University of Reading

What factors are important to the choice of academic pathway for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia from their perspective?

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By

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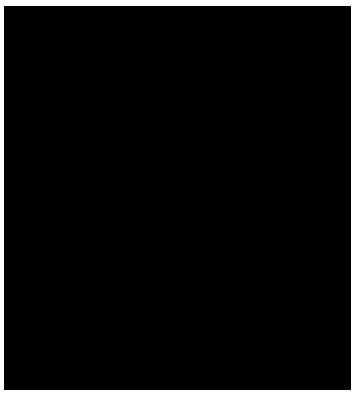
Author's Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work, and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.



Abstract

When considering their future education, the academic decision-making of first-year university students is of primary concern because students need guidance and support to make the right decision about their most appropriate academic choice. Research has shown that some cultural, social, career, personal and educational factors may influence the academic choice of students, whether this is a positive or negative influence. This research aimed to understand the influence of factors, such as family, school and career guidance in high school, on students' academic decision-making. Therefore, this research sought to answer the question of 'what factors are important to the choice of an academic pathway for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia from their perspective?' The literature review identified Bourdieu's theory and Rational Choice Theory as useful in explaining decision-making. This research used the mixed methods approach. Questionnaire data was collected followed by an interview with interested participants. Analysis of the responses showed that, unsurprisingly, the important factors for the academic choice of the first-year university students was their ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway they had chosen. The results also demonstrated that there is a gap between career guidance services and programmes and the educational and career needs of students. In addition, the social and cultural background of students has an important influence on their academic decisions. Based on the results of this research, it is recommended that the career guidance services and programmes should be reviewed and re-evaluated to make sure that the services being delivered effectively and sufficiently meet students' needs. Further research is needed to identify some practical approaches to provide these services and programmes for students to help them with their academic decision-making.

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1 Chapter One – Introduction

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1.1 The education policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Ministry of Education's (MoE) education policy is primarily based on general Islamic concepts, as well as national goals and priorities. For example, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been built on the basis of the Holy Quran and the biography of the Prophet Mohammed, in which several verses and hadiths emphasise that people must study, learn and improve their knowledge in order to develop the society. Therefore, these ideas very much underpin the general approach to education. In terms of the educational and career guidance, education policy focuses on specific goals, considered below.

1.1.1 High school goals

1. Maintaining and orienting students' skills and abilities towards the correct and beneficial direction in order for them to develop themselves and meet Islamic concepts and national goals.
2. Providing an appropriate opportunity for talented students to study at undergraduate level and guide them to choose a suitable subject for their abilities, interests and skills.
3. Preparing students, who will join the labour market after high school, to be capable of working in different fields.
4. Providing a high level of guidance for students to overcome their career, educational, social or psychological issues.

1.1.2 Higher education goals

1. Preparing highly intellectual and scientifically competent citizens to contribute to the development of the nation.
2. Providing an appropriate postgraduate study for graduates who are interested in that subject and guiding them to the academic course suited to their abilities and interests.

3. Providing career guidance services for graduates to help them to understand the nature of the labour market and career environment and to help them to get an appropriate job (Education, 1995).

High school has a responsibility to achieve these goals to prepare students for the next stage of their educational or career journey. In order to reach them, the MoE provides several educational pathways for high school students; for example, scientific and literary pathways. Students have the opportunity to choose which pathway will be studied after finishing their first year of high school. School has combined methods; for example, teachers and a students' guide to assist students to choose the pathway suitable for their abilities and skills. From this step, the career guidance services should contribute to help students understand themselves and explore the features of the educational pathways. In terms of the next stage of their educational journey, the higher educational institutes, such as universities and colleges, are responsible for achieving these goals in the students' first year by providing them with some services. For example, clarifying the academic and career features of each academic pathway and offering some ability tests to give them the opportunity to make their academic decision based on these features and their abilities and interests.

1.2 The preparatory programme in university

In terms of higher education in Saudi Arabia, first-year university students study in a preparatory programme. In some universities this is called an orientation year, which is the first year for all new students at university. The preparatory programme at the E university is conducted for the new undergraduate students for one year. In this programme, students study a general curriculum which is relevant to their academic pathway. For example, students who choose the health pathway will study some general subjects in health, science, English, sport and Islamic culture. There are several goals that this programme seeks to achieve. For example, preparing students for undergraduate study, developing students' skills in the English language and information technology, encouraging innovation and creativity, and developing learning, research, thinking and communication skills.

Moreover, the two main objectives are to develop the necessary scientific knowledge needed by the students in their future specialities, and to classify them for the next years of study (Studies, 2016). The final grades of the preparatory programme determine the specific subject that students can choose for the subsequent years.

1.3 From high school to university, and then to the labour market

The educational journey of high school students has some factors that might affect the students' destination. For example, some students may prefer to join the labour market or pursue professional courses to obtain a job in a short time for various reasons, such as helping their families financially, building themselves independently or they may not be interested in studying at undergraduate level. However, this research focuses on the students who are interested in joining an undergraduate programme, perhaps because they want to study a specific academic pathway or obtain a job in the labour market in future, or maybe because their parents have dreams about their children's study specialisation.

In general, Saudi universities and colleges request a required standard in levels of achievement, which is a combination of final grades of high school, a general aptitude test and the general educational attainment test. These two tests are provided by an independent centre, which is the National Centre for Assessment. The purpose of this test is to examine students' comprehension of what they studied in high school. This required standard is considered to be a challenge for high school students; reaching a high score will allow them to choose from various academic pathways. The challenge is that none of the students can anticipate the score of this required standard in levels of achievement because the results are declared after their graduation from high school. Therefore, some students may decide their academic pathway based on the required standard score. The percentage of the three components of the required standard is determined by the deanship of admission to the university. For example, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University(1) and King Saud University required(2) 30% of final grades of high school,

(1) https://goo.gl/6NGqcp. Quoted on 26/02/2017 by downloading the standard guide for admission.

(2) https://goo.gl/aDvzXR. Quoted on 27/01/2018 by downloading the standard guide for admission.

30% of the general aptitude test and 40% of the educational attainment test. Furthermore, King Abdul-Aziz University required 50% final grades of high school, 30% of the general aptitude test and 20% of the educational attainment test.(3) Students must meet the requested score of the required standard in levels of achievement to be able to enrol in the university and choose the academic pathway. Therefore, the transfer of students from high school to university entails some requirements and preferences which might influence the academic choice of the first-year university students.

In terms of Saudi culture and the opportunities of higher education for students, all students have equal rights and opportunities to join any academic pathway. Moreover, all students from different social classes and regions have an equal chance to enrol in public universities because the undergraduate programmes in these universities are free of tuition fees. Furthermore, both female and male students have an equal opportunity to decide what academic choices they want to study at university. However, the main factor that may influence their academic choices is the required standard in levels of achievement. For example, as has been mentioned before, the result of the score of the required standard in levels of achievement is the main factor influencing their opportunities, which means the score achieved after graduating from high school may determine their academic choices. Each university has a specific required score for each academic pathway. Therefore, the academic choices are available for all students, although they may vary according to students' achieved scores of the required standard in levels of achievement.

There are a few other factors that may influence students' academic choice: the Saudi culture and the reality of the labour market. For example, some academic pathways vary between both student genders, such as only females can be teachers of children in the pre-school programme. The policy of the MoE only allows female teachers to work in the pre-school programme rather than male teachers. From the Saudi cultural perspective, female teachers are more capable of dealing with and teaching children of an early age

(3) https://goo.gl/LpMpm7. Quoted on 27/01/2018 by downloading the standard guide for admission.

than male teachers. Moreover, from the same perspective and the reality of the labour market, there are other careers which are more suitable for males than females due to the nature of these careers. For instance, the circumstances of the reality of some careers are challenging, demanding particular experience. They may have some dangers such as operators, technicians, dangerous maintenance work, manual labour work in remote areas and heavy industries. Indeed, Saudi culture respects females' needs and preferences, and seeks to provide the most convenient and appropriate circumstances for their career choices in the labour market. However, this does not mean that females are not capable of undertaking these kinds of jobs. Females sometimes contribute more than males in the same field but with different approaches to males. Furthermore, when males cannot make some career choices that females can that also does not mean they do not have the ability to perform those choices. It is the beauty of the cooperation and integration between females and males to achieve the highest level of the national goals and develop the Saudi nation.

1.4 The gap or problem

The concerns about making a decision regarding the academic pathway among university students and the influence of relevant factors on their decisions have attracted researchers' attention. In terms of the Saudi context, most of the students had made their decisions to study academic pathways at universities. They might have made this decision because of the influence of some factors such as personal perspective, social impact, family influence, labour market and career guidance services.

The researcher discovered the existence of a gap in the literature through his own personal experience as a student, and his professional experience as a teacher in high school and then as a lecturer at university. From the aspect of professional experience, the researcher had some career guidance experience with students' concerns about their academic choices and career needs. Moreover, he found some interesting research regarding the role of career guidance at universities in the academic choices of students. Some research has explored the reality of the benefit of career guidance services in Saudi universities from students' perspectives. Aldulaim (2012) received 350 responses of students, male

and female, from five different Saudi universities to a questionnaire. The results indicated that an unattractive method of providing career guidance services led to nearly 60% of students never obtaining any benefit from these services, from the participants' perspective. Also, Aldulaim assumed that this might refer to some social and cultural factors, but he did not provide examples (2012).

Furthermore, Abdelhamid (2002) found that around 2,515 students from a United Arab Emirates university had some problems and concerns about the career guidance services, such as lack of professional guidance to make the appropriate academic choice and lack of knowledge of disciplines and departments in each college. Also, they stated that sometimes their parents insisted on selecting a particular academic choice (2002). Therefore, the career guidance at university failed in its responsibility to provide help and support for students to help them decide about their academic pathway. These two research studies mentioned that the career guidance services were not helpful and were insufficient to assist students to make the right decision regarding their academic pathway. More interestingly, in 1994 research about the career guidance in higher education in Saudi Arabia was conducted by Alkhatib. The research stated that half of the 676 participants had received no career guidance services and they claimed that these services were not available. Also, 51% of participants stressed that these guidance services did not play any role in their academic choice (Alkhatib, 1994). To summarise, in relation to the identification of the research problem, since 1994 different researchers and studies have stated that there is a lack of career guidance services and those that exist have not met students' educational and career needs.

From the aspect of personal experience, the researcher found, when studying at undergraduate level in an education college, that some students did not finish their undergraduate study within four years, which was the standard number of years for graduation from education college at that time. Also, some students left the college, changed their academic pathway or switched to another college. He became curious about the reasons why these students had decided to switch course or leave, or spend more years finishing their degree. Fortunately, he had the chance to ask some of these students who

were friends about this. He discovered that some had chosen their academic pathway because of their parents' wish for them to study a specific academic pathway. Other students had made their decision due to a teaching job in the future, and others had chosen their academic pathway because it suited their abilities and interests.

Interestingly, one of the researcher's friends had left the education college to join an oil company as an operator in the field because he thought that he could not become a teacher in the future. However, he had enrolled at the college to study until the company responded to his application. Moreover, the researcher could not recall that there was any kind of career guidance services, except for a few students who had a grade point average (GPA) lower than the normal average. This was the researcher's experience as a college student. After graduating he joined a master's programme in counselling and guidance in order to become a student guide at school. The master's dissertation was about the career guidance at school, specifically, the role of the clarification programme of different academic pathways in the academic choice of high school students. After analysing the pre-test and post-test data, it appeared that there was little difference between the participants' responses, because some students were from highly educated families, which meant their parents were supportive and helpful whilst they made their academic choice during high school. After becoming a lecturer at the education college and a counsellor providing students' counselling and guidance, the researcher met several students who sought advice regarding career and educational issues.

In conclusion, some research studies and personal experiences have indicated that the gap between students' educational and career needs and the career guidance services at university still exists and has not yet been filled. Students need some types of advice, support and guidance to help them choose an appropriate academic pathway according to their abilities, interests and tendencies, because the chosen academic pathway will determine their future job. In addition, university students may face different kinds of challenges as a result of their academic choice, which would also raise the need for educational and career guidance. However, the career guidance that exists has not met students' needs and has not provided sufficient and effective services for students.

Choosing the academic pathway has some consequences and influences, whether positive or negative ones, especially on students themselves. However, there are more possible influences on other relevant aspects; for example, the labour market, the financial expenditure of MoE and other social issues. Nevertheless, this research focuses on elements of the gap between career guidance and students' decision-making.

1.5 Research aims and questions

Given the context of this research, the research question guiding this thesis is:

What factors are important to the choice of academic pathway for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia from their perspective?

1.5.1 Sub questions

1. What role did schools and families play in academic decision-making for first-year university students?
2. What role did career guidance services play in academic decision-making for first-year university students?
3. What were the main challenges that first-year university students faced during and after making their academic decision?
4. What services could support students' academic decision-making about the specific academic subject for the next year from their perspective?

1.5.2 The aims of the research

1. Explore the important factors that may affect the academic choice of first-year university students in Saudi Arabia.
2. Understand the role of families and schools with regard to the academic choice of the first-year students.
3. Explore the challenges that first-year students may face after making the decision about their academic pathway.

4. Explore the role of the career guidance service with regard to the first-year university students' academic decisions for specific academic subjects for the next year.

1.6 Significance and outcomes of the study

The academic choice of the first-year university students is a cornerstone of this research because its process is complicated. The complexity of decision-making arises due to factors which influence students' choices, whether by helping and supporting their academic choice or by forcing them to choose a specific academic pathway or by preventing them from choosing what they prefer to study. Therefore, this research seeks to explore these factors and understand their role in affecting students' academic choice from the students' perspective.

This research is considered to be the first research that used questionnaires and interviews of male and female students to obtain relevant information. In addition, the inclusion of female university students' voices in relation to the effects of the important factors on their academic choice using an interview is the first significant contribution to the educational and career guidance field. Understanding the important factors of the academic choice for first-year university students would provide the career guidance service with a clear picture of why students chose their academic pathway and enable the service to prepare appropriate services for students. Additionally, this research aims to provide an explicit view of which of these factors – school, family, career guidance in school – are important for the first-year university students' academic choice, in order to help the career guidance service at universities to prepare helpful services and recommendations in relation to these factors and assist students making an academic choice.

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2.1 Introduction of globalisation

The influence of ideas of globalisation can be seen in the developments of the labour market and how these, in turn, influence several societal aspects such as universities. For this thesis, it has led to changes to the provision of the academic pathways based on these labour market requirements. Global changes and the changes in the available academic pathways may affect students' academic choice as they attempt to navigate personal preference in conjunction with market demands. The global economy is unstable and constantly changing, which has created other changes in the jobs in the labour market. Higher education institutions such as universities are relevant to the national educational system, which means the influences of globalisation may affect the educational policy in order to meet the national goals.

Educational policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has been strongly influenced by changing market needs and a desire to be globally competitive. In many ways, the influence of notions of globalisation have been key to the changes currently occurring across the Middle East. There is a broad consensus among researchers, scholars and all those interested in the issues of globalisation that this phenomenon is a very complex and multifaceted one. Abod-her has interpreted globalisation as having many dimensions as it is a worldwide phenomenon. The vast growth of attention on studying globalisation could be considered to be the result of the perceived effects of globalisation on various sectors. There are various perspectives, such as theoretical, social, economic, educational and philosophical, which makes a definition of globalisation difficult (Abod-her, 2013).

Therefore, there is a difficulty in consolidating various interpretations and perspectives to arrive at a standard definition. The sections that follow will briefly focus on and explain the social and economic aspects of globalisation in particular, although there are more aspects to the phenomenon, such as political, cultural and technological issues. Moreover, they will emphasise the link between areas of globalisation and higher education and its influence on it.

2.1.1 Social perspective

The unique conceptualisation of globalisation offered by Held and colleagues is that globalisation is "a process which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interactions and the exercise of power" (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999, p. 16). They utilised and focused attention on spatial and organisational attributes as a process of worldwide interdependence between nations. According to this definition, there are some sectors which may be affected by globalisation, such as cultural or social, political and economic, as well as higher education. This research focuses on the social perspectives in relation to educational context, although there are other social influences from globalisation that can be discussed from different perspectives. However, it is important to realise that this interdependence between nations results in inflows between some higher education activities, such as new academic programmes, modern teaching and learning approaches, exchange of academic researchers' experiences and educational collaboration between higher education institutions.

Another social vision of the definition of globalisation is that social relationships in the world are increasingly important, which means there is an enormous interdependence between countries. For example, home nation events may be controlled or formed through events abroad, which might occur in distant locations. From the educational social angle, most of the higher education institutions around the world engage in scientific communications for academic purposes, such as swapping academic experiences and scientific research collaboration. Therefore, national higher education institutions have to make improvements and progress if they are to provide an educational environment that follows the global evolution in higher education around the world. Giddens concluded that "the intensification of worldwide social relations, which links distant localities, in such a way the local happenings have been shaped by those events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens, 1996, p. 64). Social communication has become more accessible and useful to provide a variety of academic opportunities for new generations, which opens up wider dimensions for their academic and career future.

As a consequence of these concepts or notions, people are more likely to engage with and to get involved with each other around the world, wherever they might live. This involvement could be physical, legal, cultural or psychological (Scholte, 2005). Most people now know what is happening around the world, even in distant locations, and can communicate with each other effectively using a common language. They benefit from the exchange of culture, knowledge or finance. This happens through the use of modern communication technology. As shown above, modern communication technology, as a result of globalisation, has opened up opportunities for students to join international universities with various degree programmes. The issues of everyday life for the population in every nation are fundamentally produced and generated by internationally interdependent procedures that cross the boundaries of countries (Castells, 2005). However, as a consequence, some students become confused and confounded about their options, in terms of which one is more appropriate. At the same time, others benefit from finding an appropriate programme abroad, which is not offered by local universities.

2.1.2 Economic perspective

Brown considered that the fundamental restructuring and reforming of the world economy, policy and environment is the key aspect of globalisation, although how this happens and what is involved is complex (Brown, 1999). Different economic visions have been discussed by Carnoy and Rhoten. Namely, there are three major domains, which are politico-economic, socio-cultural and educational. In fact, building an international labour market with growing information communication technology presents new knowledge and experience, which leads to an enormous push toward re-organising the world economy (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). This re-organisation can be considered as dividing countries into two levels. The first level is developed countries which have a robust and high-functioning economy. This means that they are often more powerful and effective than other, second-level, developing countries. Both kinds of countries are concurrently under the pressure of globalisation. They seek to stimulate local and foreign capital to invest locally, which leads to an intensive need to provide skilled employees (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). It is clear, then, that there is an impact on the education system, which needs to educate and produce these workers.

It could be argued that economies and societies have become more integrated through the increased free-flow of ideas, people, services, capital and policies, according to the expectations of the globalisation process (Arokiasamy, 2012). Tabb has confirmed that, in other words, globalisation has reduced barriers between countries and inspired closer economic, political and social interaction among the population (Tabb, 1999). Consequently, the globalisation phenomenon could be manifested in the expression of a 'global village' or 'small village'.

2.1.3 Higher education and globalisation

Knowledge is arguably the principal operator of development. Development relies primarily on knowledge, whether in social, science, political, educational or economic terms (Shahidi & Seyedi, 2012). The demands of a global knowledge society have increased and this has put higher education under pressure to concentrate more profoundly on a distinct form of activities, programmes, approaches and outcomes (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). To put it another way, the essential site that can encourage sustainable human development and economic growth is the education system, which includes higher education.

For some academics, globalisation causes multiple difficulties and challenges, some of which are connected to the quality and quantity of higher education. Demands to develop and improve curricula as well as facilitate greater access to higher education are particularly relevant (Featherstone, 1995). Lingard and Ozga indicated that there are significant impacts of globalisation on private and public sectors. Globalisation also affects economics and politics, and the cultural and educational environment (Lingard & Ozga, 2007).

Altbach stated that higher education has been influenced by the manifestations of globalisation. He referred to "the broad economic, technological, and scientific trends that directly affect higher education and are largely inevitable in the contemporary world"

(Altbach, 2004, p. 5). It is, therefore, considered to be a huge phenomenon. Shahidi and Seyedi were interested in how higher education is affected by globalisation. Their research demonstrated globalisation as a multi-dimensional phenomenon and a multifaceted process; for instance, higher education faces a diversity of challenges, such as the educational quality of universities, which will affect the national economy, the quality of professionals and the quality of society itself (Shahidi & Seyedi, 2012). The educational quality of universities means that they must ensure that they provide various high quality degree programmes and consider areas such as the new curriculum, modern teaching methods, modern and safe buildings and skilled faculty members, as well as efficient services, for example, an academic or guidance service.

Higher education is considered to have been influenced by the labour market changes, as a result of globalisation. For example, the labour market requires a diversity of skilled workers, operators, engineers, teachers, doctors and other employees and often requires employees educated through a higher education institution. Therefore, universities have made some changes to provide stabilisation within various disciplines, whether life sciences, literature, psychology, sociology, mathematics or economics. These changes in academic pathways and market demands have influenced the preference of students and parents for higher education programmes and for majors and pathways that would make youth employable (Nayyar, 2008).

Yet another sphere which has been influenced by globalisation is the courses themselves. Vocational courses in higher education have increased and offer more places, because of student employability. For example, China is considered to have a huge labour market that has resulted in urgent demands for high-level skilled labour to support its economic progress. Thus, higher education has, over the last 30 years, sought to develop vocational programmes and services. Despite this, China still has a skilled workers shortage (Xiong, 2011). Calmand, Giret, and Guégnard stated that in 2008, from among French students who enrolled in higher education, 42% were enrolled in a vocational training programme within the university system. Also, 78% of vocational bachelor graduates had the highest employability with better long-term employment compared to 68% of general bachelor

graduates (Calmand, Giret, & Guégnard, 2014). In fact, universities have to encourage and provide new courses and programmes to meet the demand in the market (Nayyar, 2008).

The international market presents diverse opportunities for people, although it also requires that they have appropriate skills to meet the opportunities and demands. Therefore, higher education could be an essential domain, due to the fact that it can provide skilled and knowledgeable people to fulfil international market demands in the work environment (Arokiasamy, 2012). The obvious progress in communication technology has led to improved market forces and then to a new world of opportunities in higher education; opportunities which can assist students to achieve future goals (Nayyar, 2008).

Information technology is an example of one result of globalisation. For example, there is a faster distribution of knowledge and opportunities within education, via multiple academic programmes using new developments of e-learning. It offers new learning and studying methods to those students who live in a distant region or who cannot attend traditional classes for any reason, such as work, physicality issues or special needs (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Carnoy assumed that globalisation has resulted in increased mobility in various forms, such as information, knowledge, people and employment, as a result of the flow of technology, the economy, policy and values (Carnoy, 1999).

Globalisation could be considered to have forced higher education to demonstrate developments in diverse spheres, such as methods for teaching and learning, as well as curriculum progression. Additionally, there is a growing sense of the correlation among higher education enterprises around the world, with league tables and rankings and competition for students. Some higher education institutions have established and launched branches and campuses in such places as Dubai, Qatar and Singapore. For example, the New York University in Abu Dhabi has a fully-fledged institution (Altbach et al., 2009).

In the light of student mobility, there are some estimates which show that the number of students who decide to study abroad in foreign countries will increase to over seven million by 2020. This enormous number is evidence of the new opportunities which are offered within higher education (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010).

Higher education has a variety of advantages and benefits emerging from the globalisation phenomenon. For example, there are multi-learning methods, which see education delivered virtually or new face-to-face programmes that are designed to meet market demands. An observed increase in the mobility of students, programmes, providers and projects over national borders brings positives as well as challenges. Moreover, a greater focus on lifelong learning presents an increasing demand for higher education degree programmes (Shahidi & Seyedi, 2012).

Higher education could, therefore, be seen as both an actor and a reactor, within the globalisation phenomenon. As an actor, there is a need for higher education to grow and improve the home country knowledge society and economy. For instance, higher education can enhance and develop degree programmes of high quality with equal accessibility to those who want to learn and find an appropriate job. The labour market gains professional and skilled graduate students and the economy gains progress. On the other hand, higher education can be a reactor; for example, when newly developed trade agreements cover education service investment (UNESCO, 2004).

In the context of this research, globalisation's changes may influence the academic choices of first-year university students. These changes might be changes in the demand of the labour market, the updated academic pathways that are provided, social communication with other people around the world or the national developments in their countries. The culture, knowledge, information, education, careers and other interesting aspects exchanged between countries around the world may have opened global academic choices for those students, which could affect their academic decisions. For example, students can explore the academic opportunities around the world and obtain

new ideas about the demands of the labour market. They may decide to compare the academic pathways available locally with others available internationally to make their academic decision about the appropriate academic choices for them. Therefore, globalisation may influence students' academic choices and their methods of academic decision-making.

2.2 Brief history of career guidance

The industrial revolution began in the 16th and 17th centuries, and covered several stages between the 16th century and the 21st century. The exciting stage from the perspective of this research is the second stage, which was between 1850 and 1914, because this stage extended the successful inventions and discoveries of the first industrial revolution (Mokyr, 1998). The concept of career guidance also appeared in this period. It was introduced by Frank Parsons to help people find and choose an appropriate job. Parsons 1854–1908 was the founder of career guidance and his career guidance services were continuously provided between 1890 and 1920 (Baker, 2009). They even continue nowadays.

The two World Wars 1914–18 and 1939–45 caused significant numbers of deaths in the countries involved. Consequently, many jobs became available for survivors and young people. For example, in the Second World War, the number of civilian and military deaths in China alone might well have been more than 20,000,000 people. Furthermore, the United States lost 418,500 people and 450,700 people died from the United Kingdom.(4) The number of Chinese lost is the most significant number of all the countries involved in this war. The demand in the labour market increased sharply after the Second World War because the countries involved established new investments in different areas in order to achieve a high level of national development.

(4) The National WWII Museum website: http://bit.do/eKcHh

The complexity of obtaining a job in the 19th century increased because of the specific skills required to operate the new machines developed in industries and workshops. Workers were generally unskilled labour, but the revolution in the labour market demanded workers with more complex and specialised skills. Society has been influenced, as well, by the change in the labour market and the revolution in technology and industry. For example, the changes in demographics, culture and capital were considered to be a result of the progressive development of the transformation of jobs, but these changes depended on human labour and machinery (Baker, 2009). The second industrial revolution has made some changes in society by increasing living standards. The purchasing power increased rapidly and the new technologies became a part of the daily life of the middle and working classes (Mokyr, 1998).

The industrial work and the continual progress of the sciences and technology have influenced societies and created and maintained permanent dimensions and changes in the customs, traditional culture and social life of society (Baudrillard, 1987). The changes in people's lives might also affect their ways of thinking and analysis regarding their education and career. The diversity of demands of the labour market and specialisations required for jobs led people to find a suitable job for their abilities and interests. According to Baker, in 1900 America was considered to have some of the most developed industrial cities; for example, Chicago, New York, Boston and Philadelphia. The revolution of technology created a significant explosion of development in urban centres. Therefore, foreign people from around the world sought a better education and a successful life. In this case, the changes happened in demographics, culture, society and capital (Baker, 2009). The new combination of the changes in the labour market and society led to the need for career guidance to help people to find an appropriate educational and career pathway for their life.

The need for career guidance arose from changes in the labour market and society and the need to match qualified people with jobs. Career guidance progressed from a project to a profession by Frank Parsons, who provided the theoretical model and scientific point of view. For example, the Civic Service House was opened in 1901 by Pauline Agassiz

Shaw. This house dealt with the educational needs of immigrant people. Furthermore, Parsons gave students lectures regarding their vocational choices. Parsons focused on understanding some interesting topics. For example, how people made their career and educational choices and how these choices could affect individual and social efficiency. A result of the benefits of Parsons' lectures was that students sometimes requested a personal meeting with him to discuss their career and educational future (Baker, 2009). Thus, Parsons provided collective and individual career guidance services by conducting lectures and personal career guidance. This indicates that career guidance was strongly required by young people.

In 1909, Parsons mentioned, in his book *Choosing a vocation,* that there are three steps that people should follow. First, people must clearly understand themselves and know more about their limitations, resources, interests, abilities, aptitudes and other skills. Second, they need to obtain information about the compensation, opportunities, requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, and prospects of various available jobs. Finally, they should use "true reasoning" to match these facts (Inkson & Elkin, 2008). True reasoning means that when people understand themselves and their abilities and interests and find an appropriate job choice, then they can make a career decision to choose that job because it suits their perceived interests and abilities. As a part of this process, in 1913, the National Vocational Guidance was established and then joined the educational system in America in 1920 (Baker, 2009). Therefore, this integration of career guidance and the educational system may have offered a perfect opportunity for students to learn more about how to make the right educational and career decisions from the earliest stage.

In conclusion, the central principle of career guidance is connecting the appropriate person with a specific job. This principle is stable and has remained unchanged for almost three centuries. The demands of the labour market will continue as long as technology is constantly evolving. People want to know more about their capacities and understand themselves clearly and, in turn, jobs require specific skills and abilities in the successful candidates who obtain them.

2.3 Career guidance from international perspectives

The rapid changes in the labour market that have occurred during the last few decades, due to the revolution in technology and industry, have led educational institutions around the world to consider these changes when designing their academic programmes and courses. In addition, these institutions have become more interested in providing qualified graduates willing to meet the demands of the labour market. Career guidance makes a significant contribution to combine people's academic and career interests with the demands of the labour market. The career guidance services have different names and definitions around the world; for example, vocational guidance, career education and guidance, occupation guidance, career counselling and educational career counselling. However, all of these names share one main goal, which is putting the right person in the right place. Career guidance has been involved in different facets of life such as educational, social, financial and psychological aspects. This research focused on the educational and social aspect.

Career guidance can be offered by schools and universities, which are the fundamental platforms for educating and advising students, plus some other government organisations and private institutions. The United States, Sweden and New Zealand have been selected as examples of other educational institutions' experiences in career guidance. There are some common services and goals between them and few differences. For example, helping students to plan for their future career by making the appropriate academic choice is one of the common goals. In contrast, the people who are in charge of providing career guidance for students differ slightly between these countries. All the career guidance services are available in educational institutions.

In the United States, seven career centres from different universities have been selected to explore the services provided for students. The research found that several services are provided for students such as individual career counselling, career assessment, workshops on job search and resume preparation and career library resources. Students have to pay for all these career guidance services except the individual career counselling (Lee & Goh, 2003). One of the interesting points about the career counselling centres in

some American universities is that they are designed to facilitate suitable connections between the following four elements to provide the most updated and effective academic and career information regarding academic choices and future jobs.

The first element is students who seek to understand their place in the world of the labour market. The second element is the related members, such as family or friends, who may encourage and support students' academic choices and career desires. Element number three is the people who are capable of helping and advising students in this process, such as career counsellors. The last element in the helpful connections that career counselling centres facilitate is the people who are more experienced in the world of the labour market, such as alumni, job mentors and employers (Lee & Goh, 2003). This interesting aspect of the university career guidance centres would benefit students when deciding which academic pathway should be chosen and what is an appropriate job, because the connections facilitated provide a complete picture of the academic pathway journey and the possible future job. It amalgamates the reality of academic choice with job expectations. However, technology has impacted on the methods of providing career guidance services. Some universities in the United States offer a number of computers for students to perform self-administered career assessments, seek job banks or apply for internship opportunities. Also, they can access various career centres' websites (Lee & Goh, 2003).

In Sweden, the educational and career guidance services are available for most school and university students, although these services may differ from one another depending on the students' level. The educational and career guidance in compulsory school, secondary school and adult education provide individual counselling and career guidance before the next stage of the educational journey and future career. Additionally, these services place greater focus on offering advice about the educational and career opportunities for students with disabilities. The counsellors play the main role in providing these services. Moreover, the career guidance activities have a significant goal of helping students to obtain more knowledge and information about their capacities, abilities and the available opportunities, and shape their personal desire based on their

education and working life. These specific career guidance services are for school students (Research, n.d.).

In contrast, at Swedish universities and colleges, some career guidance services are provided for students. For example, a drop-in service, and a special schedule for guidance booked in advance. These two services are conducted individually for students, especially for the first-year students, because their common issues are educational choices, changes of academic pathway, studying abroad and making the decision about the right academic pathway in order to find an appropriate job in the future. Most first-year students are concerned about these different matters. In addition, some universities offer individual career guidance services for students who are about to graduate in order to help them with job applications, provide continuous information about job availability and summer jobs. The university career guide also provides individual career guidance services for students related to their current academic pathway and future jobs related to the particular academic subject which they are currently studying (Research, n.d.).

The Ministry of Education in New Zealand has established career education and guidance as part of the school curriculum from year 1 to year 13. During these years, students will benefit from and learn different skills and strategies in order to prepare them for the next stage of each year. Teachers have the main role in conducting career education and guidance as a normal part of the regular classroom. For example, from year 9 teachers start to create connections between classroom learning and life outside of and beyond school, which includes the world of the labour market. Students can learn from teachers how to make appropriate decisions during schooling that may have a potential influence on their future academic pathways. In year 11, teachers assist students in the classroom to explore and understand their talents and abilities and to realise which academic pathways at university may enable them to obtain an appropriate future job. In the last two years of school, years 12 and 13, students become capable of conceiving themselves in the academic pathways at university, and comprehend how the final grades of high school will affect their academic choices at university and other occupation choices. One of the interesting career education and guidance goals is that schools can offer visits to

and experience of several options of occupations and work in industries and other workplaces for students in years 12 and 13 (Career Services, 2009).

The Ministry of Education in New Zealand has developed the role of teachers in schools to be part of the career guidance service. Making career education and guidance part of the school curriculum has a significant influence on students, because it is available from year 1 to year 13. In this situation, students have a perfect opportunity throughout 12 years of schooling to obtain a wide range of skills and strategies from their teachers. Moreover, teachers are very close to students, which would make the career guidance more acceptable for students. However, providing career guidance services out of school may allow some students to discover and experience other ways of seeking advice. Furthermore, counsellors who work in centres could have more professional knowledge of career guidance than teachers. There is also a careers service provided by a government organisation which aims, for example, to assist students by analysing their career education needs. It provides modified guidance through individual or collective advice for students. It offers a wide range of career information and advice through its website. These services and others are available for school students from year 7 onwards (Career Services, 2009).

These career guidance services and programmes have different shapes, approaches, methods and tools to deliver knowledge to students whether in schools or at universities. Teachers can have a role in providing career guidance for students in schools, and also the career guides at universities play an essential role in offering students guidance. The significant contributions of career guidance are advising and supporting students to make the right decision regarding their academic pathway, and helping them to find and acquire an appropriate future job.

2.4 Career guidance in Saudi high schools

Each school of the majority of high schools in Saudi has a student guide who is responsible for providing different guidance services including career guidance services.

In high school, career guidance is linked with educational guidance because they cannot be separated from each other in the educational environment. According to Alghamlas, educational and career guidance are linked and complement each other. Based on the right academic choice, students can obtain the right job in future. Also, he added, helping students to determine their academic choices in the next stage of their educational journey is a step to putting students in the right place in the labour market (Alghamlas, 2000). However, the career guidance in high school is defined as a professional vocational training programme that follows a procedural process in which the students become aware of themselves and their attitudes, aptitudes and abilities and the educational and professional opportunities available to them. This enables them to make an appropriate decision for shaping their educational and career future (Alshahri & Alqasim, n.d.). Both perspectives mentioned that career guidance and educational guidance need to work with each other to support students in their educational and career destiny.

A student guide or student consultant has a responsibility to achieve a variety of different goals of career guidance. For example, career guidance should aim to introduce students to careers and introduce professional and educational alternatives, in order to prepare them to enter the world of work or choose an academic pathway at the university to prepare for a particular occupation (Arabiyat, 2014). Students want to have adequate information related to their career concerns and academic choices at university. Most students wish to study at university, although choosing a specific suitable academic pathway for them is the main issue. In order to provide information to students, some career guidance services organise meetings, seminars and lectures on the importance of students selecting an academic pathway that is appropriate to their orientation and abilities. Also, they conduct educational visits to various educational and training institutions to familiarise students with the nature of study in these institutions. In addition, career guidance services are active in developing the role of the professional week in each academic year through the participation of the relevant bodies such as the Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training. These are examples of different career guidance services in high school (Alhamidah, 2005).

However, in reality, career guidance in high school has some constraints that may not allow it to deliver sufficient and helpful services to students. Almansour researched the obstacles to career guidance services and programmes in the high schools from the point of view of student guides and school principals. He found some interesting obstacles. For instance, lack of material and moral incentives that the school receives when implementing career guidance programmes and poor participation of teachers in the implementation of career guidance programmes in high schools. He also added that there is a lack of numbers of student guides in schools, and a scarcity of databases on professional choices and academic pathways (Almansour, 2011). Due to these obstacles and issues, a student guide cannot offer and provide different career guidance services and programmes for students in schools. Thus, there is a need for some collaboration between the department of guidance and counselling in the Ministry of Education, teachers and student guides to overcome these issues with sufficient services.

As can be seen from New Zealand and Sweden's experiences of providing career guidance services for students in schools, there some similarities and differences between them and Saudi high schools' experiences. The common points between Saudi and New Zealand are the individual counselling and career guidance before the next stage of the educational journey and future career. Also, the counsellors play the main role in providing these services. Both countries seek to assist their high school students by providing individual career guidance, which is offered personally by the student guide. However, teachers in New Zealand schools are responsible for providing the career guidance for students through the school curriculum; this differs from the Saudi experience. Therefore, this different experience may help and benefit students at schools, especially high school students, in order to teach them how to understand themselves and think carefully about their interests, abilities, career and academic preferences and available academic choices. All countries seek to assist students in high school with their academic choices and academic decision-making from different points of view depending on the educational and guidance system.

2.5 Career guidance at Saudi universities

The university life is considered to be a new, different life for students in a number of aspects when compared with their previous study life in high school. At university, students become more independent of their families. They will have more responsibilities such as financial, academic, social and personal issues. University students are personally responsible for their study, more than they were before in high school, and their parents do not have the same level of academic supervision. Students have to balance their schedules between academic, social and personal responsibilities. Sometimes, university students need to find a part-time job to pay for their tuition fees and support themselves or their families. The academic subjects at university are new and changeable, and the university lecturers differ from high school teachers. Learning and achieving the academic goals depends primarily on students. This is different from high school, where one of the teachers' responsibilities is making sure that the students did understand the information in the lesson.

As can be seen, the career guidance services at universities have been explored based on different international experiences. For example, they are provided at American universities to assist students, individually and collectively, to solve their issues through, for example, individual career counselling, career assessment and workshops on job search. In addition, technology is involved in the career guidance services by providing some computers for students to seek self-administered career assessments and use job banks or apply for internship opportunities. However, there are other methods for the same purpose; for instance, universities in Sweden offer a drop-in service or a particular schedule for guidance booked in advance. These two kinds of services are provided for individual guidance, mainly, for the first-year students because they have common issues with different causes such as educational choices, changes in the academic pathway and studying abroad. In addition, students who are about to graduate and who are in other years can benefit from these career guidance services, too.

