

Between Expectation and Opportunities:
Youth (Un)Employment in the Arab Gulf

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Introduction

This paper aims to identify successful employment projects for young people across the world and present an analysis of what these projects offer, in order to determine why they are successful. This paper will also identify skills that are being recognised as skills needed in for the future. To achieve this, I have systematically reviewed international publicly available reports that included successful youth employment projects and skills for future employment. The projects and skills in these reports have been described as being successful or show potential, in engaging with young people, transitioning the economy and increasing the employment opportunities for young people. The projects and skills for youth were then examined for possible application in the Arab Gulf countries to ultimately, be sustainable in the long-term. To ensure implementation of these projects and skills for youth could be considered in the Arab Gulf countries, a literature review was carried out to analyse the current views of young people, and identify a range of considerations when reviewing the sources and making recommendations. This paper concludes with a variety of possible actions that can be carried out to increase employment opportunities and match these to the needs of the Arab Gulf countries and the aspirations and expectations of young nationals.

The world population is increasing at an extraordinary pace. On the 15th December 2018 at 1200 hrs GMT, the world population was 7,670,275,895 (Worldometers, 2018). This population has a median age of 32 years, much younger than previous years. According to the Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population (GLMM) Demographic-Economic Database (2015) the rate of population growth of Nationals in the Arab Gulf countries, between 2010 and 2015, was higher than the 1.2% world average. The Arab Gulf countries had on average, a population increase of 2.2% during those five years, ranging from Bahrain, which has the highest increase in nationals, 4.2% through Saudi Arabia with the lowest increase of 1.4%. Over the same period, the GLMM Demographic-Economic Database (2015) identified an exceptionally high rate of population growth of non-nationals. This increase was on average 9.3% across all Arab Gulf countries. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) scored the highest with 16%, and Kuwait had the lowest with 3.7%. The Arab Gulf countries referred to in this paper are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.



The recent national population growth in the Gulf has created a large number of young people who have different aspirations from their parents, grandparents and possibly the State. An expanding youth population has primarily been characterised as a 'youth bulge' problem. German social scientist Gunnar Heinsohn created this term in the mid-1990s. The increase of this age range within a population is often perceived as being excluded from- or on the margins of mainstream political, economic and social pro-

A 'National' is a person who is a local, with that country's nationality. For example, an Emirati is a National of the UAE.

cesses. In addition, the number of young nationals in the Gulf gaining degrees has been increasing year on year, and these young people are expecting jobs that match their perceived knowledge and skills. The increasing number of non-nationals entering the Arab Gulf countries indicates that there are employment opportunities there. However, according to the GLMM Demographic-Economic Database (2014), only 29.6% of nationals in the Arab Gulf countries were employed compared to 70.4% of non-nationals.

“Young people are much less likely to be employed than adults, with the global youth unemployment rate standing at 13%, or three times higher than the adult rate of 4.3%.”
(International Labour Office, 2018:2)

According to Baldwin –Edwards (2011) there is a precarious division in the supply and demand chain when it comes to "public/private and national/immigrant worker" employment (Ibid: 12).

The public sector labour market, in the Arab Gulf countries, does not have the current capacity to employ a large number of nationals (Baldwin –Edwards, 2011). Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2012) endorse this and state that,

“The public sectors [within the Arab Gulf countries], are no longer realistically able to absorb the majority of young national job seekers.... [who] tend not to want to pursue many of the occupations that a great many non-nationals undertake.”

They go on to state that,

“the prevailing perception of the desirability of the public sector (not to mention salaries and benefits) lies at the root of much regional unemployment and the continued over-dependence on non-nationals.”

This is not only a current problem, as due to birth rates over the past two decades, it is going to be a long-term problem. According to Shah (2012:138),

“About 36-38% of the population in most [Arab Gulf] countries are aged less than 15. These trends have several implications for unemployment rates and actions to replace foreign workers with nationals.”

However, the governments of the Arab Gulf countries are trying to address this by encouraging nationals to work in non-traditional sectors, for example, the private sector. According to Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2012), Nationals can be encouraged to take up prolific roles in the private sector through messages such as "working in the private sector reduces our nation's need for non-nationals; therefore, you are helping save our culture." Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2012) believe this message will “appeal to nationalism or national pride [and] would fall on fertile ground.” However, there is hardly any evidence of this across the Arab Gulf countries.

