THE UAE's CAREER COUNSELLORS COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

by

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Abstract:

The labour market of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has become increasingly competitive, requiring higher qualifications, specialised skills, and informed academic and career decision-making from secondary-school graduates. In response, the Ministry of Education has appointed Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) across public schools. Despite these efforts, CGCs continue to face significant challenges, including the absence of a national competency framework, inconsistent qualifications, unclear role definitions, and limited professional development and progression. These gaps restrict their effectiveness in guiding students toward future-oriented pathways, especially at a time when the nation's priorities are shaped by UAE Vision 2021 and the forward-looking agenda of UAE Vision 2031.

This qualitative study develops a contextually grounded competency framework for CGCs in UAE public schools. The literature review provides an overview of CGCs in the UAE, drawing on the HRD literature on practitioners who deliver client-centred services and on competency frameworks, highlighting how organisational structures, professional learning systems, and socio-cultural expectations shape guidance practice. Building on international competency models from NICE, Canada, Australia, the UK, and Saudi Arabia, while embedding Emirati cultural authenticity, the study conceptualises CGCs as reflective "life designers" whose professionalisation is essential for national talent development.

Empirical data were collected between December 2023 and June 2024 through semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions with CGCs, educators, and key stakeholders across Abu Dhabi and the Northern Emirates. Thematic Framework Analysis revealed significant regional variations in counsellor preparation, institutional support, and programme implementation. Participants across all regions stressed the need for explicit job descriptions, structured continuing professional development, and the establishment of a unified, nationally endorsed competency framework aligned with the strategic aims of Vision 2021 and the transformative human-capital agenda of Vision 2031.

This study contributes theoretically by integrating HRD perspectives with culturally responsive approaches to career guidance and by proposing a comprehensive, internationally informed, and locally authentic competency framework tailored to UAE public schools. By articulating standards that strengthen counsellors' professional identity, enhance consistency of practice, and improve their capacity to guide students toward meaningful and

future-ready careers, the framework supports the UAE’s long-term aspirations for human-capital development and a knowledge-driven economy.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In the UAE's public education system, developing a robust and contextually relevant Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) Competency Framework is essential (Al Rasbi, 2019). Career guidance and counselling (CGCs) are becoming increasingly vital in national education and economic development agendas, as they play a crucial role in assisting high school students with making academic choices, transitioning into the labour market, and personal growth. This significance is evident in the UAE's unique sociocultural environment, characterised by a diverse student body, a constantly evolving labour market, and the strategic objectives outlined in the UAE Vision 2021 and Vision 2031. These national plans highlight the importance of maintaining social cohesion and a strong sense of national identity while preparing students to succeed in a globalised economy (Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023). Considering these aims, schools' success depends on the efficacy and clarity of CGC roles, duties, and skills within the UAE public education system (Al Falasi & Alsouebi, 2019). According to Bustamam et al. (2021), a counsellor's professional competency is the combination of their knowledge, abilities, and dispositions that allow them to carry out their responsibilities in the career-counselling sector effectively. This competency covers cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements and calls on the counsellor to recognise needs, establish objectives, deliver counselling services efficiently, utilise contemporary technology, make sound decisions, and interact effectively with educators. A career counsellor must be well-versed in a wide range of in-demand professional fields and occupations (Rosiqi, 2024).

According to Griffin et al., (2021) and Porter (2023), a well-designed mentoring programme can help students explore career options and make well-informed decisions about their future. Generally, in 2012, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in the UAE introduced the position of "Career Counsellor" or "Career Guidance" in public schools. Recently, there has been renewed interest in practitioners' roles in guiding students towards making informed decisions about their future career paths. These practitioners implement guidance programmes, and their role is to inspire students to pursue careers that align with their interests and skills, ultimately leading them towards successful engagement in the labour market (Guichard, 2022).

Usually, the career counsellor or guidance role was confusing to all stakeholders and often led to ambiguity with other professions, such as social workers or psychologists. To date, there has been little agreement, and the Department of Guidance and Future Skills at the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Emirates School Establishment (ESE) have initiated intensive efforts to identify and enhance the status of career counsellors, providing ongoing support to the field of career guidance.

Attention to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) has sparked renewed interest in enhancing the role of career counsellors by improving their knowledge, skills, and experience through collaboration with various stakeholders.

However, a clear competency framework is needed to establish an optimal environment for career guidance and counselling, ensuring professionals are competent and supportive when working with students. The UAE government has incorporated its National Agenda Vision 2021 as a key part of current research initiatives. The objectives outlined in the agenda are relevant to the roles of career guidance and counsellors and can be inferred from the specific goals. Although there are six overarching objectives, some directly correspond to the core aims of counsellors' extensive work within educational institutions. The pillars of the National Agenda include a sustainable environment and infrastructure, world-class healthcare, a competitive knowledge economy, a safe public and fair judiciary, a first-rate education system, and a cohesive society with a preserved identity (UAE Government, 2021).

The principal goal of the UAE government is to create "a competitive knowledge economy" that seeks international recognition. Another sub-goal initially focuses on beginning a first-rate educational system to reach the top national education ranking. The achievement of those two national priorities will impact Emiratisation as one of the UAE's key initiatives. Through the Emiratisation initiative, the government is working on providing a well-prepared, educated, and qualified citizen workforce who can continue developing the country with a driven, competitive knowledge economy (Zeffane & Kemp, 2020). Accordingly, the UAE environment has undergone profound changes at home and globally, as well as in the labour market, since its establishment in 1971.

Within this context, the education system is tasked with preparing students to enter a labour market that is becoming increasingly complex and competitive, and with highlighting the importance of equipping Emirati youth with the skills and knowledge required to compete effectively in both the public and private sectors (Aldabbas, 2025; Wilkins, 2002). Deliberately, Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) were appointed in schools to assist students with career planning and decision-making, to enhance their interests, abilities, and aspirations, and to improve their educational outcomes, aligning with the country's workforce needs (Duong, Tran and St-Jean, 2024; Minsky, M. 1974). Aligning with the academic objectives and the nation's vision, the country dedicates significant effort to ensuring that students meet the required standards that fulfil government and international academic expectations. However, global models are to provide structured approaches in defining and professionalising the role of CGCs; these frameworks emphasise lifelong learning, ethical practice,

and the integration of guidance services into broader social and economic objectives. In contrast, the absence of a standardised framework in the UAE led to unpredictable practices, inadequate professional development, and variable student outcomes (Hiebert and Neault, 2014; Al Rasbi, 2019; Godden and Borgen, 2024).

Therefore, this study is dedicated to identifying and understanding the significant role of the counsellors. Drawing inspiration from the Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe (NICE), the Canadian framework, and the Australian model, the aim is to align efforts with the UAE Vision 2021. Additionally, the study aims to develop a comprehensive competency framework that aligns with global standards while reflecting the UAE's authenticity. The existing study is distinctive; it synthesises research on the influence of career counsellors' roles in UAE public schools. It aims to guide counsellors in making well-informed future decisions aligned with the vast, complex, and competitive labour market. Furthermore, it examines the challenges and opportunities for career counsellors to become equivalent in their role within a formal competency framework. The constantly changing, complex world of work creates unpredictable, unstable career paths, making it essential for individuals to develop decision-making skills and for career counsellors to empower them to become independent decision-makers and influencers in their academic environment.

1.2 The Educational System in the UAE

The educational system in the UAE started in the 1950s, with 20 schools and fewer than 4,000 students, most of whom were male (ElKaleh, 2019). Following the UAE's formation in 1971, the education sector experienced significant growth, resulting in the proliferation of organised schools (UAE Government, 2022). Historically, the relationship between education and economics has emphasised developing students and equipping them with 21st-century skills, professional and academic personalities, and the innovative skills needed for the country's economic growth (UAE Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, 2015; UAE Government, 2022). In general, the UAE offers free education to all UAE citizens and to Arabic-speaking children of expatriates working in the public sector (UAE Government, 2024). Likewise, the UAE's educational institutions comprise both public and private sectors, as well as military schools, vocational training institutions, and higher education institutions. Moreover, there is a positive relationship between the education system and economic progression.

The education curriculum was completed, and a system that included four-tier, as follows: kindergarten (4-5 years), primary (6-10 years), intermediate (11-14 years), and secondary (15-18 years) as for the higher education UAE citizens are entitled to choose between study in the UAE universities that provide (undergraduate and post studies), or they can study abroad through a generous

scholar system for citizen enrolment. The vision of the UAE and labour market trends in the political, economic, and social sectors have impacted the education system and schools' curricula (UAE Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, 2015; UAE Government, 2023). Therefore, the educational system underwent a comprehensive update to prepare students for life in both personal and professional contexts, enabling them to make informed decisions about their future careers and adapt to labour market changes.

According to Creed(2022), the Emirati education system experienced significant growth following the establishment of the UAE in 1971, leading to an increase in the number of high school graduates. The population also increased during the oil price boom between 1973 and 1982, resulting in a sharp demand for qualified expatriate workers. This flood caused an imbalance in the labour market, preferring expatriates over the local workforce in both the public and private sectors. This issue made unemployment among Emiratis a pressing concern, prompting the government to implement various Emiratisation initiatives and programmes to address it. Efforts are geared towards presenting a strategy that aligns with the Emiratisation programmes and increases demand for an efficient workforce in the labour market. Research on career counselling competency indicates that a country's cultural nuances and socio-economic landscape significantly shape the skill set required for effective counselling. For instance, in a diverse and rapidly evolving environment like the UAE, competencies might include cross-cultural communication, adaptability to technological advancements, and an understanding of the local labour market dynamics (Arulmani, 2011; Evans and Sejuit, 2021; Hiebert and Neault, 2014). Central to the discipline of policymakers, essential standards have been established for career counsellors to measure their professional performance in the Emirates School Establishment (ESE) schools, where the study takes place.

Correspondingly, enhancing the education system can be achieved through various approaches, including the government's proactive initiative to hire experienced developers who can mentor young individuals in choosing their desired career paths. This approach is further supported by career counsellors (CCs) or advisors whose valuable perspectives and suggestions can significantly contribute to fulfilling this goal. CCs also help implement lifelong practices in their guidance programmes and learn an active approach to labour market engagement and transition (UNESCO, 2021). Additionally, CGCs advise students throughout their life journey and support them in making informed, critical, and wise decisions about their future careers based on their preferences, thereby significantly impacting students' lives and the influence of teachers, parents, and CGCs.

Beyond national initiatives, the framework builds on international best practices in career guidance and counselling. For instance, the International Association for Educational and Vocational

Guidance (IAEVG) developed a "Competency Framework for Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners" that enumerates core competencies, such as ethical behaviour, understanding of labour market trends, ability to design and implement guidance programmes, cross-cultural sensitivity, and continuous professional development, which serve as a benchmark for any country seeking to implement high-quality career guidance services. By adapting and localising such global frameworks, the UAE's competency framework aims to ensure that counsellors are professionally equipped to meet the diverse needs of students, families, and the changing demands of the national labour market.

The practical relevance of the competency framework is underscored by recent efforts and data showing its application in schools, universities, and national employment programmes . Through the "Guidance Portfolio" initiative, hundreds of professional counsellors from public and private educational institutions received training to better guide students toward employment in the private sector and to familiarise them with the skills needed in the labour market. Moreover, according to the Emirati Talent Competitiveness Council (Nafis) in collaboration with MoHRE, as of 2023, more than 8,500 Emiratis have benefited from individual and group career counselling programmes , indicating a tangible impact of structured guidance services on the national workforce development. Therefore, embedding the competency framework into national educational and labour-market policy becomes not only a strategic move for workforce planning but also a socially impactful endeavour that supports youth in making informed, realistic and meaningful career choices.

The current research paper aims to investigate career guidance and counsellors' multifaceted roles and responsibilities in school environments, particularly in the UAE, and their influence on students' decision-making process regarding their future career paths. The study will develop and implement a viable competency framework that meets the standards of the UAE Vision 2021 and aligns with the NICE and Canadian competency frameworks. Subsequently, the current study will also analyse the standards used to evaluate career counsellors' performance, including the extent to which the government's vision informs their appointment. In addition, the research will explore the UAE's 2021 strategic vision, which primarily aligns school outcomes with labour market requirements, to gauge the effectiveness of Career Guidance and Counselling services.

The importance of effective career counselling has recently risen in the general competitive job market. Studies have shown that career counselling or guidance positively impacts students' academic performance, career inclinations, and overall well-being. Research in the UAE found that students who received career counselling services reported higher career readiness and better academic performance (Al Rasbi, 2019). Moreover, career counselling services help bridge the gap between the

education system and the job market in terms of students' skills. Despite methodological difficulties, studies analyse individuals' decisions regarding their future.

Recently, there has been renewed interest in graduates facing limited public-sector employment opportunities, with the private sector offering an alternative. Regulatory changes impact the economy and the initiatives and programmes of UAE policymakers that support local recruitment and enhance product quality. CCs guide these students in making informed decisions, developing their self-confidence, and helping them achieve their aspirations. The educational sector is a vast industry with significant responsibilities to enhance students' personal and professional development and prepare them for real jobs in the UAE labour market, promising a smooth transition from academic life to the world of work.

Career counsellors' comprehensive role involves guiding students towards achieving their future goals and equipping them to make informed decisions. The more knowledge students acquire, the more credible and realistic their choices become, increasing their chances of success in their desired career path. The Ministry of Education (MOE) and/or Emirates School Establishments (ESE) conduct most career counselling or guidance studies in the UAE. The initiative to provide schools with CGC will support students in making informed career decisions, guiding them towards their career goals by building constructive skills, knowledge, and abilities for effective future choices (Popescu, 2021).

1.2.1 Research Justifications:

Over the past decade, as a career guidance and counselling practitioner in Emirati public schools in the UAE, I have observed a significant decline in the number of local workers in a highly competitive labour market, leading me to rely heavily on expatriate workers. This considerable issue needs to be addressed. Qualified career guidance and counselling prepares young people to face these challenges and maximise opportunities in the job market. (Wong et al., 2021), including the vast changes brought about by recent technological advancements. To improve current conditions, it is essential to enhance local workers' abilities, skills, and knowledge, encouraging self-development and enabling them to acquire lifelong learning skills. This will help them integrate well into the labour market and meet government economic standards.

This can be achieved by improving career counsellors' professional performance and competency frameworks. In addition, the UAE standards are generally based on creating and innovating new policies and initiatives. The government consistently articulates its unique and diverse ambitions and goals, which are reflected in current labour market needs, thereby preparing for the future. On this basis, the government prepares the next generation to participate in the job market by

leading the way with government support and exceptional abilities. Recently, there has been a renewed interest in achieving this, and a clear statement of CGC's framework has been developed, focusing on the needs and performance of their students in relation to the UAE labour market.

These standards aim to define the role of career counsellors and ensure that principals or policymakers periodically confirm their Continued Professional Development (CPD). However, there needs to be greater understanding and specificity regarding the significant competency framework to measure career counsellors' outcomes and their impact on individuals' decisions about their future paths. Consequently, this current paper aims to study the existing role of career counsellors in UAE's public schools and design a new competency framework structure up to the standards of the UAE and aligns with government initiatives in consistency with the Emiratisation programmes, combined with the NICE, Canadian, Australian and Saudia Arabi framework, standards, or competencies, and fits the best with the UAE's policies and regulations.

This research outlines the necessary competencies for a successful career guidance and counselling role in the United Arab Emirates. It delves into the influential factors affecting career counselling in the UAE and underscores the significance and efficacy of employing Career Guidance Counsellors in schools across the Emirates.

1.2.2 Research Problem

The current state of career guidance in the UAE represents a systemic failure of misalignment between educational outcomes and the volatile demands of a globalised labour market (Al-Darmaki et al., 2012). This failure is not merely a lack of resources but a structural disconnect that directly affects students, career guidance counsellors (CGCs), and the broader national agenda. For students, the absence of a contextually grounded competency framework results in significantly low career readiness, leaving them ill-equipped to navigate complex professional pathways. For CGCs, this systemic gap manifests as extreme professional ambiguity, where their roles are often conflated with social workers or psychologists, undermining their professional status and limiting their specialised impact (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019). Most critically, this misalignment threatens the realisation of UAE Vision 2021 and 2031, as the education system fails to produce a workforce strategically aligned with the nation's transformative human-capital goals.

Existing training initiatives and the ad hoc adoption of international frameworks fail in practice because they lack local cultural authenticity and institutional consistency. While the Ministry of Education (MOE) provides various programmes, they often rely on generic global models—such as those from NICE or Canada—that do not account for the unique sociocultural nuances and familial

influences inherent in the Emirati context (Al Rasbi, 2019). The persistence of this problem creates a stigma around career counselling and perpetuates unpredictable practices across public schools. Without a framework that integrates international best practices with local cultural legitimacy and clear institutional regulations, the guidance system will remain a series of disconnected efforts rather than a cohesive professional discipline capable of supporting a knowledge-driven economy (Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023).

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives:

This research aims to investigate the systemic foundations of career guidance in the UAE and to develop an evidence-based competency framework that resolves the misalignment between educational practice and national economic priorities. By critically analysing current failures and validating critical competencies through qualitative inquiry, a competency framework will have two practical effects - to professionalise the CGC role and enhance the CGC role for transformative impact on student outcomes (Goher et al., 2021).

The specific investigative research objectives are:

1. To critically investigate the systemic failures, key challenges, and perceived effectiveness of the current UAE school-based career guidance system relative to international best practices.
2. To determine and validate the critical knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by CGCs to enhance student career readiness and facilitate alignment with the UAE's strategic workforce initiatives.
3. To analyse counsellors' professional perceptions and attitudes regarding their role, job satisfaction, and the practical impact of existing guidance programmes on student outcomes.
4. To develop and propose a contextually grounded, evidence-based competency framework for UAE CGCs that integrates international standards with local cultural authenticity.

1.4 Research Questions:

1) What are the systemic failures, key challenges, and effectiveness perceptions of the UAE's school-based career guidance system compared to international frameworks?

2) What are the essential theoretical and practical elements that must be incorporated into a competency framework to boost student career readiness and align with the UAE's workforce initiatives?

3) What critical competencies do career guidance and counsellors need to help students make informed labour market decisions?

4) How do counsellors' perceptions of career guidance programmes impact student outcomes and programme effectiveness?

1.5 Research Structure:

The current study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the rest of the research project. It provides background on the research problem and identifies a gap in the existing literature that this study aims to address. It outlines the research objectives and questions the study intends to answer. It also outlines the specific methods that will be employed, guiding every stage of the research process. Furthermore, the chapter details the research design, the types of data needed, the methods of data collection, and the approaches to analysing and interpreting the data. It highlights the study's importance and proposes a structure for the thesis, including the sequence and content of the chapters.

Chapter 2 examines the key concepts of Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) within the UAE's public education system, emphasising their importance in supporting high school students. It considers the UAE's socio-cultural context and its effects on career guidance and counselling, referencing the UAE Vision 2021 and Vision 2031. The chapter aligns with international best practices, especially the NICE, Canadian, Australian, and Saudi Arabia frameworks for advice and counselling. This analysis offers a strong rationale for developing a competent framework tailored to the UAE's unique context. It also critically evaluates the relevance of additional materials reviewed, ensuring they contribute to the focus on career guidance and counselling.

Chapter 3 covers all the methodological steps and procedures that the researcher will follow to achieve the research objectives, including the research philosophy, which explains the foundational beliefs guiding the study. Research approach: outlining whether it is qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method. Research design: describing the overall structure and plan of the research. Data collection tools: identifying the instruments and techniques used to gather data. Sampling and population: defining the target population and sampling methods. Statistical methods and tests: discussing the analytical techniques that will be employed. Emphasising key ethical issues that will be addressed throughout the research process.

Chapter 4 presents detailed findings from the interview and focus group, clearly addressing the research questions (RQs). It articulates the research's vision and connects the findings to established theories, such as specifying theories or a relevant framework to the research findings (e.g., Cultural Authenticity Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory). This connection strengthens the case for the proposed competency framework discussed in Chapter 2, demonstrating that the insights align with existing scientific literature and frameworks.

Finally, Chapter 5 summarises the key conclusions drawn from the research results, focusing on the effectiveness of the proposed competency framework and its enhancement of career guidance practices in the UAE. It provides insights into specific requirements for career guidance and counselling within the UAE context. The chapter also outlines research limitations by identifying any challenges encountered during the research process that may affect the findings. Additionally, it discusses the implications of the findings for practice and policy in career guidance and counselling. Concrete recommendations based on the research findings for various stakeholders involved in career guidance programmes , aiming to improve the effectiveness and relevance of these initiatives.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

The chapter provides a thorough review of the literature on creating a contextually grounded CGC Competency Framework tailored to the UAE's public education system. It emphasises the importance of CGC in helping high school students make informed academic decisions, navigate labour market transitions, and pursue personal growth (OECD, 2004; UNESCO, 2021; Gu et al., 2020; David et al., 2022). This focus aligns with the national educational and economic development goals outlined in UAE Vision 2021 and Vision 2031, which aim to prepare students for a global economy while maintaining national identity and social cohesion (UAE Government, 2022b; UAE Government, 2023a; UAE Government, 2023b; UAE Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, 2015). The chapter is organised into key sections covering crucial aspects of CGC.

This chapter summarises key insights from the literature review, highlighting the urgent need for a new Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) Competency Framework tailored to the UAE's cultural context and aligned with global best practices. It emphasises the framework's role in enhancing the effectiveness of career guidance practices, ensuring that they are relevant to the UAE's social and cultural dynamics. The chapter identifies gaps in current frameworks and stresses the importance of a comprehensive, context-specific theory to guide this development. By integrating approaches such as Culture and Authenticity Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory, the new framework seeks to improve career guidance practices in the UAE. This chapter lays the groundwork for implementing a framework that empowers career counsellors to provide effective and culturally sensitive guidance, thereby meeting the diverse needs of the UAE's labour market while respecting local identity and promoting social cohesion (Al Rasbi, 2019).

Accordingly, this chapter is organised into key sections covering crucial aspects of CGC. Section 2.2 defines essential terms, including career, guidance, counselling, competency, and frameworks, ensuring clarity and consistency throughout, an exploration of the vital features of CGC, highlighting its significance within the educational landscape of the UAE, and the importance of CGC: This section discusses the crucial role CGC plays in guiding students' academic and career pathways, aligning with national priorities. Section 2.3 reviews the historical evolution of CGC practices, providing context for understanding the current landscape in the UAE. Section 2.4 examines various international CGC frameworks, drawing on models from NICE, Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabia, which share cultural similarities with the UAE. Section 2.5 discusses relevant theories that inform the

development of the CGC framework. Section 2.6 illustrates a theoretical framework for building the UAE CGC competency framework and examines the role of cultural identity in career guidance. Also, this section Evaluating the Theoretical Foundation for Developing a Competency Framework: A critical assessment of the theoretical foundations necessary for establishing a strong CGC framework. Section 2.7 underscores the need for a framework that reflects the UAE's unique cultural and contextual realities. Section 2.8 discusses and formulates research questions to guide the development of the CGC competency framework. Section 2.9 summarises the chapter (Goher et al., 2021).
The detailed exploration of these crucial components begins with a fundamental definitional analysis of Career Guidance and Counselling in the following section.

2.2 Career Guidance and Counselling (CGCs)

The following subsections, organised under their respective subheadings, explore the core concepts of career, guidance, counselling, competency, and frameworks by defining key terms and emphasising their roles. It examines the essential features and skills required for effective CGC practitioners, emphasising the importance of creating a supportive environment for students. Additionally, the significance of CGC is discussed, particularly in preparing students for a dynamic job market and aligning with the national objectives of the UAE, Vision 2021 and 2031. This alignment ensures that students are equipped with the necessary skills for successful career transitions (Goher et al., 2021).

2.2.1 Concepts of Career, Guidance, Counselling, Competency, and Frameworks

A clear articulation of foundational terms—Career, Guidance, Counselling, Competency, and Framework—is essential for defining the professional role and scope of the Career Guidance Counsellor (CGC).

Career

A career is universally defined as a chosen profession, occupation, or sequence of roles experienced throughout an individual's lifetime (Najem et al., 2019). It is a collection of personal roles that encompasses skills, values, and long-term goals (Popescu, 2021). The CGC's role, therefore, is to guide the individual in proactively shaping this lifelong collection of roles through informed decision-making.

Guidance

Guidance is a process that assists individuals in understanding their aptitudes, aspirations, and interests, helping them gain knowledge about the world of work (Okumu, 2018). It is a customised

service designed to facilitate problem-solving and provide direction (Arun & Sivakumar, 2018; Aboh, 2015). Effective guidance requires a practitioner who possesses the knowledge and relational skills necessary to connect a client's personal profile to labour market requirements (UNESCO, 2021).

Counselling

Counselling is a structured, collaborative relationship between a trained professional and a client, grounded in ethical codes and evidence-based theory (Yates, 2022). Its primary purpose is to provide support, facilitate personal change, and address complex issues such as indecisiveness or anxiety (Galea, 2024; Popescu, 2021). Professional counselling is a critical function within the CGC role, requiring mastery of psychological theories and interpersonal factors to ensure positive client outcomes.

Competency

Competency is a comprehensive concept referring to the combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes required for an individual to perform a professional role effectively (Andi, 2022; Arifin, 2021). It represents the observable behaviours that are instrumental in delivering desired results or outcomes in the workplace (Robertson et al., 2002). For the CGC, professional competency is the essential standard used to measure and assure the quality of their service delivery, encompassing cognitive, functional, personal, and ethical domains (Ischinger, 2007).

Framework

A framework is a systematic structure of rules, ideas, and values used to plan, build, or decide something (Partelow, 2023; Binder et al., 2013). It functions as a set of assumptions and concepts that defines a particular reality or approach. A CGC competency framework serves as the definitive structural blueprint, cataloguing the necessary knowledge and skills across the career guidance life cycle to enable rigorous, evidence-informed professional practice (Vermette & Valiquet, 2023). Building on these fundamental definitions, the subsequent section delves into the essential features and requisite competencies that characterise effective Career Guidance and Counselling services in the modern educational environment.

2.2.2 Features of Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) – The Professional's Role

The effective delivery of Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) is predicated upon the professional features and competencies inherent in the practitioner's role. These features establish the necessary scope, depth, and quality of service, ensuring that the CGC operates as an autonomous, skilled, and accountable agent in the educational ecosystem. Shifting the focus from passive service provision to active professional mastery, this review delineates the core features that define the

competent career counsellor, aligning the review with the counsellor-centred thesis of professionalisation and framework development. These features encompass the moral, relational, strategic, and technical dimensions required to facilitate meaningful career development in a dynamic socio-economic landscape. The professional role of the CGC is thus defined by eight interconnected features: ethical practice, confidentiality, professional communication, labour-market awareness, strategic planning, competency in assessment, proactive collaboration, and professional responsibility.

Ethical Practice

Ethical practice serves as the non-negotiable foundation of the CGC profession, dictating the moral conduct and decision-making framework for all professional activities (Plant, 2001; International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 2018). The counsellor must strictly adhere to comprehensive codes of ethics, which typically govern issues such as professional boundaries, dual relationships, referral protocols, and the management of personal biases (Schiersmann et al., 2012; Hiebert and Neault, 2014; International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 2018). Ethical competency is not merely passive compliance but an active, reflexive process requiring the counsellor to constantly analyse their actions against principles like beneficence (acting in the client's best interest), non-maleficence (doing no harm), autonomy (respecting the client's right to self-determination), and justice (ensuring fairness and equitable access to services) (Ovri, 2024). For CGCs operating within culturally diverse educational settings, such as those in the UAE, this also mandates cultural competency—the ability to apply ethical standards while acknowledging how cultural context, values, and religious beliefs influence a client's interpretation of career choice and counselling intervention (Lehman et al., 2019). The integrity of the guidance process rests entirely on the counsellor's commitment to self-monitoring and accountability, ensuring that their personal values do not override professional duties or exploit the power dynamic inherent in the counsellor-client relationship. Furthermore, the ethical CGC must proactively seek supervision or consultation when facing complex moral dilemmas, solidifying professional accountability and safeguarding the client's well-being. This rigorous adherence to ethical guidelines is the professional shield that protects the client, the institution, and the counsellor themselves, ensuring that all interventions are carried out with the highest degree of moral and professional diligence. Ethical practice dictates a commitment to lifelong learning regarding professional standards, particularly as technological advancements and social media platforms introduce new complexities to client privacy and professional boundaries. This necessitates the CGC to remain current on all updates to national and international professional codes, ensuring that technological engagement with clients and stakeholders is managed in a way that preserves integrity and avoids ethical drift.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a cornerstone of the counselling relationship, directly establishing the climate of trust essential for effective service delivery (Plant, 2001; International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 2018; Schiersmann et al., 2012). It is the CGC's professional duty to protect the privacy of all client communications and records, thereby creating a safe environment where students can discuss personal ambitions, vulnerabilities, and potential career obstacles without fear of external disclosure (Hiebert and Neault, 2014; Robson and Robson, 2000; International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 2018). The ethical mandate of confidentiality is, however, not absolute and requires the counsellor to possess acute awareness of legal and institutional limits—specifically the "duty to warn" or mandated reporting obligations when a client poses a clear and imminent danger to themselves or others. The professional feature of confidentiality thus involves transparent practice; the CGC must clearly communicate the parameters and limits of privacy to the client at the onset of the relationship, ensuring informed consent (Yates, 2022). Maintaining confidentiality requires systematic control over all forms of data, including digital records, interview notes, and assessment results, necessitating advanced technological and administrative skills to secure sensitive information against unauthorised access, aligning with data protection policies (Harris, 2020). The complexity of maintaining this feature is compounded in school settings where the counsellor often acts as an intermediary between the student, parents, teachers, and administrators. A competent CGC skilfully navigates these competing demands, selectively disclosing information only with explicit consent or when mandated by law, ensuring that the client's privacy remains the default professional setting. This often requires the development of internal protocols for data management that comply with national educational and privacy laws, making the counsellor responsible for the institutional security of sensitive developmental and psychological data.

Professional Communication

Professional communication transcends simple conversation, serving as the primary instrument through which the CGC implements guidance theory and practice (Hiebert and Neault, 2014; Schiersmann et al., 2012; International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 2018). This feature encompasses both verbal and non-verbal skills, demanding mastery of active listening, empathetic responding, and the capacity to build a strong, reflexive rapport (Savickas, 2016; Guichard and Pouyaud, 2019; Evans and Sejuit, 2021; Lavee and Itzchakov, 2023). For the CGC, communication involves translating complex psychometric data and abstract labour-market information into comprehensible, actionable insights for the client. The counsellor must adapt their communication style across diverse modalities—from one-on-one counselling sessions requiring deep

empathy, to leading group workshops demanding clarity and authority, to engaging in professional consultation with industry partners requiring technical precision (Akpan & Udo, 2025). A key professional facet is the ability to manage emotional complexity; the CGC must communicate difficult truths, address client resistance or denial, and encourage aspirational goal-setting using language that is non-judgmental and culturally sensitive (Wong & Yuen, 2019). Furthermore, effective professional communication extends to documentation and record-keeping. The counsellor is responsible for producing clear, concise, and academically sound reports detailing client progress, intervention strategies, and outcomes, which are vital for institutional accountability and continuity of care. The capacity to communicate effectively is inextricably linked to the counsellor's perceived credibility and effectiveness, making it a critical competency for influencing client behaviour and stakeholder support. In a multicultural environment like the UAE, professional communication also demands multilingual capabilities or, at minimum, exceptional cross-cultural sensitivity to ensure that guidance is linguistically accessible and culturally resonant with the diverse student and parent population.

Labour-Market Awareness

Labour-market awareness is a fundamental cognitive competency that situates career guidance in economic reality, transforming the CGC from a traditional school counsellor into a vital human capital strategist (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2004). This feature requires the counsellor to be a continuous learner and expert in macroeconomic trends, national workforce priorities (such as the UAE Vision 2021/2031), and the specific occupational demands of the local and global economy (UAE Government, 2023a; Elbanna, 2021; Arulmani and Kumar, 2014; Herdman et al., 2024). The professional role mandates proactive research into industry transformation, emerging technologies (e.g., Industry 4.0), and shifts in educational pathways that align with high-demand sectors (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021). Critically, the CGC must not only possess this knowledge but also possess the skills to interpret it for diverse client populations, bridging the gap between a student's self-efficacy and the objective demands of the employment landscape (Arulmani & Kumar. S., 2014). This involves translating national economic data into practical career information, advising on necessary hard and soft skills, and providing realistic projections regarding job growth and compensation. Without a deep and current labour-market awareness, the guidance offered by the CGC risks becoming obsolete or leading clients toward pathways that are professionally unviable, thereby undermining the core mission of career development and national talent alignment. Furthermore, the competent CGC actively seeks out and maintains a repository of up-to-date, verified information on local employers, university programmes, and vocational training options, effectively functioning as an information broker who curates relevance for their client base.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the feature that governs the systematic design and delivery of CGC programmes, moving professional practice beyond reactive, one-off sessions to proactive, developmental interventions (Bernard, 2019; Warui, 2018). The counsellor is expected to be a programme manager, responsible for assessing the needs of the student population, setting measurable programme goals, and selecting evidence-based interventions that span individual, group, and whole-school levels (Ovri, 2024). This professional feature requires conceptual mastery of developmental career theories (such as Super's life-span, life-space theory or SCCT), translating theoretical constructs into practical curriculum design (Brown & Lent, 2019). Strategic planning mandates continuous evaluation of programme efficacy through data-driven methods, such as tracking student engagement, academic progress related to career goals, and post-graduation outcomes (Al Rasbi, 2019). A key responsibility is resource management, ensuring that time, budget, and materials are allocated efficiently across guidance activities, including classroom presentations, career fairs, and individual counselling appointments (Eide and Showalter, 2010; Alwari, 2024). Furthermore, the CGC must ensure that the guidance curriculum is structurally aligned with the school's overall educational mission and national mandates, making strategic planning a highly visible feature of professional leadership within the institution. This involves creating a multi-year scope and sequence for career development learning that integrates seamlessly with academic subjects, demanding the counsellor's leadership in institutional curriculum development.

Competency in Assessment

Competency in assessment is the technical feature that enables the CGC to gather, interpret, and apply diagnostic information rigorously and ethically (Akosah-Twumasi et al, 2018). This professional skill set includes the selection, administration, scoring, and nuanced interpretation of standardised career assessments (e.g., interest inventories, personality profiles, and aptitude tests), ensuring psychometric validity and cultural appropriateness (Maree and Twigge, 2016). The CGC's responsibility extends beyond tool administration to the art of integrating quantitative test data with qualitative information (e.g., interview narratives, observational data, academic performance) to form a holistic understanding of the client's profile (Ovri, 2024). Ethical assessment practice demands that the counsellor understand the limitations of each instrument, avoid over-interpreting results, and use the data solely to inform and facilitate client decision-making rather than prescribe a path (Yates, 2022). For the counsellor, providing effective feedback on assessment results is a communication competency, translating technical scores into developmental language that fosters client self-awareness and self-efficacy (Lent et al., 2015). This technical mastery is crucial for distinguishing

effective, evidence-based guidance from generalised advice, cementing the CGC's role as an expert diagnostician in career development. The professional is also tasked with the ongoing process of vetting new assessment technologies and digital tools for their reliability and validity within the specific context of UAE public school students, particularly regarding language and cultural norming biases.

Proactive Collaboration

Proactive collaboration defines the CGC's professional engagement with the entire ecosystem surrounding the client, establishing the counsellor as the central coordinator of support services (Akpan & Udo, 2025). This feature requires the counsellor to initiate and maintain productive, defined relationships with a diverse range of internal stakeholders—including teachers, administrators, and specialised student support personnel—to integrate career guidance into the broader curriculum and student support structure (UNESCO, 2021). Externally, proactive collaboration extends to industry employers, higher education admissions officers, and community organisations (Greidanus, 2020). The CGC is responsible for cultivating and leveraging these partnerships to generate practical career experiences for students, such as internships, mentorship programmes, and career exploration events (Fantinelli, 2024). Crucially, collaboration involves skilful consultation with parents and guardians, particularly in cultures where family influence heavily shapes career decisions (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019). The counsellor must educate parents on labour market realities and guidance outcomes while respecting the family's authentic cultural values, acting as a translator between generational, educational, and economic perspectives. This feature requires the CGC to possess managerial and advocacy skills, ensuring that external partnerships align with the school's policies and the client's best interests. This is not passive networking; it is a strategic function where the CGC acts as a liaison, ensuring a seamless flow of information between the educational setting and the future world of work, ultimately increasing the relevancy of the guidance provided.

Professional Responsibility

Professional responsibility is the overarching feature of accountability, defining the CGC's commitment to maintaining and advancing the profession itself (Valverde et al., 2020). This mandates continuous professional development (CPD), requiring the counsellor to seek ongoing training to update their knowledge of counselling techniques, cultural shifts, and labour market dynamics (Luca et al., 2022). Responsibility involves rigorous self-reflection (reflexivity), where the CGC critically evaluates their own practice, biases, and effectiveness to inform continuous improvement (Savickas, 2016). Furthermore, the professional CGC is accountable to the institution and national standards, responsible for accurate record-keeping, programme reporting, and contributing empirical data that

justifies the importance and resource allocation for career guidance services (Al Rasbi, 2019). This feature also encapsulates the role of professional advocacy: the CGC must actively champion the value of guidance services to policymakers, school leaders, and the public, working to clarify the professional identity and competency requirements of the role (Schiersmann, 2012). By upholding this responsibility, the CGC contributes to the development of a unified, high-quality, and respected profession that is capable of meeting the strategic human capital goals of the nation. The CGC is professionally responsible for remaining current on all policy documents, such as updates to the national curriculum or changes in Emiratisation goals, ensuring that their daily practice is directly informed by and contributes to the broader national agenda. This level of responsibility establishes the CGC as a key professional stakeholder in national development, demanding competencies far exceeding general educational advising.

By mastering these eight professional features, the Career Guidance Counsellor transitions from a reactive advisor to a strategic professional—a crucial prerequisite for achieving meaningful student outcomes. The delineation of these competencies reinforces the essential nature of the CGC role and sets the stage for a thorough investigation of the transformative impact these professionals have, which leads directly to an evaluation of the importance of CGC in the subsequent section.

Economists describe skills as personal qualities characterised by three key features: they are productive, meaning that using them at work generates value; expandable, in that they can be enhanced through training and development; and social, in that social contexts and interactions influence their development and application (Eide and Showalter, 2010; Gillies, 2015; Wuttaphan, 2017).. Helping factors that integrate individuals into the education process and the labour market at both national and international levels have contributed to the development of a system (OECD, 2004; Johanson and Adams, 2004; Ischinger, 2007). The constantly evolving economic and labour market structures, the increasing diversity of study programmes, and the relevance of educational outcomes to the job market indicate that economics defines skills in terms of productivity. At the same time, human resources development (HRD) studies divide the concept of competencies into several key components. According to Midhat & et al., (2021) these components encompass: knowledge (information and understanding acquired by a person), experience (practical expertise in a specific field), technical skills (abilities needed to perform tasks efficiently), soft skills (interpersonal abilities such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving), motives (drives influencing a person's actions), emotions (feelings that can affect decision-making), and behaviours (observable actions and conduct in different situations).

Green (2013) described skills as one of the main ingredients of HR (see also Eide and Showalter, 2010; Gillies, 2015). This system involves CGCs through various activities, including career education, guidance, and information on education and job opportunities, as well as the interrelationships between them (OECD, 2004; UNESCO, 2021; Plant, 2004). The job market is becoming increasingly competitive, and students need to possess specific skills and abilities to succeed in their future careers (Presti, 2022). Enhancing the CGC's competencies within the educational system will aid adolescents' integration into the labour market by exploring new methodologies to support students in their future job searches (García-Péres, 2021).

Moreover, Akkermans (2013) differentiated employee development within organisations into two categories. The first is the traditional career path, where individuals grow and develop vertically within a single organisation's hierarchy. The second is the more recent career path, which is more competitive and better aligned with labour market demands. This dynamic path allows employees to develop skills across different organisations, leading to more equitable and prominent careers based on their competency. In today's challenging, ever-changing job market, students need guidance on career competencies, effective career management, and securing employment. This guidance is delivered by professionals with specific cognitive skills and knowledge to help overcome these challenges, which is the core of the current study.

In the UAE, the standard approach involves assessing the competency framework for certified counsellors and drawing valuable insights from the NICE, Canadian, Australian and Saudi Arabian models (Magee, 2022). Understanding the knowledge, skills, and attitudes held by CGCs is crucial to effectively meet students' needs and align them with the demands of the UAE's diverse job market. These models aim to boost self-efficacy and support the development of a unified competency framework across public schools in the UAE. They also seek to increase confidence in the effectiveness of this approach and how accurately it reflects students' performance.

Contextually, competency refers to the skills, abilities, and authority an individual develops and demonstrates in their job. Organisations highly value competency, especially those facing frequent changes, challenges, and uncertainty. The study concludes that the availability and quality of information about education and job opportunities provided by CGCs positively influence individuals' educational and career choices that align with their interests and abilities, making CGCs' role essential for school employment (Dislere and Vronska, 2020).

OECD (2007) provides the following definition:

According to Ischinger (2007, pp. 22–23), "*Competency is an ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes: i) cognitive competency involving the use of theory*

and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; ii) functional competency (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area; iii) personal competency involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and iv) ethical competency involving the possession of certain personal and professional values." (Ischinger, 2007; Le Deist and Winterton, 2005; Ennis, 2008; Shavelson, 2010).

It is a broad term that includes competencies such as skills, knowledge, abilities, and behaviours expected of a person when performing tasks in different settings (Packard, 2014; Le Deist and Winterton, 2005). These competencies are usually grouped into three main categories: Basic Competencies, Psychological Competencies, and Functional Competencies. Core competencies are behaviours universally relevant across roles that do not contradict the profession's concept, including communication, teamwork, and critical thinking (Ennis, 2008; Vazirani, 2010; Shavelson, 2010; Schiersmann et al., 2012). Behavioural competencies mainly relate to interpersonal and communication skills, values, motivation, and emotional and social abilities. Technical competencies form the procedural basis of roles within organisations, such as data analysis for analysts or programming for programmers (Vinay, 2024). An important implication of each competency type is that all these skills contribute to professional capability. For instance, technical competencies allow individuals to perform their jobs effectively. Meanwhile, behavioural and core competencies support individuals in collaborating, innovating, and thinking in line with the organisation's vision and values (Suff, 2006).

Competency is an essential standard in public and private organisations, especially in meeting the demands of rapid change, emerging problems, and future challenges. Therefore, competency involves building abilities, skills, and knowledge that align with the work environment, attitude, and professional performance requirements (Arifin, 2021). Therefore, as a career counsellor, within their work environment, they need to adopt the organisation's required competencies for their role with any clients (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021).

From the field of research, the framework is likely to vary across disciplines and thematic areas. Therefore, this section offers definitions for the framework. A frame is a syntactic structure derived from a new representation of a situation, aimed at helping to adapt to reality by modifying details as needed (Minsky, 1974). Furthermore, Partelow (2023) described the framework as "a supporting structure around which something can be built; a system of rules, ideas, or beliefs that is used to plan or decide something." Binder et al (2013, p. 2) noted that the definition of a framework is "a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices, that constitute the way of viewing the specific

reality," emphasising the prescriptive or inherently particular judgment involved in framework development.

The Cambridge dictionary states the framework as "a supporting structure around which something can be built; a system of rules, ideas, or beliefs that is used to plan or decide something." (Partelow, 2023, p. 511).

Binder et al (2013) In their study, note that the definition of a framework is "a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices," emphasising the prescriptive or inherently particular judgment in framework development. The framework is grounded in social cognitive science, emphasising how individuals construct meaning, make decisions, and adapt within dynamic environments, core processes essential not only for sustainability but also for informed career development (Partelow, 2023).

Finally, Vermette and Valiquet (2023) demonstrated that the framework was developed to establish a common understanding of the foundational, intermediate, and advanced data competencies required across the federal government. It catalogues the necessary knowledge and skills across the data life cycle to enable effective, rigorous, evidence-informed decision-making (Hiebert and Neault, 2014).

2.2.3 The Importance of CGC

The importance of Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) as a distinct professional discipline is amplified within the context of Industry 4.0, where the complexity of the global labour market necessitates high-level practitioner competency (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021). The profession's significance lies in its ability to provide a structured, evidence-based service that empowers individuals to navigate career trajectories that are increasingly volatile and competitive (Presti, 2022). Competent CGCs are essential for facilitating informed decision-making; they transform guidance from a passive receipt of information into an active cognitive process where the practitioner's analytical skills are used to align individual potential with economic realities (Sucharitha et al., 2021). Consequently, the CGC profession serves as a vital institutional mechanism for talent management and human capital optimisation (Gillies, 2015; Eide and Showalter, 2010).

Professional CGCs provide critical ethical guidance, ensuring that the exploration of career pathways is conducted within a rigorous moral framework that protects the interests of the individual against external pressures (Clutter, 2010). Grounding their practice in established career development models, such as those proposed by Super (1990) and Holland (1997), competent counsellors utilise a specialised knowledge base to interpret interests and capabilities with psychometric precision. This

level of professional mastery is required to ensure that guidance services are delivered competently, maintaining high standards of service delivery that are responsive to the multifaceted demands of the labour market (Arulmani & Agbenyo, 2014). The identity of the CGC is thus defined by this commitment to theoretical application and continuous practitioner reflexivity (Wong & Yuen, 2019).

A core dimension of the profession's importance is its role in life design, where the counsellor acts as a strategic architect of professional identity rather than a mere advisor (Gang & Xi, 2024). This collaborative role requires the CGC to employ reflexive practices through counselling interviews that foster individual agency and self-reflection. By utilising a reflexive approach during mentoring activities, CGCs solidify their academic and professional standing within educational organisations, increasing the institutional relevance and efficacy of the guidance process (Collins et al., 2024; Valverde et al., 2020). The professionalisation of this role is a prerequisite for any education system seeking to integrate national human resources into sustainable economic frameworks.

Furthermore, the significance of the CGC profession is underscored by its function in managing the school-to-work transition, a process that requires practitioners to be experts in both educational pathways and labour law (Arun & Sivakumar, 2018; Fuller, 2019). Competent counsellors bridge the gap between academic theory and workplace application, ensuring that transitions are seamless and strategically aligned with technological advances and economic cycles (Nadon & et al, 2016). To maintain this significance, CGCs must equip themselves with advanced qualifications and training, utilising technical interventions to help clients navigate complex career decisions with confidence (Maree and Twigge, 2016). This professional accountability ensures the continued integrity and socioeconomic value of career guidance services.

To effectively operationalise this professional role and develop the necessary competency frameworks, it is essential to ground guidance practice in robust psychological and social constructs. The importance of the CGC profession is thus inseparable from its theoretical foundations, as these provide the conceptual tools required for expert intervention. Accordingly, the following section provides a comprehensive review of the theories—including Cultural Authenticity, Social Learning, and Social Cognitive Career Theory—that inform the development of professional CGC competencies and daily practice.

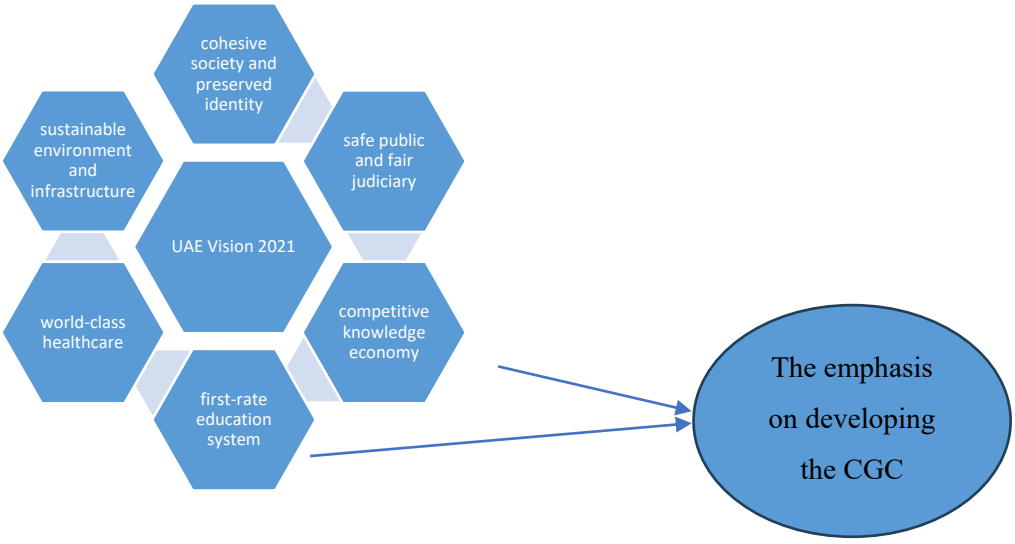


Figure 1: UAE Vision 2021 Six Pillars: The focus is on developing the CGC competency framework by aligning it with the NICE, Canada and Australian frameworks.

Public school CGC programmes are increasingly essential in today's context. These programmes help students understand emerging career paths, make informed decisions about their academic and professional futures, and acquire the skills to succeed in a competitive, dynamic labour market (Ana-Mariana *et al.,* 2024). By providing early exposure to various career options, aligning educational pathways with market needs, and supporting students in setting realistic goals, CGC plays a significant role in students' success. This contribution directly supports the objectives of Vision 2021, particularly in areas such as education quality, employment, and national development competitiveness.

In the background, the CGC profession is recognised worldwide. The existing study will focus on the Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe (NICE) model, as well as its applications in Canada and Australia, and ultimately in Arabic and neighbouring countries, with the Saudi Arabia model aligning with the UAE's authentic standards. The UAE may benefit from learning from other countries that have implemented CGC programmes by aligning its framework with existing best practices. Analysing the methods and strategies of these countries will enhance the UAE's programmes and equip individuals with the essential skills in demand from CGCs (Magee, 2022).

To put it differently, CGC services in the UAE have made significant progress in recent years, but they still face skills gaps and challenges that require further attention. A Comprehensive

Competency Framework: Another considerable gap is the need for a well-defined competency framework for career counsellors. Lai & McDowall(2014) stated that emotional, social, and cognitive intelligence competencies, such as soft skills, are required for critical capabilities in organisations. A competency framework outlines the skills, knowledge, and attitudes counsellors should possess to be effective in their roles; such a framework helps set standards, ensure consistency, and enhance the quality of career counselling services (Schiersmann et al., 2012; International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 2018).

A critical consideration is the limitation on collaboration with industry (Greidanus, 2020). Considering the limitations of collaborating with industry in the UAE's diverse economy, with opportunities across sectors such as technology, healthcare, finance, and tourism, it is essential. However, there is often a need for more collaboration between educational institutions and industries. A stronger link between schools and the job market will improve the CGC's experience and make their roles more productive and reflective, benefiting students (Fantinelli, 2024). Moreover, Bonesso (2020) referred to behavioural competencies as the most in-demand skill in the labour market. The UAE has a diverse population, and CGCs need to develop intelligence and emotional intelligence, which requires self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, cognitive awareness, and cultural competency training to support students from diverse backgrounds (Wasel, 2025).

2.3 Related Theories

The EU Science Hub's (2023) definition of competency encompasses knowledge, skills, and attitudes. From an economic perspective, a person must possess knowledge, such as learning, ideas, theories, concepts, and facts, to understand a specific area (Bratton et al., 2021). Competency is a core element in public and private organisations, especially to meet the demands of rapid change, emerging problems, and future challenges. Therefore, competency involves developing abilities, skills, and knowledge that align with the roles and requirements of the work environment and professional performance standards. Skills represent the application of this knowledge, enabling individuals to carry out processes and achieve results.

