What Skills do Employers Really Want from Graduates?

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ABSTRACT: For over a decade the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has supported an Emiratization initiative designed to employ UAE nationals in a meaningful manner in both the public and private sectors. Utilizing this skilled Emirati labour pool is key to the country's development and its prioritization is reflected in government mandates. For example, the 'Project of the 50', aims to employ 75,000 UAE Nationals in the private sector between 2021-2025.   Underpinning all of these initiatives is the role of the education section which plays an instrumental part in ensuring graduates are work ready and have the skills and knowledge to compete in a global market. This research study explores the growing divide between employment market realities and classroom practices and policy in order to more effectively prepare graduates for employment. It argues that in order to realize the country's Emiratization aspirations there needs to be tighter collaboration and discussion between Higher Education and the employment market. To equip HCT graduates for the work force, the research design of this study takes the form of interviews with employers and Higher Colleges of Technology working graduates in order to examine more closely employer needs and the potential disconnect with classroom practices.

Keywords: Job Readiness, Employability, United Arab Emirates.

1   INTRODUCTION

Following the discovery of oil in the 1960s the United Arab Emirates has grown at an increasingly rapid rate, transforming from a small regional port to a global commercial, tourist and aviation hub [1]. Reflecting this growth has been the need to import a largely expatriate white-and-blue-collar workforce, from across the globe diversifying the demographic mix [2]. Fifty years later and the demographic imbalance and labour market distortions have presented a unique situation where UAE nationals are both outnumbered demographically, and disproportionally represented in the labour market.

   The challenges this presents the leaders of the UAE are complex and reflect the social and cultural fabric of the region. Ensuring Emiratis remain the stake-holders in their country is key and only achievable through an 'Emiratization' policy and buy-in from the tertiary sector. While 'Emiratization' was first introduced in the early 1990s the policy is even more relevant today and garners generous government attention and financial support as unemployment amongst Emiratis has become one of the nation's fundamental domestic challenges [3]. However, Emiratization has become somewhat of a double-edged sword in the United Arab Emirates. On the one hand, mandating the hiring of UAE nationals ensures employment and Emiratization, on the other hand, this carrot and stick approach reduces it to a numbers game. In this 'game' the genuine development of Emiratis and appreciation and nurturing of their meaningful contribution is often sidelined for tick boxes. Incentives and enforced legislation merely encourages the practice of hiring Emirati 'ghost workers' [4], and fails to instill effective work habits in young Emirati graduates [5].

   Emiratization is especially relevant for Emirati women, the demographic pertinent to this study, as it is here the underutilization of human capital is most strongly felt. Typically, higher educational attainment results in higher employment [6], however in the UAE an almost reverse trend is happening, whereby Emirati woman who are now highly educated to unprecedented levels, are not necessarily reflected in employment numbers. This reveals a number of possible explanations: an increasing desire on the side of Emirati women to stay at home and manage family responsibilities [7]; a reticence on the part of employers to hire Emirati women, where negative gendered attitudinal assumptions may still pervade [8]; or perhaps "a weak awareness of the correlation between education and occupation among Emirati women" [9].

   To mitigate these issues, educational institutions need to 'join the dots' somewhat, by illuminating not only the obvious link between education and occupation, but by examining practice and curricula. This will ensure students are best prepared for the work place on two levels: in both the skills they bring to the workplace and in carrying a
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purpose driven mindset toward their chosen vocation. In this way Emiratis are not only initially hired as the best fit, but retention is high, and wellbeing and job satisfaction remain constant.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the main impediments to Emiratization has been evidenced in this market imbalance between UAE nationals and non-nationals employment rates in private and public sectors [10]. It is therefore incumbent upon us as educators, researchers, employers and key UAE stake holders to address this imbalance to ensure the success of the UAE's Emiratization policy and contribute to the development of the country.

In 2019 a mere 8% of private sector employees were UAE Nationals with the bulk choosing to work in either local or federal government [11]. The reasons for this are varied, including, motivational impetuses where the public sector is often seen as more attractive; societal forces that contribute to Emirati women choosing not to work, and hiring practices related to work readiness.