A Note on Definitions

Before proceeding to the argument of this paper, some definitions and the state of the art of the problem are worth clarifying.

The term 'youth' is often used without defining the age range, and the term 'young people' is used interchangeably throughout the international documentation. This can be seen as confusing. Clearly defined parameters of text and consistent use of language is important. The United Nations acknowledges that the meaning of the term 'youth' varies in different societies around the world. In the UNSRC 2250 (United Nations, 2015), a resolution on youth, peace and security which recognises the contribution of youth, defines 'youth' as persons aged 18 to 29 years. Definitions of youth have altered in response to changing political, economic and social conditions. This includes the different definitions of the terms 'young people' and 'youth'. These are used interchangeably at national and international levels, including the definition of youth in previous resolutions. For example, in the General Assembly resolutions A/RES/50/81 World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (1995), and A/RES/56/117, the General Assembly Resolution on Policies and Programmes Involving Youth (2001), the world youth population was defined by the United Nations as aged 15-24 years. The General Assembly endorsed this definition in 1981 in preparation for the International Youth Year in 1985 (Dunhill, 2018). The World Bank (2017) also define youth as 15-24 years, when presenting unemployment figures. However, Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE), a multi-stakeholder coalition, part of The World Bank's Social Protection and Jobs Practice, defines 'youth as 15-29 years (Goldin et al., 2015). The International Labour Office (ILO), World Employment Social Outlook Trends for Youth, 2017 report, states that youth are "those under 25 years of age" (International Labour Office, 2017:2). However, it states later in the report that "discussions about young people assume the age is 15-29" (Ibid:30).

Due to the lack of consistency within international organisations, across different international reports, and a lack of a global definition of the term 'youth' or 'young people/person', I will use both terms in the paper. The age range of the young people being referred to in the sources will be stated, if available.

It should be noted that although there are clear gender inequalities in labour market opportunities, which are entrenched in the multifaceted interaction of gender roles, and the limited participation of women (International Labour Office, 2017) this paper will not focus on gender but youth.

Youth: Employment Aspirations and Expectations

There is a developmental theory of occupational aspirations that was created by Linda Gottfredson in the late 1970s. Gottfredson (1981) stated that our aspirations vary depending on our age and our choices of employment are a combination of the perception of 'self'. This theory is composed of four distinct developmental stages that begin from early childhood, through youth and into early adulthood,

and leads the individual into a preferred or expected employment role. According to Gottfredson, these stages all occur in the first twenty years of life. The four stages are:

Stage 1: Orientation to Size and Power (Ages 3-5) –children begin to organise people into simple categories (big/small, strong/weak). They also start to identify jobs/roles with being an adult human being and are less likely to state they want to be an animal or a superhero when they grow up.

Stage 2: Orientation to Sex Roles (Ages 6-8) - children make unassuming differences among people and jobs/roles. Identifying specific roles/jobs to gender and beginning to make decisions about what jobs/roles are assumed to their gender.

Stage 3: Orientation to Social Valuation (Ages 9-13) - Children are incredibly conscious of the standing of individuals in their society, especially those with jobs/roles that are seen as having high prestige. They now disregard any desires to work in jobs/roles that they believe are below their social standing. The jobs/roles that children of this age identify with can become their permanent aspiration and can lead to unrealistic expectations.

Stage 4: Orientation to Unique, Internal Self (Ages 14 and Older), young people realise how diverse employability is and begin to struggle to define their interests and values with certain jobs/roles. They now start to reject jobs/positions that they believe are not right for them. This is what Gottfredson calls ‘circumcision’, where sometimes unsuitable self-promoting of jobs/roles are encouraged, usually by adults, without any thought to the job market or the skills set of the young person.

Education can play a significant part in preparing young people for a world of employment. A recent international project set out to ask children between 7 and 11 years, what were their career aspirations (what did they want to do when they grew up) and where did they find out about that job (family, school, social media)? Gore et al. (2017) identified many global trends. Stereotypical gender roles were prevalent. Boys stated they wanted to work in positions where they were working with things, and girls said they wanted caring, people facing roles. This is aligned with common theories around masculine and feminine roles at this age and stage of development. The researchers found that the most significant influence on the children’s aspirations was their family. This research indicates that children are starting to make decisions regarding their future employment at an early age — however, children’s ideas about the types of jobs they want to do when they grow up and are questionable in regards to providing signals of what they might do in the future. Early career ideas of young children may be slightly imaginative. While these aspirations may not be entirely representative, they can be used to study children’s perceptions of and thoughts about the ‘world of work’ (Hutchings, 1996). There is very little research on children’s career ambitions as it may be seen as transitory and this will have dissuaded researchers from focusing on them in the past.