Conversely, attitude describes the character and mindset that drive action in response to ideas or individual situations with the organisation's standards (JRC Portfolio, 2023). Skills refer to abilities, competencies, aptitudes, and talents; while economics defines the term competency similarly, the difference lies in the analytical disciplines (Arifin, 2021). David C. McClelland, a psychology professor at Harvard University, defined competency "as the key components of performance

interpreted as any kind of psychological or behavioural characteristics related to success in a person's life" (Wong 2020). Green (2013) explained this as a focus on generations from a psychological perspective, whereas economic interests are centred on market values and growth. Psychologists define competency as the ability to perform a range of tasks at a high level (Kotsab, 2018).

On the other hand Boyatzis (YYYY) defines competency as "characteristics related to the job performance of individuals." Chung and Lo (2007), added that, "Competencies are skills, knowledge, and capabilities individuals should possess when completing assigned tasks or achieving goals" (Arifin, 2021; Kotsab, 2018).

Economically, competencies are essential for individual and organisational success and play a key role in driving economic growth. They facilitate the alignment of skills with job demands, enhance productivity, and boost the competitiveness of both firms and nations. Recognising this enables policymakers and organisations to create targeted training programmes that benefit individuals and foster economic development. Additionally, focusing on skills development, productivity, and employment is crucial for increasing competitiveness and improving working conditions across diverse demographic groups (Young, 2005; Sachmann, 2008; Sadek & Scott-Parker, 2001).

In summary, the goal of developing competencies in career guidance and counselling is to boost human capital, which supports economic growth and productivity through effective skill investment. Career counsellors need specific skills rooted in their academic training to provide the essential foundation for guiding individuals in their careers (Young, 2005). This knowledge is vital as it supports skill development and fosters personal traits and behaviours that affect interactions with clients and colleagues. For instance, communication, empathy, and problem-solving are essential for building meaningful relationships. However, these skills can become outdated if not regularly refreshed through ongoing professional development (CPD) provided by organisations to enhance practitioners in the guidance and counselling field. Such continuous training not only boosts individual performance but also ensures counsellors remain up to date on the latest career guidance techniques and labour market developments (Sadek & Scott-Parker, 2001).

Adapting to labour-market changes driven by shifting business demands is crucial for counsellors to stay competitive and effective. This reflexive practice ensures clients receive timely, relevant advice, helping them navigate their careers successfully. Ultimately, investing in skills development in this area is essential for both economic growth and individual career progression. Ongoing professional development enables counsellors in their roles to keep their skills and knowledge

up to date, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of career guidance services (Arulmani & Kumar, 2014)

Compared to other factors, possessing a set of career competencies is essential for success in one's professional life. (Vinay, 2024; Kotsab, 2018) It is agreed that having competencies is vital in predicting various forms of career success, such as career progression and maintaining a continuous upward career path. Developing career competencies equips employees with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform in accordance with industry standards (Arifin, 2021; Hansen, 2006). These competencies, known as learned capabilities, enable employees to manage their careers effectively. They aim to provide a general taxonomy of behaviours and principles to achieve desired career outcomes (Lent and Brown, 2013). Therefore, the key role of career competency is to promote career development and progression by enabling individuals to take control of their professional growth (Arun and Sivakumar, 2018; Lent and Brown, 2013).

2.3.1 Culture and Authenticity Theory (CAT):

The concept of authenticity influences relevant topics in management studies (Lehman et al., 2019). Lindholm (2007) defines authenticity as the leading attribute of a set of values that includes sincerity, essentialness, naturalness, originality, and reality. In the context of career guidance and counselling (CGC) in UAE schools, authenticity refers to a dynamic, reflexive process through which counsellors and students align internal values with external behaviours and professional practices (Lehman et al., 2019). It involves affective, cognitive, and narrative dimensions and is shaped by both individual experiences and collective social interactions. Authenticity is not a static trait but a developmental process, described by Giddens (1991) as a "project of the self," subject to both intrapersonal reflection and interpersonal recognition (Vannini & Williams, 2016, p. 20).

Practising authenticity through CGCs enhances trust, relevance, and personalisation in the counselling relationship with clients. Moreover, it helps develop service-delivery perspectives that are more effective, efficient, and flexible. To this end, practitioners should adhere to the evolving framework that utilises the (4Cs skills): critical, creative, communicative, and collaborative (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021). Rachmad (2023) concludes that in the modern technological era, authenticity is both beneficial and essential for sustained influence and effectiveness, resulting in higher levels of engagement and loyalty among employees and organisations (Rachmad, 2023). Culture refers to a flexible, interconnected system of shared values, beliefs, norms, and routines that inform individual identity and group belonging (Roessler, 2012). Within the UAE school system, CGCs must consider the diverse cultural backgrounds of students and their families, as well as the

societal and labour market expectations they face (Lindholm, 2007). Culture influences how career choices are made, how authenticity is interpreted, and how counselling interventions are received. Culturally responsive counselling acknowledges these nuances and integrates them into career development strategies.

Accordingly, by developing a regional competent framework for the CGCs utilising the Authentic approach of the UAE, aligned with best practices from global examples, such as the NICE, Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabian models (Lehman et al., 2019). Consequently, this initiative will promote the unification of competencies for CGC, thereby enabling a more thorough understanding and effective tackling of local career challenges and opportunities. Additionally, it will help apply these competencies to identify additional criteria, thereby contributing to the development of interventions to reduce students' career indecision and increase their adaptability to future labour market trends.

The necessity for a culturally authentic and contextually relevant framework established by CAT leads naturally to a consideration of how learning occurs; the subsequent section, therefore, explores Social Learning Theory (SLT) and its implications for how CGCs can model and reinforce effective career decision-making behaviours.

2.3.2 Social Learning Theory (SLT):

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) lies between behaviourism (traditional learning theory) and cognitive theory. Behaviourism focuses on a specific view of learning, in which a change in external behaviour is achieved through reinforcement and repetition, thereby shaping behaviour related to the learning process (Rumjaun & Narod, 2025).

It has been demonstrated that the SLT is a bridge between behaviourism and the cognitive approach (Bandura, 2014a, 2014b). Frequently, SLT as a theory supports teaching and learning of science, understanding the construction of science concepts, and developing learners' science process skills by engaging them as a group to work and solve a problem, carry out projects, engage with role-play to conduct learning inquiry to make meaning of science concepts, issues, and phenomena (Abdullah, 2020; Bandura, 2014b). These science teaching, learning and guiding activities align with SLT, which encompasses observation, attention, retention, motivation, and various types of modelling (Abdullah, 2020). According to Wong's (2020) study, receiving help from CGC can significantly enhance an individual's academic self-efficacy.

Practitioners in the guidance and counselling field depend on specific behaviours, particularly in self-management and self-efficacy. By developing these competencies, career guidance

counsellors can more effectively support students during adolescence, empowering them to make well-informed career decisions and follow successful paths (Brown & Lent, 2019; Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022; Stamou et al., 2024). Such practices underscore the need to move beyond one-size-fits-all counselling methods and to offer a framework for UAE schools to adopt more personalised and career-responsive strategies that prepare students for labour market demands (Akpan & Udo, 2025).

The SLT technique in CGC has proven to be a convenient tool that benefits people from all walks of life (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). A proficient CGC should guide individuals in addressing their concerns, reinforcing their self-assurance, and advising along a career trajectory that is both personally fulfilling and grounded in their skill sets and accomplishments (Hewitt & et al, 2024). CGCs must prioritise several competencies in their daily work to help individuals overcome fears and anxieties about their future careers. Utilising self-efficacy and expectations of positive outcomes helps guide students toward their goals and reinforces the value of their life choices with the support of a counsellor (Popescu, 2021).

A point often overlooked in aligning with UAE standards is that the CGC, as a practitioner, can be a valuable resource for students during the learning phase, providing constant guidance to help them make informed career choices, overcome obstacles, and stay motivated to achieve their goals. Implementing SLT practices requires a professional CGC who is familiar with conducting individual and group guidance in a multicultural context. When working with students, CGC must apply SLT principles, including effective communication, foreign language skills, and relationship-building, while maintaining a service-oriented attitude through proactive support (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021).

Contrarily, CGC's role is to navigate students towards their future career development (Ibimiluyi & Falana, 2024). A wealth of evidence indicates that these competencies utilise techniques firmly rooted in pertinent theories, such as SLT, and are customised to address the specific needs of industries or organisations (Lent & Brown, 2013). It is crucial to follow the client guidance process technically and subordinately; CGC can help students better understand their limitations and develop a more realistic perspective on their potential and career options. This, in turn, enhances students' self-confidence and equips them with the necessary tools to explore their abilities and interests more effectively (Chen and Bansal, 2021). According to Chen and Bansal (2022), those who can effectively plan their future careers and utilise available resources are more likely to succeed; with this in mind, the professional role of CGC will be expanded more efficiently.

Reflexive practices are essential to the process, allowing practitioners to critically assess their thoughts and actions while developing a deeper understanding of their clients' needs (Savickas,

2016). Engaging with clients is just as important as fostering trust and building a strong rapport, which can lead to successful outcomes (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021). Promoting critical thinking is another essential part of a counsellor's role, encouraging students to explore different career options and make well-informed choices (Resaiee & Kareshki, 2024). Adopting professional values is also paramount; a counsellor must maintain strict confidentiality and adhere to ethical principles (Robson & Robson, 2000).

Furthermore, CGCs must continually develop competencies, integrating theories into their daily practices to provide the best possible guidance, behaviour, and competence (Ana-Mariana et al., 2024; Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021). This includes staying updated with social and technological advancements through ongoing training to ensure they provide their clients with the most relevant and practical advice (Ibimiluyi & Falana, 2024). Additionally, CGCs should advocate for their profession by supporting scientific research and policymaking in their field, promoting openness, and fostering understanding of diversity in the educational environment (Schiersmann, 2012).

Building on the principles of observational learning and environmental influence outlined in SLT, the discussion now shifts to the critical role of individual cognitive factors, such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations, as detailed in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which provides a more granular framework for understanding career development and decision-making.

This is especially critical and can be observed in the UAE's employability environment, as exemplified by the value of tolerance, which was highlighted in 2019 when the UAE government announced the Year of Tolerance (UAE Ministry of Economy, 2019). In other words, the UAE established the Tolerance[1] Framework as a pillar of values and openness to diverse cultures and people, adopting a community-based approach that involves all segments of society and fosters a sustainable institutional framework across the country. Significantly, educational values must be instilled in young people and integrated into the curricula of all educational institutions in the UAE (UAE Ministry of Economy, 2019).

[1] In June 2016, the UAE Cabinet adopted the UAE National Program for Tolerance, with goals to advance the ideals of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. This program consists of seven pillars that serve as the foundation for enhancing tolerance values: The pillars of Tolerance values: "As per the Tolerance Government website 7 pillars: 1. Islam 2. The UAE's Constitution 3. Sayed's Legacy and Ethics of the UAE 4. International conventions 5. Archaeology and history 6. Humanity 7. Common values. https://www.emiratesscholar.com/system/publish/060225050277172.pdf

2.3.2 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and self-efficacy contributions:

The relationship between employers and employees has undergone significant changes due to the rise of boundaryless careers driven by technological advancements (Wang et al., 2022). Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is a new and comprehensive theory in the academic field that builds upon previous methods to demonstrate how individual beliefs, environmental factors, and personal experiences interact to influence how to set goals, identify their career interests, and achieve success in their careers (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021).

Understanding how career development programmes influence students' professional decision-making, growth, and self-beliefs can be supported by a theoretical model such as SCCT (Stipanovic, 2017). It emphasises individuals' beliefs about self-efficacy, outcome expectations, self-evaluation, and goals as key determinants. Inclusively, revolves around a core set of predictions, including interest, choice, satisfaction, and performance models utilising SCCT (Lent et al., 2015). The theory highlights the impact of personal behavioural and environmental factors on career development (Falco et al., 2021; Lent & Brown, 2013). Furthermore, it recognises that a person's background is a vital factor in assessing these influences (Chen & Bansal, 2021). The researchers within SCCT identified three critical elements that alter a person's life: psychological, social, and economic (Brown & Lent, 2023, 2019; Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). Beyond conventional viewpoints, career development theory adopts a comprehensive and structured approach. It highlights how cognitive, personal, and environmental factors influence a person's career development, which is a competent skill for CGCs in their roles (Bandura, 2014b; Boyatzis, 2009).

These theoretical perspectives—CAT, SLT, and SCCT—provide the essential lenses through which to evaluate current best practices; therefore, the following section, using these theoretical lenses, conducts a comparative analysis of existing international CGC Competency Frameworks to identify common elements and assess their relevance to the UAE context.

2.4 Review of Related Studies: Key Themes and Trends Informing Empirical Work

The empirical design of this study—specifically the in-depth interviews and focus groups with UAE Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs)—is not merely a data collection exercise but a direct investigation into theoretical and contextual gaps identified across the literature. A review of related studies reveals five critical themes and trends that collectively inform the research questions and the design of the proposed UAE CGC Competency Framework. These themes transcend geographical boundaries, identifying essential, contextually adaptable components of professional career guidance.

Theme 1: The Critical Necessity of a Contextually Anchored Competency Framework

A primary trend observed in the literature is the global shift toward professionalising career guidance through national competency frameworks (NICE, Canada, Australia). Related studies repeatedly highlight that the absence of a unified framework leads to significant challenges, including inconsistent practices, role ambiguity, and variable student outcomes. The UAE context is no exception, with research identifying an urgent need for a clear, nationally endorsed framework to establish professional standards, enhance consistency, and clarify the CGC's role, which is often confused with that of social workers or psychologists. Studies show that an established framework is a prerequisite for ensuring professionals are competent and supportive when guiding students toward future-oriented pathways (Al Rasbi, 2019; Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019).

Furthermore, the literature points to a significant gap where existing training initiatives, although supportive, lack a cohesive theoretical foundation to define the necessary knowledge, skills, capabilities, and behaviours of counsellors. This gap is a critical national issue in the UAE, where career guidance is essential for meeting national objectives, such as boosting local employability and equipping students for the competitive labour market. The empirical work is therefore designed to elicit practitioners' perceptions of this gap, specifically asking about their current role definition, challenges, and effectiveness perceptions, as outlined in Research Question 1: *What are the key challenges and effectiveness perceptions of the UAE's school-based career guidance system compared to international frameworks?* The response will provide the contextual data required to anchor the framework in local reality, moving beyond the consensus that a framework is needed, to specifying what that framework must contain. (Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023; Al Rasbi, 2019)

Theme 2: Alignment of Guidance with National Human Capital and Economic Strategy

A prominent trend in the review of international frameworks (NICE, Canada, Australia, Saudi Arabia) is the imperative to align CGC services with broader social and economic objectives. The UAE's commitment to Vision 2021 and Vision 2031, which emphasise a competitive knowledge economy and human capital development, mandates that career guidance be a strategic function, not just a supportive service. Related studies stress that effective CGC is a vital mechanism for talent management and human capital optimisation. This context highlights **Labour Market Alignment** as a core competency component. (UAE Government, 2021; Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023)

Literature confirms that the competent CGC must act as a human capital strategist, possessing deep cognitive knowledge of macroeconomic trends, national workforce priorities, and emerging occupational demands. This professional role requires moving beyond generic advice to translating national economic data (like Emiratisation goals) into comprehensible, actionable career insights for students. The empirical study leverages this theme directly by examining *how* counsellors can enhance their performance to fill skills gaps (RQ2) and what critical competencies they need to help students make informed labour market decisions (RQ3). By asking practitioners about their labour-market intelligence and ability to connect academic pathways to job demands, the research grounds the theoretical imperative in practical, verifiable experience (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021; OSUNDE, 2025).

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Theme 3: The Interdependence of Theory, Agency, and Practitioner Competency

The literature review, particularly through the lens of Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), establishes a clear trend: effective career guidance relies on the counsellor's ability to foster client agency and self-efficacy. SLT emphasises that professional competency is developed through social interaction, modelling, and reflection. SCCT, meanwhile, provides the conceptual mechanism, theorising that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental supports/barriers determine career interests and choices (Lent and Brown, 2013; Brown & Lent, 2019).

This theme directly informs the empirical investigation into the practitioner's role. Studies indicate that a core competency is the ability to guide individuals in addressing their concerns, reinforcing their self-assurance, and aligning their trajectory with their skill sets. The empirical work is structured to explore this theme by examining counsellors' perceptions and attitudes about their roles and how their programmes impact student outcomes (RQ3 and RQ4). This approach is vital, as SCCT provides the necessary theoretical grounding to evaluate *how* a competency framework can boost student career readiness (RQ2) by promoting confidence, aspirational action, and realistic goal-setting in the face of environmental obstacles (known as barriers-efficacy). The empirical data will thus reveal how existing competencies (or the lack thereof) affect the counsellor's ability to act as a 'strategic architect of professional identity' for their students (Stipanovic, 2017; Lent et al., 2015).

A critical trend, particularly relevant to diverse environments like the UAE, is the recognition that competency is never developed or applied in a cultural vacuum. The comparative analysis, even with frameworks like Saudi Arabia's, underscores the need for context-specific adaptation. Culture and Authenticity Theory (CAT) informs the premise that guidance must be

culturally legitimate, meaning counsellors must skilfully navigate familial expectations, social norms, and the significance attached to various careers within Emirati society. The literature identifies the challenge of stigma attached to career counselling in the UAE, which negatively affects self-efficacy and hinders the counsellor's ability to connect with and help individuals (Lehman et al., 2019; Lindholm, 2007).

A critical trend, particularly relevant to diverse environments like the UAE, is the recognition that competency is never developed or applied in a cultural vacuum. The comparative analysis, even with frameworks like Saudi Arabia's, underscores the need for context-specific adaptation. Culture and Authenticity Theory (CAT) informs the premise that guidance must be culturally legitimate, meaning counsellors must skilfully navigate familial expectations, social norms, and the significance attached to various careers within Emirati society. The literature identifies the challenge of stigma attached to career counselling in the UAE, which negatively affects self-efficacy and hinders the counsellor's ability to connect with and help individuals.

Therefore, **Cultural Authenticity** is established as a non-negotiable component of the proposed framework. The review suggests that a competent CGC must integrate the UAE's tolerance policies and ethical norms, acting as a translator between generational, educational, and economic perspectives. The empirical study seeks to operationalise this theoretical need by gathering firsthand data on the challenges counsellors face in dealing with family influence and cultural interpretation of career choices (e.g., the preference for public vs. private sector employment). The findings will define the specific ethical and interpersonal competencies required to ensure that the guidance offered is linguistically accessible, culturally resonant, and effective in overcoming indigenous barriers to career decision-making . (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019; Roessler, 2012)

Finally, related studies emphasise the unavoidable impact of Industry 4.0 on career trajectories, establishing the trend that **Technological Readiness** must be an integral professional competency. Counsellors are expected to be continuous learners, knowledgeable about emerging technologies and equipped with the digital literacy to leverage tools like virtual platforms, data analytics, and online career assessments. The literature supports that integrating technology not only improves access to resources but also enhances engagement in the counselling process, which is crucial for modernising guidance services. The empirical questions are designed to assess the current technological proficiency of CGCs and identify the necessary competencies to ensure their advice remains relevant in a labour market reshaped by automation and digital careers. Without this theme, the competency framework risks becoming obsolete in the fast-paced, competitive knowledge economy the UAE is striving to build (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021; Harris, 2020)

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In synthesis, the related studies establish a theoretical foundation (CAT, SLT, SCCT) and a practical roadmap (international frameworks). They define the core professional components—cultural authenticity, labour market alignment, and technological readiness—that are essential for a CGC to transition from a reactive advisor to a strategic professional. The subsequent comparative analysis will detail how international models address these themes, while the theoretical proposition will synthesise them into the UAE-specific framework that the empirical investigation is designed to validate.

Comparative analysis of the existing CGC Competency Framework

This section presents a comparative analysis of the career guidance and counselling (CGC) competency frameworks in Canada, the UK (NICE), Australia, and Saudi Arabia. The analysis is structured according to the four theoretical pillars of professional competency: behaviour, cognition, development, and context.

2.4.1 What CGCs Should Do (Behaviour)

Across the four frameworks, the behavioural expectations for counsellors emphasise ethical service delivery and interpersonal mastery. In Canada, practitioners are expected to engage in coordination, consultation, and advocacy, maintaining strict moral norms in all professional interactions. Similarly, the UK (NICE) framework, anchored by the British Association for counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), demands character traits of justice, autonomy, and beneficence, requiring counsellors to maintain rigorous professional boundaries and non-judgmental attitudes. Australian standards focus on multi-modal delivery, requiring practitioners to navigate individual and group counselling while coordinating with diverse student support networks. Saudi Arabian requirements emphasise interdisciplinary collaboration, tasking counsellors with integrating cultural and religious values into their proactive and preventative guidance strategies (Ovri, 2024; Valverde et al., 2020).

2.4.2 What CGCs Should Know (Cognition)

Cognitive competencies vary from highly theoretical to pragmatically focused. Canadian counsellors are required to possess specialised knowledge in counselling or related disciplines, typically at the master's level, to support academic and social-emotional growth. The UK framework prioritises a deep understanding of humanistic approaches and informed consent protocols. Australian practitioners must possess the cognitive capacity to identify, evaluate, and address psychological risks, often requiring degrees in social work or psychology. In contrast, the Saudi Arabian model requires

cognition rooted in the National Curriculum Framework, necessitating an understanding of how to blend contemporary counselling research with traditional Islamic values and national ideals (Magee, 2022; Al-Ababneh, 2020).

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2.4.3 How CGCs Should Grow (Development)

Professional development is a mandatory pillar in all examined regions, though implementation varies. Canada utilises programmatic pillars to guide growth in prevention and education, while the UK emphasises continuous supervision and specialised training for digital or phone-based therapy to meet evolving service demands. The Australian framework establishes lifelong learning as a core expectation to ensure skills remain current. Saudi Arabia provides structured, ongoing development in specialised areas such as gifted education and career-pathway integration, though practitioners often report a need for more localised training (Luca et al., 2022; Arulmani & Kumar. S., 2014).

2.4.4 Where CGCs Apply It (Context)

The application of these competencies is heavily dictated by institutional and national structures. Canadian practitioners apply their framework within a structural pillar that addresses institutional barriers to achievement, navigating high caseloads across diverse provincial jurisdictions. The UK context requires navigating funding constraints and role ambiguity in schools where the counsellor may also serve as a teacher. Australian counsellors operate within localised state and territory regulations, adapting to specific regional governance. Saudi Arabian counsellors apply their skills within a context where traditional family values and collectivism influence the stigma around mental health, requiring high cultural sensitivity (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019; Al-Ababneh, 2020).

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of CGC Professional Competencies

Criteria	**Canada**	**UK (NICE)**	**Australia**	**Saudi Arabia**
Behaviour	Coordination, consultation, and advocacy within moral norms.	Justice, autonomy, and non-judgmental empathy (BACP).	Multi-modal delivery; proactive and reactive support.	Interdisciplinary collaboration and preventative strategies.
Cognition	Expertise in counselling theories (Master's level).	Humanistic approach and awareness of personal biases.	Knowledge of psychology, social work, and risk evaluation.	Alignment with National Curriculum and Islamic values.
Development	Growth through structural and programmatic pillars.	Specialised training in digital and group modalities.	Lifelong learning and state-level accreditation.	Ongoing training in gifted education and career pathways.
Context	Addressing structural barriers across diverse provinces.	Navigating role ambiguity and funding limitations in schools.	Application within specific state/territory regulations.	Sensitivity to family collectivism and cultural norms.

2.5 Critical Comparison of Existing Career Guidance and Counselling Competency Frameworks

The comparative study of NICE, Canadian, Australian and Saudi Arabian models shows that while a number of professional principles are shared, these models are based on different notions of the roles of career guidance counsellors (CGCs), the link between education and employment, and the role of counselling in society. There is a general focus on ethical behaviour, professional responsibility, communication and the need to assist students to make informed choices for education and careers in the existing frameworks. An in-depth study, however, shows that they are not entirely mutually compatible, as they have different institutional objectives, cultural philosophies, and understandings of what professional competency is (Gonsalves, 2021; Al Rasbi, 2019).

Lifelong learning, mobility, social inclusion and the embedding of career guidance into wider European education and employment frameworks are all key features of the NICE framework. The framework imagines counsellors as facilitators of career management skills as well as reflective processes of life design. The Canadian approach puts more emphasis, however, on the whole child and its development, advocacy and collaborative support systems, which include schools, families, and communities. The Australian approach is more specific about employability, risk management, and transitions to the labour market, whereas the Saudi Arabian approach is more focused on social values, cultural orientation and moral upbringing in educational institutions. These are important differences, as the understandings they entail are quite different from what a counsellor is expected to accomplish in the educational system (Valverde et al., 2020; Wong and Yuen, 2019).

Importantly, the differences between the frameworks are not only in terms of structure. There are some frameworks that focus on autonomy and student-centred career exploration, and others that are more state development goal and social expectation oriented. For instance, the emphasis on individual career choices and mobility in Western competency frameworks should be complemented by an understanding of the roles of family, national identity, social responsibility and policies on labour-market localisation in contexts in the Gulf. Thus, skills that are seen as core skills in one framework can be understood differently in another environment. The competency model that originated in a highly decentralised education system might not be transferable to a more policy-oriented education system at a national level like in the UAE (Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023).

Likewise, there are variations in how labour-market alignment is addressed across the frameworks. Others international models emphasise counselling process and psychological support, while others make explicit mention of the economic priorities and workforce preparation. The UAE Government's Emiratisation policy also relies on public education to directly support the country's economic plans for human-capital development and the building of a competitive knowledge economy (UAE Government, 2021). If not contextualised, the implementation of international competency frameworks can create a model that is theoretically coherent, but practically unachievable in UAE schools and in terms of the expectations of the labour market.

Another significant restriction is technological readiness. Current frameworks recognise the increasing role of technology in education and career development but most of them were developed prior to the rapid shifts in the technological revolution, artificial intelligence, and technologically mediated work systems. The UAE is undergoing a constant transformation in its labour market, with innovation, automation, and economic diversification driving the change. Therefore, CGCs must also possess skills and competencies in areas outside of interpersonal counselling, such as digital literacy, labour-market knowledge and analysis, technological awareness, and helping students navigate their way through increasingly complex career tracks (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021; García-Péres, 2021). The current frameworks offer good foundations but do not capture the pace and scale of technological change impacting educational and employment systems in the UAE.

The comparative analysis further shows that international standards are not adequate to capture cultural authenticity in the context of the UAE. Career guidance in the UAE is embedded in a society that values culture, social cohesion, religion and family. Multiculturalism is accepted and acknowledged internationally, but there are still a number of imported models where career guidance is taken to be culturally neutral and universally applicable. Social expectations, notions of prestige, national development objectives, however, and the nature of local identity and globalisation all play significant roles in career decisions in the UAE. It is therefore necessary to incorporate competencies that will allow the UAE counsellor to work in culturally sensitive environments and to comply with international standards of practice (Lehman et al., 2019; Lindholm, 2007).

2.5.1 Limits of Existing Theoretical Frameworks for the UAE Context

Theoretical perspectives in the career guidance literature offer valuable insights for counselling practice, professional learning, and career development. But none of the theories comprehensively encompasses the complexity of career guidance and counselling in the UAE educational system. This study will instead take a selective integrative theoretical approach as opposed to one major, overarching explanatory approach (Al Rasbi, 2019; Gonsalves, 2021)

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The research is mainly based on the three theories: Culture and Authenticity Theory (CAT), Social Learning Theory (SLT), and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT).

Theories were chosen because they, when combined with one another, form an explanation of the relationship between culture, learning, identity, environment and career behaviour. CAT is significant in particular because it focuses on the issues of authenticity, cultural legitimacy and social identity in counselling relationships. Counsellors are required to work within the context of the UAE's educational landscape that is influenced by the UAE cultural values, family expectations and social norms. To grasp the professional competency, one has to move beyond the technical aspect and embrace the ability to practice guidance that is culturally responsive and contextually authentic (Vannini & Williams, 2016; Roessler, 2012).

The SLT was chosen as it speaks about the development of professional competencies through observation, interaction, modelling and institutional experience. This holds particular significance in the UAE context, where CGCs are likely to acquire both knowledge and skills through practice, collaboration, and continuous professional development, as opposed to just relying on standardised professional development routes (Bandura, 2014a; Rumjaun & Narod, 2025).

SCCT was also chosen because it offers a solid explanation of the career behaviour and decision-making process that is influenced by self-efficacy, outcome expectations and environmental supports. It is an especially important view to help students deal with the challenges of educational transitions and labour-market uncertainty in a competitive economy (Lent and Brown, 2013).

This study also intentionally does not limit itself to universalist competency theories that view professional competency as completely transferable from country to country and culture to culture. All such approaches assume that the competencies acquired in one country can be transferred without change to another country. The comparative analysis,

however, shows that competency frameworks are very much embedded in local educational systems, in the structure of the labour market, in policy agendas and in cultural expectations. Hence, a generic competency model would not be sufficient to address all the social, educational and economic in the UAE context (Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023; Lindholm, 2007).

Likewise, purely psychological career development theories were not used as the organising principle for this study, since they tend to have a strong individual focus on career development and decision-making, and lack enough attention to institutional structures, national policy goals and labour-market transformation. While these theories are still relevant to the understanding of student development, these theories do not provide a comprehensive account of competency frameworks as organisational and policy tools in educational systems (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019; Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023).

This innovativeness of the current research is linked to the combination of international competency concepts with a contextually based UAE framework architecture. It is in this originality that this originality functions in three interrelated dimensions. Firstly, the study has contributed to contextual translation by making the international principles of career guidance applicable in the UAE educational, social and economic context. Second, it aids role clarification of CGCs by outlining the roles, expectations and competencies in UAE public schools where role ambiguity has long been a problem. Third, most importantly, the study provides the framework architecture with the development of a competency structure based on cultural authenticity, labour-market alignment and technological readiness as core professional domains of competency (Al Rasbi, 2019; Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019).

This contribution is original in the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) level as it not only describes the existing theories or compares the international frameworks. It instead combines theory, policy, and practice into a locally relevant competency framework that responds to a practical organisational and national issue. The originality thus does not involve the creation of a new theory; rather, it involves creating a framework grounded in theory that will enhance professional standards, boost counselling effectiveness, and provide a foundation for the development of the counselling workforce in the UAE (Al Rasbi, 2019; Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023)

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2.6 Theoretical framework for building the UAE CGC competency framework.

The examples of competency frameworks in the previous section indicate that there are some useful sources of information that can be used to help develop the competency definition of the career guidance counsellor role from existing frameworks found in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Saudi Arabia. It is, however, clear from the analysis that there is no single blueprint to be taken out of the context and applied in the UAE context, in that competency is never developed or applied in a cultural vacuum. The comparative evidence shows that each of these frameworks is representative of the circumstances in the country where it was created, in terms of the policy context, the structure of the labour market, the expectations of professionals and the social values.

The challenge in the UAE is not just to borrow existing competencies; however, it is to reframe and reinterpret them using a theory grounded in local contexts as they explain why some competencies are more important than others, how they are to be understood, and what conditions underlie their effectiveness (Al Rasbi, 2019; Gonsalves, 2021). In this context, theory is not employed to re-state general principles; rather, it is used to help inform the design of a framework that is responsive to the UAE context of education, society and economy.

The study thus relies on three theories: Culture and Authenticity Theory (CAT), Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) not as complete theories, but rather as lenses to complement each other in building a competency model in the context of the UAE. CAT is useful because it emphasises the significance of cultural identity/indigenisation and context sensitivity in professional practice. Career guidance in the UAE is not culturally neutral, as students' career decisions are influenced by family expectations, social norms, language, national identity and the significance attached to the various careers within Emirati society. Authenticity, in this case, is less a moral concern and more a practical one, in that counsellors who are attuned to the realities of their students' lives and their local values must be authentic, secure, and credible in their interactions with them (Lehman et al., 2019; Lindholm, 2007; Vannini & Williams, 2016). This is particularly important in a multicultural UAE public school system that caters for a diversified population with CGCs having to manoeuvre Emirati cultural expectations as well as the UAE multicultural environment (Roessler, 2012). Thus, a key principle that CAT brings to the definition of a competency framework for the UAE is one which focuses on the how as well as the what of a counsellor's role.CAT therefore provides an essential principle for a competency framework

for the UAE: the focus is not simply on what counsellors do, but on how they do it in culturally legitimate and contextually appropriate ways.

Simultaneously, CAT can be used alone to create competency frameworks. While cultural authenticity is a key reason for the importance of local sensitivity, it does not provide any specification as to how counsellors learn effective practice, how they build professional capability or how competency is translated into practice through observation, reinforcement and experience. SLT fills in that void. The framework is enhanced by strong support from Social Learning Theory as it is seen that professional competency is developed through interaction, modelling, imitation, reflection and influence of the surrounding environment (Bandura, 2014a, 2014b; Rumjaun & Narod, 2025). This is particularly important when working in a school setting as counsellors gain knowledge from colleagues, school culture, leadership vision and day to day work. SLT is particularly relevant for the UAE context as it has historically been poorly understood and not consistently applied, helping to explain why SLT is also a core condition for competency (Sultana & Watts, 2005; Luca et al., 2022). The theory, therefore, lends support to having a framework that sees counsellors not as repositories of knowledge, but as practitioners whose competencies are built over time from social and institutional learning.

But the process of developing frameworks remains a problem with SLT alone. It can describe the acquisition and adaptation of behaviours in the social context, but it does not completely explain the internal decision processes from self-beliefs, outcome expectations, to goal setting to career behaviour. It is here that SCCT is so important. Social Cognitive Career Theory has a clear conceptual connection between personal agency and contextual conditions and is therefore very applicable to a competency framework developed for career guidance in schools (Lent & Brown, 2013; Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021). SCCT theorises that career interests, career choices, career performance and career satisfaction are determined by factors relating to self-efficacy, expected outcomes, and supports/barriers in the environment. This is important for the UAE because the outcomes of the students' career path are determined by their ability, motivation, family influence, institutional support and opportunity in the labour market. It is, therefore, imperative that CGCs develop competencies that will allow them to evaluate these dynamics and promote students' confidence, as well as enable them to take aspirational action in a realistic and informed way (Stipanovic, 2017; Chen & Bansal, 2021; Bhati & Sethy, 2022). SCCT is particularly useful, as it reflects an interaction between

personal, social and structural dimensions that is very relevant to guidance practice and that the UAE framework needs to address.

However, if applied individually, SCCT has its limitations. It offers a robust description of the career development processes but it doesn't prescribe the institutional and policy structures that a national competency framework needs to support. The UAE framework cannot be created just based on self-efficacy and student choice; it has to take on national priorities, workforce plans, public education objectives and the long-term development agenda of the UAE. This is the reason for the importance of the framework being clearly influenced by five contextual factors: culture, authenticity, policy, labour-market needs and technological development. These are not the "peripheral" factors, but rather the factors that make competency a reality. The UAE's approach to education is highly focused on supporting a competitive knowledge economy, providing a first-class educational system and a united society with a preserved identity as outlined in UAE Vision 2021 and ongoing UAE strategic direction (UAE Government 2021). Career guidance must, therefore, help to build human capital and national unity. A competency model for CGCs should take into consideration this dual mandate by ensuring that counsellors can have the capability to assist students with their academic and career choices, also aligning those with national development goals and Emiratisation priorities (Al Rasbi, 2019; UAE vision 2021, 2022).

Labour-market alignment is a major context factor, therefore. The UAE labour market is very dynamic, international and influenced by the fast development of the economy, new skills requirements and growth in technological sectors. Under these conditions, counsellors should not be prepared with generic guidance skills, but rather a knowledge of the labour market, analytical skills and an understanding of the evolving nature of occupations and careers for students and families. What is evident in the literature already is the need for support for students to link their interests and capacities to the realities of the job market, as well as the need for counsellors to act as facilitators in bridging the gap between education and employment (Nwakanma, 2024; UNESCO, 2021; Herdman et al., 2024). Therefore, local skills and competencies in labour-market intelligence, information on careers, transition support and facilitation of information for making decisions should be part of any local framework. If it is not aligned, the framework would be conceptually appropriate but have no real-world connection for learners as they transition from school to further learning or work.

The second primary force is policy. Career guidance is not just a school support service, as in the UAE, it is an integral part of a broader state project, which has a wider remit

of looking at education quality, national capability and sustainability of the workforce for the future. A competency-based framework needs, therefore, to be shaped by the Ministry of education's priorities, the expectations of public schools, as well as the policy logic of national visions and initiatives. In part, this is why the position of the CGC has not been easy to make stable: it has been a position which has been entrenched in policy frameworks, and not always in a clearly defined professional framework. However, this gap can be bridged by the adoption of a competency framework which serves to clarify the expectations of roles, standardise practice, and offer a foundation for training, evaluation, and professional development (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019; Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023). That means that policy is not just an influencing factor to the framework but rather one of the main context frameworks that the framework has to operationalise.

Thirdly, the UAE framework should be influenced by technological change. The reviewed literature above shows that digital literacy, awareness of AI and technology within the educational process and counselling practice are of great importance (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021; Harris, 2020). This is not just for ease of use. Counsellors need to have the ability to communicate, seek information, engage in exploration and tailor the way they deliver information to new ways of learning and working, as the labour market and the information about careers become more digital. Such a competency-based framework, in a labour market that is being reshaped by automation, online platforms and digitally-mediated careers, will soon become obsolete. Technological readiness must thus be seen for the UAE as an integral part of the professional competencies of the professionals and not as a bonus. It must be incorporated with cultural responsiveness and labour-market awareness, as all three dimensions influence the effectiveness of counselling in contemporary schools (Fuller, 2019; Nadon et al., 2016; Disriere & Vronska, 2020).

CAT, SLT and SCCT together offer a good theoretical basis, but this cannot be a substitute for contextual construction. Each of these theories is briefly explained and described in their context and how they apply to the three personal, social, and cultural concepts that were explored. Each of these theories is described and explained within the context of the three personal, social, and cultural concepts explored, and how they relate to the development of competency through social and experiential learning, as well as the importance and role of authenticity and cultural legitimacy, and the role of personal agency, environment, and self-efficacy in influencing career behaviour. However, none of these theories can identify all the skills required in the UAE as they address only a subset of the skills required in each of the

following areas: national policy priorities, labour-market alignment, technological change, and Emirati cultural authenticity. The approach should thus be defined as a local response which is integrated, where the theory is used to understand and explain the UAE context, not to replace it. This is why in this study the framework is proposed not only in the form of repetition of theoretical aspects but also in the form of contextual synthesis. It is not a model or framework imported, modified and supported with local examples; it is a competency structure that is developed through the interaction between international theory, comparative framework analysis and the local needs of public education in the UAE (Al Rasbi, 2019; Gonsalves, 2021).

The concept behind the theoretical contribution of this section is to warrant a framework that is locally anchored, internationally knowledgeable and practically applicable. This UAE CGC competency framework should be linked to the social context, the policy frameworks, technological adaptation and the demand for skills in the labour market. It also must maintain cultural authenticity without being culturally restrictive and professional development without limiting competency to attending training. This synthesis serves as a basis for the next section, which examines the theoretical underpinning to shape the competency framework and provides a means of converting these theoretical threads into a viable framework in the UAE context (Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023; Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019).

2.7 The Need for A New UAE CGC Competency Framework

The need for educational guidance has become increasingly urgent and essential on a global scale, particularly considering technological advancements that have transformed citizens' perceptions of their societies and enhanced their self-awareness (Joncas & Pilote, 2021). These changes have prompted individuals to reassess their capabilities to adapt to the social transformations accompanying this development. In this context, it is crucial to understand the relevance of Career Guidance Counselling (CGC). This approach underscores the significance and value of guidance counsellors in the educational landscape (Ansloos et al., 2022). Furthermore, CGC is instrumental in helping adolescents make informed decisions that align with their expectations, knowledge, skills, aptitudes, values, and the prevailing labour market dynamics. However, the current examination of various competency frameworks raises critical questions about their applicability to the UAE context. If these frameworks are deemed

suitable, it is essential to clarify the rationale for conducting this research. Conversely, suppose they are found to be inadequate. In that case, it is necessary to identify the specific reasons that warrant developing a new framework tailored to the UAE's unique needs (Day, 2015).

In the UAE educational environment, counsellors need to integrate tolerance as a vital component of labour laws and ethical standards into their daily practices. (Abdel Fattah & Abboud, 2024). By embodying these principles, CGC can help clients achieve their goals and develop rewarding careers (Lasarus & Ihuoma, 2011). As mentioned earlier, SCCT emphasises self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their ability to perform. It plays a crucial role in motivation (Lent & Brown, 2013). On the opposite side is barriers-efficacy, which relates to confidence in one's ability to overcome social, personal, and environmental obstacles (Joncas & Pilote, 2021). Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to overcome challenges and remain motivated during transitions (Feller & Furbish, 2013). Therefore, by addressing self-efficacy and expected outcomes across all five extant SCCT models (interest, choice, performance, satisfaction, and career self-management) (Brown & Lent, 2019), CGCs can help clients outline steps to achieve their goals and promote positivity in their lives. Chen and Bansal (2022) note that throughout students' learning journey, they face new obstacles that can be difficult to overcome on their own. That is why CGCs' role is to provide ongoing support and motivation and to encourage individuals to stay on the right track while addressing any significant concerns that may arise.

In addition to the significant increase in population, which has been reflected in schools' ability to accommodate more students (Ansloos et al., 2022). This has led to several issues in schools, including difficulties with academic adaptation, delays, challenges in identifying students' abilities, readiness, and tendencies, and determining how to invest in them effectively. It also includes problems in designing curricula to meet societal needs and transferring those who are behind to the appropriate authorities for their care and rehabilitation (Cohen et al., 2022). Students must possess specific skills and talents to thrive in their future careers as the labour market becomes increasingly competitive (Presti, 2022). An accessible framework for professional advice and competency among CGCs is essential, encompassing goal-setting, recognising strengths and weaknesses, exploring career pathways, overseeing professional growth, and fostering networking opportunities. Such a framework facilitates reflection on students' development, skills, and academic progress, offering practical guidance aligning their interests and abilities with labour market demands (Magee, 2022; Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023).

The literature review highlights several key limitations that underscore the need for this research. Although international frameworks such as the NICE and Canadian Standards and Guidelines offer well-established models for defining career guidance and counselling competencies, the study aims to align these frameworks with the authentic contexts of the UAE. Therefore, a significant gap persists in the implementation of guidance and counselling models; besides, the existing study aims to develop a competency framework for the guidance and counselling programme that maintains the authenticity of application within the local context, especially in preparing students to meet the demands of the diverse national labour market (Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023). Therefore, to ensure that the roles of CGCs are effectively addressed in the UAE, it is essential to define the professional competencies required for these roles. This includes identifying the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable CGCs to influence students' responses to the UAE's Vision and National Agenda. Developing a unified competency framework would enhance the clarity and consistency of CGC practices across schools, thereby improving trust in their role and impact, particularly in student preparedness, achievement, and lifelong learning (Al-Darmaki, 2005).

Reflecting the significant challenges the era faces, and the obstacles students may encounter at different stages of their education, the need for a Competency Framework in the UAE has emerged (Al-Darmaki et al., 2012). This is seen as the foundation for nurturing a generation that is psychologically and socially balanced by providing support, helping them face challenges, and fostering positive behaviour and skill development through monitoring and discipline within schools, as well as preparing for the future diverse labour market demands aligned with the country's visions (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019). To promote a systematic, practical approach to student support, the UAE's education system needs to develop a comprehensive competency framework that aligns with schools' professional standards. Considering, implementing, and participating in data-driven interventions are essential to CGCs' professionalism. This framework offers counsellors a clear guide to address students' social-emotional, academic, behavioural, and career development, in line with the school's objectives (Al Rasbi, 2019).

Despite the increasing demand for CGC services in the UAE, counsellors face numerous challenges that impede their effectiveness. They encounter various obstacles in offering practical guidance to their students, as the study aims to highlight these issues to foster a supportive educational and scientific environment. To summarise, the primary challenge is

the lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of career counselling. (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019; Al-Darmaki et al., 2012)

For example, Al-Darmaki (2012) found that women majoring in humanities and social sciences in the UAE are more susceptible to stigma regarding career counselling than those majoring in hard sciences. Furthermore, the stigma associated with career counselling negatively affects the self-esteem and self-efficacy of both men and women in the UAE (Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023). This stigma presents a significant barrier for CGCs in the UAE, restricting their ability to reach and support individuals who could benefit from career counselling services (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019).

Many obstacles affect the process of educational guidance and counselling in UAE schools. Due to the intellectual and educational development witnessed globally, the focus has shifted to the student as the central focus of the educational process. In other words, there is an emphasis on mental development in its various dimensions (Al Hefaiti and Jusoh 2023). Therefore, there is a need to understand the impact of educational guidance in an advanced and effective manner, so that it can play its role in the educational environment without restrictions. Here comes the question: Who is responsible for clarifying the role of educational guidance and the educational counsellor's missions in the school? The answer is that the responsibility is shared among the teacher, the school guidance and counselling staff, the school administration, and the parents (Al-Darmaki, 2005). CGCs must operate independently of school administration and its regulations, as this is crucial to maintaining their professional focus and enhancing their expertise in serving students effectively. Moreover, they should remain unaffected by parents' negative sentiments, ensuring their commitment to student well-being and academic success remains unwavering (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019).

The existing discussion highlighted the need for a specific competency framework for CGCs in the UAE. To support proper certification and training, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is developing standards and offering support through educational programmes delivered by accredited institutions and professional organisations, e.g., ASCA, NCDA, or by collaborating with other institutions in the UAE, such as universities. However, establishing clear laws and regulations to support CGC functions could improve the effectiveness of these initiatives. Therefore, by aligning models from NICE, Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabia with those of the UAE, policymakers might consider integrating successful and relevant elements into existing competency frameworks. This approach could further develop and

enhance the CGC profession while incorporating initiatives such as Emiratisation programmes (Al Rasbi, 2019).

The clear mandate for a context-specific framework necessitates outlining its key structural components and defining the empirical inquiries that will guide its development; therefore, the following section proposes the theoretical pillars of the UAE CGC competency framework and finalises the research questions.

2.8 Theoretical Proposition and Development of Research Questions.

As shown in Figure 2, the UAE CGC competency framework comprises three key components that were previously absent in other frameworks: labour market alignment, technological readiness, and cultural authenticity.

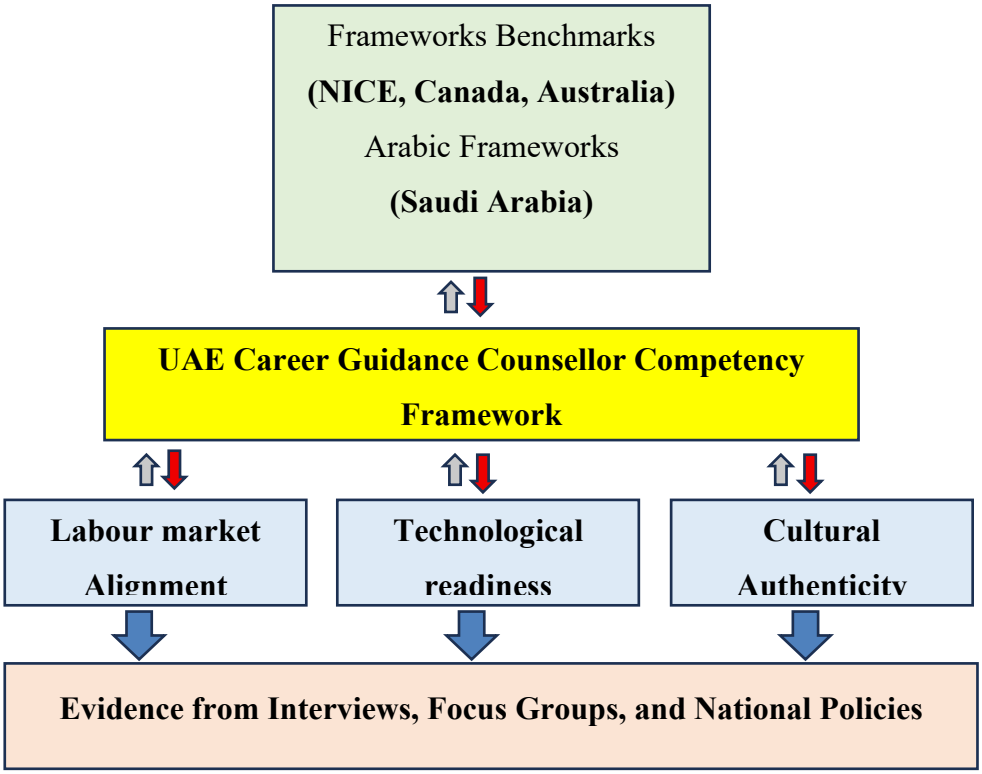


Figure 2: A proposed UAE CGC Competency Framework

1. **Labour market alignment:**

Labour Market Alignment is a pivotal aspect of the UAE CGC competency framework. Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) bridge the gap between academic study and labour-market needs, guiding individuals through educational and career choices. They help clients identify their interests and strengths, explore various career options, and develop the

skills necessary for workplace success. CGCs act as vital connectors between education and employment, empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their future paths. (UNESCO, 2021).

In the context of the UAE's diverse labour market, characterised by rapid technological advancement, CGCS needs to align its practices with national priorities, particularly those outlined in the UAE Vision 2021. The competency framework integrates relevant theories grounded in practitioners' current and desired practices, providing insights into human behaviour, motivation, learning, and decision-making processes. (UAE Government, 2021).

To create a practical competency framework, CGCs must enhance their analytical skills and ability to deliver personalised advice. This requires a comprehensive understanding of various assessment tools and methodologies to accurately evaluate the unique needs, interests, personalities, and skills of the individuals they serve. Ongoing professional development through workshops and training programmes is crucial for practitioners to stay current with the latest trends and best practices in the field. (Arulmani & Kumar. S., 2014).

Collaborative efforts with interdisciplinary teams enrich practitioners' perspectives, allowing for more holistic guidance. Incorporating client feedback further refines CGC strategies, ensuring relevance and impact. By focusing on these areas, CGCs can build a robust competency framework that enhances their effectiveness and empowers individuals to make informed career decisions aligned with their aspirations. Moreover, considering environmental factors such as educators' perspectives, familial expectations, and broader cultural and economic contexts enables counsellors to help individuals set realistic career goals (Racene and Dislere, 2019; Solehuddin, 2022).

2. Technological Readiness

The UAE National Agenda and Vision serve as foundational frameworks that underscore the importance of technological readiness in the workplace. Consequently, technological readiness is a crucial component of the CGC competency framework. It empowers counsellors to make informed decisions that align with their skills and values in a rapidly changing labour market. To provide adequate counselling, CGC needs to adapt to shifts in economic cycles, technological advancements, national labour laws, and competitive environments (Fuller, 2019; Nadon et al., 2016; Arun and Sivakumar, 2018). This component emphasises digital literacy, familiarity with various digital tools, and the ability to utilise technology for effective communication and information sharing. Research indicates that

integrating technology into career counselling not only improves access to resources but also enhances engagement in the counselling process (Harris, 2020). By leveraging their knowledge and skills, CGCs can provide essential guidance that helps individuals successfully navigate their career paths (Disriere & Vronska, 2020).

