greatly affects the grades in initial years. The student realizes a little bit late in the year that this is not school anymore. The freedom given by being in college, no one to run after you, and heck if you had your work done, coupled with the fact that back in school the student did not take classes that much seriously and was studying/cheating just to pass the exams, is putting the student in a situation where they feel the loss and behind their classmates.

This study is more aligned with our study. The Emiratis students, especially the fortunate ones, spend most of their school years skipping classes and cheating during exams, because their goal is usually not to go to college. As soon as they are done with school, they want to go to military training. Thus, when they end up being sent to college instead, the first year, if not the entire college years, is usually a big disappointment academically.

Kanagari also stated that gender, race, and origin may have a role to play in the readiness of students regarding college. The matter of race is not really of essence to this study as it is focusing only on Emiratis male students. On other hand, the aspect of origin and gender can be quite important. Studies have shown that not only female Emiratis are more likely to go to college and more than succeed, but also that males Emiratis students that started or did their entire high school years out of the UAE, like in Europe or the USA for example, are more incline and motivated about going to college and getting those degrees. Even though all these different studies have been made on the factors affecting students' readiness, none have focused on the factors that this study has unfolded.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In the United Arab Emirates, it has been widely studied that after completing school many a great number of students approximately 45% of the total student-population do not opt for higher studies and get enrol in colleges. Many researches tried to find the rationality behind this issue and studied various factors that affect the enrolment rate of students in college after completing school. Those studies mainly focused on students' motivation and some other factors however lack of motivation is not the only factor thus, this study gives you in-depth understanding of the core factors behind less enrolment of students in college. The other key factors behind this issue is overall education system of UAE schools, the support of family and also the psychological support provided to students. This study unfolds these factors in details and present meaningful findings.

3. SUMMARY

This study focuses on the predominant factors affecting students' enrolment rate in college and students' success at first year of college. The qualitative research design has been used to carry out the detailed study to know the perception of students about the concerned topic. The study highlighted the key factors behind the lack of enrolment i.e. overall education system with sub-factors: classroom environment, role of school and role of teacher. Second factor is family support and finally the psychological support.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- (a) Is the UAE secondary educational system preparing young Emiratis male students enough for college?
- (b) Do families have a role in a play on the preparation of their youngsters for college?
- (c) Does the psychological resources provide by school help in readiness of students for college?

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Overview of the Data Collection

This study will utilize a qualitative, exploratory approach with data to be collected and analysed until saturation is reached. Participants will be purposefully selected according to the criteria specified below to participate in open-ended interviews. The following tools are included for review.

5.2 Sampling Criteria

(a) Structured questionnaire

Target group: Senior students and first year college students.

(b) Semi-structured interview

A purposeful sample of participate, who completed the questionnaire, will be selected for individual interviews. The criteria for selection for the interview will be determined upon the completing of the quantitative portion of the study and the findings shape the open-ended interview questions.

(c) Research Instrument for Review

1. Close-ended survey instrument
2. Semi-structured interview

(d) Distribution of Instrument

In this study, the questionnaire will be distributed through the use of different channels such as e-mail and/or social media. Interviews, will be conducted through face to face, MS TEAMS or ZOOM with interviews recorded. The recorded sessions will be stored privately and after completion of coding and checking will be destroyed. Confidentiality and privacy for all study participants will be maintained.

(e) Reliability and Validity of Data

For the research to be considered valid, the researcher will ensure credibility and trustworthiness are emphasized in the data collection and analysis process. In order to accomplish that, the data will be triangulated. Triangulation means using three data sources to confirm the findings that answer the research questions (Heale & Forbes, 2013). In this research, the finding will be triangulated by utilizing three different data collection instruments. Additionally, trust will be the major factor in the relationship between the researcher and the participant. The researcher will start to build trust at the beginning of the research period and maintain it by showing integrity.

The reliability of the open-ended interview questions will be established by internal consistency Interview validity refers to whether interview questions map to students. To ensure maximum validity, there needs to be one-to-one correspondence between interview questions asked and underlying competency. To ensure interviewer reliability, the interviewer will transcribe the interview word for word and will then check the interview recording to rectify an inaccuracy. For the interviews both the interviewer and interviewee will have a copy of the interview questions that have been prepared as a guide for students' responses. The interviewer may ask for more clarification if the students' response is incomplete or if he or she raises an issue related to the study that needs more exploration.

6. PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Confidentiality and Anonymity of the study participants is a priority and most important for this research paper. Prior to participating in the study, potential participants will be provided with information regarding the study. Study participants will electronically sign a consent to participate that includes acknowledgement of the scope of the study, understanding that participation is voluntary, and participant can withdraw at any time, and the individual's willingness to be interviewed. Those willing to be interviewed will provide an email address that allows the researcher to arrange a MS TEAMS meeting.