There are some main career guidance services that most educational institutions should provide for their students, including higher education institutions. For example, Aqel

indicated that some key career guidance services are, first, providing professional information by informing individuals about the existing professions, their requirements, the qualifications required for them and their future career prospects. The second service is to familiarise individuals about their abilities and aptitudes using measurement methods such as tests and interviews. Therefore, they can determine the appropriate professional choice according to their abilities and aptitudes. The third is preparing the individual for the chosen profession, theoretically and practically, by acquiring the skills necessary to increase his competence (Aqel, 2000). These career guidance services can be provided for individuals or groups, depending on the purpose and target of the group. According to the University Counselling Centre (UCC) of the E university, the career guidance service provides some psychological tests, for instance, the Holland Career Inventory. The purpose of these types of test is to give students a great opportunity to determine and understand their career tendencies. The UCC provides efficient career guidance for students who have concerns regarding their current academic pathway and relevant future career. Moreover, the UCC works and collaborates with the Alumni Centre and Professional Development to provide efficient and effective career guidance services for new, current and graduate students. These services can be provided individually or collectively [5].

The career guidance at Saudi universities has several goals for helping students with their issues. For example, academic and career issues. These two issues are related to each other because the future career is a result of the current academic study, and also students are still in the academic university environment. From the academic perspective, career guidance aims to help students to choose the appropriate academic pathway which is suitable for their abilities and tendencies. On the other hand, the career perspective leads the career guidance to advise students, especially those in the first year of university, to highlight some possible and suitable future jobs for their academic pathway and their future career goals. Providing these suitable job options for students can be more effective if the career guidance works with other interested and relevant institutions to update their educational and career database.

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(5) University Counselling Centre. https://bit.ly/37RKQUo

Abdulhadi and Alazza mentioned, in their book *Career guidance and theories*, that career guidance has many goals to be achieved in relation to students' academic choice and career decisions. The first goal is helping them to understand themselves and create a clear picture of their personalities in order to accept that their decisions must include their capacities, attitudes, tendencies and values. The second is helping students to explore the world of the labour market and different work environments; for example, the educational, training and skills requirements, and also the system of professional promotions and earnings. The third goal is helping students to make decisions to choose their academic pathway and to decide which future job is suitable and appropriate for them. The fourth is helping students to develop positive values and attitudes toward the labour market and the value of manual labour (Abdulhadi and Alazza, 2014). These goals are simply examples. The key concept of career guidance is to put the right person in the right place. To achieve this main goal, career guidance must provide sufficient information about the jobs' features and what are the specific requirements for abilities, tendencies and capacities, in order to prepare students to make the right decision about their academic pathway, first, and then, their possible job, second.

The career guidance service can provide a variety of different services to assist first-year students to make the right academic decision with regard to the specific academic subject for subsequent years. Some services should be provided to most of the students to assist them in solving their career and academic issues because there are some common concerns among university students, including first-year students. For example, some career guidance problems experienced by the 2,515 United Arab Emirates university students were a lack of professional guidance to make the appropriate academic choice, lack of knowledge of disciplines and departments in each college and parents' insistence on selecting a particular academic choice (Abdelhamid, 2002). Therefore, Alhumaidi stated four career guidance services for university students. First, providing careers information about job conditions such as the required qualifications, place or location and features. Second, giving the students a broad and clear picture of their abilities and tendencies. Third, providing adequate information about the suitable and available jobs in the labour market. Fourth, organising interesting interviews and seminars with businessmen, businesswomen or employers in order to clarify the nature of the jobs and

the career environment (Alhumaidi, 2013). At these events, students would have a chance to learn about themselves through some ability tests and explore their preferences. Also, they can learn more about the required abilities and skills for jobs they find interesting, learn how to succeed at a job interview and understand more with regard to the challenges and opportunities in their career. Meeting someone who works in the field in which they are interested may clarify some ambiguous questions in students' minds regarding the jobs' options and potential. The career guidance services may have significant influences on the students' academic choice.

In order to explore the reality of the career guidance offered at university from the students' perspective, Aldulaim explored the reality of the benefit of career guidance services in Saudi universities from students' perspectives. The research sample consisted of 350 male and female students from five different Saudi universities. The results indicated that nearly 60% of students had never benefitted from the career guidance services in their universities because the method by which these services were offered was not attractive. Also, Aldulaim assumed that this might refer to some social and cultural factors, but he did not mention examples (Aldulaim, 2012). Another interesting study related to career guidance in higher education in Saudi was conducted by, he aimed to explore the perspective of 676 university students on the career guidance services in higher education. The research stated that half of the participants had received no career guidance services and they claimed that these services were not available. Moreover, 51% of participants stressed that these guidance services did not play any role in their academic choice. The conclusion was that there was a lack of availability of career guidance services, although it must be borne in mind that this research is very dated now (Alkhatib, 1994).

Additionally, Alhumaidi researched the female students' perspective on the guidance services in their university. The results showed that the participants' satisfaction and benefit from the guidance services were at the lowest level. They did not gain any benefit from these services, and thus they were dissatisfied with them. They believed that these services were inefficient and unable to help them to choose their academic pathway and

to determine a possible future job. Alhumaidi conducted a questionnaire to explore female students' perspectives on the guidance services in their university. However, she did not explain the reasons beyond these responses (Alhumaidi, 2013). There are two significant differences between the current research and Alhumaidi's study. The first is that her study did not interview participants to explain the reasons behind their perspective on the guidance services in their university, which this research does. The second is that the current research sought to explore and understand the influencing factors on participants' academic choice. In this case, the current research had a perfect opportunity to explore the most important factors influencing participants' academic choices through a questionnaire, and then to understand why these factors were influential from the participants' perspectives by conducting interviews with them. Furthermore, Alaghbari explored the problems faced by 260 students of the Teachers College in AlAhsa. He found that the lack of guidance and counselling services for new students was the most selected problem among participants (Alaghbari, 2009).

However, there are some university students who appreciated the career guidance services. Alkhatib found, in his research, that 63% of the 676 participants agreed that career guidance services could affect their attitudes towards work and the labour market. This positive result implies that those students had an awareness of the role of career guidance services and that it positively affected their perception of the reality of the labour market conditions (Alkhatib, 1994). Interestingly, Alkhatib's research is considered to be the first research in Saudi to explore the effects of career guidance services on university students. Nevertheless, the study was conducted 25 years ago. The significant result was a positive perspective from the participants regarding the career guidance services. However, other recent research and studies have shown negative viewpoints from university students and lack of benefit from the career guidance services. Therefore, during the intervening years the gap between the career guidance services and students at university has continued to widen and recently it has become more significant. Therefore, this current research sought to answer some questions by asking what, why and how to fill this gap with reasonable answers by conducting a questionnaire and an interview regarding factors influencing the participants' academic choice. It also examined the expected benefits of some career guidance services for first-year students

from the participants' perspective, which were suggested in the questionnaire. Both research methods focused on career guidance services at universities to improve these services to meet students' needs.

Some researchers have sought to explore the needs and guidance problems of university students to measure whether the guidance services meet those needs or solve these problems. Tshtoush sought to explore the guidance needs of first-year university students by focusing on different aspects of guidance and counselling. The results indicated that three career needs were most frequently selected by the participants. First, most of the participants stated that, "I feel that I need to select the appropriate academic pathway". Second, "I feel that I need to determine the suitable future job for me". Third, "I feel that I need to make a decision regard[ing] the academic pathway which is appropriate to my abilities, tendencies and interests". These were the top career needs for the participants, which implies that they had an awareness of what they needed, although they were concerned about meeting their needs, making the right decision and asking for help and advice (Tshtoush, 2012).

Moreover, Baos also explored the university students' career guidance problems. He claimed that 78% of 1,500 participants had a problem with "Lack of career guidance to choose the appropriate academic pathway". Also, 72% of his 1,500 participants experienced a problem with "Lack of knowledge of the academic pathways needed by the labour market". The participants were concerned most about these two common career guidance problems and how the career guidance services could meet them in order to overcome these concerns (Baos, 2002). Furthermore, Abouleish researched the guidance needs of 281 female students of the faculty of education. She found that the most selected need was the need for career guidance, such as knowing more about the available job opportunities after university and choosing the appropriate academic choice at the undergraduate level. Also, the second most selected guidance need was the academic need, which included knowing the best methods of study and how to develop the self-motivation to study (Abouleish, 2014).

The researcher read several related articles to the experience of different countries providing career guidance services for students, whether at schools or universities, such as the United States, Sweden, New Zealand, England, Korea, and France. However, the career guidance experiences of Sweden, New Zealand, and the United States were provided and published by the relevant authorized institutions or the Ministry of Education. Therefore, the wording was straightforward and useful. They demonstrated the concepts of career guidance services and who was responsible for providing them for students, whether at school or university. Indeed, the most comparable experiences in career guidance services to what is being provided in the Saudi context were Sweden, New Zealand, and the United States. Thus, the researcher decided to choose them rather than other countries. However, there are some similarities in the career guidance services at university between some Swedish and American universities and some Saudi universities in the individual and collective services offered to help students to understand themselves and find a suitable solution to determine their academic and career choices. Moreover, the connection between career guidance and other relevant people is common between some Saudi and American universities. It provides the most updated information about the labour market and the reality of future careers, for example. However, some American universities help students to make their career choice by giving them access to job banks and internship opportunities by providing some computers, and also they can search for jobs through various career centres' websites. Unfortunately, this kind of career guidance service has not been available until now in most Saudi universities. Exploring others' experiences in career guidance has given this research a new dimension for providing suitable and effective services for the first-year university students.

The career guidance at university aims to provide helpful and efficient services for the students to support their career and academic choices. However, there is a gap between the services which students expected to be provided and the reality of helping and guiding them to make the right decision regarding their academic choice and future job. Also, there is a gap between what the career guidance services provide for university students and their real career guidance needs and problems. This current research is interested in exploring and filling these gaps by exploring the factors influencing the academic choice

of first-year university students and which career guidance services would be helpful and suitable for them.

2.6 The role of family – introduction

The fundamental component of society is the family. It could be the primary key for any financial, educational and social development. Also, the family can be an essential social, educational environment for children. Its role may have either a positive or negative effect on a child's personality, depending on the internal interactions among family members. Some elements may determine this role, such as parents' educational achievement, socioeconomics, parents' jobs and siblings.

The parents' educational achievement level may an influence on children's decisions to choose their academic pathway. Based on the researcher's reading and personal experiences, on the one hand, the highly educated parents, who finished undergraduate study or more, can offer a source of information about the academic pathway for their children based on their own academic experience. Moreover, there is the opportunity to discuss their academic choices with parents, to decide on the appropriate choice or to discover if the parents prefer a specific academic choice to be made. In some cases, parents know their children's skills and abilities, which may allow them to suggest a pathway or convince them to choose the appropriate academic route from the parents' perspective. Sometimes, the parents may support and encourage their children to choose what they want to study, even if the parents prefer another academic choice. Also, the children may consider their parents to be role models and may prefer to follow their academic pathway. In this case, the parents can be a source of encouragement and inspiration to their children.

On the other hand, parents with a low-level education, who finished their own studies after high school, may not have enough information about the academic choices, because of their own limited academic experience about undergraduate study. This means there are limited chances for children to obtain sufficient information about the available

academic choices from their parents. In this case, some parents may suggest a specific academic choice because they have dreamt about it and want their children to have a specific job in the future. Other parents may ask their children to join the labour market instead of choosing an academic pathway, because they want them to help the family financially. The limitation of academic experience may lead some parents to refuse to accept their children's preference because they believe that choice has no social status or has lower earning capacity in future, compared with other alternatives.

The influence of family essentially relies on the parents, more than other family members, which gives them an important and influential role in their children's academic choice. However, other family members could influence students' academic decisions due to their academic experience or their speciality. Opening discussion with them relies on the students' belief in the benefits to be gained from sharing their concerns about their academic choice. Recently, most universities have developed the range of academic choices available and improved the quality of academic content. This has led families, in general, to become more concerned about what their children want to study at university. The labour market offers more job opportunities with good employment conditions because of the development in universities' academic programmes. Obtaining a job is one of most families' biggest concerns about a safe future for their children.

2.7 Family and culture in the Middle East

The Middle Eastern culture has changed over the past few decades according to the revolution in different aspects of life. Family protects and delivers the culture by educating the younger generations to prepare them to be adaptable, to live a better life and make the right decisions about new issues they will face. In fact, religion and culture give the family stability and the power to meet any new changes and challenges. For example, there has been a revolution in technology which has made a huge improvement in people's lives. It has made life easier and facilitated many things such as learning, shopping, communication and the labour market. However, this improvement affected the culture and people's ways of evaluating and thinking about how to benefit from previous experiences to make rational and reasonable decisions regarding their new

experiences. Moreover, globalisation has had an impact on families and societies through the cultural exchange between communities and mobilisation of knowledge between countries. People have become more open and understanding of others' experiences, culture and knowledge. In terms of culture, the interconnection of the family in the Middle East is traditional, which allows it to maintain its culture and heritage. Day after day, this task becomes more difficult for the family because of the effects on societies of rapid changes in the world.

The gap between the parents' generation and the children's generation is a part of that difficulty. Most families in the Middle East are close to each other. This makes educating and raising their children easier, sometimes, as they receive support from grandparents or other family members to keep delivering the good values, principles and traditions of culture. Also, children may find it easy to look for a role model from within the family, who has achieved something valuable. Most families in the Middle East are extended families, which means that the family consists of a mother, father, and their children, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins who live nearby or in the same house. However, recently, the structure of the new generation's families has changed due to the transformation of society. The extended family has become the nuclear family, which means that the new formation consists of two parents, mother and father, and their children. This does not include other relatives and family members (Al-Gharib, 2008). Most families have reformatted themselves within a new structure, to keep their culture and traditions, because of the changes in the economy and urban developments. Also, education has involved and influenced the family structure. People now are more educated and able to get jobs and become financially independent. This allows them to leave the family and set up their own new family. However, nuclear families still maintain contact with each other using communication technology or traditional methods to keep in touch with other relatives.

The General Authority for Statistics in Saudi stated, in 2018, that the population of Saudi Arabia was 33,413,660.[6] Within this number, there are around 19,221,882 people enrolled in educational institutions to study, who are between the ages of 3 years and over 30 years.[7] These numbers show that Saudi families are interested in educating their children. The Ministry of Education (MoE) provides different levels of educational and academic programmes for people to improve the family's knowledge, develop society and maintain culture. These programmes are provided to meet people's educational interests. The MoE makes huge efforts to match people's culture, heritage and education in order to improve society's knowledge. Therefore, 67% of males and 51% of females have graduated from high schools, and also 28% of males and 25.5% of females have achieved different higher education degrees.[8] Thus, the percentage of people achieving different levels of higher education degrees is up to one-quarter of the Saudi population. According to this, one in four families in Saudi will have an experience of higher education study. This has given the new generation a chance to grow up within educated families and learn from the academic experience of other family members. Their children would be more educated and have a broader culture compared with other children from less-educated families.

The General Authority for Statistics in Saudi indicated that the highly educated families are in Riyadh and the Eastern and Western regions. The E university is situated in the Eastern region. Its location makes exploring the factors influencing first-year university students an interesting topic. Moreover, the percentage of children who live in a positive and stimulating family environment for learning is 34% of the Saudi population. In particular, the highest percentage was in the Eastern region, in which 52% of children live in positive and encouraging family environments for learning.[9]

(6) General Authority for Statistics. The education and training. https://t2m.io/gvjszAPb .

(7) General Authority for Statistics. The population. https://t2m.io/RmnYU8jF .

(8) General Authority for Statistics. The education and training. https://t2m.io/gvjszAPb .

(9) General Authority for Statistics. The education and training. https://t2m.io/gvjszAPb .

2.8 Bourdieu's theory – habitus, cultural capital and social capital

The educational environment is a small representative community of the larger society, which consists of several social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The academic choice is a significant decision for a student's educational journey. Involving other factors in the process of the academic choice is an interesting topic because personal desire, family pressure, social perspective, academic requirements and employment opportunities all have an influence on students' choices. For example, some students make their academic choice based on their interests and preferences, but there are other students who make their choice based on some influencing factors which may incline their academic choice to an inappropriate one. Both cases would lead students to make either a right or wrong academic choice. The academic decision is a result of some interactions between the students and other elements, which could support their choice or could force them to make other academic choices. It is interesting that the preferences and interests differ from one sibling to another within the same family, although there would be more differentiation among university students who came from different social classes. Moreover, the career decision-making, which is based on the chosen academic pathway, also differs between university students who study the same pathway. In order to understand those processes and the role of other influencing factors, Bourdieu developed cultural capital, habitus, economic and social class as key concepts in his theory to interpret some interesting social and educational issues.

2.8.1 Habitus

Habitus is a broad umbrella for different capitals. Bourdieu was interested in understanding and explaining the interaction mechanisms of society and in people's actions regarding their past and current situations. Society is usually divided into different classes based on, for example, the culture, economics, knowledge, education, power and social factors. All these classes are related and affect each other. The economic situation influences people's educational opportunities, which impacts their knowledge, and consequently, their knowledge impacts different aspects of their culture.

Bourdieu was interested in understanding how society works and how individuals act. Habitus is a concept that is considered to be a fixed framework, which is constant and broadly unconscious and provides ideas about one's chances, preferences, tastes and values as well as chances of success or failure. These ideas are common between members of social groups/classes (Swartz, 1997). Fuller added a simple and understandable definition of habitus, stating that "it is a set of fixed and sub-conscious ideas about how society works that is shaped and common to the experience of class" (Fuller, 2008, p. 15).

From a different point of view, habitus is considered to comprise three forms: structured, structuring and structure. The first form is 'structured' by one's past or present situations such as educational experience, family upbringing, social environment and work practices. The experiences are built and sorted into matrices in people's minds, which lead them to move to the next form of habitus. The second form is 'structuring', because it shapes practices for the present and the future that depend on how people learn from their experiences. It is a kind of thinking and evaluating of the previous and current situations in order to react and respond. The third form is 'structure', which implies that it is a systematic approach rather than randomly ordered (Grenfell, 2010). The systematic approach means that some procedures and processes are used to transfer the habitus from older generations to new generations and structures that depend on the current changes among the new generation. At the individual level, dispositions are the matrix of experiences that enable a person to decide how to act and respond properly in different situations; they also depend on how this person understands and evaluates those situations. Indeed, Bourdieu emphasised that "each social class has characteristic habitus that generates specific sets of practices" (Swartz, 1997, p. 144). Interestingly, Bourdieu indicated that habitus has been collectively organised. The process of building the habitus in societies was unconscious, which means that people did not organise this process. The dispositions and practices were built naturally without any intervention from leaders (Bourdieu, 1977). This shapes and builds students' aspirations and expectations and provides encouragement regarding their education and career to make the right academic choice. Thus, this happens because of the 'structured' aspect of experiences. This procedure tends to be common amongst different social groups.

2.8.2 Cultural capital

Cultural capital is considered to be the wide cultural background of people. For example, the tendencies, preferences, skills, knowledge and dispositions that students possess. Also, the linguistic capacity, art and values and norms are part of the cultural background that students receive from their families, educational institutions or societies. On the one hand, economics may classify the cultural background because financial capacity determines the availability and the possibility of many lifestyle choices; for example, the family income will affect members' taste, tendencies and preferences for leisure activities. According to Bourdieu's belief, cultural capital cannot be separated from other concepts, and there are some effects that are common between them. He pointed out that cultural capital is made and established by the various forms of cultural competence, although these forms are affected by economic capital. In Western countries, the school system produces and transfers the various forms of cultural capital to students from different social classes, based on their families' economic capital. Therefore, there are mutual effects between social classes, cultural capital and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). On the other hand, the academic choice, educational attainment and college selection are strongly affected by cultural background and parental cultural capital. There is an interconnection between social class, cultural background and economic class.

Parents are fundamental participants in transmitting cultural capital to their children. They transmit cultural capital through cultural activities and the interaction between these and their children. These activities differ from one social class to another because of the variety of people and their cultural capital. Sullivan stated that parental cultural capital and parental qualifications are strongly associated with cultural capital. Furthermore, he indicated that parental cultural capital determines the cultural capital and cultural activities of social classes (Sullivan, 2001). For example, students who come from the working class are interested in working in the labour market rather than finishing school. They wish to join the labour market to support their family financially. This interest is a result of the limited cultural capital that students have received from their family, and the educational level of parents is part of this limitation. Normally, children view their parents as role models in different aspects of achievement. Therefore, their educational achievement affects the range and depth of the cultural background that parents transmit

to their children. Consequently, children's academic choices and career decision-making are influenced by the cultural capital received.

Cultural capital implies that each social class has its knowledge, beliefs, culture and educational credentials. To clarify that, Bourdieu indicated that economic capital can affect and shape the cultural capital of people by dividing society into different social, cultural and economic classes (Bourdieu, 1977). Parents' cultural background has a strong influence on students' academic performance because their children have received their parents' cultural heritage throughout the parental upbringing. For example, in France, most of the children of professionals have higher education degrees, in contrast, very few farmers' and workers' children have them (Swartz, 1997). Thus, cultural capital can be referred to as a reason for the academic choices of first-year university students. They might choose particular academic pathways rather than others as an outcome of the educational or professional experience of their parents. Arguably, students who are children of high-class parents or professionals have more opportunities, ambitions, hopes, self-selection opportunities and expectations for higher education achievements, because their culture and educational community contains a wide range of knowledge and professional experiences of different academic pathways and jobs. This makes those students more likely to realise what they want to study.

People from the lower class or working class may not benefit from cultural capital in the same way as those from a high class, as the educational experience of their community is limited in its knowledge and culture. For instance, students from the lower class may wish to be an engineer or a doctor, but their parents or community has little information about the academic requirements of those jobs and which higher education institutes offer these choices. Consequently, they cannot help them to reach their goal. Other parents from the lower class may need their children to provide financial support. This could prevent the children from achieving their academic dream. Fuller researched the differentiation between university students from different social classes in their educational aspirations, career decision-making and academic choices. She stated that their cultural capital is affected and shaped by the economic foundation of class, which

leads to the limitation of educational decisions (Fuller, 2008). Therefore, students from different class backgrounds make different academic choices.

Students who have highly educated parents are more likely to succeed in their studies than those who have less-educated parents (Beethoven, De Jong, & Van Hout, 2002). For example, the highly educated family environment would give the children access to a wide range of knowledge and methods of thinking. Also, the discussion between the highly educated parents and their children with regard to their academic choice may provide an appropriate chance for the children to understand more about their abilities and to determine which academic pathway is suitable for them. Furthermore, the method of socialisation within their families will also affect students' academic confidence, because students from a highly educated family have greater academic confidence than those from a less-educated family (Need & De Jong, 2001). This confidence would positively reflect the students' academic choice. For instance, highly educated families are more knowledgeable about university academic choices than less-educated families because of the higher education experience of parents and family members. Bourdieu pointed out that cultural capital is constituted and determined by academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1977). This academic experience would give the children a bigger picture of the academic choices available. By seeing examples of higher education achievements from close relatives, such as parents and family members, children from a highly educated family would be more confident of choosing their academic pathway and success than children from a less-educated family.

Cultural capital and habitus associate with the academic choice and the career decision-making on different levels. The interesting level, in this case, is how cultural capital can interpret or determine the process of the academic choice for the first-year university students. According to DiMaggio and Mohr, it has significant influence on different academic outcomes. They investigated the effect of cultural capital on the academic outcomes of university students. The results showed that the completion of college and graduate education were significantly affected by cultural capital. The academic choices and educational rewards are a combination of different interactions and influences

between students, families, university, employment opportunities and society (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). The accessibility of the academic choices that students want to study depends on the cultural capital transmitted by the family to its children. Therefore, family background is reflected in students' academic choices. Fuller concluded that "habitus is the accumulation of a set of knowledge on which one draws to determine actions, a tool kit that provides a range of strategies for action and a foundation on which to build choices" (Fuller, 2008, p. 15).

Several social educational theories contribute to the interpretation of educational issues or social phenomenon in a specific period or area and concern local people. Bourdieu's theory was initiated in France and examined inequality in educational opportunities for some social classes. The theory has made a significant contribution to the clarification of this educational issue and suggested some solutions to provide equal opportunities for people from different social classes. However, not all concepts of Bourdieu's theory have worked well outside France, because of the existence of differences between communities and societies. In contrast, whilst Bourdieu's theory worked with the social classes existing in France, similar distinguished social classes do not exist in the United States. In this case, the theory would not work properly with other different societies (Kingston, 2001). There is a difference in culture, knowledge, habits, social structure and linguistic skills between people around the world, although there are some common issues that people share and practice as human beings. Applying the concepts of Bourdieu's theory is sometimes difficult due to similarities and differences between societies and communities. In terms of higher education, some countries require tuition fees for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, whereas others provide these programmes free in public universities and colleges. Therefore, parents can transmit cultural capital and children would receive it, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, their economic class, their location, social class, educational level and family background (Bourdieu, 1986).

2.8.3 Social capital

In recent years, the term 'social capital' has been used increasingly, receiving attention as a way to understand the role families play in the educational success of their children. It is also relevant with regard to academic choice for university students. The concept of social capital is elusive; it can be defined in diverse ways. According to Morrow, social capital refers to "sociability, social networks and social support, trust, reciprocity and community and civic engagement" (Morrow, 1999, p. 744) as, for example, the relationships between people and communities. Sharing objectives, promoting cohesiveness and fostering trust among people are the results of the relationship between people and communities. Moreover, individuals can benefit from collective social capital (Fuller, 2013). Reay stated that the processes between the family and the wider society generate social capital by constructing social networks (Reay, 2000). The value of those social networks is that they give people an opportunity to accomplish their goals, whether they are for themselves or others (Coleman, 1988).

From a societal point of view, social capital refers to whom you know rather than to what you know. The relationships between members of a society depend on their social class (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Social capital implies the features of social communities, such as networks and social trust, which can collaborate and facilitate coordination for reciprocal benefit (Putnam, 1995). For Bourdieu, social capital refers to the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986). High school students can achieve high grades and a high level of educational attainment when their families engage with their school, as this promotes a trusting and mutual relationship that is educationally helpful. Their educational attainment can be seen as a benefit of the social capital of the students' families.

Regarding higher education, the social capital of the families is likely to have an influence on the students' choice of academic pathway. The value of people's social capital depends on the size of the network of relationships that they can efficiently assemble (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital is never completely independent of economic and

cultural capital, because there are mutual influences between capitals. Therefore, socio-economic level might limit the access to those networks (Perez & Mcdonough, 2008). Thus, the strength and weakness of networks and social capital resources can determine what college major a student chooses. Parents who do not communicate with people with high levels of social capital and without access to resources of social capital have limited opportunities to help their post-secondary children to choose their academic route (Perez & Mcdonough, 2008).

With regard to higher education and families, social capital "promotes attitudes, efforts and conception of self" (Coleman, 1987, p. 38) that interact with universities to encourage children to choose the appropriate academic route (Fuller, 2008). The families have an important role to play in the academic choice of their children. This role, as argued by Schneider and Stevenson, means that "parents need to do more than communicating with their teenagers the importance of a college education. They have to take action: accompany adolescents on college visits, arrange for financial assistance, and assist in judging the programme of a college and whether it is the right one for them" (Schneider & Stevenson, 2000, p. 147). Parents can provide their children with the resources of information related to the academic pathways they want them to choose. The communication between parents and children can define useful resources related to the academic route they want to choose. These resources could be family members, other non-family members and institutions.

Using these ideas, social class is therefore seen as shaping the academic choices of university students. Bourdieu emphasised the correlation between subjective hopes and objective opportunities. Indeed, he believed that parents' educational experience forms and shapes the academic choice of their children, because parents expect levels of ambition from their children according to their own past educational experience (Swartz, 1997). For example, if the parents have a medicine degree and work in a hospital or surgery, they are likely to demonstrate the advantages and features of this route and encourage their children to choose a medicine major and be part of the medical community. The topic of the factors affecting the academic choices of students who study

in business administration and marketing specialties in Saudi universities was an interesting field for Abdel-Qader and Albahsin. They received 597 completed responses from university students at two universities for the same two academic pathways. Several factors were included in the questionnaire to explore the top influencing factors on their academic decision. They stated that 77.80% of the 597 participants selected their parents as an influencing factor on their preferences for the academic pathways (Abdel-Qader & Albahsin, 2015). Bourdieu argued that the working-class youth do not target high levels of educational attainment and achievement because they have internalised ideas of limited chances for school success that may be due to their knowledge and experience, or a financial issue (Swartz, 1997). Mostly, parents want their children to be in the same educational and work level of their social class, although a few may encourage their children to reach higher than their current social class in educational and work opportunities.

Social capital outside the family is the relationship between the family and the community and the institutions. This form is wider than the previous form due to the diversity of relations among parents and other close people and institutions. Both forms are important for students to gather interesting information in order to choose their academic pathway (Coleman, 1988). These relationships are important for sharing objectives and exchanging knowledge. In relation to higher education (Fuller, 2008), for example, students from families with strong relations with society are more likely to receive information and help to determine a suitable academic choice and make the right decision. In contrast, weak ties between relations would not offer a similar range of information and help, thus, the students' academic decision may not be correct. Therefore, the current research presupposes that social capital has an influence on the academic choice of first-year university students through the level of strength and breadth of the relationship between children, parents, family, community and institutions.

In conclusion, social capital can build relationships, both within students' families and with other agents, which may facilitate access to resources. These relationships are important for sharing objectives and exchanging knowledge. In relation to higher

education (Fuller, 2008), for example, students from families with strong relations with society are more likely to receive help to determine a suitable academic choice and make the right decision. Bourdieu indicated that there is an obvious correlation between the students' academic performance and their social-class backgrounds which can be observed in the school system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). However, this correlation may have an effect on students' academic choices. Thus, this research presupposes that social capital has influence on the academic choice of preparatory year students.

It is interesting to explore the factors influencing the academic choice of first-year students within the Saudi context. Saudi Arabia has a unique structure of both family and society. For example, the relations between children and their siblings and parents are important and it is essential to keep them close to each other. Moreover, the relationships between family and relatives and society have the same importance. Therefore, the interactions between the elements may make students' decisions straightforward or complicated, at the same time. The role of these elements in students' decisions may determine how difficult they will be. For example, in Saudi culture, children usually obey their parents' orders and seek to satisfy them, and sometimes they follow their family's customs and traditions. From this perspective, the academic choices of the first-year students might be influenced by the social and cultural background of their families. In the Saudi context, some academic pathways may not be acceptable as normal choices for students, whether male or female, because of the Saudi culture or the nature of the future job or the policy of the labour market. For example, a female student cannot choose a specific academic pathway which prepares her to be an operator in a heavy equipment industry due to the Saudi culture and the nature of the job. Furthermore, a male student cannot seek to be a kindergarten teacher through a particular academic pathway because of the educational policy and Saudi culture. The social and cultural background and other related factors may determine whether to discourage or encourage students to make their academic choices.

Indeed, Bourdieu's theory helped the researcher to interpret and understand the data obtained. The academic choices were made based on a variety of reasons which differ

between students. The diversity of social and cultural backgrounds and habitus caused the differences among students' academic decisions. This theory is interested in exploring and understanding the actions and causes in several fields, such as educational and social fields. Therefore, it was useful to understand and explain the roles and effects of the influencing factors which were related to students' backgrounds in relation to their academic choices. In this research, it was interesting to explore and understand the role of these factors from Saudi students' perspectives, such as their families, parents, schools, friends and teachers.

2.9 Rational choice theory

Social phenomena are considered to be outcomes of people's choices, which could be either rational or irrational (Wittek, 2013). The rational choice theory can explain some factors and reasons behind these choices and outcomes to make them more understandable and offers a different perspective compared to Bourdieu's theory. Cultural reproduction theory and rational choice theory are significantly different approaches, although they have some common aspects, such as the focus on how the individual acts (Swartz, 1981). Rational behaviour was defined by Wittek as "the behaviour that is suitable for the realization of specific goals, given the limitations imposed by the situation". Also, he indicated that there are three critical elements of the explanation of rational choice, which are 1) individual preferences, 2) beliefs and 3) constraints (Wittek, 2013, p. 688). Each of these are now addressed.

An individual's preferences, the first element, refer to a person's positive or negative evaluation about the potential consequences of their choices. Preferences may have different roots, from cultural background or personal habits as well as commitments, such as tendencies towards studying a specific academic pathway or enjoying doing something. Students want to choose the academic pathway to study at university which mostly meets their preferences. The second element is that people's beliefs influence the perception of the cause–effect relationship, and also how they see the different possible consequences of their choices. For example, students may believe that studying academic pathway (A) could be a more accessible route to study and more helpful to obtain a job

in the future than academic pathway (B), which is harder to study and where future job opportunities might be limited. The third element of the rational choice explanation is constraints, which are the limits to the set of possible choices. Some people's choices might be limited by specific strict circumstances, which may or may not be helpful for their choices. Some of these constraints may be actual and some perceived. Moreover, Need and De Jong (2001) indicated that rational choice may be influenced by the constraints and opportunities that students find when making a rational choice for their academic pathway. For example, in terms of Saudi students, they may often face some social conditions or strict academic circumstances when they intend to choose their academic pathway. They may be limited by, for instance, the academic pathway requirements, parental desires or the students' own abilities. Moreover, sometimes, students want to choose to study academic pathway (A) but the university is in a different city. In this case, there may be some costs, whether educational, social, personal or financial because of the location of the university, which may influence their academic choice. Therefore, making a rational choice or deciding something has to be processed through these three elements, which requires some analysis of the costs of the decision and the benefits of that choice or decision in order to reach the correct decision.

The essential concept for the rational choice theory is the costs and benefits of the decision. Evaluation of decisions depends on the balance between costs and benefits, and also on avoiding the risk of failure costs. Breen and Goldthorpe considered the effects of socio-economic class on rational choice. They stated three key factors for general educational decisions which may influence rational choice. First, the cost of remaining in studying the current academic pathway, in this case, parents and students must think about the direct cost of education when deciding to continue studying. The costs might be time, money, social costs and effort if they decide to continue studying the chosen academic pathway. Second, the likelihood of success if they continue studying. Breen and Goldthorpe believed that students' knowledge about their abilities and tendencies helps them to form their goals concerning success in studying an academic pathway. The chance of success in the academic pathway may depend on the students' abilities or their academic circumstances at university. It may also depend on job availability, which could motivate students to success. The final factor is the earnings that students would obtain

after graduating from their academic pathway. The opportunity to obtain a job that earns enough after graduation to warrant the cost is a critical aspect for most university students when choosing their academic pathway (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997).

Breen and Goldthorpe's statement that the general model of educational decisions is based on these three key factors is demonstrated by the fact that when students intend to choose their academic pathway, they attempt to evaluate the costs and benefits of their choice of academic pathway. Kim, Markham and Cangelosi sought to explore the factors influencing students' academic choice of business major across different universities. They indicated that 30% n=202 of 671 of participating students chose their interest in the field as the first influential factor. Moreover, the second factor was good job opportunities, which was selected by 20.5% n=137 of 671 of participants. The other 13.2% n=88 of 671 chose "good fit", which means the academic choice was appropriate for their abilities and tendencies, as the third influential factor on their academic choices (Kim, Markham & Cangelosi, 2002). These three factors govern educational decisions and influence the choice of academic pathways made by university students.

Adams, Pryor, and Adams sought to explore the factors that make students choose one specific academic pathway rather than another. They found that 57% n=135 of 238 of the participants stated that future job opportunities significantly influenced their academic choices. Furthermore, the potential for high earnings significantly influenced 51% n=121 of 238 of participants' academic choices. Both factors had a positive influence on academic choice (Adams, Pryor, & Adams, 1994). The future earnings potential would have a positive influence on the students' academic choice as part of the mechanism of costs and benefits analysis. Indeed, from both previous studies, the differences between the influencing factors might be a result of students' analysis of the costs and benefits of the academic choices.

In terms of the costs and benefits of the rational or educational choice, Beekhoven et al. formed three mechanisms for the costs and benefits analysis of academic choices, which

are the family income, the social costs of dropping out of university study and the students' subjective expectations and concerns (Beekhoven et al., 2002). This divides students into different classes depending on the role of these mechanisms. The family income is the first mechanism. This implies that students who come from a high-income family have better access to the financial resources required for obtaining a university degree and so will evaluate the actual costs in a different way than someone with more limited resources. According to the study of Paulsen and John, students from low-income families believed that financial aid and low tuition costs are very important factors in their academic choice, but students from upper and high-income families did not (Paulsen & John, 2002). Therefore, financial resources would influence students' academic choices, because the students from low-income families may not have many academic choices, thus, their rational choice will be determined by the available financial aid and low tuition costs.

The second mechanism is the social costs of dropping out of university study. Facing the social consequences of this is not easy for students. Other social costs may appear when students choose an academic pathway that might embarrass their families or put them in an inappropriate position, although there are other social costs that may make families proud of their children when they succeed in choosing and studying their academic pathway. According to Breen and Goldthorpe, families from different social classes want to avoid their children having any bad experiences which may put them in a worse position than that where they started (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). For example, in the Saudi context, when a student drops out of university after the first year, he will be asked for his reasons for doing so and be blamed by his parents or relatives for this failure. However, students who have dropped out rarely have help and sympathy from people around them such as parents, relatives and friends. The rational choice theory explains how educational or academic decision-making can be applied by students. The students and their parents may sometimes be worried about the costs of studying an undergraduate programme and the benefit to be gained from it after graduation. The costs could be monetary and non-monetary (Glaesser & Cooper, 2013). The decision-making is often a complicated process because the students and their parents are concerned about the likelihood of success and the risk of failure; for example, the consequences of dropping

out of university before achieving their qualification. Both benefits of success and risks of failure rely partly on the family's social background (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997).

The third factor of Beekhoven et al. concerns the students' subjective expectations and concerns about their abilities to succeed in studying their chosen academic pathway (Beekhoven et al., 2002). Most students have an idea about their ability level, although sometimes other people's expectations may enable them to better understand themselves. Students can know more about their abilities by considering subjects they find interesting in high school or from advice of their teachers and career guides. For example, students may choose academic pathway (A) instead of academic pathway (B) because they have positive expectations about their abilities to succeed in studying (A). However, further positive expectations from people who students trusted, such as parents, teachers and career guides, may provide more understanding of their abilities. This may influence their belief in their abilities and, in turn, that would influence their academic choices.

Need and De Jong found that the higher the level of education of students' parents, the more likely the students were to enrol in university. Also, academic achievement has a significant influence on the students' academic choice. They are more likely to succeed in studying their chosen academic pathway and avoiding downward mobility (Need & De Jong, 2001). The rationality of the students' academic choice must be comprehended, not only from a cost–benefit perspective, but also relative to the students' social starting point, which is the family's social background. The family background is considered to have a substantial influence on the costs, benefits and risks of the students' academic choice (Glaesser & Cooper, 2013). For example, the family can encourage their children to choose and succeed in studying their selected academic pathway to gain the benefit of higher earnings later. In contrast, the family may discourage the children from choosing what they want to study and force them to choose another academic pathway or find other choices to help the family financially.

Rational choice theory is one of the useful theories that helps researchers to explore more about some people's acts, although this theory has no answer to 'why' questions regarding those acts. It can explore 'how' people make the rational choices or make their decisions in order to explain the role of factors behind those decisions and choices. In terms of criticising rational choice theory, as can be seen, it concentrates more on financial resources, socio-economic and economic rewards, to interpret the educational decisions made by students rather than cultural factors. To demonstrate that, the key concept of the rational choice theory is the evaluation of the costs and benefits of the potential academic choices. However, this evaluation may not help to explain the influence of financial factors on the students' academic choice, because this study has been conducted in a public Saudi university where there are no tuition fees (as the MoE provides most of the undergraduate programmes at public universities). Nevertheless, later earnings may still be an interesting factor to be evaluated because the costs and benefits of the academic choices, whether social or financial, are important and valuable in Saudi culture.