Counsellors play a crucial role in promoting career readiness, social-emotional well-being, and academic success. The use of digital tools greatly improves counselling services. Virtual platforms like Soom and Google Meet facilitate meetings and counselling sessions, accommodating various schedules and learning preferences. Applications such as Google Docs, Google Sheets, and Google Calendar streamline administrative tasks, helping counsellors organise workflows and communicate effectively with colleagues and stakeholders. Additionally, data analytics and career assessment tools help CGCs identify performance and preference trends, enabling them to customise guidance strategies to address the specific needs of those seeking support. By emphasising technological readiness, the CGC competency framework equips career guidance counsellors to adapt to the evolving educational landscape, ensuring high-quality, responsive support for a diverse client base (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021).

3. Cultural authenticity

Cultural authenticity is a core component of the CGC framework (James et al., 2021). Authentic counsellors are defined by their sincerity, approachability, and reliability (Evans & Sejuit, 2021, pp. 76, 211). They follow the UAE's standards, as reflected in the distinctive cultural and ethical norms of the Ministry of Education, the UAE's tolerance policies, and the professional responsibilities outlined in the profession's code of conduct for UAE employees (Vargas et al., 2023).

The significance of the UAE Vision lies in its cohesive structure, characterised by interconnected pillars that foster continuity and connectivity from the 2010 vision to the long-term aspirations set for 2071. This interconnected approach reflects a unified strategy encompassing diverse aspects, aims, objectives, and procedures (UAE, 2023). Cultural authenticity is manifested through consistent communication, strong interpersonal skills, and a profound understanding of the diverse backgrounds of individuals seeking guidance (Lindholm, 2007; Nasarqulova et al., 2025). Essential skills within this framework foster an environment of trust and openness, promoting genuine interactions that enhance the overall counselling experience (Al Falasi and Alsouebi, 2019; Liu and Jin, 2021).

Understanding the vital role of the CGC in guiding students' academic and career paths, the CGC Competency Framework has become a crucial part of education. School leaders and policymakers are increasingly recognising the importance of practical career guidance in helping individuals make informed choices. Practical guidance involves two related steps: collaborating with opportunity providers such as employers and educational institutions and supporting individuals as they explore and choose among available options (Vargas et al., 2023). This approach not only assists individuals in making well-informed career decisions but also helps in building a skilled, culturally competent workforce in the UAE.

By incorporating cultural authenticity into the CGC framework, the effectiveness of career guidance is enhanced, fostering greater sensitivity to diverse cultural contexts in public schools. Recognising and integrating diverse cultural backgrounds into the counselling process allows CGCs to establish a more inclusive and supportive environment that promotes both academic and personal growth. Participants are encouraged to obtain qualifications that enhance their expertise and skills, raising the quality of guidance and counselling services they offer (Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023).

This initiative aims to improve individual professional standards and meet the rising demand for qualified counsellors in the educational labour market. By addressing these challenges, counsellors can better align their practices with the UAE's Vision 2021 and 2031, as well as with frameworks from NICE, Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabia. (Al Rasbi, 2019).

Moreover, obtaining advanced credentials in CGC can create new opportunities for career growth, networking, and collaboration. It enables counsellors to contribute effectively to community career initiatives, support diverse populations, and engage in continuous professional development. This comprehensive approach benefits individual practitioners within the CGC field, improving the overall environment for guidance and counselling services in the region. Ultimately, the focus on cultural authenticity strengthens the foundation of the UAE's educational system, aligning it with the nation's vision for a unified and cohesive society. (Sucharitha et al., 2021; Al Hefaiti and Jusoh, 2023)

In conclusion, the development of a Competency Framework for guidance counsellors in UAE schools is crucial for establishing a standard of professional excellence and promoting continuous improvement within the educational landscape. This framework not only ensures that career counselling services effectively support individuals in their academic and career pursuits but also aligns with the national vision to foster a knowledge-based economy and a highly skilled workforce. By emphasising the significance of cultural authenticity, the

framework underscores the essential role of career guidance counsellors in nurturing an inclusive and responsive educational environment (Sucharitha et al., 2021).

The subsequent summary section synthesises the key insights derived from the literature review, reinforcing the essential role of the proposed framework's components—labour market alignment, technological readiness, and cultural authenticity—in guiding the subsequent methodological design.

2.9 Summary

This chapter addresses the concept of educational guidance and counselling, which plays a significant role in helping students discover their academic abilities and potential. It provides a clear study plan, assists students in choosing an appropriate major, and helps them adapt to their educational and social environments by offering sufficient, relevant information. This enables them to follow the optimal behavioural path, which will help them successfully achieve their life goals, both within and outside the educational institution. To help school counsellors advance their school counselling programmes, this chapter provides a conceptual framework for doing so (Popescu, 2021).

By outlining how the counselling programme is anticipated to develop, a counselling vision provides direction for the work that counsellors conduct. Additionally, this chapter examined Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), one of the fundamental theories supporting CGC practice. This theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding how counsellors influence students' growth, particularly in multicultural and dynamic contexts such as the UAE. This critical examination of international competency frameworks, which offer proven, empirically supported methods for defining and assessing professional competencies in guidance and counselling, is based on this theoretical foundation. Another theory the chapter includes is the Social Learning Theory (SLT), which focuses on behavioural and cognitive perceptions in working with students and how it can help CGC in their counselling process (Brown & Lent, 2019; Lent and Brown, 2013)

The chapter also addressed the urgent reasons for a new CGC Competency Framework in the UAE. In the UAE's society, students face increasingly complex challenges after school due to rapid technological growth. This has significantly affected the outcomes of traditional teaching methods, and graduates may require more time to secure employment. Thus, it is impossible to exaggerate the CGC's significant role, whose efforts have helped people prepare to adapt to changes in the labour market. Then, to help people overcome and manage the needs and obstacles they encounter in their environment, CGCs, as life designers, need to be professionally developed academically, behaviourally, and socially (Magruk & Rollnik-Sadowska, 2021; Ana-Mariana et al., 2024).

All relevant educational stakeholders who agree that the educational advice process is essential to education and serves as a link between students and stakeholders are the focus of the new UAE competency framework. In addition to helping students choose their career path and develop strong professional relationships, the counsellor always aims to establish an

educational environment that meets students' basic needs and to address issues in the educational process. This also entails directing people and groups by the specifics of the problem. As a result, having an academic counsellor as staff at school is essential (Al-Darmaki, 2005; Al Rasbi, 2019).

Above all, with a clear competency framework, CGCs can provide valuable information and guidance to help clients navigate their career paths. Aligning the NICE, Canadian, Australian, or Saudi Arabian frameworks will support the development of the UAE framework and meet Vision by exploring how CGCs can assist Emirati adolescents in choosing the right career path, considering the UAE's unique environment, authenticity, and cultural aspects. (Magee, 2022).

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The Research Methodology chapter presents a structured investigative process designed as a direct response to the theoretical gaps identified in Chapter 2. This methodology is structured to gather empirical data (Post-data Re-alignment) that informs the contextually grounded theoretical framework proposed earlier, specifically addressing the need for a culturally authentic model. By bridging Culture and Authenticity Theory (CAT), Social Learning Theory (SLT), and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) with a comparative analysis of international models from NICE, Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabia, this chapter details the instruments used to deepen the understanding of competencies required for UAE career counsellors. At its core, research is about exploring and creating knowledge using rigorous scientific methodologies, playing a structural role in shaping and understanding the world.

The primary objective of this research was to formulate a theoretical framework for career guidance and counselling (CGCs) within the United Arab Emirates (UAE), utilising systematic data collection techniques, including in-depth interviews and focused group discussions with voluntary participants. It is essential to emphasise that this study aims to establish and implement a Competency Framework aligned with the standards aligned by the UAE's policies for the visions of 2021 and 2031. This framework will be based on exemplary practices observed internationally, including those from NICE, Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabia. The intent is to identify gaps within the existing framework, match it with the 2021 National Agenda, and emphasise the importance of employing professionally competent CGCs in UAE educational institutions. Fundamentally, this chapter supports the assessment of the research findings' reliability and validity. The researcher's positionality as both an insider and an outsider practitioner influences the conduct and outcomes of the study. As a reflexive practitioner seeking competent competency frameworks for CGCs in UAE public schools, this dual role facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the field, including the development of best practices and the recognition of notable challenges. However, it necessitates heightened awareness to mitigate potential biases and perspectives intrinsic to the researcher's workplace environment. By employing ethnographically influenced methods, the study seeks to examine impersonal norms, practices, and values within the field, thereby maintaining credibility through professional integrity training. Therefore, reflexivity assumes a central role in

mediating between the insider perspective and the more general, often external, research interests (Cayir et al., 2022; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

The methodology is structured to address the research questions, which include:

I. What are the key challenges and effectiveness perceptions of the UAE's school-based career guidance system compared to international frameworks?

II. How can a competency framework for career guidance counsellors (CGCs) boost student career readiness and support the UAE's workforce initiatives?

III. What critical competencies do career guidance and counsellors need to help students make informed labour market decisions?

IV. How do counsellors' perceptions of career guidance programmes impact student outcomes and programme effectiveness?

The Saunders Research Onion guides the research technique. To help students develop a more structured and methodical approach, Saunders et al., (2019) developed the research onion model, which tries to define the many stages of dissertation writing. The research onion model provides a metaphorical representation of how several research project components could be investigated to arrive at the ultimate study design (Melnikovas, 2018). The current study is an in-depth qualitative investigation based on primary data collection from the relevant field. In this model, methodological choices were made using a step-by-step process to conduct this study as efficiently as possible. The reason for using Saunders' research onion method is that it provides a systematic approach and a precise framework to conduct thorough research (Abdelhakim, 2021). The research onion gradually narrows the research from the philosophical foundation to the reasoning approach and from the data-gathering strategy to the analysis approaches (Mardiana, 2020). In current research, the Saunders research onion comprises six main phases that are systematically followed to advance decisions from one to the next until the ultimate choices for data collection and analysis are made and supported, as illustrated in Figure 3.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Research Design

Philosophy is the process of deep and systematic reflection on the nature of existence, knowledge, values, logic, and beauty. It seeks to understand the fundamental principles that govern human reality and the world. In design, philosophy serves as the intellectual framework that guides designers in understanding the relationships among humanity, the environment, society, and technology. It helps designers think critically and creatively about problem-solving and achieving a balance between beauty, function, and meaning. In other words, design philosophy defines the vision and beliefs upon which a designer bases their work, such as: What is the purpose of the design? Who benefits from it? And what values should it embody? Therefore, philosophy in design is not merely intellectual contemplation but rather a practical guide to design practices, considering specific existential and epistemological beliefs and concepts (Bemme, 2023).

The research philosophy serves as the foundation for the study's design, data collection, and interpretation, specifically framed to resolve the lack of a context-specific CGC framework in the UAE. The current research adopts an interpretivist philosophical stance within a qualitative framework to explore and interpret the social realities and meaning attributes of CGCs. This approach allows the researcher to understand how CGCs construct and perceive competency through lived experiences, professional contexts, and interactions, directly informing the integration of CAT, SLT, and SCCT. By utilising observational means from both insider and outsider positions, gathered through in-depth interviews and focus groups, the study enables participants to express their perspectives in their own words, emphasising that reality is inherently distinct for each participant.

While acknowledging alternative paradigms such as positivism and critical realism, this study recognises that these frameworks are based on contrasting assumptions. Positivism asserts that perceptions and behaviours constitute social reality, whereas objectivism maintains that the interpretations and experiences of social actors do not influence their capacity to survive (Saunders et al., 2019). Positivism assumes that there is more than one existence that the researcher reveals its various implications during the research, so the researcher cannot identify and understand human behaviour through external factors only but rather determine and understand that human behaviour is formed through the meanings and concepts that people have about the existence in which they live (Bogna et al., 2020).

The humanistic philosophical vision of science aims to comprehensively address the standards of scientific behaviour and the values of scientific practice, encompassing the

ethics of research and the production of scientific knowledge that underpin contemporary civilisational progress (Shan, 2022). A research philosophy depends on purely rational considerations that transcend the data of the senses; that is, it does not seek after the objective sensual facts of the external world but instead seeks after the hidden meanings in this external existence, such as causation, place, and time (Mbanaso et al., 2023). Philosophical assumptions can be viewed from three angles: Positivism, interpretivism, and critical realism.

Finally, critical realism emphasises the importance of meaning and action in examining social attitudes and values, recognising that people's subjective experiences, beliefs, and behaviours are just as meaningful as objective, observable facts. Critical realism provides a nuanced and insightful examination of the formation of contemporary social values, their implications, and the theoretical issues that arise, aiming to determine their logical origin and objective value (Bogna et al., 2020).

Consequently, the research philosophy integrates interpretivism with a constructivist understanding of meaning formation. In this study, interpretivism was employed, resulting in a critical and realistic perspective that acknowledges knowledge is constructed through experiences and daily interactions. The primary justification for adopting this philosophy is to facilitate analysis and generalisation, thereby extending its applicability to encompass the entire spectrum of employees engaged in CGC within UAE schools. The aim is to design and develop a competency framework for career counsellors in the UAE, aligned with adapted practices from global models such as NICE in Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabia, while also considering the UAE's authentic cultural context. The genuine societal culture of the UAE is rooted in an inspired divine source and complemented by human intuition, which together form the foundation for this research. It underscores that meaning is generated through observation and the interaction between CGCs and their clients. Recognising the authentic cultural context of the UAE reveals that cultural and social values and experiences significantly influence individual perception and skill development, as evidenced in participant interviews and the data collection process.

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology concerns the nature of reality and what can be known about it (Goddard and Melville, 2004; Gaus, 2017; Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). This study adopts a relativist ontological position, which holds that multiple realities exist and are socially constructed through individuals' experiences and perceptions. Highlighting the interpretation of the

guidance process for students in high schools by the Current knowledge base concerning guidance programmes. It primarily focuses on the essential role of a competency framework in guiding the activities of CGCs operating in schools across the UAE. The ontology presented in this research illustrates the understanding and conceptualisation of their work by CGCs in UAE schools, including how they develop their competency in guidance programmes with individuals. Therefore, reality is inherently distinct for each participant, emphasising the subjective nature of the observed reality and utilising interpersonal skills required for the research (Cayir, 2022).

The current qualitative research methodology involves data collection through ethnographic substance using observational means from both an insider and outsider position within the study environment (Greene, 2014). The study primarily involves clarifying phenomena through systematic data collection, employing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with voluntary participants (Stewart-Withers, 2014). The results will be analysed and generalised, extending their applicability to encompass the entire spectrum of employees engaged in CGC within UAE schools (Alwari, F., 2024).

This methodological orientation aligns with an inductive reasoning process (Woo, 2017), allowing insights and patterns to be derived from specific data and applied to a broader context. Being aware that this study was conducted entirely in public schools in the UAE, from an insider position. The justification for this decision is that the current CGCs are distributed based on the number of years of experience and specific attitudes and beliefs regarding employment (Farouki, 2016). This study adopts a relativist ontology, recognising that reality is socially constructed, socially mediated, and experienced differently by each career guidance and counsellor within their institutional and cultural context. This directly influences the study's epistemology, as will be discussed in the next section (Willig, 2016).

3.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology addresses how knowledge about this socially constructed reality can be acquired and validated. Informed by its relativist ontology, this study adopts a constructivist epistemology, recognising that knowledge is built through the interaction between the researcher and the participant. Understanding emerges from dialogue, reflection, and interpretation rather than detached observation. The study utilises a constructivist epistemological approach, recognising that knowledge is formed through experiences and daily interactions (Chamberlain, 2015). It emphasises that meaning is generated through observation

and the interaction between CGCs and their clients. Recognising the authenticity of the UAE shows that cultural and social values and experiences influence an individual's perception and skill development, as reflected in the participant interviews and data collection.

The importance of CGCs' services lies in helping individuals reflect on their aspirations, interests, qualifications, and capabilities, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of educational frameworks and the labour market. This epistemological approach aligns with interpretivism, emphasising how individuals interpret their experiences and the motivations behind their actions (Sultana, R., 2003). This supports the use of qualitative methods that emphasise participants' voices and experiences as valuable sources of knowledge (OECD, 2003a).

The research examines the competencies required of CGCs in the UAE to enhance programme quality for students, considering relevant ontological and epistemological principles (Alkaabi, 2025). The methodology adopts an interpretivist and constructivist perspective, viewing reality as socially constructed through lived experiences and contextual understanding. In the UAE context, each CGC and policymaker has a unique, valid understanding of guidance practices. Ontologically, the study recognises multiple realities shaped by cultural and institutional factors; epistemologically, it considers knowledge as co-created through researcher-participant interactions. Researchers engage reflexively with participants during semi-structured interviews and focus groups to share authentic experiences, perceptions, and reflections.

This relational approach ensures data are rooted in participants' voices and that interpretations reflect the cultural authenticity of UAE schools. To derive meaningful patterns from these narratives, the study employs Thematic Framework Analysis (TFA). Following this model, TFA systematically identifies meanings from participants' stories rather than just categorising data. The process involves sequential steps: familiarisation, identifying a thematic framework, coding, charting, and interpretation. This ensures that the co-constructed realities of the researcher and participants inform a framework that is both academically rigorous and culturally resonant.

Considering this relativist ontology, the constructivist epistemology offers a consistent philosophical foundation for the study. It informs methodological choices, ensuring the research remains grounded in context, ethically reflective, and capable of uncovering the nuanced realities of career guidance practice in UAE schools.

The ontological perspective in this context involves understanding the nature of the reality that the researcher aims to study, specifically the "professional and behavioural existence" of career guidance counsellors in UAE public schools. From an ontological viewpoint, the reality being examined is a complex social and human phenomenon, shaped by numerous interactions among individuals (counsellors, students, school administrations, and parents) and the cultural and educational environment in which they function (Kaggwa et al., 2023).

This means that professional behaviour and required skills are not fixed or entirely objective facts, but rather social phenomena that are shaped by the cultural, value-based, and institutional context of the UAE, where artistic, religious, and organisational factors play a role in defining what is considered "professional competency" or "appropriate professional behaviour." From this perspective, the ontological approach holds that the professional reality of consultants is not a singular reality that can be discovered from the outside, but rather a social construct shaped and understood through consultants' own experiences and the expectations of society and the educational system.

Therefore, developing a framework for professional and behavioural competencies cannot be imported or generalised; it must be authentic and contextually relevant, reflecting the values and identity of the Emirati educational system and responding to the needs of students and society (Huang et al., 2025). Accordingly, this ontological stance establishes an epistemological vision that views knowledge of professional competencies as built through a deep understanding of field realities and human experiences, rather than through the imposition of ready-made models. In this context, the researcher adopts a constructivist ontology, which holds that reality is socially constructed through interaction and meaning. This necessitates adopting a qualitative and interpretive approach to understanding meanings and behaviours within their real-world context, rather than relying solely on quantitative measurement or stereotypical comparisons (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

The epistemological decision in this study directly derives from the ontological perspective that views the professional and behavioural reality of career guidance counsellors in Emirati public schools as a dynamic social phenomenon shaped through human experiences and interactions. Since this ontology is rooted in a constructivist understanding of reality, the suitable epistemological approach is interpretive-qualitative epistemology, which seeks to understand the meanings individuals assign to their professional experiences and behaviours within their real-world context.

Based on this premise, the researcher does not aim to "discover" a single, absolute truth about professional competencies (Bengtsson & Lindqvist, 2024). Instead, the goal is to explore the diverse perspectives and individual and collective experiences of career guidance counsellors, analysing them in relation to the prevailing educational culture and values in the UAE. Knowledge here is not objective or detached from the researcher; instead, it is constructed through dialogue and interaction with research participants, fostering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon within its authentic human or behavioural context. Consequently, it becomes evident that the ontological choice significantly influences the epistemological approach: when reality is seen as a multidimensional social construct, knowledge becomes an interpretive product rooted in understanding context and meaning, rather than in quantitative measurement or generalisation (Garg et al., 2005). Therefore, developing the professional and behavioural framework for career guidance counsellors should rely on qualitative, participatory methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, to gain a realistic, genuine understanding of the meanings of professional behaviour in the Emirati context.

Thus, it can be said that ontology and epistemology together form the philosophical foundation that guides thought and practice. The former defines the nature of the reality the research deals with, while the latter determines how to acquire knowledge of it. When an individual believes that reality is independent and objective, they tend to adopt quantitative and objective epistemological approaches. Conversely, when they see reality as shaped by meaning and human interaction, they tend towards interpretive and qualitative methods. Therefore, philosophy, in its broadest sense, represents an integrated unity that combines ontology and epistemology to form a comprehensive vision that guides thinking, influences decision-making, and determines the research or design methodology that reflects humanity's stance towards the world and towards knowledge itself.

3.3 Approaches to Theorising

A research approach describes the logical process of investigation (Spens & Kovács, 2006). The current study uses an inductive approach, enabling the development of a theory or explanation of the UAE CGCs' competency framework. As noted in the literature review, which identifies a notable theoretical gap, this chapter details how to develop a reciprocal framework for the Emirati educational system that is deeply embedded in its authentic cultural context (Kim, 2021). The inductive approach provides a logical and practical way to develop conceptual understanding directly from empirical semi-structured interviews

and focus groups. By enabling patterns and meanings to surface from participants' lived experiences, it seeks to enhance theoretical insights into the creation of culturally authentic, practice-based CGCs competency frameworks.

Guided by the interpretivist and constructivist philosophy outlined earlier, the study adopts an inductive, theory-building approach. The purpose is to develop a contextually grounded competency framework for CGCs working in UAE educational institutions. Through conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups, the research aims to identify patterns in participants' lived experiences and professional contexts. These patterns facilitate the identification, refinement, and organisation of new conceptual relationships into theoretical propositions. This inductive theorising aligns with established descriptions (Gaus, 2017).

The research orientation employs an inductive approach, which helped formulate a framework for the UAE by creating a theory that explains how to develop a competency framework. Expanding upon international competency models from NICE, Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabia, integrating them within the authentic cultural paradigm of the UAE. Moreover, by developing this section, the study advances a constructive approach to theorising, in which knowledge is built through interaction between the researcher and participants during data collection and is expressed as a new theoretical framework that bridges the gaps between global standards and Emirati authenticity.

The inductive approach moves from part to whole, or from specific to general, in which the researcher first identifies the parts and then interprets the results for all or groups of similar conditions and situations (Yuwono & Rachmawati, 2023, p. 8). The inductive approach relies on observation and experimentation to conduct genuine scientific research aimed at assisting individuals by developing specific and explicit knowledge. It emphasises the growth and diversification of experiments to prevent intellectual stagnation, thereby enabling research to accurately recognise and meet the broader framework's needs (Kim, 2021). The inductive approach is one of the methods that help researchers achieve certainty in knowledge, leading to precise results that cannot be based on correct epistemological facts. Undoubtedly, it draws on the subjective experiences of CGCs to develop an empirically grounded, culturally authentic theoretical framework. This approach allows for the identification of patterns and relationships that might otherwise remain concealed under a purely deductive design (Yuwono & Rachmawati, 2023).

On the contrary, the deductive approach is the inference that moves from whole to part, or from general to specific, and relies on postulates or theories to derive from them what

applies to the part in question (Fife & Gossner, 2024). Also, the deductive approach is based on pure scientific observation, careful experimentation, historical investigation, and the guiding principle of empirical determinism, which rests on the link between independent and dependent variables. Based on that, the deductive approach proceeds through three steps: the central assumption, the minor idea, and the conclusion (Proudfoot, 2023). Hereafter, it is necessary to start from the particles consisting of observation, participation and coexistence with reality as it is, leading to patterns of interpretation and analysis to find relationships, followed by deduction of initial hypotheses, and finally reaching conclusions that can explain the studied phenomenon in a quantitative approach (Fife & Gossner, 2024).

This methodological orientation aligns with an inductive research approach, in which insights and patterns are derived from specific data and applied to broader contexts. The study was conducted from an insider position across UAE public schools, involving career counsellors with varying years of experience and diverse attitudes toward employment. The inductive path provided the flexibility to gather rich qualitative data from different Emirates, facilitating comparison and cross-contextual understanding. The analysis of these narrative data facilitated the development of a new theoretical understanding that elucidates how a culturally authentic and contextually grounded CGCs competency framework can be devised. This theoretical model, developed and presented in chapter four, incorporates social-cultural authenticity, national visions, professional development, and responsiveness to the UAE's changing labour market needs.

Methodologically, the study employed specific research methods aligned with its purpose, including comparative analysis, cross-sectional studies, and in-depth case studies involving selected career counsellors in the public schools of Abu Dhabi (the capital) and the United Arab Emirates. The study involved a broader sample of participants from other Emirates in the UAE in the data collection. Some research approaches were discarded to enhance accuracy and consistency, aligning with the research objectives. This strategic approach was adopted to ensure robust, meaningful results for a comprehensive investigation into career counselling in the UAE within the study timeframe, while accounting for relevant research methods.

Specific procedural approaches were deliberately excluded to preserve conceptual clarity and ensure alignment with the study's objectives. This strategic focus ensured that the resulting theory was both analytically rigorous and contextually relevant, providing a solid foundation for the competency framework. The approach to theorising adopted in this study is

therefore inductive, interpretivist, and theory-building. It aims to develop rather than test theory, constructing a framework derived from genuine professional experiences and shaped by the UAE's educational and cultural environment. By integrating insights from established international models and grounding them in local realities, the study extends existing theory to new contexts, fulfilling the dual aims of scholarly originality and practical relevance.

The application of inductivism in developing an authentic and context-appropriate behavioural competency framework for Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) in UAE public schools is based on starting from practical reality and field experiences to construct a theoretical framework derived from the data itself, not the other way around. That is, the researcher does not begin with pre-existing hypotheses or models but instead extracts concepts and criteria from participants' actual practices and experiences in the field. The data are analysed using an open-ended inductive method, in which the researcher codes the texts line by line without imposing preconceived categories, instead using descriptive codes derived from the participants' own language.

For example, codes such as "builds trusting relationships with students," "deals with the sensitivity of family values," and "connects students' interests with the requirements of the local labour market" may appear. These codes are later organised into broader groups or categories that form the building blocks for developing competencies. Through continuous case comparison, similar codes are grouped into key themes that express shared professional and behavioural competencies, such as "cultural competency in career guidance" or "effective communication with students and the school community." Here, the method's inductive nature is evident, as general concepts are derived from recurring patterns in specific data points. In short, the inductive approach in this research moves from concrete realities to theoretical generalisations through the analysis of field data and the gradual, systematic development of competencies. The result is an authentic competency framework grounded in local experience, reflecting the culture of Emirati education and the needs of career guidance counsellors in the UAE schools.

3.4 Research Strategy

Research strategy definition refers to a plan or scheme that outlines the process of searching for and evaluating information (Malhotra, 2017; Saunders, 2018). A research strategy is a component of the research design that encompasses elements of data collection and interpretation, derived from both the research purpose and question. It allows the researcher to begin data collection on an interesting topic and organise the data in line with the study

objectives (Marlow, 2023). According to Mertens (2023), various research strategies can be employed, including experimental, case study, and survey designs.

Johannesson et al. (2021) described a research strategy as a systematic plan for how the research shall be carried out, in which the methodology and the research questions and objectives align. The advantages of a research strategy lie in its ability to provide a clear, structured framework for the research process, helping the researcher define the steps for data collection and analysis in a systematic, coordinated manner. A research strategy also allows the researcher to focus specifically on the phenomenon or problem under study and helps select appropriate data collection tools that align with the research objectives.

Furthermore, it reduces randomness during implementation and enhances the reliability of results, particularly when designed in accordance with sound scientific principles and rigorous methodological standards (Johannesson and Perjons, 2021). The advantages of a research strategy are evident in its role in improving understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by integrating theoretical evidence with field data. It also helps the researcher reach accurate, dependable conclusions that can inform scientific or practical decisions.

Adopting a clear research strategy ensures consistency among research objectives, study questions, and analytical methods and improves the efficiency of resource and time use in the research process. Moreover, it enables the academic community or practitioners in the field to verify and review results. Regarding the limitations of research strategies, these relate to various factors that may affect the optimal execution of research, such as time or financial resource constraints, difficulties accessing certain participants or necessary data, and challenges associated with the environment or context in which the research takes place. Limitations may also encompass complexities related to maintaining data quality and accuracy, mainly when relying on qualitative tools that demand considerable time and effort for data collection and analysis, or when organisational or administrative restrictions limit access to information (Verschuren & Hartog, 2005).

The disadvantages of research strategies become clear when they are not carefully designed or when the tools and methods are not suitable for the nature of the phenomenon or the research participants. Moreover, some research strategies, especially qualitative ones, may be difficult to generalise to other contexts or to compare with results from different studies, reducing the broader applicability of the findings. Additionally, the strategy may face challenges in adapting to sudden changes in the research environment or to new developments

during data collection, which calls for flexibility and the ability to modify the design without undermining the study's credibility (Mishra & Dey, 2022).

Experimental research manipulates variables to establish cause-and-effect relationships, aiming to detail and explain phenomena as they occur (Gupta & Gupta, 2022). Survey research uses questionnaires to gather data on a population's characteristics, opinions, or behaviours, but it is often used in descriptive studies. Experimental research, on the other hand, is a distinct methodology that focuses on intervention and employs focus groups (Marlow, 2023). A case study's suitability depends on the researchers' study goals, questions, and preferred methods. If the study emphasises statistical analysis or aims for widely applicable results, case studies might not align with the chosen methodology. Additional reasons for not using case studies as a quantitative approach include resource limitations, time constraints, the requirement for generalisation, and ethical issues, particularly when sensitive personal information is involved (Gupta & Gupta, 2022).

Definition: This study adopts a case study approach that illustrates the organisational structure of the MOE and positions the specified participants of CGCs working within the educational institution. Yin (2002) defines case study research as the most common qualitative method in information systems; it is fitting for this study because the focus on ecological information systems in organisations isn't on technical issues (Yasan, 2015). It is commonly used in the social sciences and humanities to analyse in-depth problems and offer insights into phenomena or issues (Coombs, 2022a). Yin (2018) explained that a case study is preferred when a researcher's interest lies in questions about "how," "why," and "what." (Coombs, 2022a).

In this research, the importance of a case study lies in its ability to enable researchers to delve deeply into a specific phenomenon in its real-world context. One of the benefits of the case study approach is the possibility to explore the multifaceted nature of phenomena in their respective contexts, especially for dynamic, context-specific phenomena (Thomas & Markus, 2023). It provides the opportunity to gather detailed, comprehensive information on events, behaviours, practices, and decisions related to the subject under study.

This enhances the researcher's ability to identify complex relationships among variables and to understand how they interact in the natural environment. Case studies are also flexible, as they can be used to explore individual, institutional, or societal cases and can be combined with qualitative or quantitative methodologies to gain a comprehensive and multidimensional perspective (Mishra, K. et al., 2025). The benefits of a case study are evident

in its ability to provide in-depth knowledge of phenomena and behaviours in their real-world context, making the findings more realistic and relevant to participants' practical circumstances. Furthermore, case studies help generate new hypotheses and theories applicable to similar situations, enabling researchers and practitioners to understand problems effectively and translate them into solutions or policy and practice improvements. In addition, case study findings provide a tangible picture of complex phenomena and support informed decision-making grounded in empirical evidence (Verschuren, 2003).

A case study is conducted to explore a new process of behaviours, involving studying different aspects, examining them, and viewing the process in its environment. It also investigates phenomena in their real-life context and addresses situations in which clear boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not evident (Coombs, 2022a; Stake, 1995). It is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system in terms of time and place (Cleland et al., 2023).

Characteristics: (Moore et al., 2024) The researcher's explanation emphasises two levels of sampling in qualitative case studies: first, selecting the case to investigate, and second, conducting related sampling such as interviews, focus groups, field notes, observations, documents, videos, and more. In this study, the case concerns an ecologically defined group of core CGCs, a bounded system of CGCs working in public schools in the UAE for 10 years, focusing on the practices and services they provided in their field, drawing on their knowledge, experience, skills, and attitudes.

Types of case studies: Case studies are typically defined by the aim of the analysis. This study uses a single, embedded, instrumental ecological case study design. A practical example of this design is the investigation of the bounded system comprising CGCs working in UAE public schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Emirates School Establishment (ESE). This specific bounded system allows for an in-depth examination of professional practices within their authentic institutional and cultural environment, providing the necessary data to address the identified theoretical gaps.

The case investigates the system (competency framework) of career guidance and counselling practices, analysed through the lived experiences of CGCs in UAE public schools, particularly within the Ministry of Education and the Department of Counselling and Future Skills. This ecological approach places the phenomenon within the authentic institutional and cultural context of the UAE, aligning with Yin's (2018) definition of real-life case study research. Since the CGCs' profession involves various interactions over 10 years and, as an

insider-reflexive practitioner, the researcher shares similar experiences with the participants, the study aims to develop a comprehensive competency framework for counsellors working in UAE public schools. It emphasises the importance of establishing criteria to guide case selection for well-structured research.

While criteria for choosing a case study sample, such as using the snowball sampling method, are essential, sampling decisions are never finalised solely after an author decides to write a paper (Gaus, 2017; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015).. Advocating a qualitative method approach in guidance and counselling allowed the collection of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions on the absence of a competency framework in UAE career guidance and counselling (Qu and Dumay, 2011; Evans and Lewis, 2018; Longhurst and Johnston, 2023). Emphasising the intersection of approaches resides in the triangulation of the results (i.e., semi-structured interviews to help in capturing live experiences and perceptions, focus group discussions to assist in validating participants' insights via a group interaction with a focus on the pioneers in the field of CGCs, documents in MOE and UAE visions, and Reflexive practitioner from notes, memos and recording, translating to interpretations) Theoretically, the case is rooted in interpretivist and constructivist paradigms, supported by an inductive logic during data collecting.

These perspectives steer the analysis toward developing a new theoretical model, a culturally authentic Competency Framework for CGCs, rather than testing an existing theory from the global. To sum, the case design adopts a single (theoretically defined), embedded multiple (12 participants)

3.5 Method Choices

The research approaches include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative research serves as a vital tool for assessing attitudes, opinions, and behaviours. It recognises that the insights and impressions of researchers are crucial within this framework. In-depth interviews, projective techniques, and focus group discussions are commonly used to gather meaningful data (Hendren et al., 2023). Qualitative studies are usually conducted in settings where researchers and participants can interact closely. The aim is to create an equitable environment for all involved, facilitating complex interpersonal interactions that yield nuanced, contextually informed accounts (Halevi Hochwald et al., 2023). Furthermore, qualitative research is valuable for exploring human behaviour, experiences, and perspectives across disciplines such as psychology, sociology, education, and business. (Punch, 1987). Qualitative research utilises open-ended inquiries designed to elicit responses that are not

restricted to numerical values, especially in questions of "how" and "why." A notable strength of qualitative research is its capacity to interpret processes and patterns in human behaviour, attitudes, and experiences (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024). Qualitative methods are well-suited for exploring context-specific phenomena, as evidenced by the UAE's multiple educational reforms (i.e., public, private, and charter schools) that reflect on the career guidance environment. This complexity arises from the convergence of rapid educational reforms, diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds among counsellors and students, and evolving labour-market expectations that continuously reshape counselling practices. These interconnected social realities generate multiple layers of meaning and experience that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement alone.

On the other hand, the quantitative method involves studying and analysing the phenomenon, as well as defining its components, characteristics, and circumstances of its origin. It describes the phenomenon in terms of how it is formed, built, and functions (Shaw, 2023). This method helps answer complex questions about how and why best practices should be implemented by focusing on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The primary goal of this approach is to develop a comprehensive description of the phenomenon's nature. Conducting quantitative methods with respect, responsibility, and ethical consideration is essential. Research dilemmas often arise when there is a lack of awareness or adherence to proper procedures, leading to a breakdown in mutual understanding and trust (www.globalmediainsight.com). Therefore, having a readily available body of knowledge to guide qualitative research and avoid frustration is helpful (Mubasher, 2024).

In alignment with the study's relativist ontology, a competency framework was employed that aligns with global standards while reflecting the UAE's authenticity. Based on realities constructed through social interaction, the live experience between the researcher and participants is a key aspect during data collection. It enables the researcher to interpret the subjective meanings counsellors assign to their professional roles and competencies within the UAE's authentic cultural framework. The purpose of using a qualitative technique in this study is to get clear future visions and concepts. Accordingly, the qualitative **case study** method enables the researcher to obtain precise, high-quality information from participants. Thus, data collected through qualitative methods provide descriptive and detailed information about the proposed problem (Halevi Hochwald et al., 2023). In addition, the qualitative data gives more information about a situation by being more specific and thorough (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024).

Furthermore, the ideas derived from the qualitative method can be broadly generalised, facilitating more flexible investigation of causal links and the prediction of future events.

The qualitative method enables the researcher to fully control the conditions and variables of the experiment through tight arrangements and measures, which allows the existing study to accurately determine the nature of the relationships between the variables (Williams, 2021). Furthermore, the qualitative strategy is entirely appropriate, as its realistic and precise description is essential for clarifying the examination of the research subject, thereby enabling the researcher to organise data through experience and compare facts to determine the factors directly affecting the phenomenon.

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry designed to gain a profound understanding of the subject matter by exploring data and generating insights into phenomena. This approach facilitates a nuanced exploration, allowing participants to express their views, feelings, and experiences at specific times or during events of interest.

The **research design** is methodologically coherent and philosophically consistent with the study's interpretivist and constructivist stances. The chosen research methodology centres on an exploration utilising in-depth interviews with willing colleagues. These participants were invited to respond to emails from the ESE Research Office. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were drawn from the guidance and future skills departments in the Emirates, specifically Abu Dhabi and Dubai. (The voluntary nature of participation is demonstrated in the Appendix ethics process.) Targeted focus groups were strategically incorporated as a supplementary tool to enhance data collection.

Qualitative research has been preferred over quantitative research because it offers more in-depth and comprehensive insights. As previously noted, the researcher is an insider practitioner and a member of the population being studied. Consequently, this study has been conducted within an ethnographic framework, which facilitates the research design and data collection through interviews and focus groups to explore participants' experiences and perspectives.

The number of interview participants may fluctuate based on responses from the ESE research office, which serves as a gatekeeper for contacting relevant interviewees. Targeting ethnographic data requires a diverse skill set from the researcher, particularly the

capacity to make informed decisions amidst significant uncertainty. Concluding this section establishes a rationale for developing the other components of the study (Atkinson, 2001).

3.6 Timeline

The research by Saunders et al. (2019) proposed two types of time horizons: cross-sectional and longitudinal. As the research employs a case study strategy, adopting a bounded time frame consistent with Yin's (2018) approach, the study is a cross-sectional observational method that collects data at a specific point in time. The approach is cost-effective and can swiftly identify boundaries that align with the study's interpretivist stance by examining meaning within a specific social and institutional context rather than tracing behavioural change over time. As a result, the study provides an in-depth visualisation of professional competency within the Ministry of Education's existing structures and reforms, providing a rich contextual understanding rather than a longitudinal comparison.

Naturally, the study is cross-sectional in scope as it captures insights available at the time of data collection rather than across multiple years (Gaus, 2017; Johannesson and Perjons, 2021). Therefore, longitudinal studies have been excluded from the current study because they are not relevant to our research. As a result, it has been dismissed from consideration (Saunders & Tosey, 2012).

Given the six-month timeframe for completing the study, a cross-sectional design was chosen. This study highlights a significant aspect of the guidance process for high school students and draws attention to the existing knowledge base on guidance programmes. A key focus is placed on the pivotal role of a Competency Framework in guiding the activities of CGCs operating within UAE schools. The cross-sectional time horizon of this study reflects how CGCs in UAE schools understand their work and construct their competency in guidance programmes with individuals. The epistemology acknowledges the existence of multiple realities and perspectives of competency in counselling among CGCs.

3.7 Data Collection

3.7.1 Introduction

In the current study, data were collected from CGCs working in UAE public schools, with a focus on senior participants in the department of counselling and future skills at the MOE. Those participants implement practices and frameworks in their counselling programme that do not meet global standards, such as the NICE, Canadian, Australian, and Saudi Arabia models; therefore, inviting those participants to represent the core unit of analysis

for the study. The current study is an in-depth qualitative investigation based on primary data collection from the relevant field. In this model, methodological choices were made using a step-by-step process to conduct this study as efficiently as possible.

The research used Saunders' research onion as a tool for making choices about the methodology because it provides a systematic approach and a precise framework for conducting thorough research (Saunders et al, 2019; Abdelhakim, 2021). The research onion gradually narrows the research from the philosophical foundation to the reasoning approach and from the data-gathering strategy to the analysis approaches (Mardiana et al., 2025).

3.7.2 Population and Sampling

In research, the population is the individuals from whom data will be collected to answer the research questions. Probability samples include random, stratified, area, and systematic samples. The selection criteria strictly focused on active Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) within UAE public schools with significant, demonstrable experience (typically 10+ years) and institutional knowledge as 'pioneers' in the field. This purposive focus provided robust justification for participant roles, as they were the authoritative source for defining a contextually authentic competency framework. Exclusion decisions were based on two criteria: individuals holding non-CGC roles (e.g., social workers or general psychologists) to maintain the study's specialisation, and those lacking the required depth of experience to provide strategic, long-term insight into the profession's challenges and policy gaps. There are samples in which the researcher's judgment intervenes, such as (quota and intentional) samples and others. The results the researcher reaches using them depend on the researcher's personal judgment, which cannot be isolated or measured. However, it is sometimes possible to apply statistical theory to them under certain assumptions. Before choosing the sample, the researcher must accurately define the original community, prepare a complete and accurate list of its components, select representative components from the list, and finally obtain a suitable sample sufficient to represent the characteristics of the original community.

The research design employed a purposive sampling strategy to gather rich information from participants who could offer in-depth insights. It included a deliberate selection of participants with specific qualifications and expertise to contribute to constructing a comprehensive competency framework. For example, the process involved establishing specific criteria such as a minimum of 10 years of experience in career guidance and current senior roles within the MOE/ESE. These criteria led to the final selection of 12 participants

(C1-C12, CFS), comprising 8 school-based counsellors and senior administrative specialists. This purposive selection ensures that the data gathered is grounded in high-level expertise, facilitating the development of a framework that aligns with UAE strategic objectives while reflecting real-world field experience.

Supportive structures guide the study's research philosophy. Interviews, focus groups, thematic analysis, and data analysis are used to develop the framework. Validation, feedback from CGCs and stakeholders, and pilot testing are integral to refining the proposed competency framework (Al Rasbi, 2019).

This approach ensures data richness and has been recognised in the UAE's ongoing educational reforms and the growing significance of career guidance services. The research methodology lays the foundation for creating a unique competency framework tailored to the specific needs of career counsellors in the UAE. Utilising a qualitative methodology and purposive sampling ensures that the framework is grounded in the expertise and practical experience of professionals in the UAE, thereby aligning with the nation's strategic objectives.

This approach also ensures diversity in gender, years of experience, and geographic representation across the Emirates. This sampling approach aligns with the study's interpretivist philosophy, which prioritises depth of understanding over numerical generalisability.

This research employs purposive sampling, aligning with a qualitative research paradigm. The inquiry examines the competency framework of career counsellors working in Emirati Public Schools, with a rigorous focus on grades 9-12 in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, the Capital of the UAE (Howe-Walsh et al., 2020; Rutledge and Al Kaabi, 2023; Gaus, 2017). The methodology comprises comprehensive interviews with volunteers from a cohort of 67 counsellors contacted by the ESE Research Office. Subsequently, a focus group composed of five consenting participants was convened.

This qualitative research gathers data through both interviews and focus groups. The analysis employs semi-structured and thematic methods appropriate to this investigation. The non-probability purposive sampling strategy selects participants based on relevance, ensuring representation from both genders, with a sample size ranging from 12, contingent on the responses received via email.

3.7.3 Sample size and composition

In alignment with the study's interpretivist and constructivist epistemology, the determination of sample size was guided by the principle of informational richness rather than

statistical generalisability, thereby prioritising depth over breadth. The qualitative case study methodology necessitated a small, highly specialised sample to facilitate prolonged, in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions. This approach was essential because the research objective was theory-building—to uncover nuanced, context-specific professional experiences that explain *how* competencies are applied in the UAE's unique cultural and policy landscape. The sufficiency of this sample size was confirmed by the achievement of theoretical saturation, a critical qualitative marker where new data cease to generate new categories or themes and instead reinforce existing ones. Saturation was considered sufficient when participants' narratives across the interviews and focus groups consistently reproduced the core professional challenges and converged on the essential components of the proposed framework (cultural authenticity, labour market alignment, technological readiness). This convergence provided strong empirical grounding, confirming the robustness and contextual validity of the resulting theoretical model.

The target was 12 participants to balance depth and diversity. The sample size was justified by the confirmation of thematic saturation, where no new insights emerged regarding core topics such as skill gaps or alignment with UAE standards. A practical example of the data collection process was the focus group conducted on May 30, 2024, which was held via MS Teams to accommodate the schedules of the 5 participating counsellors (C3, C6, C7, C8, C10). This use of technology ensured secure and effective engagement with the core participant group (C1-C12, CFS), maintaining methodological rigour within the bounded system of UAE public schools.

The research sample was purposively selected to align with the study's interpretivist and constructivist philosophy, which seeks to explore the lived experiences of CGCs in UAE public schools. Guided by a relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology, the study adopted an inductive phenomenological approach to examine the multiple realities and subjective meanings that counsellors assign to their professional roles, competencies, and perceived skill gaps. This perspective provides the experiential foundation for developing a culturally authentic, contextually grounded competency framework for career guidance and counselling in the UAE (Jacucci, 2023; Roberts, 2020). The UAE MOE identified 67 CGCs with expertise in counselling and future skills, based on three criteria: (a) $\geq$ 10 years of experience in career guidance within a UAE public school, (b) two years of senior involvement in a higher-level department of the MOE, and (c) self-reported involvement in designing or delivering school-based guidance programmes. These 67 CGCs constitute the core

group, with over 300 CGCs across the Emirates offering broader insights through studies focusing on the Abu Dhabi public school environment.

This sample of 12 participants included individuals from different school levels, those who deliver guidance programmes directly in Abu Dhabi schools, and two senior leaders to ensure diverse perspectives on practice and policy. Key demographics (see Table 2):

Roles: 1 specialist (CFS) and 11 school-based career guidance and counsellors (C1-C12). **Experience levels**: 10 years or more to 28 years or more of experience, with 3 participants holding a PhD (C1-C3), 1 MBA with IT (C4), 1 MBA specialist (CFS), and 8 participants holding additional experience and a bachelor's degree (C5-C12). **Gender distribution**: 5 from participants are male (C1, C2, C3, C9, C11) while rest are female (CFS, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C10, C12) reflecting Abu Dhabi's public school CGC demographics. Most participants (not specified in the table) are based in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

Expanding the participant group, implementing alternative data collection methods, and directly involving the counselling and future skills department presented considerable challenges during the study, ultimately hindering the efficiency and timeline of data collection.

Expanding the participant pool, implementing alternative data collection methods (e.g., semi-structured interviews and focus groups) and engaging senior department posed challenges:

- Low participation: only 17 of the original 25 remained interested in data collection; some withdrew due to other commitments. Snowball sampling through MOE coordinators helped replace these participants with peers of similar experience.
- Logistical challenges included limited trustworthiness of virtual tools, but secure and convenient platforms like MS Teams were used remotely to facilitate participation.
- Bureaucratic delays involved consulting the senior guidance department to navigate approval processes, which delayed data collection but enhanced credibility by incorporating senior expertise.

These strategies ensured the sample remained relevant and high-quality despite obstacles.

Table 2 lists 12 participants who were selected through purposive sampling from a broader MOE-identified cohort of 67 CGCs. Key demographics and roles included:

Table 2: List of the Participants

Position	Gender	Date of focus groups (F.G)	No. of hours of F. G	Age	Year of experience	Degree
Academic and career counselling specialist (CFS)	Female	-	-	50 - 55	25+	MBA
School career counsellor (C1)	Male	Did not attend	-	45+	20+	PhD
School career counsellor (C2)	Male	-	-	45+	20+	PhD
School career counsellor (C3)	Male	May 30, 2024	Assumed: 90 minutes	50+	25+	PhD
School career counsellor (C4)	Female	-	-	35+	10+	IT & MBA
School career counsellor (C5)	Female	-	-	35+	10+	Bachelor's
School career counsellor (C6)	Female	May 30, 2024	Assumed: 90 minutes	50+	28+	Bachelor's
School career counsellor (C7)	Female	May 30, 2024	Assumed: 90 minutes	40+	15+	Bachelor's
School career counsellor (C8)	Female	May 30, 2024	Assumed: 90 minutes	45+	20+	Bachelor's
School career counsellor (C9)	Male	-	-	50+	28+	Bachelor's
School career counsellor (C10)	Female	May 30, 2024	Assumed: 90 minutes	40+	18+	Bachelor's
School career counsellor (C11)	Male	-	-	40+	16+	Bachelor's
School career counsellor (C12)	Female	-	-	44+	15+	Bachelor's

Career Future Skills (CFS), Counsellor 1 (C1), (C2), Focus Group F.G)

As outlined in Table 2, the research sample comprised 12 career guidance counsellors (CGCs) from Abu Dhabi's public schools, Grades 9–12, selected purposefully to align with the study's goals of exploring lived experiences related to skills gaps, home-environment control issues, and alignment with UAE career guidance standards. All 12 participants were interviewed semi-structurally, and 5 (CFS, C6, C7, C8, C10) volunteered for the focus group discussion (FGD), with one initially interested but withdrawing due to personal issues.

This section details how the sample informed the design of interviews and focus groups, addresses challenges encountered, and explains how reflexivity and focus group practices enhanced data validity.

Interviews and focus group questions are designed to align with the research goals, considering what has been implemented and used in other studies. Specific upcoming challenges require careful consideration during the focus group stages. Factors such as limitations on the quality of participants' responses, the dynamics of relationships and interactions among group members during the session, and participants' individual personalities could influence the credibility of their answers. Additional constraints arose during reflexivity, particularly regarding the time allocated. The research was developed after data collection. The activities conducted during the focus group were part of reflexivity practices, as they incorporated qualitative reflexivity into data collection, providing benefits through participants' sharing of their experiences. These participants, who were insiders working as a CGC and at a higher departmental level than the guidance department in Abu Dhabi's Emirates, offered insights that transformed collective learning into reflexivity. These considerations emphasise the importance of careful planning and execution to mitigate potential challenges and ensure the validity of research outcomes.

Considering focus group discussions, structured dialogue, seven critical samples' composition and research aim:

1) Define the aim and objectives of the meeting explicitly.

2) Ensure a coherent topic understanding.

3) Outline anticipated outcomes.

4) Specify stakeholders.

5) Formulate guided questions.

6) Foster a logical flow (EEE).

7) Cultivate professional moderation.

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews are used when the researcher wishes to explore a problem or issue in depth beyond what a questionnaire can capture. This involves interactive engagement with participants, allowing for follow-up questions, keen observation of interviewees, and adaptability in steering the conversation to align with the group dynamics, thereby mitigating subjectivity.

Remarkably, focus groups provide an opportunity to collect data from a larger participant pool than one-on-one interviews, thereby yielding diverse responses simultaneously. Formulating open-ended questions in focus groups helps yield deeper insights from participants, leading to higher response rates and more comprehensive results.