Individuals answering the questions are not asked any identifying information. The structured interview portion of the study will be recorded for coding and cross-checking purposes. Following the coding and cross-checking, the recording will be destroyed. Absolutely, participant name will be used in any analysis of the data or subsequent writing of the study results.

7. DATA ANALYSIS

For this qualitative study, the semi-structured interviews were used as data collection tool. Participants have given in-depth responses; the qualitative data have been analysed thematically using content analysis method.

8. FINDING

This section presents the findings of the study and have been presented in three themes, addressing the research questions guiding this study.

RQ1: Is the UAE secondary educational system preparing young Emiratis students enough for college?

Theme one: Classroom Environment, role of school and teacher influence the overall education system in preparing young students for college

Classroom environment, role of school and role of teacher are the predominant factors in the overall education system of UAE secondary schools. Majority of the participants acknowledged that these factors drive their willingness to proceed to college. According to them, the classroom environment affects the participation in the classroom and the motivation to study. Some students also endorsed that the safe and conducive classroom environment builds their confidence and plays a significant role in their learning process. In addition to that, the prolific teaching and learning environment helps in developing new skills and achieving high grades. Learning facilities in the classroom for instance, technology is the core element of the class environment and it makes the complex topic easy to understand and increases the participation of students. Moreover, extra-curricular activities in groups make students build healthy relationship with their peers which ultimately encourages positive classroom environment.

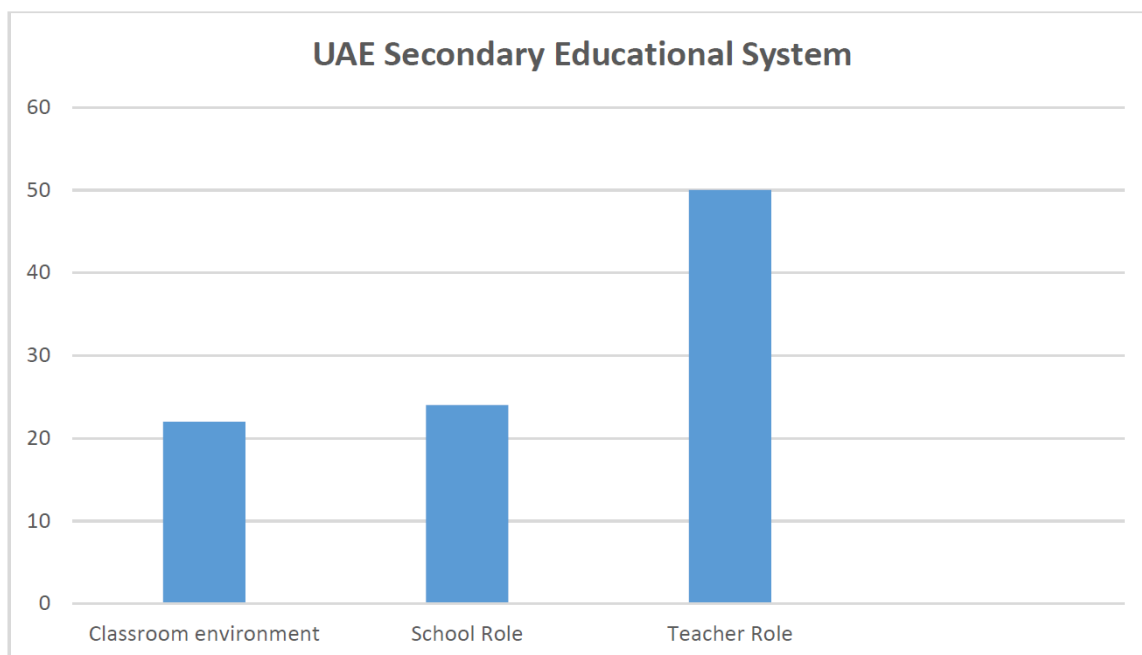


Figure 1: The role of UAE secondary educational system (RQ1)

After classroom environment, role of school plays a significant role in the willingness of students to go for college. Majority of participants agree that our school does not empower students to go for higher education. It does not support in the transition from school to college. The main reasons are that schools do not provide financial aid or scholarships for higher education and do not focus on motivating students for further studies. Also, the school does not improve the course quality as the advanced topics are not

covered or are not part of the course. This affects students' grades when they enroll in college as they struggle in understanding the concepts of new courses because of no basic knowledge.