This paper examines the latter issue, that of work readiness of UAE graduates for the private sector. A 2017 article by Alijanah, examining over 88 articles on Emiratization, revealed that the number one barrier to Emiratization was that of work readiness, reflecting the mismatch between graduate skills and employers' requirements. Alijanahi argues "The low skill standards of Emiratis imply that the UAE has an inefficient educational system that needs to be aligned to serve the needs of the private sector" (p. 13). This notion is reinforced in further studies such as a 2018 British council study [12] indicating the need by employers for more soft skills development, such as critical thinking, to adequately prepare Emiratis for the workforce. Ashour (2020) [13] argues that there is a distinct mismatch between the qualities of university graduates and the continually changing labour market needs. A further study by Alqahtani, (2020) [14] reiterates this sentiment when examining the voices of UAE HR managers who cite 'serious concerns' regarding the employability and work readiness skills of locals and question their contribution to the organization. More recently a study by Abaker et al (2022) [15] continues to highlight the disconnect between skills taught in Higher Education and work skills needed, thereby creating a barrier to UAE nationals exceling in the work force. Looking back further this type of narrative has been echoed in the UAE for a number of years as evidenced in a 2011 article by Natasha Ridge [16], who calls on a complete overhaul of the domestic education sector arguing that: "If this does not happen, both young men and women will be at a disadvantage when it comes to finding employment in an increasingly competitive labour market" (para. 14). Harsh statements and a bitter pill to swallow for Higher Educational institutions committed to Emiratization. However, rapid transformation is the hallmark of UAE society and this study is poised to question and revisit these assumptions by reopening this pandoras box and examining first hand employers and Emirati graduates perspectives around issues of Emirati work readiness.

Hence the title of this paper: Why won't they hire me…signaling that Emiratis, especially women, are challenged with not only graduating and securing work, but also having to work towards dismantling this type of unconscious bias that pervades the UAE workplace narrative. This is a great weight to carry, and it is no wonder there is a reluctance to seek full time employment. Having said this, like anywhere else in the world, the need to accurately match educational skills and qualification with career aspirations does need to constantly be examined and improved on.

The pressure is clearly on the Higher Education system to bring about these necessary changes in preparing graduates for the work place, particularly the private sector (Matsumoto, 2019) [17]. Higher Education is seen as the key to reform in any society, but especially in Gulf Arab countries such as the UAE who are constantly revisioning and restructuring (UNESCO, 2016) [18]. This study argues, that to some extent, the measure of success of the UAE's higher education system can be reflected in the employment rates of nationals in the private sector (Ashour, 2020) [13].

The key question now, is, *exactly what skills and competencies are most needed by employers in the UAE private sector?* We know to some extent, general tendencies for future employment, for example, we know administrative jobs will likely be reduced in the future, we know innovation, collaboration and commitment to life- long learning are core required skills, and we also know the importance of math and science skills in future employment (Ashour, 2020) [13]. However, these sweeping ideals often lack meaning to the average classroom teacher who is immersed in achieving daily learning outcomes and ensuring students pass their exams. This is exactly the disconnect that this study aims to soften.

This need for upskilling Emiratis is clearly on the UAE's radar as initiatives such as the Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM) Academy's National Development Program aims to raise standards across various skills sectors for UAE nationals, particularly in financial education [19]. Additionally, the '100 Programmers Every Day' initiative aims to increase the number of Emirati coders and establish programming companies in the UAE [20]

The researcher belongs to one of the largest federal higher educational intuitions in the UAE, it is only fitting then that it is at the helm of an examination that is at the heart of both the UAE national agenda and its institutional remit: 100% employability. This research study aims to examine the requisite skills preferred for private sector employers hiring Emirati graduates, in order to inform policy and practice.