These considerations underscore the critical role of careful planning in balancing sample size, methodological rigour, and practical challenges. By intentionally designing questions, addressing group dynamics, and integrating reflexivity through insider participation, the study ensured the data's validity and credibility. The focus groups' alignment with the sample's demographic and role diversity (as shown in Table 2) further enhanced the depth of insights, supporting the development of a context-specific framework to guide CGC practice in Abu Dhabi's schools and generalise to all UAE schools.

3.7.4 Collecting the Data

The primary data were collected through well-structured ethnographic methods, including semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, designed to capture the lived experiences and professional insights of CGCs in UAE public schools. To enrich data collection through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, the process began by obtaining approval from the university's ethics committee at the first stage, followed by securing authorisation and confirmation of the role in distributing the data collection tools. The following information was obtained from published emails sent by the ESE gatekeepers to participants working as CGCs in UAE public schools, Grades 9-12, and the senior Department of Counselling and Future Skills in the MOE.

The research utilised Microsoft Office applications, focusing on leveraging the university's MS Teams platform as a secure, accessible platform for conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups. Implementing these tools enabled participants to articulate their

thoughts in practical, effective ways. The interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed in their entirety, and subsequently subjected to thematic analysis of the original Arabic documents from the interviews and focus groups. This process preserved linguistic and cultural authenticity, ensuring that participants' voices were represented accurately.

These transcripts were then translated into English to facilitate thematic analysis of the research following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, through iterative coding and interpretation recurrent patterns and themes emerged, which were identified and formed the empirical foundation for developing the UAE's contextually grounded competency framework for career guidance and counselling.

3.7.4.a Semi-structured in-depth Interviews

In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were used to elicit more in-depth information. In contrast to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews are flexible, allowing the interviewer to discuss topics in greater detail based on participants' responses (Karatsareas, 2022). To ensure consistency, interviews are conducted in a structured yet flexible manner, with the researcher using a list of core questions while leaving space for interviewees to expand on specific topics.

An interview is not merely a method of data collection but also has intervention features. Initially, it involves establishing a relationship of trust and securing consent to record the interview. Among the main types of in-depth interviews, the study chose semi-structured interviews, which are based on a prepared list of topics to fill the research gap. A semi-structured interview is the most common interview method (Pillárová, 2025) and requires more demanding technical preparation. The interview process is designed to create a specific framework by defining the core of the interview. The research interview approach was initially inductive, collecting data from individuals and applying it broadly, moving from specific to general (Stralcsynská, 2024).

The qualitative research approach employed in this study integrates in-depth ethnographic interview questions and subsequent focus groups. The questions underwent multiple iterations based on research gaps, a literature review, and methodological considerations. The study is characterised by three designs, with the primary focus on data collection of counselling competency, understanding UAE standards, interactions with students, and identifying skills gaps. Semi-structured interviews involve systematically designed questions with interspersed probes to elicit detailed responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Since interviews are a popular tool for qualitative research and are thought to be the most appropriate approach for this kind of information, as well as being highly regarded for their ability to cover a wide range of subjects regarding the variables, they were used as the research tool to collect data from the research sample in this study. Interviews rely on semi-structured guidance, which combines closed- and open-ended questions, to facilitate an in-depth conversation about the different components and facets.

The semi-structured interview method is chosen for data collection in qualitative research. Commonly, open-ended conversations with participants involve informal methods to gather information about their experiences, opinions, and attitudes regarding the research topic. Compared to the collected ethnographic objective data, interviews provide a much deeper understanding of participants' subjective experiences and perspectives regarding the framework. A fundamental technique employed in semi-structured interviews involves the utilisation of both scheduled and unscheduled probes. This method equips the researcher with the skills (i.e., interpersonal skills) and tools to extract more comprehensive narratives from interviewees, delving deeper into specific topics (Gupta & Gupta, 2022).

The semi-structured interviews feature scheduled and unscheduled probes, enabling the extraction of complete narratives from participants. Participants' Feedback provides insights into the nature of the problem (Gulati et al., 2025). The advantages of semi-structured interviews include developing rapport and empathy, which are essential for gathering accurate data (Howe-Walsh, 2020). The improved model collected empirical data and validation; semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of eleven participants. Participants were identified through official channels within the ESE organisation and contacted via a gatekeeper using snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and via MS Teams to accommodate participants' preferences and geographic constraints. The interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and facilitate subsequent analysis. Data collection involved narrative analysis, employing thematic analysis and a qualitative research approach that interprets human experiences and motivations through participants' stories within a specific context (Evans, C. & Lewis, 2018).

Given the complexity of the topic, questionnaires would not be suitable instruments for collecting primary data, as they are not designed for in-depth explanations. Therefore, interviews enabled the researcher to thoroughly investigate the topic and plan to utilise the data to generate themes, theories, or models. The aim is to support the creation of a framework ideal for leading the CGC profession in UAE public schools. It is essential to acknowledge that

interviews have limitations, such as respondent bias and a time-consuming nature; however, achieving valuable results requires leading the conversation more efficiently and with greater focus. Therefore, unstructured interviews are the study's most effective qualitative research method.

3.7.4.b Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Focus groups, a methodology like in-depth interviews, were used during the data collection phase. The approach aimed to gather participants' voices (CGCs) and uncover issues of control within the home related to work and intelligence. Focus groups are conducted using interviews and participant observation. The researcher derived insights into congruent and discrepant results through collective reflexivity and determined which patterns to share. The exchange of information through interviews and observations conducted during these sessions fostered a profound understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences of career guidance programmes.

A thematic approach, guided by key themes, informed the interviews and focus groups. Suppose participants' ethnographic perspectives, education levels, experience, and methods for selecting focus align. In that case, they proceed to the focus group stage of data collection, and discussions steer towards relevant topics and issues of interest.

A focus group was conducted alongside interviews to explore collective perceptions and group dynamics, complementing individual insights. One focus group was convened, and questions were carefully prepared to elicit shared perceptions, attitudes, knowledge, experiences, and demographic characteristics. Employing focus group discussions offers the advantage of encouraging participants to generate ideas openly, which may not be as pronounced in individual interviews. In focus group discussions (FGD), participants are more likely to influence one another and be influenced, creating more authentic environments.

Therefore, FGD selection must include sufficient experience and knowledge to engage in a debate on the subject. FGD must be conducted with a moderator who is sympathetic to the topic under discussion. In the current study, the researcher serves as a moderator during focus group discussions, drawing on training in qualitative moderation from workshops at UAE digital institutions, which are understood as not merely interviews facilitated by a professional moderator. The FGD took place on May 30, 2024. The entire session lasted 90 minutes; five participants (C3, C6, C7, C8, C10) attended (see Table 2). This included combining institutional knowledge with practical field experience. Overall, the FGD was conducted online

via MS Teams (after school hours due to heavy daytime responsibilities) to prioritise authenticity given logistical constraints.

Exceptionally, the moderator establishes basic rules for focus group discussions, including privacy, careful proposal planning, and the ethics committee's review process. The moderator sets a duration for the focus group session, 90 minutes, structured using the Engagement, Exploration, and Exit (EEE) framework: the Engagement phase lasts for fifteen minutes and includes activities such as icebreakers, review of consent, and setting group norms (e.g., interruptions, confidentiality, respect); the Exploration will last 60 minutes and will include guided discussions on predetermined themes (e.g., skills gaps, frameworks, challenges or barriers aligned with the visions of the UAE); finally, the Exit phase lasts for fifteen minutes and serves to summarise key themes, invite final reflections, and confirm participants' comfort regarding data usage.

To address potential credibility issues, the research's reflexivity was thoroughly embedded in FGD activities, utilising participants' insider status and implementing targeted strategies throughout the focus group process. The group was limited to 12 participants to enable them to express their views, values, and skills confidently, with the moderator managing the process and ensuring it was well organised and within a set time frame. The moderator asks open-ended questions to gather responses and encourages discussion among participants (Longhurst & Johnston, 2023). The aim of the moderator in a focus group discussion is to generate as many arguments and perspectives as possible within a limited timeframe, ensuring careful note-taking to make the collected data reliable and record it properly. This supports data analysis and the storage of information needed for the research review, as highlighted in the ethics consents.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data were collected involving 18 participants, as detailed in Table 2 (Section 3.7.3). of these, 12 contributed via a semi-structured interview, and six initially participated in Focus Group Discussion (FGD); however, on FGD participant was Excluded due to unforeseen circumstances (Section 3.7.3.b), yielding a final dataset of 17 participants (12 interviews, 5 FGD).

All sessions (interviews and FGDs) were audio-recorded with written participant consent, and the moderator systematically recorded notes (documenting tone, pauses, and nonverbal cues). Transcripts were generated verbatim in Arabic, the participants' primary

language, to preserve authentic cultural and linguistic nuance. These were translated into English by the Researcher, with validation from a bilingual expert, ensuring semantic accuracy and conceptual equivalence across languages. The dataset comprising interview transcripts, FGD transcripts, and associated field notes was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2012, 2015) six-phase thematic analysis framework, as outlined in the subsequent sub-section.

This structured approach ensured consistency in identifying, refining, and interpreting recurring patterns and themes across both individual and group data sources, grounding findings in the lived experiences of CGCs with the UAE context. The six phases were clearly defined and implemented, as shown in the diagram and table listed in Appendix 9.

3.8.1 Introduction

According to Goddard and Melville (2004), data analysis is a key phase of research because it enables one to interpret raw data and draw valuable conclusions. Thematic framework analysis, a popular approach to analysing qualitative data, shall be employed to analyse the data retrieved from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic framework analysis is an adaptable, organised methodology that facilitates the identification, investigation, and reporting of patterns (or themes) in information (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994; Goldsmith, 2021; Frazer, Orr and Thielking, 2023). Such an approach is especially fitting for the current study because it can be used to explore, in detail, the subjective experiences and views of senior managers regarding the role of leadership in financial sustainability.

Thematic framework analysis will help the researcher identify recurring themes, including the perceived effect of strategic leadership on organisational performance, the challenges leaders face in ensuring sustainability, and the solutions applied to these challenges. NVivo software will be used to support coding and theme identification. NVivo is a data analysis programme designed to help qualitative researchers analyse large volumes of textual information by organising, coding, and retrieving data (Allsop et al., 2022). Using NVivo, the researcher can systematically code the interview transcripts, assigning a code to each section that symbolises a particular idea or concept related to the research questions. After coding the data, NVivo enables researchers to identify themes through a process of constant comparison, ensuring findings are data-driven. The software also assists with the management and visualisation of data trends, which can be easily translated into complex qualitative information.

Qualitative data analysis involves a systematic process of organising, coding, and interpreting non-numerical information to reveal patterns of meaning embedded within participants' lived experiences (Dambusa, 2025; Saldaña, 2021; Salmona & Kacsynski, 2024). This process is central to translating raw qualitative data into actionable insights that reflect the complexity of social phenomena. Consistent with the interpretivist and constructivist philosophical orientation guiding the current study (as detailed in Section 3.2), Analysis proceeded inductively. This approach recognises that knowledge is co-constructed through dynamic interaction between the researcher and participants, acknowledging multiple, context-dependent realities rather than singular objective truths. (Acharya, 2025).

Inductive analysis was prioritised to align with the study's aim of exploring nuanced, participant-driven experiences of career guidance practices and home-related control dynamics, and to align with the UAE's standards. To operationalise this inductive design, the study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model of thematic analysis framework. This framework was selected for its balance of flexibility and rigour, accommodating the exploratory nature of the research while providing a structured method for systematically identifying, refining, and interpreting recurring patterns in both interview and focus-group transcripts. Braun and Clarke's model is remarkably congruent with the study's epistemological assumptions, grounded in the belief that meaning emerges from data rather than being imposed externally, making it a suitable choice for extracting themes that authentically represent participants' perspectives. A detailed account of the model's application, including phase-specific procedures and examples of coding decisions, is provided in Section 3.8.2.

By combining the interpretivist and constructivist philosophies with inductive thematic analysis, the study achieved methodological consistency. This alignment not only reinforced the data interpretation process but also helped shape the development of the UAE Career Guidance and Counselling Competency Framework, ensuring it reflects the diverse, co-constructed realities of CGCs' experiences in public schools.

3.8.2 Data preparation

The preparation and handling of qualitative data followed a rigorous, systematic process that prioritised accuracy, confidentiality, and consistency in analysis. All semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were audio-recorded with written participant consent, and transcripts were generated verbatim to retain linguistic nuances and

contextual detail. Transcription was performed exclusively in Arabic, the participants' primary language, to preserve the authenticity and cultural sensitivities of their narratives and ensure that the meanings embedded in the original discourse were not diminished by translation before analysis.

Subsequently, each Arabic transcript was translated into English by the researcher under oversight from a professional bilingual reviewer (fluent in both Arabic and English) to ensure semantic accuracy and conceptual equivalence between the source and target languages. This dual-step translation process reduced the risk of misinterpretation, especially for culturally specific terms or idiomatic expressions that could otherwise lose significance in translation.

Before transcription, participant details (e.g., full names, institutional affiliations, and specific school identifiers) were recorded, and each participant was assigned a unique alphanumeric code (e.g., C1, C6, CFS) to maintain confidentiality. These codes aligned with the participant demographics outlined in Table 2, enabling consistent referencing while upholding the university's Research Ethics Committee guidelines for participant protection.

Field notes, meticulously recorded during in-depth interviews and FGDs to document tone, pauses, nonverbal cues (e.g., hesitations, eye contact, vocal inflexions), and interactional dynamics (e.g., group member engagement), were merged with the transcripts. This integration contextualised participants' verbal responses, enriching the dataset with paralinguistic and behavioural data that informed the interpretation of meaning within their narratives.

Processed textual data, including transcripts, translations, and merged field notes, was stored securely on the university's encrypted server, accessible only to the research team. Materials were organised chronologically, with timestamps and session identifiers, to facilitate systematic retrieval and cross-referencing during analysis. Post-transcription and translation, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis model, detailed in Sections 3.8.1 and 3.8.3, was applied consistently to both the interviews and FGDs datasets.

This framework, chosen for its balance of flexibility and structure, enabled the systematic identification, refinement, and tracking of patterns, initial codes, and emergent themes across the entire corpus. Phases included: (1) familiarisation with raw data through iterative reading, (2) generation of initial codes via open coding, (3) clustering codes into preliminary themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes for coherence, (5) defining and naming themes to reflect core meanings, and (6) producing an analytical report synthesising findings. By applying this standardised approach to data preparation and analysis, the study reinforced

methodological rigour and enhanced the credibility of its outcomes. The process ensured that interpretations accurately captured both the smooth, individual experiences of Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) and the collective dynamics of group dialogue, grounding findings within the UAE's educational context. This alignment among systematic preparation, ethical handling, and structured analysis validated the authenticity of the data. It strengthened the study's contribution to understanding CGCs' lived experiences, ultimately informing the development of a context-specific competency framework.

3.8.3 Thematic Analysis (TA)

Thematic analysis, a method of qualitative data analysis first described in the 1970s, gained prominence by the late 1990s through researchers such as Boyatsis (2009), who defined TA as an accessible, flexible, and increasingly popular method of qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023). While it shares similarities with systematic methodologies such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis or grounded theory, it does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge these approaches demand. Thematic framework analysis, a specific application of thematic analysis, involves identifying, analysing, and reporting themes within data using a predefined conceptual framework to guide coding.

Quinlan (2011) Emphasised that qualitative data analysis aims to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Grounded in the traditions of the adopted critical realism epistemology, an extra-discursive approach, this process emphasises developing abstractions from thematically organised evidence rather than relying on discursive methods (Dahal, 2025). These latter techniques utilise socio-linguistic tools to analyse language use and meaning, such as discourse and conversation analysis. However, they raise concerns about potential subjectivity in interpretation and the risk that researchers may favour constructivism over objective data analysis (Berthet et al., 2023).

Thematic analysis data are coding-based. Analytical methods employing thematic data analysis include Grounded Theory Method (GTM), Framework Analysis (FA), Phenomenology, and some variants of Content Analysis (Quinlan, 2011). While GTM's focus on data is appealing, its philosophical dismissal of established theories in coding presents issues, particularly as existing theories, such as those about career guidance and counselling, cultural authenticity, cognitive, and social cognitive theories, remain relevant (including institutional frameworks governing student-career counsellor interactions), and critical for organising knowledge and theories in this domain. This study utilised thematic framework

analysis, enabling the integration of deductive coding (guided by research propositions) and inductive coding (emerging from the data) (Goldsmith, 2021).

Thematic framework analysis

Thematic Framework analysis aims to identify, describe, and interpret key patterns within and across cases of themes within the phenomenon of interest, grounded in and interpreted from the data (Goldsmith, 2021; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Framework analysis involves two main parts: creating an analytical framework and applying it. These parts are carried out through five steps: data familiarisation; (2) identifying a thematic framework; (3) indexing all study data against the framework; (4) charting to summarise the indexed data; and (5) mapping and interpreting patterns within the charts (Goldsmith, 2021; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

Framework analysis is grounded in interpretivism and applicable to various data types and purposes. Data sources for framework analysis include semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups, observational data, policy documents, online discussion board posts, photographs, and case studies. Methods in applied research range from highly deductive analysis of structured data to inductive theory development for knowledge users. There is growing interest in and use of framework analysis as a methodology (Fraser et al., 2023; Goldsmith, 2021).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (conducted via Microsoft Teams), in accordance with ethical standards approved by the university's ethics committee. All sessions were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim in Arabic to preserve linguistic and cultural nuances, translated into English, and anonymised. Reflexive field notes (such as tone and pauses) were incorporated into the transcripts to retain contextual cues, and materials were securely stored on the university's encrypted platform. Purposive sampling was used to align with the study's philosophical focus on lived experiences, targeting Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) in Abu Dhabi public schools (Grades 9–12).

According to Ritchie and Spenser (1994), thematic framework analysis has five stages:

1. Data Familiarisation and Coding.
2. Construction of Thematic Framework.

3. Indexing of Data Units.
4. Charting and Display.
5. Mapping and Interpretation.

3.8.3.1 Data Familiarity and coding

Data familiarisation is the essential first step in qualitative research, especially in methods such as thematic analysis or case study research. It involves thoroughly immersing oneself in the raw data to gain a complete understanding of its content, patterns, nuances, and context before any formal coding or categorisation begins. Data familiarisation aims to help the researcher become closely acquainted with the details, subtleties, and overall "story" conveyed by the data (Mishra, S. & Dey, 2022).

Data familiarisation is the initial step in thematic framework analysis, giving the researcher a purposeful first impression of the data. The researcher starts to grasp themes by immersing in the data and noting key ideas (Quinlan, 2011). The data were analysed through repeated readings of source materials: semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion transcripts (Goldsmith, 2021). The researcher transcribed interview recordings verbatim in Arabic to preserve original contextual nuances, then translated them into English for analysis. This iterative engagement and reflexivity enabled a close inspection that refined the conceptual descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation, aligning with Dahal's (Dahal, 2025) emphasis on data scrutiny. Purposeful sampling during the data familiarisation phase involves selecting from the collected data, irrespective of the sampling strategy employed.

Data familiarisation was achieved by making notes in the margins of the printed transcripts of the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, as well as in an overall memo. The next step was to identify more abstract concepts to provide a framework for the analysis and the resulting interpretations. This framework structure is built from a combination of ideas and themes.

Familiarisation and reflexivity heightened sensitivity in developing an initial coding list, an extended, unwieldy inventory of key data elements (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Recurring concepts identified included integrating psychological expertise into career guidance and counselling (CGC) practice and the role of continuous professional development (CPD). For example, CGC #6 noted, 'As someone with a specialisation in psychology, I found my experience as a mentor to be both excellent and helpful for both myself and my students,' highlighting the foundational value of psychological insight in their work. This early familiarisation established the initial conceptual map guiding subsequent coding.

Coding can be a part of the data familiarisation process, but it is not required. In this part, some researchers prefer to work immediately with preliminary codes linked to the data s stage. In contrast, others prefer to take notes on their thoughts and understanding of the data without explicitly linking them to specific portions of the data (Goldsmith, 2021). Understanding the significant themes in the data does not depend on coding at this stage.

Saldana (2009, p. 3) describes a code in qualitative research as a symbolic label that assigns a meaningful, key, and evocative attribute to a segment of language or visual data, following the model of moving from codes and categories to theory. The coding process is inherently shaped by the researcher's goals, methodology, personal background, and experience. Additionally, a good code has five elements: 1) Label, 2) A definition, 3) A description of how to know when the theme occurs, 4) Description of any qualifications or exclusions of the identification of the theme, and 5) Exclusion lists (Olapane, 2021).

Coding is a standard part of the framework identification stage, though it is possible to arrive at a well-functioning framework without engaging in explicit coding. The emphasis in this stage is on completing the framework, identifying the essential themes and concepts, and the conceptual relationships among them, rather than on how they play out in the data.

Coding in thematic analysis is a crucial step in qualitative research, in which the researcher labels or tags segments of data (such as sentences, phrases, or paragraphs) with descriptive terms that capture their core meaning. These codes serve as summaries or conceptual markers that help organise and simplify large amounts of qualitative data into manageable and meaningful units, forming the basis for identifying patterns, themes, and relationships (Goldsmith, 2021; McLeod, 2024).

The significance of coding in the objective analysis of qualitative data lies in several key aspects that help researchers turn raw data into structured, valuable knowledge. Coding enables researchers to structure large, complex datasets into manageable, understandable units, making it easier to handle the extensive information generated from interviews, observations, or documents. Coding also facilitates the extraction of recurring patterns and meanings within the data, allowing researchers to identify key themes, behaviours, and attitudes that emerge from participants' experiences, thereby transforming individual pieces of information into broader, more comprehensive insights into the phenomenon under investigation. This process helps reveal relationships among concepts and how they interact in the real-world context of the study (Fraser et al., 2023).

This was systematically cross-checked against research questions, objectives, and theoretical direction (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994)

3.8.3.2 Constructing a Thematic Framework

Following Braun and Clarke's (2012) Phase three, codes were shared, clustered meaningfully, grouped into themes in accordance with the conceptual relationships and research objectives, and participants co-constructed the initial thematic framework. Following Ritchie and Spencer (1994), the emergent pattern comprised five main themes, which were then organised and condensed to avoid redundancy (Hernandes & Dringus, 2021):

1. *Professional Passion and Student Needs* – Counsellors' intrinsic motivation to support students' career growth.
2. *Professional Competency and Development* in career guidance and counselling– Commitment to ethical standards, certification, and lifelong learning.
3. *Challenges and Organisational Barriers* – Role ambiguity, workload, and resource limitations.
4. *Integration of National Vision and Policy* – Application of Vision 2021/2031 and Emiratisation priorities.
5. *Strategic Growth and Labour Market Alignment* – Incorporation of AI, technology, and industry partnerships.

This framework served as an analytical guide to explore how individual counsellors' experiences reflected institutional, cultural, and professional aspects of competency. The emerging framework aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase model —data familiarisation, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report, ensuring analytical rigour and transparency (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Olapane, 2021).

3.8.3.3 Indexing and Charting

Following Braun and Clarke's (2012) Phase 4, themes were systematically organised in a framework matrix to link participant responses to codes and categories, facilitating cross-data comparison. This matrix acted as a visual and analytical tool to emphasise consistencies and differences across interviews and focus groups (Fraser et al., 2023; Olapane, 2021). Linking study data and framework components can be done using any method the researcher prefers for coding data, such as pen and paper, the comment function in

a word processing programme, or a CAQDAS programme, selecting the most suitable approach for connecting framework components to relevant study data (Goldsmith, 2021).

The study data are linked to the framework components through the appropriate units of analysis, namely, the entities or items that are the focus of the study framework. In some frameworks, the data-collection sampling units can also serve as the units of analysis. Other frameworks operate at a different level regarding the study topic than was established during the initial design or data collection phases, requiring units of analysis that differ from the sampling units used in data collection.

This matrix-based display offered a clear visual representation of how individual experiences intersected with institutional expectations, national policies (Vision 2021 and 2031), and theories, i.e., cultural authenticity. The analytical matrix connects data extracts to relevant codes and themes, ultimately contributing to the theoretical development of the UAE Career Guidance and Counselling Competency Framework (Goldsmith, 2021; Hernandes & Dringus, 2021). Indexing the data by individual providers and clients was an opportunistic choice, as individuals were explicitly identified within each focus group, allowing me to index using both units of analysis simultaneously.

Framework testing and revision during the indexing process involve confirming and adjusting the definitions and boundaries of each framework component and sub-component, as well as adding to sub-components to account for new variations. The researcher may even encounter data during the indexing stage that do not fit the framework, necessitating a revisit to the framework's overall structure and contents. Regardless of the revisions made, framework indexing and revision must continue iteratively until all data are accurately indexed within the final framework (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

3.8.3.4 Charting and Display

The next step in framework analysis is to organise and abstract the indexed study data so they can be examined systematically and in their entirety. This is achieved by creating one or more charts summarising the study data. The chart(s) are arranged in a matrix, with rows and columns ordered by the units of analysis and the framework components. Although charting mainly focuses on summarising the study data, it also depends on the work done in earlier steps of the framework analysis.

The process of charting offers an opportunity to revisit and improve earlier decisions regarding the appropriate units of analysis, the order of units and framework

components, the proper level of data abstraction, and the suitability of the framework for the data being examined. Interpreting, revisiting, and refining decisions about the appropriate units of analysis, charting the indexed study data may reveal that it is not possible to proceed with one or more of the units of analysis from the indexing step (Goldsmith, 2021; Ritchie and Spencer, 1994) .

The charting and display step in thematic framework analysis involves organising qualitative data and presenting it visually in a systematic manner to aid the understanding of patterns and relationships between topics. After initial coding and the identification of tentative issues, this step allows the researcher to see the whole structure of meanings extracted from the data. The aim is not merely to summarise, but to arrange the information in a way that emphasises the connections between concepts and highlights subtle differences in participants' opinions (Goldsmith, 2021).

When applying this step to the context of career guidance and counselling in the UAE, the research begins by collecting initial findings from semi-structured interviews or focus groups, then presents them in tables or presentation templates to track how topics emerge across participants. For example, given that the participants in this study include individuals from various educational stages, direct guidance programme providers in Abu Dhabi schools, and two senior leaders, this step helps identify their differences and agreements regarding the role and importance of career guidance in the UAE.

In practice, the researcher creates "display pages" containing the main and sub-topics, then under each topic, places the most significant symbols and text extracts that reflect it. This organisation enables a deeper understanding of a topic, such as "the need for specialised training for career counsellors," by presenting all the statements supporting it from diverse sources. It also enables monitoring how often this topic arises and its connections to other topics, such as weak community awareness or family pressure on students' preferences. A key element of this step is the use of visual aids such as thematic maps or comparison matrices. These diagrams illustrate the relationships among factors affecting career guidance and counselling, including the interactions among educational policies, cultural values, and the personal experiences of students and counsellors.

3.8.3.5 Mapping and interpretation

The final stage of framework analysis, mapping and interpretation, involves synthesising key insights from earlier phases, including initial intuitions about patterns to

investigate further in the data, with comparisons across and within units of analysis and framework components. Notable comparisons at this stage include examining variations across the entire dataset, within subgroups and subthemes, and identifying data clusters. Charts and other data visuals are reviewed, reorganised, condensed, or simplified based on the study's focus, data, and prominent patterns. The research's principal aim is to craft a compelling narrative about how the data is structured and how patterns emerge.

There is no single format mandated by framework analysis. The results of mapping and interpretation can be presented in various formats, such as identifying and describing key concepts or phenomena, illustrating relationships across units of analysis, explaining attitudes, experiences, and behaviours, or developing typologies (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). According to Ritchie and Spencer (1994), this list is not exhaustive; the researcher is encouraged to be creative and follow the analysis wherever it leads, even if the approach is not listed above.

Mapping and interpretation are the stage where the research moves from merely presenting topics to understanding them and analysing their relationships. Here, the researcher begins to "map" the data, showing how the topics interact and what deeper insights the data reveals. This step goes beyond simply identifying issues; it involves interpreting what these topics mean within the research context and what they reveal about the phenomenon under study (Braun and Clarke, 2023).

When applying the Mapping and Interpretation stage to career guidance and counselling within the UAE, the research focus shifts to understanding how the factors affecting the effectiveness of these services in schools are interconnected. For example, the study starts by mapping the relationship between "weak awareness of career guidance services" and "lack of counsellor competency framework," then attempts to explain how this relationship creates challenges for empowering counsellors as practitioners through their knowledge, skills, aptitude, and integration of theories in practice to help individuals make independent and informed career decisions based on their preferences.

In practice, the researcher creates more detailed thematic maps than the initial ones, illustrating the causal or related connections between themes. After drawing these maps, the researcher begins analysing each relationship by asking: What does it mean? Why did it appear in the data? How is it interpreted within the Emirati context? For instance, if the data show that counsellors lack training, which affects the quality of guidance provided to students, the researcher interprets this relationship considering recruitment and professional development policies within UAE schools. This stage of interpretation helps the researcher turn raw data

into meaningful insights. In the UAE context, interpretation may reveal that some challenges in career guidance are not solely due to individual practices but are also linked to a culture that values traditional disciplines or to educational policies that have yet to fully embed career guidance and counselling within a strong institutional framework.

This understanding allows the researcher to deliver findings that go beyond simple description, exploring the core of the phenomenon, its causes, and effects.

The responses from the interviews emphasised the importance of employees' professional development (PD) in keeping up with emerging trends and, regarding legal requirements, in adhering to ethical standards. Several counsellors observed that current practices align with the UAE's national plans, notably Vision 2021 and 2031, recognising that education plays a vital role in diversifying the economy and developing human capital. The knowledge shared with policymakers included adopting national standards for CGC, fostering interdepartmental cooperation, and integrating the concept of counselling into educational legislation.

The semi-structured interviews, the focus group discussions, and the relevant documents were collected between December 2023 and June 2024. The data scripts were analysed using Thematic Framework Analysis (TFA). From this research process, it is evident that the interviews elicited valuable information about CGC's commitment in the UAE. These stakeholders reiterated the uniqueness of their suggestions and demonstrated outstanding commitment to the ability of performance and students. In those scenarios, they uniquely persist in actively practising changes in their observations that address emerging students' needs and the current societal culture.

As a result, this study's findings aim to contribute to the existing research on CGC in the UAE, particularly regarding appropriate practice, issues, and prospects for enhancing counselling services. It may be that the specified findings can be addressed, strengthening stakeholders' perspectives and improving them. CGC frameworks to assist counsellors in their crucial role of directing learners toward meaningful and sustainable employment aligned with the National Agendas.

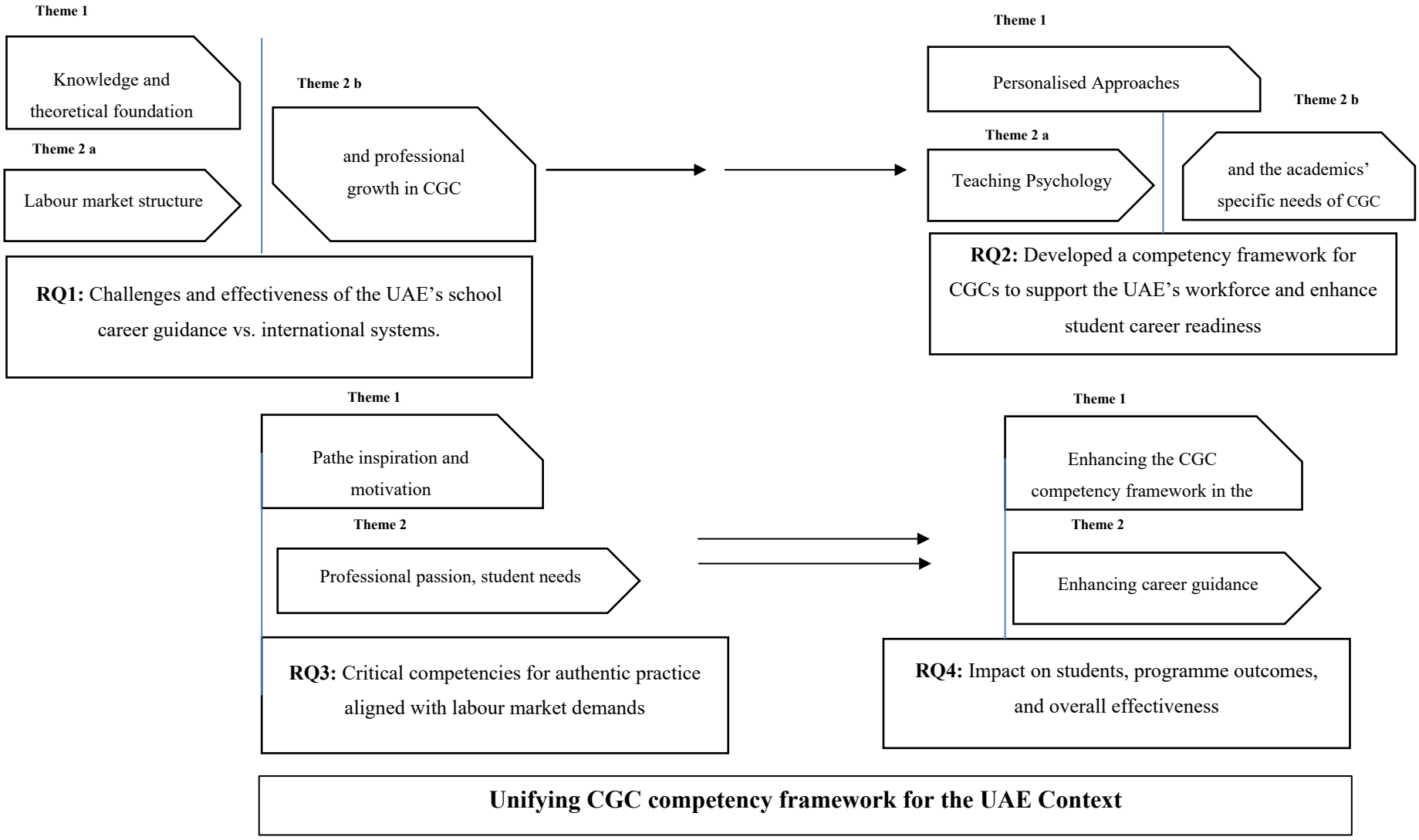


Figure 3: Unified CGC competency framework for the UAE context

The diagram highlights the research questions and employs the Thematic Framework Analysis to interpret the data, following the study's finite population correction formula to determine the margin of error. The TFA was carried out using Braun and Clarke's six-phase data interpretation process. As an insider practitioner, the researcher maintained a reflexive approach during data collection, demonstrating the core competency framework requirement for the CGC to operate in their professional role working with students in UAE public schools, thereby showcasing the researcher's expertise.

3.9 Ethical considerations

All research processes were carried out in accordance with the University of Lancashire's ethics panel guidelines. From collecting, storing, and interpreting qualitative data, ethical procedures are required that consider the various nuances of participation for both participants and researchers from a praxis and critical consciousness perspective, especially during the process of conducting interviews (Richards and Schwartz, 2002; Pietilä et al., 2020; Ederio et al., 2023).

Research ethics refers to fundamental moral principles that guide the design and execution of research projects, especially those involving the observation and documentation of participants' experiences and lives (Shang, 2020). To interpret, ethics is the ancient Greek word ethos, which means customs and usages. In addition, it means the science of a subject that deals with "moral conduct." Data collection was prepared in accordance with the procedures outlined by the instruments and methods used, including the sample, participants, entities, and data ethics regulations and policies. Contrary to expectations, this research found no significant differences in ethical considerations between the UAE and European countries, nor in the University's expectations.

Instead, it revealed similarities in processes, regulations, and participant rights during and after data collection, although cultural contexts influenced notable differences. In the UAE, ethical guidelines are integrated into the missions, visions, and values of various organisations, including those that set regulations and provide research grants across the education, healthcare, and child development sectors (Richards and Schwartz, 2002; Ederio et al., 2023; Okorie et al., 2024). The university's ethical code includes protections such as participant confidentiality and privacy, serving as the guiding framework for informed consent, procedures, risk assessment, and participants' rights to withdraw from in-depth interviews and focus groups. The University ethics form is in Appendix 1.

In the current study, the researcher ensured that all ethical considerations of research were followed. As it is primary research and involves communicating with several respondents, it entails considering various ethical considerations to ensure respondents' safety. One of the most important factors considered in this research was objectivity, as the researcher adhered to complete neutrality, avoided the influence of whims and emotions, and was committed to presenting the actual results without altering or falsifying them to suit his own vision or inclinations. In this research, the researcher was keen to thoroughly understand the research issue, focus efforts on specific main headings, and avoid falling into the trap of ambiguity and dispersion.

Upon obtaining ethics approval, participants received an invitation letter and an information leaflet about the study, both of which complied with the ethics panel's guidelines. Interview questions, participants' consent forms, and relevant documents were provided in both Arabic and English, reflecting the participants' primary language. Responding to the interview questions indicated informed consent. Additionally, given the emphasis on social responsibility, human rights, and the protection of personal information, ethical considerations should be considered when conducting interviews (Ederio et al., 2023). Essential keys for addressing ethical issues include avoiding harm, adhering to relationship-based ethics, disclosing the research intent, and ensuring respect for privacy and confidentiality (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The interviewer's paramount concern is to avoid harm to the interviewee by adhering to established ethical guidelines. Researchers must inform participants of the potential risks associated with the study. Safeguarding participants' identities and clarifying the research aims and objectives are paramount. Following the interview, it is ethical to conduct a debriefing session with subjects to provide closure.

The right to privacy and confidentiality is crucial, especially when employees discuss their work life during interviews. Researchers should agree with the interviewees not to disclose information to their employers. Suppose a small number of participants are being interviewed; in that case, the researcher should design interview protocols that ensure the anonymity of the participants' details and keep them secret (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The process of considering ethics and conducting research began after completing the ethics process, which included adhering to a code of conduct and attending various online ethics training sessions. This allowed the researcher to submit the approved data collection forms to the university. The committee approved the research proposal only after verifying that the research aims and design were ethically acceptable and aligned with the university's code of conduct.

Creating interview questions and selecting participants for in-depth interviews and focus groups are equally important. The ethical application form details the structured data collection methods and procedures used. Before conducting the interviews, participants must be informed about the study's benefits, risks, funding sources, and the institutional approval process. The researcher established guidelines for the entire research process. This process began with identifying research gaps, and the research questions were categorised into primary and sub-questions. These were discussed in the literature review chapter, which led to the formulation of the research questions.

Customised questions were created to collect data pertinent to the study, and the approval process for the interview questions was divided into three separate phases:

Firstly, the ESE research department (gatekeeper) sent emails inviting CGCs to participate in the in-depth interview. The counsellors replied to the formal letters sent via email, expressing their willingness to participate in the interview. Secondly, a focus group was conducted with counsellors as participants. A formal email and a reminder were sent to all counsellors, inviting them to participate in the focus group. In accordance with the ethical application form and the participant information sheet, pioneering counsellors were given priority to participate in this stage. These are counsellors who presented during the first announcement of career counselling in the UAE and are still actively working.

Lastly, the higher administration from the Counselling and Future Skills department was interviewed (as defined in Figure 1) and invited to participate in the study. The questions for this group were divided into three parts. All participants received a consent form before the interview, on which they provided their consent to proceed. Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012)) explained that the participants' selection process occurs after informed consent is emailed.

Participants' responses were then collected and analysed, and their willingness to participate in the study was assessed. The code of conduct was read and applied throughout the interview and focus group sessions, including the research topic, objectives, interview timing, and participant rights. All steps were repeated for each study participant. Participants' data, such as their identities and locations, were kept confidential and anonymous to avoid misleading information.

Sim & Waterfield (2019) stated that researchers must establish guidelines for providing follow-up care to participants who experience undue emotional distress during the study. They should also present vitality and rigour in interpretive sufficiency to ensure quality care. As shown above, ethics represent a clear statement prepared by the researcher that presents all the ethical considerations of conducting a research paper. This statement either includes

research subjects or contacts. Therefore, participants' permission was obtained to conduct primary research, including in-depth interviews and focus groups, to explain the research purposes and the use of data. Given the importance of confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher ensured that participants' identities could not be identified. Finally, as part of the ethics process, participants must sign a declaration in accordance with the regulation. However, the challenge for the researcher is to conduct the study effectively without harming any participants.

3.10 Research Quality Issues

This study was carried out in public schools in the UAE, focusing on higher education counselling and future skills. The research involved recruiting 12 participants for in-depth interviews and 5 for focus group discussions, which helped ensure the credibility of the collected data.

The research design addressed ethical issues during the Research Office gatekeeper's approval process for the MOE. However, the approval process took longer than expected, causing stress and potentially affecting the research findings and analysis. Therefore, future researchers planning to conduct similar studies in the MOE are advised to adjust the timeframe to ensure a smoother research process and to minimise possible adverse effects on research outcomes. In individual interviews, several factors negatively affected participants' quality during group interviews. These included participants' lack of knowledge, poor practices, limited experience, inadequate skills in the interview process, negative attitudes towards the process, and insufficient personal development.

Another interview was held to verify the accuracy and reliability of the data collected. This follow-up aimed to clarify any remaining doubts and gain further insights into the factors affecting participants' quality of participation during group discussions. By conducting this additional interview, the researcher sought to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the situation and gather data to enhance the quality of future group discussions. The data revealed a significant correlation between individuals' career guidance experiences and their willingness to participate in the interviews. Their lack of experience in sharing knowledge and personal insights through direct, in-depth interviews compromised data collection, necessitating alternative methods or conducting more interviews.

Interestingly, the researcher advanced data collection through in-depth interviews and focus groups, reflecting on and refining the data-collection instruments. The changes were made based on the participants' feedback. The researcher was open to using data collection

methods other than interviews or focus groups to reduce participant burden and make them more comfortable and better prepared to participate in the study. In-depth interview questions were prepared, and amendments were added to the Ethical Application Form (EAF), which was then shared with the ethics committee. Upon discovering the implications of the research findings, the researcher collaborated with the university's ethics committee and the ESE Research Office gatekeeper in the UAE to streamline communication and secure timely approval for improvements to the data collection process. Impartiality: following ethical considerations was central throughout the research process. Formal approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee and the ESE Research Office. Participants' confidentiality, informed consent, and the right to withdraw were advocated. When challenges arose, such as delayed approvals or participants' hesitancy during the interview process, the researcher adapted flexibly, incorporating participants' feedback into revised data collection protocols. Instead of piloting, memo writing and reflexive review were employed daily to identify procedural gaps and improve engagement strategies.

Generally, by employing methodological triangulation, reflexivity, and thick description, this research ensures that its findings are credible, reliable, confirmable, and transferable. Together, these approaches strengthen the study's contribution towards developing an authentic, culturally specific Career Guidance and Counselling Competency Framework tailored for the UAE.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and, in similar places, the results of a study on the competency framework for UAE CGCs. The study employed 11 interviews, one from a higher-level position in the Ministry of Education (MOE) Career Counselling and Future department, and one focus group to capture various aspects of career counselling practices and their alignment with the UAE's national educational and economic priorities. Therefore, to obtain themes and patterns within the interviews and focus group discussions, Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis was employed.

This approach enabled an overall understanding of the competencies, opportunities, and approaches of CGCs in the UAE and their responsibilities in orienting students in suitable educational and career tracks, considering Vision 2021 and other similar frameworks (Alhajeri, 2022). Qualitative data from the interviews were collected and analysed using thematic analysis. The interview and focus group results were used to identify and categorise into seven themes. In this chapter, where the findings are reported, the sources of the evidence are clearly marked to clarify the relationships among the evidence, the claim, and the theoretical claims being developed.

To provide further insight into the empirical data, the discussion throughout this chapter directly signposts the reader to the related appendices, specifically Appendix 8 (Participant Responses from Interviews and Focus Groups) and Appendix 9 (Thematic Analysis), where the raw data and detailed coding are presented. The instruments used to collect this data are available in Appendix 3 (Individual Interview Questions) and Appendix 4 (Focus Group Questions).

4.2 Presentation of Findings of RQ1

To answer the first question (RQ1): What are the key challenges and effectiveness perceptions of the UAE's school-based career guidance system compared to international frameworks? Interviews with CGCs in Abu Dhabi revealed several challenges, mainly in understanding their roles and responsibilities. A key finding was the common concern among counsellors about balancing expected outcomes with the rapidly changing education system and competitive job market (Kumari et al., 2020).

The interview results showed that respondents identified several contextual factors, including staff shortages, heavy counsellor workloads, and inadequate specialised training (Boland, 2024). These barriers to developing and implementing effective CGC programmes indicate underlying organisational-level structural issues affecting performance and counsellor well-being. Interviews highlighted the need for a unified and transparent framework for CGCs to support their work in schools.

4.2.1. Knowledge and Theoretical Foundations

Reflecting on the interviews conducted with the CGCs provides a holistic view of competency, frameworks, and policies regarding educational and career directions in the UAE. The observed transition from teaching psychology to counselling and moral education of students indicates a shift in the emphasis on individualised support for the interviewee. This transition from teaching a subject to providing service aligns with changes in education, where individual guidance and support for students have become key priorities.

The following approaches are considered beneficial for ensuring that CGC services continue to monitor advancements in this field: holding exhibitions, organising conferences, and conducting ongoing research.

This commitment ensures that counsellors can integrate new practices into their work, resulting in more relevant and meaningful guidance for students facing career-related challenges. There are inquiries about the UAE's impact on career counselling, including insights into progress and developments. CGC focuses on guiding and empowering students to meet programmes, strengthening relationships between schools and universities, and fostering connections between higher education institutions and current labour markets (Pathrose & Verma, 2022).

Analysing the CGC policy framework in the UAE reveals a strategic alignment between educational programmes and market needs, helping students align their academic interests and skills with Emiratisation policies. The counsellors' efforts and roles are evident in raising students' awareness of labour market entry and in aiding the realisation of national economic goals, as opposed to Vision 2031. This role is vital for efficiently managing and fairly

distributing human resources to fulfil the nation's educational and vocational development requirements.

The interviews yielded insights into training activities that aimed to help counsellors update their competency and knowledge. *"It can also help keep you informed if you participate in action research,"* adds one of the counsellors, saying that *"action research is a discipline that ensures an individual or group of employees remains relevant in practice"*. In this interview, CGC plays a significant role in filling gaps in students' capabilities and awareness, helping them identify suitable career paths. The interview insights offer a comprehensive perspective on the theoretical foundations in the UAE, supporting and adapting to students' growing needs and changing market demands.

CGCs must develop greater expertise in the programmes they deliver and present to adolescents to ensure these sessions are formative, engaging, and influential. Improving CGC's technology competencies is crucial to enhancing the effectiveness of their guidance programmes, making them more formative, fruitful, and motivating. By incorporating coaching and mentoring principles into their practice, CGCs can build persuasive skills that empower students during individual sessions, leading to more impactful and well-structured programmes. Additionally, as Husain (2022) outlined, CGCs must actively engage with STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Focusing on these fields allows CGCs to utilise their expertise and foster a growth-oriented mindset among students, helping them to navigate challenges effectively and persevere in STEM careers. Husain (2022) notes the relationship between influencing students' attitudes and aspirations towards STEM programmes, which will affect their future career choices; this targeted approach enhances counsellors' instructional sessions and positively shapes students' perceptions of STEM careers. By imparting theoretical knowledge in STEM, CGCs can significantly improve the quality of guidance, helping students make informed, strategic career decisions for their future endeavours (Husain, 2022).

Additionally, establishing a university major could significantly advance the field of counselling and development, particularly in recruitment and professional development. The emphasis on lifelong learning embedded in the CGC curriculum will directly impact practitioners' competencies, enriching their knowledge base, enhancing their skill sets, and broadening their practical experience. Furthermore, CPD, in addition to licensure, will facilitate advanced career paths within the profession. As the need for qualified CGCs continues to rise,

this initiative will contribute to increased demand for these professionals within educational institutions (Haug et al., 2020).

By adopting these strategic recommendations, public educational institutions in the UAE that sponsor the Higher Department for Future Skills and Counselling Programmes in the Ministry of Education can significantly enhance the effectiveness and coherence of Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) initiatives. This programme aims to standardise best practices across all UAE schools, ensuring alignment with global standards from the NICE, Canadian, Australian and Saudi Arabian frameworks while respecting the region's socio-economic context. The primary aim is to establish strong benchmarks tailored to the local environment, equipping students with the tools they need to make well-informed career choices. This initiative seeks to improve students' employability within the labour market and directly support the UAE's economic ambitions as outlined in Vision 2031. Enhanced professional development opportunities, ongoing collaboration among stakeholders, and rigorous evaluation processes are essential to this effort. These components are crucial to developing a comprehensive and adaptable CGC competency framework that meets the needs of a rapidly changing, diverse labour market in the UAE.

Finally, this thesis introduces an integrated theoretical framework that explains the relationships among conversational dynamics, ethical skills, cognitive processes, and different strategies for CGCs. The framework aims to improve the quality of guidance and counselling programmes and initiatives in the UAE, aligning with the goals set out in the National Agenda for Vision 2021 and progressing towards Vision 2031, while incorporating the SDG frameworks.

The research study identified key strengths to improve the departments and workforces of the CGCs operating within Emirati public schools. It highlighted differences among CGCs in the UAE, especially in Abu Dhabi, the capital, and the Northern Emirates. Although governed by the same Ministry of Education, these centres adopt varied approaches to implementing guidance programmes. A significant outcome of the current study was the development of a Competency Framework tailored for each CGC in Emirati public schools, along with other significant findings.

The framework appears in Appendix 10.

4.2.2 Labour Market Structure and Professional Growth in CGC

CGCS will be competent if they apply knowledge of the labour market structure and use opportunities from the education system to carry out their professional work.

Consequently, in the in-depth interview, question #2 in section IV, Skills Gaps, showcases a proactive approach to professional development as it reflects the use of knowledge and opportunities: *"How do you stay informed about trends and developments in the field of career counselling and integrate these trends into your daily practice?"*

Furthermore, the interviewee emphasises the importance of non-biased, ethical compliance when delivering counselling programmes, with valid confidentiality, transparency, and inclusion. They stress that such practices should align with UAE cultural standards.

Counsellor #5 replied: *"I am reviewing the updates on the UAE labour market and the world in general, attending training workshops and courses, Conferences and official Websites, Social and niche Media, Self-learning and development of research skills."*

The interviewee's views align with broader educational strategies aimed at equipping Emirati youth with the skills needed for employment in government and corporate entities.

Counsellor #2 replied: *"Certainly, inspiring consultants in the UAE to help individuals pursue career paths that align with government Emiratisation policies can be key to achieving sustainable development and social justice. Connecting with individuals, training and workshops, participating in government programmes, motivating and supporting, listening and interacting."*

This alignment is tactical, considering both national goals, individual learners' expectations, and market demands. The discussion offers valuable insights into CGCs' practices and the opportunities they may encounter during the ongoing transformation of education and the economy.

Creating a clear, well-structured framework for career counsellors to strengthen their roles within the organisation. By working closely with the HR department to develop and promote these positions at various levels, we can significantly increase the motivation and effectiveness of these professionals. The work environment for CGCs is notably different from other roles; they bring unique perspectives, characteristics, and a strong commitment to their responsibilities. This individuality should be a key factor for HR, especially as they begin to understand the specific roles and responsibilities of CGCs through the Competency Framework that this research aims to define. HR must develop a customised, positive job description that reflects the unique nature of CGCs' work, addresses their specific needs, and encourages their professional development.