Finally, the role of teacher is another predominant aspect which affects students' motivation to get enrollment in college. Students acknowledge that good teacher encourages classroom participation and their right guidance helps in choosing the college for further studies. Moreover, the participants highlighted the two factors that affect their motivation to pursue college negatively; the homework given by teacher and the medium of instruction i.e., English. These are some of the significant factors highlighted in this study which make an education system unsupportive for the young students to enroll in college and go for higher studies.

RQ2: Do the families have a role to play for the preparation of their youngsters for college?

Theme two: Positive family Support encourages young students to prepare for college.

This research question answers that how much family support encourages students to perform good in school and in motivating them for college. Apart from few participants, all agreed that the pressure and control from family demotivate them and decrease their interest in studies. It creates high pressure, affects mentally and drains the energy level. The controlling behavior of family makes them disinterested in school thus affects their persuasion of higher studies. Along with controlling behavior, the family problems also affect negatively in students' motivation and affects their grades. On the contrary, the positive support by the family encourages students rather stressing them; it helps in developing interest in studies. Another factor behind the lack of motivation is the family's financial status; students are unable to join college after school because their families do not afford the expenses of high school.

However, majority of participants think otherwise; for them their poor financial status encourages them to work hard and attend college, according to them they can only change their financial status by pursuing for higher studies and getting good jobs which is only possible after attending high school or college.

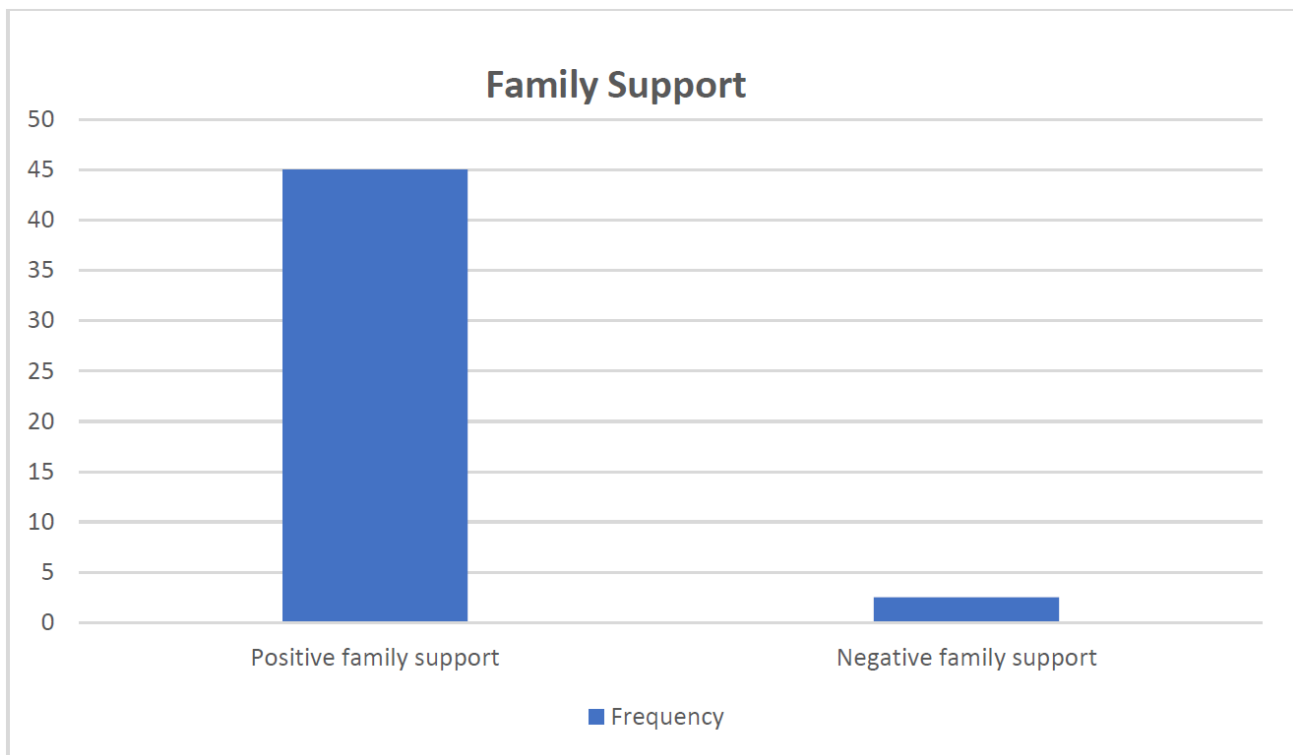


Figure 2: Family support (RQ2)

RQ3: Does the psychological resources provided by school help in readiness of students for college?

Theme three: The mental readiness of students along with psychological support provided by school stimulates students' willingness to pursue for college.