3   METHODOLOGY

3.1   Approach

This is a mixed methods study incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection as its purpose is to uncover participants' perceptions of a complex lived experience [21], that of being ready for work. In this case, it is the best 'fit' as it allows for reach through the use of triangulation: "the combination of two or more different research strategies in the study of the same empirical units" [22]. Utilizing this framework, the holistic qualitative interview results and open-ended survey responses complement and flesh out the quantitative statistical data derived from the survey to not only provide a fuller picture but also to increase the validity and strength of the findings [23]. In total four sources of data were collected in order to capture responses to the research questions.

- *To what extent are HCT graduates prepared for the workplace?*
- *In what ways can HCT ensure graduates are ready for work?*

The data sources included: surveys with employers; surveys with working graduates; interviews with employers and interviews with working graduates

Survey and interview questions were adapted from two previous studies: Assessing Learners' Perceptions of Graduate Employability [24], The Work Readiness Scale: Developing a measure to assess work readiness in college graduates [25]. In addition, questions were informed by the World Economic Forum list of most preferred job skills [26]. To ensure comprehensibility higher level vocabulary items such as resilience and critical thinking were translated into Arabic. Data analysis was through coding, identifying key themes and the use of descriptive statistics.

3.2   Participants

There are two groups of participants in this study in order to capture two perspectives around work readiness. Firstly, employers (n 14) working in various private sector fields in Dubai including, for example, the IT industry, supermarket chains, HR, management, and the banking sector. Employers were enlisted through the help of the Dubai Women's Campus careers liaison officer. Secondly, working Emirati graduates from the Higher Colleges of Technology (n 49). These comprise of graduated students or those in final year work-placement. As above these were enlisted through the help of the Dubai Women's; Campus career liaison office and various faculty members. This group of participants is termed 'graduates' throughout for ease of communication.

One limitation of this study is the number of employers' responses at fourteen which is not ideal for quantitative data collection. All attempts were made to garner more responses, whilst emphasizing the voluntary nature of the research. However, of these fourteen, six agreed to be interviewed which provided more indepth findings and make up for the lack of survey responses. In contrast only two out of the forty-nine working graduates agreed to be interviewed. This can perhaps be explained by cultural considerations, where revealing personal information, even related to work, is often prohibitive as there is a fear of gossiping or of secrets being exposed [27]. Or, as busy workers, it could also simply be an issue of time.

All participants were assured of confidentiality throughout as well as anonymity in the surveys. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and they were assured they could withdraw from the study at any time.

4   FINDINGS

As this study aims to examine the mismatch between graduate and employer expectations this section will be organized; where possible, by presenting both sets of data from employers and graduates side by side to highlight the similarities and differences in perceptions. Only the most salient data from the surveys is examined here. Survey findings are presented first followed by interview findings and aim to address the study's research questions:

4.1   Survey Findings

How well developed are graduates' work skills? Figure one below visually illustrates both graduates' and employers' perceptions of how well-developed graduates work readiness skills are.
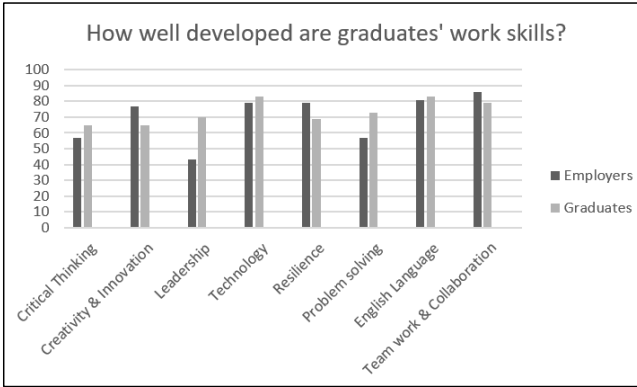

Figure 1: Perceptions of Graduate Work Skills

For employers, team work/collaboration and English language are perceived as the most developed skills in graduates followed equally by technology and resilience. The results from the graduates concur with that of employers as they report that technology and English language skills are the most developed skills in working graduates followed closely by team work and collaboration. What this suggests is that according to both employers and graduates, students leave this federal institute with relatively well-developed skills in team work and collaboration, English language, technology and resilience.