The interview revealed that counsellors possess strong proficiency and ethics aligned with the UAE's educational priorities. It emphasised the need to implement the CGC profession in UAE schools, along with institutional support and responsiveness to the national agenda. Additionally, the interview highlighted their diverse role in developing educational frameworks. The discussion provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities arising amidst the current academic and economic changes.

For a detailed review of the raw participant data and the full thematic coding supporting these findings, the reader is directed to Appendix 8 (Participant Responses) and Appendix 9 (Thematic Analysis).

4.3 Presentation of Findings of RQ2

To answer the second question (RQ2): How can a competency framework for career guidance counsellors (CGCs) boost student career readiness and support the UAE's workforce initiatives? The interviews highlighted the various strategies implemented by the American School Counsellors Association (ASCA) and other professionals operating in the UAE. This framework forms the basis for a responsive annual development model that addresses the academic and professional goals of students across all the Emirates. Regular training and skills updates for counsellors were central to this initiative, underscoring the importance of introducing new ideas and strategies.

4.3.1 Teaching psychology, Academics' specific needs of CGC

The counsellor discusses linking, prompting, and switching from teaching psychology to encouraging students' needs in secondary school. This shift highlights a focus on self-development and the ability to adapt to changes in learning requirements. In assessing the counsellor's professional experience, the counsellor emphasises the importance of staying informed about trends and developments (Shammas, 2023). These include training courses, CPD, licensing, a clear framework, and online resources, which the ESE or MOE has considered crucial in assimilating new practices into operational professional practice.

In the interview, the individual expresses a strong passion for professional development and involvement through constant learning and networking. The counsellor emphasises the need to innovate in technology, particularly by integrating artificial intelligence into counselling services to enhance reflective practices and service delivery and meet the diverse needs of students.

Focus groups: Question 2, R #1: *"I believe CGCs need a strong foundation in key competencies such as academic and professional knowledge of higher education, academic systems, and education technologies."*

R #2: *"In my belief study, Effective communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, continuous learning, guidance and counselling, and working effectively with diverse students from different backgrounds."*

Other CGC respondents emphasised the importance of addressing Emiratisation initiatives and guiding students into the diverse local labour market. This theme reflects a positive attitude towards counselling services that meet the UAE's specialised cultural and economic standards.

In-depth interview, Part IV. Skills Gaps Q #3, CGC #6: "*Instilling the value of work to promote citizenship in the student – a curriculum that suits the Emiratisation policy in the country – consolidating the concept of homeland and citizenship – choosing the path based on the labour market and linking it to citizenship.*"

Other CGC #2: *"Certainly, inspiring consultants in the UAE to help individuals pursue career paths that align with government Emiratisation policies can be key to achieving*

sustainable development and social justice…Academic and career guidance is vital in promoting education and employment opportunities. Consultants in the UAE can motivate individuals to pursue career paths that support Emiratisation policies and contribute to the positive development of the local community."

In focus groups: R #2: *"These competencies are essential for success as a CGC…., aligning with their aspirations and the future needs of the labour market in the UAE."*

Hence, the strategies the interviewees used to develop individual career plans support a person-centred approach that emphasises personal growth and academic and career goals. This is followed by adherence to ethical practices and an emphasis on ongoing review to assess the effectiveness of counselling measures.

Overall, the interview presents a picture of a CGC knowledgeable about theoretical approaches and a practitioner committed to the practical implementation that benefits the student population and the UAE's general educational goals and objectives. The CGC's knowledge of skill attainment, policy direction, and economics bolstered its position as a significant agent in linking skill surpluses and providing students with relevant and appropriate career directions aligned with the National Agenda and Vision 2021, as well as 2031.

4.3.2 Personalised Approaches

After interviewing the CGC, the most convincing evidence is their intense passion for enhancing fundamental guidance outcomes in alignment with the UAE's vision. The counsellor's emphasis on educational counselling as a process that shapes students' futures reflects a commitment to bridging the transition gaps from school to university or any other choices students may pursue. They advocate for student-centred guidance and counselling to address diverse needs (McGill, 2020).

Integrating ethical principles and professional competency frameworks is essential. The individual interviewed demonstrates a deep understanding of the UAE standards and Vision 2021, particularly in their relation to CGC practice and the region's educational aims.

The interview commonly interprets the understanding of dedicated CGC professionals, who are progressively contributing to the profession's evolution in the UAE. These professionals need to develop and incorporate established competency frameworks, as

outlined in the literature review of the NICE, Canadian, Australian, and Saudi Arabian career guidance models, aligned with the UAE standards.

For a detailed review of the raw participant data and the full thematic coding supporting these findings, the reader is directed to Appendix 8 (Participant Responses) and Appendix 9 (Thematic Analysis).

4.4 Presentation of Findings of RQ3

To answer the first question (RQ3): What critical competencies do career guidance and counsellors need to help students make informed labour market decisions? The interview conducted with UAE career counsellors yielded critical findings, identifying four key themes. Stakeholders, including policymakers, educational institutions, and counselling practitioners, can collaborate to create an enabling environment. This environment will empower CGCs to better support students in achieving their intended learning outcomes and securing employment and income levels that resonate with the UAE's National Agenda, fostering both personal fulfilment and collective progress.

4.4.1 Path Inspiration and Motivation

During the in-depth interview, the focus was on transitioning from teaching psychology to CGC. The interviewees expressed a desire to assist students beyond traditional teaching roles. CGCs highlighted:

"The psychology teaching background helped CGCs gain a deeper insight into the students' psychological and educational needs, which formed a good base for moving to career counselling". (CGC participant #10)

Others added, "Teaching experience in psychology has allowed us to gain insights into students' mental growth and behaviour during their educational and developmental stages" (CGC participant #6).

The interviewee describes interest in using good practices, skills, knowledge, and strategies with the students regarding career guidance and developing a system that applies psychological theory in counsellor sessions (CGC participant #3); their approach is to ensure that: *"…every student chooses a course aligned to their preferences concerning the job market"*,

and so *"Every CGC must encourage each learner to be ready to embrace change and versatility in the context of the ever-evolving job market."* (CGC participant #5)

These statements illustrate that CGCs exercise competencies in their daily behaviour with students as a reflexive practice. Comparing their career to teachers and CGCs, they emphasised that there:

"Teaching experience in psychology has allowed us to gain insights into students' mental growth and behaviour during their educational and developmental stages". (CGC participant #6)

In addition, (teaching experience in psychology):

"It enables us to understand how to align best career strategies in daily practices and experiences, reflected in the guidance and counselling services we provide to adolescents". (CGC participant #3)

A different perspective was indicated during the interview; the participant was keen to point out the following statement:

"CGC's role in educational processes highlights successful practices in the UAE; concepts such as Vision 2021 enhance our efforts in providing academic support, guidance, and counselling programmes, as these are designed to help individuals (students) and groups successfully navigate the labour market". (CGC participant #3)

These quotations support the idea that students respond to the general narrative of educators and CGCs by reflecting on their life paths and choosing professions that align with their strengths and dreams.

4.4.2 Professional Passion, Student Needs

The following themes and ideas emerged from interviews with professionals in the UAE to understand the nature and extent of CGCs. Counsellors find fulfilment in helping students realise their potential and improve their academic success. Their experiences have motivated them to transform their perception of people's difficulties at work. One of the interviewees described it in the following way:

"I decided to help others to choose as I faced similar issues myself" (CGC participant #2)

This demonstrates that CGCs are no different from their clients and are genuinely committed to their futures. Keeping up to date with labour market trends and advancements is essential for remaining relevant and efficient.

Another key area that emerged from the interviews was continuing education and professional development. One counsellor stated this during the in-depth interview at two different times:

First time: *"I can apply the new techniques and theories in my practice by attending conferences and workshops"* (CGC participant #5).

Secondly*: "It is beneficial for counsellors to stay updated with the latest field trends because they are a part of society."* (CGC participant #5)

The following interviewee highlighted his reflexive practices with students:

"The career plans we develop are unique to each client; we help them make rational decisions" (CGC participant #9)

The advantages of such an individualised model include increased client satisfaction and a greater likelihood of continuous employment, reflecting CGC's passion and alignment with their students' interests. In the following statement:

"Ethical behaviour is mandatory in our work; it builds and sustains trust and guarantees that clients will get the best treatment throughout the counselling process" (CGC participant #5).

Evaluating the effectiveness of counselling approaches is another concern among UAE CGCs. They assess the effectiveness of their actions and constantly improve the process.

"By monitoring client progress, one can adapt the approaches and enhance the delivery of services that will help clients", said one of the interviewees (CGC participant #5).

When considering UAE standards, it is essential to highlight Vision 2021 and 2031, and Emiratisation initiatives' impact on the labour market. This initiative influences CGC practices in schools, shaping educational and counselling policies aligned with the economic focus of these roles.

"Our work directly feeds into national priorities in personnel development and Emiratisation," added the counsellor (CGC participant #2).

They were produced in the TFA. They emphasised the importance of understanding students' needs, communicating effectively with them, and providing guidance to resolve career-related challenges. This underscored their commitment to creating an environment that fosters students' success.

CGCs must develop greater expertise in the programmes they deliver and present to adolescents to ensure these sessions are formative, engaging, and influential. Improving CGC's technology competencies is crucial to enhancing the effectiveness of their guidance programmes , making them more formative, fruitful, and motivating. By incorporating coaching and mentoring principles into their practice, CGCs can build persuasive skills that empower students during individual sessions, leading to more impactful and well-structured programmes. Additionally, as Husain (2022) outlined, CGCs must actively engage with STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Focusing on these fields allows CGCs to utilise their expertise and foster a growth-oriented mindset among students, helping them to navigate challenges effectively and persevere in STEM careers. Husain (2022) notes the relationship between influencing students' attitudes and aspirations towards STEM programmes, which will affect their future career choices; this targeted approach enhances counsellors' instructional sessions and positively shapes students' perceptions of STEM careers. By imparting theoretical knowledge in STEM, CGCs can significantly improve the quality of guidance, helping students make informed, strategic career decisions for their future endeavours (Husain, 2022).

This positioning underscores the critical role of Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) in preparing students for the diverse labour market (Maree & Twigge, 2016). Participation in activities such as camping, competitions, and other extracurricular endeavours motivates students and supports their development throughout high school. This involvement reflects various dimensions of a student's character, including personality, academic

achievement, attitude, and effort. Husain's (2022) study highlights the positive correlation between students' experiences at school and at home, which is essential for fostering their motivation and confidence in achieving their goals. Consequently, a well-structured guidance programme designed by CGCs can significantly impact students, facilitating their successful transition into the workforce.

In the UAE, CGCs align their professional practices with national visions and the Ministry of Education's (MOE) behavioural and professional standards, emphasising attitudes and skills relevant to their work. They strategically achieve this alignment through their experience and knowledge programmes.

For a detailed review of the raw participant data and the full thematic coding supporting these findings, the reader is directed to Appendix 8 (Participant Responses) and Appendix 9 (Thematic Analysis).

4.5 Presentation of Findings of RQ4

To answer the fourth question (RQ4): How do counsellors' perceptions of career guidance programmes impact student outcomes and programme effectiveness? The interview highlighted a genuine interest in counselling for students' academic and career development. This authenticity is reflected in the UAE's cultural setting, which demonstrates an authentic connection to the community. During the focus group, the participants expressed a broad understanding of CGCs, emphasising the importance of psychological experience in their sessions; therefore, having or pursuing a psychology degree will strengthen their practical work.

4.5.1 Enhancing the CGC Competency Framework in the UAE

The interview with the CGC in the UAE revealed a clear theme centred on professional development. It emphasises CPD practices that support counsellors' commitment to professional development, align with evolving demands, and meet national requirements and international benchmarks, such as those from the ASCA, NICE, and Canadian or NCDA models.

In an in-depth interview with CGC #5, the participant said:

"….counsellors must participate in continuing education programmes to ensure that they keep abreast of the latest developments in guidance and counselling. Attending training

courses, workshops and conferences on guidance and professional ethics, the use of technology, and familiarisation with the fundamental ethical principles in guidance."

They encouraged attendees to attend workshops and stay informed about current trends. This will ensure adaptation practices in their communication with students, thus implementing and improving techniques, learning new skills, and being aware of strategies in the diverse labour market (Kemp & McLoughlin, 2022).

Next, the theme of ethical norms and rules was revealed as one of the most important. The CGC's strategies include responsibility, confidentiality, and collaboration, which are critical to ensuring effectiveness in the current practice. All these principles protect the student's rights and interests while maintaining the fairness of the counselling. Following the interview, it was revealed that the observed practices were compatible with the UAE's Vision 2021 and 2031 standards. The counsellor explained how these national priorities operate by presenting the counsellor's code of practice, lifetime learning, economic development, and use of technology.

In an in-depth interview, participant CGC #1 said:

"They must participate in conferences and attend training courses from accredited international bodies in the development of academic guidance; they must have specific certificates and experiences that they must obtain; all of this helps them and is up to date. Academic advising has reached global and state levels and is crucial for joint conferences, attendance, and course enrolment. Participation in research papers in specific forums contributes significantly to informing the academic advisor of recent trends in academic advising."

The interviews scrutinised potential solutions to address skills gaps while underscoring the proactive strategies CGCs employ to mitigate deficiencies in education, training, and skills development. By enhancing their competencies, counsellors increase their capacity to help students navigate toward fulfilling, pragmatic career trajectories. The interview features a CGC from the UAE who highly values diligent work and experiential learning. This individual adheres to ethical standards, complies with established policies, and actively promotes skills development, engaging others in the process and fostering a sense of commitment. This enriches the ultimate framework, aligning with the economic and social

objectives outlined in the UAE's Vision 2021 and beyond; it will enhance and support the CGC's profession.

4.5.2 Enhancing career guidance.

Education remains a priority for counsellors as they attend workshops and update their knowledge of the latest trends in incorporating modern methods into mentoring sessions. This commitment also improves their professional abilities, core ethical behaviour, and compliance with the country's laws and Vision 2021 and 2031 agenda. This agenda is reflected in the fourth Sustainable Development Goal framework, which has been integrated into the UAE's educational strategy by emphasising the need to provide fair and high-quality educational opportunities (Federal Competitiveness & Statistics Authority, 2017). Referring to the guidance will be more personalised and aligned with the UAE's policies and its most important strategic objective (Federal Competitiveness & Statistics Authority, 2017).

The findings suggest that CGCs enhance educational outcomes by aligning with labour market demands and developing new skills with learners. Utilising coaching theories and guidance models from NICE and Canada can strengthen the CGC's competency framework and develop its professional status. A thorough CGC intervention prioritises proficiency, ethics, and student success, emphasising the importance of integrity in career guidance. This approach fosters students' choices, enhances the UAE's economy and prosperity, and promotes CGC work.

To enhance the effectiveness of CGCs, it is crucial to maintain ongoing workshops and develop specialised training programmes. Collaborative efforts should be established to address the specific challenges faced by CGCs, facilitating organised forums, symposia, and seminars to better equip CGCs to support students professionally or experientially. Additionally, it is essential to increase the visibility and acceptance of CGC initiatives by emphasising the value of guidance and counselling services. This involves targeted outreach to students, parents, and educators to stress the importance of career guidance in shaping student futures. Strategies may include optimised communication plans that highlight the significance of career guidance programmes in preparing students for their future paths. To foster a shared understanding of the role of career guidance within the community, it is recommended that shared platforms be used to disseminate resources. Engaging with industry partners in promotional activities will further

demonstrate the alignment of career counselling with labour market needs, reinforcing its relevance and importance to students and their families.

Data analysis shows that the success of CGC programmes depends on the existing competency framework; it is through training and development (CPD). Mandatory training covering current counselling trends, labour market needs, and effective counselling methods is vital to enhancing these programmes. Furthermore, creating a certification scheme that aligns with international standards is essential for professional recognition. Promoting attendance at international conferences and workshops enables CGC professionals to learn from global best practices and improve their skills. By prioritising continuous professional development and compliance with international standards, CGC programmes can significantly improve their quality and impact. Licensure is necessary in the field to ensure CGCs remain up to date in their skills, knowledge, and experience.

For a detailed review of the raw participant data and the full thematic coding supporting these findings, the reader is directed to Appendix 8 (Participant Responses) and Appendix 9 (Thematic Analysis).

4.6 Conclusion

This study has investigated the UAE's CGC scenario, including career counsellors and their participants, through interviews and focus group discussions. Significant facts highlight the versatility of CGCs, their methods for improving learners' performance, and the difficulties they encounter due to dynamic changes in learning and economic systems. The research objectives were to identify the competencies and practices that define practical career guidance and counselling (CGC) in the cultural context of the United Arab Emirates and to uncover themes from in-depth qualitative interviews. The findings revealed that CGCs in the UAE integrate psychological theory into counselling sessions and tailor advice to the client's strengths, passions, and aptitudes. The study addressed topics such as managing client expectations, the influence of culture on career choices, and the incorporation of technology in counselling processes.

The responses from the interviews highlighted the importance of employees' PDs in keeping up with emerging trends and, regarding legal requirements, in following ethical standards. Several counsellors noted that current practices align with the UAE's national plans,

notably Vision 2021, in that education plays a central role in diversifying the economy and developing human capital. The knowledge of recommendations for policymakers included adopting national standards for CGC, promoting cooperation between industries, and incorporating the concept of counselling into educational legislation or the UAE's Authentic culture. From this research process, it is evident that the interviews elicited valuable information about CGC's commitment in the UAE. These stakeholders reiterated the uniqueness of their suggestions and demonstrated outstanding commitment to students' performance. Uniquely, in those scenarios, they persist in actively practising changes in observations, cognition, and reflexivity, ensuring their practices address emerging student needs and current societal issues and culture. As a result, this study's findings aim to contribute to the existing research on CGC in the UAE, particularly regarding best practices, issues, and prospects for enhancing counselling services. It may be possible to address the specified findings, strengthening stakeholders' perspectives and enhancing CGC frameworks to assist counsellors in their crucial role of directing learners toward meaningful and sustainable employment aligned with the National Agendas.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises and interprets the empirical findings presented in Chapter 4 through a structured, multi-level discussion that advances understanding of Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) in UAE public schools. Drawing on a clustered analytical approach, the chapter first presents the proposed Career Guidance Counsellor Competency Framework (CGCF) for the UAE, which represents the core integrative outcome of the study. Building directly on participants' accounts and institutional realities, the framework is discussed as a contextually grounded response to the fragmented preparation, unclear role expectations, and uneven professional support identified across regions. In doing so, the chapter moves beyond description to demonstrate how the CGCF consolidates international competency standards while embedding Emirati socio-cultural and policy priorities, thereby offering a coherent professional reference point aligned with the nation's human-capital development agenda.

The chapter then extends the discussion to examine the broader implications of the findings for knowledge, theory, practice, and policy. It critically reflects on what this study reveals about CGCs in the UAE, which were previously underexplored, particularly regarding professional identity, competency development, and systemic constraints shaping guidance practice. The implications were based on the study's purpose, objectives, research questions, and results. The chapter discusses the impact of the findings and recommendations, as well as the evolving needs of CGC programmes in the UAE education sector. These insights aim to highlight the successful integration of programmes in public schools within a broader context. A qualitative research approach was employed to gather initial data through focus groups and in-depth interviews. By examining participants' responses, this research aimed to identify insights that underscore the urgent need for a structured competency framework for CGCs in Emirati public schools under the Ministry of Education's auspices.

The research conducted in 2024 highlights the need for CGCs to have a comprehensive competency framework that supports their roles and reflects on their guidance programmes. Similarly, it is crucial to understand the role of these counselling sessions in fostering adolescent development by guiding them in various academic and professional fields. The development of such a framework aims to improve CGCs' status and effectiveness, thereby enhancing their clients' range of tasks and services. Furthermore, the current research paper raises career development standards by guiding mentoring practices, encouraging greater competitiveness, professional growth, and motivation among counsellors to work more

efficiently. This competency framework will outline a unified vision for guidance and counselling practices, improving the quality and impact of the services provided.

To address these gaps, a new competency framework must be developed. This framework will align with the initiatives undertaken by the Future Skills and Counselling Department within the Ministry of Education to create a practical strategy. The aim is to guide this department in developing and effectively serving students and the community, drawing on insights from the literature review and data collected during collaboration with the higher department of guidance and counselling of future skills. To support this effort, the conclusions and recommendations of the current study will emphasise the needs, opportunities, and objectives related to the CGC framework.

5.2 Discussion on the CGC competency framework for the UAE

The UAE CGC competency framework aims to improve career guidance and counselling by focusing on three fundamental areas: labour market alignment, technological readiness, and cultural authenticity.

1. **Labour Market Alignment:** CGCs function as vital links between education and employment, helping individuals understand their interests and strengths while exploring career options. This component highlights the importance of aligning career guidance practices with national priorities, especially those outlined in the UAE Vision 2021. CGCs should develop analytical skills and participate in ongoing professional development to offer personalised advice that reflects current labour market needs.
2. **Technological Readiness**: This component equips CGCs with the digital literacy and technological skills necessary to adapt to a rapidly changing job market. By utilising digital tools and platforms, CGCs can enhance service efficiency and improve client engagement. Emphasising technological readiness ensures that counsellors can effectively support individuals in navigating their career paths in an increasingly digital landscape.
3. **Cultural Authenticity**: Cultural authenticity is essential for establishing trust and rapport in the counselling process. CGCs, who are predominantly Emirati, play a crucial role in integrating local cultural values into their practices, fostering an inclusive environment that respects diverse backgrounds. This component also aligns with the UAE's Emiratisation programme, supporting the development of a culturally competent workforce.

The framework not only addresses the immediate needs of career guidance in the UAE but also aligns with national goals for a knowledge-based economy. By focusing on these competencies, the CGC framework enhances professional standards and promotes continuous improvement in educational practices.

As shown in the figure, the UAE CGC competency framework comprises three core components that were absent in previous frameworks: labour market alignment, technological readiness, and cultural authenticity.

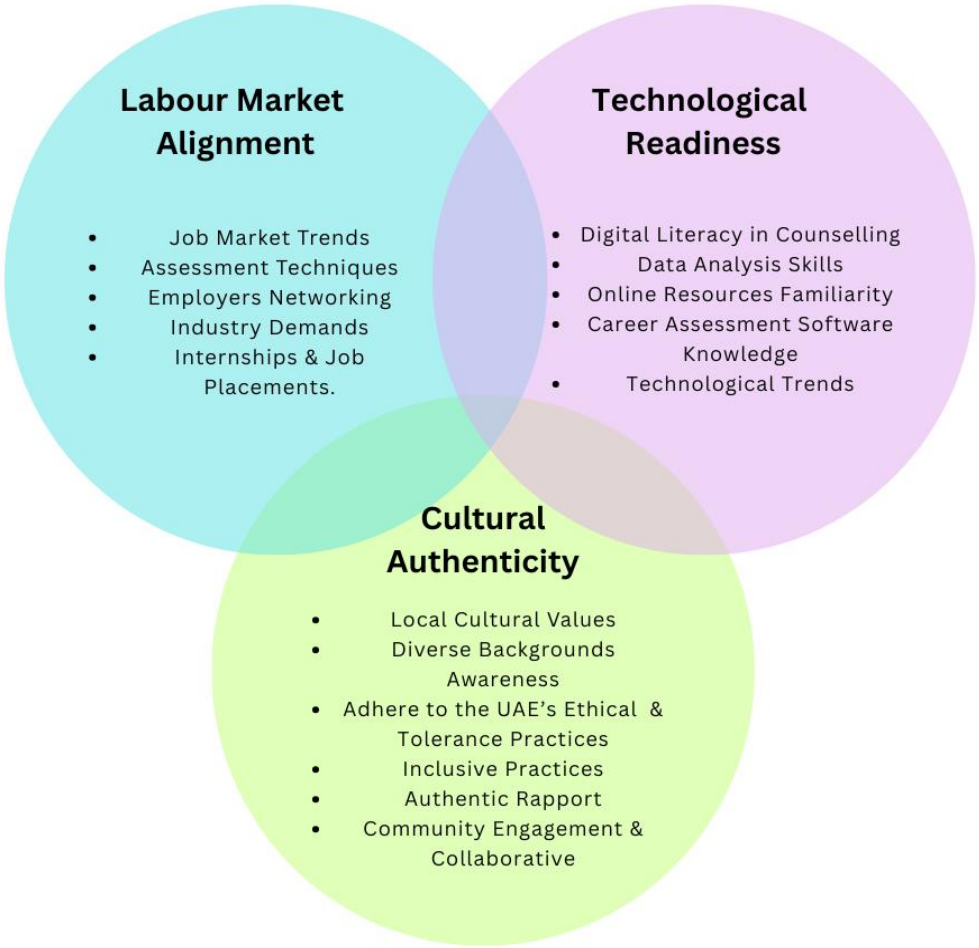


Figure 4: A proposed UAE CGC Competency Framework, and a list of Attributes that are shown in the diagram

Developing a Competency Framework for UAE school guidance counsellors is vital for establishing a standard of professional excellence and promoting ongoing improvement in the educational sector. This framework ensures that career counselling services effectively support individuals' academic and career growth. Additionally, implementing the framework aligns with the national vision of building a knowledge-based economy and a highly skilled workforce, underscoring the importance of authenticity in the role of career guidance counsellors (Sucharitha et al., 2021). The Competency Framework delineates the knowledge, skills, and behaviours required for practical career guidance and counselling, making it essential for application within the educational context (Sultana, 2009).

By focusing on these competencies, the framework not only enhances the effectiveness of career guidance and counselling but also supports the broader educational aims of the UAE.

The existing study used a qualitative approach to assess cultural authenticity among CGCs, yielding valuable insights into their demographics and perceptions. Data collection involved conducting different phases during the semi-structured interviews and FGDs with CGCs across the UAE; 17 of 67 participants responded. Notably, three-quarters of respondents were Emirati nationals, while a quarter were expatriates. This demographic profile supports the UAE's Emiratisation programme, which aims to improve the employment prospects of Emiratis in the local labour market, underscoring the importance of cultural authenticity in career guidance practices.

A positive correlation was observed between these findings and the National Agenda, which emphasises the development of a high-quality education system and a competitive knowledge economy. This agenda includes improvements in schools and universities, alongside projects and research initiatives designed to prepare young people for informed choices regarding university preparation, subject selection, graduation requirements, and future career paths aligned with labour market needs. It also addresses the challenges adolescents face through updated educational programmes .

Table 3: A proposed competency framework designed for the CGCs in the UAE. The complete table in Appendix 10

Competency	**Sub-competency**	**Behavioural sub-competency**
Role – duties and responsibilities	*Skill, knowledge and experience required*	*Behaviours to enact the role*
Help individuals make informed decisions about academic and career pathways.	Communication and questioning ability.	Empathetic, active listening, and patience
Explore an individual's interests, abilities, and aspirations.	**Required skills:** Assessment skills, Active listening, being empathic and rapport-building, communication skills, facilitation skills, problem-solving, and decision-making. **Required Knowledge:** Theories, assessment tools and development, labour market trends, educational pathways, cultural competency **Required experiences:** Guidance and counselling professional experience, analysing experiences, experience of working with diverse backgrounds of individuals, engaging with professional development, experience of collaboration with educational institutions and employers.	The behavioural role to be enacted: engaging, asking, providing constructive feedback, self-reflection, utilising assessment tools, demonstrating empathy and understanding, facilitating goal setting, encouraging, building trust and rapport, collaborating with clients, maintaining professional boundaries, evaluating progress, providing resources and referrals.

The initial step in developing a competency framework is to deeply understand the local context, including the economic, social, and cultural needs of institutions and students. In the UAE, this involved a thorough labour market study, interviews with education and career guidance experts, and focus groups through discussion with senior officials from the Ministry of Education and Career Guidance and Counselling in public schools, starting in Abu Dhabi and later expanding to other Emirates. This field research revealed key gaps between current skills and future needs, ensuring that competencies such as labour-market alignment, technological readiness, and cultural authenticity are adapted to the local context. When creating a framework for another country, it is essential to gather detailed data that reflects labour market demands, educational culture, and the region's social and technological environment.

The framework's distinctiveness also stems from its integration of the UAE's cultural factors, standards, national goals, and visions, which greatly influence its design. In addition to this local emphasis, the framework incorporates best practices from around the world and examines comparable contexts internationally. This comparative approach effectively helps realise the framework's objectives and incorporates relevant guidance and counselling theories. By drawing on insights from diverse sources, the research findings develop a comprehensive model suited to the UAE's educational and professional environment.

The framework must focus on a set of core competencies aligned with the country's or institution's strategic objectives. In the UAE, three main competencies were identified during the study: labour market alignment, technological readiness, and cultural authenticity. These competencies were not selected randomly but carefully chosen to balance the needs of the current labour market, the ability to adapt to advanced technologies, and the preservation of national cultural identity. When developing a competency framework in any country, it is essential to select comprehensive competencies that complement one another and span the professional, technical, artistic, and social dimensions, while ensuring each competency is measurable and practical.

Creating a practical competency framework largely depends on gathering reliable data from various sources, including experts, practitioners, and successful best practices implemented worldwide. In the UAE, individual interviews and FDGs provided valuable insights into the skills needed and the challenges students face in the job market. More questions were employed to collect data from additional practitioners utilising the same methods and approaches, focusing on the required competency for CGCs, the challenges they encounter, and their opinions on shaping this competency framework. When developing a framework for a new

country, it is critical to rely not only on theoretical data and official documents but also on the perspectives of real practitioners. This approach ensures the framework accurately reflects reality and is practical, thereby enhancing its credibility.

A key lesson from the UAE experience is recognising the importance of factoring in cultural and social contexts when defining competencies, which highlights the uniqueness of creating an effective framework country for CGCs. For example, the competency related to cultural authenticity was included to ensure the framework emphasises not only technical and professional skills but also fosters national agendas, identity and local values. When developing a competency framework for another country, it is crucial to identify the cultural and social factors that influence learning and career guidance, recognising that some globally standardised practices or competencies may not be appropriate for the local con text.

It is also equally important to understand what to avoid when developing a competency framework. For example, one should refrain from automatically adopting competencies or copying another country's framework without considering the local context, as this can result in an inappropriate, potentially ineffective framework. Similarly, an excessive emphasis on theoretical or broad competencies that cannot be measured or applied in practice should be avoided. The framework must be measurable and feasible for both educational and vocational institutions. Preventing these pitfalls ensures that the framework remains practical and truly valuable.

Ultimately, a competency framework should be a dynamic process that continuously evolves and enhances itself. The UAE's experience has demonstrated that integrating the three competencies and conducting regular assessments of the framework's effectiveness helps keep it relevant to labour market trends and social and technological shifts. Furthermore, involving key stakeholders in review and update processes ensures the framework's sustainability and acceptance by all parties. Any country aiming to develop a competency framework should establish a flexible system that combines data collection, ongoing analysis, and periodic evaluation to maintain the framework's effectiveness and alignment with local realities and future changes.

5.2.1 Evolution of Career Counselling in the UAE

Previous research has examined diverse career guidance models across regions, including those from the United States (e.g., National Career Development Association (NCDA) or American School Counsellor Association (ASCA)) (Su et al., 2014), Europe (e.g., National Institute for Career Education (NICE)) (Wetsel, 2023), Canada (Canadian Guidance & Counselling Association (CCPA)) (Karnjanavijaya et al., 2023), Australia (The Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA)) (OECD, 2003b), and Saudi Arabia (Mahfoudh et al., 2025). Collectively, these models assess the competency of Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) and aim to empower graduates of all ages to make informed decisions about education, training, and career pathways, facilitating effective transitions into the labour market. Notably, the guidance and counselling models currently employed in the UAE reflect the evolution of government-driven efforts in this domain and have the potential to strengthen CGCs' effectiveness in supporting high school graduates seeking to enrol in universities (Alshamsi & Mohebi, 2022).

Aligned with the UAE's educational strategic vision, substantial initiatives in education and career development are being implemented to advance the nation's strategic growth, as detailed in its Vision and labour market trends (Alwari, Fatima Mohammed Abdulrahim, 2024). This strategic emphasis expands CGCs' roles beyond their traditional function as psychology teachers, integrating responsibilities for career guidance and counselling. Findings from interviews with CGCs indicate that this development aligns with other educational policies, emphasising students' needs, the demands of a competitive labour market, and preservation of the country's authentic environment.

There are several plausible explanations for these findings. A critical factor may lie in the necessity to integrate personalised counselling approaches into broader career guidance strategies when engaging with young individuals. Such integration expands the scope of counselling interventions, recognising the diverse knowledge and different knowledge and training, skills, aptitude and behaviours inherent within the profession, including communication and interviewing proficiencies, client-centred methodologies, counselling and guidance techniques, assessment and matching capabilities, cognitive skills to motivation and inspiration, resilience and stress management, patience, therapeutic interventions and the theoretical application, result interpretation, empathetic understanding, non-judgmental listening, and knowledge of labour market trends (OECD, 2004).

Moreover, structural and policy-related influences, such as higher administrative levels within the Ministry of Education (MOE) and political frameworks including Vision 2021 and Vision 2031, shape the strategies adopted by CGCs in the educational policy contexts. These findings underscore that such policies provide structured guidance, enabling counsellors to support students in both career preparation and the deliberate shaping of their academic trajectories. By aligning these trajectories with future employment opportunities and national development goals, these strategies enhance the practical relevance of career guidance efforts (Shammas, 2023).

Against this backdrop, these integrated approaches position the CGCs in the UAE as critical actors in fostering successful and sustainable career trajectories for students. By interpreting and operationalising guidance and counselling initiatives, counsellors equip students with informed insights into emerging, successful, and innovative career pathways, thereby bridging the gap between individual aspirations and market realities. Central to their role is educating students to make contextually grounded decisions, while simultaneously assisting in developing the skills and competencies indispensable to cultivating a knowledgeable, well-prepared workforce attuned to the demands of increasingly competitive and diverse labour markets.

From this analytical perspective, the evolution of career counselling in the UAE, as highlighted by these findings, can be characterised as a deliberate, strategic response to dynamic shifts in educational landscapes and economic priorities. This evolution not only elevates counsellors to pivotal agents in enriching students' academic experiences but also underscores their contributions to the nation's overarching developmental objective, ensuring that career guidance remains a cornerstone of aligning human capital with societal and economic needs.

5.2.2 Challenges and Innovations in Career Counselling

In the thematic analysis of the interview data, several key challenges confronting career counsellors in the UAE were identified. These include navigating clients' shifting expectations amid volatile labour markets, addressing cultural influences on career choices, and adapting to dynamic forces shaping professional decision-making, such as technological transformations and the interplay between national strategic policies and authentic cultural contexts. These challenges collectively underscore the need for CGCs to engage in lifelong professional training and development, encompassing training, coaching, guidance, practice,

and the cultivation of specialised skills, alongside a robust organisational infrastructure to enhance their capacity to respond effectively to students' evolving needs.

Findings further highlight innovative strategies to mitigate these challenges, particularly the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and data-driven counselling approaches. As noted by Kumari (2020), AI trends have the potential to enhance the efficacy of counselling sessions, expanding the field's possibilities. Aligned with the UAE's broader vision, which prioritises technology adoption and AI applications across sectors, these innovations aim to streamline service delivery, reduce resource expenditure, and enable more efficient client support. By embedding AI and data-driven methods into guidance practices, the goal is to equip subsequent generations with the tools to make informed, responsible decisions tailored to the competitive demands of the labour market.

Notably, integrating technology into career guidance services requires CGCs to develop complex competencies that not only strengthen their professional expertise but also enable them to navigate future career trajectories with greater precision and alignment with market needs. These innovations not only enhance the quality and relevance of counselling services but also necessitate adherence to ethical principles, including the protection of client privacy and respect for autonomy, to ensure equitable and responsible application. By embracing technological advancements, the challenges of modern career counselling in the UAE can be addressed, empowering individuals to make informed, successful career choices.

5.2.3 Professionalism and Ethical Standards in Counselling Practice

Building on the thematic analysis of challenges and innovations, the interviews underscore that sustaining knowledge and ethical standards underpin best practices in career counselling in the UAE. This emphasis reflects CGC's extensive professional experience in delivering effective counselling services. Further findings suggest that developing CGCs necessitates ongoing engagement with international advancements, which can be achieved by attending seminars and conferences to stay informed about global developments in the field. Consequently, CGCs actively participate in continuous professional development (CPD) to enhance their professional competencies, remain aligned with MOE practices, gain proficiency in impactful counselling tools and methodologies, and maintain awareness of the applied theories that guide their work.

Adhering to ethical standards is critical in this process. By upholding these standards, counsellors strive to strengthen their professional capabilities, demonstrating proficiency in core competencies such as safeguarding client confidentiality, practising transparent disclosure, and avoiding harm through heightened awareness of their code of conduct. These ethical guidelines not only enhance service quality but also ensure interactions with students are culturally sensitive and attuned to individual inclinations, as highlighted by Tahir (2021).

The inclusion of internationally recognised practices tailored to the region's specific circumstances enables counsellors to address students' needs effectively in the UAE. This enhances the effectiveness of counselling interventions and aligns with the educational goals outlined in Vision 2021, which include Emiratisation and preparing students for the future job market.

These findings carry significant implications for aligning counselling policies with the broader framework of national educational strategies. They clarify CGC's pivotal role as a driver of economic growth and social development, underscoring its responsibility to integrate guidance and counselling into the education system. Through this integration, counsellors help students align their career choices with national trends, fostering proactive strategies that benefit both counsellors' professional development and the UAE workforce. Ultimately, such approaches prepare students for the global talent market demands outlined in the UAE Vision 2021 and 2031 (UAE, 2024).

Overall, CGC's expertise, dedication to ethical principles, and use of relevant topics and methods directly boost clients' career growth while helping to raise the UAE's socio-economic status. These insights show that counsellors take on an essential role in developing future workforce skills, encouraging innovative thinking, and supporting sustainable prosperity for future generations.

In the context of the UAE's highly developed educational and economic landscape, technological readiness emerges as a vital element of any career guidance and counselling framework. Interviews with school practitioners and administrators from the Ministry of Education's department of counselling and future skills revealed that students with robust digital skills and knowledge of modern technologies are better prepared for future jobs that rely heavily on technology, such as those in artificial intelligence, big data, and digital transformation. The

qualitative data further indicated that a significant majority of Career Guidance Counsellors (CGCs) acknowledge the importance of technological competencies in enhancing employability. Focus group discussions echoed these views, with participants emphasising that a lack of technological preparedness leaves students feeling insecure about their professional abilities, contributing to the widening digital skills gap. This data highlights the urgent need to incorporate technological readiness as a key component of the framework, enabling students to meet the demands of the digital age and improve their capacity to innovate and compete in a rapidly evolving job market.

Integrating labour market alignment into the competency framework for career guidance and counselling is crucial in the UAE, especially amid rapid changes in local and regional labour markets. The growing demand for specific skills in emerging technologies and economic sectors requires that career guidance programmes effectively equip individuals with the competencies needed for successful employment. Interviews with senior educators from the Ministry of Education and career guidance specialists in the UAE have revealed a notable gap between the skills students and graduates currently have and those required by the labour market. This gap hampers their ability to secure suitable employment after graduation. For example, qualitative results (from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions) indicated that more than half of respondents believe that aligning educational curricula with labour market demands significantly improves employment opportunities. The success of education-sector strategies, such as the Emiratisation of the counselling profession, is crucial in closing this gap from planning through to implementation.

This study has investigated the UAE's CGC scenario with career counsellors' participants through interviews and focus group discussions. Significant facts drawn from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions include the versatility of CGCs, their approaches to improving learners' performance, and the difficulties they encounter due to dynamic changes in learning and economic systems. The research objectives were to identify the competencies and practices that define practical career guidance and counselling (CGC) in the United Arab Emirates and uncover themes from in-depth qualitative interviews. The findings revealed that CGCs in the UAE integrate psychological theory into counselling sessions and tailor advice to the client's strengths, passions, and aptitudes. The study addressed topics such as managing client expectations, the influence of culture on career choices, and the incorporation of technology in counselling processes.

The significance of CGC's effect and effectiveness on students must be taken into consideration. It helps them make informed decisions regarding their future and choose a path that aligns with their interests, skills, and global standards. The UAE understands the importance of practical career guidance and counselling to meet the needs of its diverse workforce. It is crucial to address educational gaps to ensure that all students have inclusive and equal opportunities. UAE students can benefit from improved career guidance programmes by adopting initiatives from other regions, which equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve their goals. Therefore, educators and policymakers in the UAE were driven to guide students towards continuing their higher education studies and changing their career major and future expectations by empowering them with new skills, knowledge, experience, and abilities and becoming more resilient in applying for jobs in the private sector rather than only focusing on the public sector. Furthermore, to reach this goal, the education strategy was to place schools with career guidance and counsellors (CGCs) in a position to play a vital role in those adolescents' lives and guide them in making decisions related to their significant future careers.

Establishing a university major could significantly advance the field of counselling and development, particularly in recruitment and professional development. The emphasis on lifelong learning embedded in the CGC curriculum will directly impact practitioners' competencies, enriching their knowledge base, enhancing their skill sets, and broadening their practical experience. Furthermore, CPD, in addition to licensure, will facilitate advanced career paths within the profession. As the need for qualified CGCs continues to rise, this initiative will contribute to increased demand for these professionals within educational institutions (Haug et al., 2020). Participating in camping, activities, and competitions motivates students and supports their development through high school. This involvement reflects various aspects of a student's character, such as personality, academic achievement, attitude, and effort. Husain's (2022) study emphasised the positive link between students' experiences at school and at home, which is vital in fostering their motivation and confidence to reach their goals. As a result, a well-designed guidance programme by CGCs can greatly influence students, helping them successfully transition into the workforce.

In a rapidly evolving global labour market, especially in a dynamic economy such as that of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), career guidance and counselling are pivotal in helping young people make informed decisions about their future education and employment

paths. The UAE recognises this and has sought to institutionalise high standards of career guidance through a structured competency framework that guides the work of professional counsellors across schools and higher-education institutions. The objective of such a framework is not merely to offer ad hoc advice, but to ensure consistent quality of career guidance services — aligning students' interests and skills with labour-market demands and bridging the gap between education and employment (for example via the "Guidance Portfolio" initiative launched by the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) in cooperation with the Ministry of Education (MoE).

Since the UAE's establishment in 1970, the government has implemented extensive initiatives to improve various sectors, including infrastructure, healthcare, education, military, economics and finance, environmental sustainability, and socio-economic development. The allocation of government budgets reflects this commitment, with significant funding directed towards key sectors such as education, healthcare, and defence. Notably, there has been progress in the education sector, with a focus on increasing the number of qualified educators and staff serving K-12 students. This strategic investment aims to equip students with the academic knowledge and skills needed for professional success. The system is designed to encourage engagement and prepare graduates for higher education, thereby contributing to a flexible, well-prepared workforce capable of meeting the challenges of a diverse labour market. To illustrate, the Ministry of Education provides schools with CGCs to support students in their academic and professional preparation programmes.

Over the past decade, CGCs have implemented comprehensive strategies to deliver year-round guidance programmes for Emirati public school students. This study examined the challenges faced by CGCs and identified a significant gap due to the lack of a clear, comprehensive, and competent competency framework to guide these CGCs in their key roles with students. Based on extensive recent research, the findings indicate that it is essential to establish a competency framework that can effectively address this gap. The researcher concludes that a competency framework is needed that aligns with the UAE's National Agenda and incorporates elements from the NICE and Canadian frameworks. This approach aims to enhance career guidance programmes in Emirati public schools, thereby supporting more informed career decisions and increasing students' employment opportunities.

Primarily, this framework should focus on competency development, experiential learning, and the integration of labour-market insights, while respecting the UAE's cultural context. Applying this competency will generate valuable insights and practical recommendations for adopting best practices. The study suggests a strategic approach that incorporates cultural and economic dimensions relevant to the UAE, emphasising the importance of a robust theoretical foundation to guide career guidance initiatives. Likewise, a thorough alignment of resources and strategies will be necessary for career guidance and counselling (CGC) initiatives to improve the effectiveness of career guidance programmes and to incorporate evidence-based practices, fostering a positive working environment for both counsellors and clients. At its core, encouraging stakeholder collaboration can be achieved by implementing and developing guidance programmes . They establish advisory committees to guide the development and implementation of counselling programmes in Emirati schools.

Integrating the CGC programme with Emiratisation efforts is essential. This alignment will significantly improve the effectiveness of guidance programmes by actively supporting the employment of UAE nationals. By synchronising career guidance activities with national workforce development strategies in collaboration with government agencies, CGCs can enhance students' awareness of local employment opportunities. This can be achieved by including information about Emiratisation initiatives in group and individual sessions. Furthermore, establishing partnerships with organisations committed to Emiratisation will facilitate valuable internships and work placements for students, further bridging the gap between education and the labour market. To effectively address the diverse needs of the student body, CGCs must engage in collaborative efforts within various organisational frameworks. This includes meeting the specific requirements of different student demographics, such as individuals with disabilities, students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and students from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Above all, strategic initiatives should focus on developing customised resources and support services to meet these varied needs. Additionally, ensuring comprehensive representation and support for all students in their career aspirations and fostering inclusivity through targeted CGC activities are vital.

CGCs must develop greater expertise in the programmes they deliver and present to adolescents to ensure these sessions are formative, engaging, and influential. Improving CGC's technology competencies is crucial to enhancing the effectiveness of their guidance programmes , making them more formative, fruitful, and motivating. By incorporating coaching

and mentoring principles into their practice, CGCs can build persuasive skills that empower students during individual sessions, leading to more impactful and well-structured programmes.

Additionally, as Husain (2022) outlined, CGCs must actively engage with STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Focusing on these fields allows CGCs to utilise their expertise and foster a growth-oriented mindset among students, helping them to navigate challenges effectively and persevere in STEM careers. Husain (2022) notes the relationship between influencing students' attitudes and aspirations towards STEM programmes , which will affect their future career choices; this targeted approach enhances counsellors' instructional sessions and positively shapes students' perceptions of STEM careers. By imparting theoretical knowledge in STEM, CGCs can significantly improve the quality of guidance, helping students make informed, strategic career decisions for their future endeavours (Husain, 2022).

5.3 Comparison of Key Findings to Literature and Original Contribution

This study's key findings from the empirical evidence, as well as the contextual analysis, are critical for comparison with existing international Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) competency frameworks, including NICE's, Canada's and Australia's frameworks. This comparative analysis will help identify commonalities of good professional practice as well as elements that are specifically influenced by the UAE context. The study validates its original contribution to the area of CGC competency development.

Regarding convergence with the international literature, the results show good convergence with the core principles of CGC professionalisation. Firstly, ethical and professional behaviour becomes a common ground. The study findings also support the adoption of ethical codes of conduct, such as confidentiality and professional responsibilities, which are also supported by international guidelines, for CGCs in the UAE. Secondly, there is a need for the structure to be clear and for professional advocacy. The results also mirror the international picture and shows that CGCs need to take an active role in collaboration and advocacy in order to clarify and elucidate their role, which tends to be confused with that of social workers and/or psychologists. Thirdly, the need for ongoing professional development is re-emphasised. The study is in line with international models that focus on lifelong learning and structured

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as important tools to ensure and develop the professional competency of the teacher.

While there are elements of commonalities, the study also highlights competency requirements and contextual factors that are not included or fully covered within the current international frameworks, emphasising the UAE context. One of the major findings is the cultural authenticity requirement, which requires the explicit incorporation of Emirati cultural values, social cohesion and the important role of family in career decision making processes. While western models emphasise individual autonomy, UAE models and contexts call for CGCs as cultural mediators between respecting local traditions and advancing national development priorities.

The study also emphasises the need for policy alignment. The practice of CGC in UAE should be linked and aligned with UAE national economic and human capital development strategies, including those outlined in UAE Vision 2021 and UAE Vision 2031. To be able to effectively tackle the mismatch between the outcomes of education and the needs of a competitive knowledge economy, counsellors need to develop strong labour market competencies. In addition, technological readiness is recognised as one of the competency domains that are critical. In response to the UAE's quick embrace of Industry 4.0 (Mishrif et al., 2023) and digitalisation, CGCs must be well informed, digitally literate and analytical, to be able to leverage virtual platforms and understand labour market data and trends to offer future-oriented guidance.

The strength of this study is the creation of a competency model which is grounded in the local reality and derived from international best practices, validated through the use of empirical data. There are three critical aspects to this contribution. The first being the contextualisation of the global career guidance principles to fit the UAE's socio-cultural, educational, and economic context, which is also called contextual translation. First, it is contextualisation of the global career guidance principles to make them applicable to the UAE's socio-cultural, educational and economic context, which may be referred to as contextual translation. Second, it helps to clarify the role, by giving a clear and nationally relevant definition of the CGC role, including expectations and professional standards, to overcome existing ambiguity in UAE public schools. Third, the study introduces a new structure architecture with three distinct domains, namely Labour Market Alignment, Technological Readiness, and

Cultural Authenticity, which are specific to each context. This integrated structure goes beyond blanket theoretical models and offers a framework that is both theoretically grounded and also practically relevant, culturally responsive and applicable to workforce development in UAE.

Chapter Six: Reflection and Conclusion

6.1 Realisation of research objectives

This study successfully addressed its primary objectives through a rigorous qualitative investigation. The first objective, to develop a competency framework for UAE CGCs, was realised through the synthesis of international best practices with local authentic requirements, resulting in the proposed framework detailed in Appendix 10. The second objective, exploring skills enhancement, was met by identifying critical gaps in psychological theory application and technological readiness, providing a roadmap for Continued Professional Development. Finally, the third objective was achieved by examining counsellors' perceptions, revealing that while professional passion is high, institutional barriers like role ambiguity must be addressed to ensure job satisfaction and service effectiveness. Collectively, these findings provide the Ministry of Education with a standard for excellence that directly supports the students' career readiness and national human-capital goals.

6.2 Original Contribution from the Study

The empirical findings of this study both corroborate and extend the existing literature on career guidance and counselling competency frameworks. While alignment with international models from NICE and Canada is evident in the emphasis on ethical standards and professional development, this research identifies several areas of divergence specific to the Emirati context. Unlike general Western models, the findings here underscore the critical necessity of 'Cultural Authenticity' as a core competency, reflecting the profound influence of family collectivism and national identity on career decision-making in the UAE. Furthermore, the explicit integration of technological readiness—specifically AI-driven counselling tools—as a non-negotiable professional standard represents a departure from more traditional frameworks. The original contribution of this research lies in its synthesis of these local socio-cultural priorities with global best practices, resulting in a contextually grounded 'UAE CGC Competency Framework'. This framework provides a unique professional roadmap that addresses the specific needs of Emirati public schools, thereby bridging a significant gap in the regional literature and offering a model for other Gulf nations undergoing similar educational and economic transformations.