In conclusion, the rational choice theory would be another approach to explain the factors influencing the academic choice of the first-year university students. The influence of expected factors could be positive or negative, and therefore the consequences would be based on that influence. Rational choice theory may help to understand how students evaluated the costs and benefits of the possible academic choices. This evaluation may determine which academic pathway would be chosen and may also give students some confidence to study and succeed in their academic pathway. These ideas are used to frame this research. However, as mentioned before, the MoE in Saudi provides most of the undergraduate programmes with free tuition fees for students, therefore, that may affect some of the financial or economic aspects of the rational choice theory and the interpretation of some results.

2.10 Conceptual framework

Some concepts in this research have several definitions and meanings. These concepts can be used in different topics and fields. Sometimes, the definitions of the same concept

may differ from one another in the same field. In terms of this research, there are two key controversial concepts. The first concept is the career guidance. Scholars have defined this concept based on the purpose of their topic or research. The definition may be more complicated because this concept is a noun phrase. Examples of definitions can be found from different perspectives on career guidance. The second key concept in this research is the first-year university students, which might be defined differently among institutions of higher education around the world. Thus, this research clarifies the meaning of who are the first-year university students in the Saudi context.

Career guidance has been defined as, "helping individuals to choose between the full range of available opportunities, in relation to their distinctive abilities, interests and values" (Watts, 2013, p. 242). Moreover, career guidance was described as a "support in relation to development, choice and placement in educational options and occupations or work roles" (Esbroeck, 2008, p. 36). Both definitions share the same aim, which is to help and support individuals to select from different choices, whether educational or occupational, in relation to their development, abilities and interests.

Another comprehensive definition of career guidance is as follows:

> Career guidance is a collection of "activities and programmes that assist individuals to assimilate and integrate knowledge, experience, and appreciations related to:
>
> 1. Self-understanding, which includes a person's relationship to his/her own characteristics and perceptions, and his/her relationship to others and the environment.
> 2. Understanding of the work of society and those factors that affect its constant change, including worker attitudes and discipline.
> 3. Awareness of the part leisure time may play in a person's life.
> 4. Understanding of the necessity for and the multitude of factors to be considered in career planning.
> 5. Understanding of the information and skills necessary to achieve self-fulfilment in work and leisure.

6. Learning and applying the career decision-making process" (Sears, 1982, p. 139).

This definition focuses on career and work aspects to help individuals to understand themselves, make career plans and understand how the community works. It has no relation to educational purposes.

These definitions have demonstrated different points of views about career guidance. However, this research has combined these points of view to create a suitable definition of career guidance to clarify the meaning sought. Thus, career guidance can be defined as a service provided for students to help them to choose an appropriate academic pathway according to their abilities, interests and tendencies to study and obtain their desired job in the same field in future.

In terms of higher education in Saudi, first-year university students study in a preparatory programme. In some universities this is called an orientation year, which is the first year for all new students at university. The preparatory programme at the E university is conducted for the new undergraduate students for one year. In this programme, students study a general curriculum which is relevant to their academic pathway. For example, students who choose the health pathway will study some general subjects in health, science, English, sport and Islamic culture. The purpose of this programme is to classify them into specific pathways of academic subjects for the next years of study. The final grades of the preparatory programme determine the specific subject that students can choose for the subsequent years.

2.11 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework was chosen based on the purpose and aims of this study, which sought to explore and understand the factors influencing the academic choices of first-year university students. Several useful theories can be used to interpret and understand the influence of these factors from different perspectives, for example, social, economic,

educational and psychological. These factors might be from the students' social environment or from the educational environment at university and school, which this research focused on. The habitus and social and cultural background of the students are interesting aspects of Bourdieu's theory. This research focuses on different aspects in relation to the social and educational context that provides a useful approach with which to explore and understand the factors influencing the academic choice of first-year university students. Moreover, for a deeper understanding of the academic choices of these students, the rational choice theory presents a helpful explanation for this research to understand the process of how students made their decisions about the academic pathway within the influence of the social and educational factors. The process of making academic decisions is an interesting field for the rational choice theory because students will usually analyse the costs and benefits of their academic choices to decide which of them is appropriate for them. Thus, Bourdieu's theory, habitus, and social and cultural capital, and the rational choice theory, are the conceptual framework of this research study.

Indeed, Bourdieu's theory is interested in the relations between academic achievement and social and cultural background and how these backgrounds may affect academic achievement and performance. Therefore, in this research, Bourdieu's theory helped to interpret and understand the participants' responses to the questionnaire and interview. Furthermore, the process of making academic decisions is an interesting field for the rational choice theory because students will usually analyse the costs and benefits of their academic choices to decide which of them is appropriate for them. Thus, using rational choice theory enabled the researcher to understand and explain how participants make their choices about their desired academic pathway.

3 Chapter Three – Paradigm

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3.1 Paradigm rationale

The current research is grounded on the constructivism and interpretivism paradigms of educational and career guidance inquiry, and allows in-depth exploration and understanding of the process of the academic choice within the influences of other related factors. Ontology and epistemology are the main concepts of the paradigm used. Researchers conduct studies depending upon their beliefs about the nature of the social world around them (epistemology), and also in relation to the question 'what can they know about it?' (ontology). Ontology involves questions about whether or not human conceptions and interpretations are involved in the social reality that exists independently (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

3.1.1 Ontology

According to Porta and Keating, the ontology concept refers to the study of the essence of a certain phenomenon. This is from a philosophical perspective. They added that in social sciences, ontology can refer to what we can know and to the units that make up the social world, such as individuals (Porta & Keating, 2008). Ontology is how we think about our approach to research, by first considering how we can know more about the social world as it exists. The main aim of considering ontology is to avoid naïve empiricism. The idea is that the social world exists independently of our perspectives (Pring, 2015). Ontological discussion enables us to consider the two main positions of how best to know and understand the social world. Ontology has two positions to explain the social reality and its relevant factors. Objectivism refers to the objective point view of the social reality; this emphasises that social reality and its phenomena exist independently of social actors. This implies that people's opinions and behaviour have no relation with the social reality. Ontology is concerned with some interesting social questions, such as whether social entities are objective entities in which social actors are separated from reality, or whether they are social constructions which have been built up from perceptions and experiences of social actors (Bryman, 2012).

In contrast, the other ontological position is constructivism. This position implies that social actors are responsible for the social phenomenon and its activities. The actors have achieved most of the actions in the social world (Bryman, 2012). Constructivist social phenomena state that the existing reality and its actions have different causes; some of them are related to people. Each individual has constructed knowledge and has built his or her experiences through social interaction. Therefore, these causes come from this constructed knowledge and experience (M. Given, 2008). The constructivist position is achieved by a focus on knowledge and experience, because social reality is only knowable through understanding the socially constructed meanings that are shared between people. It focuses on investigating phenomena (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Indeed, Bryman has emphasised that if social reality is an external reality and objective, the social actors would feel constrained to develop and build their knowledge and experiences (Bryman, 2012). For example, when social actors confront current social issues, they must look back to what older people have done and start from their endpoint to solve these issues. Therefore, if they sought to address their concerns as an external reality and objective position, they would be unable to achieve a solution, because the current social environment and actors' knowledge and experience are different to the previous ones. Social organisation and culture are important factors, as people use them to assist them in understanding the world around them (Bryman, 2012). In fact, a researcher is also a subject in this position. This position allows researchers to understand how the social world is constructed, rather than understanding an external world. Researchers consider problems in more detail to understand and identify causes and effects, so as to provide appropriate solutions or suggestions.

3.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is a philosophical concept which concerns the creation of knowledge. It raises some relevant questions in terms of knowing and exploring the social world around us, including what people need to do to produce knowledge, and also what does the constructed understanding look like? (Neuman, 2013). The epistemological position concerns whether the social world can be studied by using the same principles, procedures and methods of the natural sciences. The two key epistemological positions are positivism and interpretivism. Interpretivism focuses on how social actions happened,

rather than focusing on what has just happened (Porta & Keating, 2008). Positivism indicates that the methods of the natural sciences can be applied to study the social reality. However, interpretivism states that studying social reality must take into account differences between actors and the objects of the natural sciences. Therefore, social scientists need to understand the subjective concept of social phenomena (Bryman, 2012).

3.1.3 Positivism

The positivist position implies that researchers can know and learn about the social world by using the methods of the natural sciences such as observation and experimentation. These methods are appropriate and convenient when seeking knowledge about the social world, because this position claims that social phenomena can be acquired objectively through these methods. Positivists believe that the social world is comprised of law-like regularities (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In this sense, positivism perceives social reality as objective, therefore it employs observation and measurements of social events. It is not concerned with understanding people's meanings and beliefs. Thus, the positivists' position aims to be considered as carrying out value-free social research. A positivist position deals with a social world that is seen as identical to the physical world and, as a result, it applies methods of natural science to the social world.

3.1.4 Interpretivism

The social interpretivist position has emerged as the opposite view to that of the positivist, where researchers and social scientists recognise that there are differences between social phenomena which are impossible to understand, explore and investigate through the methods of natural science. This implies that researchers cannot be objective in research, as they have to be subjective to understand and explain the social phenomena (Bryman, 2012). Thus, there are multiple truths and each one has been constructed by people's experiences. Ritchie and Lewis stress that there is a relationship between researchers and participants, too. Hence, social reality cannot be objective or an external reality exist independent of people's beliefs and meanings (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The paradigms applied in this research are interpretivism and constructivism. The two positions are appropriate methods to explore and understand the research problem in more depth. The process of academic choice and deciding which academic pathway would be suitable for the first-year university students is complicated because it is influenced by other related factors. It would be simple and easy to explore the causes of the academic choice and the influences of the factors, although that would not be sufficient to understand how and why students made their decision of chosen academic pathway. Using these two paradigms offers a perfect opportunity to explore the critical influential factors for academic choice. Moreover, it enables understanding of the influences of the factors from the participants' perspectives. The career guidance service would be able to provide sufficient services for students to assist them in determining and choosing the appropriate academic pathway if it has explored and understood the role of the influential factors in the process of academic choice.

3.2 Methodology

According to the paradigms utilised, the research methodology is the mixed methods approach, which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Both follow scientific conditions and rules, although each method has specific independent processes and purposes. In terms of clarifying these methods, Punch stated that quantitative research focuses on the data in the form of numbers. However, qualitative research focuses on the data which is not numerical (Punch, 2005). The following paragraphs demonstrate the differences between these research methods.

3.2.1 Qualitative research methods

The essential purpose of the qualitative research method is to explore particular social phenomena using a small number of participants in order to obtain more detailed information. This allows it to achieve 'depth' when exploring and understanding (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006). The data collected has different formats that depend on the methodology of the research. For example, qualitative research seeks to gather textual data through audiotapes, videotapes and field notes (Mack, Woodsong, McQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Usually, most social research has a problem or research gap,

which researchers are interested in exploring, understanding or explaining in order to fill the gap or solve the problem (Kumar, 2011). Therefore, several approaches can help to obtain the data which might be used to answer the question of 'why or how' the social phenomena happened; for example, interview, questionnaire, observation and case study.

In relation to the current research, exploring important factors of academic choice, and understanding the influence of these factors on the academic decision of the first-year university students, are the primary purposes. This implies that using the qualitative methodology will provide a clear understanding of how students made their academic decision within the relevant factors. Moreover, this methodology will offer a deep understanding of the role of the influential factors in their academic choice.

Qualitative research is a flexible approach to obtain detailed responses and information from the participants regarding the research problem. The open-ended questions provide the perfect opportunity for the participants to answer the researcher's questions with no limitations or obstacles. The participants may find these questions more suitable than other kinds of questions about their perspectives on the related issues. Moreover, the researcher has an opportunity to interact with the participants during the interview when that is necessary; for example, to clarify something or add more details to a specific point by asking why, how and other interesting questions. However, asking open-ended questions requires some professional skills in order to obtain more valuable information from the participants. For example, it is necessary to listen carefully to the participants' responses in order to decide how to ask further questions, record every single participant's words and review the summary of the highlight points of the interview (Mack et al., 2005). Indeed, Ritchie and Lewis stated that the qualitative research method could explore social phenomena and understand them from different perspectives with more details (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Diversity and deepness are the essential values of qualitative methodology. Normally, deductive logic is the basis of this type of research method, rather than the inductive basis (Kumar, 2011). The inductive qualitative approach encourages a slow evolution, analysis and flexible evaluation of the specific

study's purposes based on what the researcher found and learned from the data obtained (Neuman, 2013).

3.2.2 Quantitative research method

Another methodology is quantitative research, which allows researchers seek to test the determined hypotheses which have been stated at the beginning. Quantitative research is a deductive approach and relies on a causal perspective (Neuman, 2013). For example, it is possible to explore the causal perspective in the relation between students' academic choices and the influences of related factors. Moreover, this approach can be construed as a research strategy that emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012). The interesting data of quantitative research is numerical data, which can be obtained by assigning numerical values to responses to the questionnaire or survey. A large number of responses from participants who have been chosen by a scientific method would encourage the researcher to generalise the results to the research community, because of the variety of sources of data obtained (Mack et al., 2005).

Moreover, collecting a large number of participants' responses provides breadth of vision to the research problem, because of the variety of data and cases, which usually enables a deductive form of analysis (Neuman, 2013). With quantitative research, variables are used in forming which type of data is required. These variables relate to the properties of participants' cases and subjects and also the relationship between them; for example, the causal relation between students' achievement and family stability (Porta & Keating, 2008). Quantitative research questions are closed-ended and fixed, which means that all participants are asked identical questions in the same order. However, sometimes, researchers use a few open-ended questions regarding specific answers to the closed-ended questions. The only differences here are that the participants' responses are 'yes' or 'no' or sometimes there are some other fixed levels of multiple choices. The key benefit of this type of question is that participants' responses will provide a meaningful comparison of their responses because of lack of flexibility provided by the questions and their answers (Mack et al., 2005).

3.2.3 Mixed methods research

Mixed methods research has been defined by Bryman as a study that "integrates quantitative and qualitative research within a single project" (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, mixed methods can be defined as "research in which the inquirer or investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a programme of study" (M. Given, 2008, p. 526). This implies that one research study integrates two different methods, such as a questionnaire with observation, but not combining interviews with a focus group. Interestingly, Porta and Keating stated that it would be easy to assert that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is equivalent to the difference between positivist and interpretivist epistemologies. And, also, it would be a simplification to say that these methods are ways of obtaining the required data (Porta & Keating, 2008). The empirical data in mixed methodology can gather numerical and verbal data to obtain rounded and reliable data. The overall picture of the research problem is gained by using a survey approach; moreover, the individual and group interviews and focus groups provide a more fine-grained analysis of the data obtained (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Mixed methods combine the advantages and strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. All quantitative and qualitative research has some weaknesses and bias, although the combination of both quantitative and qualitative data will balance out the weaknesses of each category of data (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, researchers conduct mixed methods research to benefit from combining the powerful points and advantages of each research method.

Mixed methods provide some features for researchers, for example, databases can explain and support each other, researchers can build one database on other databases, and also, researchers can find better instruments based on one database, especially when the instruments are unsuitable for a particular research sample or population (Creswell, 2013). According to Leavy, different forms of data could be linked when the quantitative data correspond directly to the qualitative database. The quantitative research can be an initial stage of research by conducting a questionnaire with the broad research population. Subsequently, some of the respondents to the questionnaire may take part in interviews to provide more details and explain further important issues concerning interesting points

identified by the researcher from their responses to the questionnaire (Leavy, 2014). Interestingly, Bryman mentioned that in the cultural capital study, most researchers took an unusual step of asking the interviewees about their answers to the questionnaire in order to obtain more interesting details and to ensure that their written and spoken responses corresponded (Bryman, 2012).

Mixed methods are a useful strategy to obtain a comprehensive understanding of research problems. For example, some interesting quantitative data can be compared with other different perspectives provided from qualitative data or some quantitative results can be supported by some relevant and interesting qualitative data (Creswell, 2013). However, there are some difficulties in conducting mixed methods. In other words, when researchers seek to use different research methods, most of the procedures of data collection and data analysis will be doubled and become more complicated. For example, using two methods in one research study requires exceptional preparation and skills to conduct and control the instruments. There will be more than one database, which demands different approaches to data analysis. Mixed methods may consume more time and effort from researchers and participants, although the outcomes of the collected data will provide greater understanding and explanation of the research problem due to the connection and support between databases.

In this current research, mixed methods was chosen to collect relevant information from participants in order to explore the important factors of the academic choice for the first-year university students in Saudi and, in addition, to obtain a clear understanding of the role of these important factors from participants' perspectives. The questionnaire provided a wide picture of the factors related to the academic choice. Also, the subsequent interviews added further information and explanations about the participants' responses to the questionnaire. An in-depth understanding emerged from the link between questionnaire answers and interview responses, because the interviewees explained more and expressed their answers to the questionnaire and the role of important factors in the academic choice, by answering 'why and how' to the researcher's questions.

3.3 Methods of data collection

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire can be defined as "a written list of questions, the answers to which are recorded by respondents" (Kumar, 2011, p. 138). Moreover, Bhattacherjee stated that a questionnaire "is a research instrument consisting of a set of questions (items) intended to capture responses from respondents in a standardized manner" (Bhattacherjee, 2012, p. 74). These two definitions stress that a questionnaire has a set of fixed questions which are related to the same subject. The current research has conducted a self-completion questionnaire, which means "A questionnaire that the respondent answers without the aid of an interviewer. Sometimes called a self-administered questionnaire" (Bryman, 2012, p. 716). The purpose of this instrument is to explore participants' responses to the same set of questions. It also provides a perfect chance to compare a variety of responses. In terms of mixed methods, the essential role of the questionnaire is offering a wide ranging database about the research problem, which would support the qualitative data. There are several modes for the administration of a questionnaire, such as postal, supervised and via the internet. Internet mode was suitable for this research. It has two sub-modes: web and email (Bryman, 2012). The method used in this research study was email and the link to the questionnaire has been provided.

There some advantages of using a self-completion questionnaire in educational and social research. Neuman indicated that researchers can conduct it at very low cost and it can cover a wide geographical area. The participants can respond at any convenient time for them, and they can check and search for personal records if it is necessary. The data obtained can be easily analysed. However, there are some concerns about this type of instrument, as some participants may not complete and return the email questionnaire. The low response rate is the biggest problem for researchers. Also, it is difficult to observe respondents' reactions to questions. It is not suitable for some kinds of questions, such as those that require visual aids or are complex (Neuman, 2013). The response-rate issue is a challenge when conducting a self-completion questionnaire, especially when the research sample is randomly selected. In contrast, Bryman stated that the response rate cannot be less significant if the research is based on a convenience sample, although

students may find a self-completion questionnaire attractive because it would not cost them a great deal, and it is easy to respond to and administrate (Bryman, 2012). If the researcher is concerned about the response rate, there are some tips and skills to increase them. For example, providing rewards for completed and returned questionnaires, ensuring that questions and instructions are easy to read, and sending reminders to the participants to finish answering the survey and return it (Cohen et al., 2007).

The researcher constructed the questionnaire elements based on information from relevant studies and from his experience of student guidance in high school and college. In high school, the common concerns among students were: which academic pathway shall I choose? How can I make the right academic choice? What is my future job? As a lecturer at university, and a faculty member of the guidance centre in the college of education, the researcher encountered several cases of students who had some concerns about their future job, academic choice, university challenges or choosing the specific academic subject for the next years. In other interesting situations, some students changed their academic pathway or moved to another university because their academic choice was not suitable for their tendencies and abilities or because it would lead to a job they did not want. These experiences and other relevant reading helped the researcher to create the self-completion questionnaire.

The questionnaire provided for the first-year university students offered a wide picture of the important factors which had influenced the students' academic choice. Furthermore, the questionnaire provided adequate information such as students' backgrounds, social classes, decisions and tendencies towards their academic choice. The purpose of gathering this sort of information was to give the researcher the opportunity to prepare the qualitative instrument of this research. The questionnaire was produced in English. After completion with all the required aspects of study, the researcher obtained his supervisor's permission. Then, it was translated into Arabic which is the first language of the participants and the researcher. A copy of the English questionnaire is in the Chapter Four – Results. The pilot study was performed with several lecturers and doctors who worked at college of education at E university. This process was important to ensure

that the questionnaire was easy to read and understand, and that it covered all elements of the research problem. It complied with the ethical requirements provided by the university to protect the rights of everyone involved in this research. All interested participants signed a consent form before answering.

The questionnaire required respondents, first-year university students, to give information about the role families, schools and career guidance services had played in the academic choices that were made by them, and the main challenges that they faced whether in making their academic decisions or after choosing their academic pathway. It also dealt with the services that could support students' academic decision-making in order to choose the specific academic subject after finishing the first year, from their perspective. These points were the main themes of this research.

The questionnaire consisted of five stages to obtain related and significant responses from the students. The first stage was personal and family information and background, which provided essential information to understand the students' social position. The second stage was the role of family. In this part, the researcher wished to focus on the factors close to the students. High schools, which was the third stage, are supposed to play a substantial role in preparing students to move on to the next education level; that is university experience. The fourth stage was university career guidance services, which looked at the students' perceptions toward this service. The last stage explored the challenges that first-year university students faced whether in making their decision or after they had chosen their academic pathway. These five stages provided a clear picture of the important factors influencing the first-year university students. The purpose of this questionnaire was to obtain a wide picture with regard to those factors which are important in terms of the role of the main themes family, school and career guidance services.

It is important to note that although this research is situated within an interpretative framework, the self-completion questionnaire was chosen as a method that was the most

convenient and appropriate to capture the key areas of interest. This method was the most appropriate for capturing the experiences of both male and female first-year students, in a way that was sensitive and respectful of the culture surrounding gender in Saudi; it, therefore, offered a way to be inclusive of all students, not just some.

3.3.2 Interview

One of the commonly used qualitative methods is an interview, which is defined as "Any person-to-person interaction, either face to face or otherwise, between two or more individuals with a specific purpose in mind" (Kumar, 2011, p. 137). The interaction between interviewer and interviewee is related to the research problem to obtain adequate and clear, relevant information from the interviewees' perspective. The qualitative interview can be conducted in several ways by the researcher, depending on the needs of the research problem and the number of the sample. According to Creswell, the qualitative researcher can conduct face-to-face interviews with participants, or telephone interviews, or engage in focus group interviews with between six to eight participants in each group (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative interview is considered to be a relationship and interaction between interviewer and interviewee which has been regulated by some conditions and procedures (Cassell & Symon, 2004). It is a relationship because the interviewer has created a temporary professional relationship with the participants in relation to the research topic; this an interaction between them by asking questions and answering them with some comments. The primary purposes of the interview are obtaining relevant information, measuring participants' feelings and expressions and asking the participants some specific questions about some interesting details about their responses to the questionnaire.

The interview sought more details regarding the respondents' answers to the questionnaire. There was a question at the end of the questionnaire to ask for the respondents' agreement to participate in the interview. Thus, the participants who were interested in joining an interview needed to select 'agree'. The researcher reviewed these participants' answers to the questionnaire and composed some questions regarding the interesting and essential answers, and also some questions to obtain further explanations

and information that was not mentioned in the questionnaire. The average interview time was between 30 and 45 minutes, depending on the details provided by the interviewees. The researcher used voice recording to record the interviews to review and code them later.

The interviewer must have some skills and follow other essential instructions to achieve an effective interview that obtains most of the desired information from the interviewees. The interview is a social interaction between two people, interviewer and interviewee. The crucial elements for an active and effective interview are listening and attending to what the interviewees are talking about. This implies that the interviewer should be attuned, alert and attentive to what happens during the interview, whether to what interviewees are telling the interviewer or even not telling him/her. Listening consists of other relevant skills. For example, whilst listening the interviewer must focus on how to ask a question; this is a foundation step for the interviewer to be able to respond to what the interviewees are saying. The timing between listening and asking the questions is crucial, to follow up their answers effectively and sensitively (Edwards & Holland, 2013). An interviewer needs to offer a sympathetic ear to the interviewees and encourage participants to give more details in their answers, although the interviewer should not interrupt them, express approval nor judge the content and context. The core of the interview is to establish a positive and dynamic relationship between interviewer and interviewees in order to give the participants confidence to explain the role of the important factors in their academic choice. However, the researcher must prepare an appropriate atmosphere to achieve helpful and valuable responses (Mack et al., 2005).

Qualitative researchers commonly use two types of interview: semi-structured and unstructured. In a normal semi-structured interview, the researcher has a list of key points with regard to the research topic or to participants' responses to a questionnaire. Although there is a list of the questions that must be covered by the participants' answers, this type of interview has a flexibility in when and how these questions are asked and how the participants would like to respond. The researcher has an ideal opportunity to investigate responses and continue the conversation which has been opened by the interviewees.

Usually, the interviewees become interested in the content and context of the interview when they understand its purpose. In addition, with the semi-structured interview, the researcher provides much more free space for the participants to express their points from their perspective, more than in a structured interview (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Given these features of the semi-structured interview, the researcher decided to conduct this type of interview to obtain more details about the participants' responses to the questionnaire and understand their perspectives on the influence of the important factors on their academic choice. This also gave the researcher the chance to discuss further interesting relevant points about the research topic with the participants.

In this research, the interview relied upon the respondents' responses to the questionnaire, especially those who were interested in participating in the interview. The responses were reviewed and analysed to highlight the interesting and debatable points. Sometimes, there were reasons behind specific responses which participants could not explain because there were closed-ended questions or the answers to opened-ended questions were not sufficient to explain the mysteries of 'why and how'. Verbal answers, sometimes, are more straightforward than written ones. Also, the researcher was able to observe the reactions, emotions and facial expressions during the interviews. See Table 7-3 in the Appendices for an example of analysing and highlighting the responses to the family. In the current research, all interviewees were given options to choose the appropriate method for conducting the interview, such as face-to-face, telephone or email. However, the male interviewees were interviewed face-to-face, and the female interviewees preferred the telephone and email interview methods. The female interviewees' preferences are a result of the Saudi culture. The Saudi context respects female students' right to choose the most comfortable method to participate in interviews, therefore, the telephone and email interview styles were alternative methods for them.

3.4 Sampling and participants

It is difficult for researchers to obtain interesting data from a large group of people to study social phenomena in different societies. Neuman defined the research population as "a large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample and to which

results from a sample are generalized" (Neuman, 2013, p. 247). In relation to the current research, the population was the first-year university students at E university. Thus, conducting mixed methods research for the first-year university students was not an easy procedure. Therefore, choosing a small number of those students was an appropriate choice to conduct the research. The concept of sampling is defined by Kumar as "the process of selecting a few [as] a sample from a bigger group the sampling population to become the basis for estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group" (Kumar, 2011, sec. 177). Moreover, in another sampling definition Neuman stated that a sample was a "small set of cases a researcher selects from a large pool and generalizes to the population" (Neuman, 2013, p. 246). According to these definitions, the researcher had to consider estimating the average specifications of the sampling population to determine the representative sample. This was an essential process in choosing a research sample.

Selecting the sample from the target population involves three steps to achieve a representative sample. The first step is targeting the specific population, for example, this research targeted the first-year university student. The second step is to determine the sampling frame, which means the specifics of the research sample, such as the first-year university students in health and humanities pathways. The last step is selecting the sample by using a useful sampling technique, whether sampling or non-probability sampling (Bhattacherjee, 2012). This research used a non-probability (convenience) sampling technique. Bryman demonstrated the purpose of using convenience sampling when the population is naturally available to the researcher (Bryman, 2012). The convenience sampling was suitable for the current research because the researcher is a faculty member at E University. As a faculty member, he had an excellent opportunity to contact the university administration to obtain a letter granting permission to conduct the study (See Figure 7-1 in the Appendices). However, he had to sign a letter pledging to follow the ethics of scientific research in accordance with university regulations in order to obtain the permission letter (See Figure 7-2 in the Appendices). The researcher was also able to distribute the questionnaire among the chosen sample of first-year university students and conduct the subsequent interviews.

In 2017, according to the statistics department at the University, the population of students in the deanship of the preparatory year was almost 5,000 students. They were distributed to a variety of academic pathways, such as the scientific pathway, engineering pathway, health pathway and humanities pathway. In this research, the health pathway and humanities pathway were selected to be the research population. In 2017, during the conduct of this research, the health pathway consisted of 490 male students and 370 female students. Additionally, the humanities pathway had 60 male students and 1,200 female students. The researcher aimed to obtain a helpful and representative sample from those academic pathways to conduct the study. The target size of the sample was between 300 to 400 students, depending on the number of responses to the questionnaire which was sent to all students in both academic pathways through the university email. Regarding the interviews, the target number of interviews was between 10 and 15, although the number of participants was determined by the number of participants responding to a question at the end of the questionnaire, which asked them if they were interested in participating in interviews.

3.5 Data analysis

The current research collected qualitative and quantitative data using mixed methods. Usually, the researcher's method of collecting data determines the statistical approach and analysis procedures. The analysis methods for the quantitative data was descriptive analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences programme (SPSS). All responses to the questionnaire were transformed into numbers; for example, the answer "I strongly disagree" was scored 1 and "I strongly agree" was scored 5. Thus, the scale was between 1 and 5. However, the interview responses were analysed by thematic analysis. Therefore, there were three main themes according to the research sub-questions, which were family, school and career guidance in high school. The responses were processed using descriptive and inferential statistics, which means that a cross-comparison was conducted frequently to analyse the questionnaire data. The researcher compared male and female students, in general, and between health and humanities pathways in some specific comparisons. The purpose of using cross-comparison and other essential descriptive and inferential techniques was to allow the researcher to realise

the whole picture of the participants' responses and to prepare adequately for the interviews. It also enabled him to select the interviewees.

The interviewees were 10 out of 58 participants who were interested in participating in the interview. The low number was due to the examinations during the data collection period. All participants who were interested in the interview received two reminder messages on the mobile phone number provided. Ten responded to the researcher and confirmed that they were still interested in participating in the interview. Neuman defined the descriptive analysis for the quantitative data as "a general type of simple statistics used by researchers to describe basic patterns in the data" (Neuman, 2013, p. 396). This research sought to explore a wide picture of the important factors for the academic choice of the first-year university students. Hence, the statistics process used was a basic descriptive one.

In terms of the interview data, thematic analysis is a common approach among qualitative researchers, with a general agreement about the principles of defining the concept of themes in data. This term is related to the extraction of main themes in participants' data within the qualitative analysis method. Themes refer to the information that the interviewee has repeated several times in different positions during the interview (Bryman, 2012). The interview data recorded was transcribed, including context, facial expressions and body language. Most of the interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes. There were three main themes based on the sub-questions of this research, and each theme had some sub-themes to cover most of the relevant aspects of the main themes. The language of the interviews was Arabic, although the repeated themes were translated into English. The thematic analysis used provided additional details about the influence of the important factors on the academic choice of participants. The researcher benefited from the interviews in understanding the process of the academic decision-making and the challenges that followed. The repetition and clarification of themes helped the researcher to justify the influence of the important factors from the interviewees' perspectives.

3.6 Ethical issues

This research met the requirements of the Ethical Approval Form and received approval from the relevant Dean of the Deanship of the Preparatory Year and Supporting Studies at E university (See Figure 7-3 in the Appendices). The researcher sent a questionnaire to all the first-year students who were studying either the health pathway or the humanities pathway through their university email address. The online questionnaire was coded to provide the required consent from the participants. Therefore, those students had to provide their consent to participate in the questionnaire; otherwise, it did not allow them to participate. Regarding the interview, several participants provided their consent to participate in the interview. All participants were informed about the purpose of this research and how their responses would be analysed and used to contribute to knowledge. Moreover, the participants were informed and reminded that they had the right to withdraw at any time during participation in the questionnaire or the interview.

There was potentially an issue regarding the effects of power relationships on the data obtained because the researcher is a faculty member. First, when the faculty members have the scholarship to complete their postgraduate study, they must obtain a clearance request. This request is for clearance with all workflow related to them as faculty members. This procedure means that there is no power over or connection with university students. This clearance provides an appropriate opportunity for the researcher to be unbiased because there is no relation or influence from the university on the research data and the results. The fundamental purpose of this research was to obtain participants' perspectives on the role of factors that may influence their academic choices. Despite that, there is one section in the questionnaire that aimed to gather participants' perspectives on the expected benefits from the suggested career guidance services. Overall, the research had no intention of evaluating or reviewing some issues which are directly related to the university. Moreover, the researcher is a faculty member at an education college which is located on a different campus to the main campus. Therefore, the researcher had no power or authority which may have affected the responses and caused a deviation in the results from the normal track. However, this research focused on exploring the important factors for the academic choices of students and understanding the role of each factor in their academic decision. These factors have been determined as

being those closest to the students, such as family, school and career guidance in high school.

According to the previous point, the bias issue did not exist because there was no influence of power relationships. Moreover, this research was prepared for a variety of outcomes depending on the participants' responses to the questionnaire and interview. This means this research did not form any hypothesis, which was one of various elements used to avoid any bias. However, the researcher started each interview by introducing himself as a graduate student from the E university, a faculty member and a graduate student. Moreover, he shared with the interviewees his experience with making an academic choice. This brief introduction helped interviewees to answer the questions and disclose their experiences with their academic choice and share the positive and negative points about their decisions and experiences. They felt that the researcher was close to them and could understand what they were trying to convey. During the interview, the researcher mentioned a few experiences of his friends and fellow students as well. This procedure gave the interviewees some confidence to speak about personal experiences which they may not have disclosed to others. Therefore, the researcher worked hard to provide the interviewees with the most confidential, suitable and friendly atmosphere so that they felt able to speak with someone able to understand their experience, rather than just someone asking for information. Thus, these procedures were helpful to obtain the most valid data from the interviewees. Moreover, the Arabic language was the main language of the interviews conducted, although Arabic is a totally different language to English. The researcher worked hard to translate the data manually, divided it into themes and kept the ideas similar to the Arabic version. He asked for assistance from his colleagues in order to ensure that the text was translated and analysed efficiently.

There was no relevant factor in the researcher's work as a faculty member and, thus, no power or influence on the participants' responses and data analysis. However, there was one section related to career guidance services in university, which demonstrated participants' perspectives on the expected benefits from these services. Therefore, these

may assist the career guidance centre to provide the most helpful programmes and sufficient services for university students.

In terms of Saudi culture, the female has a special place and unique treatment because she is a mother, sister and wife. She is the core of society and the main source of good, polite, educated and decent generations. Moreover, she is half of society. Therefore, it was very important to include the female voice in this research, to explore and understand the important factors for her academic choice and to help her to plan and build her academic and career future. Obtaining the participation of female students for the questionnaire was not difficult. They received it through the university email system, similar to the male students. However, conducting an interview with female students was not as easy as the researcher expected for several reasons. First, Saudi culture requires special conditions for interviewing female students face-to-face, including university students. For example, one of her parents or siblings or the closet relative should be informed about the interview, just in case there is a need for any support. Also, the interview has to be conducted in a public place with adequate privacy. Moreover, before recording the interview, the researcher must explain why and how it would be recorded and give her the right to decide whether to participate.

In the current research all interviewees were given options to choose the appropriate method for conducting the interview, such as face-to-face, telephone or an email interview. The female interviewees preferred the telephone and email interview methods. Their preferences are a result of Saudi culture. The Saudi context respects female students' right to choose the most comfortable method to participate in interviews, therefore, the telephone and email interview styles were appropriate methods for them. Moreover, arranging a suitable time for female students and an appropriate method to conduct the interview was not easy due to the female participants' preferred time and method to conduct the interview. Ultimately, this was their right.

3.7 The limitations of this research

This research has some limitations which may have affected the procedures used to collect the data through the questionnaire and interviews. These were not serious influences on the outcomes of this research, but it would have been preferable if the researcher had been able to avoid most of the limitations.

The researcher was an insider to the institution. This helped accelerate and facilitate the procedures for conducting the research and gathering the data, and placed him in a better position than other researchers from outside the E university. However, the limited time for conducting the questionnaire and the process of gathering its responses and then analysing them consumed most of the data collection period because the data was collected in Saudi. Therefore, the researcher worked hard to complete everything relevant to this process before he returned to the UK.

During the data collection period, gathering the completed responses from the participants took longer than anticipated. However, due to the procedures for expanding the period of time for the data collection, it would normally take between two and three months to receive approval depending on the strength of the reasons provided. Thus, there was no time to start those procedures. Furthermore, if such expansion had been approved by the sponsor, it would have affected the period of the scholarship in total based on the sponsor's rules and conditions.

The questionnaire was not piloted with students because the researcher had limited time to conduct the questionnaire and follow it up by the interviews. Due to the procedures from the E university, it had taken a long time to obtain final permission to send the questionnaire and conduct the interviews. Therefore, there was no time to pilot the questionnaire and perform intercoder reliability before sending it to the participants. However, the only solution that was available for the researcher was to seek assistance from some assistant professors, associate professors, and professors in his department at

the E university and ask for their professional reviews to criticise and evaluate the questionnaire. Their reviews were constructive and helped him to provide the most complete questionnaire for the participants. The reviews provided the questionnaire with the highest level of validity within stressful circumstances during the data collection. However, the Cronbach's alpha test was conducted to ensure that the questionnaire used was internally reliable. This point is discussed in more detail in the results chapter.

The interviews were conducted under different circumstances. The researcher had provided several choices of times and places to conduct the interviews for students to choose from. The interviews had to be conducted in the most favourable circumstances for the students. Finding appropriate circumstances for them had consumed most of the interview period as well. Furthermore, the exams period affected the total number of interviewees, because the researcher did not have access to the exam schedules for the academic subjects. Usually, these schedules are created by the faculty members who teach the subjects. They alone decide the exact date of their exams. Therefore, it was difficult for the researcher to check these schedules for each interviewee. Thus, the target number of interviews was between 10 and 15.

Moreover, arranging the interviews with students took longer than the researcher expected because their academic homework and obligations kept students busy most of the time, according to the interviewees' explanations. Some of the participants changed or cancelled their interview appointments several times. However, it was their right to find a convenient time and place for them to conduct the interview. Moreover, arranging a suitable time for female students and an appropriate method to conduct the interview was not easy due to Saudi culture and the female participants' preferred time and method to conduct their interview. However, the researcher contacted participants who were interested in the interview many times through their email and contact numbers to encourage them to participate. Indeed, communication with the participants was also difficult due to the intensive academic schedule of the first-year programme. These are the main reasons why the interviews numbered just 10, of which six were males and four females.

3.8 The first attempt to conduct a previous research topic in another university

Before the researcher obtained permission to conduct this research in the E university, he had planned to conduct research in a different university in the same region. The research topic was "Development and improvement of services provided to students by the Centre University guidance and counselling" including career guidance service. The questionnaire was proposed as the primary method of collecting data from university students. This university has established the first counselling and guidance centre among all Saudi universities. It had provided several career guidance programmes and services for students, and it had longer experience in this field than the E university. Unfortunately, the application was rejected because of the privacy and confidentiality of information in the university's records. The communication with the relevant departments was through their official email, and took place during January 2014 (See Figure 7-4 in the Appendices).. However, the researcher respected their decision, and developed a new application to the E university, although the researcher is a faculty member. Fortunately, this university welcomed the current research topic and facilitated its success.

4 Chapter Four – Results

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4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings which were obtained from the questionnaires and interviews. Sometimes, students may make their decision to choose an academic pathway based on their academic preference, or based on the effect of other external factors. For example, their school, family and relatives, the career guidance in high school, their friends, or the demands of the labour market may influence their choices. In fact, the process of decision-making is often complicated because students want a balance between their personal desires and external factors. The potential consequences of their decisions are a part of this complexity, which means the students may be excited about their academic choice because of their academic and career preference, or they may be confused about it because they do not have other choices or do not know exactly what their preferences are.