Employers cite the least developed skill in graduates to be leadership. Interestingly, it is here the largest mismatch between employers' and graduates' perceptions sit, with graduates ranking leadership as their more developed skill. Employers also cite critical thinking and problem solving as graduates' second and third least developed skills, attributes which can broadly be attributed to leadership, thus suggesting that employers need graduates with more developed leadership skills overall.

Which skills are most important at work? While figure one above examines the work skills graduates actually bring to the workplace, figure two below illustrates which skills both employers and graduates value most highly in the workplace. This distinction is important to make as it shows the gap between what we do as educators and what we need to do in order to ensure our graduates are work-ready.
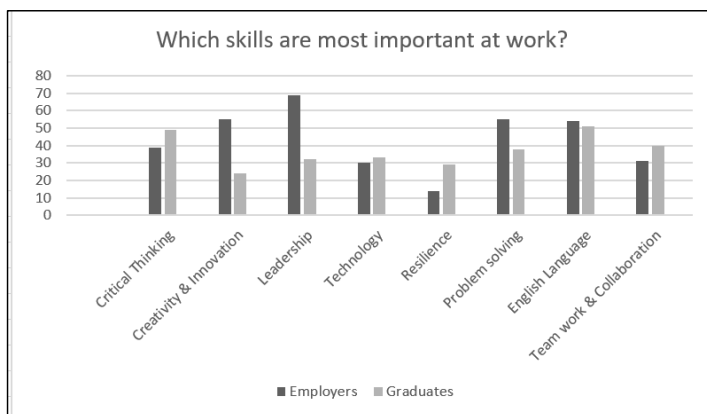
Figure 2: Most Valued Work Place Skills

Figure one demonstrates that employers perceive graduates' leadership skills to be the least developed. Interestingly in figure two, above, employers cite leadership as the most important work skill, and by quite a significant margin. When you compare this to the results of the graduates who rank leadership as the second lowest work place skill in order of importance, the divergence between employers, graduates, and subsequently what is taught in Higher Education is clearly emerging. This highlights four key points around leadership:

- the importance of leadership skills to employers
- the need by employees for graduates to have more developed leadership skills
- the divergent perspectives of working graduates and employers around leadership skills at work
- the need for Higher Education to foster students' leadership skills

Another interesting finding here is that, although both graduates and employers describe resilience as a fairly developed workplace skill in working graduates, figure two accords less weight to this skill as valued in the work place. In short, resilience is perhaps developed in HCT graduates, but it is not considered a priority work place skill. The priority skills for employers are leadership, problem solving and creativity and innovation. As above, along with critical thinking, these skills can broadly be characterized as under the umbrella of leadership. The priority skills for graduates are seen as English language, team work/collaboration and critical thinking. This develops the findings seen in figure one where employers recognize that graduates have more developed English language and team work/collaboration skills. Thus, revealing that the attention given to English language and team work/collaboration skills at this federal institution have paid off, graduates recognize their importance and employers recognize their development. However, there is somewhat of a divide here, in that, while team work/collaboration and English language are perceived as developed and; according to graduates a much-needed work skill, employers do not share this perspective, giving these skills a lower ranking. This does not translate to employers disregarding the importance of these skills, it simply means that in order of ranking other skills are prioritized. Again, this tells us that what is happening in Higher Education, does not always feed the priority needs of employers.

What makes a student ready for work: graduates' perceptions. The survey includes an open ended question asking graduates what makes a student ready for work. Thirty eight out of 49 chose to answer this question, indicating a high level of commitment to the survey, thus adding credibility to the results alongside a willingness and readiness to have their voices heard.

Sixteen students cited experience as making a student most ready for work. This highlights how valuable work placement is perceived for these students, and invites educators to consider how we can bring more hands-on work experience type activities into the curriculum.