This theme intends to highlight the psychological paradigm and its influence on students' enrollment in college. According to the responses of the participants, two major elements are extracted that influence students' entry in college: their mental readiness to go for college and the psychological support offered by the schools. They believe that, schools are not providing enough psychological support, they are giving stress to a student which is decreasing students' motivation and affecting their performance rather influencing positively. Over and above that, the students are not mentally equipped and prepared to go for college because of the less psychological support by school as well as by their families. Except few students, others don't have choice of choosing the college for themselves, thus it affects their readiness to attend the college after completing school.

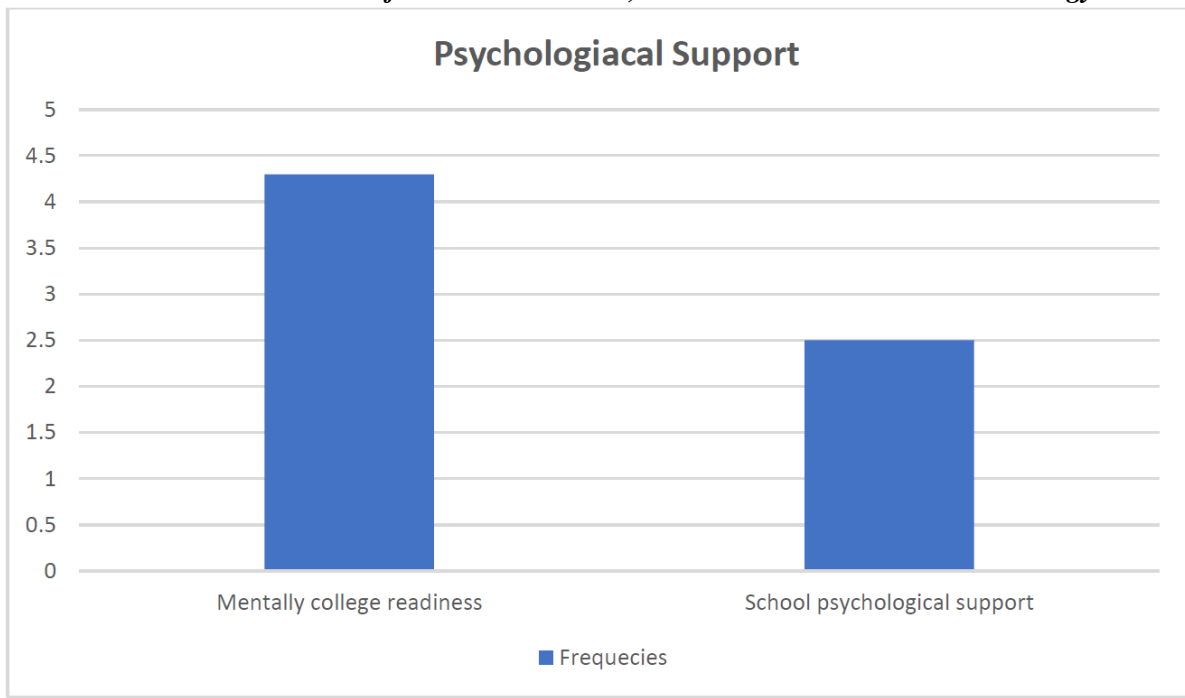


Figure 3: Psychological support (RQ3)

9. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The transition from high school to tertiary education is a journey of uncertainty for many first-generation college students. Some goods and services of high school that were part of the norm now represent an added expense. This experiment explored the factors that factors affecting students' enrollment rate in college and students' success at first year of college. An overarching theme in the study's findings are the need to:

(1) provide a proper classroom environment and discipline to ensure the success of learning process. It is very obvious that the teacher plays the main role in arranging a healthy environment where students feel confident to participate and maximize their efficiency as well. Most participants are willing to participate and engage in the classroom if they meet the right teacher. So, it is all depends on the teachers' interest in the profession and the particular environment in which they are performing their duties that how much they are interested for the well being and academic performance of the learner. (Sapieha, 2007).

(2) It's not socioeconomic status, nor how prestigious the school is that a child attends. The best interpreter of student success is the extent to which families encourage learning at home and engage themselves in their child's learning process. Around 95% of the students claim that family support and their involvement encourage them to tackle all the obstacles they meet in their learning process. However, it is needed to build the foundations for parent-teacher communication in schools. Because the sooner they do, the more equipped students will be to reach their academic potential.

(3) The importance of psychological factors is demonstrated in the ability of students to acquire knowledge, gaining skills, perception of educational information, and attitude to others. Unfortunately, the majority of the participants confess that they are not getting enough psychological support from their schools. They expressed their lack of trust to the social workers who failed to address and embrace their problems.

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