The questionnaire sought to gather a wide range of data from the participants about the important factors that may affect their academic choices. The data obtained will assist the career guidance department in the university counselling and guidance centre to build and format the career guidance services dependent upon these data. These services will help to meet university students' career needs because the important factors have been explored and understood. Thus, the interviews provided a suitable way to gain a deep understanding of the participants' responses to the questionnaire. The factors gathered might have a positive influence on students' academic choice. Hence, the career guidance service will encourage the students to consider these factors and guide them to rely on them to achieve their future career goal. However, these factors could influence students' academic choice negatively. Thus, the career guidance service must support students to overcome the negative influencing factors and guide them to make the right academic choice based on other valued and positive factors.

The current research sought to achieve a number of aims. The first was to explore the important factors that may affect the academic choice of first-year university students in Saudi Arabia. The second was to understand the role of families and schools with regard to the academic choice of the first-year students. The third aim was to explore the

challenges that first-year students may face after making the decision about their academic pathway. The final aim was to explore the role of the career guidance service with regard to the first-year university students' academic decisions for specific academic subjects for the next year. Therefore, the four research sub-questions were:

1. What role did schools and families play in academic decision-making for first-year university students?
2. What role did career guidance services play in academic decision-making for first-year university students?
3. What were the main challenges that first-year university students faced during and after making their academic decision?
4. What services could support students' academic decision-making about the specific academic subject for the next year from their perspective?

The results chapter has been organised in the following way. First, it presents general information about the sample, including two separate sections containing general details about the male students and female students. The second part provides the questionnaire outcomes, while the third part presents the interview outcomes. The final part summarises the chapter.

4.2 The questionnaire

The questionnaire required respondents, first-year university students, to give information about the role families, schools and career guidance services had played in the academic choices that were made by them, and the main challenges that they faced whether in making their academic decisions or after choosing their academic pathway. It also dealt with the services that could support students' academic decision-making in order to choose the specific academic subject after finishing the first year from their perspective. These points were the main themes of this research.

The questionnaire consisted of five stages to obtain the related and significant responses from students. The first stage was personal and family information and background, which provided essential information to understand the students' social position. The second stage was the role of family. In this part, the researcher wished to focus on the factors close to the students. High schools, which was the third stage, are supposed to play a substantial role in preparing students to move on to the next education level; that is university experience. The fourth stage was university career guidance services, which looked at the students' perceptions toward this service. The last stage explored the challenges that first-year university students faced whether in making their decision or after they had chosen their academic pathway. These five stages provided a clear picture of the important factors influencing the first-year university students. The total number of completed responses 246 were divided into 117 responses from male students and 129 responses from female students. The purpose of this questionnaire was to obtain a wide picture with regard to those factors which are important in terms of the role of the main themes family, school and career guidance services.

The purpose of the Cronbach's Alpha test is to ensure that the constructed questionnaire meets the required level of the coefficient of internal consistency, and that it is reliable. All the questions of all the questionnaire's stages were included in this test except for the first stage, which was about personal and family information and background. Usually, the Cronbach's Alpha ranges from 0 to 1. Therefore, any result above 0.7 is acceptable and implies that the questionnaire is reliable. The researcher used the Social Sciences programme (SPSS) to conduct the Cronbach's Alpha test. The result of the test on the questionnaire used in this research was 0.762, which confirms the reliability of the four stages tested. The factor analysis helps to minimize the number of individual elements into small number of dimensions in order to simplify the data. By using the SPSS, the researcher divided the individual elements of the questionnaire into few number of dimensions, thus, Figure 4-1 shows the scree plot of the factors, above 1.0, where all questions were included.

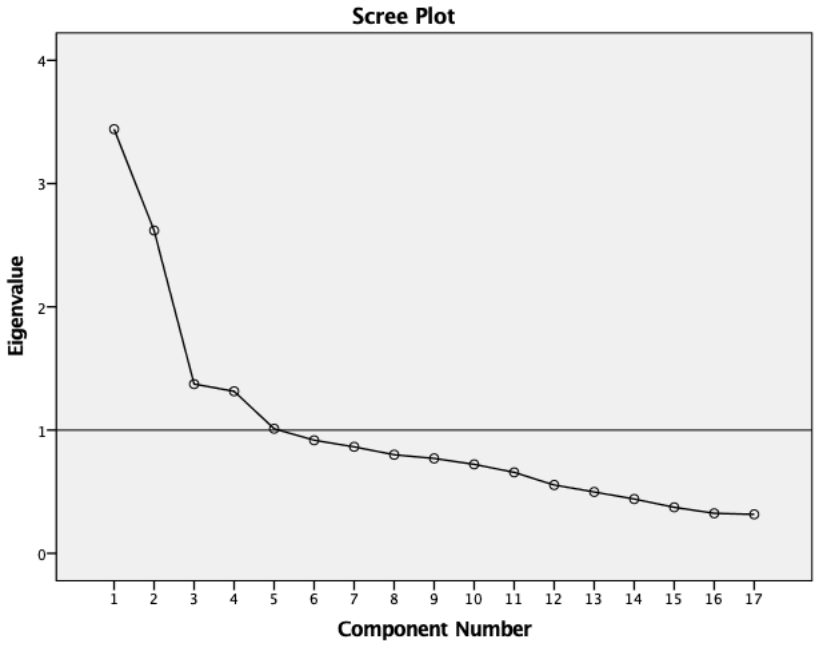

Figure 4-1 The factor analysis: the scree plot is for all questions included in the questionnaire.

4.3 The interview

The interview sought more details regarding the respondents' answers to the questionnaire. There was a question at the end of the questionnaire to ask for the respondents' agreement to participate in the interview. The total number of respondents who agreed and intended to go to the interview were 24% n=58, and 76% n=188 did not want to participate in the interview. After analysing the questionnaire's results, follow-up emails were sent to the 58 interested respondents to remind them and ask if they were still interested. Also, the short message service (SMS) was used to send a message to all participants to make sure that everyone had been reminded. While waiting for the participants' responses, the midterm exams took place in the students' schedule. This may explain why only ten students agreed to attend the interview. The interviewees who did come and join comprised 17% n=10 of 58. As can be seen in Table 4-1, there were four female students, three from the humanities pathway and one from the health pathway. The six male students were all from the health pathway. All participants have been given pseudonyms. The context of the interview was Arabic, and it was translated into English and checked for accuracy by fellow students.

Health pathway	Ali	Saleh	Hind	Saad	Fahd	Adel	Hamad
Humanities pathway	Mona	Suha	Manal				

Table 4-1 Participants' initial academic pathway.

4.4 Sample of the interview questions

All the interview questions were compiled after reviewing the participants' responses to the questionnaire. Below are some examples of the interview questions, which were asked during one participant's interview. Each interviewee had a different context and questions because of his/her perspective. Also, there were some common questions asked during all interviews, but with different wording. Some participants gave long and detailed responses, which led to more questions and comments. Moreover, others gave short responses, which led the interviewer to ask more questions seeking more details about their responses to the questionnaire.

4.4.1 Family section

1. Why didn't your parents have an impact on your choice of current speciality?
2. You have stated that your father did not experience university and your mother did not study at high school, did that influence your academic decision-making?
3. Did your parents have a wish for you to study a specialisation because you are the youngest brother? And what is that speciality? And did that influence your academic choice?
4. Why didn't a family member influence your choice of speciality even though you were the youngest sibling?
5. Did the experience of your older siblings at the university affect your academic choice?
6. What were your siblings' specialities?
7. What was the summary of your conversation with your brothers about the university? Did you identify your academic choice more clearly or did you have a tendency to other choices discussed?

8. Was there an influence of the speciality of relatives on your academic decision?
9. What other academic choices did you think about?
10. Did your ambition to work in the same field as your academic choice in the future influence your current academic choice, and why?
11. What job do you hope for in the future and why?

4.4.2 School section

1. Which teachers have influenced your academic decision?
2. What was that influence?
3. Was this because you like Chemistry and English or the way these subjects' teachers teach?
4. Why did the teachers of Chemistry and English influence your academic decision?

4.4.3 Career guidance in high school section

1. Why did the student guide not influence your academic decision?
2. Why did career guidance programmes not influence your academic choice?
3. What is the name of that book? How did it help you determine your academic choice?
4. What subjects did you enjoy studying in high school?
5. Why do you find enjoyment in studying Chemistry, Biology and English?
6. How did that influence your academic decision?
7. Did the demand in the labour market influence your choice of specialisation?

4.4.4 Challenges section

1. What challenges do you now face with literary subjects specifically and other subjects in the current academic pathway?
2. How can you overcome them?

3. Are there other challenges you face when choosing your current major?

4.5 General information about the research sample

There was a wide variety of academic pathways in the E university. The first-year university students numbered more than 5,000 students in different academic pathways. However, the scholarship has limited time to allow the researcher to conduct his research. Thus, he decided to balance between the time for gathering the data and the range of academic pathways and the number of first-year students. Thus, the researcher looked to the admission requirements among the academic pathways, and he found the health pathway had the most admission requirements. However, the humanities pathway was one with the least admission requirements. Also, the nature of future jobs of both academic pathways is different, although both provide services and support for people directly. This means the nature of the future job was most apparent to the students, although there is no guarantee that they would be successful obtaining that job. Therefore, the researcher became interested in studying the important factors for first-year university students and how students make their academic decisions, taking as an example these two academic pathways.

Regarding the number of female students in the humanities pathway, this pathway is considered to be one of the first available academic pathways for female students, and it has a variety of specific subjects for them to choose from and study in the following years. Previously, the humanities pathway was a more popular academic choice for female students than other new academic pathways that have been provided recently for them. Lately, most of the academic pathways are available for both female and male students. Moreover, the admission requirements may change or be revised annually by the deanship of admission, based on the required standard in levels of achievement, to maintain the capacity of the university and control the number of new students. Thus, the number of newly enrolled students differs each year; that is why the researcher could not estimate the number of newly registered students for the specific year.

In terms of male students, the total enrolment number is lower than female students in the humanities pathway. This is due to the new academic plan that has been designed by the Standing Committee for Study Plans and Programmes in the E university for male students in the humanities pathway. The new plan intends to limit the education college's pathways to provide different academic programmes for the undergraduate students; for example, the high education diploma is for people who have finished their undergraduate studies and want to be teachers or join the educational field. These programmes are provided for both male and females students. The female students still have an option of an undergraduate programme in the humanities pathway. However, there are other universities which still provide a humanities pathway for male students.

The research targeted two academic pathways in the preparatory programme for the first-year university students in one university in Saudi Arabia: the health pathway and the humanities pathway. The questionnaire was sent to all students, male and female, who followed those pathways, and they were reminded by the academic coordinators and group leaders to fill in and submit the questionnaires. As a result of those procedures, 574 students received the questionnaire, and 66.5% n=382 of the students began to complete it. Eventually, 43% n=246 completed responses were received. All students were Saudi except three, one female and one male student from Yemen, and one male student from Jordan. In the research sample, 48% n=117 were male and 52% n=129 were female. During their high school years, 93% n=228 of the students were living with their parents, while the rest were living with either their mother, father or other relatives. The students at E university, located in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia, all lived in the same region. Just over half of the participants 52% n=129 were the middle sibling. Of the remainder, 27% n=67 were the eldest child and 19% n=47 were the youngest. Three participants were only children.

In terms of educational background, most of the participants 89% n=220 had graduated from public high schools, and 11% n=26 had graduated from private high schools. Eighty-two percent n=201 had studied scientific subjects and 18% n=45 literary subjects. Consequently, 29% n=71 had chosen the humanities pathway and 71% n=175 the health

pathway. The level of parental occupation varied, and Table 4-2 below shows the level of educational achievement of both mothers and fathers. From this, it is apparent that a large proportion, over half of the parents, were educated to high school degree and undergraduate degree levels.

	Up to Middle School	High School	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
Mothers	26.5% n=65	32% n=79	35% n=85	7% n=17
Fathers	19% n=46	35% n=87	32.5% n=80	14% n=33

Table 4-2 The educational level of parents of students.

Interestingly, there was almost no difference between fathers and mothers in high school and undergraduate achievement, although the up-to-middle-school achievement group had a small difference between mothers and fathers. The obvious difference was between fathers and mothers in postgraduate achievement. From these comparisons, the fathers were more educated given their achievement in undergraduate and postgraduate study than mothers.

4.5.1 Female students

The total number of female students participating from the health pathway and humanities pathway was 129. Almost all were from Saudi Arabia, with only one from Yemen. During the high school years, almost all of them were living with both their parents, with only 5% n=8 living with a single parent or other relatives.

An important cultural point to note here is the locality of the university. It was near to where the female students lived, as most Saudi families want their children to study at the nearest university to their home. Moreover, the MoE has established several public universities and some other colleges to encourage the local population to study and develop their knowledge. In this case, the location would be a positive influencing factor on their academic choices because it removes any concerns about travelling or living in

a different city to study the academic pathway. However, the location issue may influence students' choices to select a specific academic pathway because of the short distance between their home and university location, rather than choosing their preferred academic pathway at another university far from their home location.

In relation to the female sample, just over half of them 57% n=74 were a middle sister and 28% n=36 the oldest sister; the remainder 15% n=19 were the youngest sister. Ninety-eight percent n=127 of them had graduated from public high schools, the remaining 2% n=2 from private high schools. Almost two-thirds 66% n=85 of the female students had studied scientific subjects in high school, the remainder 34% n=44 literary subjects. Currently, at university, 55% n=71 of the female students have chosen the humanities pathway while the health pathway was selected by only 45% n=58.

In terms of the parents' educational level for female students, Table 4-3 shows that two-thirds of parents had achieved high school degrees and undergraduate degrees. Most of the educational achievements were quite similar between female students' mothers and female students' fathers, except in respect of the postgraduate achievement, where the female students' fathers' achievement was greater.

	Up to Middle School	High School	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
Mothers	23% n=30	36% n=47	36% n=46	5% n=6
Fathers	16% n=21	41% n=53	30% n=39	12% n=16

Table 4-3 The educational level of parents of female students.

4.5.2 Male students

The total number of male students participating from the health pathway was 117. Unfortunately, no male students from the humanities pathway participated. The researcher did not receive any responses from these male students, even after encouraging them and reminding them to respond. A possible reason could be that the total number of

male students in this academic pathway was only 67. This low number could be due to the new academic plan that has been designed by the Standing Committee for Study Plans and Programmes in the E university for male students in the humanities pathway. Almost all were from Saudi Arabia, with one from Yemen and one from Jordan. Almost all of them were living with both their parents, with only 7% n=8 living with a single parent or other relatives during their high school years.

Living near to the university location is a part of Saudi families' culture, which facilitates their children's mobility to study at the nearest university to their home. Thus, all male students were living near to the E university. The university has several campuses around the Eastern region, so it is easily approachable and encourages local people to join. Therefore, Saudi families' usual preference to be near to the university could influence the students' academic choice to study at this university whether or not their preferred academic pathway is available. There were a few families that may not have an issue with the location of the university if their children want to study a particular academic pathway which is available at another university in a different city.

With regard to the male sample, almost half of them 48% n=56 were the middle brother, 26.5% n=31 the eldest brother, 24% n=28 were the youngest brother, and the rest 2% n=2 were only children. Eighty percent n=94 had graduated from public high schools, and the remainder 20% n=23 graduated from private high schools. All the male students had studied scientific subjects in high school and all had chosen the health pathway. Unfortunately, no male students from the humanities pathway participated. As can be seen in Table 4-4, there is no significant difference in the achievement of high school and at undergraduate level between male students' mothers and fathers.

	Up to Middle school	High School	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
Mothers	30% n=35	27% n=32	33% n=39	9.5% n=11
Fathers	21% n=25	29% n=34	35% n=41	14.5% n=17

Table 4-4 The educational level of parents of male students.

4.5.3 Comparison between health and humanities pathway

An interesting comparison can be made between the parents' educational achievement in terms of the academic pathway. There are some differences in the educational achievement levels, which may clarify the students' background and how that could influence their academic choice. Table 4-5 shows the educational achievement of the parents of 71 students in the humanities pathway.

	Up to Middle school	High School	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
Mothers	31% n=22	38% n=27	30% n=21	1% n=1
Fathers	20% n=14	51% n=36	24% n=17	6% n=4

Table 4-5 The educational level of parents of students in the humanities pathway.

However, Table 4-6 also presents the educational achievement of the parents of (175) students in the health pathway.

	Up to Middle school	High School	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
Mothers	25% n=43	30% n=52	37% n=64	9% n=16
Fathers	18% n=32	29% n=51	36% n=63	17% n=29

Table 4-6 The educational level of parents of students in the health pathway.

As apparent in Table 4-5 and Table 4-6, there are some differences between the parents' educational achievements according to the academic pathway. For example, up-to-middle-school and high school achievement levels for mothers of the humanities pathway students are slightly higher than the mothers of the health pathway students. In contrast, the undergraduate and postgraduate achievements among mothers of the humanities pathway students are lower than mothers of the health pathway students. Therefore, most of the mothers of students in the health pathway are better educated and cultured than the mothers of humanities pathway students.

Moreover, regarding the educational achievements of the students' fathers, the percentage of fathers achieving an educational level up-to-middle-school of students in the humanities pathway is close to the percentage of fathers of the health pathway students, although the number of high school graduations is higher among the humanities pathway students' fathers compared to the fathers of the health pathway students. Interestingly, the undergraduate and postgraduate achievements between fathers of the humanities pathway students are significantly less than the fathers of the health pathway students. Hence, fathers of the health pathway students are more educated and cultured than fathers of the humanities pathway students.

In summary, there are both similarities and differences between male students and female students. In terms of similarities, most participants were of Saudi nationality. More than half of the males and females were the middle sibling. Almost all of the participants had graduated from public high schools. In addition, nearly all the students were living with their parents. On the other hand, the participating male students were from the health pathway only, while the participating female students were mixed in terms of following the humanities pathway and the health pathway. A large proportion of parents of the female participants had finished high school, but the most common educational achievement on the part of parents of the male students was possession of an undergraduate degree. The highly educated parents believed that their children could decide what academic pathway they wanted to choose. Also, they have a wider outlook and encourage and support the academic choice of their children. In contrast, the less-educated parents may not have the same academic comprehension and future horizon. In this case, they might suggest or ask their children to choose a specific academic pathway based on their opinion or experience. However, more detail is provided in the following sections on the questionnaire and interview outcomes.

4.5.4 The differences between female and male students in relation to the role of the family, school and the career guidance in high school in their academic choices

Usually, female and male students have some differences in their interests and preferences. Moreover, they may have differences in their perspectives on how some factors may influence their academic choices. This research was interested in exploring the differences in the role of these factors in the academic decisions between male and female students. However, it found that there is no significant difference between the role of family, school and career guidance in high school in the academic choices of female and male first-year university students. The following tables 4-7, 4-8 and 4-9 show that the results of the independent samples tests show no significant difference in the role of the main themes in the academic choices of female and male participants. If the Sig. is less than 0.05 that means there is no significant difference between groups. Otherwise, if the Sig. is more than 0.05 there is a significant difference between groups.

Independent Samples Test		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
The role of family	Equal variances assumed	.729	244	.467
	Equal variances not assumed	.729	242.254	.467

Table 4-7 The independent samples test for the difference between female and male students about the role of family in their academic choices.

Independent Samples Test		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
The role of high school	Equal variances assumed	1.376	244	.170
	Equal variances not assumed	1.384	243.962	.168

Table 4-8 The independent samples test for the difference between female and male students about the role of high school in their academic choices.

Independent Samples Test		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
The role of career guidance	Equal variances assumed	.387	244	.699
	Equal variances not assumed	.387	240.806	.699

Table 4-9 The independent samples test for the difference between female and male students about the role of career guidance in school in their academic choices.

4.5.5 The differences between humanities and health pathways students in relation to the role of the family, school and the career guidance in high school in their academic choices

In order to understand the important factors for the participants' academic decisions, this research sought to explore the differences in the role of family, school and career guidance in high school in the academic choices among humanities and health pathways students. The variations of decision-making among participants could be as a result of different influences from these factors. However, the results of the independent samples test show that there is no significant difference in the role of the family, school and career guidance in high school in the academic choices between humanities and health pathways students. See tables 4-10, 4-11 ,and 4-12. If the Sig. is less than 0.05 that means there is no significant difference between groups. Otherwise, if the Sig. is more than 0.05 that means there is a significant difference between groups.

Independent Samples Test		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
The role of family	Equal variances assumed	-1.406	244	.161
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.421	132.730	.158

Table 4-10 The independent samples test for the difference between humanities and health pathways students about the role of family in their academic choices.

Independent Samples Test		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
The role of high school	Equal variances assumed	-.306	244	.760
	Equal variances not assumed	-.288	115.220	.774

Table 4-11 The independent samples test for the difference between humanities and health pathways students about the role of high school in their academic choices.

Independent Samples Test		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
The role of career guidance	Equal variances assumed	.849	244	.397
	Equal variances not assumed	.858	132.585	.393

Table 4-12 The independent samples test for the difference between humanities and health pathways students about the role of career guidance in high school in their academic choices.

4.6 The role of the family

The family is a fundamental factor that could affect the academic decisions of the first-year university students because it is the place where the students were raised and educated. Most of their dreams and hopes start from within the family. For example, some students make their decision based on their family environment, because they have seen their parents working, older siblings studying at the university, or other relatives' achievements. All of these elements may affect students' decisions. This research sought to explore and understand the role of the family in the first-year university students' academic choice. The questionnaire obtained a wide range of information about family influences and, furthermore, interviews were conducted to understand the role of the family. The main theme here was the family, which consisted of 1) the role of parents, 2) the role of brothers and sisters, 3) the financial considerations of the family, 4) the role

of speciality of relatives, 5) the role of parents' educational achievements and 6) the role of the students' ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future. It is essential to clarify the relation between the role of students' ambition to choose their academic pathways and work in the same field in the future and the role of the family. The ambition to do a specific thing, in general, derives from personal factors. However, these factors might be influenced by some of the educational and professional factors of students' families, who would have a role in shaping that ambition. For example, students who have been brought up in highly educated families and by professional parents will have a high level of ambition to achieve a similar educational and professional level as their families, because the family is the first fundamental and influential platform of the students' upbringing. This statement could also be applied to other families from other educational and professional levels. The academic future of the students could be considered to be determined as a result of the interactions between these sub-themes.

4.6.1 The questionnaire

Table 4-13 shows the most and least selected responses to the role of the family in the academic choice.

The statement	The most selected response	The least selected response
My parents have had the greatest influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I disagree - 30% n=74	I strongly agree - 8.5% n=21
My brothers and sisters were an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I disagree - 30% n=73	I strongly agree - 9% n=22
Financial considerations were an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I strongly disagree - 48% n=119	I strongly agree - 3% n=7

The speciality of relatives of my family was an important influence on my choice of current academic pathway.	I strongly disagree - 43% n=106	I strongly agree - 8% n=19
My parents' educational achievement was an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I strongly disagree - 42% n=103	I strongly agree - 6.5% n=16
My ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future was an important influence on my choice of the academic pathway.	I strongly agree - 47% n=116	I strongly disagree - 4.5% n=11

Table 4-13 The response to the role of family in the academic choice.

Table 4-13 presents the participants' responses to the questionnaire in terms of the role of their family in relation to their academic decision. Most of the participants disagreed that there had been any influence by their families on their academic decisions. Consequently, 30% n=74 of participants disagreed with the role of their parents in their academic choice. The role of brothers and sisters in the participants' academic choice was disagreed by 30% n=73 of participants. Moreover, the influence of financial considerations on academic choice was strongly disagreed by 48% n=119 of participants.

There were 43% n=106 of participants who strongly disagreed with the role of the speciality of relatives of their families in their academic choice. Also, their parents' educational achievement was strongly disagreed by 42% n=103 of them. In contrast, a few respondents agreed with the effect of these sub-themes on their academic choice. For example, the role of parents did influence 34% n=24 of the humanities pathway participants. Moreover, the ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future influenced 57% n=100 of health and 33% n=22 of humanities pathway participants. However, a small number of participants 3% n=7 strongly agreed that there was an impact of financial considerations on their academic decision. From a cultural and social perspective, Saudi parents do not share their financial issues with their children,

especially with regard to higher education. The main reason for that is because the MoE want to encourage students to complete their undergraduate studies by offering most of the undergraduate programmes free of tuition fees. Moreover, due to the influence of culture, some students may not want to share details about their private family issues, such as financial considerations, with others.

Surprisingly, examination of the data by dividing the participants into two groups dependent on their academic pathways may present another perspective on the role of family. Table 4-14 shows the significant difference in two sub-themes between the health pathway students and the humanities pathway students. The remaining sub-themes show no differences between the academic pathways.

The statement	The health pathway students	The humanities pathway students
My parents have had the greatest influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I disagree - 33% n=58	I agree - 34% n=24
My ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future was an important influence on my choice of the academic pathway.	I strongly agree - 57% n=100	I agree - 33% n=22

Table 4-14 The most selected responses to the role of parents and the ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future, according to the academic pathways.

Moreover, the participants' ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future was significantly different between health pathway students and humanities pathway students. The differences were in the level of the agreement and the proportion of participants who agreed. The health pathway participants had a stronger level of agreement and higher responses than humanities pathway students. The reason for this may be that jobs in the health field are limited and specific to hospitals and other health facilities. However, job opportunities in the humanities field might be more comprehensive and non-specific, because there are a range of opportunities in several

institutions in different humanities areas. Therefore, health pathway students are more focused on their future job than humanities pathway students. The next section presents additional details about the participants' responses through the interview results.

4.6.2 The interviews

4.6.2.1 The role of parents and their potential influence on decision making

The parents were an essential element in the lives of first-year university students. They have shaped their children to be able to decide between different academic choices. The effect of the parents on the students can, therefore, be direct or indirect. For example, the direct effect of the parents on the students' academic choice might be asking their children to choose a specific academic pathway. The indirect effect could be the parents' job or their interests. According to the questionnaire's responses, 30% n=74 of participants chose "I disagreed" as an answer to the statement about whether their academic decisions were influenced by their parents. Notably, 8 interviewees also emphasised that their parents did not affect their academic decision.

Suha indicated that her parents were supportive, and Hind made a similar point:

> "I had made my decision about studying the health field since I was in middle school. Indeed, both of my parents were supportive and encouraged me to achieve my dream. So, I chose the health pathway."

Saad made a similar statement regarding his parents:

> "First of all, I had decided to study the health pathway when I was in middle school. My parents have a different attitude towards my academic decision. In fact, my mother told me: 'Please my son, choose what you prefer to study', that was supportive. However, unfortunately, my father was not involved in this process at all."

Ali's father wished he would choose a business management major at university, but his mother did not prefer a specific academic pathway. Fahd parents preferred studying engineering at a different university. However, these parents were supportive of their children in their chosen academic pathways. Likewise Manal replied:

> "My parents wished me to choose the health pathway, but at the end of the discussion between us, they said: 'Dear daughter, you have persevered and made great efforts in your studies during high school. However, now you will decide what is the appropriate academic pathway for you that you want to study at the university'. Then, I chose the humanities pathway."

Likewise, Hamad said:

> "My mother was not involved in my choice of the health pathway. She allowed me to choose what I wanted to study. Unfortunately, my father passed away before I graduated from high school. So, I made my academic decision by myself."

In the interview with Hamad, he mentioned that there were some personal issues in his family, and that his father's health condition was critical. His father died in a different country and that was very painful for him. Overall, his family was not in a good position when he was trying to decide which academic pathway he wanted to follow.

Overall, in the case of those eight participants and others who have experienced similar encouragement and support from their parents, this has an indirect influence on students' academic choice by adding additional positive points and support from those whom, culturally, traditionally and socially, mean a lot to them: their parents. Students sometimes want a small push or support to make their final decision, although they may not recognise this support as having an influence on their decision. They would describe it as the 'green light' to go ahead and choose their academic pathway. However, some

parents would not prevent or stop their children from choosing a specific academic pathway, though the children may not understand that this is a type of influence on their academic choice. Nevertheless, it is an indirect influence on their decision.

In the questionnaire, 8.5% n=21 of participants strongly agreed that their parents did influence their academic choice. Additionally, 2 interviewees stated that their parents did affect their academic choice. To emphasise that, Adel reported:

> "Usually, when my father comes home, he tells me some stories about his treatment of patients in the hospital. I became more interested in the health field. These stories have influenced my academic choice. My mother is interested in engineering, but she is satisfied with the health pathway. And, my father had supported me when I chose it."

In contrast, Saleh told a different story about his parents:

> "I decided to choose the health pathway to achieve my parents' dream for me to study and work in the health field. Unfortunately, my older brothers and older sisters were not sufficiently ambitious to complete their studies. For that reason, they did not enrol at the university. I wish to achieve their dream."

In fact, the two participants have been affected by their parents in different ways. In Adel's case, he may have chosen the health pathway without any pressure, because his father's stories encouraged him to follow his father's steps in the health pathway. However, Saleh, probably, decided to choose the health pathway with a little pressure from his parents. Both participants chose the health pathway because of the role of their parents. Therefore, family could be either be a source of pressure on students or indirect encouragement to choose a specific academic pathway. However, in general, the students did not want to let their families down.

4.6.2.2 The role of brothers and sisters and their potential influence on decision making

Most of the participants have brothers and sisters. Some were older than the participants, which means there was a chance of an influence on their academic decision-making. In other words, they may have finished their undergraduate study or still be studying at the university, so will have stories to tell. Therefore, the participants could have chosen their academic pathway based on the academic experience of their brothers and sisters if they obtained advice or support from them. However, some brothers and sisters were younger than the participants and, in this case, the chance of influence would be weak, because of their lack of academic experience. This research sought to ascertain the participants' perspective on the role of brothers and sisters in their academic decision. Based on the questionnaire's answers, 30% n=74 of participants disagreed about the role of their siblings in their academic choice. Indeed, 7 interviewees were not affected by their brothers and sisters' advice and opinions.

Hind, Adel and Suha were the oldest siblings. They shared similar points of view about their youngest siblings who did not affect their academic choice. For example, Suha said:

> "I did not talk to them about my academic choice because I am the oldest sister. They do not have any idea about undergraduate study."

Fahd replied:

> "I am the middle brother. My older brother and sister graduated from university. The other brother is studying at university. However, I did not involve them in my decision because I believe that it is my academic decision not their decision. By the way, I think they will not mind giving help."

Mona was the youngest sister, and she made her academic decision by herself because she believed that there was no benefit to be gained from asking for advice from her older

brother and sister. Also, Saad made his own academic choice because his older siblings were not interested in his preferred academic pathway, although Manal stated:

> "I am the youngest sister. All my siblings have finished their undergraduate studies. I have discussed my academic decision with them. I obtained some information about the academic pathways from them, but that did not affect my academic decision. So, I chose what I wanted to study, which is the humanities pathway."

Overall, these participants were not affected by their brothers and sisters for various reasons; for example, some of them were the oldest brother or sister, "I am the oldest brother". In this situation, the participants had no reasonable chance to obtain advice from those who have not been an undergraduate. Also, a few participants thought that there was no point in asking their brothers and sisters for support and advice about their academic decision because they were not interested in the academic pathway which the participants wanted to choose, such as, "I did not discuss my academic choice with them because they are not interested in the health pathway". Other participants held the opinion that the academic decision belonged to them, which meant they did not want to talk about it with their brothers and sisters, "I did not ask their advice because it is my academic choice".

In contrast, 9% n=22 of the questionnaire participants strongly agreed with the role of their siblings in their academic choice. To stress that point, 3 interviewees benefited from their brothers and sisters' advice, although seven others stated they had no effect.

Saleh told a different story about the role of his brothers and sisters:

> "Some of them have finished high school. Unfortunately, they were not ambitious enough to complete their undergraduate study. However, I am the middle brother, and they encouraged me to pursue

> my academic decision to achieve an undergraduate degree in the health pathway. They want to be proud of me."

Similarly, Ali stated:

> "I am the middle brother. My brothers and sisters encouraged me to go ahead with my academic choice. My older brothers and sisters had finished their undergraduate studies. They were supportive."

Hamad stated:

> "I am the youngest brother. One day, my older brother gave me some novels because I am interested in reading them. One novel was about the daily life of some doctors who worked at the hospital. It opened my mind to the health field, so I became interested in the health pathway. After that I chose it."

In fact, three participants had a chance to talk with their brothers and sisters about the academic pathway that they would choose. They found some support and encouragement from their brothers and sisters to choose what they wanted to study at the university. There was direct influence such as, "They encouraged me to pursue my academic decision to achieve an undergraduate degree in the health pathway". Another influence was indirect, for example, "One day, my older brother gave me some novels … One novel was about the daily life of some doctors who worked at the hospital … so I became interested in the health pathway". Most of these participants had older brothers and sisters who had finished their undergraduate study. In this case, they were able to give some support based on their academic experience, "My brothers and sisters encouraged me to go ahead with my academic choice. My older brothers and sisters had finished their undergraduate studies".

4.6.2.3 The role of financial considerations and their potential influence on decision making

Financial considerations were a concern for most of the families, especially when these considerations could affect their children's education. The participants were asked about the role of their family's financial considerations in their academic choice. As was mentioned in the questionnaire responses, the MoE provides undergraduate programmes without tuition fees for students through the public universities. The critical purpose for this is to encourage students to join these programmes and complete their undergraduate studies. Therefore, most of the families were not concerned about their children's undergraduate study cost. According to the questionnaire's findings, 48% n=119 of the participants believed that the financial considerations of their families did not influence their academic choice, and these chose to reply, "I strongly disagree". Moreover, 8 interviewees stressed that there was no effect from their families' financial considerations on their academic choice. Indeed, from a cultural and social point of view, Saudi families do not usually share their financial concerns with their children, in order to keep them away from any distraction or something that may negatively affect their educational future.

Fahd, Hamad, Mona and Suha stated that their families did not have any financial considerations which may affect their academic choice. Similarly, Ali stated:

> "As I know from my parents, we are a normal family and my family does not have any financial issues which may affect my academic choice. I made my academic decision without any effect of financial considerations."

Adel and Manal shared with Hind the statement about the tuition fees which did not add any financial load to their families. Thus, there was no influence from the financial considerations of their families. As Hind stated:

> "I was not concerned about the financial considerations that may affect my academic choice because there are no tuition fees to study

> at the public university. It is free. Also, I have not noted any financial issues in my family."

Overall, the interviewees' families did not have financial considerations which may have affected their academic decisions. The common response was, "My family did not have any financial issues", based on the eight interviewees' perspectives. They had chosen their academic pathway independently without any influence that could make a change to that choice, such as, "I made my academic decision with no influence from financial considerations". Interestingly, some interviewees mentioned that many undergraduate programmes, which are provided by the public universities, are without tuition fees. According to the Saudi culture and social life, most of the families were not concerned financially about their children's future undergraduate study. Also, it should be noted that some participants may not like to share their private family issues with others such as researchers, but overall the family's financial considerations did not affect the academic choice of most first-year university students.

However, there were 3% n=7 participants who selected "I strongly agree" in relation to the influence of family finances. Indeed, there were 2 participants who agreed their families' financial considerations influenced their academic choices. The interviewees were asked to express their point of view in more detail.

Saleh reported:

> "My parents were hoping that I could study the health pathway to get a job in the health field because they want me to help my family financially. I am their only hope of supporting my family. This is how my academic choice has been affected. I hope that I can achieve it."

Saad had a dream to study a health pathway abroad:

> "I have been thinking of studying the health pathway in Sudan. However, I have had to rethink it due to the financial aspect; then I realised that I have a chance to study this pathway here in Saudi, with significantly lower financial risks and better educational benefits because the current academic pathway is free of charge."

The financial considerations had influenced the academic choice of these interviewees in two different ways. The first was the parents' hope for financial support from their son by asking him to study the health pathway to get a job later and support his family financially, "My parents were hoping that I could study the health pathway to get a job in the health field". The second was the interviewee's comparison between the local academic choice and studying abroad, both financially and academically, "I have had to rethink it due to the financial aspect; then I realised that I have a chance to study this pathway here in Saudi, with significantly lower financial risks and better educational benefits". He found the local choice was better than abroad. Thus, financial concern has a limited effect on the academic choice of some first-year university students.

4.6.2.4 The role of speciality of relatives of the family and its potential influence on decision making

The social life of most families in Saudi involves close bonds between the family members and their relatives. In this social environment, the first-year university students might have been influenced by some of their relatives when they chose their academic pathway. Normally, families have some relatives who have been successful in different areas, which could impress some young family members. In this case, the first-year students may make their academic decision based on other relatives' achievements. However, some students might not be influenced by relatives' educational achievements because they want to study a different academic choice. The questionnaire results indicated that 43% n=106 of the participants had chosen "I strongly disagree" about the influence of the speciality of relatives of their families on their academic choice. Notably,

8 interviewees emphasised that their academic choice was not affected by the speciality of relatives of their families.

Fahd did not ask for advice from his relatives because no one has studied a similar academic pathway. Also, Mona stated:

> "Unfortunately, none of the relatives of my family had studied on the same academic pathway. There was no point in asking their opinion. My academic choice was not affected."

Adel and Hind had a similar point of view about not asking advice for from their relatives because they were satisfied with their parents' support. Hind stated:

> "Regarding the relatives of my family, I did not ask their advice because I had made my academic decision. Also, my parents supported the achievement of my academic dream, which was enough for me to insist on my academic choice."

Saad believed that the academic choice was his choice, thus there was no need to talk with his relatives about it. Similarly, Ali stated:

> "I believe that the academic choice is my decision without any intervention from relatives of my family. I had not asked their advice about it because no one had studied the health pathway."

Interestingly, Suha and Manal had a chance to talk with their relatives, but there was no influence, as Manal said:

> "I had listened to some advice from the relatives of my family about my academic choice. Most of them concluded their advice by saying: 'The academic choice is your decision, please, decide what you prefer

> to study'. Thus, my academic choice was not affected by their advice."

In fact, there was an agreement among these interviewees about the influence of the speciality of relatives of their families. They agreed that their academic choices were not influenced by their relatives' speciality. There were various reasons for this; for example, some interviewees thought there was no benefit from asking their relatives if they have not studied the same academic pathway. Responses included, "Studying the health pathway is a new thing in my family. None of my relatives have studied this academic pathway before". The common point between these reasons is that the interviewees wanted to make their academic choice by themselves whether or not they discussed it with their relatives, stating replies such as, "but the academic decision was mine". Also, some interviewees were satisfied with their parents' support to choose the current academic pathway, saying, "I was satisfied with my academic decision and my parents' support for me". In Saudi culture, usually, students pay attention more to the support and encouragement of their parents regarding their academic choice than the opinions of relatives or family members.

However, 8% n=19 of the questionnaire's participants selected "I strongly agree" that the academic choice was affected by the speciality of family relatives. Also, 2 interviewees believed that their academic choice had been affected.

Saleh had a different perspective on the influence of relatives on their academic choice:

> "I had some conversations with my relatives about my academic choice. Unexpectedly, they encouraged and supported me to achieve my parents' dream about my study and future job."

Hamad made an interesting statement about his relatives' effect:

> "My family and relatives had some sad circumstances previously. My father and other relatives died. Unfortunately, most of them passed away because of bad health conditions. These circumstances influenced my academic choice to study the health pathway to help other people who are suffering from health problems."