Fourteen students cited skill development as making a student most ready for work. Skill development is obviously the remit of a college education, however ascertaining the most appropriate skills is a unique challenge for today's educational stake holders given the rapid rate of change. The place of research, and studies such as this one go

somewhat in providing answers to these important questions, however, it is incumbent on us as educators to stay abreast of trends and consider anticipated futures in order to more effectively meet our students' needs.

What can the HCT do to best prepare graduates for work: graduates' perceptions. The natural follow up question to 'what makes a student read for work is': What are your suggestions and comments to the HCT to help us best prepare graduates for work? Thirty-two responses were received to this question, from which almost 90% confirm the themes from the question above which show conclusively that HCT graduates want more practical work training and more skills development in order to be work-ready. Below is a snapshot of responses:

- *perhaps shift their focus to more hands-on classes instead of theoretically assessing students*
- *since experience is much more valuable*
- *I think they must work every summer as summer work*
- *compare the theory part to the real life so when we work we know*
- *increase the practical skills for example the labs need to be changed, we need to have knowledge in*
- *how to test a problem or troubleshoot it, and how to fix and maintain it*
- *to make the courses practical more than theory*
- *provide sessions where we get to improve our technical skills (coding languages, software etc)*
- *do more work experience than courses*

What makes a student ready for work: employers' perceptions. For employers, what makes a student ready for work: is simply a willingness to learn and a natural curiosity. It is worth noting that answers to this question did not evoke specific skills, training, or experience needed, but rather a mindset of openness, a disposition to want to learn, and a desire to develop themselves. A snapshot of responses is below:

- *willingness to learn*
- *want to develop themselves*
- *their interest to learn outside their classes/courses and develop themselves professionally*
- *willingness to learn and be curious*
- *show initiative*

Hints of the 'teach a man to fish' proverb come through here: give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. By instilling a natural curiosity, willingness to learn and desire to grow in students we are, in effect, 'teaching them to work' and giving them work skills for a lifetime. This is a call to action for us as educators, as we skillfully find ways to let this natural curiosity emerge in our students.

What can the higher education do to best prepare graduates for work: employers' perceptions. When asked: What are your suggestions and comments to help us best prepare graduates for work? Three themes arose:

- Teach leadership skills – this agrees with the findings in figure two where employers cited leadership as the most valuable work skill
- Develop more work-based training, for example: Extend the internship program, engage more with industry, give more industry experience. This agrees with the findings in section C above where graduates argue for more experience and practical skills.
- Develop students' personal skills, for example, find ways to enable students to adapt, to cope with challenges and instill a desire in them to want to learn and be curious. This concurs with the findings above in section E.

These three themes concur with the findings above, providing rigor and validity to these results.

4.2 Interview Findings

Interview Findings: employers, work readiness skills needed

Six in-depth interviews were conducted with employers on zoom, recordings were then transcribed and key themes distilled. Five key themes emerged from the interviews:

Basic technical skills: Employers emphasized the need for graduates to have basic technical skills, for example how to use EXCEL. There was a readiness on the part of the employers to either train graduates, or give them time and resources to train themselves in more sophisticated skills if and when needed.

- *If they do not come from HCT equipped with the skills, I'll say go watch your videos yourself, go for Microsoft professional exam, do it yourself.*
- *We need them to have the basic technology level*
- *We need them have the basic of the software, for sure a training will be given*

Engagement with practical work skills: Employers stressed the need to prepare student for the practical element of work, along with the theoretical.
- *I would advise you not to accept any more homework or projects if the student cannot demonstrate the use of the machine learning and artificial learning tools in the market.*
- *Include more engagement with professionals, for example more guest speakers at colleges*
- *Their theoretical part is very strong, but for the practical, I believe there is more exercises needed to be done.*
- *She should already have a skill before or experience*
- *more engagement with professionals, including skills required at work*

Leadership skills: These are a key required skill for employers defined through soft skills such as critical thinking and problem solving.
- *We'd like to take them further toward leadership, towards critical thinking, and problem solving*
- *We need a leader personality more than a manager type*
- *A strong personality is good – not be afraid to speak up and give opinion and ideas*
- *Need more leadership skills in students, not be passive.*
- *Be active to solve problems, be creative, think ideas.*