6.3 Policy implications

Based on the findings and implications outlined earlier, policymakers in the UAE are encouraged to prioritise the following interrelated initiatives to strengthen the role of CGC and advance their contributions to students and national success: First, establish clear, nationally recognised practice guidelines for entry-level and advanced career counsellors, grounded in international benchmarks aligned with established regional models. Adopting frameworks such as the NICE (Wetsel, 2023), Canadian (CCPA) (Karnjanavijaya et al., 2023), Australian (CICA) (OECD, 2003b), and the Saudi Arabia career guidance framework (Mahfoudh et al., 2025) will support the standardisation and quality assurance of CGC services, ensuring alignment with global best practices while addressing local needs. Second, fostering organisational collaboration among educational institutions. Strengthening partnerships across these sectors enables the sharing of resources, expertise, and innovative approaches, thereby enhancing the scalability and effectiveness of counselling service delivery. Such collaboration is particularly critical given the dynamic challenges of career market volatility and the need for context-specific solutions, as discussed in earlier sections on challenges and innovations. Third, allocate adequate funding for CGC's (CPD). Sustained investment in CPD programmes will empower CGCs to update their competencies, including proficiency in emerging tools (e.g., AI-driven platforms) and approaches, as highlighted in the study's implications for practice (Kumari, 2020). This ensures CGCs remain agile in addressing evolving students' needs and labour market trends, aligning with the UAE's strategic emphasis on technological integrations (UAE, 2024). Fourth, formally integrate CGC practice into national education polices, with explicit alignment to the Vision 2021 National Agenda. This integration will position CGC as an integral component of academic curricula from early educational stages, reinforcing its role in bridging individual aspirations with national priorities, such as Emiratisation and workforce readiness, objectives that align with CGC's contributions to socio-economic development (Shammas, 2023). Fifth, implement periodic assessments and outcome evaluations of counselling services. Regular data collection on service delivery, student outcomes, and alignment with national goals will provide actionable insights to guide iterative policy refinement. These evaluations will also ensure that interventions remain responsive to shifting labour market demands and cultural contexts, as emphasised in discussions on ethical standards and cultural sensitivity (Tahir, 2021).

6.4 Practical implications

The current study underscores several critical implications for the practice of CGCs in the UAE. A primary recommendation is adopting a more individualised counselling approach to better address students' unique needs and foster tailored career pathways. Central to this is the integration of psychological theories into daily guidance sessions: these theories not only enhance CGCs' capacity to understand students' diverse requirements but also provide a structured framework for navigating routine counselling tasks (Kumari, 2020). By grounding interventions in these theoretical foundations, counsellors are equipped to guide students toward career choices that align with their interests, abilities, and aptitudes, ultimately supporting their pursuit of successful and fulfilling professional trajectories. Cultural competency is equally vital. Recognising the influence of cultural contexts on individuals' career decisions enables CGCs to avoid stereotyping and discrimination, ensuring guidance remains inclusive and attuned to the UAE's socio-cultural fabric. Finally, systematic evaluation of counselling outcomes and iterative adjustments to practices based on students' feedback and dynamic needs are essential to optimising service quality within the UAE's specific educational and economic landscape. These implications collectively emphasise the need for CGCs to balance theoretical grounding, technological adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and practice evaluation, aligning directly with earlier discussions on continuous professional development (CPD), ethical standards, and the strategic role of counsellors in supporting national goals like Emiratisation (Zeffane & Kemp, 2020) and future workforce readiness (as referenced in Vision 2021 and UAE Vision 2031). By operationalising these insights, CGCs can strengthen their efficacy, enhance student support, and contribute meaningfully to the UAE's socio-economic development.

6.5 Theoretical implications

This research depended on Culture and Authenticity Theory (CAT), Social Learning Theory (SLT), and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) to build a Theoretical framework for the UAE CGC competency framework. In the UAE context, the complementarity between the Framework and CAT becomes even more pronounced, given the country's unique blend of rapid modernisation, multicultural demographics, and deep-rooted national identity. The UAE's Career Guidance and Counselling Competency Framework explicitly incorporates culturally responsive practice, community engagement, and contextual awareness as essential competencies, which aligns with CAT's call for authenticity in navigating local values,

traditions, and social expectations. By embedding these principles into guidance practice, counsellors in the UAE are better positioned to provide career support that is both globally informed and deeply reflective of Emirati cultural specificities, including respect for societal norms, sensitivity to family dynamics, and awareness of emerging national development priorities. Thus, CAT reinforces the Framework's commitment to ensuring that guidance in the UAE is not only professionally rigorous but also culturally meaningful and resonant with the lived experiences of diverse learners.

In the UAE context, the connection between the Framework and SLT becomes particularly salient because career development is embedded within strong familial, cultural, and societal expectations that significantly influence young people's perceptions of appropriate career paths. The Framework's emphasis on contextual awareness, stakeholder engagement, and culturally informed practice aligns with SLT's assertion that individuals learn within social systems, meaning UAE counsellors must understand the influential roles of family, community norms, national role models, and policy-driven narratives in shaping career choices. By incorporating SLT principles, the Framework enables counsellors in the UAE to design guidance practices that acknowledge these social influences, reinforce positive modelling, and help students navigate the interplay between personal aspirations and the broader social structures shaping their career development. In the UAE context, this alignment is especially relevant because a mixture of personal ambition, family expectations, cultural norms, and national development priorities influences career decision-making.

The Framework's emphasis on culturally responsive guidance, stakeholder engagement, and contextually aware practice complements SCCT's focus on environmental supports and barriers, helping counsellors to assist Emirati students in exploring both opportunities and limitations while boosting their confidence and making well-informed, goal-oriented career decisions. By integrating SCCT principles, the Framework guarantees that career guidance in the UAE remains both theoretically sound and practically applicable, promoting self-efficacy, realistic outcome expectations, and active engagement with available social and institutional resources.

Collectively, these theories highlight the multifaceted nature of competency development in CGC and point to a significant theoretical gap. There is currently no single, comprehensive theory that effectively guides the construction of a CGC Competency Framework. This gap underscores the need for this research to establish a cohesive theoretical

framework that integrates these diverse perspectives, thereby advancing career guidance and counselling practices in the UAE.

6.6 Limitations

Several limitations were encountered during the study. Methodologically, the research was constrained by a small sample size of 17 participants, which, while providing depth, may limit the generalisability of findings across all seven Emirates. Bureaucratic delays in the ethical approval process with the ESE gatekeepers impacted the timeframe for data collection, causing significant stress and potentially affecting the depth of follow-up inquiries. Logistically, the transition to virtual tools like MS Teams was necessary but faced initial trustworthiness and engagement issues. Furthermore, the researcher's positionality as an insider-reflexive practitioner necessitated high methodological vigilance to avoid bias or normalising regional disparities. Lastly, some participants displayed hesitancy during in-depth interviews due to a lack of experience in sharing professional knowledge, suggesting that future research participation may require more structured preparatory support for practitioners.

6.7 Recommendations

Based on the study's implications, the following actionable recommendations are proposed: For policymakers, it is essential to formally adopt the proposed UAE CGC Competency Framework as a national standard to unify practices across public schools and provide a clear job description for HR departments. Practitioners should actively integrate psychological theories and AI-driven assessment tools into their daily sessions to move from reactive advising to strategic "life design" support. Regarding professional development, the MOE should establish a specific university major for career counselling and mandate licensure to ensure long-term professional status. For future research, it is recommended to conduct a longitudinal study tracking students' post-graduation outcome to evaluate the long-term impact of the proposed framework. Finally, fostering a collaborative ecosystem among industry partners, parents, and schools is critical to aligning student aspirations with the realities of the UAE's competitive, technology-driven labour market.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – The Ethics documentation

Ethics:

1. Filling the ethics, integrity, and governance unit.



Ethics, Integrity and Governance Unit

Ethics Application Form

V5. 04th December 2023

PLEASE NOTE THAT ONLY ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION IS ACCEPTED

This application form is to be used to seek approval from one of the three University Ethics Review Panels (BAHSS; Science & Health). These Ethics Review Panels deal with all staff and postgraduate research student projects. Taught (undergraduate and MSc dissertation projects) will normally be dealt with via School/Faculty process / committee.

If you are unsure whether your activity requires ethical approval please complete a University of Central Lancashire Ethics Checklist. If the proposed activity involves animals, you should not use this form. Please contact the Ethics, Integrity and Governance Unit within the Research and Enterprise Service – EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk – for further details.

Please refer to the guidance notes for help with completing the Ethics Form.

If this application relates to project/phase which has previously been approved by one of the University of Central Lancashire Ethics Review Panels, please supply the corresponding reference number(s) from your decision letter(s). ONLY REQUIRED FOR PHASED PROJECT

Previous Ethics Approval Ref No	
Student Registration No	G 20997566

1.0 Insurance Assessment Questions: *Place a cross against the options that reflect your project (if applicable)*

Does any part of your research take place outside of the UK?		☒
Does the research deliberately include participants from any of the following groups:	pregnant women?	☐
	children aged five or under?	☐
	adults who lack the capacity to give informed consent?	☐
Does the research include medical intervention involving:	investigating a medical device?	☐
	a clinical trial?	☐
	contraception?	☐
Does the research include more than 5000 participants?		☐
Is the research to be carried out by other organisations where the University is required by contract to provide insurance cover for the research if it proceeds?		☐

1.1 Project Type:

What Research Theme does your project fall under? Sustainability, Business and Enterprise

Which Research Institute or Research Centre does your project align to? Centre: Business, Management and Enterprise

☐ Staff Research ☐ Commercial Project	☐ Masters by Research ☐ MPhil Research ☐ PhD Research ☒ Professional Doctorate	☐ Taught MSc/MA Research* ☐ Undergrad Research* ☐ Internship *Please provide course name:

1.2 Principal Investigator / Director of Studies or Supervisor (if student project):

Name	School	Email
Iftikhar Bokhari	Business	IBokhari3@uclan.ac.uk
Ruth Elisabeth Slater	Management	RESlater1@uclan.ac.uk

1.3 Other / Co-Researchers / Student:

Name	School	Email
Amal Alawadhi	Business	aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk
	Choose an item.	

1.4 Project Title:

The UAE's Career Counsellors Competency Framework

1.5 Proposed Start Date:

13/11/2023

1.6 Proposed End Date:
30/08/2024
1.7 Is this project in receipt of any external funding? (including donations of samples, equipment etc.)?
☐ Yes ☒ No
If Yes, please provide details of sources of the funding and what part it plays in the current proposal.
1.8 Project Description (in layman's terms) including the aim(s) and justification of the project (max 300 words)
*Give a brief summary of the **b**ackground, **p**urpose and **p**ossible **b**enefits of the project. This should include a **statement** on the academic **rationale**, the **context** of the activity and **justification** for conducting the project.*
The UAE has made significant progress in building a diversified-based economy over the past few decades. As part of this process, the government has implemented several Emiratisation initiatives to increase the number of Emirati nationals working in the private sector. A vital component of these initiatives is the requirement of career counselling or guidance services to help Emirati individuals make future career decisions and guide adolescents and post-secondary students to acquire and develop the skills needed to succeed in the workplace of the future. This research study investigates career counsellors' function in UAE schools. It will also create a framework of competencies that will guide their work, particularly among UAE nationals, and help further economic growth in the region. To achieve this, it is crucial to develop a competency framework that adheres to the UAE's standards. Additionally, we will draw from successful practices used in the Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe (NICE) framework and Canadian.

The study's results present a chance to enhance career counselling services for UAE students. Standards can be established by aligning with the UAE vision 2020 and the government's future goals. This framework will assist Emiratis in matching their career aims and aspirations with their abilities, knowledge, and potential to meet future demands. Additionally, it offers counsellors a platform to implement organised professional standards.

The research objective goal is to enhance the current system for professional career counsellors in UAE schools. The approach will involve extensive research, utilising our knowledge of the UAE context, and incorporating best practices from the NICE framework. The updated framework will prioritise evidence-based practices and practical implementation principles, aligning with the five-year UAE Vision 2021 policy. We aim to improve the education and training of UAE students through revisions to the policy. To support decision-making, we will provide a strong rationale in our framework.

Furthermore, the framework includes the professional competencies of career counsellors by developing a robust, appropriate, practical framework and being well-trained and qualified in compliance with UAE legislation. Overall, the role of career counsellors and their competency framework in the UAE is an important step forward in developing and supporting adolescents in implementing strategies for future decision-making. With its focus on their current role and framework of evidence-based support and developing collaboration among stakeholders, this framework can bring positive change for UAE nationals and deliver long-term benefits to the country's economy and society.

1.9 Methodology Please be specific

Provide an outline of the proposed method, including details of sample numbers, source of samples, type of data collected, equipment required and any modifications thereof, etc. Please include:

- *Aims and objectives:*
- *Hypotheses and/or research question(s) to be addressed:*
- *Study design, to include recruitment and sampling strategy, inclusion/exclusion criteria, sample size and justification*
- *Proposed method(s) of data analysis:*
- *Description of site(s) / facilities / equipment required:*

Aims and objectives:

The primary aim of this study is to examine the positive impact of career guidance and counsellors on students by guiding and supporting them to make future decisions related to the competitive labour market.

The objectives are:

To analyse gaps in the career counselling framework in the UAE schools (if there is an existing one), with the NICE and Canadian framework.

To examine how the UAE 2020 National Agenda in the education field reflected the need for career counsellors in schools.

To explore the importance of career counselling programmes in guiding and helping students make future decisions related to the competitive labour market demand and develop the potential for career counsellors in schools.

Research questions:

What are the challenges in the career guidance framework in UAE schools compared to the NICE and Canadian framework?

What is the relation between the existing competency framework and Emiratisation government initiatives?

How the UAE 2020 National Agenda in the education field reflected the need for career counsellors in schools.

What is the significance of career counselling programmes , and how it can help students to make future decisions related to the competitive labour market demand to develop the potential for career counsellors in schools?

Study method and design*:*

The study will adopt a qualitative approach and design, collecting non-numerical data to understand individual experiences, opinions, and different research concepts and using semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups. Preliminary data will be collected in the form of interviews after attaining ethical approval from the university. A sample size of **10** has been selected to gather data of in-depth interviews and semi-structured; divided into **8** from the field of counselling and **2** from the managerial level and above, the selection purpose is to ensure adequate insight and quality of data. And email will be sent to the gatekeeper (in Emirates School Establishment (ESE) training and research, and colleagues where those wishing to take part can express an interest by contacting the candidate as they will be requested to attend and online interview at their convenient time. In-depth

interviews will be conducted via the University of Lancashire's MS Teams accounts. The interview and the focus group will be recorded along with the transcripts for **14** days, them anonymised and retained for **7** years. Potential participants will be requested to give their shared (via email) consent before starting the interview process. The researcher will go through the consent process and form with participants to ensure they are aware of what the project will entail and that they agree/consent to take part. Added, three to four individuals who have taken part in the interview will be asked to take part in focus groups.

Focus groups:

The data collected will be analyses using qualitative data analysis techniques. The current study will be using a thematic analysis, and content analysis techniques to analyses the collected data. The thematic data analysis technique will analyses the data collected from the interviews. In contrast, the contend analysis technique will analyses the secondary data collected from scholarly sources such as journal articles, publications, official websites, and books on guidance and counselling competency framework. The rationale for using thematic and content analysis techniques is that they provide a practical framework through which the collected data and information can be analyses by identifying relevant themes about the primary research variable. This will allow us to establish the relationship between the research variables and draw conclusions based on the relevance of the data in responding to the primary research questions. The selection of focus groups will be based on the data that has been gathered from individual interviews, and the specific areas that need to be focused on. Typically, 3-4 participants will be selected from different schools (male – female), cities (capital, other cities; i.e., Dubai, Sharjah, and Ras Al Khaimah), and backgrounds (level of education; i.e., PhD, master degree, and undergraduate – gender) and experiences (first will be with the founders worked with first announcement of the career counsellors whom are still at their work, then selecting others according to their ethnography already mentioned), to ensure that a broad range of data is covered during the discussion. The data collection process for each session will take approximately 30-45 minutes. The session will be conducted on university MS Teams and will be set up from the UCLan account. The individuals will be provided with further information and will be asked to contact the candidate to complete a consent form prior to the focus group. Participants will be notified that they can exit the focus group at any point, without giving a reason. However, DUE to the nature of focus groups what one person says may have an effect on what another participant says. Therefore, if the participants choose to withdraw from the study the student will retain any data that you have provided up to that point. In addition, participants will be informed that taking part in a focus group means that full confidentiality cannot be guaranteed on behalf of the other focus group participants.

Participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality at the start of the focus group.

Sample size:

The sample size will be 10 participants; they will be requested to participate in interviews using University of Lancashire MS Teams (the candidate will use University of Central Lancashire account to create online meeting) for confidentiality recording and transcript; also, 2 participants from managerial positions will be involved in the interview.

Secondary Data

The research project also proposed to use data from existing documents. The data sources that will be used will be in the public domain, i.e. from articles, journals and e-books. These will be accessed from within University of Central Lancashire resources (online library) and online. The use of secondary data has helped identify the research problem and develop research questions for this research project.

1.10 Has the quality of the project been assessed? (select all that apply)

☐ Independent external review

☒ Internal review (e.g. involving colleagues, academic supervisor, and School process)

☒ Research Programme Approval gained on Click here to enter a date. ***(Please note that RPA is a prerequisite for Research Degree Students and Professional Doctorates).***

☐ None

☐ Other

If other, please give details

RPA was approved on 03rd of March 2023

1.11 Please provide details as to the storage and protection of your physical / electronic data for the next 7 years (or 10 years if funded by the EU or Medical Research Council) – as per University of Central Lancashire requirements – or whichever archive period is appropriate

According to University of Central Lancashire's code of conduct, all primary data shall be anonymised and stored securely for at least 7 years. All data collected will be secured and a password-protected folder within University of Central Lancashire's network.

Moreover, we can promise that all data will be collected, stored, and processed according to University of Central Lancashire's Research Ethics code of conduct.

Data will be stored on the University of Central Lancashire OneDrive and destroyed after 7 years in line with University of Central Lancashire guidance. The OneDrive will be shared with the Director of Studies, and the Director of Studies will be responsible for deleting the data at the 7 years' time point.

Contact details for arranging interviews and focus groups will not be retained, unless participants have requested to receive a summary of the research findings. In which case, contact details will be held until a summary of the research is shared with them at the end of the study.

Recordings of interviews / focus groups will be destroyed once satisfactory transcriptions are completed.

1.12 How is it intended the results of the study will be reported and disseminated?

(select all that apply)

☐ Peer-reviewed journal – hard copy or online

☒ Internal report

☐ Conference presentation

☐ Other publication

☐ Written feedback to research participants

☐ Presentation to participants or relevant community groups

☒ Dissertation/Thesis

☐ Other

If other, please give details

The Emirates School Establishment (ESE) may request a summary of the research.

The participants will be offered the opportunity to receive a summary of the thesis if they wish.

1.13 Will the activity involve any external organisations for which separate and specific approval is required? (e.g. NHS; school; any criminal justice agencies including the Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Prison Service or Probation Service)?

☐ Yes ☒ No

*If **YES**, please refer to the guidance notes to determine what external approvals may be required.*

If Yes, please provided details of the external organisations and attach letter of approval

1.14 The nature of this project is most appropriately described as research involving:

(more than one may apply)

☐ Behavioural observation

☐ Questionnaire(s) – please provide a copy of the questionnaire/survey.

☒ Interview(s) – please provide a list of questions to be asked, or if semi-structured, the topics

☒ Qualitative methodologies (e.g., focus groups) – please provide the questions/topics to be covered.

☐ Psychological experiments

☐ Epidemiological studies

☐ Data linkage studies

☐ Psychiatric or clinical psychology studies

☐ Human physiological investigation(s)

☐ Biomechanical device(s)

☐ Human tissue(s)*

☐ Human genetic analysis

☐ A clinical trial of drug(s) or device(s)

☐ Lab-based experiment – please provide relevant COHSS / RA forms

☐ Archaeological excavation/fieldwork

☐ Re-analysis of archaeological finds/ancient artefacts

☐ Human remains analysis.

☐ Lone working or travel to unfamiliar places (e.g. interviews in participants' homes) – please provide relevant risk assessment form

☐ Other (please specify in the box below)

If 'Other' please provide details:

1.15 Human Participants, Data or Material – the project will involve:

Please select the appropriate box(es)

☒ Participants [proceed to next question 1.16]

☐ Data [proceed to question 1.30]

☐ Tissues /Fluids / DNA Samples [proceed to question 1.31] Please email EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk if a project involves this option.

☐ Remains [proceed to question 1.32]

1.16 Will the participants be from any of the following groups:

(tick as many as applicable)

☐ Students or staff of this University (*Where staff or students of the university are being used please explain how this is not a convenience sampling in section 1.9)*

☐ Children/legal minors (anyone under the age of 18 years)

☐ Patients or clients of professionals

☐ Those with a learning disability

☐ Those who are unconscious, severely ill, or have a terminal illness.

☐ Those in emergencies

☐ Those with mental illness (mainly if detained under Mental Health Legislation)

☐ People with dementia

☐ Prisoners

☐ Young Offenders

☐ Adults who are unable to consent for themselves.

☐ Any other person whose capacity to consent may be compromised.

☒ A member of an organisation where another individual may also need to give consent.

☐ Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, e.g. those in care homes

☐ Other vulnerable groups (please list in the box below)

If 'Other' please provide details

Consent forms from employers for counsellors.

1.16a Justify their inclusion

*Ethics approval covers **all participants,** but attention must be given to the vulnerable category. Therefore, you need to fully justify their inclusion and give details of extra steps taken to assure their protection.*

Colleagues and higher leadership admins will take part in the interview and focus group, they will be informed by the gatekeeper in the ESE training and research department through emails. Selecting them will be according to their degree and the number of years they have been in the field.

Sign a consent form and full information will be given to them before starting any word related to the interview.

Explain the whole process and time-consuming (adding break times) with the interviews.

A pilot interview will be conducted with 2 or 3 participants from the same field (regarding my area of research) thereafter I will revise the interview questions, and from there I shall proceed with the real interviewees.

Focus groups will be integrated after the individual part is done.

Appreciation letters will be shared after the interview is completed via emails and texting direct messages.

1.16b Is a DBS – Disclosure and Barring Service (formerly CRB – Criminal Records Bureau) check required?
Certain activities and/or groups of individuals require DBS (formerly CRB) clearance. If unclear, please seek advice.
☐ Yes ☒ No
If Yes, please advise status of DBS clearance (e.g. gained; in process; etc.)
1.16c All staff should be aware of University of Central Lancashire's Policy and Procedures on safeguarding and prevent. Please confirm that, where relevant to your project, the appropriate training has been undertaken.
Please refer to UCLan Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Prevent guidance.
☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ N/A
If yes, please give details of relevant training session – external or internal - and when (e.g., within last 3 years)
1.17 Please indicate exactly how participants in the study will be (i) identified, (ii) approached and (iii) recruited
If an advertisement and/or information sheet is being used, please attach.
The study participants will be Emirates School Establishment (ESE) employees and managerial level. The gatekeeper in ESE will obtain email letters from the research and training department to give full authority to conduct the research and permission, privileging employees to experience the interviews. The selected parties will be according to their education level, gender, experience, relevant role, and designation. The gatekeepers' role is limited to distributing the emails to selected participants; giving full authority to conduct research and allowing high-rank

employees to take part in the in-depth interviews and focus groups with 3-4 participants.

1.18 Will consent be sought from the participants and how will this be obtained?

If a written consent form is being used, please attach.

Yes. As a PDF form.

Via an electronic copy to support collecting formal consent before conducting any interview.

Consent will be obtained from the participants prior to the interviews. A copy of the Participant Consent Form (attached) will be shared with the participants in advance.
The participants will be contacted via email by a representative (gatekeepers) of ESE.
Those individuals who express interest in taking part will contact the student.
The candidate will circulate a copy of the consent form for the interview.
The candidate at the beginning of the interview will go through the consent form once again to confirm the participant agrees to take part in the study and understands what is involved.

The consent form offers the opportunity for individuals to agree to be contacted again to be sent details about a future focus group.
A separate participant information sheet and consent form will be distributed to individuals who wish to take part in the focus group.

1.19 How long will the participants decide whether to participate in the research?

2 weeks of notifying (14 days).

1.20 What arrangements have been made for participants who might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information, or who have special communication needs?

Give details of what arrangements have been made (e.g. translation, use of interpreters, etc.).

The study will be in English, but the interview questions, and consent will all be in Arabic. All academic career counsellors in ESE; as the first language for ESE's Arabic, but questions will be printed in both languages (Arabic and English). Nevertheless, the interview will be implemented in the Arabic language. All will be transcribed into English, and all originals will be made available.

1.21 Payment or incentives: Do you propose to pay or reward participants?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If Yes, please provided details

1.22 Will deception of the participant be necessary during the activity?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If Yes, please provide justification, and complete Question 1.28

1.23 Does your project involve the potential imbalance of power/authority / status, particularly those which might compromise a participant giving informed consent?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If Yes, please detail including how this will mitigated

Describe the relationship and the steps to be taken by the investigator to ensure that participation is purely voluntary and not influenced by the relationship in any way.

The gatekeeper has given authorisation for this research to be conducted. However, some participants may feel compelled or pressured to participate in the study due to fear of backlash. To ensure that participants do not feel

pressured and compromise the quality of the collected data. They will be asked about their willingness to be a part of the research at the start of the interview process. If participants are unwilling, they will be free to refrain from participating. The participants will be informed that their unwillingness to participate in the interview will also be kept confidential so no outside party, including the gatekeeper, can be aware of the events that transpired.

The student works at ESE which means there may be some potential imbalance of participants knowing the student. However, the student will communicate with participants via University of Central Lancashire communication channels. The following mitigations have been made:
Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants can withdraw if they wish
Initial information will be disseminated by a representative at the ESE establishment.

1.24 Does the procedure involve <u>any</u> possible distress, discomfort, or harm (or offence) to participants or researchers? (including physical, social, emotional, psychological and/or aims to shock/offend – e.g. Art)?
☐ Yes ☒ No
If Yes, please explain. *Describe the potential for distress, discomfort, harm or offence and what measures are in place to protect the participants or researcher(s). Please carefully consider all possible causes of distress, including likely reaction to the subject matter, debriefing or participant upset.*

1.25 Does the activity involve any information pertaining to illegal activities or materials or the disclosure thereof?
☐ Yes ☒ No
If Yes, please detail *Describe involvement and explain what risk management procedures will be put in*

place.

1.26 What mechanism is there for participants to withdraw from the investigation and how is this communicated to the participants?

The participants are willing to withdraw from the interview within two weeks (14 days), which should be acknowledged before conducting the interview process. All participants can withdraw at any point before and during the interview.

s1.27 What are the potential benefits for the research?

The finding of this study will be in improving a competency framework for professional career guidance and counsellors and improving their role within an evident competency among the public schools in the UAE. The most considerable improvement will be in the counsellors' impact on students and their enthusiasm personally and professionally for future decision-making, specifically about the competitive complex labour market.

Primarily through focusing on the Emiratisation programme and developing students' personal and professional life skills towards conducting decision-making for the future labour market. The new framework will be implemented by creating a developed competency framework up to the standards of the UAE in the 2021 vision and applying some of the successful best practices of the Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe (NICE) framework and Canadian career development framework. Study and review the existing literature on career counsellors and analyse the results compared to the UAE government's goals, the NICE framework, and Canadian competency framework.

1.28 Debriefing, support and/or feedback to participants

Describe any debriefing, support or feedback that participants will receive following the project and when.
Based on the association and participant feedback and the research department of ESE on the thesis. The participants will receive feedback after completing the interviews and an appreciation letter for participating in the study.
1.29 Will the project involve access to confidential information about people without their consent?
☐ Yes ☒ No
If yes, please explain and justify. *State what information will be sought, from which organisations and the requirement for this information.*

1.30 Confidentiality/anonymity - Will the activity involve:		
	Yes	No
ıon-anonymisation of participants (i.e. researchers may or will know the identity of participants and be able to return responses)?	☒	☐
ɔarticipants having the consented option of being identified in any publication arising from the research?	☐	☒
he use of personal data (i.e. anything that may identify them – e.g. institutional role – see DP checklist for further guidance)?	☒	☐
*If **yes to any** please attach completed Data Protection (DP) checklist*		
1.31 Does the activity involve human tissue?‡ See **Human Tissue Act (HTA)** **Supplementary list of Materials** to check what is classified as human tissue.		
☐ Yes ☒ No		
If no, please skip to question 1.32 If yes, please detail and answer questions 1.31a-c		
1.31a Who will be sourcing the human tissue? (e.g. a tissue bank governed by its own HTA licence)		

1.31b Will the human tissue be stored at University of Central Lancashire? (please note restrictions on storage)
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, please state how long and in what form - cellular or acellular (DNA extracted) *Please note – if human tissue is only kept for DNA extraction rendering it acellular the HTA storage regulations may not apply. If holding for DNA extraction, please state the length of time the tissue would be stored pre-extraction.*

1.31c Is the human tissue being used for an activity listed as a 'scheduled purpose' under Schedule 1 Parts 1 and 2 of the Human Tissue Act 2004? *(click here to see list of HTA 'scheduled purpose' activities)*
☐ Yes ☐ No
1.32 Does the project involve excavation and study of human remains?
☐ Yes ☒ No
If yes, please give details *Discuss the provisions for examination of the remains and the management of any community/public concerns, legal requirement etc.*

1.33 Does the project involve working in a low or lower-middle income country as defined by the World Bank ?
☐ Yes ☒ No
If yes, please explain how each article within the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings has been considered with respect to your project:

http://www.globalcodeofconduct.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Global-Code-of-Conduct-Brochure.pdf **NOTE:** *If your research involves humans or animals, University of Central Lancashire ethics/AWERB approval needs to be in place before application for local approval is made.*

‡ Until such time as the University gains its own HTA Research License, human tissue that is for a 'scheduled purpose' and not sourced from a BioBank or part of an NHS REC approved project can only be stored for a maximum of 5 days

DECLARATION

This declaration needs to be signed by the Principal Investigator (PI), and the student where it relates to a student project (for research student projects PI is Director of Studies and for Taught or Undergrad project the PI is the Supervisor). Electronic submission of the form is required to EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk. Where available insert electronic signature – alternatively, provide an email in lieu from appropriate party.

Declaration of the:
Principal Investigator
OR
Director of Studies/Supervisor and Student Investigator
(please check as appropriate)

- The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I take full responsibility for it.

- I have read and understand the University Ethical Principles for Teaching, Research, Knowledge Transfer, Consultancy and Related Activities.

- I have read and understand the University's policy and procedures on Safeguarding and Prevent.

- I undertake to abide by the ethical principles underlying the Declaration of Helsinki and the University Code of Conduct for Research, together with the codes of practice laid down by any relevant professional or learned society.

- If the activity is approved, I undertake to adhere to the study plan, the terms of the full application of which the Ethics Review Panel has given a favourable opinion and any conditions of the Ethics Review Panel in giving its favourable opinion.

- I undertake to seek an ethical opinion from the Ethics Review Panel before implementing substantial amendments to the study plan or to the terms of the full application of which the Ethics Review Panel has given a favourable opinion.

- I understand that I am responsible for monitoring the research at all times.

- If there are any serious adverse events, I understand that I am responsible for immediately stopping the research and alerting the Ethics Review Panel within 24 hours of the occurrence, via EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk.

- I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.

- I understand that research records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in future.

- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this application is

required by the Ethics, Integrity Unit and Governance Unit within Research and Enterprise Services, on behalf of the University, for an ethics review, and to evidence that the appropriate level of ethics review has been undertaken. Such data will be stored and managed in accordance with the principles established in the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

- I understand that the information contained in this application, any supporting documentation and all correspondence with the Ethics Review relating to the application, will be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts. The information may be disclosed in response to requests made under the Acts except where statutory exemptions apply.

- I understand that all conditions apply to any co-applicants and researchers involved in the study, and that it is my responsibility to ensure that they abide by them.

- **For Principal Investigator:** I understand my responsibilities to work within a set of ethical and other guidelines as set out by the University Policies and/or professional standards.

- **For Supervisor/Director of Studies:** I understand my responsibilities as Supervisor/Director of Studies, and will ensure, to the best of my abilities, that the student investigator abides by the University's Policy on Research Ethics at all times.

- **For the Student Investigator**: I understand my responsibilities to work within a set of ethical and other guidelines as agreed in advance with my Supervisor/Director of Studies and understand that I must comply with the University's regulations and any other applicable code of ethics at all times.

Please indicate below if you consent to your University Ethics Checklist, Ethics Application and other documentation being shared for training and review purposes. All forms and documents will be anonymised.

☒ Yes ☐ No

☐ **Signature of Principal Investigator: or** ☒ **Supervisor or Director of Studies**	
Print Name:	Iftikhar Bokhari
Date:	

Signature of Student Investigator:	Amal Alawadhi
Print Name:	Amal Alawadhi
Date:	15th Sep 2023 modification 13.11.23

Please submit the completed Ethics Form and Supporting Documentation to EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk

2. Receiving the approval letter.

University of Central Lancashire
UCLan

University of Central Lancashire
Preston PR1 2HE
01772 201201
uclan.ac.uk

14th March 2024

Iftikhar Bokhari / Amal Abdulkarim Mohammad Ali Alawadhi
School of Business
University of Central Lancashire

Dear Iftikhar / Amal,

Re: BAHSS2 Ethics Panel Application
Unique Reference Number: BAHSS2 01121

The BAHSS2 Ethics Review Panel has granted approval of your proposal application, 'The UAE's Career Counsellors Competence Framework'. Approval is granted up to the end of project date*.

It is your responsibility to ensure that

- the project is carried out in line with the information provided in the forms you have submitted
- you regularly re-consider the ethical issues that may be raised in generating and analysing your data
- any proposed amendments/changes to the project are raised with, and approved, by Committee
- you notify ethicsinfo@uclan.ac.uk if the end date changes or the project does not start
- serious adverse events that occur from the project are reported to Panel
- a closure report is submitted to complete the ethics governance procedures (Existing paperwork can be used for this purposes e.g. funder's end of grant report; abstract for student award or NRES final report. If none of these are available use e-Ethics Closure Report Proforma).

Yours sincerely,

Richard Davies, Deputy Vice-Chair
BAHSS2 Ethics Panel

* for research degree students this will be the final lapse date

NB - Ethical approval is contingent on any health and safety checklists having been completed, and necessary approvals gained.

3. Data protection checklist.

Data protection checklist: Teaching, research, knowledge transfer, consultancy and related activities

All activities which involve personal data of any kind, in any way, must comply with data protection legislation (the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)). This checklist outlines the requirements of the data protection legislation and the measures you must take when processing personal data; it also provides a mechanism for recording the steps you will take to ensure the personal data you are using are safeguarded and the reputation of the University is upheld.

Ensuring personal data are processed transparently, fairly and lawfully with due regard for individuals' privacy and ensuring that personal data remain secure are paramount. Demonstrating that we have considered the requirements of data protection legislation when conducting our activities will provide assurances to students, employees, research participants and business partners that their personal data is protected at University of Central Lancashire. Organisations can be fined up to £17.5 million or 4% of global annual turnover for breaches of the UK GDPR; therefore it is important that we get it right from the outset. If it is possible to use anonymised data so that individuals cannot be identified from it and still achieve your aims, this is always the preferred method of operating. Truly anonymised data (which cannot be reconstructed or linked to any other data you hold or may hold in the future to enable you to identify individuals from it) does not constitute personal data because it cannot be used to identify individuals.

Section 1: Does my activity involve personal data?

What is *personal data*?

Personal data is data relating to a living individual who can be identified from those data (or from those data and other information in our possession or likely to come into our possession).

Personal data can be factual (such as name, address, date of birth) or can be an opinion (such as a professional opinion as to the causes of an individual's behavioural problems or a response to a survey question). Voice recordings are personal data because the individual can be identified from his or her voice. Information can be personal data even if it does not include a person's name or other obvious identifiers. ***Example***: *a paragraph describing a specific event involving an individual or a set of characteristics relating to a particular individual may not include their name but would clearly identify them from the set of circumstances or characteristics being described or represented.*

If you are unsure whether or not your activity involves personal data, please contact the Information Governance team to discuss on DPFOIA@uclan.ac.uk.

More information about personal data is available in the Data Protection Policy.

What is *processing*?

The UK GDPR is concerned with the processing of personal data. 'Processing' means any operation or set of operations which is performed on personal data or on sets of personal data, whether or not by automated means, such as collection, recording, organisation, structuring, storage, adaptation or alteration, retrieval, consultation, use, disclosure by transmission, dissemination or otherwise making available, alignment or combination, restriction, erasure or destruction.

Does your project involve personal data?	Yes	*Please provide details: respondents' name, their video recording, voice recording and participant individual opinions.*
If yes, are you processing that data? If you have any kind of access to that data,	Yes	*Please provide details: respondents' name and video recordings of the interviews will be linked to the data*

including just holding it, you are likely to be processing it.		*collected from them for a period of 14 days before the data is anonymised*

If your proposed activity involves processing personal data, you must complete the remainder of this checklist, providing answers to each relevant question.

Section 2: Have I addressed all the key areas of data protection compliance?

This checklist will ensure that you have properly considered how you are processing the personal data you are collecting. You should be able to answer 'yes' to all questions or explain why the question is not applicable. You must provide details to support your answers so that your proposal can be approved. If you are a researcher completing this form as part of your ethics application, you can complete parts of this checklist by referencing your answers on the relevant parts of your Ethics Application Form, if they cover the same detail.

Type of activity:	**DBA Research Study**
Activity name/title:	The UAE's Career Counsellor Competency Framework

Processing personal data transparently, fairly and lawfully

Data protection legislation requires us to process personal data transparently, fairly and lawfully. In practice, it means that you must:

- have lawful grounds for collecting and using the personal data;
- not use the data in ways that have unjustified adverse effects on the individuals concerned;
- be transparent about how you intend to use the data, and give individuals appropriate *privacy notices* when collecting their personal data;
- handle people's personal data only in ways they would reasonably expect; and make sure you do not do anything unlawful with the data.

1. Have you checked and confirmed that the intended uses of personal data (including special category data or criminal convictions data) have a lawful basis?	Yes	
2. What is the lawful basis for processing the personal data? *In almost all cases at University of Central Lancashire, the lawful basis for processing personal data for research purposes will be that the processing is necessary for a task carried out in the public interest (Article 6(1)(e) UK GDPR). If you think there is an exceptional reason why this does not apply to your research, there are alternative lawful bases from*		*Please provide details: A task carried out in public interest*

the UK GDPR which can be considered. You must contact the Information Governance team for advice, particularly if you are considering relying on consent as a lawful basis. Further information about lawful bases can be found here.		
3. Are you processing special category data or criminal convictions data?	No	*Please provide details: Only names of the individual involved.*
4. If the answer to question 3 is 'yes', what is the lawful basis for processing this type of personal data? *If you are processing this type of data for research purposes and the processing is in the public interest, the lawful basis is likely to be Article 9(2)(j) UK GDPR by virtue of section 10 and Schedule 1(4) DPA.*		*Please provide details:*
5. If the intended use of the personal data would or would be likely to have an adverse effect on one or more individuals, have you considered and documented why that adverse effect is justified?	Not applicable	*Please provide details:*

6. Have you documented why you are collecting the specific items of information to demonstrate they are necessary for your stated purposes *e.g. if you are carrying out research into how students' music preferences affect their degree classification and also collecting participants' shoe sizes, can you show you have a legitimate need for this information, when they are not obviously linked?*	Yes	*Please provide details: Data is labelled by names of individuals for identification purposes for 14 days before it is anonymised in case they wish to withdraw from the research during this timeframe*
7. **Have you written an appropriate privacy notice to provide to individuals at the point you collect their personal data?** *A privacy notice is a legal requirement and tells individuals how you will process their data if they give it to you, among other things. Clear and detailed guidance about privacy notices and what they must contain is available here. If you are carrying out research, you should refer participants to the University's standard privacy notice for*	Yes	*If your privacy notice is published on a website, please provide a link here. Alternatively, attach the notice to this form when you submit it for ethical approval (where appropriate).* *If you are using the standard privacy notice for research participants, please confirm this. If you are carrying out research, it is likely you will always rely on the standard privacy notice unless exceptional circumstances apply.* *"You may refuse to participate or withdraw from this research freely within 14 days of completion of your interview. All data will be*

research participants, which must be supplemented by your participant information sheet.		*anonymised on the 15th day and you will no longer be able to withdraw from this study as your data cannot be identified."*

Consent
Consent to participate in a research study is not the same as relying on consent as a lawful basis on which to process personal data. Researchers are strongly discouraged from relying on consent as a lawful basis for processing personal data for research purposes. If you are relying on consent as the lawful basis for processing personal data, the UK GDPR requires that a certain standard of consent is obtained. Consent as a lawful basis to process personal data is only valid if it is freely given, fully informed, unambiguous and **capable of being withdrawn at any time**. If consent is withdrawn, you must cease all processing of personal data which is being carried out on the basis of that consent. For research purposes, this means that if a participant withdraws consent to process their personal data, all processing must cease and all personal data already collected about that participant must be deleted or destroyed. This may have significant implications for your research. The UK GDPR is clear that an indication of consent must be unambiguous and involve a clear affirmative action (an opt-in). A failure to respond to a notification that an activity will take place unless an individual opts out is not valid consent. The UK GDPR also requires granular consent options for distinct processing operations e.g. participants may consent to you processing their survey responses but they may choose not to consent to you taking photographs of them during focus groups.

Consent should be separate from other terms and conditions. You must keep clear records to demonstrate consent has been obtained. You need to tell people about their right to withdraw and

Consent should only be used as a lawful basis for processing personal data if valid consent can be obtained; the consent can be withdrawn at any time; and withdrawal of consent will not impact your research. Note that where group recordings are made e.g. focus groups, it will be very difficult to remove one participant's personal data (their voice and opinions) from the recording if that participant withdraws consent to process their personal data. This is one example of why consent as a lawful basis for processing personal data will not be appropriate for many uses of research.

offer them easy ways to withdraw consent at any time.

You may still obtain participants' consent to participate in various aspects of your research, even if you do not rely on consent as a lawful basis for processing the personal data you subsequently collect. Participants may withdraw their consent to participate in any future aspects of the research but you may continue to process any personal data already collected **if** you have relied on a lawful basis for processing other than consent.

Further detailed information about obtaining valid consent under the UK GDPR is available here.

8. Have you checked and confirmed that consent is necessary and is the most appropriate basis for your processing? *Note that this question relates to consent as a lawful basis for processing personal data and **not** consent to participate in your research.*	Not applicable	*Please provide details:*

9. If you are processing special category data or criminal convictions data on the basis of consent, have you planned to obtain individuals' explicit consent? *As the standard for consent is so high under the UK GDPR, there is not likely to be a significant difference between consent and explicit consent.*	Not applicable	*Please provide details:*
10. If you are relying on individuals' consent as the lawful basis for using their personal data, have you developed a process for managing the withdrawal of consent at any point during or after the research?	Not applicable	*Please provide details:*
11. If you are relying on consent as a lawful basis to process personal data, have you ensured that the individual understands their rights and is capable of giving consent? This should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. *If you are processing personal data about children or those with reduced capacity, consider whether or not you need to*	Not applicable	*Please provide details:*

obtain consent from parents, guardians or legal representatives. You must consider how to provide clear consent statements to those whose first language is not English.		

Security
The UK GDPR requires you to process personal data securely. This means that you must have appropriate security measures in place to protect the personal data you hold from being lost, damaged, destroyed or disclosed inappropriately. Security measures include technical security measures to keep electronic information secure; physical security measures to keep hard-copy information secure; and processes and procedures around the management of, and access to, the information. Organisations can be fined up to £17.5 million for breaches of security involving personal data. The UK GDPR requires us to implement appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure a level of security appropriate to the risk. It is important that any personal data you collect or use during your activities remains secure until it is securely destroyed, which includes ensuring that only those who are authorised to access and use the data can do so. **For further guidance on information security, please see the Information Governance pages of the University of Central Lancashire intranet and the LIS IT Security Policy. You may also find the information on the ICO website useful.**

12. If you are intending to publish information which could identify individuals, have you made those individuals aware that this will happen via your privacy notice and obtained their consent, if appropriate?	No	*Please provide details:*
13. Will papers, files, audio visual recordings, CDs, USB (memory) sticks, microfiche or other media which contain personal data be kept in locked cabinets, cupboards, drawers etc. when the offices are vacated or if they are stored off University of Central Lancashire premises?	No	*Please provide details: Using UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE's secure/encrypted OneDrive cloud network for data storage.*
14. Do all individuals who will have access to or be using the personal data understand that it must not be provided to any unauthorised person (which includes disclosing information to family members or other representatives of data subjects, unless the data subject has given consent for us to do this)?	Yes	*Please provide details:* I will be the only author of this research and the only one to handle or process personal data. My co-researchers will have access to the data only after it has been anonymised.

15. Do all individuals who will have access to or be using the personal data understand their responsibilities under data protection legislation and have they received data protection training? *A UK GDPR e-learning course is available to staff and students via Blackboard.*	Yes	*Please provide details:* a) Obtaining Ethical Approval at University of Central Lancashire (May, 22) b) Research Ethics in Practice (Feb, 22) c) Becoming an Ethical Researcher (Feb, 22) d) University of Central Lancashire's GDPR for students training (Nov, 22)
16. Do you have appropriate procedures in place to ensure the security of the personal data if it is removed from or collected and stored away from University of Central Lancashire offices for any reason? *You must provide details of how you will ensure personal data remains secure if you remove it from University of Central Lancashire premises or collect and store it away from University of Central Lancashire premises. Please note that electronic data must only be removed if it is stored on encrypted devices or media e.g. an encrypted disc or USB stick, an encrypted laptop or*	Yes	*Please provide details: Cloud storage using OneDrive only. No physical form for the data.*

Dictaphone etc. Alternatively it can be accessed remotely via a secure connection. If an unencrypted device containing personal data is lost or stolen, it is likely to lead to a substantial fine for a breach of data protection legislation. Non-electronic records must be rigorously safeguarded at all times and not left unattended or in view of unauthorised people. Laptops, USB sticks and other devices, papers or any other form of personal data must not be left in cars.		
17. Will the personal data be stored on the University of Central Lancashire network, or in a Microsoft 365 account provided by University of Central Lancashire, in a secure location with restricted access, to prevent unauthorised parties who have no right or need accessing the data?	Yes	*Please provide details: : Encrypted and secure folders with a password on OneDrive cloud.*
18. Are all individuals who will have access to or use the personal data aware that personal information should	Yes	*Please provide details: One I will be handling the personal data.*

only be stored on the University of Central Lancashire network or in cloud storage provided by University of Central Lancashire and should only be stored on equipment owned or leased by University of Central Lancashire, unless exceptional circumstances apply, after taking advice from LIS? *Storage under such exceptional circumstances must include the use of appropriate security measures. No personal information should be stored on any removable media e.g. USB sticks, CDs or devices e.g. laptops, smartphones, Dictaphones unless they are encrypted. BitLocker is the recommended tool for encrypting external devices; guidance can be obtained from LIS Customer Support. University of Central Lancashire makes available Microsoft 365 cloud storage for staff and students, including OneDrive for Business.*		

This is the only approved cloud storage facility.		
19. Are all individuals who will have access to or use the personal data aware that any information accessed via remote working methods such as Outlook Web App, University of Central Lancashire Global or similar must be treated securely in line with relevant legislation and all University guidelines? *University of Central Lancashire business information, including personal data, should not be stored on personal, non-University of Central Lancashire equipment or devices unless exceptional circumstances apply, after taking guidance from LIS, even where personal equipment and devices are used to access information remotely.*	Yes	*Please provide details: I am aware of this.*
20. Are all individuals who will have access to or use the personal data aware that email is not a secure method of communication and can easily be sent to the wrong	Yes	*Please provide details: I am aware of this.*

recipient and do they know how to encrypt documents so that they can be attached to an email and sent securely? *N.B. Encryption passwords must be provided separately and never included in the same email as the encrypted attachment. Guidance is available here. Users should consider whether or not email is the most appropriate method. Consider using University of Central Lancashire's OneDrive for Business instead.*		
21. Are all individuals who will have access to or use the personal data aware that all non-electronic material which contains personal data and has been authorised for disposal must be disposed of via the University's confidential waste service (including handwritten notes, computer print-outs etc.)?	Yes	*Please provide details: I am aware of this.*

22. Are all individuals who will have access to or use the personal data aware that any paper documents, electronic media or hardware which has been designated for disposal must be kept in a secure location until it has been appropriately destroyed and any information it contains is no longer accessible or recoverable? *Electronic media and hardware must be disposed of in line with LIS guidelines and procedures.*	Yes	*Please provide details: I am aware of this.*
23. Data protection legislation prohibits the transfer of personal data to countries or territories outside the European Economic Area (EEA) unless certain conditions can be met. Can you confirm that if you intend to transfer personal data outside the EEA, you have taken advice from the Information Governance team to ensure you can do so in compliance with data protection legislation?	Yes	*Please provide details: I am aware of this and this will not take place.*

Transfers includes via email, websites and by virtue of using 'cloud' providers which store your data on their servers based overseas, as well as physically holding the information overseas. For detailed guidance see Sending personal data outside the UK.		

Third parties acting on behalf of University of Central Lancashire
Under some circumstances, it will be necessary or desirable to work with organisations external to University of Central Lancashire, such as charities, research organisations, private companies, other public sector organisations, contractors, service providers or any other types of third parties. If a third party is acting on our behalf e.g. providing a service for us or on our behalf and that activity involves the third party accessing, collecting or otherwise processing personal data, they are a *data processor* under the UK GDPR. Guidance on the use of data processors, including a checklist to ensure their use is appropriate, is available here.

24. Are you using a data processor?	No	*If no, then you do not need to complete the questions regarding data processors below.*
25. If you are using a data processor or you need help	Yes/No	*Please provide details:*

deciding if the proposed arrangement does involve a data processor, have you read the guidance and, if necessary, taken advice from the Information Governance team to ensure all data protection requirements around the use of data processors have been satisfied?		
26. **If you are using a data processor, have you taken advice on information security from the Information Governance team and the Information Security team in LIS?** *It is a legal requirement to ensure a data processor is capable of putting in place appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect personal data. If your data processor is based outside the EEA, additional measures must be in place.*	Yes/No	*Please provide details:*
27. If you are using a data processor, have you taken advice from the contracts team in Legal and	Yes/No	*Please provide details:*

Governance or from Procurement (as appropriate) to ensure you have appropriate contractual arrangements in place to cover the use of a data processor? *It is a legal requirement to have UK GDPR-compliant contracts in place with data processors.*		

Once this form has been completed, it should be attached to your Ethics Application Form (if applicable) and submitted as directed. If your activity does not require further or any ethical approval, this form should be retained with your project documentation as a record of your considerations and data protection compliance. If you require any further advice or guidance to help you complete this checklist, please contact the Information Governance team: DPFOIA@uclan.ac.uk. Members of staff can also find a variety of guidance documents and FAQs on the Information Governance intranet pages.

4. Participant information sheet.

Participant Information Sheet

The UAE's Career Counsellors Competency Framework

Participant Information Sheet (Individual interviews)

V3 04.12.2023

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide if you wish to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand, please contact us using the contact information below. Please also feel free to discuss with others if you wish.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study is being completed by Amal Alawadhi as part of their Doctor of Business Administration degree within the School of Business at the University of Central Lancashire and is being completed under the supervision of Dr Iftikhar Bokhari.

The purpose of this study was to identify the gaps in the competency framework of career counsellors and to develop the necessary skills and knowledge required for them to be effective counsellors. The study aimed to align the counsellors' skills with the UAE's economic trends and cultural needs. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the availability of professional development opportunities for counsellors and how they can keep up with the evolving career trends and education pathways. This will help individuals seeking career counselling to make better-informed career choices.