Overall, these two interviewees had been influenced by their relatives in different ways. For example, the words of encouragement and support from the family relatives influenced their academic choice to achieve their academic goal; for example, "Unexpectedly, they encouraged and supported me to achieve my parents' dream about my study and future job". Another impact was because some sad circumstances had happened to relatives and family members. The critical situation of Hamad demonstrates that there are some students who want to do something to help and support their families due to family circumstances, which puts great responsibility on their shoulders if they are to achieve this. Thus, the critical health problems of family members may inspire the students to choose the health pathway in order to become a health professional. Therefore, students could make their academic decision based on family circumstances rather than just a simple academic choice of their own.

4.6.2.5 The role of parents' educational achievement and its potential influence on decision making

The students' academic choice might be affected by other people's educational achievements, especially when it is their parents' achievement. The research attempted to explore the role of the parents' educational achievement in the first-year university students' decisions. The responses to the questionnaire showed that 42% n=103 of the participants strongly disagreed with the influence of their parents' educational achievement on their academic choice. This is from their own perspective. There were 8 interviewees who supported this agreement when they were asked about the influence of their parents' educational achievement. Interestingly, the eastern region of Saudi has

many companies and high-level professional institutions in different fields, and also the labour market demand is active, which increases the level of education and knowledge of families and society in this area. Therefore, the students would potentially be indirectly influenced by their parents' educational achievement. The educational achievement is an essential element of the family's educational background and culture which can affect the knowledge of subsequent generations. Children have a great opportunity when they grow up among a complete family with parents and family members. The children's knowledge will increase through the interactions between them and other family members. They will be able to analyse decisions and choices based on the educational achievements of other family members. However, the children may not experience a direct influence of educational achievement on their academic choice because most of the time it is part of their disposition or personality.

Some interviewees' parents did not achieve undergraduate study, such as Mona, Saad and Manal but that did not affect their academic choice, according to Manal's answer:

> "My father finished high school and my mother finished middle school. However, their educational achievement did not affect my academic choice. In fact, they supported my decision."

Similarly, Ali's statement noted:

> "My parents did not enrol at the university because my father finished high school and my mother is illiterate. This achievement did not influence my academic decision. They want me to be better than themselves by achieving the undergraduate degree. They did not have chance to achieve it."

Other interviewees' parents finished an undergraduate programme and a few of them completed postgraduate study, although that did not influence the academic choices of Hamad, Fahd and Suha. In terms of this point, Hind said :

> "I made my academic decision without any effect from my parents' educational achievement. Indeed, my father has a master's degree and my mother finished a bachelor's degree, but that has not influenced my academic choice."

In fact, there was a diversity of educational achievements among the interviewees' parents. However, these educational achievements had no direct influence on the academic choice of those interviewees, from their perspective. There were various reasons; for instance, some interviewees preferred to choose their academic pathway as their own decision without any impact from their parents' educational achievement, stating, "I made my academic decision without any effect from my parents' educational achievement". Other interviewees stated that they were satisfied with their parents' support despite their educational achievements; for example, "They supported my academic choice" and "In fact, they supported my decision". However, these students may not realise that they have been indirectly influenced by the educational achievement level of their parents. They thought that those achievements did not influence their academic choice, although they have obtained a wide range of knowledge, learned different methods of thinking and benefit from this highly educated social environment. Some of the students preferred to make their own personal academic decision regarding which academic pathway to study. Although a few students had one parent who was illiterate that did not affect their academic choice negatively, because their parents encouraged them to choose the academic pathway that they preferred to study. Responses included phrases such as, "My father finished high school and my mother is illiterate ... They want me to be better than themselves by achieving the undergraduate degree". The educational background of parents is a significant part of children' knowledge and culture that is subconscious.

However, 6.5% n=16 of participants did strongly agree that parental education had an influence. The interviews conducted assisted the researcher to understand the reason for the participants' points of view. Indeed, 2 interviewees shared similar disagreement about the influence of their parents' educational achievement on their academic choice

When Adel was asked about the role of his parents' educational achievements in his academic choice, he answered:

> "My parents achieved a Ph.D. degree. However, my father is a doctor and his educational achievement affected my academic choice because of his academic degree in the health pathway. This achievement made me more excited about my academic decision."

Similarly, Saleh stated:

> "My father has a high school certificate and my mother barely finished primary school. This academic situation of my parents encouraged me to choose the health pathway in order to fulfil their hope of achieving something academically that they could not achieve in the past."

Overall, the parents' educational achievement did affect the academic choice of a few interviewees. The influence came from the educational achievements of the parents when they became a model for their children, in particular, when that achievement fulfilled the right job requirements; for example, "My father is a doctor and his educational achievement affected my academic choice because of his academic degree in the health pathway". Sometimes, the impact occurred when the children wanted to make their parents proud by achieving some academic goals they wished them to achieve, or by doing something they dreamed about, but could not achieve such as, "My father has a high school certificate and my mother barely finished primary school … they encouraged me to choose the health pathway in order to fulfil their hope of achieving something academically that they could not achieve in the past". This happened whether or not the parents had a high educational achievement. Consequently, the parents' educational achievement could impact directly on the academic choice of the first-year university students, but that effect might be limited.

4.6.2.6 The role of students' ambition to work in the same field and its potential influence on decision making

Most of the university students wanted to get a job related to their academic pathway after graduation. Therefore, ambition might affect their academic choice. This ambition could arise in different ways, such as their parents' job, other relatives' achievement, or personality traits. Other students may have been through some critical circumstances which gave them the ambition to seek a future job by choosing a related academic pathway. The participants were asked about their answers to the ambition question and to express more profound thoughts. Interestingly, all 10 interviewees had the ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future.

Some interviewees had an ambition to help and support patients and be a part of their recovery such as Hind, Ali, Saleh, Saad and Hamad. The latter said:

> "First of all, I love helping people. After seeing my father and other family relatives suffering from some health issues and diseases, that gave me the ambition to be in the health field to help suffering people. I made a promise to myself to become a professional in cancer surgery."

Manal wanted to be a teacher to achieve her ambition. Similarly, Suha stated:

> "I chose the humanities pathway to study English. My ambition is to teach students at schools or maybe to work in a company as a translator. Both fields are related to the English language."

Adel has a special health condition. His ambition is to become a professional in genetic engineering because there is a hope of finding an effective treatment for his health issue. A similar health experience had happened in Fahd's family, where he reported:

> "My mother has been suffering from her illness for over ten years. It is so hard to see your mother suffering. I wish that I could help her. So, I made my decision to work in the health field to help other people, especially mothers. I hope to be an assistant surgeon or in an emergency department."

Mona's statement noted a specific ambition:

> "I want to study English, that is why I chose the humanities pathway. I made that decision to achieve my ambition to be a translator in a company or one of the ministries. This ambition influenced my academic choice."

In fact, all of the interviewees emphasised that their ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future influenced their academic choice. They gave responses such as, "My ambition is to teach students at schools or maybe to work in a company as a translator. Both fields are related to the English language". The ambition to work as a nurse in an emergency department or in hospital, or as a professional in neuroscience or an assistant surgeon or other health field job encouraged some interviewees to choose the health pathway. For example, "Actually, working as a nurse in an emergency department is my ambition". The students from this pathway shared some factors behind their ambitions; for example, they want to help other people and relieve their pain. This was demonstrated by their comments such as, "I chose the health pathway to have the chance to help patients and relieve their pain". Others had difficult and touching experiences with their parents' sickness or relatives' health circumstances; for instance, "My ambition is to become a professional in genetic engineering because there is a hope of finding an effective treatment for my health issue". Similarly, teaching students in schools to give them helpful knowledge and improve their education is a motivating factor, as one participant replied, "The humanities pathway will give me a good opportunity to teach students in school and deliver useful knowledge to them. This is my ambition". Similarly, working as a translator or in other related jobs also motivated some students to choose the humanities pathway. When the first-year university students had an ambition, it gave

them some encouragement and motivation to achieve that ambition by choosing and studying the related academic pathway.

4.6.3 Summary of the role of the family in the academic choice

In summary, the role of the family in the academic choice of the first-year university students did not influence, directly, their academic decisions, based on the majority of the participants' responses. Given the responses to the sub-themes, most disagreed that this had an impact on their academic choice. For example, the role of parents did not impact most of the participants, but their parents were satisfied and supported their children's academic choice. Also, some parents allowed their children to choose what they preferred to study at the university. In contrast, a few participants agreed that their parents did impact their academic decision by asking them to choose a specific academic pathway, or by telling them some stories about their own job.

Moreover, brothers and sisters did not affect most of the participants' academic decisions. The participants had some opinions about this effect. For instance, some participants were the eldest sibling, which meant they had no brothers or sisters with prior academic experience. Also, other participants did not involve their brothers and sisters in their academic decision-making because they believed that they were capable of making the academic decision by themselves, and some participants mentioned that their brothers and sisters were not interested in their desired academic pathway. However, a small number of them were affected by some support and advice from their brothers and sisters to choose the academic pathway.

The financial considerations of the family, again, did influence a few participants; for example, one interviewee had chosen the current academic pathway because he wanted to help his family financially after graduation. Another participant made his academic decision because the local academic choice had less financial risk and more academic benefits than studying abroad. The option of studying abroad is a result of the influence

of globalisation. It meant that this participant had a chance to think about other international academic choices that may meet his academic preference. However, he did not make his decision to study in abroad due its cost and the benefits of his decision. On the other hand, many of the participants were not influenced by the financial considerations of their families due to the free tuition fees for most of the undergraduate programmes at the public universities. In addition, other participants stressed that their families did not have any financial issues that could affect their academic choice.

The speciality of relatives has not impacted most of the participants' academic choices, because they indicated that some relatives had not studied the same academic pathway and the academic decision was their issue. Also, some participants did listen to the advice from their relatives about their academic choice, but that did not affect their decision. Moreover, some participants were satisfied with their parents' support and encouragement to choose the academic pathway instead of having advice from their relatives.

The role of the parents' educational achievements, similarly, had no direct influence on most participants' academic choice. This was because the participants made their academic choice themselves, regardless of their parents' educational achievement, and some other participants were satisfied with their parents' support and encouragement more than their educational achievement. Indeed, most parents had a high level of educational achievement, which provides an appropriate and stimulating educational and cognitive environment for their children. In this situation, parents' educational background did influence the students' culture and knowledge through education and parental upbringing. In contrast, some parents may have less educational achievements or were illiterate, although they were supportive and encouraged their children to choose what they preferred to study at university. However, a few participants were affected by their parents' achievement; for example, by seeking to achieve some academic goals which their parents could not attain to make them proud, or by seeing their parents as a model of achievement and following their steps.

The last sub-theme was whether the participants' ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future had influenced them. Many of the interviewees confirmed that it had. Indeed, some of them had a dream to obtain a specific job and to be professionals in their field, and others wanted to get a job related to their field of study. For example, some interviewees had the ambition to be an assistant surgeon or to work in an emergency department. Other interviewees had seen critical sad experiences with their parents' and relatives' health problems, such as the loss of a parent or relatives because of an incurable disease, or suffering from health problems. These difficult and critical health experiences of the participants and their relatives had given them the ambition to join the health pathway in order to contribute to providing help for those suffering.

Ultimately, the main theme, the family, did not directly affect most of the participants, although some were affected by some of the sub-themes, such as the ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future. On the other hand, according to the questionnaire, the parents did influence the academic choice 34% n=24 of 71 of humanities pathway students. Most of the interviewees stated that the influence of parents on their academic choice was by encouraging and supporting them to choose what they preferred to study at university.

4.7 The role of high school

High school is an important stage for students as it is here that they must achieve the high grades needed for enrolment in university. The subjects studied in high school may help students to explore their academic preferences. Moreover, teachers are expected to assist students to learn more about the academic subjects open to them for study at university and how to search for knowledge. Friends, too, can have an impact on each other with regard to academic choices and preferences. Regardless of choices and preferences, the required standard in levels of achievement will be a big determinant of the students' academic choices for university. In understanding these choices, the main theme in this section was the role of high school. This consisted of the following sub-themes: 1) the role of teachers in high school, 2) the role of preferences for some high school subjects,

3) the role of friends and 4) the role of the required standard in levels of achievement. The participants were asked about these themes in the questionnaire and the interview.

4.7.1 The questionnaire

Table 4-15 presents the most common responses from the participants about the role of teachers, the role of students' preferences for some subjects, the role of students' friends and the role of the required standard in levels of achievement.

Statement	The most selected response	The least selected response
Some of my teachers in high school were an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I strongly disagree - 40% n=98	I strongly agree - 6% n=14
My preference for some subjects in high school was an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I agree - 43.5% n=107	I do not know - 11% n=27
My friends were an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I strongly disagree - 43% n=106	I strongly agree - 3% n=7
My required standard in levels of achievement was an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I agree - 38% n=93	I do not know - 7% n=17

Table 4-15 The most and least selected responses to the role of the high school in the academic choice.

As this research has been conducted in the first semester of first-year university students, it is too early to predict whether or not there has been a positive or negative influence of the preference for some subjects and their required standard in levels of achievement on their academic choice. In other words, it is too early to determine if the first-year students have made the right or wrong academic decision. They may have decided to study the

current academic pathway because they preferred this pathway and aimed to find a job later. However, it is possible that some students do not prefer their current academic pathway, but they are studying it now to find a future job after their graduation. There are assumptions about whether the result of their academic decision was right or wrong.

The responses have been divided based on the academic pathways to reveal some interesting results and differences between the health pathway and the humanities pathway. The comparison between academic pathways indicated that there was no difference in the participants' responses to the role of high school in their academic choice. The results look similar between both pathways in respect of all the sub-themes of high school.

In summary, the respondents gave different responses to the role of high school in their academic choice. Most of the respondents' answers indicated that the high school, generally, did not affect their choice of academic pathway. In detail, and according to the responses, around 40% of the participants strongly disagreed with the influence of the role of high school teachers and the role of friends on their academic decision. However, up to 40% of respondents agreed with the influence of their preference for some curricula in high school and the role of the required standard in levels of achievement in making the decision about their academic choice. Moreover, a few other participants did not know whether or not their preference for some subjects and the required standard in levels of achievement had influenced their academic choice.

4.7.2 The interviews

4.7.2.1 The role of high school teachers and their potential influence on decision making

The teachers in schools play an important role in building students' culture and knowledge, not just about the subjects they teach, but also ideas for future careers. However, in high school the role of teachers becomes even more important because the

students are close to graduation and most will hope to move on to undergraduate education. This also implies they may need support and advice from their teachers regarding their academic choices. According to the questionnaire's responses, 40% n=98 of participants had chosen "I strongly disagreed" as an answer to the statement that their academic decision was influenced by the high school teachers. Notably, 6 interviewees agreed that there had been no influence on their academic choice from their teachers in high schools.

Hind, Suha and Ali have shared similar statements about how the high number of students prevented teachers from providing any related advice or help regarding the academic choices for students. For example, Ali said:

> "There were lots of students [and] that was keeping the teacher busy in evaluating the students' assignments and tests more than guiding them regarding the academic choice at university."

With another viewpoint, Saad, Saleh and Fahd stated that teachers were busy and have lots of work to do, which meant that they had no chance to advise and support students in deciding between academic choices. Saad said:

> "Teachers were busy with teaching several subjects for different levels of high school. They could not find time to provide advice for students about academic choice."

Overall, there were common points among these interviewees regarding the role of teachers in high school. All of them mentioned that teachers were busy but put forward different reasons according to each interviewee's perspective. For example, the number of students in the class which kept the teachers busy teaching. Comments included, "There were many students in my class. That did not allow teachers to offer some support and advice to us, in the right way, about the academic choice". More teaching work and a high number of students were barriers preventing the teachers offering some career

advice to high school students, such as, “There were many students in my school which distracted teachers sometimes from advising students who may need guidance about their academic choice”. Sometimes, the students in high school preferred and trusted particular teachers, which led the students to speak to them about different personal issues or academic concerns. In this case, the students had a chance to do so if the teachers had free time for them. Unfortunately, some participants mentioned that the teachers were busy. Therefore, the teachers did not affect the students’ academic decisions.

There was, however, positive contributions from some teachers. In this case, 6% n=14 of participants strongly agreed that the high school teachers influenced their academic choice. Indeed, 4 participants from the interview agreed with that influence.

For example, Adel stated that:

> “The chemistry teacher had said more than once in my class: ‘Medicine needs men who have ambition, diligence, patience and who are not afraid of hard work.’ His words encouraged me to choose the health pathway.”

The teacher’s comment does not mean that medicine does not need women. It was said to students in a boys’ high school because the education system in Saudi separates boys and girls in schools. Women work and contribute in this field more than men in some situations.

Similarly, Manal, Hamad and Mona stressed that the ways of teaching and the creative methods of delivering the knowledge to students did affect their decision regarding the academic choice. For instance, Mona said:

> “I found the teaching method of the English teacher in high school different and creative. She encouraged me to learn more about the English language by recommending some creative learning methods for English. The favourite teachers sometimes become a model so

that you follow their steps. Therefore, I decided to choose the humanities pathway."

These four participants shared a positive experience with their teachers in high school. All of them were affected by the teachers in different ways. Indeed, it is apparent that the teaching methods and teacher's personality affected the students' academic decisions. Also, the creative teaching methods made some teachers' support acceptable and their advice influential; for example, "The English teacher, the biology teacher, and the maths teacher had exciting and creative teaching methods … In fact, their advice was helpful and supportive of my academic decision to choose the health pathway". To emphasise that point, teachers are the most significant influence on students' knowledge, learning, behaviour and future if the students accept and use teachers as a role model. The teachers' responsibilities are more than just teaching and examining the students. They can make a substantial positive change in the students' present and future when they become a positive model for the students.

4.7.2.2 The role of students' preference for some subjects and its potential influence on decision making

Students may make their academic choice based on their preference for certain school subjects. Their preferred subjects in high school may guide students to make the right academic choice. According to the questionnaire, 43.5% n=107 of participants agreed that their academic decision had been influenced by their preference for some subjects in high school. Interestingly, 9 of the interviewees had some preferred subjects in high school which affected their academic choice. However, most participants could not state whether they had chosen the right or wrong academic pathway because, as some of them mentioned, they were still in the first semester of the first year at university. Interestingly, there were 4 responses to the question about the influence of teachers on the participants' academic choice that matched the responses to the impact of the preference for some subjects. These four responses belonged to Adel, Mona, Manal and Hamad.

The preferred subjects in high school have influenced interviewees' academic choice. Hamad preferred maths, biology and English. Adel, also, preferred maths, biology, chemistry and physics, and Saad preferred these subjects in high school. Furthermore, Ali preferred maths, physics and biology. These interviewees made their decision to choose the health pathway due to their preferred subjects in high school. Similarly, Hind was asked about her preference for high school subjects, she replied:

> "Yes, I agree that my preference for biology, physics and maths has affected my academic choice. All these subjects are in the health pathway."

In a similar situation, Suha, Manal and Mona decided to study the humanities pathway at university because they preferred the English subject in high school. For instance, Mona stated:

> "I preferred the subject of English. I agree with its effect on my academic choice. Then, I chose the humanities pathway to study English next year."

Interestingly, the academic choice for Saleh has been affected in a different way:

> "There are no specific preferred subjects, but I do not like maths. So, I chose the health pathway because I knew from my research there is no advanced maths in the health pathway. I agree that my opinion about the maths did affect my academic decision."

In fact, nine of the ten interviewees stressed that their academic choice had been affected by their preference for the subjects in high school. Four of them had matched their preference for certain high school subjects with the teachers who affected their academic decision. For example, Adel has been influenced by the chemistry teacher, and also his preference for chemistry as a subject in high school did influence his academic choice. The academic choices of Manal and Mona have been influenced by their preference for

English and its teacher in high school. Moreover, Hamad preferred three subjects in high school, maths, biology and English, which influenced his academic choice, as well as the teachers of these subjects who affected him. These preferences imply that students enjoy what they study and would like to progress their learning at university in order to find a job in that field later. They provided responses such as, "I prefer maths, biology, chemistry and physics because I believe that they are essential for my academic choice" and "I preferred the subject of English … I chose the humanities pathway to study English next year", moreover, "I agree that my preference for biology, physics and maths has affected my academic choice. All these subjects are in the health pathway".

Sometimes, students may not know what they prefer, but they know what they dislike. For example, one of the students did not like advanced maths. Thus, Saleh decided to study the health pathway because he knew that there is no advanced maths in this academic pathway. He said, "but I do not like maths. So, I chose the health pathway because I knew from my research there is no advanced maths in the health pathway". In this case, the students who make their academic decision based on some inaccurate information from personal sources may take the risk of studying their chosen academic pathway.

In contrast, 11% n=27 of the participants did not know if their preference for some subjects in high school affected their academic choice or not. Indeed, there was 1 interviewee who stated that his preferred subjects in high school did not affect his academic choice.

Fahd had a different point of view on the role of the preference for subjects in high school:

> "I strongly disagree that my preference for the subjects affected my academic decision-making about the health pathway. In my opinion, most high school subjects are enjoyable."

From Fahd's situation, it seems there are a few students who may like most of the high school subjects, which leads them to make their decision about the academic choice based on other factors, rather than their specific preferred subjects in high school.

4.7.2.3 The role of friends and their potential influence on decision making

Most of the students in high school have different friendships, which may have a role in their academic choice. Friends in school share various experiences about their daily life, study, hobbies and future because they come from different social, cultural and economic backgrounds. This research sought to explore the role of friends in the academic choice of the first-year university students. According to the questionnaire responses, 43% n=106 of the participants strongly disagreed that the role of friends affected their academic decision-making. In fact, 8 of the interviewees had similar perspectives on their friends' role in their academic choice.

Saleh, Saad, Ali, Manal, Hind and Hamad have a common belief that the academic choice was based on their decision, thus, there was no need to share it or discuss it with their friends, especially, when they have different plans for their academic pathways than their friends. According to Saleh's statement:

> "My friends did not impact my academic decision. We study in the same school, but each one of us has different and independent plans for the academic future."

Similarly, Suha had a chance to talk about her academic choice with her friends, although they were interested in different academic pathways. Thus, there was no influence on her academic decision. As Mona said:

> "There were some friends who have similar academic interests, but that did not affect my academic decision. We respect each other's academic choices."

Overall, these eight interviewees emphasised that the role of their friends did not impact their academic choice. The classroom gathers together a variety of students from different backgrounds which means that there are similarities and differences between them. Students can sometimes share their academic choices, although each one of them has academic concerns. However, there are several reasons why they were not affected by friends. For example, some participants discussed the academic choice with their friends, but said, “I found that they were interested in different academic pathways”. Others preferred not to talk about their academic choice because they believed their friends were not interested in discussing the issue, such as “I was not interested in talking with my friends about my academic choice”. There were some participants who have similarities to their friends, but that did not influence their academic choice because, “We respect each other’s academic choices”. This implies that they are independent in their academic choices. Some participants preferred not to share their academic choice with their friends because, “I had made my decision already, so I think there was no reason to talk with them”. Overall, these participants had made their academic choice by themselves without any influence from their friends.

However, 3% n=7 of the participants strongly agreed with the effect of their friends on their academic choice. There were 2 interviewees who stressed that their academic decisions were affected by their friends.

Fahd stated that:

> “I had a conversation with some older friends who study the health pathway regarding my academic choice. They encouraged me to select that academic path by telling me about the advantages of the health pathway. Also, they clarified some misunderstanding of issues about the reality of this academic pathway. Yes, they affected my academic decision.”

Similarly, Adel said:

> "More than one of my friends told me that I am good at organising my tasks and my personality is suited to becoming a doctor in the future. This is maybe because I have a similar personality to my dad. Somehow, their words convinced me to choose the health pathway."

The role of friends may affect academic decision-making in different ways. For instance, the students sought advice from older friends who have experienced a similar academic pathway to benefit from their experiences. They have some common academic interests between them. One stated, "They clarified some misunderstanding of issues about the reality of this academic pathway". Other students may talk with friends of the same age because they knew each other very well, such as, "More than one of my friends told me that I am good at organising my tasks and my personality is suited to becoming a doctor in the future". This could help students to identify more about themselves from the perspective of their friends. The influence between peers is sometimes more acceptable and useful among the students. They can benefit each other.

4.7.2.4 The role of the required standard in levels of achievement and its potential influence on decision making

Most universities request a required standard in levels of achievement, which is a combination of final grades of high school, a general aptitude test and the general educational attainment test. These two tests are provided by an independent centre, which is the National Centre for Assessment. This required standard is considered to be a challenge for high school students; reaching a high score will allow them to choose from various academic pathways. The challenge is that none of the students can anticipate the score of this required standard in levels of achievement because the results are declared after their graduation. Therefore, some students may decide their academic pathway based on the required standard score. According to the survey's results, only 38% n=93 of the participants agreed that the standard level of achievement required affected their academic choice. This is a surprising finding given the importance of grades for

university entry. To clarify this issue, 6 interviewees stressed that their required standard in levels of achievement affected their academic choice.

Saad, Manal, Saleh, Hind, Ali and Fahd agreed that their required standard in levels of achievement did influence their academic choices by encouraging them to choose the current academic pathways. For example, Saad replied that:

> "I dreamed of choosing the health pathway. As a result of my effort in high school, the required standard in levels of achievement was more than what I expected. It achieved the required standard of the health pathway. Then, I decided to study this academic pathway."

These participants believed that their required standard in levels of achievement had affected their academic decision-making. In fact, a high score for the required standard in levels of achievement provided more academic options to the high school students because most universities and colleges demanded specific scores to accept new students. Some participants did study hard and did their best to achieve a high score of the standard required because they aspired to join the current academic pathway. There were some participants who made their academic choice based on the score of the standard required; for example, "that encouraged me to persist with my academic decision and choose the health pathway". Other participants were expecting a range of the score of the standard required, which gave them some confidence and motivation regarding their academic choice. Responses included, "It was high and close to my expectation, that motivated me to choose the health pathway". Thus, sometimes the students might make their academic decision according to the score of the required standard in levels of achievement.

On the other hand, 7% n=17 of the participants chose "I do not know" to answer the question about the effect of the required standard in levels of achievement. Indeed, the other 4 interviewees reported that there was no influence on their academic choice from either the grades or the standard required.

Adel stated that:

> "The required standard in levels of achievement score was high, as a result of my hard study. However, this high score did not affect my academic decision to apply for the health pathway. I worked hard to achieve my academic dream."

Interestingly, Hamad, Mona, Adel and Suha made their academic choices without any influence from the required standard in levels of achievement for different reasons. For example, some of them had made their decision before receiving the scores as a result of their hard work studying. A few expected the required score for the academic choice based on scores of previous years. Also, Suha replied, "I was confident about my study and educational achievement". As Hamad said:

> "I knew the university's required standard in levels of achievement for last year. So, I managed my time and studied hard to achieve higher than that level. I was confident about my academic choice, and I was not surprised when I received my required level of achievement. It did not affect my academic decision."

To summarise, academic choice is a complicated process because various factors may be involved and have an influence. The required standard in levels of achievement is one of those factors. The interviewees who mentioned that these factors did not affect their decision about which academic path would be chosen had studied hard and done their best to achieve their academic dream, "I managed my time and studied hard to achieve higher than that level". They had decided to study a specific academic pathway before receiving the required standard in levels of achievement result and checked the previous score of required level of achievement for the university. They were confident about their academic decision as a result of their hard work whilst studying in high school; for example, "The reason for that is I was confident about my study and educational achievement". Therefore, the required standard in levels of achievement did not influence the academic choice of some students.

4.7.3 Summary of the role of high school in the academic choice

This research found that generally the role of the high school in the academic choice of first-year university students did not affect their academic choice, at least from the perspective of the student. The high school was the main theme here, and the sub-themes examined were the teachers, the preference for some subjects, friends and the required standard in levels of achievement. Some of those sub-themes did affect the participants' academic decision-making and others did not.

The role of teachers in high school in the academic choice of first-year university students influenced some participants and did not affect others. For example, some participants mentioned that some teachers affected their academic choice, because of their creative method of teaching and their encouraging words to make the decision about the academic choice. However, the other participants believed that the teachers were busy with teaching work and the number of students was over the school's capacity. The teachers were not able to help and guide them regarding the academic choice.

With regard to the preference for subjects in high school, most of the participants emphasised that their academic decision-making was affected by this factor. For example, some participants preferred some subjects in high school which encouraged them to choose a specific academic pathway because they are in that academic choice. Other participants preferred specific subjects in high school and decided to progress their learning in that subject at university. There was one interviewee who believed that his preference did not impact his academic choice because he found all high school subjects to be enjoyable.

Interestingly, the required standard in levels of achievement has influenced the academic choice of some participants in different ways. For example, some participants were expecting a level of the score of the standard required which gave them some encouragement regarding their academic choice. Other interviewees made their academic

choice based on the score of the standard required. However, others stressed that it did not affect their academic decisions because they had decided to study a specific academic pathway before receiving the score of the required standard and had checked the previous score required by the university.

Overall, the high school, as an educational system, must make a significant contribution to the academic choice of students by providing high quality education and encouraging teachers to help students with regard to their academic choices. Also, high school can assist students in determining their academic choice through a variety of updated academic subjects to give them a chance to make themselves familiar with these subjects. Students spend more than one-third of the day at school; thus, the high school has a great opportunity to provide several facilities for students to build and develop their knowledge and personality for the next stage of their study journey, which is the university.

4.8 The role of career guidance in high school

The career guidance in high school is an essential service that must be provided for students. The career guidance as a main theme consisted of two sub-themes which were: 1) the role of the student guide in schools, who has a responsibility to advise and help students collectively and individually on various issues, and 2) the role of career guidance programmes, which may enable students to explore their abilities, skills and the most suitable academic choice for them. In fact, the labour market needs people who enjoy their work. This enjoyment comes from making the right academic choice of subjects studied. Delivering students to the labour market is a combined mission in which the student guide in school is involved. As mentioned in Chapter two – literature review, different services and programmes can be provided by collaboration between the student guide, the school administration and other organisations for students in high school which are related to career guidance.

4.8.1 The questionnaire

Table 4-16 shows the participants' responses when they were asked in the questionnaire about the role of career guidance in high school.

Statement	The most selected response	The most least response
The student guide in high school was an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I strongly disagree - 64% n=158	I strongly agree - 1% n=3
The career guidance programmes in high school were an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.	I strongly disagree - 50% n=123	I strongly agree - 3% n=7

Table 4-16 The most and least selected responses to the role of the career guidance in high school in the academic choice.

The respondents demonstrated that the student guide and the career guidance programmes in high school did not impact their academic choice. This collective disagreement among the participants may refer to the lack of providing guidance programmes by the student guide, such as professional aptitude tests and individual career guidance. Moreover, the disagreement could be related to the lack of information about the career guidance programmes among the students. For a deeper understanding, the following interview results provide more details about the negative statements from the participants.

The student guide's mission is to prepare, help and advise students on which academic path would be appropriate for them, taking into consideration their abilities and interests. In fact, the student guide in high school should prepare the students who are close to graduating to decide between the academic pathway choices at the university. It is the student guide's responsibility to provide different programmes and services for the high school students and encourage them to attend and benefit from these, in order to help

them prepare for undergraduate life. Rarely, the students sought the student guide's advice about their academic choice or academic decision-making. This may be due to the lack of information with regard to the student guide's responsibilities towards them. Furthermore, not seeking the student guide's advice might be because of some reasons, for example, the effectiveness and the benefit of provided information about career guidance for students. The next section presents the results of the role of career guidance in high school with regard to the academic choice of the first-year university students included in this study.

Notably, the responses have been divided based on the academic pathways to reveal some interesting results and differences between the health pathway and the humanities pathway. The comparison between academic pathways indicated that there was no difference in the responses to the role of career guidance in high school in the participants' academic choice. The results appear to be similar between both pathways in respect of all the sub-themes of career guidance in high school.

4.8.2 The interviews

4.8.2.1 The role of the student guide in high school and his/her potential influence on decision making

High schools have a student guide who is qualified to provide different guidance services and programmes for the students, such as professional aptitude tests and individual career guidance. One of the main services is that of individual career guidance. The student guide has full responsibility to provide this service for students in high school. This research was interested in exploring and understanding the role of the student guide in relation to the academic decision-making of first-year university students. There were 1% n=3 of participants who strongly agreed with the effect of the student guide in high school on their academic choice. However, 64% n=158 of participants strongly disagreed with the statements questioned in the survey. Furthermore, 10 interviewees, both male and female, provided greater details about their responses. All the interviewees stressed that the student guide did not help them in their academic choice.

Mona and Hamad shared the same point of view about the student guide in high school. They said it did not affect their academic choice because there was no advice from the student guide in terms of academic choice. For example, Mona said:

> "The student guide in my high school did not provide any individual advice for me. She did not affect my academic decision."

Differently, Saad answered:

> "Unfortunately, the student guide did not impact my academic decision. He was doing other work rather than advising students."

Differently, Saleh and Ali stated that the student guides did not influence their academic choice because the work unrelated to career guidance including general guidance kept the guides busy, so they did not provide career guidance for students. As Saleh said:

> "He was helping the school's director with other general guidance works, but not those related to career guidance. I did not gain any benefit from him that affected my academic decision."

With regard to the number of students, Fahd, Suha and Manal mentioned that the high number of students prevented the student guides from providing sufficient career guidance for students. Fahd said:

> "The number of students in my high school was over the student guide's capacity. He did not affect my academic choice at that time."

Hind shared a similar point of view of Adel, when he said:

> "I did not seek or ask for any advice from the student guide in my high school. I did not need his guidance."

Overall, the role of the student guide in high school did not influence the participants' academic decision-making for various reasons. For example, the number of students in the school was such that the student guide only provided some general guidance programmes or services for the students. The participants commented, "He has provided some general guidance programmes for the students there". Also, some students did not ask for advice; for example, "I did not seek or ask for any advice from the student guide in my high school". Furthermore, the task of providing guidance was not a high priority on the student guide's list of tasks; for example, "He was doing other work rather than advising students". The enormous number of students in school did not allow the student guide to provide individual guidance to students, as described in some interviewees' viewpoints; for instance, "The number of students in my high school was over the student guide's capacity". Consequently, the individual career guidance was not active or provided. Therefore, there was a misunderstanding of the real tasks of the student guide in high school from both students and the student guide, and the performance of the student guide was poor.

4.8.2.2 The role of career guidance in high school and its potential influence on decision making

The career guidance programmes are a shared responsibility between the student guide, the school administration and other relevant organisations. There are two common methods of providing guidance in high school, which are individual guidance and public guidance events. The provision of individual guidance has been mentioned in the previous point regarding the student guide in high school. However, public guidance events have different subjects, purposes and organisers. The interesting events in relation to this research are the career guidance services for students in high school. The research aimed to explore and understand the role of the career guidance programmes and services in relation to the academic choices of first-year university students. The questionnaire results show that 50% n=123 of the participants strongly disagreed with the statement that the career guidance programmes in high school played a role in their academic decisions. The interviews provided more details about their responses. Nine of the ten interviewees emphasised that the career guidance programmes did not influence their academic choice.

Most of the guidance services at high school were general and not related to the career field. Moreover, they were not effective in the academic choices of Hind, Hamad, Ali, Manal. For example, Hind stated:

> "There were a few public guidance programmes, but these were not related to career guidance and choosing an academic path."

Some interviewees, Fahd, Adel, Saad and Saleh, indicated that the career guidance services were few and insufficient for helping them to choose their academic pathways. Thus, a few interviewees cannot remember these services. Other interviewees did not attend and seek to benefit from these services because they were few and inadequate for assisting their academic decision-making. As Suha stated:

> "I cannot remember any guidance programmes in my high school. So, there was no impact on my academic choice."

Nine out of the ten interviewees mentioned that there was no influence from the career guidance in high school on their academic decision-making. Some of them stated similar reasons; for example, the number of students in school, "The number of students did not help to provide such programmes". In some cases, there were a few guidance services, but these did not place enough focus on career guidance rather than general guidance. The responses included, "The few guidance services did not affect my academic decision-making. They were general guidance", "My academic choice was not affected by the few guidance programmes in high school. They were for general guidance purposes", and "I cannot remember any guidance programmes in my high school". All of these reasons came from the interviewees' perspectives on the role of career guidance services and programmes in their high school in their academic choice.

In contrast, (3% n=7) of participants strongly agreed that the career guidance programmes did affect their academic choice. Also, one interviewee had a different point of view about this role.

Mona made a different statement about the career guidance in her high school:

> "There was one career guidance programme that had an effect on my academic decision-making. My high school took us to a small career exhibition regarding the academic pathways in university. The exhibition was a significant event for other students and me."

She said that the school's visit to the career exhibition had affected her academic choice because she obtained lots of information about different academic pathways. She found satisfying answers from the representatives of the humanities pathway to questions that concerned her. She said, "The exhibition was a significant event for other students and me."

4.8.3 Summary of the role of career guidance in high school in the academic choice

In conclusion, the role of career guidance in high school, in general, did not affect the academic choice of the first-year university students. The student guide in school had been kept busy with other works not related to career guidance, or the number of students in the school did not enable them to run career guidance programmes. Also, the student guide's performance was poor. The career guidance services and programmes were not sufficiently convincing to influence their academic choice. Interestingly, some interviewees could not remember any career guidance programmes, and that implies they were few and had no influence, or maybe that the interviewees were not interested. The career guidance did not rely only on the student guide, but the school administration was also involved and should have supported it.

4.9 First-year university students and challenges

Most decisions have some challenges which people sometimes do not initially realise. The first-year university students could face some challenges after starting their chosen academic pathway. These could be, for example, academic challenges related to the academic pathway, social challenges or some other challenges about the specific

academic subject for the next year. This research aimed to explore the challenges that the first-year university students could face. The research excluded questions about the challenges from the questionnaire because the responses to the interview questions in this regard would be more in depth and provide more details about the challenges compared with responses to the questionnaire. The key point of the interview was to give the participants a chance to express their answers and to provide further explanations about their perspective on the challenges.

The outcome of the interviews indicated that the participants did face some challenges at the university. For example, the academic English, the methods of studying the academic pathway, the new academic lifestyle or the undergraduate's lifestyle, the location of the university, the admission requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year and the parents' wishes or dreams for their children. These patterns of challenges were shared by 8 of the interviewees, although the remaining 2 did not encounter any challenges for reasons that will be explained later. Almost all of these challenges may force students to study hard and do their best to overcome them successfully, otherwise some students may move to another university, leave undergraduate study or change their academic subject. All of these are assumptions about the consequences of the challenges that the first-year university student may face. The context of the interview was Arabic and has been translated into English.

4.9.1 The interview

4.9.1.1 The challenge of academic English and its potential influence on decision making

English is the international academic language for many higher education institutions. Therefore, the E university uses English as a primary language for most of its academic pathways. However, Arabic is the principal language for schools in Saudi, except the subject of the English language. This means that most of the first-year university students may find it a challenge to study their academic pathway in English because they have spent around 12 years at school studying in Arabic. This change in the learning language

could create some difficulties for the first-year university students in studying at undergraduate level. The research sought to explore and understand this challenge in order to understand the consequences of their academic decision. There were four interviewees who had faced a challenge with academic English.

Saad, Saleh, Suha and Ali agreed that the English language was their challenge when studying their academic pathway at university because they had been studying for twelve years at school in the Arabic language. As Saad said:

> "I had studied most of the school curriculum in Arabic. In my opinion, the key challenge for me, now, is studying English as an academic language because all the health pathway subjects and their duties are in English."