Communication skills – English language, both written and spoken, listening skills alongside the need to give confident presentations were emphasized here.
- *Communication is highly required, multi-language is best*
- *…to stand up and speak, like a public speaker, you need to work on this,*
- *they need more encouragement to do presentation*
- *they can listen well so they can communicate with the people*
- *I will be shocked if they don't know how to speak English, how will they send an email if they doesn't know English?*
- *how to present more than just a PowerPoint – for example - video presentations*
- *Self-management: The personal skills needed to succeed at work for the long term*
- *If they do not know how to learn by themselves and are not curious they will not achieve tasks*
- *Curiosity to learn by themselves*
- *We want if they are willing to learn*
- *We say to them [graduates] do not be the Daffy Duck …that duck that never gets satisfied and always complaining and bringing negative energy*
- *How to accept being questioned*
- *don't be shy – speak up –*
- *Be positive*

Overall these findings concur with findings from the data collection instruments above and thus strengthen the reliability of these results. In one aspect, however, there is an intriguing divergence. In figure one employers cite communication as one of the most developed skills in graduates, however in the interviews, the employers unanimously stressed the importance of communication skills and suggested this could be improved on. This can be explained through how communication is interpreted in these two questions. In the interviews the improvement in communication is directed mostly towards the ability to give a confident presentation. In figure one communication is likely interpreted as English-speaking skills, of which these graduates are generally proficient.

During the interviews the researcher was mindful of noticing not only the language, but subtle clues from facial gestures and voice tone that might suggest an overall negative perception in the educational system and subsequent work skills of local Emirati women. There was no evidence in either the survey or interview responses to indicate this,

and overall perceptions were positive, however, the remit of this study was to uncover the issues that need developing. It was encouraging to see a number of unsolicited encouraging comments coming through in the interviews:

I don't have any issue with your students, they are very trained and yanni I believe you know, you did the best job….to give the full context here, this employer then continues with but for the practical…

All your graduates they already have a skills which they bring to work

Normal teething problems in hiring new graduates, or experiences in work placement were evident, however, graduates across the world generally face these issues [28]. An aptly named article by Forbes: *Why Aren't Graduates Ready For Work? They're The Least Working Generation In U.S. History,* cites a mere 13% of adults in the US believe current US graduates are ready for work [29]. A large scale study conducted in Malaysia, Australia and Indonesia assessing graduates work readiness skills identify graduate skill deficits in: critical thinking, decision-making, showing initiative, attitude, problem-solving skill presentation skills and self-management skills [30]. These are not too dissimilar from issues raised in this study, and demonstrate that fine tuning competencies and skills are simply part of the college-to-work process.

To summarize this section, there are a number of things that the higher education is getting right and needs to continue, however, there is always room to grow and improve to meet changing needs. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, it is clear these graduates are ready and equipped for the work place. Most have developed appropriate vocational skills, carry solid work ethics and have strong skills in team work and collaboration, English language, technology and resilience. However, in some areas, we could 'do better' as a higher educational institution, namely, more emphasis on leadership, critical thinking and problem solving would better fit the needs of employees and complement the skills students graduate with. Providing more opportunities for practical hands on training while at college would build confidence and agency in students, ensuring they are more ready for the work place. Finally, instilling in graduates a curiosity, desire to learn and to grow professionally are key personal and life skills that would serve students well in terms of work readiness and prepare them for a life of work at any age, in any context.

To understand this better, it is also necessary to view work readiness issues from a global perspective where a similar narrative is apparent. Therefore, there is a need to appreciate that a graduate skills deficit is perhaps to be expected from young people and their first foray into the world of work, it is certainly not unique to Emiratis in the United Arab Emirates.