This study aims to investigate career counsellors' multifaceted roles and responsibilities in school environments, specifically the UAE schools, and their influences on students' decision-making process concerning their future careers by creating and implementing a viable competency framework up to the standards of the UAE polices 2021, and the NICE and Canadian competency framework. The objectives of the study are:

To analyse gaps in the career counselling framework in the UAE schools (if there is an existing one), with the NICE and Canadian framework.

To examine how the UAE 2020 National Agenda in the education field reflected the need for career counsellors in schools.

To explore the importance of career counselling programmes in guiding and helping students make future decisions related to the competitive labour market demand and develop the potential for career counsellors in schools.

The updated framework will prioritise evidence-based practices and practical implementation principles, aligning with the five-year UAE Vision 2021 policy. We aim to improve the education and training of UAE students through revisions to the policy and prepare them to integrate with the future labour market more successfully. By supporting decision-making, the results of the current paper will provide a strong rationale for our framework.

Furthermore, the framework includes the professional competencies of career counsellors by developing a robust, appropriate, practical framework and being well-trained and qualified in compliance with UAE legislation. Overall, the role of career counsellors and their competency framework in the UAE is an important step forward in developing and supporting adolescents in implementing strategies for future decision-making. With its focus on their current role and framework of evidence-based support and developing collaboration among stakeholders, this framework can bring positive change for UAE nationals and deliver long-term benefits to the country's economy and society.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You are receiving an invitation to participate because the Emirate School Establishment has agreed to forward information to you about this study to individuals with expertise in career guidance and counselling services.

To be eligible to take part in the study participants need to meet the following criteria:

- You are aged 18 and over
- You have worked as a career guidance counsellor since the programme career guidance and counselling (advising) first announcement in 2016
- You have more than 5 years of experience in the field of career counselling
- You are currently actively employed as a career guidance and counsellor.

- You are demonstrated in ongoing professional development activities related to career counselling.
- You are adhering to ethical guidelines in the counselling practices, demonstrating a commitment to confidentiality, informed consent, and other ethical considerations.
- You are willing and able to commit the required time for study participation, which includes in-depth interviews focus groups, or other methods of data collection.

What will happen if I take part?

The study involves taking part in a one-to-one interview with the student at a time to suit you. Interviews will be conducted via a video conferencing platform (Microsoft Teams) and will be audio recorded with your permission. Interviews will be arranged at a time and place which is mutually convenient for you and the candidate.

The interview will explore your views / experience on the included interview questions divided into 4 main criteria as: competency in counselling, understanding the UAE standards, interacting with students, and skills gaps. Interviews are expected to take 30-45 minutes, discussing the interview questions within a comfortable environment, and will be scheduled at your convenience through the MS Teams platform, dependent on what you have to say and how much time you have available.

After you have read and taken time to consider the information if you wish to contribute, you will need to complete a study consent form. Once completed, the researcher will contact you via email to arrange a convenient time for an interview. Your email address will also be used for the electronic invitation for the interview.

If you accept to be part of this research, we need your consent by signing off the consent form after reading it carefully and being familiar with all conditions mentioned.

The research interview will be conducted via MS Teams, at a convenient time and it will be transcribed. Teams can record both audio and visual but please note that the video option can be disabled should you wish. This will be discussed before the recording commences.

An invitation letter will be shared from (gatekeeper) the training department of the Emirates School Establishment (ESE) forwarded to the nominated participants and I am expecting your full acceptance and support to be.

In case you are accepted to part of the interview, the collected data from the interview will be anonymised and combined with the data collected from other participants with the current research. Then you will have a period of 2 weeks (14 days) to withdraw from this research even after completion of the interview. Additionally, any after requests for withdrawal will not be entertained, and your data will no longer be identifiable. More information, to keep you noted that you will not receive monetary compensation for your participation. This research is purely for academic purposes.

You may also be asked to take part in a subsequent focus group, and permission to contact you about this will be included in the consent form.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is entirely up to you if you want to take part or not. Participation in the study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you do not have to answer all the questions, and you can stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. In this case we would still like to include the questions you did answer.

How will my data be used?

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities per the lawful basis of 'public task'. It follows the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit". The researcher will only have access to the pre-anonymised personal data for 14 days after the completion of the interview. On the 15th day, this personal data will be anonymised.

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. The University privacy notice for research participants can be found on the attached link https://www.uclan.ac.uk/data_protection/privacy-notice-research-participants.php

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below.

How will my data be collected?	By taking part on one online Microsoft Teams interviews
How will my data be stored?	Confidentiality of data and maintaining it can be assured by saving them in a secured and password-protected folder within University of Central Lancashire's network.
How long will my data be stored for?	Your consent forms and interview transcripts will be stored for 7 years. Audio/visual recordings will be deleted once your interview has been transcribed (14 days from the date of interview).
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	Confidentiality of data and maintaining it can be assured by saving them in a secured and password-protected folder within UCLan's network (OneDrive).
Will my data be anonymised?	When the interview is transcribed, we will remove any names/personal identifying information. When we use any of your quotations, we will use a participant identifier (i.e. a pseudonym).
How will my data be used?	We will use anonymised quotations from the interviews in a thesis and may be shared as internal reports.
Who will have access to my data?	The researcher will have exclusive access to the primary data. No personal data will be shared with any researchers or supervisors. They might look through the transcript, the themes or codes, reading formal transcribes.
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	*No*
How will my data be destroyed?	After the interview, the student will download the interview recording into a OneDrive folder on University of Central Lancashire's secure network. Once a transcript of the interview has

	been produced, the interview recording will be deleted. Your personal data contact details will be deleted following the interview unless you express an interest in taking part in the focus group or receive a summary of the results, in these cases your contact details will be deleted following this activity.

Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no perceived risks involved in this research.

Are there any benefits from taking part?

The research findings could be shared with participants to utilise the benefits. Moreover, participants can get exposure to the UAE's Career Counsellor Competency Framework.

Expenses and/or payments

No payments for this research will be handed to the participants, and the researcher will not be liable for any expenses incurred.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The study results will be written up to form part of the thesis for the degree. A summary of results may be shared with Emirates School Establishment and participants will be offered the opportunity to receive a summary of the results by indicating on the consent form.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

Even if you agree to take part and give your consent, you may still decide not to participate in the interview, and you do not need to give a reason. During the interview you are free to not answer any question. You may also leave the interview at any point, without giving a reason. After the interview you may withdraw your data from the study up until 14 days from the interview date, by contacting the student (details below). After your interview has been transcribed and anonymised your data can no longer be withdrawn.

Who has reviewed this study?

The study has been reviewed and approved by the Business, Arts. Humanities and Social Science Ethics Review Panel at the University of Central Lancashire [BAHSS2 01121].

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy or have a problem, please contact Dr Iftikhar Bokhari via ibokhari3@uclan.ac.uk, and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with, then please contact the Ethics, Integrity, and Governance Unit at OfficerForEthics@uclan.ac.uk

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in processing your data. However, if you have any concerns about how the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

If you have any further questions, please contact the Principal Investigator on the following:

Research Candidate: Amal Alawadhi
Email: aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk
Contact No. +971 50 6616441

Senior Lecturer in Management: Dr Iftikhar Bokhari
Contact number: +44(0)
Email: ibokhari3@uclan.ac.uk

Postgraduate Supervisor: Dr Ruth Elsabeth Slater
Contact number: +44(0)
Email: reslater1@uclan.ac.uk

5. Consent forms.

Consent form for key informants.

Interview Questions

The UAE's Career Counsellors

Competency Framework

University of Central Lancashire - UK

Prepared by: Amal Alawadhi

Student No.: G20997566

[The UAE's Career Counsellors Competency Framework]

This project has received the approval of the Lancashire School of Business and Enterprise THE Division Ethics Panel

- I understand that my participation in this project will involve completing a questionnaire about [The Career Counsellors Competency Framework of the UAE is a powerful tool for individuals seeking direction in their professional growth. It offers comprehensive guidance for career counsellors to effectively assist individuals in making informed decisions about their careers. With this framework, career counsellors in the UAE can provide significant advice and support tailored to each person's needs. The framework ensures that career counselling services in the UAE are of outstanding quality, making it a required resource for career counsellors and those seeking guidance on their career paths.] It will take approximately [30 - 50] minutes of my time.

- I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason or discussing my concerns with

[Amal Alawadhi]
(aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk).

- I understand that any identifying information I provide will be confidential, so only the [Amal Alawadhi] can trace this information back to me individually.

- I understand that my data will be stored on password-protected computers/servers, anonymised after the survey and that no one can trace my information back to me. The raw data will be retained for up to three years when it will be deleted/destroyed.

- I hereby need your permission to record this interview to refer to it later to derive information supporting my research.

- If you are 18 or over, understand the statement above, and freely consent to participate in this study, please tick the consent box to proceed.

Consent box.

Thank you for helping us with this project and participating in the research.

Note: To be included if an open-questioning technique is involved: "This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance but will depend on how the interview develops and that if the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable, I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind."

Interview: Administration

Greet the participant, introduce myself, and explain the general purpose of the interview. (Researcher side)

I am researcher Amal Alawadhi, a DBA student at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. The paper will study the role of school career counsellors or guidance, their current competency framework, and whether they are qualified to guide and support students and inspire them to make a formal decision related to the future labour market. The Emirates School Establishment (ESE) is committed to enhancing career counselling through comprehensive research and its integration into public policy in the UAE. This initiative demonstrates the organisation's commitment to assisting individuals in achieving fulfilling and successful careers and developing career counsellors' performance. Career counselling is highly valued at the ESE, so it strives to equip individuals with the essential skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about their future.

The research aims to develop a Standardised framework for career counsellors working in schools in the UAE. This framework will focus on enhancing their skills and knowledge to better assist students in achieving career success.

Section I: introductory and Consent:

Thank you for permitting this interview, which will significantly support my research. Secondly, I will briefly explain the purpose of conducting this interview and give a quick understanding of what research is about.

I am interested in ***The UAE's Career counsellors' competency framework.***

This interview focuses on the academic career counsellors who will answer questions about their current school situation, what is available, challenges and recommendations, plans, standards, regulations, and strategies.

The Emirates School Establishment (ESE) career counselling standards are paramount. It ensures that students receive quality services that meet their needs and expectations. Standards also provide a framework for practitioners to follow, which helps to maintain consistency and professionalism in the field. By adhering to these standards, career counsellors or guidance can build trust with individuals and demonstrate their commitment to providing ethical and practical

services. Therefore, we must continue to develop and uphold these standards to ensure the growth and success of the profession of career counselling.

Therefore, career counsellors within the UAE education system aim to provide guidance services and empower students to transition professionally from the education environment to the workforce, contributing to the Emiratisation of the UAE.

Section II: Interview Questions.

1) **Questions about the demographics of the participants.**

Invite the participants to introduce themselves:

Tell me your Name: ……... (**optional**)

Age range:							
25 – 30	31 – 35	36 – 40	41 – 45	46 – 50	51 – 55	56 – 60	61 +
Gender	F	M		**Nationality**			

Qualification / What is the highest professional qualification obtained (is there any available qualification related to career counselling or guidance): ……....

Tell me your experience before you occupied this position or field: ……

more subsection / …….

The UAE's Career Counsellors Competency Framework

Participant Consent Form Interviews

Version 2 04.12.2023

Research ethics approval number: V. / BAHSS

Name of the researcher(s): Amal Alawadhi

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [V3 04.12.2023] for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. I understand that taking part in the study involves an online recorded videocall interview via Microsoft Teams with the student researcher.

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions.

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

4. I understand that I can withdraw from the study if I wish at any time up to 2 weeks after the interview. I understand that following 2 weeks after the interview I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide.

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Central Lancashire.

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. I understand that an audio recording of my consent and a transcript of the interview will be retained on the University secure network accessible only by the student and Director of Studies until 7 years from the end of the study.

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

7. I agree that my anonymised information can be quoted in a thesis and internal publications

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

8. I would like to receive a summary of the research and agree for my contact details to be held for this purpose.

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

9. I agree to take part in the above study.

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

Option to be contacted again about future research

Would you be willing to be contacted in the future to invite you to be involved in a focus group related to this research project? This is optional and you can still take part in the study if you prefer not to be contacted again.

☐ Yes ☐ No

10. If Yes, I understand that my contact details will be stored securely on the University network and only used to contact me about a future focus group on UAE's Career Counsellors Competency Framework

    ☐ Yes ☐ No

11. **Please enter your name**

12. **Please enter your email address**

13. **Date**

Format: ---/---/-----

Principal Investigator

Dr. Iftikhar Bokhari

Email: IBokhari3@uclan.ac.uk

Student Investigator

Amal Abdulkarim Alawadhi

+971 50 6616441

aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

The UAE's Career Counsellors Competency Framework

Participant Information Sheet (focus groups)

Version 1.0 04/12/2023

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide if you wish to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand, please contact us using the contact information below. Please also feel free to discuss with others if you wish.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study is being completed by Amal Alawadhi as part of their Doctor of Business Administration degree within the School of Business at the University of Central Lancashire and is being completed under the supervision of Dr Iftikhar Bokhari.

The purpose of this study was to identify the gaps in the competency framework of career counsellors and to develop the necessary skills and knowledge required for them to be effective counsellors. The study aimed to align the counsellors' skills with the UAE's economic trends and cultural needs. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the availability of professional development opportunities for counsellors and how they can keep up with the evolving career trends and education pathways. This will help individuals seeking career counselling to make better-informed career choices.

This study aims to investigate career counsellors' multifaceted roles and responsibilities in school environments, specifically the UAE schools, and their influences on students' decision-making process concerning their future careers by creating and implementing a viable competency framework up to the standards of the UAE policies 2021, and the NICE and Canadian competency framework. The objectives of the study are:

- To analyse gaps in the career counselling framework in the UAE schools (if there is an existing one), with the NICE and Canadian framework.
- To examine how the UAE 2020 National Agenda in the education field reflected the need for career counsellors in schools.
- To explore the importance of career counselling programmes in guiding and helping students make future decisions related to the competitive labour market demand and develop the potential for career counsellors in schools.

The updated framework will prioritise evidence-based practices and practical implementation principles, aligning with the five-year UAE Vision 2021 policy. We aim to improve the education and training of UAE students through revisions to the policy and prepare them to integrate with the future labour market more successfully. By supporting decision-making, the results of the current paper will provide a strong rationale for our framework.

Furthermore, the framework includes the professional competencies of career counsellors by developing a robust, appropriate, practical framework and being well-trained and qualified in compliance with UAE legislation. Overall, the role of career counsellors and their competency framework in the UAE is an important step forward in developing and supporting adolescents in implementing strategies for future decision-making. With its focus on their current role and framework of evidence-based support and developing collaboration among stakeholders, this framework can bring positive change for UAE nationals and deliver long-term benefits to the country's economy and society.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have previously engaged with my research by taking part in an online interview.

When that was completed, there was an invitation, if you agreed you were happy to be contacted again for a future focus group.

What will happen if I take part?

The study involves taking part in an online focus group (using Microsoft Teams) with up to four participants.

The focus group will be facilitated by the candidate. The facilitator will introduce some topics for discussion and will support you in joining in the conversation. It is estimated the focus group will take 30-45 minutes. We would like to hear your views and opinions on (The USE's career counsellors competency framework), there are no right or wrong answers. The focus group will be audio / (visually) recorded using Microsoft Teams recording feature [and written notes will also be taken]. The recording will be used to create a written transcript of the group discussion which will be analysed as part of the research.

You will be asked to complete an electronic consent form before the group begins.

Do I have to take part?

No, it is entirely up to you if you want to take part or not. Participation in the study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you do not have to answer all of the questions, and you can stop taking part in the focus group at any time, without giving a reason.

If you decide to stop taking part we would still include the questions you did answer but no further information will be collected.

How will my data be used?

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit".
The researcher will only have access to the pre-anonymised personal data for 14 days after the completion of the interview. On the 15th day, this personal data will be anonymised.

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. The University privacy notice for research participants can be found on the attached link https://www.uclan.ac.uk/data_protection/privacy-notice-research-participants.php

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below.

How will my data be collected?	By completing a consent form and taking part in a focus group online via Microsoft Teams.
How will my data be stored?	Electronic consent forms will be downloaded and stored securely in password-protected folders on University of Central Lancashire's

	secure network drive and kept separately from the focus group data. Focus group audio recordings will be downloaded from Microsoft Teams and stored in a secure and password-protected folder on University of Central Lancashire's network. Once the focus group has been transcribed, the recording of the focus group will be deleted.
How long will my data be stored for?	We will delete your transcripts of the focus groups and electronic consent 7 years from the end of the study.
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	All data will be stored in password/encrypted computer files at the University. We will not share your research data outside of the research team. Quotations from the focus group will be used in a thesis publication, but you will not be identifiable. If you agree to take part in a focus group full confidentiality cannot be guaranteed on behalf of the other focus group participants, although all participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality at the start of the focus group.
Will my data be anonymised?	When the focus group is transcribed, we will remove any names/personal identifying information. When we use any of your quotations, we will use a participant identifier (e.g., a pseudonym).

How will my data be used?	We will use anonymised quotations from the focus groups in the thesis, journal publications and presentations.
Who will have access to my data?	Only the student and supervisory team will have access to your data.
How will my data be destroyed?	After the focus group, we will download the interview recording onto a computer and delete the interview from the recording device or software. Once a typed transcript of the interview has been produced, the interview recording will be deleted. Your personal data (e.g., contact details) will be destroyed following the focus group unless you have agreed to receive a summary of the research.

Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no perceived risks or disadvantages involved. However, with focus groups, you will be discussing ideas and experiences in the presence of other participants. While we ask all participants to maintain confidentiality, we cannot guarantee this. There is a risk that the information you share in the focus group is shared more widely beyond the group discussion.

Are there any benefits from taking part?

The research findings could be shared with participants to utilise the benefits. Moreover, participants can get exposure to the UAE's Career Counsellor Competency Framework, after completing the study and allowed sharing from the University. For research purposes, this interview will not offer compensation or incentives, and the collected data will only be used for research.

Expenses and/or payments

No payments for this research will be handed to the participants, and the researcher will not be liable for any expenses incurred.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The study results will be written up to form part of the thesis for the degree. A summary of results may be shared with Emirates School Establishment and participants will be offered the opportunity to receive a summary of the results by indicating on the consent form.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

Even if you agree to take part and give your consent, you may still decide not to participate in the focus group, and you do not need to give a reason. Because of the nature of focus groups, it is not possible to withdraw your data once it has been given. Therefore, if you do choose to withdraw from this study after you have participated in the focus group, then the researchers will retain any data that you have already provided.

Who has reviewed this study?

The study has been reviewed and approved by the Business, Arts. Humanities and Social Science Ethics Review Panel at the University of Central Lancashire [BAHSS2 01121].

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy or have a problem, please contact Dr Iftikhar Bokhari via ibokhari3@uclan.ac.uk, and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with, then please contact the Ethics, Integrity, and Governance Unit at OfficerFor Ethics@uclan.ac.uk

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in processing your data. However, if you have any concerns about how the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

If you have any further questions, please contact the Principal Investigator on the following:

Research Candidate: Amal Alawadhi

Email: aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

Contact No. +971 50 6616441

Senior Lecturer in Management: Dr Iftikhar Bokhari

Contact number: +44(0)

Email: ibokhari3@uclan.ac.uk

Postgraduate Supervisor: Dr Ruth Elisabeth Slater

Contact number: +44(0)

Email: reslater1@uclan.ac.uk

The UAE's Career Counsellors Competency Framework

Participant Consent Form Focus Group

University of Central Lancashire
UCLan

Participant Consent Form

Version number & date: V2.1 02.02.2022

Research ethics approval number:

Title of the research project: **The UAE's Career Counsellors Competency Framework**

Name of the researcher(s): Amal Alawadhi

Please initial box

14. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated [**DATE**] for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have these answered satisfactorily. ☐
15. I understand that taking part in the study involves interviews in the form of online Microsoft Teams meetings. ☐
16. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any question or questions. ☐
17. a) I understand that if I withdraw from this study, data collected before my withdrawal will be retained, but no further data will be collected. ☐

    b) I understand that I can request the destruction of that information if I wish before anonymisation after 14 days of data collection. I understand that following the 14 days, I will no longer be able to request access to or withdraw the information I provide.
18. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with the University of Central Lancashire data protection requirements. ☐
19. I understand that the interviewer will retain signed consent forms and interview outcomes stored in a secured and password-protected folder within UCLan's network for **seven years after the interview**. ☐
20. I understand and agree that my participation will be **video recorded**, and I am aware of and consent to use these recordings only for the mentioned thesis preparation purposes. ☐
21. I understand that my interview recordings will be retained for 14 days. ☐
22. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained, and it will not be possible to identify me in any reports, presentations, or publications arising from the research. ☐

23. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Participant name	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

Principal Investigator

Dr. Iftikhar Bokhari

Email: IBokhari3@uclan.ac.uk

Student Investigator

Amal Abdulkarim Alawadhi

+971 50 6616441

aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

Version 1 04.12.2023

Research ethics approval number: BAHSS2 01121

Name of the researcher(s): Amal Alawadhi

24. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [V1 04.12.2023] for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐ Yes ☐ No

25. I understand that taking part in the study involves taking part in an online recorded focus group via Microsoft Teams facilitated by the researcher.

☐ Yes ☐ No

26. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions.

☐ Yes

☐ No

27. I understand that if I withdraw from this study, data collected prior to my withdrawal will be retained but no further data will be collected.

☐ Yes ☐ No

28. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Central Lancashire.

☐ Yes ☐ No

29. I understand that an audio recording of my consent and a transcript of the focus group will be retained on the University secure network accessible only by the student and Director of Studies until 7 years from the end of the study.

☐ Yes ☐ No

30. I agree that my anonymised information can be quoted in a thesis and internal publications

☐ Yes ☐ No

31. I would like to receive a summary of the research and agree for my contact details to be held for this purpose.

☐ Yes ☐ No

32. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐ Yes ☐ No

33. **Please enter your name.**

34. **Please enter your email address**

35. **Date**

Format: ---/----/------

Principal Investigator

Dr. Iftikhar Bokhari

Email: IBokhari3@uclan.ac.uk

Student Investigator

Amal Abdulkarim Alawadhi

+971 50 6616441

aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

الموعد الأول المقترح للمقابلة ( )

ستكون في يوم الجمعة الموافق 17.05.2024

بعد فترة الدوام المدرسي في تمام الساعة 7:30 م .

الموعد الثاني للمقابلة( )

هو يوم الأثنين الموافق 20.05.24

الساعة 12:00 ظهرا.

6. Invitation letters.

<u>Proposed</u> Invitation letter from Emirates School Establishment (ESE)

V2.04.12.23

Dear head of career guidance and valuable colleagues,

As you know, I'm a doctorate student at University of Central Lancashire, UK. I have obtained your authorisation to conduct the required interviews with selected middle management-level employees from the organisation via your confirmation email date (proper date). I want to confirm that the data collected from the interviews will be treated highly confidentially within University of Central Lancashire's Research Code of Conduct.

Hence, you are kindly requested to circulate the following to the selected employees who are well to attend the interview:

Dear colleagues,

Amal Abdulkarim Alawadhi is studying as part of a professional doctorate at the University of Central Lancashire in the UK. Amal is undertaking a project on UAE's Career Counsellors Competency Framework, and we have agreed to share information about this project with colleagues.

The purpose of this study was to identify the gaps in the competency framework of career counsellors and to develop the necessary skills and knowledge required for them to be effective counsellors. The study aimed to align the counsellors' skills with the UAE's economic trends and cultural needs. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the availability of professional development opportunities for counsellors and how they can keep up with the evolving career trends and education pathways. This will help individuals seeking career counselling to make better-informed career choices.

This study aims to investigate career counsellors' multifaceted roles and responsibilities in school environments, specifically the UAE schools, and their influences on students' decision-making process concerning their future careers by creating and implementing a viable competency framework up to the standards of the UAE policies 2021, and the NICE and Canadian competency framework. The objectives of the study are:

- To analyse gaps in the career counselling framework in the UAE schools (if there is one existing) with the NICE and Canadian framework.
- To examine how the UAE 2020 National Agenda in education reflected the need for school career counsellors.
- To explore the importance of career counselling programmes in guiding and helping

students make future decisions related to the competitive labour market demand and develop the potential for career counsellors in schools.

As part of the project, Amal is looking to interview individuals with expertise in career guidance and counselling services to explore [competencies included within career counselling related to competency in working with students, whether there are synergies between career counselling and academic curricula, challenges and barriers, improvements strategies, the impact of career counsellor outcomes in understanding the UAE standards, interacting with students and skills gaps, career counsellors' challenges, comparison with some international standards in other countries and learned lessons; i.e., the NICE and Canadian model, and most relevant theme is related to the effectiveness of the competency framework and how the existing framework is assessing UAE's career counsellor and they are equipped with the relevant shall to address the diverse needs of individuals seeking career guidance?] online via Microsoft Teams, which should take [the interview session will last between 30-45 minutes] Attached is a participant information sheet which provides additional information about the project and what it would involve. If you are interested in taking part, please get in touch with Amal directly via aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

Company representative

Amal Alawadhi
DBA Candidate
Business and Management Faculty
University of Central Lancashire – Preston – UK
+971527400420
aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk
amal.alawadhi@ese.gov.ae

7. Ethics checklist.

University of Central Lancashire
UCLan

Ethics, Integrity and Governance Unit

Ethics Checklist

All activities involving projects by undergraduate students, postgraduate taught and research students and staff whether they are undertaking projects focussing on research, commercial, knowledge transfer, evaluation, audit or teaching and learning, need ethical consideration.

Undergraduate students and postgraduate taught students will follow the process outlined by their School by their Course/ Module Leader

This checklist will identify whether a project requires an application for ethics approval, and to which Ethics Review Panel (ERP) it should be referred to. **No field work, experimentation or work with participants can start until approval is granted**. The questions should be completed by the Principal Investigator or Supervisor of the proposed project. Where projects are those of students, the Principal Investigator is always the Supervisor/Director of Studies and never the student.

Principal Investigators, or Supervisors/Director of Studies, are responsible for ensuring that all activities fall within the principles set down in the University Code of Conduct for Research and the University Ethical Principles for Teaching, Research, Knowledge Exchange, Consultancy and Related Activities. They are also responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgment in undertaking this review and evaluating the activity according to the criteria laid down in this checklist. If you are uncertain about any sections of this document, or need further information and guidance, please contact the Ethics, Integrity and Governance Unit in the Research and Enterprise Services (EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk).

If, on completion of the checklist:

- ***any*** question in section 2 is answered '***Yes***', then an application for ethical approval is required:-
    - For **undergraduate** and **postgraduate taught** projects, students should in the first instance discuss the project and ethical issues with their Supervisor. Unless the project is considered to be ethically complex or of a sensitive nature (e.g.

involves vulnerable populations) submission for ethical approval should be sought through the relevant School Ethics Committee or process.

- For **research, commercial and other projects**, use the questions to help compile suitable evidence and submit an application to the Relevant Ethics Review Panel.

- ***all*** questions in section 2 are answered '***No***' and you (the Principal Investigator) are not concerned with the ethical nature of the activity, then it is unnecessary to apply for ethical approval. However, it is still incumbent on you to observe the University's Ethical Principles in the conduct of the activity and to record that:

  - a review has taken place of the ethical aspects of the activity; and that
  - *either* no ethical issues have been identified *or* ethical issues have been identified but that these have been addressed satisfactorily.

All **postgraduate research degree student registration proposals**, irrespective of the outcome of the Ethics Checklist, need to be submitted to the Relevant Ethics Review Panel to be dealt with either by Chair's Action or full review.

Important note

For all research being conducted in a low or lower-middle income country as defined by the World Bank the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings (GCC) must be applied. This includes the following:

- Ensure that the research incorporates the values of the GCC and consideration has been given to satisfying each article within the code.

For research involving humans or animals:

- Researchers are required to submit an ethics application for full review at UCLan or to the University AWERB (as applicable) prior to applying for local ethical approval.

A copy of the code of conduct can be found on the below link:

http://www.globalcodeofconduct.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Global-Code-of-Conduct-Brochure.pdf

For any assistance or queries on application of the code please contact *EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk*

1.1 Project Title				
1.2 Project type	Staff research ☐ Research degree (including Prof Doc) ☐ Commercial ☐ Student Registration No		PG taught ☐ UG taught ☐	
1.3 Short description in layman's terms [no acronyms or jargon]				
1.4 Dates	Start	Click here to enter a date.	End	Click here to enter a date.
1.5 School of …..				
1.6 Project supervisor /principal investigator/ Director of Studies: name, position and original signature				
1.7 Co-workers/Co-Researchers / Postgraduate Research Student: names and positions, including signature				
	Student Registration No:			
1.8 Declaration	I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this checklist is required by the Ethics, Integrity and Governance Unit within Research and Enterprise Services, on behalf of the University, for the purpose of ethics			

	review, and to evidence that the appropriate level of ethics review has been undertaken. Such data will be stored and managed in accordance with the principles established in the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Please indicate below if you consent to your University Ethics Checklist, Ethics Application and other documentation being shared for training and review purposes. All forms and documents will be anonymised. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 1 – Type of Project

1)	**Is your study Research?** Research is generalisable and generates new knowledge or adds to current knowledge. To decide whether your project is research or service evaluation. The National Research Ethics Service (NRES) has published the following guidance to help decide: NRES Guidance PDF. A decision tool provided by the Health Research Authority and Medical Research Council is also available to help decide whether your project is research http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/	☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
Note: *The links above have been designed to help researchers decide if ethics approval is required within the NHS, however this information can be used as guidance for other research areas.*		
2)	**Is your study Service evaluation/Audit AND Are the results of the Service evaluation/ Audit to be disseminated beyond those who commissioned it?** Service evaluation - "What standard does this service achieve?" Usually involving analysis of existing data but also includes interviews and questionnaires. Audit - "Does this service reach a predetermined standard?" Usually involves analysis of existing data but may include administration of simple interview or questionnaire. The Health Research Authority (HRA) have published a table defining research categorising research, service evaluation, audit and usual practice http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/docs/definingresearchtable_oct2017-1.pdf. This can help decide the correct classification of your project. The table has been designed with NHS research in mind, however this is useful guidance for other research areas. If the results of the service evaluation/ audit are confined to those commissioning the evaluation, then ethics approval is not required. However, if you intend to disseminate	☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

	the findings of the evaluation more widely through conference or paper publication then ethical approval is required.	

Section 2 – Ethical Considerations

To complete section 2, please read any of the associated procedures and guidance under each question and delete, 'Yes' or 'No', for each characteristic in relation to your project. If you respond 'No', then in your judgment you believe that the characteristic is irrelevant to the activity. You may only tick 'No' to the main question (i.e. A, B, etc) where none of the statements in that section apply to your activity. If you are unsure whether to answer 'Yes' or 'No' to a question, you should answer 'Yes' and submit details to relevant Ethics Review Panel for initial review.

A)	**Does the activity involve human participants, data or material e.g. as research participants including the use of their data or using human tissue/fluid/DNA samples?**	☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
If Yes, and;		
Where the activity involves any external organisation for which separate and specific ethics clearance is required (e.g. NHS; school; any criminal justice agencies including the Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Prison Service, Probation Service or successor organisation) *seek and gain external ethical approval before submitting for University of Central Lancashire ethical approval. Submission may be just the external organisation ethics application paperwork – email details to EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk to check.*		
Secondary data (existing data or data which is publicly available) can be used without ethical review only if it can be guaranteed to be truly anonymised and if there is no possibility that participants may be identified following analysis, re-presentation or combination with other data sets. For this reason, it is likely that many projects involving secondary data will require some form of ethical review. The same policy applies for secondary data received by University of Central Lancashire researchers to provide a service to a secondary party. In these cases, there is an additional requirement that researchers should request evidence of participants' consent for the use of the data and assurance of compliance with data protection legislation from the data provider.		

Where the activity involves the use of human tissue / DNA samples or body fluid *seek and gain relevant external ethical approval before submitting to the relevant Ethics Review Panel. Submission can be just the external organisation ethics application paperwork (e.g. Brain Tissue North West) – email details to EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk to check.*

For all other activities involving human participants, their data or materials**, complete and submit University of Central Lancashire Ethics Application Form to relevant Ethics Review Panel – BAHSS; Science or Health.*

* such as:-

(i) requiring participants to give informed consent;

(ii) potential imbalance of power and authority which might compromise the validity of participants' consent;

(iii) researchers and/or participants in the potential disclosure of any information relating to illegal activities; the observation of illegal activities; or the possession, viewing or storage of any material (whether in hard copy or electronic format) which may be illegal

(iv) potential risk of physical, social, emotional or psychological harm, distress or discomfort to the researchers or participants (*Please note also the University's Policy and procedures on Safeguarding and Prevent);*

(v) deception of the participant be necessary during the activity;

(vi) aim to shock or offend (e.g. art)

(vii) invasion of privacy or access to confidential information about people without their permission;

(viii) excavation and study of human remains

B)	**Does the activity involve isolation and culture of micro-organisms, genetically modified micro-organism or cell lines?**	**☐ Yes ☐ No**

If so, process via UCLan Biological Safety Committee before submitting to the relevant Ethics Review Panel

C)	**Does the activity involve scientific procedures[2] being applied to a vertebrate animal (other than humans) or cephalopods[3]?**	☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
If so, please email EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk requesting application form and submission deadlines for AWERB (Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Board)		
D)	**Does the activity involve collection of rare plants, endangered species or work in the natural environment?**	☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
If so, please submit this checklist together with outline details of the activity / UCLan's role to EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk		
E)	**Does activity relate to military/defence/weapons or the Defence industry, including excavation of battlefields, military installations, etc** (i.e. site with unexploded bomb)**?**	☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
If so, please submit this checklist together with outline details of the activity / UCLan's role to EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk		
F)	**Does the activity involve or accessing Security-Sensitive Research Material or proscribed terrorist materials?** e.g. Will you be viewing or accessing data / prohibited material (digital or paper) that can be interpreted as contravening counter-terrorism legislation under the Terrorism Act (2006)?	☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
If so, please submit this checklist to the OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk		
G)	**Are there any potential other ethical and political concerns?** **e.g.** Are you aware of any ● potential ethical concerns or political concerns that may arise from either the conduct or dissemination of this activity, e.g. unethical practices of companies funding this research; results of research being used for political gain by others; potential for liability to the University from your research? ● ethical concerns about collaborator company / organisation, e.g. its product has a harmful effect on humans, animals or the environment; it has a record	☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

[2] Including interrupting an animal's natural environment (e.g. tracking or observing wild deer)

[3] Cephalopods are an active predatory mollusc of the large class Cephalopoda, such as an octopus or squid

	of supporting repressive regimes; does it have ethical practices for its workers and for the safe disposal of products?	
If so, please submit this checklist together with outline details of the activity / University of Central Lancashire's role to EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk		

UCLan Ethics Review Panels

The Ethics Review Panel for **Business, Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (BAHSS)** has responsibility for the following Schools:

- Arts and Media
- Business
- Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT)
- Humanities, Language and Global Studies
- Justice
- Management
- Social Work, Care and Community
- Sport and Health Sciences (Coaching)

The Ethics Review Panel for **Science** has responsibility for the following Schools:

- Engineering
- Natural Sciences
- Psychology and Computer Science

The Ethics Review Panel for **Health** has responsibility for the following Schools:

- Community Health and Midwifery
- Dentistry
- Medicine
- Nursing
- Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences

- Sport and Health Sciences

Please contact the Ethics, Integrity and Governance Unit in Research and Enterprise Service (EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk) regarding submission of applications involving animals or cephalopods.

Please contact Biological Safety Committee Chair (jasmith@uclan.ac.uk) regarding submission of applications involving Microbes, Genetically Modified Organisms & Cell Lines.

External Ethical Approval

Where a project involves the NHS, either staff or patients, please email IRASSponsor@uclan.ac.uk to determine requirements for both IRAS Sponsor sign off and UCLan ethics review.

Where other external ethical approval is required, e.g. another university or organisation, the standard process is to gain the required external ethical approval, followed by submission for ethical approval at University of Central Lancashire using the external ethics application documentation and approval notification. If in doubt, please email EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk for advice.

Helpful Tips :-

Please note that ethical approval is not required for the following, but evidence is required that relevant approvals have been gained where appropriate:

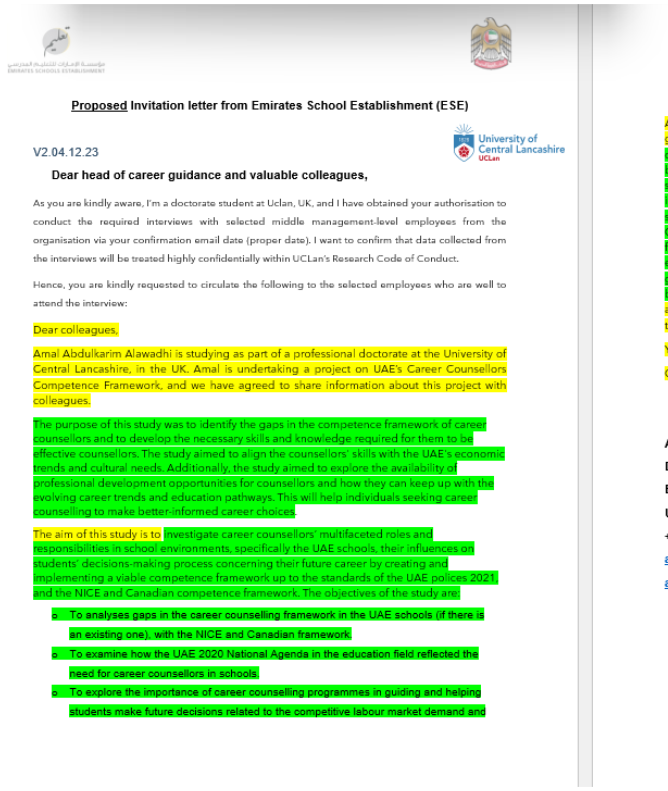
Where an activity involves collecting, obtaining, accessing, viewing, holding or any other kind of processing of personal data please refer to University of Central Lancashire Data Protection Guidance/GDPR/Checklist

Where an activity involves fieldwork, travel (e.g. overseas) or lone working please refer to your School Risk Assessment procedures.

Where Health and Safety clearance is a requirement of the activity (e.g. lab work) please check all relevant COSHH forms and/or Safety clearance/approval are in place

Please consider the University's requirements and procedures under Safeguarding and Prevent.

Appendix 2 – documents to ensure consent (letter, invitation, consent, etc)



Proposed Invitation letter from Emirates School Establishment (ESE)

V2.04.12.23

University of Central Lancashire UCLan

Dear head of career guidance and valuable colleagues,

As you are kindly aware, I'm a doctorate student at Uclan, UK, and I have obtained your authorisation to conduct the required interviews with selected middle management-level employees from the organisation via your confirmation email date (proper date). I want to confirm that data collected from the interviews will be treated highly confidentially within UCLan's Research Code of Conduct.

Hence, you are kindly requested to circulate the following to the selected employees who are well to attend the interview:

Dear colleagues,

Amal Abdulkarim Alawadhi is studying as part of a professional doctorate at the University of Central Lancashire, in the UK. Amal is undertaking a project on UAE's Career Counsellors Competence Framework, and we have agreed to share information about this project with colleagues.

The purpose of this study was to identify the gaps in the competence framework of career counsellors and to develop the necessary skills and knowledge required for them to be effective counsellors. The study aimed to align the counsellors' skills with the UAE's economic trends and cultural needs. Additionally, the study aimed to explore the availability of professional development opportunities for counsellors and how they can keep up with the evolving career trends and education pathways. This will help individuals seeking career counselling to make better-informed career choices.

The aim of this study is to investigate career counsellors' multifaceted roles and responsibilities in school environments, specifically the UAE schools, their influences on students' decisions-making process concerning their future career by creating and implementing a viable competence framework up to the standards of the UAE polices 2021 and the NICE and Canadian competence framework. The objectives of the study are:

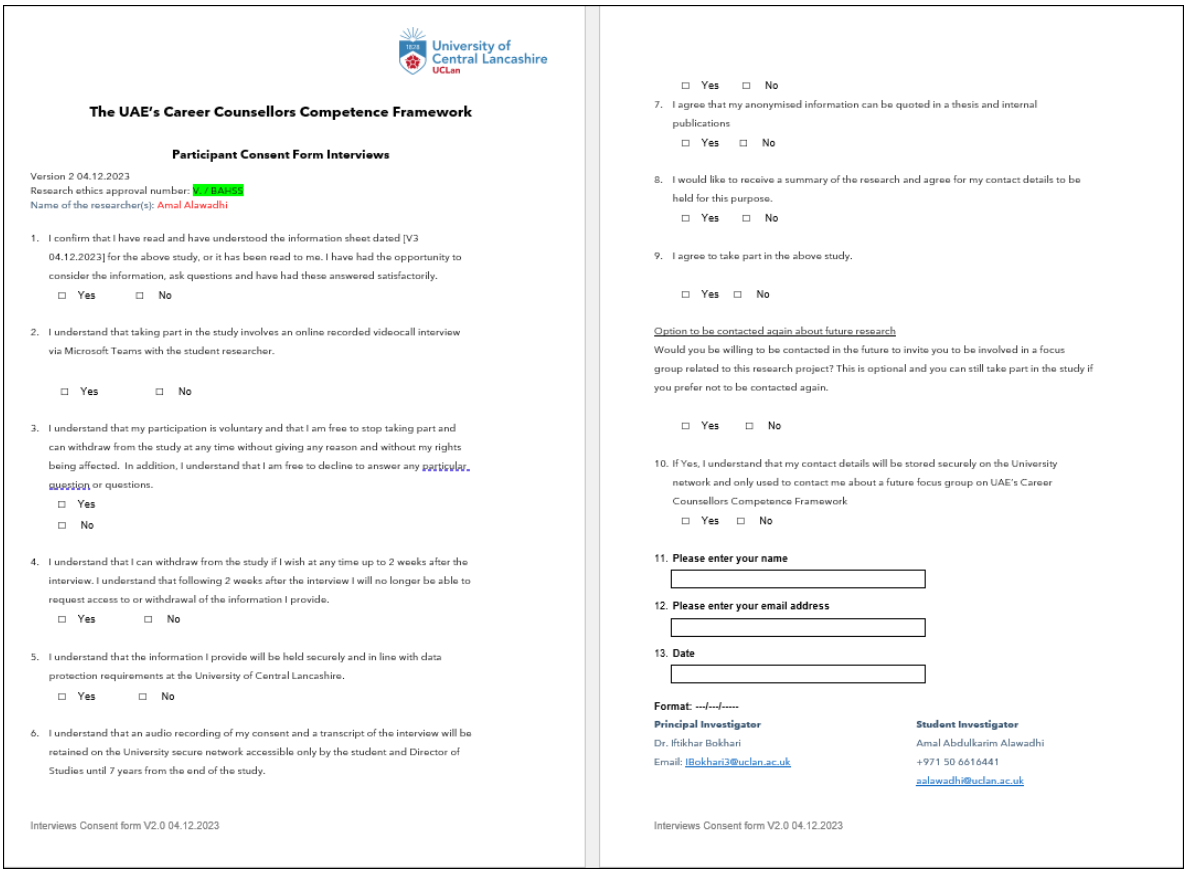
- To analyses gaps in the career counselling framework in the UAE schools (if there is an existing one), with the NICE and Canadian framework.
- To examine how the UAE 2020 National Agenda in the education field reflected the need for career counsellors in schools.
- To explore the importance of career counselling programmes in guiding and helping students make future decisions related to the competitive labour market demand and develop the potential for career counsellors in schools.

As part of the project Amal is looking to interview individuals with expertise in career guidance and counselling services to explore [competencies includes within career counselling related to competence in working with students whether there are and synergies between career counselling and academic curricula, challenges and barriers, improvements strategies, the impact of career counsellor outcomes in understanding the UAE standards, interacting with students and skills gaps, career counsellors' challenges, comparison with some international standards in other countries and learned lessons; i.e., the NICE and Canadian model, and most relevant theme is related to the effectiveness of the competence framework and how the existing framework is assessing UAE's career counsellor and they are equipped with the relevant shall to address the diverse needs of individuals seeking career guidance?] online via Microsoft Teams, which should take [the interview session will last between 30-45 minutes]. Attached is a participant information sheet which provides additional information about the project and what it would involve, if you are interested in taking part please contact Amal directly via aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

Company representative

Amal Alawadhi
DBA Candidate
Business and Management Faculty
University of Central Lancashire – Preston – UK
+971527400420
aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk
amal.alawadhi@ese.gov.ae



University of Central Lancashire UCLan

The UAE's Career Counsellors Competence Framework

Participant Consent Form Interviews

Version 2 04.12.2023
Research ethics approval number: V. / BAH-SS
Name of the researcher(s): Amal Alawadhi

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [V3 04.12.2023] for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. I understand that taking part in the study involves an online recorded videocall interview via Microsoft Teams with the student researcher.
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions.
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No
4. I understand that I can withdraw from the study if I wish at any time up to 2 weeks after the interview. I understand that following 2 weeks after the interview I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide.
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Central Lancashire.
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. I understand that an audio recording of my consent and a transcript of the interview will be retained on the University secure network accessible only by the student and Director of Studies until 7 years from the end of the study.

☐ Yes ☐ No

7. I agree that my anonymised information can be quoted in a thesis and internal publications
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
8. I would like to receive a summary of the research and agree for my contact details to be held for this purpose.
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
9. I agree to take part in the above study.
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

Option to be contacted again about future research
Would you be willing to be contacted in the future to invite you to be involved in a focus group related to this research project? This is optional and you can still take part in the study if you prefer not to be contacted again.

☐ Yes ☐ No

10. If Yes, I understand that my contact details will be stored securely on the University network and only used to contact me about a future focus group on UAE's Career Counsellors Competence Framework
    ☐ Yes ☐ No
11. **Please enter your name**
12. **Please enter your email address**
13. **Date**

Format: ---/---/-----

Principal Investigator
Dr. Iftikhar Bokhari
Email: IBokhari3@uclan.ac.uk

Student Investigator
Amal Abdulkarim Alawadhi
+971 50 6616441
aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

Proposed Invitation Letter form, Emirates School Establishment (ESE)

V2.04.12.23

Dear ESE Research Office,

As you know, I'm a doctorate student at UCLan, UK, and I have obtained your authorisation to conduct the required survey with employees from the Organisation by sharing the survey link through their email addresses. I want to confirm that the data collected from the survey will be treated highly confidentially within UCLan's Research Code of Conduct.

Hence, you are kindly requested to circulate the following to the employees who are well to take part in the survey:

Hi, ESE research office,

As part of the current study (The UAE Career Counsellors Competence Framework) and previous approval on conducting my interview with the participants in the ESE schools, I would like to inform you that After gathering data using interviews and focus groups, it became clear that some of the invited participants were unwilling to participate in the individual interview. They indicated that they would be prepared to respond to a survey instead. Their reasons included a need for more confidence in their ability to respond to direct and in-depth questioning. This required a change of format for the research so that participants would have to answer a direct written question from a range of prescribed responses.

The survey will be online. I will not have any access to personal data that can identify individuals, such as email addresses.

The study will collect additional data from participants through a survey to obtain more in-depth information related to the study. This will enhance the study by distributing the survey across schools in the United Arab Emirates and collecting responses from more participants working in cycle 3 (year grades 9-12).

Regards,

Amal Alawadhi

DBA Candidate
Business and Management Faculty
University of Central Lancashire – Preston – UK
+971527400420
aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk
amal.alawadhi@ese.gov.ae

Re: Interview for Research purposes "The UAE Career Counsellors Competence Framework"

Amal Abdulkarim Mohammad Ali Alawadhi (Student)
To: Hana Karkaba

Reply | Reply all | Forward
Wed 5/22/2024 5:56 PM

Interview Consent form V2.0 ... 57 KB
Interview- Admin Amal Alaw... 70 KB

2 attachments (127 KB) Save all to OneDrive - University of Lancashire Save All Attachments

وعليكم السلام ورحمة الله وبركاته

الأستاذة: هناء فايز من إدارة الإرشاد ومهارات المستقبل بمؤسسة الإمارات للتعليم المحترمة

تحية طيبة، وبعد:

سعدت بتواصلكم وبعودتكم بحمد الله سالمين.

عذرا لعدم التمكن من الرد على البريد المرسل من قبلكم مسبقا.

مرسل لكم التعهدات الخاصة بالمقابلة. الرجاء قراءتها والتوقيع عليها وإعادة إرسالها ليتسنى لنا تحديد الموعد المناسب معكم بخصوص مقابلتكم الخاصة بالجزء المتعلق بالإدارة.

المقترح الأول لموعد اللقاء هو يوم الخميس الموافق 23.05.2024 الساعة العاشرة صباحا.
المقترح الثاني لموعد اللقاء هو يوم الجمعة الموافق 24.05.24 الساعة العاشرة صباحا

في حالة لم يناسبكم الوقت في اليومين الر جاء تحديد ما يناسبكم وإبلاغي.

في حالة كان الوقت مناسب لكم التأكيد لإرسال الرابط الخاص بالتيمز على البريد الخاص بكم.