Overall, there was an agreement among these four participants that English was a challenge. According to the interviewees, the reason was that most students study their school curriculum in Arabic, except the English language subject, such as "The shift from studying in Arabic to English is difficult". Then, at university, most of the university academic curricula are taught in English except a few Arabic and Islamic subjects. Moreover, there are new academic vocabularies, grammars and also the new academic information to learn. Most of the homework, assignments and other academic duties must be done in academic English language. The participants remarked, "I have to understand it very well because most of the academic subjects are in English". Hence, the first-year university students must study hard and seek advice from the student guide or any specialised department at the university regarding the challenge of English.

4.9.1.2 The method of study and its potential influence on decision making

The first-year university students have a new experience with the subjects of their academic pathway. The method of study with which the students are familiar at school has changed, because the new academic environment system demands a new method of

study. Previously, in schools, the teachers taught the students and they were supposed to be the main source of information. Hence, the students received and learnt information from their teachers. In contrast, the undergraduate has a different learning and teaching system. The students are responsible for learning and searching for information, and the lecturers and professors teach less than the school teachers, although they may help the students to discover how they can find academic information by themselves. Moreover, sometimes the students may find themselves learning some new subjects which are not directly related to their high school subjects. Therefore, six interviewees had a challenge regarding the methods of study, which they needed to change in order to be able to adapt successfully to their new academic experience.

Interestingly, Saad, Suha, Ali, Adel and Manal stated that the academic subjects at university demanded new and effective methods of learning and obtaining knowledge. It is a new chapter in their educational journey. For example, Fahd shared the same opinion:

> "I had no idea that studying at university is difficult and complicated. However, now I have found out that, I have to find new methods of study to make some academic progress because the high school traditional methods did not work very well."

To summarise this challenge, the interviewees indicated that there are some differences between the methods of study in high school and undergraduate study. For example, "I realised that there is a gap between my methods of studying in high school and the undergraduate study methods" These differences are because the academic information is in greater depth at university compared with high school. This is shown by statements such as, "In the health pathway it seems it is not easy to understand the information. There is lots of academic knowledge". Therefore, some participants were trying to find other suitable methods to obtain information and understand it, such as searching online, for example, "I need to search online to find more explanations for some academic subjects". Also, these participants agreed that undergraduate study is more difficult and requires more effort compared with the high school. The positive side is that this challenge encouraged them to look for new ways to find and understand information.

4.9.1.3 The university lifestyle and its potential influence on decision making

After the university students made their decision about the academic pathway, they became more independent than previously, because they were supposed to be aware of the future and their academic achievements. For example, previously, their parents had authority to send their children to school, and they were responsible for their children's educational attainment. However, currently, the university students are responsible for their own academic achievement, and the parents' position becomes more supportive and encouraging rather than controlling and supervision. This independence and responsibility may create some challenges to studying and adapting to the new lifestyle.

Suha, Saad and Adel shared the same concerns about the new responsibilities for their academic experience at university and for achieving their future academic and career goals. For instance, Suha stated:

> "It is a challenge to manage my time. I have lots of homework that must be done and lots of things I desire to do. I did not think that I would have to schedule that by myself. Now, I have more responsibilities than before."

In fact, the interviewees indicated that their responsibilities have increased since they joined the university. They mentioned that they have become more independent of their parents than before, stating, "Now, I have more responsibilities than before". However, the interviewees emphasised that the challenge is how they can achieve a balance between their academic obligations and their personal life. There is freedom, but there needs to be control of it, and there is independence, but it has to be managed perfectly. The successful student requires this good control and perfect management, "The achievement of success relies on me, in the first place, and then how I can manage the time. I must adapt myself to this new lifestyle". Otherwise, the students may lose this academic opportunity and would be disappointed. The new academic experience is a big step in the students' lives that demands some support and advice from someone who works in guidance.

4.9.1.4 The university location and its potential influence on decision making

The location of the university was sometimes a challenge for some students who lived far away from it. Transportation and university accommodation could make their mobility easier, but the long distance might be a barrier between the first-year university students and academic achievement. Also, living away from home and family may affect the first-year students' attainment. The next interviewee explains the reasons behind this challenge of the university location.

When Hind was asked about her challenges at the university, she replied:

> "The university is far from my home. My home address and university are in different cities in the Eastern region. My parents are worried about the long distance between us. So, I live in university accommodation. I hope that helps me focus on my academic goals and reassures my parents that I am safe."

The focus on the academic goal and the parents' concern about her are the reason why the university location became a challenge for her. After the long time she had spent with her family previously, now she must live away from them to achieve her academic dream. She said, "I live in university accommodation. I hope that helps me focus on my academic goals and reassures my parents that I am safe". It is difficult for her to live alone with her personal responsibilities and academic obligations.

4.9.1.5 The parents' wishes and their potential influence on decision making

Sometimes, the students may decide to choose a specific academic pathway because their parents want them to study that pathway. In this case, this pressure to choose a specific academic pathway may meet the student's preferred academic choice, or it may not meet their academic desires. The challenge becomes difficult if that decision was not one the student wanted to make. Moreover, there is more pressure on the student in both cases,

because the parents will observe their academic achievement and the student would not like to disappoint their parents.

When Saleh was asked about his challenges, he said:

> "I had made my decision to choose the health pathway because of my parents' hope. And, the social perspective is my parents' concern. Their hope and concern load more responsibilities on my shoulders. I do not want to disappoint them. That is my challenge."

Overall, this student has made his academic decision based on his parents' hopes, which makes the consequences of his decision hard on him, as he said, "I had made my decision to choose the health pathway because of my parents' hope". The difficulty is that he would not like to disappoint his parents, "I do not want to disappoint them", because they want to be proud of him, and also they want him to help them financially. He mentioned this during the interview, saying, "because they want me to help my family financially. I am their only hope of supporting my family". The burden of his parents' hopes may affect his academic achievement and either encourage him to succeed in studying and achieving their dream or disappoint them and fail in his study. He noted, "Their hope and concern load more responsibilities on my shoulders".

4.9.1.6 The specific academic subject requirements and their potential influence on decision making

The academic requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year are a challenge for the first-year students. If they want to be able to choose a preferred academic subject for the next year they must achieve the requirements of that subject. The students who were interviewed had chosen the health pathway. Moreover, they found the academic requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year were a challenge to be achieved.

Fahd, Ali and Adel stated that the specific academic subjects' requirements were their challenge. They had to achieve these in order to gain the opportunity to choose their preferred subjects for the next four years. As Fahd answered:

> "I am studying the health pathway now, and I want to be a doctor after graduation. However, the academic requirements for the doctor dream are high and strict. I will do my best to accomplish them. Otherwise, I will become a nurse, which is good, but it is not my goal."

All of these interviewees are studying the health pathway, and they are concerned about the high and strict academic requirements of the specific academic subject for the next year. For example, "The health pathway has high requirements to enable me to qualify to choose the preferred subject for the next year". It is a challenge for them to meet those requirements, especially for those who want to be a doctor in the future, as a first aim, as well as for students who hope to be a nurse or work in the health field. This is demonstrated by comments such as, "I must work hard in my studies to achieve results for what I prefer to study for the next four years". The requirements have been imposed to encourage students to study hard and make them more responsible for their future goal. The health field is important for people's lives and health.

4.9.2 Summary of first-year university students and challenges

In conclusion, the interviewees have indicated some challenges that they faced after starting to study their academic pathway. For example, the challenge of academic English as an essential language for most of the undergraduate curricula, and the fact that their methods of study must be updated and changed because the undergraduate requires different methods compared with high school study. Another challenge is that the university lifestyle has more responsibilities and tasks, which demands adaptability to succeed in study. Moreover, the parents' hopes for their children to study a specific academic pathway places pressure on the students. Also, the university location is a challenge when there is a long distance between it and the student's home, consequently,

their responsibilities are increased. The last challenge for the participants is the academic requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year, because the university has high and strict academic requirements. These challenges could affect the first-year students' academic achievement, and that effect might be positive or negative. On the positive side, the students could work seriously and motivate themselves to overcome these challenges and succeed in achieving their academic goals. However, on some students it could have a negative effect, which may lead them to change their academic pathway or leave the university, for example. Both types of reactions need some support and advice from qualified people.

4.10 The university career guidance services

The university guidance centre has the potential to provide several diverse services including career guidance services. In fact, the career guidance programmes and services are important for the university students, especially for the first-year students. These services may help the students to decide what they want to study in the following years and what area they prefer to work in, in future. Also, the students can explore and learn more about themselves using these services, and discover more about their abilities and skills. The first-year university students could benefit from career guidance services and programmes to make the right decision with regard to any career concerns or academic decision-making issues. This research sought to explore the participants' responses and understand the interviewees' perspectives on the benefit of career guidance services and programmes.

The questionnaire suggested five career guidance services and programmes for the participants. The first is providing some general career guidance programmes for the first-year university students; for example, group career guidance, workshops regarding academic decision-making and field visits. The second service is providing some ability tests and examining their inclinations towards particular professions in order to assist the first-year university students understand themselves and know more about their abilities and professional tendencies. The third is collaboration between career guidance and other relevant institutions; for example, some companies from the labour market or some

higher education institutions. The reason for this collaboration is to give the students updated information about future job prospects. The fourth service is individual advice by a career guide that provides a good opportunity for the student to ask for the career guide's advice regarding their concerns about the specific academic subject for the next year or their future job. The final suggested service is career guidance publications providing some information about the specific subjects next year or some news of the labour market's need for new jobs.

4.10.1 The questionnaire

Table 4-17 the most and least selected responses to the role of the suggested career guidance services and programmes in students' academic choice.

The statement	The most selected response	The least selected response
Providing some career guidance programmes such as workshops, individual career guidance, field visits and public lectures may affect my decision about the academic subject for the next year.	I agree - 40% n=99	I strongly disagree - 5% n=13
Providing tests and measurements of tendencies towards particular professions would influence my decision about the academic subject for the next year.	I agree - 35% n=85	I strongly disagree - 11% n=28
The collaboration between the career guidance centre and other interested institutions such as ministries, companies and academic guidance could provide updated information about the labour market which would influence my decision about the academic subject for the next year.	I agree - 41% n=100	I disagree - 3% n=7

The advice of a career guide at the university would influence my decision about the academic subject for the next year.	I agree - 38% n=94	I strongly disagree - 4.5% n=11
The publications and brochures of career guidance which are provided by the career guidance centre would influence my decision about the academic subject for the next year.	I agree - 32% n=79	I strongly disagree - 6.5% n=16

Table 4-17 The most and least selected responses to the role of the suggested career guidance services and programmes in students' academic choice.

Table 4-17 shows the respondents' answers to the suggested career guidance services and programmes. The majority of participants were agreed that these services could help them, for example, to decide which specific academic subject is suitable. However, there were a few students who had a different opinion about the benefit of the general career guidance services and programmes.

Notably, the responses have been divided based on the academic pathways to reveal some interesting results and differences between the health pathway and the humanities pathway. The comparison between academic pathways indicated that there was no difference in the responses to the role of university career guidance services in their choice of specific academic subject. The results appear to be similar in respect of both pathways for all the sub-themes of university career guidance services.

4.10.2 The interview

The ten interviewees were asked about their responses to the questionnaire to gain a deeper understanding of their responses. There were 3 interviewees who had both disagreement and agreement about the benefit of the suggested career guidance services and programmes. However, the other 6 interviewees agreed with the benefit of these services and programmes. Interestingly, there was one interviewee, Saleh, who had a lack

of information about the benefit of the career guidance services and programmes, as most of his responses were “I do not know” or “I disagree”. In fact, this participant chose the academic pathway to achieve his parents’ hopes and this is possibly why he could not find any benefit in those services or he did not need them due to his academic choice.

4.10.2.1 Provide some general career guidance programmes

The career guidance at university can provide some general services and programmes for first-year students. These services could be, for example, a public lecture related to aspects of the career, a field visit, a careers day and academic decision-making workshops. The fundamental purpose of these services is to offer an opportunity to a large number of first-year students to benefit from each other’s experiences and the career guidance service itself. In the questionnaire, 40% n=99 of participants selected “I agree” to answer the question relating to this service. There was also agreement from 9 interviewees with the benefit of this service.

Saad, Fahd, Hamad, Suha, Hind and Adel have a similar viewpoint on the updated information about specific academic subjects and the demands of the labour market which students can obtain from the general career guidance programmes. Also, these programmes can help them to choose a specific academic subject for the next four years. For example, Mona stated:

> “The career guidance workshops could assist me to realise the specific academic subject for next year. I think other general career guidance services, also, might be helpful.”

Ali and Manal shared the same point of view, which is that the general career guidance programmes may benefit a large number of first-year university students at the same time; for example, through public lectures and field visits. Manal said:

> "I encourage the general career guidance services because of the large number of students that may learn something new, which could help them with their academic decision-making."

Overall, there was a consensus among these participants about the benefit of the general career guidance services. These services could help many students in different ways. For example, a large number of students can benefit at the same time. The participants commented, "Many students could benefit from these services". Moreover, these services can help them to make the correct academic decision, as shown in this statement, "I think the general career guidance would help us as first-year students to make the right academic decision". Also, students could learn about the updated demands of the labour market, notably, "The career day could provide updated information about the jobs' requirements". Also, the students may have an opportunity to share their experiences with other students and with the career guide.

However, a few participants 5% n=13 strongly disagreed about the benefit of the general career guidance services. This is demonstrated by Saleh who said:

> "I do not think that the general career guidance services could help the first-year students with their academic decision-making, because each student has his own case with its specific details."

In fact, this interviewee had a point of view about the influence of the general career guidance programmes on the first-year students. He stated that it would not help or solve the individual case of each student. The students' cases each have different backgrounds. Therefore, the general guidance programmes do not have an influence on the students.

4.10.2.2 Provide some ability tests and examination of their inclinations towards particular professions

The ability tests and examination of the tendency to choose certain professions could help the first-year students to learn more about their abilities and inclinations. There are several kinds of tests that can help students to identify their specific academic subject choice for the next year. These tests can assist students to know more about possible and suitable jobs according to their abilities and inclinations. When the participants were asked in the questionnaire about these kinds of tests 35% n=85 agreed with this service, indeed, 9 interviewees also agreed that these tests would help.

Hamad, Ali, Suha, Hind, Fahd, Manal, Mona, Saad and Ade made a common statement about the benefit of ability tests and examination of their inclinations towards particular professions. Most of the interviewees believed that these tests are helpful in their academic decision-making. For example, Hamad stated:

> "Sometimes, I want to know more about myself by doing some tests. I believe the ability tests and the examination of professional tendencies will help other students including me to explore our abilities and career preferences."

To summarise, these nine interviewees stressed the positive effect of these tests on the first-year students, as they can benefit from them in different ways. For example, students would have a chance to understand their abilities and tendencies through the test results, as the participants commented, "Most people could be convinced of their abilities by using the results of this kind of test". Moreover, students can determine which academic choice is suitable for their abilities based on the results. Some comments included, "The help comes from the results which could lead the students to make the right academic choice for the next year". Therefore, the students could decide the appropriate specific academic subject according to their abilities and inclinations and find a suitable future job. The correct academic decision means educational achievement and a successful job.

On the other hand, 11% n=28 participants selected "I strongly disagree" to respond to the questionnaire. Notably, one participant had a different attitude towards these tests' assistance, as Saleh stated:

> "I do not know about the benefit of the ability tests and the professional tendencies test. Also, I do not understand how they could measure my abilities."

The misunderstanding of the role of these kinds of tests and their function could lead students to doubt the benefit, and also to refuse to experience them. Thus, they may not make the correct academic decision. Other external influencing factors would affect their academic choice if they could not understand their personal needs, career abilities and academic tendencies.

4.10.2.3 The collaboration between the career guidance centre and other institutions

The career guidance service can provide more updated information about the labour market and jobs through collaboration with other interested institutions. These could be from higher education or the labour market or other private institutions. The key point of this collaboration is allowing both parties to update each other in order to present helpful information for the students. The students would benefit from this collaboration and the updated information by balancing their academic choice with the demands of the labour market. Responding to the questionnaire, 41% n=100 of participants agreed with the effectiveness of this collaboration, and 9 interviewees agreed with this statement.

Suha, Hind, Saad, Hamad, Mona, Fahd, Manal, Adel and Ali shared similar viewpoints with regard to the benefits of the collaboration between the career guidance centre and other institutions. For example, this collaboration would help students to plan for their future and to gather the most up-to-date information about the jobs available in the labour market. Suha said:

> "The updated information about the demand of the labour market is important for all university students. Especially for those who are in the first year because they could determine which specific academic subject should be chosen from early on. I encourage the career guidance to activate this collaboration."

Overall, these was an agreement among the interviewees' perspectives that collaboration between the career guidance service and other institutions will help the first-year university students to choose their academic subject for the next year. This is demonstrated by their responses such as, "The collaboration between the career guidance and other institutions will positively affect the first-year students' academic choice for next year. The career guidance service should collaborate with other institutions in order to help the first-year students to make the correct academic decision, as the respondents noted, "The career guidance must collaborate with other interested companies to help the first-year students to learn about job opportunities". Knowing more details about the work environment could also help students to decide their specific academic subject for the subsequent years, which will determine their job later. This help would come from the information provided about new jobs in the labour market as a result of the collaboration.

However, 3% n=7 of participants disagreed with this service in the questionnaire. Also, Saleh had an opposing answer:

> "I cannot understand the benefit of this collaboration between the career guidance and other institutions for my academic decision. I think the internet could help me with that."

This participant is not sure that this kind of collaboration would help him to make an academic decision based on the outcome of that collaboration. He has his own way of researching about new jobs in the labour market through the internet.

4.10.2.4 The advice of the career guide

The career guide in the university must provide individual guidance for the first-year students so they can obtain appropriate advice that can lead them to deal correctly with their issues regarding, for example, the academic subject for next year, future job, and their professional abilities and inclinations. Sometimes, students may lose their way to the achievement of their goals. Most first-year students need privacy to speak about their issues in order to find an individual solution with someone whom they trust. The interviewees were asked about this type of service. According to the questionnaire, 38% n=94 of participants agreed with the benefit of this service, and 8 interviewees supported this agreement.

Fahd, Adel, Suha, Saleh, Mona, Hamad and Saad stated that the individual guidance from the career guide would be helpful and beneficial in their academic decision about the specific academic subject for the next four years. They could help them to determine how to make the right academic and career decision individually. Also, there is privacy and the service is confidential, which may help students to discuss their academic and career issues with the career guide. For example, Saleh said:

> "I can agree with this career guidance service because the career guide is an opportunity for the first-year students to speak with a trusted person who could help them."

In fact, the benefit of the career guide's service has been agreed by all of these participants. They believed how important this service is, commenting, "Yes, the career guide is necessary for the first-year students". There were various reasons for this agreement; for example, the privacy that the first-year students look for to share and explain their concerns about their future job with the qualified career guide, as they noted, "The key benefit of the career guide at the university is the privacy". Also, confidence and confidentiality were essential for encouraging the participant to feel safe and optimistic about his concerns, "They can discuss their issues between them and the career

guide with more confidence and confidentially". It is obvious that there are several benefits from this service based on the participants' perspectives.

In contrast, 4.5% n=11 of the questionnaire participants strongly disagreed about the benefit of the career guide service. This was supported by 2 interviewees, of whom Hind had a point of view on the career guide service:

> "I do not know if the career guide at university will help me to make the right academic decision for the next year. I think I can make my decision on my own."

Similarly, Ali stated:

> "I do not have any idea about the career guide's benefit. In my opinion, I do not need advice from him because I believe in my academic decision. I need to trust whom I will share my concerns with."

As outlined above, there were 2 participants who doubted the benefit of this service, they said, "I do not know if the career guide at university will help me to make the right academic decision for the next year" and "I do not have any idea about the career guide's benefit". They have a doubt because they made their academic decision themselves and they think that their decision is right, "I think I can make my decision on my own". Thus, they do not need to seek advice from the career guide, as one stated, "I do not need advice from him". In both situations, the career guide at the university seems, in general, necessary for the students to talk about their academic concerns and career concerns, in order to find a solution with mutual trust and in a confidential process.

4.10.2.5 The publications of the career guidance service

There are different ways for the career guidance service to present its services and programmes. For example, publications and brochures regarding some career issues, academic choices, academic decision-making or other topics related to the students' career concerns. This research sought to explore the first-year university students' responses to the benefit of the publications and brochures. There were 32% n=79 of participants who agreed that publications and brochures would help them to choose the academic subject for the next year. Moreover, 7 interviewees agreed there was a benefit from this service.

Mona, Suha, Saad, Ali, Fahd and Manal agreed about the benefits of the publications of the career guidance service in their academic decision about the specific academic subject. They mentioned that students can read them in their free time without any pressure and that it was useful for those who find it hard to speak with the career guide. For instance, Hamad replied:

> "I like reading, and these publications could give me an idea about the process of making an academic decision. I hope that would guide me to the right academic subject for the next year. I am not sure about the effect of the publication on the other students who do not like reading."

To summarise the agreement on the career guidance publications and brochures, the interviewees emphasised that this kind of service would help the university students to understand the academic decision-making process by themselves, as "they can read and understand the career guidance content in order to choose the academic subject for the next year, by themselves". The availability of these publications and brochures was another reason for the interviewees' agreement, as the students can find help and read them easily, for example, " I can read what I need from them in my free time". Moreover, the students may prefer to read brochures instead of facing the career guide and discussing their career concerns, especially some first-year students who do not have

enough experience with the career guide. One stated, “In my opinion, the career guidance brochures may help students who find it hard to speak with the career guide”. Some students enjoy reading; therefore, the publications would be more helpful for them, “I like reading, and these publications could give me an idea about the process of making an academic decision”. The career guidance publications and brochures could help first-year university students to know more about different career and academic issues which are important for their academic and career decisions.

However, 6.5% n=16 of participants strongly disagreed with this service. Indeed, 3 interviewees had opinions about the benefit of those career publications.

Hind had a negative point of view about the career guidance publications and brochures:

> “I strongly disagree with the career guidance publications. I do not think that students would spend time reading them. It is traditional to present the guidance information to the students.”

Adel said:

> “I doubt the benefit of the career guidance publications. The career guidance should choose another effective alternative way, for example, social media, to provide the services or information for the first-year university students rather than this classic way.”

Interestingly, Saleh stated:

> “The career guidance brochures would not help the first-year students. The students want to speak with a trusted career guide about their career concerns instead of reading these guidance brochures.”

Overall, these interviewees made opposite statements with regard to the benefit of the career guidance publications. For example, the publication is a classic and traditional way to present the career guidance services which would not help students with their career and academic concerns. They commented, “It is traditional to present the guidance information to the students”. Moreover, the first-year university students would not spend time reading and understanding these publications to find a solution by themselves because they are busy with their academic assignments. This is demonstrated by the comments, “I do not think that students would spend time reading them”. The new technology might be effective and more useful to reach the new modern career guidance publications, for example, “The career guidance should choose another effective alternative way, for example, social media, to provide the services or information for the first-year university students rather than this classic way”. The new generation of university students may not find the traditional career guidance publications and brochures are helpful and effective in order to provide useful information about their academic and career issues.

4.10.3 Summary of the university career guidance services

In conclusion, career guidance should provide services and programmes in different ways for the university students to allow them to choose the most helpful service or programme taking into consideration their individual differences. Most of the participants were agreed that these career guidance services and programmes are useful, although there were a few negative responses in the questionnaire and the interview. In fact, the agreement with the programmes and services should force the career guidance service to work hard on developments and updates that would make these services and programmes more effective. Also, the positive responses to the career guidance services and programmes indicate that there is a high demand for and belief in them. On the other hand, the disagreement with these services and programmes may have come from personal experience or lack of information with regard to career guidance or the method of presenting them to the students. Indeed, the negative responses should encourage the career guidance service to ascertain the reasons for the negativity and weakness, and try to resolve that in the interest of the students’ careers.

4.11 The conclusion

This research has shown that the academic choices of the first-year students at E university have been influenced by a number of factors. The selected academic pathways were the health pathway and the humanities pathway. The main themes that participants were asked about in the questionnaire and the interview were the role of family, the role of high school and the role of career guidance in high school. These were assumed to be the main themes that were the closest to the participants when they made their academic choice. Also, the participants were asked about the challenges they faced in university and the expected benefit of the suggested career guidance services at university. Each main theme consisted of some related sub-themes. According to the research question, "what factors are important to the choice of academic pathway for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia from their perspective?" the results were divided according to the main themes and sub-themes, and the most influential factor on the academic choice of the participants was highlighted. Indeed, during the interviews, there was a question that all interviewees were asked, which was, "did you have a chance to think about another university where you may join one of its academic pathways?" Most of the interviewees were satisfied with the E university as an appropriate option for them and did not mention other international universities, except one interviewee who mentioned that he did think about studying the health pathway in Sudan. The purpose of this kind of question is to explore whether these interviewees had an opportunity to consider other international academic pathways as a result of the influence of globalisation on their academic choices.

The role of family consisted of 1) the role of parents, 2) the role of brothers and sisters, 3) the role of financial considerations of the family, 4) the role of speciality of relatives, 5) the role of parents' educational achievements and 6) the role of students' ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future. Participants have been affected indirectly by the role of their parents and their educational achievement level. Moreover, the students' ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future had a direct influence on their academic choice. Other sub-themes, such as the speciality of relatives, brothers and sisters and the financial considerations of family did not influence the first-year university students from their perspective.

The second main theme was the role of high school in the participants' academic choice. This theme consisted of the following sub-themes: 1) the role of teachers in high school, 2) the role of preferences for some high school subjects, 3) the role of friends and 4) the role of the required standard in levels of achievement. There were two sub-themes that did influence the academic choice of the participants, which were the preferences for some high school subjects and the required standard in levels of achievement. However, two other sub-themes, teachers in high school and friends had no influence on the participants' choice. This is according to the outcome of the questionnaire and interviews.

The career guidance in high school was the third main theme, with two sub-themes. The first was the role of the student guide in schools, who has a responsibility to advise and help students collectively and individually on various issues. Second was the role of career guidance programmes. Both sub-themes did not influence the academic choice of the participants, according to their responses to the questionnaire and interview.

Some challenges appeared after the decision about academic choice had been made. Some participants faced some challenges after starting their studies. For example, the academic English language, the methods of studying the academic pathway, the new academic lifestyle or the undergraduate's lifestyle, the location of the university, the admission requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year and the parents' wishes or dreams for their children. Most of the participants acted positively toward these challenges, and motivated and encouraged themselves to overcome them successfully.

There were five suggested career guidance services and programmes. The first was providing some general career guidance programmes for the first-year university students. The second service was providing some ability tests and examining their inclinations towards particular professions. The third was collaboration between career guidance and other institutions; for example, some companies from the labour market or some higher education institutions. The fourth service was the provision of individual

advice by a career guide. The final suggested service was career guidance publications providing some information about the specific subjects for the next year or some news of the labour market's need for new jobs. The participants agreed about the benefits of these services and programmes to their academic decisions about the specific academic subject for the next year.

In terms of the important factors for the academic choice, Bourdieu's theory and the rational choice theory helped to interpret and understand the participants' responses to the questionnaire and interview. For example, the relation between the cultural, educational and social background and the academic choice of first-year university students. There was indirect influence on participants' academic choices from their parents, and also the educational achievement level of those parents. The cultural, educational and social background of the participants have encouraged and shaped their ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future. Therefore, the participants' ambition influenced their academic choices directly. Furthermore, this ambition made the participants have confidence to choose academic pathways relevant to their preferences for some subjects in high school, and also inspired them to achieve the required score of the required standard in levels of achievement.

Furthermore, the process of making academic decisions is an interesting field for the rational choice theory because students will usually analyse the costs and benefits of their academic choices to decide which of them is appropriate for them. In this research, participants analysed the costs and benefits of their academic choices in relation to their parents, their ambition, their preferred subjects in high school and the required score of the required standard in levels of achievement. Moreover, they analysed the costs and benefits of their academic decision based on the social, cultural and educational background of them and their parents. The academic decision is complicated because of the variety of relevant elements. Thus, using rational choice theory enabled the researcher to understand and explain how participants make their choices about their desired academic pathway. These are further discussed in the next chapter.

5 Chapter Five – Discussion

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5.1 Introduction

This research set out to explore and understand the important factors for the academic choices of first-year university students in Saudi Arabia. There is a variety of different academic choices and pathways provided by the E university to meet students' hopes and ambitions. Students applied to obtain a place at university to accomplish their academic dreams and obtain an appropriate job in the future. However, those students have different backgrounds, social classes, cultures, abilities and personalities, even though they are from the same region. The focus of this research has been students' educational experience before university, and in this regard schools and how the education system may make a contribution to preparing students for the next educational stage of their academic journey.

The current research aimed to explore how students make their decision to choose a particular academic pathway. It sought to understand the influence of factors, such as family, school, and career guidance in high school, on students' academic decision-making. The main aim of this research was to understand what factors are important to the choice of academic pathway for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia from their perspective.

In order to achieve these aims, this main research question was divided into four sub-questions. What role did schools and families play in academic decision-making for first-year university students? What role did career guidance services play in academic decision-making for first-year university students? What were the main challenges that first-year university students faced during and after making their academic decision? What services could support students' academic decision-making about the specific academic subject for the next year from their perspective? Family, school, and career guidance in high school were the main themes in this research as these were identified in the literature as important. Each of them has sub-themes. The challenges were the result of students' academic choices and they begin once they start studying their current academic pathway. The research also examined students' perspectives on the benefits of

the career guidance services. A brief re-cap on the key theoretical ideas framing this research is presented next.

5.1.1 Academic choice and theory

There are several theoretical approaches or frameworks which can be used to explore the important factors for the academic choices of first-year students at university and to understand the influences of these factors on their academic decision-making. These explore the different related elements to the academic choice that students make; for instance, students themselves, their families, the labour market, and the admissions requirements of the academic pathway. The researcher faced theoretical concerns about how to explore important factors and understand their influences on students' perspectives particularly within the context of Saudi Arabia.

Bourdieu's theory provided an interesting framework for exploring and understanding the reasons behind the academic choice of students, showing how their decisions are connected with other factors around them. Using this framework, most decisions could be considered to be a result of habitus, cultural and social capital. These three concepts shape people's thinking, evaluation and analysis of their decision and choices. The rational choice theory provided a helpful theoretical framework to understand how students made their academic choice in the midst of these factors and how they evaluate these on a cost/benefit basis. Furthermore, it was interesting to explore and understand the decision-making process from the students' perspective and see how these theories helped or not in understanding them.

5.1.1.1 Cultural reproduction theory – Bourdieu

Habitus is the umbrella term covering different kinds of capital, including social and cultural capital. Bourdieu was interested in understanding and explaining the interaction mechanisms of society and in people's actions regarding their past and current situations. Society is usually divided into different classes based on, for example, the culture,

economics, knowledge, education, power and social factors. At the students' level, dispositions are the matrix of experiences that enable a person to decide how to act and respond appropriately in different circumstances; they also depend on how a particular student understands and evaluates those circumstances. Indeed, Bourdieu emphasised that, "each social class has characteristic habitus that generates specific sets of practices" (Swartz, 1997, p. 144).

The social capital can provide some information related to the academic pathway that depends on the size of the social network. For example, students who come from a high social class may have an appropriate opportunity to obtain helpful information through their parents' social contacts which will help with their academic choice. However, working class students may not find their parents' social network helpful because of the social and educational limitations of their social class. Students' networks with others, such as relationships with friends, teachers, relatives and neighbours, could assist their decision regarding the academic pathway. According to Bourdieu, the value of people's social capital depends on the size of the network of relationships that they can efficiently assemble (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, the strength and weakness of networks and social capital resources can determine which academic pathway a student will choose.

In addition, cultural capital is one of the main concepts of Bourdieu's theory. It is the wide cultural background of people; for example, the preferences, skills, knowledge and dispositions that people possess. In terms of the social and educational environment, societies, families and educational institutions are part of structuring students' backgrounds. They receive a variety of linguistic capacity, art, and values and norms. The fundamental participants in transmitting cultural capital to their children are parents through the upbringing process. Usually, children look on their parents as role models in different aspects of achievement. Therefore, their educational achievement may affect the range and depth of the cultural background that parents transmit to their children. Consequently, children's academic choices and career decisions are influenced by the cultural capital received.

5.1.1.2 Rational choice theory

From a different point of view of understanding the influence of important factors on the academic choice of students, the rational choice theory provided more explanations and understanding of their academic decision-making. The rational choice theory can explain some factors and reasons behind these choices and outcomes to make them more comprehensible, and offers a different perspective compared to Bourdieu's theory. The essential concept for the rational choice theory is the costs and benefits of the decision. Evaluation of decisions depends on the balance between costs and benefits, and also on avoiding the risk of failure costs. Breen and Goldthorpe's statement that the general model of educational decisions is based on these three key factors is demonstrated by the fact that when students intend to choose their academic pathway, they attempt to evaluate the costs and benefits of their choice (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Moreover, Need and De Jong indicated that rational choice may be influenced by the constraints and opportunities that students find when making a rational choice for their academic pathway (Need & De Jong, 2001). The rational choice theory explains how students can make an educational or academic decision. The students and their parents may sometimes be worried about the costs of studying an undergraduate programme and the benefit to be gained from it after graduation. Moreover, the decision-making is often a complicated process because the students and their parents are concerned about the likelihood of success and the risk of failure; for example, the consequences of dropping out of university before achieving their qualification.

5.2 The structure of this chapter

This chapter is organised into seven sections. It begins with a brief summary of the career guidance available in Saudi universities, and then summarises the first-year university programme or the preparatory programme. This is followed by the three main themes: family, school and career guidance in high school. The chapter then goes on to discuss the challenges that students may face after making their academic decision. The chapter concludes by examining the career guidance services that the researcher suggested to the participants.

The role of family, as one of the main themes, has six sub-themes, which are 1) the role of parents, 2) the role of brothers and sisters, 3) the financial considerations of the family, 4) the role of the speciality of relatives, 5) the role of parents' educational achievements and 6) the role of the students' ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future. In terms of the role of school, there are four sub-themes: 1) the role of teachers in high school, 2) the role of preferences for some high school subjects, 3) the role of friends and 4) the role of the required standard in levels of achievement. Moreover, the career guidance in high school consists of two sub-themes, which are 1) the role of the student guide in schools, who has a responsibility to advise and help students collectively and individually on various issues, and 2) the role of career guidance programmes, which may enable students to explore their abilities, skills and the most suitable academic choice for them.

Additionally, there are some challenges that students may face after making their academic choice, as a result of their new educational experience. For example, first-year university students may experience the challenges of studying academic English, the methods of studying their academic pathway, the new academic lifestyle or the undergraduate's lifestyle, the location of the university, the admission requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year and their parents' wishes or dreams for their children. In order to find helpful services for university students, five career guidance services were suggested including 1) providing some general career guidance programmes for the first-year university students, 2) providing some ability tests and examining their inclinations towards particular professions in order to assist the first-year university students in understanding themselves and knowing more about their abilities and professional tendencies, 3) collaboration between career guidance and other relevant institutions, 4) individual advice by a career guide that provides an excellent opportunity for the student to ask for the career guide's advice regarding their concerns about the specific academic subject for the next year or their future job and 5) the career guidance publications which provide some information about the specific subjects for the next year or some news of the labour market's need for new jobs.

This discussion chapter highlights the main and significant results of the current research. It interprets them through the chosen theoretical frameworks and links these results with some relevant studies, articles and literature. Furthermore, it identifies other interpretations of some results that cannot be interpreted by these theoretical frameworks because of differences in, for example, cultures and educational systems of these frameworks, as well as the population and sample of the current research. These are then followed by some personal interpretations of the significant results by the researcher, as a faculty member of the E University who also works in the counselling and guidance centre in the education college.

5.3 Career guidance in Saudi universities

The career guidance service is designed to provide a variety of different services to assist first-year students in making the right academic decision concerning the specific academic subject for subsequent years. The critical concept of career guidance is to put the right person in the right place. To achieve this main goal, career guidance must provide sufficient information about the features of different jobs and the specific requirements for abilities, tendencies and capacities, in order to prepare students to make the right decision about their academic pathway, first, and then their possible job, second.

The general career guidance at Saudi universities has several goals for helping students with their problems, such as academic and career issues. From the academic perspective, career guidance aims to help students to choose the appropriate academic pathway which is suitable for their abilities and tendencies. The career perspective leads the career guidance service to advise students, especially those in the first year of university, on possible and suitable future jobs for their academic pathway and their future career goals. The career guidance at university aims to provide helpful and efficient services for the students to support their career and academic choices.

5.4 The first-year university programme or the preparatory programme

The preparatory programme is operated in most public Saudi universities, including the E University. This programme was established for first-year undergraduate students who have just started studying at university. In this programme, students study a general curriculum which is relevant to their academic pathway. For example, students who choose the health pathway will study some general subjects in health, science, English, sport and Islamic culture. This programme seeks to achieve several goals. However, its two main objectives are for students to develop the necessary scientific knowledge required in their future specialities and to classify the students into specific pathways of academic subjects for their next years of study. The final grades of the preparatory programme will determine the specific subject that students can choose for the subsequent years. Clearly, guidance and support do not sit in a vacuum, however, and other factors, such as family, school and career guidance in high school have an effect.

5.5 The role of family

This research sought to explore the role of the family in the academic choice of first-year university students to understand its influences on decision-making. First, the family is the fundamental educational and social environment for students to obtain knowledge and skills and develop ambitions. This leads to the question: would this influence students' decisions about their academic pathway? The family's role may have either a positive or negative effect on a child's personality, depending on the internal interactions among family members. In terms of academic choice, it is a social, cultural and educational environment that may also affect students' academic choices in some way. For example, parents can influence academic choice by asking their child to choose a specific academic pathway directly, or indirectly by their own educational achievement level or professional success. Moreover, brothers and sisters may affect students' academic decisions by supporting their academic choice or suggesting other interesting academic choices, for example. The family has other different elements that may influence the academic decisions of students, such as the speciality of relatives and the family's financial considerations.

Interestingly, the two significant sub-themes which appeared to have influenced students' academic choices are "my parents" and "my ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future". Around half of the participants agreed with the influence of their parents on their ambitions and their academic choice. Abdel-Qader and Albahsin found that 77.80% of the 597 participants selected their parents as an influencing factor on their preferences of the academic pathways (Abdel-Qader & Albahsin, 2015). Regarding ambition, 47% n=116 of the respondents and all interviewees strongly agreed with the influence and importance of "the ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future" as the family members as a factor in their academic choices, with only a very small number 4.5% n=11 who strongly disagreed with this influence. However, the influence of parents provoked different responses from the different pathways. For students of the humanities pathway, 34% n=24 of 71 agreed about the influence of "my parents" on their academic choice. On the other hand, a third of health pathway students 33% n=58 of 175 disagreed with the influence of their parents on their academic choice, and also 21% n=37 of 175 strongly disagree about the influence of this factor. Therefore, more than half of the health pathway students stated that their parents did not influence their academic decision by forcing them to choose the current academic pathway or another. Furthermore, in the interviews, most of the interviewees emphasised that their parents were supportive and encouraged their academic choices.

In order to understand these interesting results, it is necessary to look at the wider picture of the society in which students live, in this instance of the Saudi context, because the family is the core of society. Bourdieu focused on understanding the process of how society works and how individuals behave. All societies have different classes, whether social, cultural or economic. Indeed, Bourdieu emphasised that, "each social class has characteristic habitus that generates specific sets of practices" (Swartz, 1997, p. 144). This shapes and builds students' ambitions and expectations and provides encouragement regarding their educational and career interests to make the right academic choice. Thus, this happens because of the 'structured' aspect of experiences. The influence of social class on students' academic choices tends to be shared amongst different social groups. In addition, cultural capital is considered to be the cultural background of students. For example, the tendencies, preferences, skills, knowledge and dispositions that students

possess. Students receive transmitted cultural capital through their parents, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, their economic class, their location, social class, educational level and family background (Bourdieu, 1986).