5   Discussion

A key finding, evidenced in both the surveys and interviews, and as perceived by employers, is the need for graduates to have more developed leadership skills. Leadership, as defined by the employers in this context include: critical thinking, problem solving, taking initiative and being naturally curious about work place activities and issues. This need for leadership skills in graduates is international and not exclusive to the UAE context. In a 2019 study in the USA, critical thinking and problem solving were ranked as the second most wanted skills by employers after interpersonal skills [31]. There needs to be a two-pronged approach to this, firstly, these skills need to be purposely fostered in higher education in more meaningful ways so they 'stick'. Critical thinking, problem solving, and curiosity are, in many ways affective skills, as such, there is a disposition of character required and a willingness to think outside the box needed to foster these [32]. This type of lateral thinking can bear huge dividends across all sectors in the workplace, and in entrepreneurial endeavors, as it brings both originality and transformational value [33]. Herein lies the conundrum; the UAE is a society that has continued to thrive and prosper through being culturally tolerance towards its varied expat community whilst at the same time nursing Emirati cultural norms and values in the local community. One of these values, is reflected in the generally accepted community codes of conduct, and expected life trajectories. 'Doing your own thing' until recently was not common practice, however, a paradigm shift has taken place over the last ten years where these outdated stereotypes are now being re-written to balance the delicate dance between originality and conformity. Indeed, 'the first Emirati woman' will soon no longer be an available newspaper catch phrase as we now have the second, third, fourth, tenth, hundredth: Emirati female pilot, Emirati female judge, Emirati female doctor, Emirati female entrepreneur etc [34]. This kind of traction brings change as research shows that for Emirati women, role models are most impactful [35]. It is no coincidence that most female students in government schools taught by Emirati women continue to pursue a higher education [36]. What are the implications of this for educators? One clear path to foster leadership skills in Emirati women is to expose them to positive female Emirati role models and as educators we need to leverage the power Emirati women have on each other. Fortunately, with the advances the UAE has made in the last decade there is a wealth of   high-profile Emirati women in

government, art, culture, business, education, IT and medicine, to call on. This success is evidenced in Forbes' 50 list of the most powerful businesswomen in the Middle East in 2021, with seven Emirati women featuring [37].

The second piece of this puzzle is that as educators we need to begin to join the dots for students so that they are taught to appreciate more the correlation between education and occupation. Survey findings show an obvious disconnect between the skills graduates value and those employers value. Students need to recognize the importance of skills, such as leadership and develop their own personal buy in and desire to develop these, this cannot be done alone by students in silos, it needs to be fostered and practiced in the classroom.

6   Conclusion

The title of this paper begins with the words: Why won't they hire me…reflecting the narrative in much of the literature over the past two decades or two around the shortfalls of public higher education in the UAE, thereby resulting in hiring practices in the workplace which may limit Emiratis. Through in-depth interviews with UAE employers this study demonstrates that work readiness issues, are perhaps more accurately defined as 'new graduate issues', a phenomenon seen across the globe and not unique to the UAE, and that, in fact Emirati graduates are generally ready for work. This research contributes to knowledge in the field by drawing attention to the divergence in perspectives on work readiness held by both employers and graduates and reveals the spaces that education needs to fill in order to best prepare students for the work place. Notably, employers claim the need for leadership skills in the workplace and have observed these are still underdeveloped in graduates. By embedding these in the higher education curriculum, we play our part in developing work readiness in our graduates. Importantly, ensuring work readiness, could also go somewhat in addressing the widening gap seen in Emirati women graduating from higher education but choosing not to take up employment. This study is especially relevant today as the call for Emiratization intensifies with the UAE wanting 10% of jobs in the private sector to go to UAE nationals by 2026. The findings of this study show that Emirati women are skilled and ready for the work force, bar the normal teething problems any new graduate has in their first job, and can confidently take their place in the UAE workforce. It is hoped that this study will generate a positive rhetoric towards Emirati women in the workplace, that it will help develop agency and confidence in Emirati women, and that it will encourage private sector employers to recruit Emirati women into the workforce where hiring comes from a choice not a requirement.

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