الشكر موصول لكم لتعاونكم ودعمكم المستمر

مع التحية

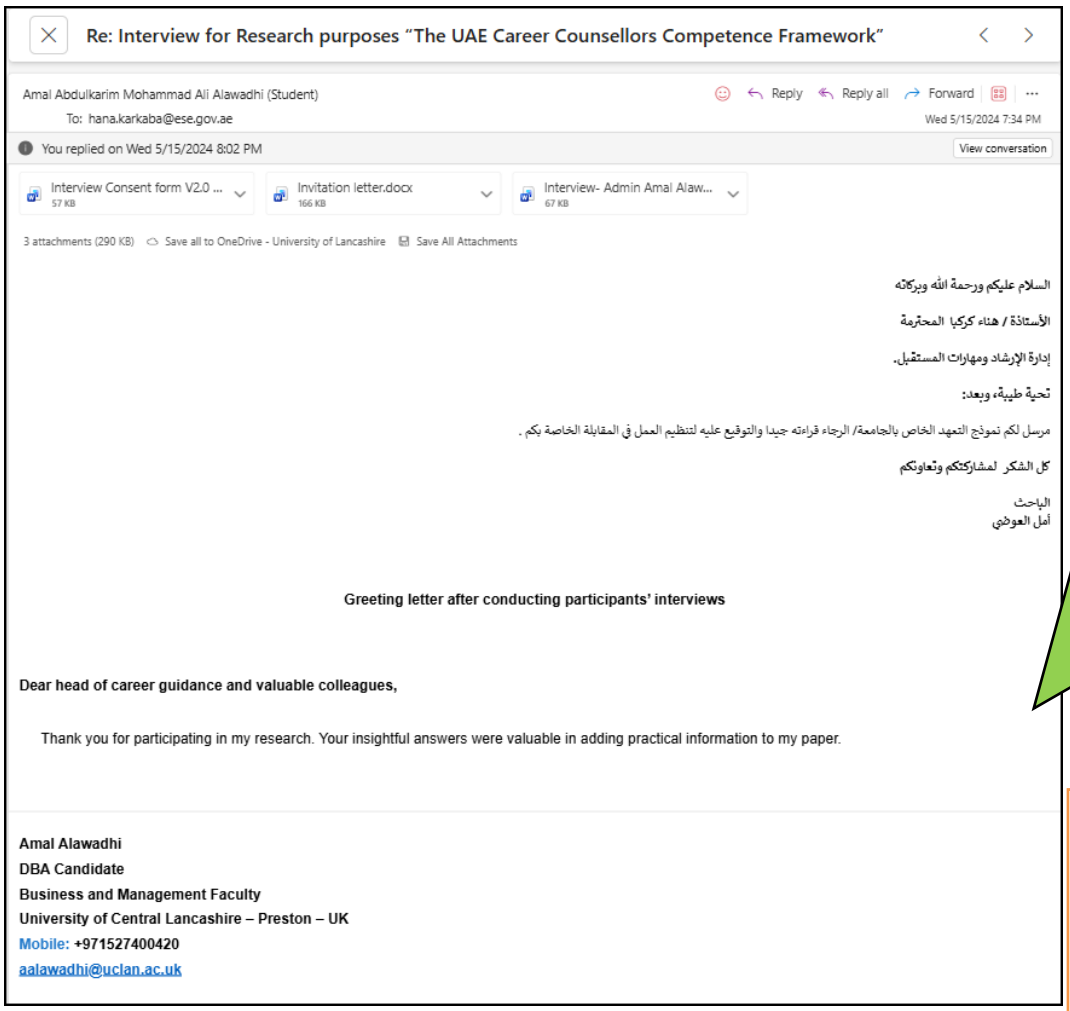
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University of Central Lancashire

Dr Ruth E Slater FHEA Chartered MCIPD
PG Supervisor
reslater1@uclan.ac.uk
School of Management

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0302-5919



Re: Interview for Research purposes "The UAE Career Counsellors Competence Framework"

Amal Abdulkarim Mohammad Ali Alawadhi (Student)
To: hana.karkaba@ese.gov.ae

Reply | Reply all | Forward
Wed 5/15/2024 7:34 PM

You replied on Wed 5/15/2024 8:02 PM
View conversation

Interview Consent form V2.0 ... 57 KB
Invitation letter.docx 166 KB
Interview- Admin Amal Alaw... 67 KB

3 attachments (290 KB) Save all to OneDrive - University of Lancashire Save All Attachments

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

الأستاذة / هناء كركبا المحترمة

إدارة الإرشاد ومهارات المستقبل.

تحية طيبة، وبعد:

مرسل لكم نموذج التعهد الخاص بالجامعة/ الرجاء قراءته جيدا والتوقيع عليه لتنظيم العمل في المقابلة الخاصة بكم .

كل الشكر لمشاركتكم وتعاونكم

الباحث
أمل العوضي

Greeting letter after conducting participants' interviews

Dear head of career guidance and valuable colleagues,

Thank you for participating in my research. Your insightful answers were valuable in adding practical information to my paper.

Amal Alawadhi
DBA Candidate
Business and Management Faculty
University of Central Lancashire – Preston – UK
Mobile: +971527400420
aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

Sample Invitation email Sharing consents Email forms. All were sent in the



المشاركة في مقابلة البحث

Amal Abdulkarim Mohammad Ali Alawadhi (Student)
To: hana.karkaba@ese.gov.ae; Amal Abdulkarim Mohammad Ali Alawadhi

Reply | Reply all | Forward
Sun 5/12/2024 10:50 PM

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

تحية طيبة، وبعد:

إدارة الإرشاد الأكاديمي ومهارات المستقبل المحترمون

الأستاذة / هنا فايز كركبا المحترمة

الموضوع: المشاركة في مقابلة البحث بعنوان "إطار الكفاءة المهني للمرشد الأكاديمي في دولة الإمارات"

الباحث / أمل العوضي أعمل على رسالة الدكتوراة والتي ستخدم مجال الإرشاد الأكاديمي والمهني في دولة الإمارات.

سيقدم البحث خدمة قيمة للأطراف المعنية في مجال الإرشاد الأكاديمي، حيث سيقدم إطارًا مناسبًا للعمل في هذا المجال المتطور.

نشأت الفكرة بعد سنوات من التجربة كمرشد أكاديمي في مدارس المرحلتين الثانوية والثالثة.

الهدف من البحث هو تطوير هذا القطاع ليواكب التحولات الدائمة في اقتصاد دولة الإمارات وتأثيرها على مختلف الجوانب السياسية، الاجتماعية، الاقتصادية، المحلية والدولية وكل الصُعد.

يتناول البحث حاجة المرشدين للتطوير والتنمية المهنية إيجاد التخصص المناسب في الجامعات وتوفير مسارات مناسبة لهذا التوجه في مؤسسات التعليم العالي، خاصة في ظل التطورات المتسارعة والحاجة المتزايدة إلى تأهيل الطلاب لسوق العمل وتوجيههم بشكل فعال.

يسلط البحث الضوء على الفجوات التي يعاني منها ميدان الإرشاد الأكاديمي منذ بداية ظهوره والإعلان عنه في دولة الإمارات، ويقدم توصيات لتعزيز دوره في توجيه الطلاب وتأهيلهم للمنافسة في سوق العمل الحديث والذي يعتبر تنافسي بشكل كبير.

تم تنفيذ المرحلة الأولى، من المقابلات مع عدد من المرشدين الأكاديميين في إمارة أبوظبي الحلقة الثالثة. وبصدد تنفيذ المقابلة الجمعية مع عينة منهم تم تحديدهم بناء على الكفاءة، الخبرة والمعلومة التي تم مشاركتها في المقابلة الفردية.

والمرحلة الثانية، ستكون المقابلة الفردية مع أفراد من الإدارة العليا في القسم المسؤول والمشرف على هؤلاء المرشدين الأكاديميين.

والمرحلة الثالثة، سيكون من خلال الإطلاع على الجهود الحثيثة لإدارة الإرشاد ومهارات المستقبل في تطبيق إطار عمل خاص بهؤلاء المرشدين الأكاديميين.

المرحلة الرابعة، المقارنة بين الدراسات والممارسات في القطاع الخاصة مع القطاع الحكومي وما هي نقاط التشابه والاختلاف، القوة والضعف

المرحلة الخامسة، سيكون من النتائج التي تم الوصول إليه والتوصيات التي سيتم الإعلان عنه ومشاركتكم به من البحث بعد الانتهاء منه.

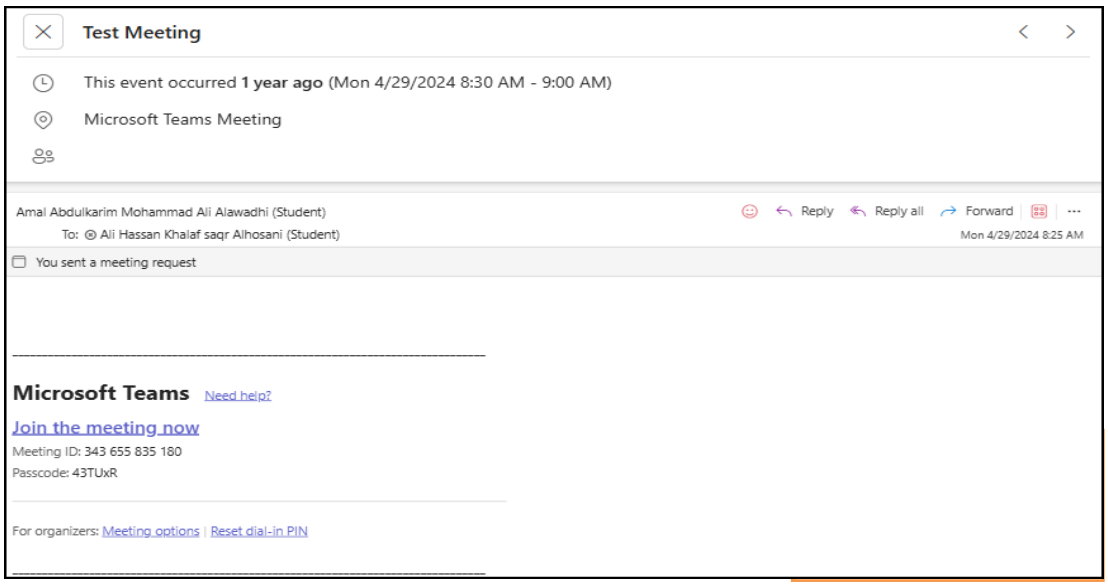
مشاركتكم مهمة وهادفة، وكلي ثقة بإضافتكم المميزة من خلال المقابلة التي سيتم تنفيذها معكم.

في حالة ترغب الإدارة بالمشاركة الرجاء الرد على البريد المرسل، حتى يمكنني مشاركتكم بالتعهد الخاص بكم وتحديد الموعد المناسب لتنفيذ المقابلة.

علما أن المقابلة ستكون عن طريق برنامج التيمز الخاص بالجامعة، ومسجلة لأغراض البحث والتطوير.

كل الشكر لتعاونكم

أمل العوضي
مرشد أكاديمي ومهني
مؤسسة الإمارات للتعليم المدرسي
دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة
للتواصل:


Test Meeting
This event occurred 1 year ago (Mon 4/29/2024 8:30 AM - 9:00 AM)
Microsoft Teams Meeting
Amal Abdulkarim Mohammad Ali Alawadhi (Student)
To: Ali Hassan Khalaf saqr Alhosani (Student)
Reply
Reply all
Forward
Mon 4/29/2024 8:25 AM
You sent a meeting request
Microsoft Teams
Need help?
Join the meeting now
Meeting ID: 343 655 835 180
Passcode: 43TUxR
For organizers: Meeting options | Reset dial-in PIN

Appendix 3 - The framework questions for the individuals' interview.

Questions:

Section 1: Higher level of career counselling and future skills from the Ministry of Education in the UAE:

Part I: Demographic information:

1. Level of education
    a. Undergraduate ( )
    b. Master's degree ( )
    c. Doctorate level ( )
2. How many years of experience do you have in Emirates School in the position of career guidance and counselling?
3. How would you grade the level of your knowledge and experience in the field of guidance and counselling?
    a. Expert ( )
    b. Intermediate ( )
    c. Basic ( )
    d. New in the field ( )

Questions for interviewees:

2) **Competency in counselling الكفاءة المهنية في الإرشاد**
    a. What specific skills and knowledge areas are identified as gaps within the UAE's current competency framework for career counsellors?

ما هي مجالات المهارات والمعرفة المحددة التي تم تحديدها كثغرات ضمن إطار الكفاءات الحالي المرشدين الأكاديميين والمهنيين في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

3) **Understanding the UAE standards فهم معايير دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة**
    a. How does the Career Counsellors Competency Framework align with the established competency criteria in counselling per UAE standards?

كيف يتماشى إطار كفاءة المرشدين الأكاديميين والمهنيين مع معايير الكفاءة المعمول بها في الإرشاد وفقا لمعايير دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

4) **Interacting with students? التفاعل مع الطلاب**

   a. How effectively does the current framework facilitate career counsellors' interaction with students to address their diverse needs and aspirations?

ما مدى فعالية الإطار الحالي في تسهيل تفاعل المرشدين الأكاديميين مع الطلاب لتلبية احتياجاتهم وتطلعاتهم المتنوعة.

5) **Skills Gaps فجوات المهارات**

   a. What strategies or initiatives can be implemented at the higher administrative level to bridge the skills gaps and enhance the overall competency of career counsellors in the UAE, as outlined by the existing framework?

العامة الكفاءة وتعزيز المهارات في الفجوات لسد الأعلى الإداري المستوى على تنفيذها يمكن التي المبادرات أو الاستراتيجيات هي ما الحالي الإطار في الموضح النحو المتحدة، على العربية الإمارات دولة في الأكاديميين للمرشدين؟

Explanatory answers. *Asking the research participant, a closing question like, "Now that you know what the research is about, is there anything I should have asked but didn't?"*

Section 1: Career Guidance and Counsellors Interview Questions Working in the UAE Emirati Schools:

Part II: Questions on the UAE's Career Counsellors Competency Framework:

This part of the interview will focus on your experiences with career guidance and counselling in Emirati public schools.

I. Competency in counselling الكفاءة المهنية في الإرشاد

1. Tell me; what inspired you to pursue a career in career counselling?
   a) Can you describe it more fully?
2. Tell me, how do you stay updated with trends and developments in career counselling and incorporate these trends into your daily professional practices?
   a) What strategies do you use to develop individualised career plans for each client?

3. What strategies or frameworks can be implemented to ensure career counsellors maintain professionalism and adhere to ethical guidelines and standards in the existing practices?
4. What methods can be employed to assess the efficacy of counselling interventions for individuals or groups within the career counsellors' competency framework?

II. Understanding the UAE standards فهم معايير دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة

1. How did UAE standards of UAE (Vision 2021) develop the career counselling and guidance competencies and qualifications required?
2. From your experience, what might be the main viable of the UAE's policy framework for career counselling?
3. From the standpoint of your existing role as a career counsellor, could you give 3 reasons for the education sector (stakeholders) consider the need for career guidance or counsellors in schools? Kindly provide a detailed analysis in (2-3) points.

Various international standards and frameworks exist in career counselling and guidance, including NICE, Indian modules, EU, American, Australian, and African modules.

4. Do you know some of the competency frameworks implemented worldwide in your field? (*If yes, I will continue with the following questions; if not, I will remain with the question and move to the next level of the interview*).
    a) To what extent do the career counselling standards in the UAE conform to internationally adopted module practices or standards, considering the global perspective?

III. Interacting with students? التفاعل مع الطلاب

1. How do you assess the competency of career counsellors in the UAE when it comes to effectively interacting with students in an academic setting?
2. Explain how a competency framework for career guidance and counselling in the UAE impacts adolescents' future goals and aspirations.

Thank you for participating in this interview and for responding to each of the questions presented in this study.

IV. Skills Gaps فجوات المهارات

1. What specific academic qualifications and training should career counsellors in the UAE possess to address counsellors' skills gaps effectively?

ما هي المؤهلات الأكاديمية المحددة والتدريب الذي يجب أن يمتلكه المرشدون المهنيون في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة لمعالجة فجوات مهارات المرشدين بشكل فعال؟

Are any specific skills or knowledge areas currently in high demand or lacking in the field?

هل هناك أي مهارات أو مجالات معرفية محددة مطلوبة حاليا أو تفتقر إليها في هذا المجال؟

2. How can career counsellors in the UAE expand their skills, knowledge and performance and stay updated with the latest market trends and developments to guide individuals' career choices better and bridge the skills gaps in the current job market to provide outstanding consulting services?

كيف يمكن للمرشدين المهنيين في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة توسيع مهاراتهم ومعرفتهم وأدائهم والبقاء على اطلاع بأحدث اتجاهات السوق والتطورات لتوجيه الخيارات المهنية للأفراد بشكل أفضل وسد فجوات المهارات في سوق العمل الحالي لتقديم خدمات استشارية متميزة؟

3. Could you kindly provide details on how career counsellors in the UAE inspire individuals to pursue career trajectories congruent with the government's Emiratisation policies? And it is essential to realise that career counselling plays a vital role in optimising the allocation of human resources and promoting fair access to education and vocational opportunities.

هل يمكنك التكرم بتقديم تفاصيل حول كيفية إلهام المستشارين المهنيين في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة للأفراد لمتابعة مسارات مهنية تتوافق مع سياسات التوطين الحكومية؟ ومن الضروري إدراك أن الإرشاد المهني يلعب دورا حيويا في تحسين تخصيص الموارد البشرية وتعزيز الوصول العادل إلى التعليم والفرص المهنية

4. How can the UAE Education policymakers enhance career counsellors' opportunities for creating a system with the necessary competencies and skills to brighten the skills gaps and reach individuals' clear guidance in professional development in schools?

كيف يمكن لواضعي السياسات التعليمية في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة تعزيز فرص المرشدين المهنيين لإنشاء نظام يتمتع بالكفاءات والمهارات اللازمة لسد فجوات المهارات والوصول إلى التوجيه المؤثر للأفراد في التطوير المهني في المدارس؟

4.a What criteria should academic and career advisors, particularly Emiratis, meet to align with the UAE's competitive job market?

ما هي المعايير التي يجب أن يستوفيها المرشدون الأكاديميون والمهنيون، وخاصة الإماراتيين، لتتماشى مع سوق العمل التنافسي في دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة؟

Explanatory answers. *Asking the research participant, a closing question like, "Now that you know what the research is about, is there anything I should have asked but didn't?"*

Notice:

You can refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the interview at any time within 14 days of completion of your interview. All data will be anonymised on the 15th day, and you will no longer be able to withdraw from this study as your data cannot be identified.

participant name: ……. **Date**: …. /….. / 202..

By signing this paper, I fully agree to participate in the interview. I understand that I can withdraw from the discussion and this research anytime.

Thank you for participating in this interview and responding to the questions presented in this study.

Amal Alawadhi
DBA Candidate
Lancashire School of Business and Enterprise
University of Central Lancashire – Preston – United Kingdom
Email: aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

Primary supervisor: Dr. Iftikhar Bokhari
Secondary supervisor: Dr. Ruth Slater

Appendix 4 -The framework questions for the focus groups.

<u>Part I:</u> Demographic information:

4. Level of education
    a. Undergraduate ( )
    b. Master's degree ( )
    c. Doctorate level ( )
5. How many years of experience do you have in Emirates School in the position of career guidance and counselling?
6. How would you grade the level of your knowledge and experience in the field of guidance and counselling?
    a. Expert ( )
    b. Intermediate ( )
    c. Basic ( )
    d. New in the field ( )

<u>Questions for participants and interviewees</u>:

A. Several constructive activities have been identified to support the competency of career counsellors. These activities have been classified into two categories:

قد تم تحديد العديد من الأنشطة البناءة لدعم كفاءة المستشارين المهنيين .وقد تم تصنيف هذه الأنشطة إلى فئتين:

i. 1) strategies based on intervention and 2) strategies based on the experience of the career counsellor. I would like to know your point of view and experience on this matter.

(1الاستراتيجيات القائمة على التدخل و (2 الاستراتيجيات القائمة على خبرة المستشار المهني
أود أن أعرف وجهة نظرك وخبرتك في هذا الشأن.

ii. Additionally, what do you think are the challenges that may arise during the implementation process?
(Please limit your response to five points).

بالإضافة إلى ذلك، ما هي برأيك التحديات التي قد تنشأ أثناء عملية التنفيذ؟ يرجى قصر ردك على خمس نقاط.

B. What is the most crucial professional competencies that career guidance and counsellors should possess to be considered as the main evaluators of the efficiency of academic advisors' work? How can these competencies be

integrated with the UAE government's policy, directions, and future aspirations?

ما هي أهم الكفاءات المهنية التي يجب أن يمتلكها المرشدون والمرشدون المهنيون لاعتبارهم المقيم الرئيسي لكفاءة عمل المرشدين الأكاديميين؟ كيف يمكن دمج هذه الكفاءات مع سياسة حكومة الإمارات وتوجهاتها وتطلعاتها المستقبلية؟

C. What do career guidance and counsellors need to improve work efficiency with their clients?

ما الذي يحتاجه التوجيه والإرشاد المهني لتحسين كفاءة العمل مع عملائهم؟

D. Throughout your experience in guidance and counselling, have you observed any significant factors in the personality of a career advisor that can impact their effectiveness in guiding clients? Is it possible to nurture and cultivate these skills so that they become integral to the hiring process?

خلال تجربتك في التوجيه والإرشاد، هل لاحظت أي عوامل مهمة في شخصية المستشار المهني يمكن أن تؤثر على فعاليته في توجيه العملاء؟ هل من الممكن رعاية هذه المهارات وتنميتها بحيث تصبح جزءا لا يتجزأ من عملية التوظيف؟

Explanatory answers. *Asking the research participant a closing question like, "Now that you know what the research is about, is there anything I should have asked but didn't?"*

Notice:

You can refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the interview at any time within 14 days of completion of your interview. All data will be anonymised on the 15th day, and you will no longer be able to withdraw from this study as your data cannot be identified.

participant name: ……. **Date**: …. /….. / 202..

By signing this paper, I fully agree to participate in the interview. I understand that I can withdraw from the discussion and this research anytime.

Thank you for participating in this interview and responding to the questions presented in this study.

Amal Alawadhi

DBA Candidate

Lancashire School of Business and Enterprise

University of Central Lancashire – Preston – United Kingdom

Email: aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

Primary supervisor: Dr. Iftikhar Bokhari

Secondary supervisor: Dr. Ruth Slater

Appendix 5 - Questionnaires.

Part 1: Demographic & Personal Information :

1. Nationality:

Emirati

Expatriate

Prefer not to say

2. If you are a citizen of the UAE, please indicate whether you are from:

Emirates of Abu Dhabi – Emirates of Dubai – Northern Emirates

3. Gender

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

4. Age

Below 30 – (31:35) – (36:40) – (41:45) – (46:50) – (51:55) – (56:60) – (61+) Prefer not to say

5. Years of experience as a career guidance and counsellor

1:3 – 4:6 – 7:9 – 10:12 – 13:15 – 16:18 – 19:21 – 22:24 – 25:27 – 28:30 – 31+ Prefer not to say

6. Education level

Diploma

Bachelor

Master

PhD

Prefer not to say

7. Do you have any license in career guidance and counselling?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

If yes, please specify:

Part 2: Perceptions & attitude:

(*On a five-point Likert Scale, answers range from strongly agree to disagree or from strongly disagree to agree strongly*)

1. Make school leavers better prepared to assume a career.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

2. Help graduates access information related to their future careers.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

3. Help graduates align majors with future jobs.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

4. Acquaint graduates with the dynamics and changing nature of the local labour market.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

5. Help make a difference in student's career.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

6. Guide students to be more dependent in achieving their objectives

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

7. The idea of career guidance is good, but the curriculum content could be better. فكرة الإرشاد المهني جيدة، لكن محتوى المنهاج يمكن أن يكون أفضل.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

8. Graduate students need to take career guidance sessions seriously. الطلاب الخريجون بحاجة إلى اعتبار جلسات الإرشاد المهني بجدية.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

9. My colleague counsellors do not believe in the efficiency and competency of the career counselling profession. زملائي المرشدين لا يؤمنون بكفاءة مهنة الإرشاد المهني. Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say
10. The primary role of school career guidance and counsellors is to assist and guide students in successfully achieving their academic goals. الدور الأساسي لوظيفة المرشد الأكاديمي والمهني بالمدارس هو دعم وتوجيه الطلاب لتحقيق أهدافهم الأكاديمية بنجاح.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

Part 3: Job Satisfaction:

11. Counsellors' Colleagues must be more motivated to do a better career counselling job. يجب أن يمتلك زملائي المرشدين الدافعية لأداء عمل الإرشاد المهني بشكل أفضل.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

12. As a current Career Guidance & counsellors were not consulted when developing career guidance curricula بصفتي مرشدًا أكاديميًا حاليًا، لم يتم استشارتنا أثناء تطوير برامج الإرشاد التعليمي.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

13. I sometimes feel that career counselling sessions waste time. أشعر أحيانًا أن جلسات الإرشاد المهني مهدرة للوقت.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

14. The Emirati career guidance curriculum (Career Guidance & Counsellors (CGC)) differs from other international programmes . برنامج الإرشاد المهني الإماراتي (CGC) يختلف عن البرامج الدولية الأخرى في هذا المجال.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

15. Quality-wise, I do not see any difference between Emirati career guidance curriculums and other international ones. من حيث الجودة، لا أرى أي فرق بين مناهج الإرشاد المهني الإماراتية والدولية الأخرى.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

16. CGCs Enhance the employability and career prospects of school leavers. تعزز مراكز الإرشاد المهني فرص توظيف خريجي المدارس وآفاقهم المهنية.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

17. A career guidance programme is not just a chore; it significantly benefits school leavers. برنامج الإرشاد المهني ليس مجرد واجب، بل يعود بفوائد كبيرة على خريجي المدارس.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

18. Graduate students' attitudes regarding career counselling sessions are generally poor. تكون مواقف الطلاب الخريجين تجاه جلسات الإرشاد المهني عمومًا غير جيدة.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

19. Counsellors determine the success or failure of career counselling very much. المرشدين الأكاديميين والمهنيين يحددون نجاح أو فشل الإرشاد المهني إلى حد كبير.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

20. I can see that some of my colleagues are not well qualified and poorly trained to become career counsellors. أستطيع أن أرى أن بعض زملائي ليسوا مؤهلين بشكل جيد وتدريبهم غير كافٍ ليصبحوا مستشارين مهنيين.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

21. Most of my colleagues have the right attitude and aptitude to be career counsellors. معظم زملائي لديهم النية والكفاءة المناسبة ليكونوا مستشارين مهنيين.

Strongly Agree \ Agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

Part 4: Competency Framework:

22. There is an activity that supports the competency of career counsellors. هناك نشاط يدعم كفاءة المستشارين المهنيين.
    a. How helpful to you are these strategies? مدى فائدة هذه الاستراتيجيات بالنسبة لك؟

Plain text:

Prefer not to say

    b. What do you think are the challenges that may arise during the implementation process? ما هي التحديات التي تعتقد أنها قد تنشأ خلال عملية التنفيذ؟

Plain text:

Prefer not to say

23. What are the most crucial professional competencies that career guidance and counsellors should possess for efficiency in their work? Select all that fit. ما هي أهم الكفاءات المهنية الحيوية التي يجب أن يتمتع بها مرشدو الإرشاد المهني لكفاءة عملهم؟ اختر كل ما ينطبق.

Answers:

Communication skills, interpersonal skills, understanding of ethics, sympathy, Empathy, Performance improvement, Individual and group assessments, technology skills, and patience are essential. مهارات الاتصال، مهارات العلاقات الإنسانية، فهم الأخلاق، التعاطف، الانصياع، تحسين الأداء، التقييم الفردي والجماعي، مهارات التكنولوجيا، والصبر، كلها أساسية.

other: specify

Prefer not to say

Job Satisfaction:

24. The essential skills that career guidance and counsellors need to enhance work efficiency with their clients: المهارات الأساسية التي يحتاجها المرشد الأكاديمي والمهني لتعزيز كفاءتهم في العمل مع عملائهم:

Reflective – building problem rapport – attending skills – genuine and empathetic – questioning and leading sessions – leadership - مهارات الاستماع - التأمل - بناء العلاقة مع المشكلات الصدق والتعاطف – طرح الأسئلة لإدارة الحوارات - القيادة

Strongly agree \ agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

25. Career Guidance and Counsellor's competency must align with the UAE's visions. يجب أن تتماشى كفاءة المرشد الأكاديمي والمهني مع رؤية دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة.

Strongly agree Let me know if there is anything else I can help you with. agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

26. In your opinion, career guidance and counselling professionals should hold degrees in business and psychology and advanced qualifications such as a master's degree and IT certifications في رأيك، يجب على محترفي الإرشاد الأكاديمي والمهني أن يحملوا درجات في الأعمال وعلم النفس، بالإضافة إلى مؤهلات متقدمة مثل درجة الماجستير وشهادات في تكنولوجيا المعلومات.

Strongly agree \ agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

27. What do you think about combining vocational and academic guidance practices in a single interactive platform at the state level? This platform would include an ethical charter, procedures, activities, annual evaluation, and all responsibilities and tasks throughout the academic year. ما رأيك في دمج ممارسات الإرشاد الأكاديمي والمهني في منصة تفاعلية واحدة على مستوى الدولة؟ هذه المنصة ستشمل ميثاقًا أخلاقيًا، إجراءات، أنشطة، تقييم سنوي، وجميع المسؤوليات والمهام طوال العام الأكاديمي.

Strongly agree \ agree \ neither agree nor disagree \ disagree \ strongly disagree \ Prefer not to say

28. Do you have any questions or want to add anything else? هل لديك أي أسئلة أو ترغب في إضافة أي شيء آخر؟

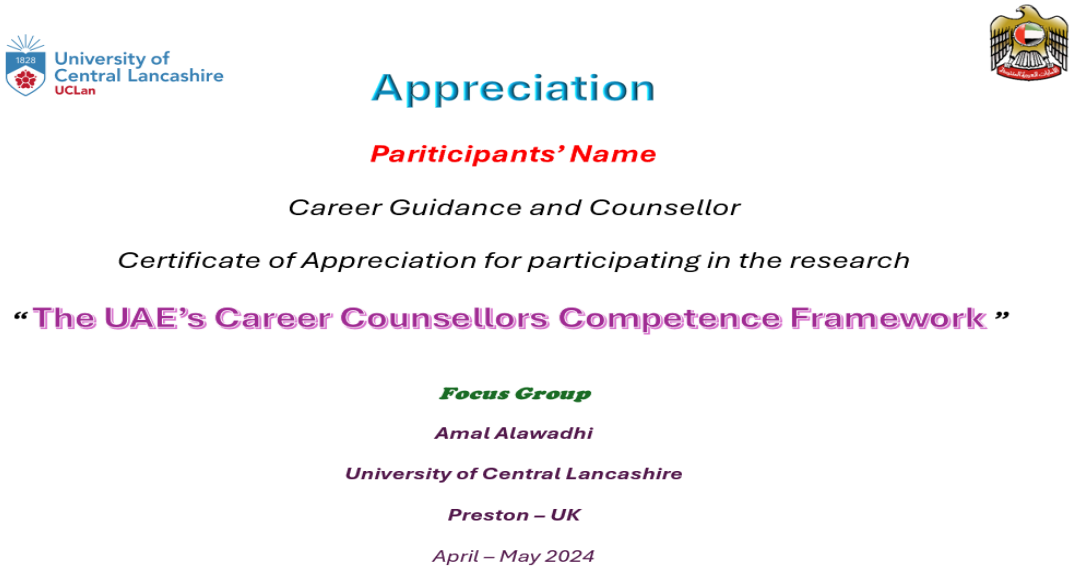
Answers:

Prefer not to say

Appendix 6 – Appreciation Certificates and Emails

Greeting Certificates: These are appreciation certificates for participating in the interviews and focus groups.

A sample of the appreciation certificate was shared with all participants participating in the interview and focus groups.



University of Central Lancashire UCLan

Appreciation

Pariticipants' Name

Career Guidance and Counsellor

Certificate of Appreciation for participating in the research

"The UAE's Career Counsellors Competence Framework"

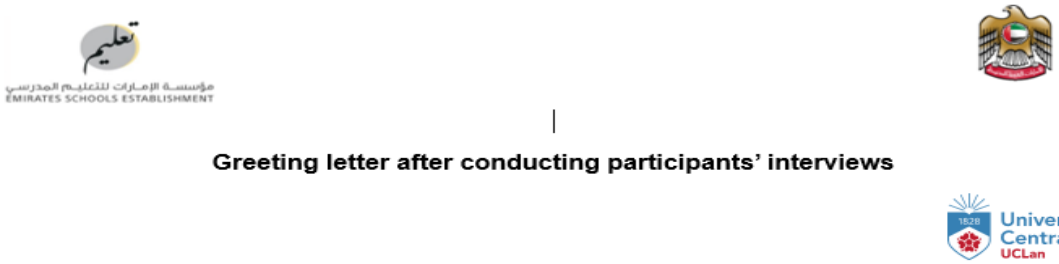
Focus Group

Amal Alawadhi

University of Central Lancashire

Preston – UK

April – May 2024



مؤسسة الإمارات للتعليم المدرسي
EMIRATES SCHOOLS ESTABLISHMENT

Greeting letter after conducting participants' interviews

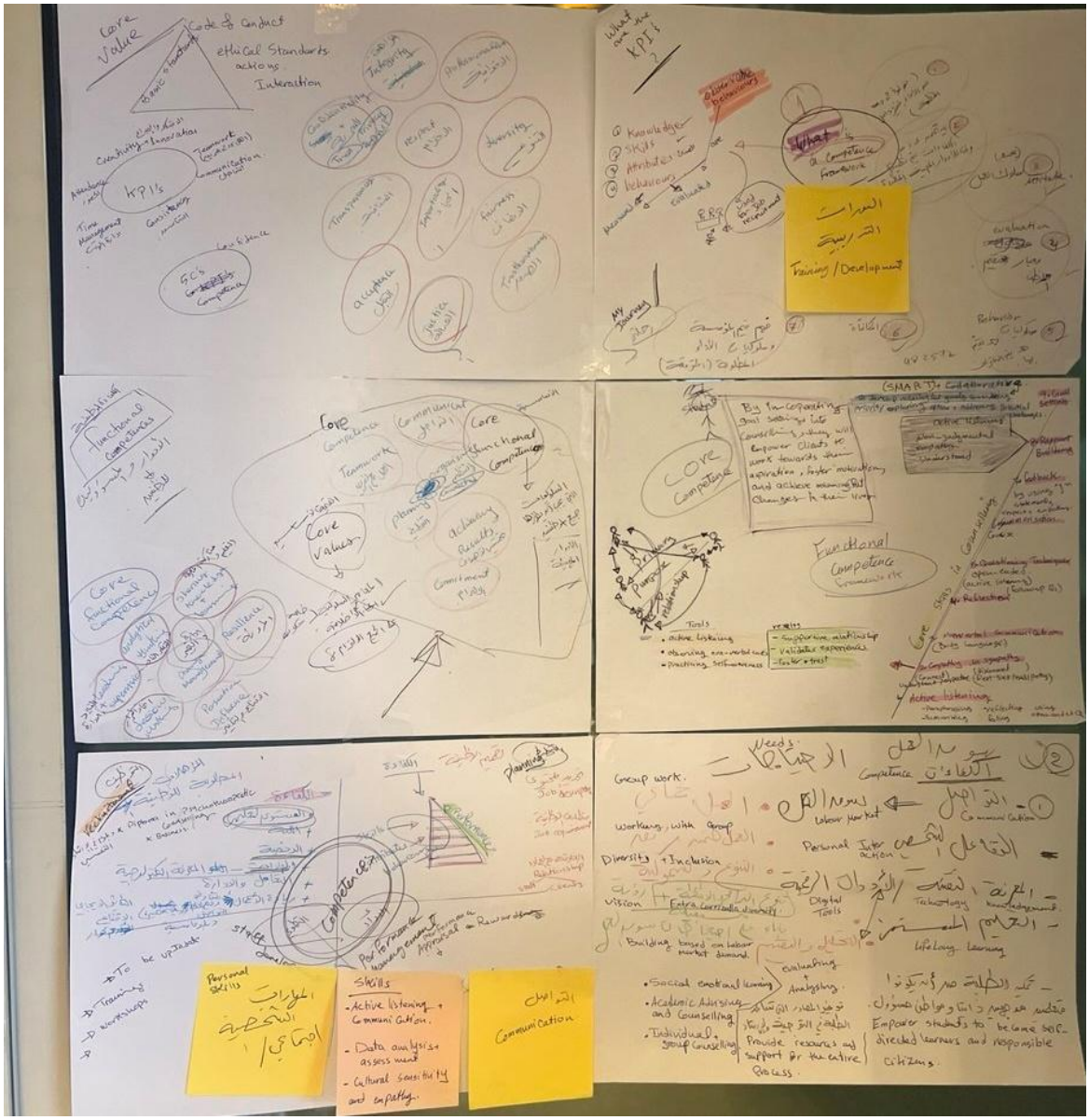
University of Central Lancashire UCLan

Dear head of career guidance and valuable colleagues,

Thank you for participating in my research. Your insightful answers were valuable in adding practical information to my paper.

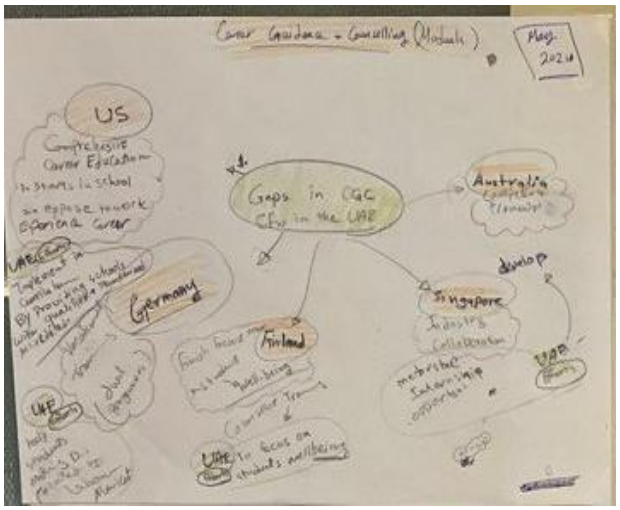
Amal Alawadhi
DBA Candidate
Business and Management Faculty
University of Central Lancashire – Preston – UK
Mobile: +971527400420
aalawadhi@uclan.ac.uk

Appendix 7 – The Proposed Competency Framework for Career Guidance Counsellors in Abu Dhabi, UAE, during the focus group.

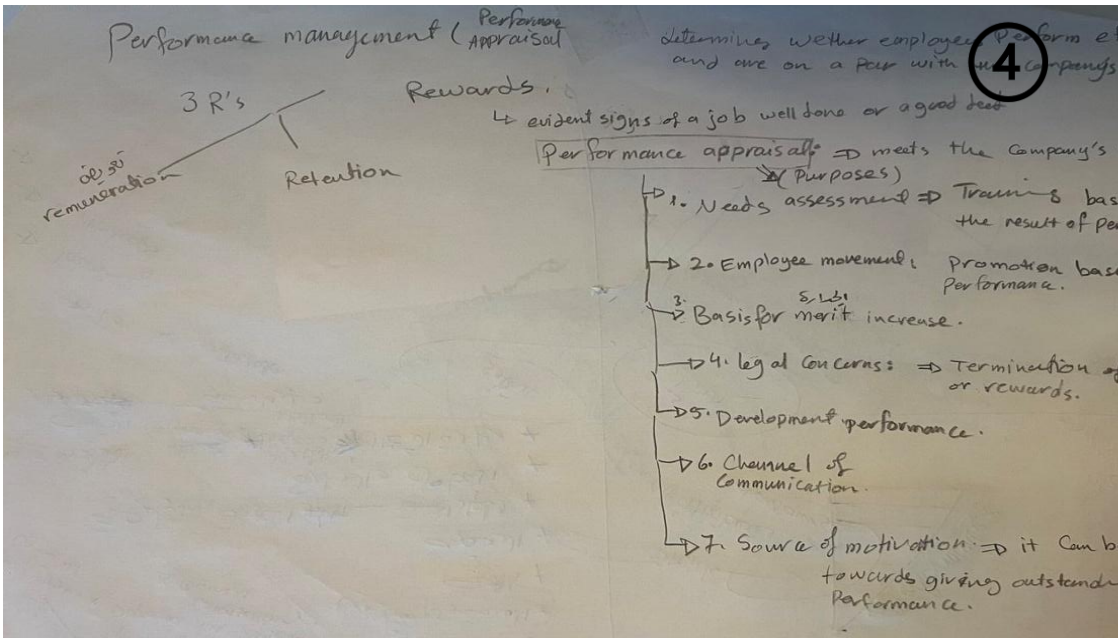


1


Part with
1. Planning
2. Engaging
recruiting
3. Performance
4. Development
Roots

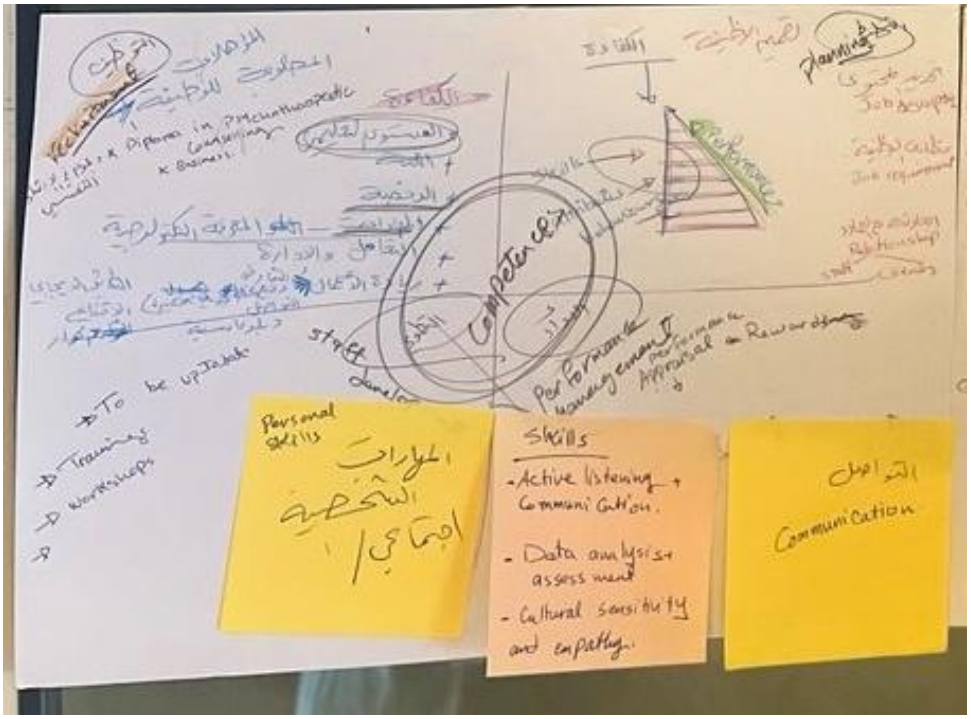

Career Guidance - Counselling (Methods)
US
Gaps in CGC
CEs in the UAE
Australia
Germany
Finland
Singapore
UAE

3


Performance management (Performance Appraisal
3 R's
Rewards.
Retention
Performance appraisals ⇒ meets the Company's
(Purposes)
1. Needs assessment ⇒
2. Employee movement;
3. Basis for merit increase.
4. legal Concerns: ⇒
5. Development performance.
6. Channel of Communication.
7. Source of motivation: ⇒ it

4

Appendix 8 – The participants' responses from in-depth interviews and focus groups about professionalism or performance elements.



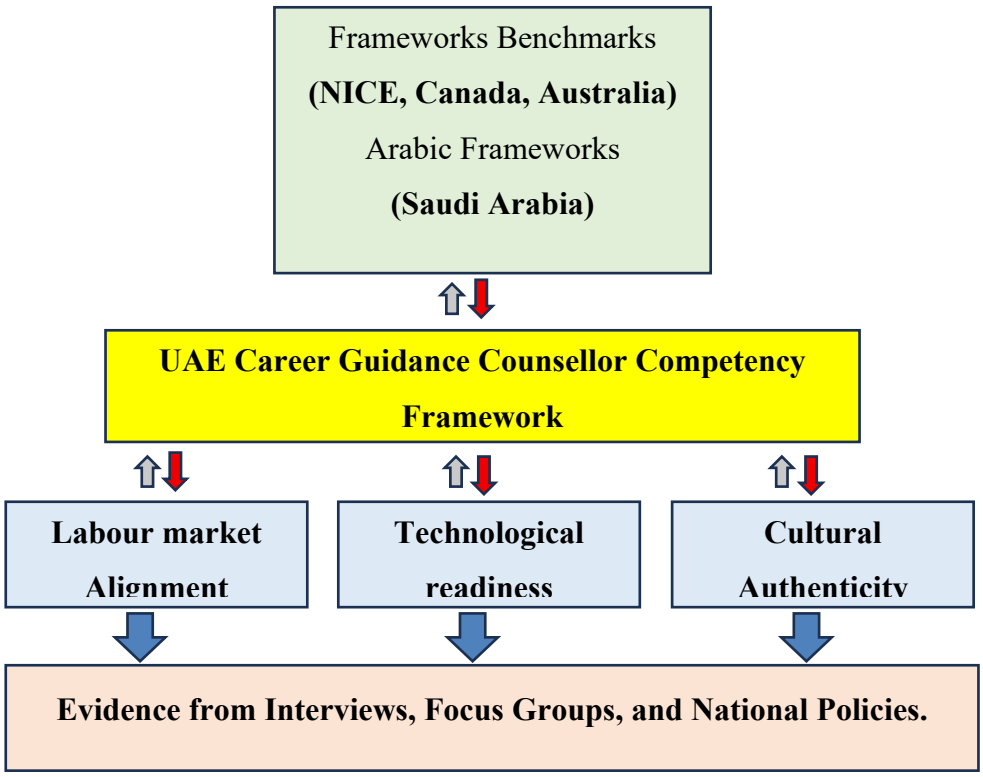
5

Appendix 9 - Thematic analysis of the UAE CGCs interview using Braun and Clarke's six phases:

1. Familiarisation with the data:

The eleventh semi-interview highlighted common issues:

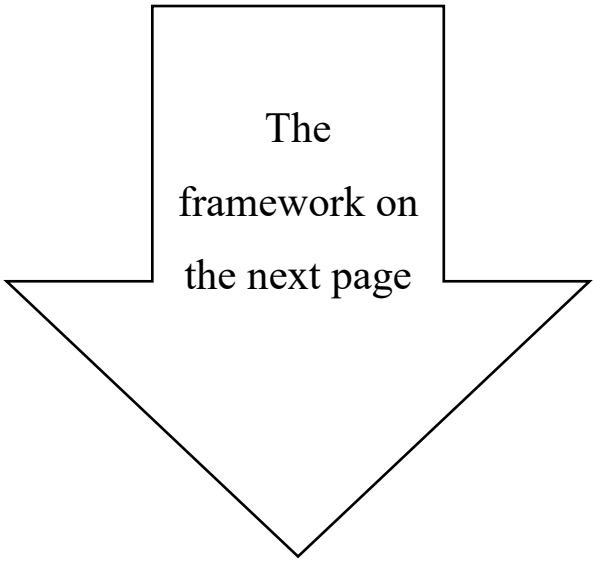
- ❖ Enhancement: The role of UAE national policies (Vision 2021, Emiratisation)
- ❖ A clear understanding of the guidance counsellors' requirements for competency frameworks.
- ❖ The importance of ethics, professional development and training
- ❖ Skills gaps within the current career counselling workforce
- ❖ Align and implement optimal localisation practices using established frameworks.



Statement quotations	Keyworks	Coding	Themes	Conceptualisation	Developing a conceptual framework	Theoretical framework
"Attending training courses from international institutions.''	Training – courses	Professional Developments	Professional Competency and Ethical Standards	PDs	Interpretation & Conceptualisation	Constructive Career Theory
"Attending specialised workshops and training courses and applying the skills acquired through them is crucial in developing oneself in a particular field."	Workshops, acquired skills.	Training Skills developing				
"Ethical standards are essential for professionals."	Ethics - professionalism	Ethical standards		Ethics		System Theory Framework
"Plans are aligned with the country's vision and cultural traditions."	The country's vision, culture and traditions	UAE Vision	Localisation of the Competency	Cultural Authenticity		Competency-based education

"Programmes like Nafis helps students move into the private sector."	Engage with the private sector.	Emiratisation	Framework to the UAE Vision			
"Career guidance counsellors should expand their skills, knowledge, performance and stay connected to the labour market."	Skills, knowledge, performance	Competency profession	Market alignment competency for CGCs	CGCs' Competency Framework	Narrative, UAE's Standards, and Labour Market	Human Capital Theory
"Linking academic competency for the CGCs with the job market needs."	Job market needs	Labour market requirements.		Labour market demands		
"Link the education outcomes with the labour market."	Education preparations, Labour market	Education strategies	Integrating the labour market needs into the CGC's practices	Education strategy		Cognitive theory (SCCT)
"Developing the skills to use modern artificial intelligence programmes according to the state's directions and the labour market's needs."	Integrating Artificial intelligence, the country's vision	Technological Competency, National vision	Alignment of technological competency with the National vision	Technology competency		Technology & AI resources

Appendix 10 – The designed Competency Framework for Career Guidance Counsellors in the UAE. After all data from the focus group, in-depth interview, and secondary data have been presented, the final design is given below.



Competency	**Sub-competency**	**Behavioural sub-competency**
Role – duties and responsibilities	***Skill, knowledge and experience required***	***Behaviours to enact the role***
Help individuals make informed decisions about academic and career pathways.	Communication and questioning ability.	Empathetic, active listening, and patience
Explore an individual's interests, abilities, and aspirations.	**Required skills:** Assessment skills, Active listening, being empathic and rapport-building, communication skills, facilitation skills, problem-solving, and decision-making. **Required Knowledge:** Theories, assessment tools and development, labour market trends, educational pathways, cultural competency	The behavioural role to be enacted: engaging, asking, providing constructive feedback, self-reflection, utilising assessment tools, demonstrating empathy and understanding, facilitating goal setting, encouraging, building trust and rapport, collaborating with clients, maintaining professional boundaries, evaluating progress, providing resources and referrals.

	Required experiences: Guidance and counselling professional experience, analysing experiences, experience of working with diverse backgrounds of individuals, engaging with professional development, experience of collaboration with educational institutions and employers.	

Providing personalised counselling and guidance to students to support their academic and personal growth.	e.g., Motivational skills, interviewing, fostering students' self-efficacy, and monitoring and analysing skills. Understanding students' developmental psychological and academic growth.	e.g., Empathy, problem-solving orientation, social-emotional and interpersonal skills. Building trustworthiness relationships.
Assisting students in career exploration, goal setting, and creating effective career plans.	Decision-making ability and leadership, applying career assessment, awareness about careers, and market trends.	Reflexive practices, national identification, labour markets' supply and demand, and counselling attitudes.
Providing resources and academic support services to enhance student learning outcomes.	Research skills, programme familiarity, and utilising educational resources and platforms.	Matching students' skills with academic supports.
Monitoring and evaluating student progress to identify areas of improvement and intervention.	Data collection and data analysis – communicating and networking –	Reflexive practices – national identification - emotional intelligence

Facilitating effective communication with parents and stakeholders to ensure holistic student support.	Communication and collaboration skills. Educational guidelines and collaboration with stakeholders within the academic settings.	Clear and constructive communication guides creative behaviour counselling.
Contributing to the development and enhancement of educational programmes to meet student needs and industry trends.	Planning skills, labour market trends knowledge, and participation in educational initiatives.	Developing intelligence and emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, cognitive awareness, and cultural competency, can help students from different backgrounds.
Analysing student data and generating reports to inform decision-making and improve student outcomes. (life designer)	Data analysis skills, assessment and data management familiarity, using student data performance to create data and build decisions related to students' development.	Utilising data in making decisions and improving counselling practices.
Engaging in continuous professional development and training to enhance counselling skills and knowledge.	Self-reflection and adaptability skills, training about current trends in education and counselling.	Lifelong learning, provided by MOE, online platforms (e.g., NCDA, ASCA)

Providing immediate support and interventions in crises affecting students' well-being.	Confidentiality, trustworthiness, Intervention techniques, Psychology knowledge	Supportive and active listener
Engaging with the community to promote educational initiatives and support student involvement in community service.	Networking skills, exploring and understanding the community resources, and engaging with country-relevant programmes .	Enhancing students' engagement in community activities. Agility skills and a positive attitude
Providing information, evaluating skills and interests, counselling on education, and giving direction and placement.	Analytical skills, familiarity with academic and career pathways. Using students' assessments of interests and abilities.	Commitment to lifelong learning, motivational skills, and cultural sensitivity.
Gather information on professions, educational programmes, and the economic and professional landscape.	Gathering data skills, insights into professions and educational institutions, and participating in professional exhibitions and academic institutions.	Staying up to date on the economic and labour market landscapes.
Maintaining the application's authenticity within the local Context.	Cultural sensitivity skills, understanding the UAE's educational expectations, values, and local customs. Working with individuals from diverse cultures.	Agility skills and positive attitudes, including respect for and reflection on local identity, and applying relevant guidance practices.