Fuller researched the differentiation between university students from different social classes in their educational aspirations, career decision-making and academic choices. She stated that their cultural capital is affected and shaped by the economic foundation of the class, which leads to the limitation of educational decisions (Fuller, 2008). Furthermore, the method of socialisation within their families will also affect students' academic confidence, because students from a highly educated family have greater academic confidence than those from a less-educated family (Need & De Jong, 2001). In contrast, students who have less-educated parents are less likely to succeed in their studies than those who have highly educated parents (Beethoven, De Jong, & Van Hout, 2002).

There is an interconnection between social class, cultural background and economic class in this research. Although class was not a feature of the data collection, it makes sense to consider that students might choose particular academic pathways rather than others as an outcome of the educational or professional experience of their parents. Arguably, students who are children of high-class parents or professionals have more opportunities, ambitions, hopes, self-selection opportunities and expectations for higher education achievements, because their culture and educational community contains a wide range of knowledge and professional experiences of different academic pathways and jobs. As noted in the literature review, parents and children are most likely to want to maintain their social position through work. That makes those students more likely to bear this in mind when considering what they want to study. Therefore, we can speculate that their academic choice, educational attainment and college selection are strongly affected by cultural background and parental cultural capital. Bourdieu pointed out that cultural capital is constituted and determined by academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1977). In the previous paragraph, Beethoven, De Jong and Van Hout stated that there was a relationship between the educational level of parents and their children's possibility of

success studying the academic pathway. Also, Bourdieu noted the influence of academic qualifications on cultural capital. According to these two statements, the academic choices of the first-year students are influenced by the cultural capital and educational background of their parents. However, the influence could be either conscious, which means the children can feel that influence directly, or unconscious through socialisation and parental upbringing. Interestingly, the participants were from different class backgrounds with different academic choices, because of the variety of educational level among the participants' parents. For example, a question about the educational level of parents showed that the educational level most achieved among the parents of humanities pathway students was high school, and a bachelor's degree was the most achieved educational level among parents of health pathway students.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) provides different levels of educational and academic programmes for people to improve the family's knowledge, develop society and maintain culture. These programmes are offered to meet people's educational interests. The General Authority for Statistics in Saudi stated, in 2018, that the population of Saudi Arabia was 33,413,660. Within this number, there are around 19,221,882 people enrolled in educational institutions to study who are between the ages of 3 years and over 30 years (Ministry of Education, 2017). These numbers show that Saudi families are interested in developing their children's knowledge by joining them in these educational and academic programmes.

The MoE makes considerable efforts to match people's culture, heritage and education in order to improve society's knowledge. Therefore, 67% of males and 51% of females have graduated from high schools, and also 28% of males and 25.5% of females have achieved different higher education degrees. Furthermore, the General Authority for Statistics in Saudi Arabia indicated that the highly educated families are in Riyadh and the Eastern and Western regions. Moreover, the percentage of children who live in a positive and stimulating family environment for learning is 34% of the Saudi population. In particular, the highest rate was in the Eastern region, in which 52% of children live in positive and encouraging family environments for learning (Ministry of Education,

2017). The E university is situated in the Eastern region. Its location makes exploring the influencing factors of first-year university students an interesting topic. According to the General Authority for Statistics in Saudi Arabia and the participants' personal information from the questionnaire, the participants have grown up in highly educated families and a supportive and encouraging social environment. From Bourdieu's perspective, the children are the mirror of their families. This means that the transmission of the cultural capital, educational and cultural background from parents to their children through socialisation and parenting has appeared in their ambition to choose their current academic pathway to obtain a job in the same field in the future. The encouragement and support they have received from their social and familial environment has given them an adequate amount of confidence to make their own decisions and choose what they want to study to find a related job in the future.

Interestingly, the participants have received an adequate amount of confidence from their families, which has given them the ambition to choose their preferred academic pathways. They agreed through their responses to the questionnaire that their ambition was to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future. Moreover, the interviewees stressed that fact and explained the reasons for it, such as "I chose the health pathway to have the chance to help patients and relieve their pain". Also, "My ambition is to become a professional in genetic engineering because there is a hope of finding an effective treatment for my health issue", and "The humanities pathway will give me a good opportunity to teach students in school and deliver useful knowledge to them. This is my ambition". Two researchers were interested in investigating the factors affecting the academic choices of students who study in business administration and marketing specialities in Saudi universities. They found that 85.40% of the 597 participants chose the desire to get a job according to the academic pathway as the third top factor (Abdel-Qader & Albahsin, 2015). Thus, ambition is one of the main motivational elements for success in studying the academic pathway and to obtain an appropriate relevant job in future.

In this current research, it might be inferred that the participants have been affected positively and indirectly by their parents' encouragement and support. Parents have not forced them to choose a specific academic pathway. Thus, these students have become ambitious to obtain a job in the same field in the future. The family has a unique position and influence on different aspects of Saudi society. It is the fundamental concept of Saudi people's lives. Ultimately, the role of family, as the central theme, was an important factor and has influenced the academic choices of the first-year university students in Saudi. Given the importance of family, a key finding from this research is to involve the family in the career decision-making of their students much more explicitly. Providing information on different pathways and careers, as well as inviting them into schools to be part of careers discussions, would also be valuable in ensuring they too are provided with information to help them advise and support their children to make more fully informed choices.

5.6 The role of high school

Students spend up to a third of their day at school studying with their peers and learning from teachers. School is the second fundamental educational and social environment from which students learn. They obtain academic information and develop their knowledge by learning high school subjects, and also have the opportunity to explore their academic preferences. This is the educational aspect of school. Thus, students' interest in some subjects might determine their academic choices. The final grades of high school might also affect students' academic decisions because each academic pathway has a particular score of the required standard in levels of achievement that all Saudi universities request.

The social aspect of the school environment relates to the relationships between students themselves and also with teachers. Social capital implies the features of social communities, such as networks and social trust, which can collaborate and facilitate coordination for a reciprocal benefit (Putnam, 1995). These relationships could influence students' educational achievements and their knowledge because good relationships mean that students have an excellent opportunity to share their academic concerns or

dreams with other peers. Moreover, a good relationship between students and teachers can provide a perfect chance for students to obtain more knowledge and seek advice. School is a significant opportunity for students to learn from other peers, teachers, and subjects, and to explore more about themselves and their academic preferences. The value of those social networks is that they give people an opportunity to accomplish their goals, whether they are for themselves or others (Coleman, 1988). For example, the value of social networks of students in schools can help them to obtain the perfect opportunity to accomplish their academic and career goals by preferring some subjects because of the creative methods of teaching and the personality of their teachers. Students' preferences for some subjects in high school can influence their academic decision by focusing on the appropriate academic choices for these preferred subjects.

Surprisingly, two factors influenced the participants' academic choices. In the questionnaire, 43.5% n=107 of respondents and almost all of the interviewees agreed with the influence of the "preference for some high school subjects" on their academic choice. Four of these interviewees mentioned that they preferred some subjects because of the teachers of those subjects. They stated that teachers' ways of teaching and treating the students, and also their exciting and creative teaching methods had influenced their academic choices. According to the previous statement of (Coleman, 1988) about the value of the social networks, the social networks between teachers and students can be valuable and beneficial to determine students' decisions about their academic choices. Moreover, 38% n=93 of respondents and 6 of 10 interviewees also agreed with the influence of the required standard in levels of achievement on their academic choice, while 4 of 10 interviewees disagreed, and 7% n=17 of respondents did not know whether this factor influenced their academic choice or not. In summary, preference and required academic achievement were important influencing factors.

Both students' preferences for some subjects in high school and the required standard in levels of achievement have influenced the academic choice of participants. These significant results might be better understood by using the rational choice theory to explore and understand the reasons behind the influence on students' academic choices.

According to Wittek, there are three critical elements of the explanation for the academic choice of participants: individual preferences, beliefs and constraints (Wittek, 2013).

Students' preferences, the first element, refer to their evaluation about the potential consequences of academic choices, whether positive or negative. Preferences may have different roots, from their cultural background or personal habits as well as commitments, such as tendencies towards studying a specific academic pathway or enjoying doing something. Students want to choose the academic pathway to study at university which mostly meets their preferences. From the preferences perspective, the participants made their academic choice after evaluating their preferences for some high school subjects and then decided to choose the current academic pathway based on that evaluation.

The second element is students' beliefs, which influence their perception of the cause-effect relationship, and also how they see the different potential consequences of their choices. For example, when students believe in their educational preferences in high school, that encourages them to achieve the score of the required standard in levels of achievement so that they can choose their targeted academic pathway. Therefore, the participants chose the current academic pathway because they have positive beliefs in their preferences for subjects in high school, and also in the required standard in levels of achievement. The third element of the rational choice explanation is constraints, which are the limits to the set of possible choices. This will be discussed when considering the main challenges that students face after making their academic choices.

The academic choice can be affected by different factors. Breen and Goldthorpe stated that there were three key factors for general educational decisions, which are the cost of remaining in a study course on the current academic pathway, the likelihood of success if they continue studying, and the earnings that students would obtain after graduating from their academic pathway (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). With regard to participants' preferences for some subjects in high school and their required standard in levels of achievement, they have a belief that they can continue studying an academic pathway

related to their educational preferences. From Breen and Goldthorpe's perspective, the knowledge that students have about their abilities to achieve the required standard in levels of achievement and their educational preferences helps them to form their goals concerning success in studying an academic pathway. Therefore, these two factors have influenced the academic choice of the participants.

Kim, Markham and Cangelosi sought to explore the influencing factors on students' academic choice of business major across different universities. They indicated that 30% n=202 of 671 of participating students chose their interest in the field as the first influential factor. The other 13.2% n=88 of 671 chose "good fit", which means the academic choice was appropriate for their abilities and tendencies (Kim, Markham, & Cangelosi, 2002). Those students had decided to choose specific academic pathways because they related to their interest in the field, which had existed since high school when they preferred some subjects. Also, "good fit" implies that their score of the required standard in levels of achievement showed their abilities and tendencies were capable of succeeding in choosing and studying their chosen academic pathways. These two factors influenced educational decisions and influenced the choice of academic pathways made by first-year university students.

The role of high school in the academic choice of the first-year university students in Saudi Arabia was influential in their academic decision due to the participants' preferences for some subjects in high school and their score of the required standard in levels of achievement. It is not easy to choose a suitable academic pathway according to your abilities, interests and tendencies. Although the rest of the sub-themes of the school theme have not influenced or helped students with their academic choice, those participants have conducted rational thinking to find out which academic pathway is suitable for them. They looked at their preferred subjects and those they enjoyed in high school to determine the most relevant academic pathway for them. The reason for this is that they would like to continue their educational success by choosing the preferred academic pathway. Therefore, they studied hard and did their best to achieve the requested score of the standard level of achievement. When their score met the

admissions requirements, the participants were satisfied and confident about choosing the current academic pathway. In conclusion, the educational preferences and the score of the required standard in levels of achievement have a positive influence on the academic choices of the first-year university students in Saudi Arabia. The high school is considered to be an influencing factor on the academic choice of the first-year university students in which it supports and advises students to achieve a high score of the required standard in levels of achievement. In addition, high school has a responsibility to follow-up students' educational achievement to determine which subjects they preferred and to encourage them to achieve high scores, thus, helping them decide their preferred and relevant academic pathway at university

5.7 The role of career guidance in high school

All Saudi high schools have a student guide or consultant who is responsible for providing several guidance services and programmes, including career guidance. Students who are close to graduation need some educational and career guidance programmes and services. For example, they need to determine the suitable academic pathway for their abilities and interests, to know how to deal with different factors that may affect their academic decision, and to obtain information regarding the admissions requirements at local universities. Students want to have an idea about the demands of the labour market in order to decide how to choose an appropriate academic pathway. This research sought to explore the reality of the career guidance services and programmes in high school from the students' perspective.

In this research, career guidance as a main focus consisted of two sub-themes: 1) the role of the student guide in schools, who has a responsibility to advise and help students collectively and individually on various issues, and 2) the role of career guidance programmes, which may enable students to explore their abilities, skills, and the most suitable academic choice for them. The participants were asked about the role of the student guide in their academic decision-making and almost three-quarters did not feel that the student guide had an influence on academic choice. Moreover, there was strong disagreement with the statement about the influence of career guidance programmes on

their academic choices. The respondents demonstrated that the student guide and the career guidance programmes in high school did not impact their academic choice and so could be considered as ineffective as resources, despite the intention behind the role.

Interestingly, there is a lack of research exploring the reality of career guidance in Saudi high schools from students' perspectives apart from one study which explored the obstacles to career guidance services and programmes in the high schools from the points of view of student guides and school principals. Almansour found some interesting issues in his master's study. For instance, lack of material and moral incentives received by the school when implementing career guidance programmes and poor participation of teachers in the implementation of career guidance programmes in high schools. He also found there was a lack of a number of student guides in schools and a scarcity of databases on professional choices and academic pathways (Almansour, 2011). In this research, for example, the number of students in the school was such that the student guide only provided some general guidance programmes or services for the students. The enormous number of students in the school did not allow the student guide to provide individual guidance to students. According to Almansour's study, and the responses of the participants in this current research, the career guidance services and programmes in high schools have several issues and obstacles. These prevent both the student guides from providing beneficial and sufficient programmes and services for students, and also prevent students from benefiting from career guidance and obtaining help and support regarding their educational and career concerns.

Again, an economic model explains why the career guidance service and programmes are insufficient. That is because the issue of their lack of benefits refers to some administrative constraints, misunderstanding among students, and the collaboration between school principals, student guides and the department of counselling and guidance in the Ministry of Education.

5.8 The challenges faced by students after making their academic choice

In general, students face some consequences of their decisions and choices. These consequences might be benefits, challenges and costs. Making a decision is a complicated process because of the influence of relevant factors, expectations and subsequent reality. The diversity of academic pathways at universities makes choosing one that is appropriate for students' abilities and interests difficult. However, this research explored the challenges that participants faced after their decisions had been made from their perspective. The challenges were explored through the interviews only. The reason for that was to provide a perfect opportunity for participants to explain and express their challenges instead of choosing from multiple choice options in the questionnaire.

University requires new skills, which high school students may not have developed, such as fast reading, writing reports and assignments and academic research methods. Therefore, during the first year at university they will also need to receive some guidance and support to succeed in their studies. The huge transformation from high school to university creates some challenges, problems and obstacles due to the complicated, new academic experience and the possible social and psychological changes of the students. Alamouri's research investigated the factors that negatively affect the academic achievement of the preparatory year students at Qassim University in view of the academic level from the students' point of view. He indicated that the educational factors were the most negative effects on preparatory year students (the first-year university students), because there was a lack of correlation between the secondary and university level. He stated that the new university students faced new educational experiences that they were not familiar with, and they also had limited communication with the faculty members because of the large number of academic lectures and the intensity of the preparatory year programme (Alamouri, 2011). For example, some students may spend more time studying than attending social occasions or having contact with friends. These students become more focused on their studies when they isolate themselves from some unimportant social occasions. The pressure of study may have psychological effects on students, too, especially during the examinations period. They may be affected by stress, anxiety and depression. Abouleish's research focused on the guidance needs of 281 female students of the faculty of education. She found that participants' guidance needs

are, respectively, career needs, academic needs, psychological needs and social needs. Also, the top two psychological needs were how participants could gain their self-confidence and eliminate despair and depression. In addition, there was a least chosen need, which was the need for social guidance. For example, knowing realistic information about university life and developing the ability to adapt to the social environment (Abouleish, 2014). The university life is a challenge for first-year university students. Students become more independent of their families, although they still need some support and advice to make the right decisions regarding these issues.

The theoretical frameworks applied in this research help to explain the reasons behind these challenges as outcomes of participants' choices, in order to understand them and provide helpful support for students. Participants mentioned that the challenges are academic English, the methods of studying the academic pathway, the new academic lifestyle or the undergraduate's lifestyle, the location of the university, the admission requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year and their parents' wishes or dreams for their children. These will be discussed further below.

5.8.1 Academic English

The first challenge is academic English. The E university uses English as a primary language for most academic pathways and subjects. However, Arabic is the primary language for schools in Saudi, except the subject of the English language. This means that most of the first-year university students find it a challenge to study their academic pathway in English because they have spent around 12 years at school studying in Arabic. This shift from Arabic to English in their learning could create some difficulties for the first-year university students when studying at the undergraduate level. Four interviewees emphasised this challenge. Some of their comments included the following statements: "The shift from studying in Arabic to English is difficult", "I had studied most of the school curriculum in Arabic" and "most of the subjects I studied in schools were in Arabic".

Currently, at university, students study most of the university academic curricula in English except a few Arabic and Islamic subjects. In addition to this problem, there are new academic vocabularies, grammar, and also the new academic information to learn. The university student must do their homework, assignments and other academic tasks in an academic English language. According to cultural production theory, this challenge appeared due to the cultural background that students received from their family, educational institutions and societies; for example, linguistic capacity, art, values and norms, tendencies, preferences, skills and knowledge. Most of these examples have been received in Arabic because it is the mother tongue of all students in the sample. The data in this thesis suggests that where English is a requirement for study in higher education, it needs to be entered into students' learning much earlier in their school life. An alternative is to remove the requirement completely.

In terms of the costs and benefits of the rational educational choices, Beekhoven et al. formed three mechanisms to analyse the costs and benefits of academic choices. These mechanisms are the family's income, the social costs of dropping out of university study and the students' subjective expectations and concerns (Beekhoven et al., 2002). Concerning the third mechanism, most students have an idea about their ability level. The participants knew English as a general language and for public usage, but the challenge was how to use it in an academic environment. The evaluation of their subjective expectations and concerns about their abilities to succeed in studying the current academic pathway made them feel that it would cost them more in terms of effort and study to learn academic English. They expected that academic English might be easy to learn, but they found it a challenge. Therefore, the participants remarked that, "I have to understand it very well because most of the academic subjects are in English", "I believe that it is an essential language to understand the academic subject" and also "all the health pathway subjects and their duties are in English". Hence, the first-year university students must study hard and seek advice from the student guide or any specialised department at the university regarding the challenge of academic English. Alternatively, university 'taster' days would enable students to experience learning before choosing their pathways. This would enable them to be both better prepared to make the right choices, as well as better informed when they start their courses.

5.8.2 The methods of studying the academic pathway

The second challenge is the methods of studying the academic pathway. This is a common issue among first-year university students because they were following a routine method of study during their school years. Unfortunately, undergraduate study is different from high school, in particular. In high school, teachers were the main source of educational information, and there were specific study sources, such as the school subjects' books. However, the shift from that routine to the new learning experience and different educational system has created a challenge for students to find a new method of studying their current academic pathway. At university, students are responsible for learning and searching for information, and the lecturers and professors teach less than the school teachers, although they may help the students to discover how they can find academic information by themselves. Moreover, sometimes the students may find themselves learning some new subjects which are not directly related to their high school subjects. Therefore, six interviewees had experienced a challenge regarding the methods of study, so they needed to change and improve their methods of study in order to be able to adapt successfully to their new academic experience.

In order to understand this challenge, the key concept for the rational choice theory is the costs and benefits of students' academic decisions. Students need to evaluate the costs and benefits of their decisions and establish a balance between them to avoid the risk of failure costs. Breen and Goldthorpe considered the effects of socio-economic class on rational choice. They stated that there were three critical factors for general educational decisions which may influence rational choice. These factors are the cost of continuing to study the current academic pathway, the likelihood of success if they continue studying and the earnings that students would obtain after graduating from their academic pathway. The first two factors are related to the challenge of methods of studying.

The critical first factor is the cost of continuing to study the current academic pathway. It is challenging for students to find new methods of studying and learning because of the new academic study system. The costs of finding new study methods might be time, money, or effort if they decide they want to succeed in studying their chosen academic

pathway. The critical second factor is the likelihood of success if they continue studying. Breen and Goldthorpe believed that students' knowledge about their abilities and tendencies helps them to form their method of studying an academic pathway. The chance of success in the academic pathway may depend on the students' abilities to develop a useful way of studying and learning, and on their academic circumstances at university (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Indeed, the interviewees indicated that there are some differences between the methods of study in high school and undergraduate study. For example, "I must look for new methods of study instead of those I have used in high school", "I realised that there is a gap between my methods of studying in high school and the undergraduate study methods." Moreover, "I have to find new methods of study to make some academic progress because the high school traditional methods did not work very well."

Developing new, suitable and effective methods of study is one of the costs of students' decisions, although their success in studying the academic pathway is also a benefit. Indeed, Beekhoven et al. formed three mechanisms for analysing the costs and benefits of rational choice. The relevant factor when examining the methods of studying the academic pathway is that of students' subjective expectations and concerns about their abilities to succeed in studying the academic pathway by using new helpful methods of studying the new academic subjects, rather than using the traditional methods of studying in high school (Beekhoven et al., 2002). Therefore, Abouleish researched the guidance needs of 281 female students of the faculty of education. She found that the second most-selected guidance need was academic needs, which includes knowing the best methods of study and developing the self-motivation to study (Abouleish, 2014). These participants showed that they wanted to find new and useful methods to study because they aimed to succeed in learning their current academic pathway correctly.

5.8.3 The new academic lifestyle or the undergraduate's lifestyle

Similar to the previous challenge, the new academic experience and the educational environment may create a challenge for students who have to deal with a new social, personal and educational life. The challenge appeared with the new responsibilities of the

first-year students. They must undertake their studies and learn almost by themselves because previously their parents and teachers were responsible for their learning and growth. However, the undergraduate lifestyle requires students to be more independent of their families and to rely on themselves for their academic achievements, study and future. Interestingly, when students found and realised that there are some challenges when studying the current academic pathway that implies that they have grown up and become responsible for themselves and their studies. The new responsibility to succeed in studying the academic pathway challenges students to find a balance between their personal life and academic achievements. In the Saudi context, most families have social occasions during the weekdays and especially at the weekend. In this case, first-year university students may not attend all of these occasions because they need to focus on studying and achieving their academic and future goals. There are lots of homework and academic obligations to be performed.

In fact, the interviewees stated that their responsibilities had been increased since they became undergraduates. They pointed out that they have become more independent of their parents, too. However, the interviewees indicated that the challenge is how to achieve a balance between their academic obligations and their personal life. There is freedom, but there needs to be control of it, and there is independence, but it has to be managed perfectly. They said, “I have lots of homework that must be done and lots of things I desire to do” and “I need to control my schedule and rearrange my priorities because no one is responsible for my study more than me.” The successful first-year university students required this good control and perfect management, stating, “The achievement of success relies on me, in the first place, and then how I can manage the time. I must adapt to this new lifestyle”. Therefore, Abouleish explored the guidance needs of 281 female students of the faculty of education. She found that one of the guidance needs was the need for social guidance which includes knowing realistic information about university life and developing the ability to adapt to the social environment (Abouleish, 2014). Furthermore, Alamouri explored factors that negatively affect the academic achievement of the preparatory year students at Qassim University in view of the academic level from the students’ point of view. He stated that the educational factors are the most negative effects on preparatory year students (the first-

year university students), which includes the fact that many homework assignments are given to them (Alamouri, 2011). Otherwise, there is a possibility that first-year university students may lose this academic opportunity and would be disappointed. The new academic experience is a big step in the students' lives that demands some support and advice from someone who works in guidance. This highlights that adapting to university life is not just about getting to grips with the study. It is also about independence and personal responsibility.

From the perspective of rational choice theory, students need to analyse, carefully, the costs and benefits of their academic choice regarding their subjective expectations of the reality of the academic lifestyle and responsibilities. The academic obligations are different and difficult compared with the students' experience in high schools. The official academic communication with the academic staff is not similar to that with high school teachers. The new sense of freedom or independence that students found in undergraduate life might be a positive or negative influential factor on their academic achievements. This will depend on how students can control this freedom or independence. In the past, parents had more responsibilities for their children's growth and study, but now students are responsible for themselves. Independence implies that students need to manage their academic and personal responsibilities, and they have to find a balance between their social life and academic achievements.

In terms of the evaluation of the costs and benefits of academic choice, Beekhoven et al. stated that the students' subjective expectations and concerns about their abilities to succeed in studying their chosen academic pathway might affect their academic choice (Beekhoven et al., 2002). In this situation, students must improve their ability to control their academic and personal life in order to benefit from their academic pathway as much as possible. The cost of their academic choice is to control and balance what they must to do with what they would prefer to do, and also to prioritise their tasks, whether personal or academic. As a result of this cost, students can benefit by achieving their academic dream and find a relevant job in the future. The whole of this process relies on students' abilities and concerns about their academic achievements.

5.8.4 The location of the university

The long distance between the university's location and home address of some first-year students might create a challenge for them when studying their current academic pathway. The lack of experience of living alone and far away from the family is arguably both a cost and a benefit of the academic choice of the first-year university students, and also the transportation between home and university may be of concern to their parents regarding their children's safety. In fact, one interviewee mentioned that it was a challenge for her and her parents for her to study her current academic pathway away from her home address. She said, "I live in university accommodation. I hope that helps me focus on my academic goals and reassures my parents that I am safe". The reason for this was her safety when she uses transportation, because of the long distance between her and her family. However, now, she must live in the university's accommodation, which is away from her parents, in order to achieve her academic dream.

The fundamental concept of the rational choice theory is the costs and benefits of the decision. Evaluation of decisions depends on the balance between costs and benefits, and also on avoiding the risk of failure costs. Breen and Goldthorpe stated that there is a cost to continuing to study the current academic pathway. In this case, parents and students must think about the direct cost of education when deciding whether to continue studying. The costs might be time, money or effort (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Both students and parents must be involved in analysing the costs and benefits of the academic choice, although they can bear the costs of this decision when they believe that they will, eventually, achieve the benefits of this decision.

5.8.5 Parents' wishes or dreams for their children

Sometimes, the students may make decisions to choose a specific academic pathway because their parents want them to study that pathway. Parents' preference for this specific academic pathway may create a challenge for students because the preference may or may not meet the student's own desires. Moreover, there is more pressure on the student in both cases, because the parents will observe their academic achievement, and

the student would not wish to disappoint their parents. However, the academic choice should be made by students themselves, but an issue occurs in some families because of their cultural background and the way of evaluating the costs and benefits of the academic choice. In the Saudi context, some parents would like to achieve educational goals through their children; this issue could force students to choose their parents' preferred academic choice rather than what they want to select.

One interviewee made his academic decision based on his parents' hopes, which makes the consequences of his decision hard for him, as he said, "I had made my decision to choose the health pathway because of my parents' hope". The difficulty is that he would not like to disappoint his parents, as he said, "I do not want to disappoint them" because they want to be proud of him, and also they want him to help them financially. He mentioned this during the interview, saying, "because they want me to help my family financially. I am their only hope of supporting my family". The burden of his parents' hopes may affect his academic achievement and either encourage him to succeed in studying and achieving their dream or disappoint them and fail in his studies. He noted, "Their hope and concern load more responsibilities on my shoulders."

Evaluation of decisions depends on the balance between costs and benefits, and also on avoiding the risk of failure costs. Breen and Goldthorpe considered the effects of socio-economic class on rational choice. They mentioned three key factors for general educational decisions, which may influence the rational choice. The factor related to this challenge is the cost of continuing to study the current academic pathway. In this case, parents and students must think about the direct cost of education when deciding to continue studying (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Another related factor is the likelihood of success if they continue studying. Breen and Goldthorpe stated that students' knowledge about their abilities and tendencies helps them to form their goals concerning success in studying an academic pathway. The chance of success in the academic pathway may depend on the students' abilities. These two costs must be evaluated within their cultural background, which makes it more difficult and complicated. Moreover, the

benefits of this academic choice are divided between meeting their parents' dreams and succeeding in studying the academic pathway.

5.8.6 The admission requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year

The specific academic subject for the next year has some academic requirements which can present a challenge for the first-year students. If the first-year university students want to be able to choose a preferred academic subject for the next year they must achieve the requirements of that subject. The students who were interviewed had chosen the health pathway. They found achieving the academic requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year was a challenge. These academic requirements may differ from year to year depending on different admissions circumstances. In relation to the interviewees, all of them were studying the health pathway, and they were concerned about the high and strict academic requirements of the specific academic subject for the next year. Some students were clearly worried about the requirements and it was a challenge for them to meet them, especially for those who wanted to be a doctor in the future, as well as for students who hoped to be a nurse or work in the health field.

The requirements have encouraged students to study hard and have made them more responsible for their future goal. The health field is essential for people's lives and health. Accordingly, the main benefit of their academic choice is achieving a future job, which requires more study and effort. In this situation, Breen and Goldthorpe stated that the likelihood of success if they continue studying is a factor that may affect the academic choice for the first-year university students, because it is a part of processing the costs and benefits of their academic decisions. They believed that students' knowledge about their abilities and tendencies helps them to form their goals and make an effort to achieve the admission requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Alamouri's research about the factors that negatively affect the academic achievement of the preparatory year students at Qassim University in view of the academic level from the students' point of view indicated that the educational factors are the most negative effects on preparatory year students (the first-year university

students). He stated that the two most-relevant educational factors are the fear of not getting the proper specialisation for their ambitions and the fear of failure to obtain a high grade point average (Alamouri, 2011). The GPA is the main admission requirement for the specific academic subject for the next year. The chance of meeting these admission requirements may depend on the students' abilities or their academic circumstances at university.

5.9 The university career guidance services

In the context of E University, students can choose the specific subject for the next years depending on their final grades of the first year or the preparatory programme. This programme has been established to teach students some subjects that are generally related to the chosen academic pathway that will enable them to become more specialised. During the first year, some career guidance services must be provided for students to assist them in determining which specific subject is suitable for them. Students may find that making the academic decision is complicated because of different factors, such as the academic requirements, the demands of the labour market, and their abilities and tendencies. In addition, the new academic experience has a role in making the academic decision difficult. The new challenges and other relevant elements put more pressure and responsibilities on students' shoulders.

Some services should be provided to most of the students to assist them in solving their career and academic issues because they share some concerns. For example, at the United Arab Emirates University, there were 2,515 students who experienced some problems due to the lack of professional guidance to make an appropriate academic choice, lack of knowledge of disciplines and departments in each college, and their parents' insistence on selecting a particular academic choice (Abdelhamid, 2002). In addition, Aldulaim explored the reality of the benefit of career guidance services in Saudi universities from students' perspectives. The research sample consisted of 350 male and female students from five different Saudi universities. The results indicated that nearly 60% of students had never benefitted from the career guidance services in their universities because the method by which these services were offered was not attractive. Aldulaim assumed that

this might refer to some social and cultural factors, but he did not mention examples (Aldulaim, 2012). Furthermore, Alaghbari explored the problems faced by 260 students of the Teachers College in AlAhsa. He found that the lack of guidance and counselling services for new students was the most selected problem among participants (Alaghbari, 2009). Therefore, this research suggested some career guidance services for the participants and sought their perspectives on the benefits of these services for their academic decision about the next years' subjects. The suggested services were the provision of some general career guidance programmes for the first-year university students. Also, the provision of some ability tests and examination of their inclinations towards particular professions, and the collaboration between career guidance and other relevant institutions. Moreover, individual advice by a career guide or consultant, and career guidance publications providing some information about the specific subjects for the next year or some news of the labour market's need for new jobs were also proposed.

In general, most participants agreed with the benefits of the suggested career guidance services, although other participants had a misunderstanding or thought that they did not need any help from others. For example, around half of the participants agreed that providing some career guidance services and programmes would help the first-year university students. Also, there was agreement from a third of respondents with the statement that first-year university students could benefit from the provision of some ability tests and examination of their inclinations towards particular professions. Furthermore, as a result of the collaboration between the career guidance service and other interested institutions, nearly half of participants would have an excellent opportunity to determine the preferred academic pathway and make an appropriate plan for their future job that was based on the information provided. However, a few other participants believed this collaboration would not help them to choose the academic pathway. A few participants stated that the service of individual advice, as one of the career guidance services, would not assist them in making an appropriate academic choice or with their career concerns. Likewise, less than 10% of participants indicated that there was no beneficial effect of the career guidance publications on their academic decision.

Overall, there was a consensus among the interviewees about the benefit of general career guidance services. These services could help many students in several different ways. For example, providing some general career guidance programmes for the first-year university students can benefit a large number of students at the same time. The participants commented, “Many students could benefit from these services” and “because of the large number of students that may learn something new”. Therefore, students can make the correct academic decision as a result of the benefits of these services. In addition, students would have a chance to understand their abilities and tendencies through the test results. As the participants commented, “I believe the ability tests and the examination of professional tendencies will help other students including me to explore our abilities and career preferences”. Collaboration between the career guidance service and other institutions would help the first-year university students to choose their academic subject for the next year. That is demonstrated by their responses such as, “The collaboration between the career guidance and other institutions will positively affect the first-year students’ academic choice for next year”. Furthermore, the benefit of the career guide’s service has been agreed upon by all of these participants. They believed how important this service is, commenting, “Yes, the career guide is necessary for the first-year students to figure out how to make the right academic and career decisions individually”. It was evident that there are several benefits from this service based on the participants’ perspectives. Similarly, there was agreement about the benefits of career guidance publications and brochures. The interviewees emphasised that this kind of service would help the university students to understand the academic decision-making process by themselves, as “they can read and understand the career guidance content in order to choose the academic subject for the next year, by themselves”. As can be seen, the interviewees were optimistic about the benefits of the suggested career guidance services, which were general career guidance programmes, the collaboration between career guidance and other interested institutions, the career guide’s service, the ability tests and examination of the tendency to choose certain professions and the career guidance publications and brochures. The majority of them stated that these career guidance services could help them and other university students, especially those in the first year, due to the new academic environment and the lack of undergraduate experience. Indeed, therefore, they need some helpful instructions to achieve their educational and career desires through the appropriate academic choice.

5.10 Chapter summary

The current research sought to explore the important factors for the academic choice of first-year university students in Saudi. The main research question was: What factors are important to the choice of academic route for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia from their perspective? Furthermore, this question had four sub-questions which were:

1. What role did schools and families play in academic decision-making for first-year university students?
2. What role did career guidance services play in academic decision-making for first-year university students?
3. What were the main challenges that first-year university students faced during and after making their academic decision?
4. What services could support students' academic decision-making about the specific academic subject for the next year from their perspective?

This research explored the role three themes played in the academic decision-making of the first-year students. The participants had an opportunity to provide their perspective on the influence of the three themes of family, school and career guidance in high school. These three main themes were followed by the challenges that students faced and the career guidance services required to support students' academic decision-making.

The participants were students in the preparatory programme provided by the E University. This was equivalent to first-year university students, because it was their first year at university. They were male and female students from two academic pathways, the health pathway and the humanities pathway. All the participants were studying in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia. They received a link to the questionnaire through the university email. The researcher obtained 246 full completed responses to the questionnaire. Moreover, there were 10 interviewees who showed an interest in participating in the interview. The responses of the participants to the questionnaire provided a considerable amount of helpful information about the role of important factors

in their academic decision-making. The wider picture was clear, in general, about the reality of how students made their academic choice taking into account these relevant factors. However, the interviews provided a major contribution to understanding the influence of these factors from the interviewees' perspectives, and to answering the questions of 'why and how', especially when there were other relevant elements. The interviewees added additional details and information about the role of influencing factors from their points of view.

Concerning the role of family, this has influenced the participants' academic decision, indirectly. Parents, as a sub-theme, did affect their children's academic choices by being supportive and encouraging them to follow their educational passion. There was no force or pressure on the participants to choose a specific academic route rather than the current chosen one. Bourdieu stressed that, "each social class has characteristic habitus that generates specific sets of practices" (Swartz, 1997, p. 144). Also, the cultural background of the family had been transmitted from the parents to the children. The academic choices and achievements constitute and determine the cultural capital of each social class (Bourdieu, 1977). Students who grew up within highly educated families have the confidence to decide about the wanted academic choice (Need & De Jong, 2001). However, other students from less-educated families may be less likely to have that level of the confidence to choose the appropriate academic pathways and to succeed in their studies (Beethoven, De Jong, & Van Hout, 2002). As a result of that, the participants had become ambitious and chose their preferred academic pathway in order to obtain a relevant job in the future. Abdel-Qader and Albahsin found that 85.40% of the 597 students who participated in their research chose the desire to get a job according to the academic pathway as the third top factor (Abdel-Qader & Albahsin, 2015). This is in line with this study's findings, showing that the participants' ambition of securing a job related to their academic choice was another influencing factor in their academic decision.

In terms of the role of high school in the academic choice of the first-year university students, the school, as the main theme, did not influence them. However, their preference for some subjects in high school did influence their academic decision-making. Similarly,

the required standard in levels of achievement affected participants' academic choices, as well. The influence came from the students themselves, within the school context, rather than the educational system in the school. Indeed, some interviewees stated that some teachers had encouraged them to determine their academic choice, and the participants had their own educational preferences. In 2002, Kim, Markham and Cangelosi sought to explore the influencing factors on students' academic choice of business major across different universities. They indicated that 30% n=202 of 671 of participating students chose their interest in the field as the first influential factor (Kim, Markham, & Cangelosi, 2002). According to Coleman's previous statement about the value of the social networks, the perfect social networks between teachers and students can be beneficial to determine students' decisions about their academic choices (Coleman, 1988). This led them to make their academic decision about their current academic path due to their educational preferences. There are three critical elements of the explanation for the academic choice of participants: individual preferences, beliefs and constraints (Wittek, 2013). Therefore, participants had obtained the required score of the required standard in levels of achievement, which influenced their decisions about the academic pathways. Kim, Markham and Cangelosi stated that 13.2% n=88 of 671 participants chose "good fit", which means the academic choice was appropriate for their abilities, tendencies and educational preferences (Kim, Markham, & Cangelosi, 2002).

The career guidance in high school was a main theme with two sub-themes, which were the career guidance programmes and the student guide in school. Interestingly, neither influenced the academic choice of first-year university students. From the participants' perspectives, the large number of students in school could not be handled by the student guide; thus, most of the career guidance programmes were not provided. In 2011, Almansour found some interesting issues in his master's study. For instance, lack of material and moral incentives received by the school when implementing career guidance programmes. He also found there was a lack of a number of student guides in schools and a scarcity of databases on professional choices and academic pathways (Almansour, 2011). In some instances, the school principal assigned some unrelated works to the student guide, and this prevented the guide providing career guidance programmes.

Therefore, the role of career guidance in high school was insufficient to help students with their academic decision-making.

The exciting consequences of the academic choice of the participants were some challenges that they faced after starting to study their academic pathway. The interviews provided another view of how they made their academic decision. Some interviewees stated that academic English was one of the main challenges because the shift from studying most of their school subjects in Arabic to studying in academic English after around twelve years was not an easy move for the first-year university students. The academic language plays a crucial role in studying the academic pathway. Therefore, academic English was the main challenge for the first-year university students. The second challenge is the methods of studying the academic pathway. According to Breen and Goldthorpe, the chance of success in the academic pathway may depend on the students' abilities to develop a useful way of studying and learning, and on their academic circumstances at university (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Abouleish's research focused on the guidance needs of 281 female students of the faculty of education. She found that participants' guidance needs are, respectively, career needs, academic needs, psychological needs and social needs. For example, knowing realistic information about university life, how participants could gain their self-confidence and eliminate despair and depression and developing the ability to adapt to the social environment (Abouleish, 2014). Parents' preference for this specific academic pathway may create a challenge for students because the preference may or may not meet the student's own desires. In this case, Breen and Goldthorpe indicated that parents and students must think about the direct cost of education when deciding, whether to choose the academic choice or continue studying (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). The costs might be time, money, social costs and effort as a result of the made academic decision. Moreover, the location of the university, the new academic lifestyle and the admission requirements for the specific academic subject for the next years are examples of other challenges.

In order to assist these students with their academic decision-making about the specific subject for the next years, this research suggested some career guidance services to the

participants and obtained their perspectives on these services' benefits. Surprisingly, most of the participants agreed with these services' benefits. For example, during the interviews, the majority of interviewees stated that providing some general career guidance programmes would help them to determine their academic decision about the specific subject for the next years. Also, providing some ability tests and an examination of their inclinations towards particular professions would help them to understand their abilities and tendencies and lead them to choose the suitable specific subject for the next year. These participants believe in the benefits of those services in overcoming any difficulties in choosing the specific subject for the next years. They hope to avoid the experience of the United Arab Emirates University. There were 2,515 students who experienced some problems due to the lack of professional guidance to make an appropriate academic choice, lack of knowledge of disciplines and departments in each college, and their parents' insistence on selecting a particular academic choice (Abdelhamid, 2002).

As this study illustrates, the first important influencing factor in the academic choice of the first-year university students is their ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future. Ambition was the first important factor, according to the participants' perspective. This factor has a direct influence on the participants' academic decision-making. However, another influencing factor in their academic choice is the family, including the role of parents. Parents had an indirect influence on the participants' academic decision by transmitting their cultural background through their upbringing. Also, when parents support their children to choose what they prefer to study at university, that encouraged the participants to decide about choosing the current academic pathway. The significance of this research is that it has highlighted the importance of the role of the family in helping students to understand themselves and explore their educational preferences, to determine the suitable academic choice at university. The social and cultural background of the family, and also parents, have a crucial role in shaping students' academic decision-making by the transmitted knowledge, culture and habitus.

Moreover, the current research is considered to be the first research that has included the voices of both male and female students by conducting interviews regarding their perspectives on the influence of the important factors on their academic decision-making. Consequently, career guidance in both schools and universities will have an excellent opportunity to explore and understand the students' perspectives on the services provided. Thus, they can re-evaluate their goals and services to meet different aspects of students' needs.

6 Chapter Six – The conclusion

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6.1 The conclusion

At the beginning of this research, the researcher set out to ask questions about the academic choices and the academic decision-making of students. During his master's degree, he had researched the development of vocational tendencies among high school students in Dammam. In particular, the effectiveness of the Knowledge Programme for the support of university academic pathway decisions for students of the third year of high school in Dammam. Therefore, in the current research, he was more interested in exploring the important factors for the academic choices of first-year university students, and then in understanding the role and influence of these factors on the academic decision-making of those students.

When students make the right academic choice, it means that most of them will succeed in studying their preferred academic pathway, hence, they will finish their programme successfully, and will obtain an appropriate future job. Moreover, students are more likely to overcome any challenges and obstacles that may appear, because they consider their studies enjoyable and appropriate for their career interest. Any problems will just be part of their educational life. The researcher has sought to find answers to, and explanations of, why some students make decisions to study specific academic pathways rather than other available choices. This is important because many students ignore opportunities or make choices that are not suitable for them. Thus, this leads to dissatisfaction with study and drop outs, as well as frequent shifts and changes in field of study, leading to some students taking a very long time to finish their course. Why do students choose as they do, what factors are important and what is the role of the family were all of interest in exploring student motivations. This research was a continuation of the researcher's interest in the field of professional guidance for students.

This research set out to achieve several aims. First, it explored the important factors that may affect the academic choice of first-year university students in Saudi Arabia. Then, it sought to understand the role of families and schools with regard to the academic choice of the first-year students and explored the challenges that first-year students may face after making the decision about their academic pathway. The final aim was to explore the

role of the career guidance service with regard to the first-year university students' academic decisions for specific academic subjects for the next year of their study. With these in mind, the research question guiding this research was "what factors are important to the choice of the academic pathway for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia from their perspective?" Four sub-questions were developed to answer the research question:

1. What role did schools and families play in academic decision-making for first-year university students?
2. What role did career guidance services play in academic decision-making for first-year university students?
3. What were the main challenges that first-year university students faced during and after making their academic decision?
4. What services could support students' academic decision-making about the specific academic subject for the next year from their perspective?

In order to meet the research aims through answers to the research question and its sub-questions, the researcher decided to use a questionnaire as the main instrument to gather a wide range of responses. This then formed the foundation of the second instrument – interviews. These interviews were conducted to understand the interesting and significant responses of those who were prepared to participate. Both instruments were beneficial and provided a meaningful understanding of the influence of the important factors for the academic choice of first-year university students. Whereas the questionnaire offered a variety of responses about these factors, the interviews enabled the researcher to gain the most in-depth understanding of the influences of these factors from the participants' perspectives.

In considering academic choices, this research has shown that several factors influenced the academic choices of the first-year students at E university. The academic pathways included in this research were the health pathway and the humanities pathway. Drawing on the literature, the main themes that participants were asked about in the questionnaire and the interviews were their family, their high school and career guidance in high school.

These were assumed to be the main themes that were foremost in the participants' minds when they made their academic choice. Also, the participants were asked about the challenges they faced in university and the expected benefits of the career guidance services at university. Each main theme consisted of some related sub-themes. The results were divided by the main themes and sub-themes, and then the most influential factor in the academic choice of the participants was highlighted.

The role of family was a main theme and consisted of seven sub-themes. The family is the fundamental basis for other relevant factors because students will deal with their new experiences dependent on their cultural and social background. As the research showed, half of the participants had the ambition to work in the same field as their chosen study pathway and this was an important influence on their future academic choices. This is interesting given that parents were considered not to have had a direct role in the academic decision-making of participants or have any influence on students' decisions. This was stated by one-third of participants who strongly disagreed with their parents' influence. However, many participants emphasised that their parents were supportive and motivated them.

In fact, the indirect support from their parents and the cultural, educational and social environment had developed their abilities and knowledge to plan and determine their future academic route and career. This research's findings emphasise that the family factor, especially the role of parents, is essential in the academic decision-making of students, whether that role was direct or indirect. This is because what participants had found helpful for their academic choice was the support and encouragement they received from their parents. They may need some advice and guidance in order to determine a suitable academic choice according to their career interests and educational preferences, and also their abilities and tendencies. Yet, the cultural and social background is crucial in shaping students' academic desire to study a specific academic pathway, and affects their ambition to work in the same field as the academic choice in future.

In considering the role of high school, which is the essential education and learning environment for the students, surprisingly, there were two factors that influenced the participants' academic choice. As the results showed, nearly half of respondents and most of the interviewees agreed with the influence of their preferences for some high school subjects on their academic decisions as well as their academic performance. This highlights the importance of not just what a student wants to do, but also, alongside the obvious – in terms of ability – what a school prioritises and how this encourages him/her to make the appropriate academic decision. These two factors might be referred to as a result of the influence of the cultural and social background of their families.

In explaining the career guidance in high school, which is designed with the aim of playing a substantial role in the academic choice of students, it was interesting to observe that the career guidance in high school, as a main theme with sub-themes, had no influence on the participants' academic choice. Poor career guidance was considered to be a result of the lack of providing individual advice to students, to help guide them in high school in terms of future options and the routes and requirements to achieve those options. Also, the number of students in these schools meant that there was simply no capacity for the student guide to see everyone. Indeed, this was the key factor that prevented them from providing career guidance programmes. In fact, the career guidance in high school still exhibits a gap between the practical and theoretical side, which leads to a lack of professionalism, quality and management from the perspective of the students. Eventually, students are affected negatively by this gap.

The research also highlighted challenges of university once there. The challenges were, for example, academic English, the methods of studying on the different academic pathways, the new academic lifestyle or the undergraduate's lifestyle, the admission requirements for the specific academic subject for the next year and their parents' wishes or dreams for their children. In fact, the research highlighted that first-year university students desperately need general guidance and professional guidance programmes, in particular, to overcome these challenges in their first year, if they are to transition forward successfully. Therefore, this research emphasises that these challenges require some

support and advice from the career and academic guidance at university to encourage students to successfully control and overcome them.

The suggested career guidance services are key to this research. Although career guidance and support services are struggling within schools, in fact, these services should be provided by universities, based on the responses within this research. Most of the participants agreed with the influences of the expected benefits of these services on their academic choices. Moreover, these services can also help and guide students to solve and overcome their career concerns, to determine academic opportunities and to make appropriate academic decisions. The participants emphasised that it would be beneficial if they received these services during the first year to identify and choose the specific academic subject for the next years.

In summary, family factors influenced students' academic choices indirectly, by way of their parents, which encouraged them to have an ambition to obtain a job in the same field as their academic pathway. However, school factors influenced students' academic choices, although these factors were more relevant to the students themselves than the school. Students who came from a supportive and encouraging social and cultural environment were able to discover their preferences and interests alone. This is similar to other research that explores this area, highlighting the importance of the key theoretical ideas discussed, regardless of the context. Drawing on the research presented here, below are recommendations and implications which may provide more support, guidance and encouragement to help students make their academic decisions as well as navigate their first years of study.

6.2 Key recommendations and implications for career guidance practices

In terms of family, some recommendations may assist in guiding and supporting children to determine and choose a suitable academic choice:

- Parents should explore and understand the career and educational interests of their children from an early stage to support their tendencies towards a specific academic pathway or career preference. Parents have a considerable role to play in enabling their children to make their academic decision based on the provision of support and encouragement.
- Parents must also develop and improve their own knowledge about their role in career and academic guidance, in order to be in an effective position to provide adequate support and assistance for their children. Sometimes, parents do that randomly without professional help, which mostly means their efforts and support are insufficient. Therefore, they need to participate in understanding career options for their children. It is the most important investment in the world when parents invest in their children's education and knowledge.
- Parents need to transmit their cultural and social background in a way that improves and develops the education and future career of their children.
- The relationship between brothers and sisters is important. It enables them to share their interests, educational preferences, academic experiences and career concerns, because siblings sometimes listen to each other and have a greater influence on each other than their parents or others.
- In the Saudi context, most of the families have social networks with relatives and others such as neighbours and colleagues. This may contribute to helping their children to benefit from their family networks in determining an appropriate academic choice.

In terms of school, some recommendations may assist in guiding and supporting students in determining and selecting a suitable academic choice:

- Friends at school can help each other by discussing and sharing their educational and career concerns. They need to encourage each other to achieve their next academic goal. Schools could make time to enable students to do this within a structured space.
- Schools should continue to prepare students educationally to achieve a high score of the required level of achievement to be able to decide between different

academic choices as well as offer the knowledge to prepare them for the next stage of their educational journey because they have improved and developed.

- The school system should work in harmony to provide an appropriate and encouraging educational environment for students, because schools have several sources of knowledge and information such as teachers, the student guide, subjects and the library. Therefore, this offers a great opportunity to build students' knowledge and personalities, and also to discover and develop their educational tendencies and career interests.

In terms of career guidance in high schools, some recommendations may assist in guiding and supporting students to determine and choose a suitable academic pathway:

- Career guidance needs to activate and improve its services and programmes to meet students' needs. The improvement might be by way of providing services or in the context of guidance programmes. Relevant information, such as academic choices at university and the demands of the labour market, must be updated in order to provide a clear vision to students to help them make an appropriate academic decision.
- Career guidance in high school should cooperate with local universities to provide a variety of choices of available academic pathways, the required score of levels of achievement and other admission requirements. This step must be provided, at least, for students in the first year in high school.
- Career guidance should ask the counselling and guidance department at the MoE for assistance and support to enable it to provide adequate and effective services and programmes for students. Such assistance could be to increase the number of student guides in high schools to accommodate the large number of students or might be some related tests and instruments the career guidance service could offer.
- The student guide should improve and develop his/her knowledge and information about career guidance to be able to respond to any questions from students and help them. The student guide needs to look for new and inventive ways to introduce himself/herself to students to give them information about the responsibilities, services and programmes they are able to provide. This will let

students know there is someone who can help and support them if they have any educational and career concerns or issues.

- Benefit from other successful local and international experiences in career guidance services and adapting these experiences to the students' needs, the Saudi culture and the educational policy.

In terms of first-year university students, some recommendations may assist them in confronting and overcoming their challenges, and prompt them to ask for help from the career guidance unit at university:

- University students should ask for help and support from someone they trust when they have any concerns and issues regarding their current study or future career, because such problems may influence their study and future negatively.
- University students should consider the challenges they face as a motivation to succeed in studying their current academic pathway and develop their knowledge and improve their academic capacities.
- University students must discover the career guidance services and programmes and seek to benefit from them as much as possible. Facing their challenges or concerns from their early years will help students to determine appropriate solutions and achieve high scores in their study.
- In terms of choosing the specific academic subject for the next years, if students have not made a decision, they must ask for some help and advice from the career guidance service to assist them in evaluating the costs and benefits of the academic choices available.

In terms of the suggested career guidance services, some recommendations may assist the career guidance unit at university in providing services to students:

- The career guidance unit should consider the participants' perspectives on the suggested services in order to provide helpful and suitable services for them to meet their needs.

- Career guidance needs to evaluate the services currently provided based on the participants' perspectives of these in order to understand how students review their benefits and the methods of provision.
- The career guidance service should be concerned about how the services are introduced and how it can attract students to benefit from them.
- Career guidance should distinguish between what career guidance services and programmes the guide or consultant wants to provide and what students want to receive.
- Career guidance should collaborate with local high schools to arrange some lectures and visits for students to help them learn more about academic choices, the academic environment and potential future careers.

6.3 Original contribution to knowledge

The significant contribution to the body of knowledge provided by this research covers several aspects. First, this research has highlighted the ways in which some key Western theoretical ideas can be translated, even into the context of this research which is the Middle East. In terms of the Saudi context, Bourdieu's theory has enabled interpretation of the influence of the importance of social, cultural and economic factors on the academic decision-making of first-year university students. The essential concepts of Bourdieu's theory are cultural capital, social capital and habitus. They helped understand the role of the social and cultural background of Saudi students in their academic choices. However, the rational choice theory has shown how students analysed the costs and benefits of their academic decision-making. It has opened a new vision for a clearer understanding of the process of decision-making among Saudi students in relation to the benefits and costs of their academic choices. This research has emphasised that some key Western theoretical ideas can be used to explain educational, social, cultural and career issues even in a context different from the Western context.

The MoE has formulated plans and strategies for sufficient and effective career guidance services and programmes to be provided for students. However, from the participants' perspectives, there is a gap and difference between the planned and prepared services and

programmes and the reality of practising them. Therefore, the second contribution is that this research showed the reality of the career guidance services from participants' perspectives, and also, it emphasised that the career guidance did not meet the educational and career needs of students, whether in high school or university. Hence, these services and programmes are insufficient for helping and guiding students to make the right academic decision when choosing the appropriate academic pathway. Thus, a lack of career guidance still exists in high schools and at university.

Third, this research has successfully integrated female university students' perspectives, as well as male, to consider the important factors in their academic choices, exploring and comparing their academic choices. Participants, both female and male, had a perfect opportunity to respond to the questionnaire and provide their perspectives. They also had the right to participate in the interview to explain and express their responses. All participants had an equal chance to provide their perspectives on the important factors for their academic choice. Although this study is not generalisable, it has still provided a greater in-depth examination of the area than would have been gained by focusing on just one perspective alone. It also highlights the lack of value of careers guidance, at least in the context of this research. Fourth, the current research demonstrated that there is no significant difference between the influences of the important factors on the academic choices of female and male university students. This implies that both female and male students have a fair chance of benefitting from their cultural and social background to decide upon their preferred academic pathway. Therefore, recently, female and male students seem to be making almost identical academic choices except for a few differences based on the Saudi cultural perspective, education policy and the reality of the labour market. Fifth, this research showed how the family is essential and important from the participants' perspectives for their academic choices. This arises from the cultural and social background which parents transmit to their children, with their support and encouragement. Therefore, they obtained an adequate level of confidence from their parents' cultural and social background to decide upon and analyse the costs and benefits of their desired academic pathways. These are considered to be the original contributions of this research to the body of knowledge and the field of career guidance.

6.4 Further interesting areas for researchers

In addition, as a study of one university this research is not generalisable. However, it is a useful starting point and has highlighted some interesting areas for further research:

- Examining the benefit and influence of the collaboration between the career guidance service at university, the career guidance in high school and the labour market on the academic decision-making of high school students.
- Comparing the differences in their academic decision-making between public university and private university students.
- Exploring the link between parents' educational achievement level and the academic choices from the parents' perspectives.
- Examining the differences between female students and male students in academic decision-making.
- Researching the influence of cultural capital and social capital on the academic decision-making of female and male students in high school.
- Investigating the influence of social media and other media platforms on the academic choice of students whether in high school or university.

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لمن يهمه الامر

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته...

نود أن نحيطكم علماً أن عضو هيئة التدريس **أ.محمد بن خالد الدعيلج** قد مُنح إذناً من وحدة الدراسات والبحوث التابعة لعمادة السنة التحضيرية والدراسات المساندة لعمل بحث بعنوان " أهم العوامل التي كان لها الدور في توجيه مسار قرار طلبة السنة التحضيرية بجامعة الامام عبد الرحمن بن فيصل في اختيار التخصص الحالي وذلك من وجهة نظرهم" فنرجو منكم تسهيل مهمته والسماح له بجمع المعلومات التي يحتاج إليها من عينة البحث الذي تقوم به لإكمال بحثه في الوقت المناسب حسب ما يقتضيه البحث.

و تقبلوا فائق التحية و التقدير.

مرفق نسخة من خطة البحث

/ مشرف وحدة الدراسات و البحوث

[redacted]

د. سامي بن عبد الله المبيريك

الرقم.
التاريخ: / /
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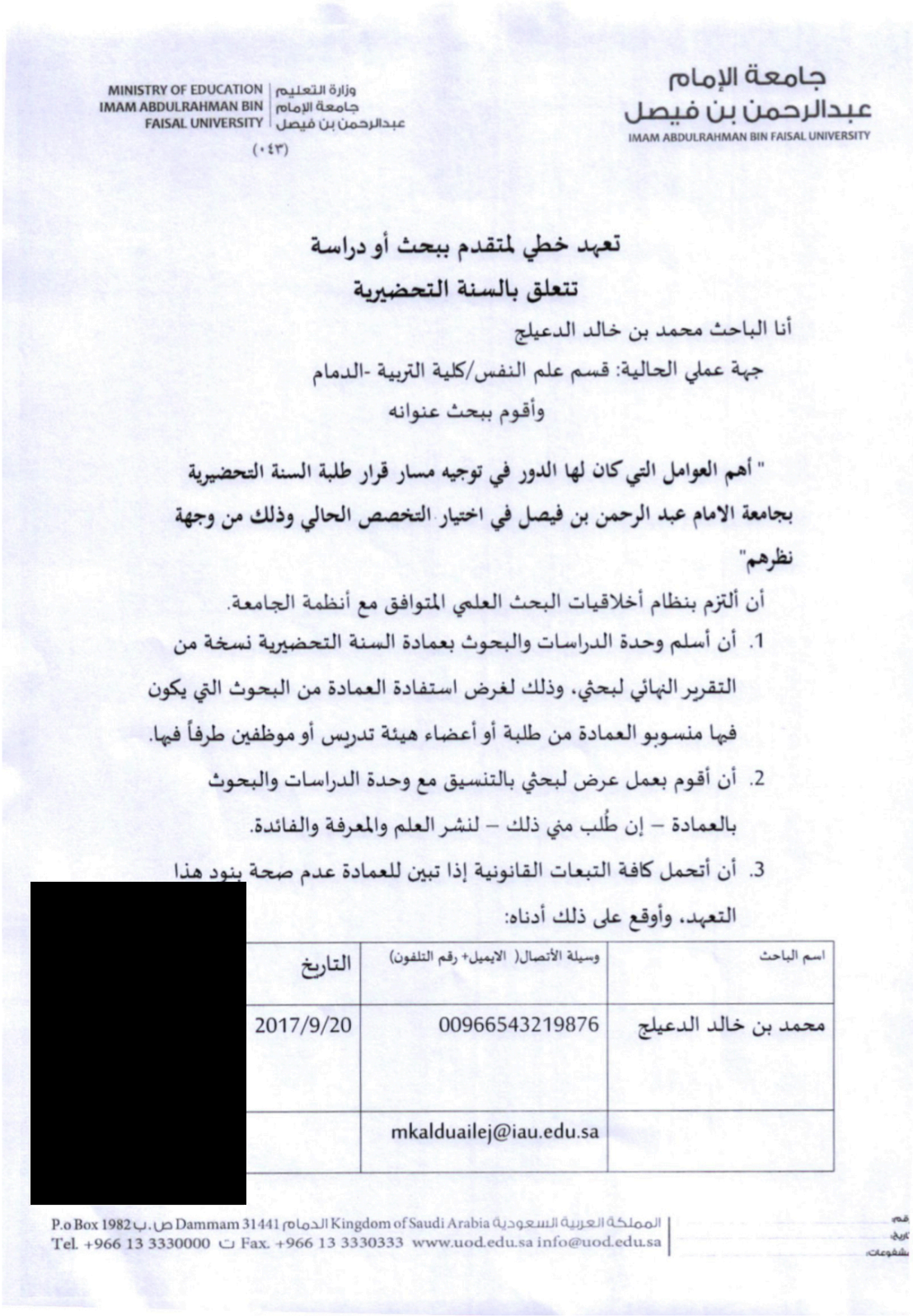
Figure 7-1 The permission letter to conduct this research.

7.2 The researcher's pledge letter



جامعة الإمام
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IMAM ABDULRAHMAN BIN FAISAL UNIVERSITY

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION | وزارة التعليم
IMAM ABDULRAHMAN BIN | جامعة الإمام
FAISAL UNIVERSITY | عبدالرحمن بن فيصل
(٠٤٣)

تعهد خطي لمتقدم ببحث أو دراسة
تتعلق بالسنة التحضيرية

أنا الباحث محمد بن خالد الدعيلج

جهة عملي الحالية: قسم علم النفس/كلية التربية -الدمام

وأقوم ببحث عنوانه

" أهم العوامل التي كان لها الدور في توجيه مسار قرار طلبة السنة التحضيرية بجامعة الامام عبد الرحمن بن فيصل في اختيار التخصص الحالي وذلك من وجهة نظرهم"

أن ألتزم بنظام أخلاقيات البحث العلمي المتوافق مع أنظمة الجامعة.

1. أن أسلم وحدة الدراسات والبحوث بعمادة السنة التحضيرية نسخة من التقرير النهائي لبحثي، وذلك لغرض استفادة العمادة من البحوث التي يكون فيها منسوبو العمادة من طلبة أو أعضاء هيئة تدريس أو موظفين طرفاً فيها.
2. أن أقوم بعمل عرض لبحثي بالتنسيق مع وحدة الدراسات والبحوث بالعمادة – إن طُلب مني ذلك – لنشر العلم والمعرفة والفائدة.
3. أن أتحمل كافة التبعات القانونية إذا تبين للعمادة عدم صحة بنود هذا التعهد، وأوقع على ذلك أدناه:

[redacted]

اسم الباحث	وسيلة الأتصال(الايميل+ رقم التلفون)	التاريخ
محمد بن خالد الدعيلج	00966543219876	2017/9/20
	mkalduailej@iau.edu.sa	

المملكة العربية السعودية الدمام 31441 ص.ب 1982 P.o Box Dammam Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Tel. +966 13 3330000 ت Fax. +966 13 3330333 www.uod.edu.sa info@uod.edu.sa

Figure 7-2 The researcher's pledge letter to conduct this research.

7.3 The Ethical Approval Form

University of Reading
Institute of Education
Ethical Approval Form A (version May 2015)

University of Reading

Tick one:
Staff project: (√) PhD

Name of applicant (s): Mohammed Khalid S. Alduailej

Title of project: What factors are important to the choice of academic route for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia from their perspective?

Name of supervisor (for student projects): Dr Carol Fuller

Please complete the form below including relevant sections overleaf.

	YES	NO	
Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that:			
a) explains the purpose(s) of the project	√		
b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants	√		
c) gives a full, fair and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used	√		
d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary	√		
e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish	√		
f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention and disposal	√		
g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this	√		
h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them	√		
i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email. If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included and their name provided	√		
k) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants		N/A	
j) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows: 'This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct'.	√		
k) includes a standard statement regarding insurance: "The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request".	√		
Please answer the following questions			
1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on blackboard to ensure this).	√		
2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants, if they are able to provide it, in addition to (1)?	√		
3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?	√		
4) Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx)?	√		
5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form to be included with this ethics application?	√		
6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?	√		
	YES	NO	N.A.
7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?	√		
8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?			√
9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent?			√

10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data[1], or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?	√		
11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?			√
12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?	√		
12b) If the answer to question 12a is "yes", does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?	√		
13a) Does your research involve collecting data in a language other than English?	√		
13b) If the answer to question 13a is "yes", please confirm that information sheets, consent forms, and research instruments, where appropriate, have been directly translated from the English versions submitted with this application.	√		
14a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?			√
14b. If the answer to question 14a is "yes": My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University's insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.			√
If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below			

Please complete **either** Section A **or** Section B and provide the details required in support of your application. Sign the form (Section C) then submit it with all relevant attachments (e.g. information sheets, consent forms, tests, questionnaires, interview schedules) to the Institute's Ethics Committee for consideration. Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.

A: My research goes beyond the 'accepted custom and practice of teaching' but I consider that this project has **no** significant ethical implications. (Please tick the box.)	√

Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc.

The participants will be first-year university students and the number of questionnaire participants is 250 including male and female, also the interview participants are 20 only male students.

Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words noting:

1. The research project title is
   What factors are important to the choice of academic route for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia from their perspective?
2. The purpose of the research project is understanding and exploring the important factors that may affect the choice of academic route for first-year university students from their perspective.
3. The two methods are used for data collection:
   a. The questionnaire students about their perspective of the important factors that might have affected their choice of the current academic route. It will focus on approximately five sectors which are. It will focus on approximately five sectors which are:
      i. The personal and family information which provides essential information to understand students social position.
      ii. The family's role in student choice of academic.
      iii. High school's role in preparing them to the next education level.
      iv. The students' experience with university career guidance service.
      v. The challenges they are faced with university life or social life out of university.
   b. The interview is the second instrument. I will ask them some questions regarding your questionnaire answers which are related to your concerns to explain in more details about the important factors that might have affected your choice of the academic route, and I will use audio recorder to record the interview. It takes approximately between 25 to 40 minutes.

This research conducts the non-probability sampling technique, which precisely a convenience sample. The convenience sample will be the first-year university students, and the number of participants for the questionnaire is 250, that including male and female. Also, the interview participants are 20 only male students. The female interview is not easy to be conducted, because of the culture of the rules of Saudi society and the University of Dammam. I will seek to follow the ethical conditions to carry out this research project with full confidentiality and safety. The estimated start date might be at the beginning of 2017.

[1] Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

B: I consider that this project **may** have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute's Ethics Committee.
Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc.
Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words. 1. title of project 2. purpose of project and its academic rationale 3. brief description of methods and measurements 4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria 5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary) 6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with then. 7. estimated start date and duration of project

C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:

Note: a signature is required. Typed names are not acceptable.

I have declared al[redacted]on regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within t[redacted]

Signed: ..... Print Name **Mohammed Khalid Alduailej** Date **08/12/16**

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE ETHICS COMMITTEE

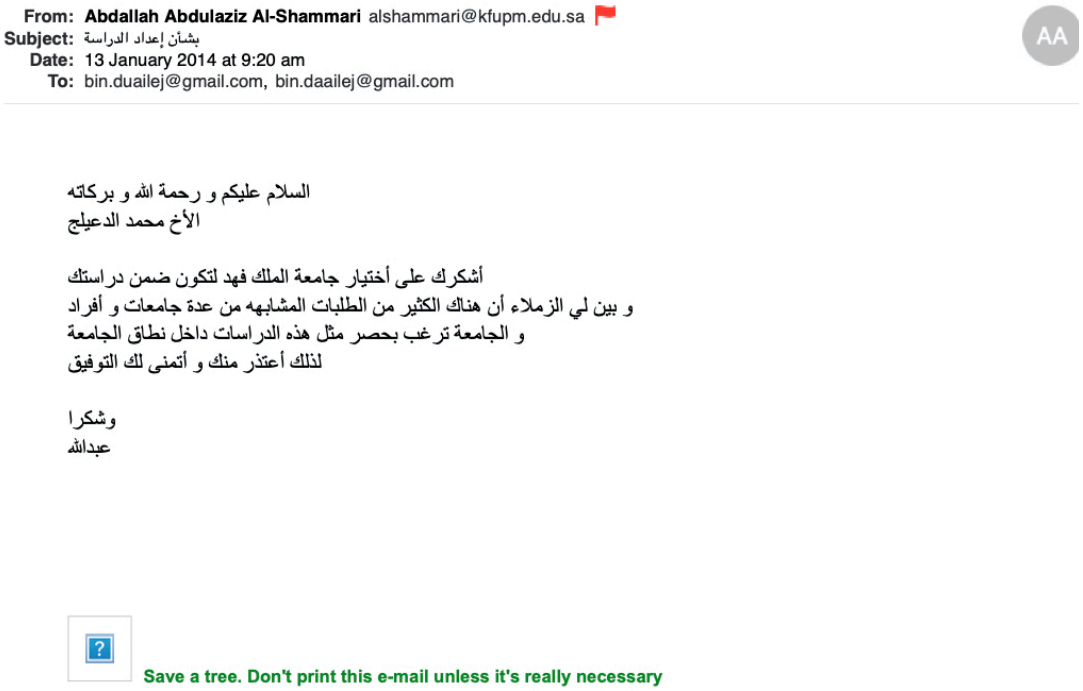
This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

Signed: [redacted]... Print Name…Xiao Lan Curd-Christiansen.. . Date **18/01/16.**
(IoE Research Ethics Committee representative)*

* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.

Figure 7-3 The Ethical Approval Form from University of Reading.

7.4 The official response to the first attempt to conduct a previous research topic



From: **Abdallah Abdulaziz Al-Shammari** alshammari@kfupm.edu.sa
Subject: بشأن إعداد الدراسة
Date: 13 January 2014 at 9:20 am
To: bin.duailej@gmail.com, bin.daailej@gmail.com

AA

السلام عليكم و رحمة الله و بركاته
الأخ محمد الدعيلج

أشكرك على أختيار جامعة الملك فهد لتكون ضمن دراستك
و بين لي الزملاء أن هناك الكثير من الطلبات المشابهه من عدة جامعات و أفراد
و الجامعة ترغب بحصر مثل هذه الدراسات داخل نطاق الجامعة
لذلك أعتذر منك و أتمنى لك التوفيق

وشكرا
عبدالله

Save a tree. Don't print this e-mail unless it's really necessary

Figure 7-4 The official response from another university to the first attempt to conduct a previous research topic.

7.5 The conducted questionnaire

The conducted questionnaire

General and personal information

Please circle ONE for each item

1. ( ) Male ( ) Female
2. I live with ( ) my parents ( ) My mother ( ) My father ( ) other: ……..
3. I live in ……
4. I am a: ( ) Youngest child ( ) Middle Child ( ) Oldest Child ( ) Only Child
5. I graduated from ( ) public high school ( ) private high school
6. I studied ( ) scientific route ( ) literary route in high school
7. Highest education level achieved by Father: ( ) some high school ( ) high school ( ) some college ( ) finished college ( ) post-graduate study
8. Highest education level achieved by Mother: ( ) some high school ( ) high school ( ) some college ( ) finished college ( ) post-graduate study

On a scale of one to four, please circle ONE answer that best describes your response.

The statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1. My parents have had the greatest influence on my choice of academic pathway.					
2. My brothers and sisters were an important					

influence on my choice of academic pathway.					
3. Financial considerations were an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.					
4. The speciality of relatives of my family was an important influence on my choice of current academic pathway.					
5. My parents' educational achievement was an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.					
6. My ambition to work in the same field as the academic pathway in future was an important influence on my choice of the academic pathway.					
7. Some of my teachers in high school were an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.					
8. My preference for some subjects in high school was an important					

influence on my choice of academic pathway.					
9. My friends were an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.					
10. My required standard in levels of achievement was an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.					
11. The student guide in high school was an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.					
12. The career guidance programmes in high school were an important influence on my choice of academic pathway.					

Table 7-1 Questionnaire questions about the important factors for the academic choice.

From the list above, which 3 factors are the most important to you, in making your decisions? Please list these in order of importance, with 1 the most important, then 2 and then 3:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Please tell us anything else you consider important to your decision-making, which is not included here:

_____

_____

_____

Since starting your degree, how confident are you that you have made the right decision?

Very confident Medium confidence Low confidence Not confident

Please explain your answer_____

_____

Since starting your degree, how confident are you that you will find a job in your chosen field?

Very confident Medium confidence Low confidence Not confident

Please explain your answer_____

_____

Since starting your degree, how confident are you that you will successfully complete your degree?

Very confident Medium confidence Low confidence Not confident

Please explain your answer_____

_____

The career guidance services you hope to find during your first year to help you choose the specific academic route for the next years

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1. Providing some career guidance programmes such as workshops, individual career guidance, field visits and public lectures may affect my decision about the academic subject for the next year.					
2. Providing tests and measurements of tendencies towards particular professions would influence my decision about the academic subject for the next year.					
3. The collaboration between the career guidance centre and other interested institutions such as ministries, companies and academic guidance could provide updated information about the labour market which would influence my decision about the academic subject for the next year.					
4. The advice of a career guide at the university would influence my decision about the academic subject for the next year.					

5. The publications and brochures of career guidance which are provided by the career guidance center would influence my decision about the academic subject for the next year.					

Table 7-2 The suggested career guidance services and programmes for the university students.

Note:

There is an interview regarding your responses. If you are interested in participation in this interview, please select from following choices:

( ) I **DO NOT** wish to take part in the interview. (please don't reply below)

( ) I **DO** wish to take part in the interview.

Your name: _____

Your contact number: _____

Your email: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

7.6 Sample of the interview analysis

The interviews were conducted to understand participants' responses to the questionnaire and to provide an appropriate opportunity for them to explain their responses in more detail. The questionnaire divided the questions into themes based on the determining factors. These themes also had some sub-themes to give participants wider options. Therefore, the interviews had categories of questions depending upon each participant's responses to the questionnaire. The researcher sought to ask 'Why' and 'How' questions to obtain a deeper understanding of the factors' role in the academic choices of the interviewees.

The interviews were analysed manually due to the number of interviewees. The researcher recorded each interview and made many notes and comments during the interview. Then, he listened to the recorded interviews to ascertain if there were more interesting points and responses. The first stage of the analysis divided the interviewees into categories based on their agreements and perspectives on the main theme. Then, the analysis became deeper and more detailed by distributing the responses to several sections based on the sub-themes. The last stage of analysis added the comments and explanations of the interviewees to each sub-theme based on their agreement. Therefore, the researcher was able to explain and justify the influence of the factors' role in their academic decision-making from the interviewees' perspectives. The utilisation of ten interviewees made the analysis of their interviews valuable and straightforward, because it was easy to calculate the percentage of their agreements and disagreements, and because their responses were clear and specific. Table 7-1 shows an example of analysing the responses to one family theme.

7.6.1 Some participants' responses to the interview questions about the role of family

Your answer to the questionnaire was that your parents did not affect your choice of major. Why?

Yes, my answer was that my parents had no direct impact on my academic choice. They had an idea about academic choices in general. Also, they had a desire to choose a specific academic pathway. However, they spoke a sentence at the end of our conversation and discussion about the academic choices (Dear daughter, you have persevered and made great efforts in your studies during high school. However, now you will decide what is the appropriate academic pathway for you that you want to study at the university.). This phrase was one of the moments of greatest encouragement and support I received after completing my high school. Therefore, it was my responsibility to try to make the appropriate decision based on my preferences and desires according to my future ambitions. Despite this, my parents were the greatest supporters of my decision and my choice of the academic pathway. This procedure was the same with all of my older brothers.

You mentioned in the questionnaire that your father did not study as an undergraduate, and your mother did not study high school. Did their educational achievement level have any effect on your academic life?

My father finished high school and my mother finished middle school. This has nothing to do with my academic decision. On the contrary, despite not completing their university studies, my parents were sufficiently familiar with knowledge of the academic pathways which are available at the university. Also, they had some information about the available jobs in the labour market. Moreover, they wished me to achieve a university degree in the appropriate academic pathway for me. However, they were understating of my academic and career preference and able to balance between their wishes and my preference because they have deep experience with this field with my older brothers. They supported my decision.

Being the youngest of your siblings, did your parents have a wish for you to study a specific academic pathway and therefore obtain a job in a field that they wished for you?

Yes, I am the youngest of my brothers, and my parents had a beautiful wish for me to study one of the health pathways. They dreamed that I would become a doctor or work in the health field to treat patients and help them. Despite this, they did not ask me to

study any specific academic pathway related to medicine. They gave me enough opportunity to choose, and also they provided me with all the support and encouragement. Then, I chose the humanities pathway.

There are brothers older than you, and as you mentioned in the questionnaire that they did not affect your choice of the current academic pathway, perhaps can you update me about their educational achievements? Were they able to complete their university stage? What are their specialities? Did they influence your academic choice?

In our family, in the beginning, we have a general idea and a way to discuss our ideas and issues which is advice and gentle guidance. I believe that it is very appropriate. All my siblings have finished their undergraduate studies. Usually, we talk and discuss university academic pathways and their advantages and disadvantages as well as their future career prospects and the challenges that the student may go through while studying. However, in the end, the decision is up to me. For example. I am the one who can determine what is the appropriate academic pathway for me based on my desires and preferences, and also I can discuss the choice of academic pathway with my parents and brothers later. Thus, I chose what I wanted to study, which is the humanities pathway.

By the way, what are your college brothers' academic pathways?

My older brother has a higher diploma in office management from Jubail Industrial College, and my other brother has finished his undergraduate degree in electrical energy engineering technology from Jubail Industrial College as well. My older sister obtained a bachelor's in sociology specialising in social work from King Saud University in Riyadh. My younger brother completed a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from an American university. Unfortunately, I do not remember its name now.

What is the summary of your speech with your brothers about their experience of university study? Have you been able to define your major in a more transparent and better manner, or have you been able to prefer one major over another?

The summary of the conversation with my brothers was very useful and helped me to visualise university study clearly, as well as to identify the most important obstacles and challenges and how to deal with them and overcome them. However, their university academic pathways did not affect my academic choice. Still, I benefited from them in making my decision more clearly based on the perception I got from them and also based on my desire and preferences for some academic pathways that I would like to study. By the way, their specialisation had no effect on my choice. The reason for this is that no one in the family had studied the specialisation that I wish to study. Also, most of them concluded their advice by saying (The academic choice is your decision, please, decide what you prefer to study). Still, there are some relatives whose specialities had an impact on the group of academic choices that I intended to enrol for in the university. Ultimately, my current specialisation is not related to any specialisations of my family members and relatives. It was my choice and my decision based on the information that I used and discussed with them as well as my personal preferences and desires.

Table 7-3 An example of analysing and highlighting the responses to the family theme.

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