Education can play a significant part in preparing young people for a world of employment

Employability and the type of employment are influenced by the qualities and capabilities each person has (Pool and Sewell, 2007). Young people do not always have the experience to identify and understand what their interests, aptitude and abilities are (Ibid). Therefore, they cannot measure how far their aspirations and expectations are from their actual skills and the opportunities that they currently or will have in the future. Gottfredson's theory predicts that young people with high aspirations and expectations of achieving employment in jobs/roles with a high social standing often have to compromise. Therefore, due to the international population growth of young people and the further demand for jobs/roles, more young people will have to accept or learn to compromise in the future (Potgieter, 2012).

As identified in Gottfredson's theory, every individual has a different set of aspirations, and they will vary over time. The aspirations are also highly influenced by people around us. A continuous encouragement from people we trust (parents, family, teachers can also reinforce our unrealistic aspirations and expectations. In addition, the effects of achieving our aspirations can lead to specific actions and attitudes. If we accomplish a goal, there is always a risk of becoming too self-interested, overconfident and egocentric and these traits can be projected through our further aspirations and expectations. Having success and continued high aspirations and expectations is not erroneous, but what do we do when these high aspirations and expectations are not realised? In such situations, our actions and attitudes can change and lead to us being dissatisfied and frustrated not only with ourselves but with the community or society we belong to (Potgieter, 2012).

21st Century skills for employment

In schools, colleges and universities, students are being encouraged and, in some cases, taught to develop a broader set of skills during their time in education (Brewer, 2013). There is also an emerging global demand for specific 'soft skills' to be taught to all young people during their formal education (Pellegrino and Hilton, 2012). School education has characteristically been seen as a grounding for maturity and the world of work, and this has now shifted toward an aspiration for education to inform both work and life more generally. Frameworks have been developed that describe these 'soft skills' or competencies that the rest of the 21st-century world will require. One such framework on 'soft skills' is from Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, and Moore (2015). They have identified five 'soft skills' that are highly influential and crucial to employability and workplace success. The 'soft skills' they identified are communication, positive self-concept, self-control, higher-order thinking skills, and social skills (Ibid). Lippman et al., (2015: 43) state that "adolescence and young adulthood are optimal times to develop and reinforce these skills" (ages 15–29 years). Therefore, schools, colleges and universities, are best placed to teach 'soft skills' as part of a student's education programme.

'Soft skills' are gaining significance with respect to the role they play regarding human capital progress and labour force success. The qualities of such skills are beginning to equal in relevance, to academic or technical skills (Kautz et al., 2014).

“ 'Soft skills' refer to a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to navigate their environment effectively, work well with others,

perform well, and achieve their goals. These skills are broadly applicable and complement other skills such as technical, vocational, and academic skills.” (Lippman et al. 2015:4)

How do we find out what young people want/need?

Listening to what young people have to say not only informs those who need to know or want to know about the lived experiences of young people but it also provides them with a voice. Historically, young peoples’ voices have been overlooked or ignored, and they have not been in a position to offer their views, comments or concerns (Qvortrup et al. 1994). However, this position has been changing, and young people are now actively participating in decisions that affect their lives (Harrison and Wise, 2005). Clark et al. (2014:27) state young people are now actively participating in decisions that affect their lives that “Participation is the act of doing and being involved, voice is the right to free expression of views that may or may not emanate from participation”. Therefore, an empowering and enabling environment must be created before young people can exercise voice. In addition, the right procedures and policies must be in place, understood and followed to “carry that voice to an audience in a way that can bring influence to bear” (Clark et al. 2014:27) to the relevant organisations and individuals.

“Agency is the fulfilment of participation and voice through actions that change or influence of young people’s lives. Young people as agents of change and knowledge bearing experts are comparatively recent concepts.” (Clark et al. 2014:28)

Young people are becoming more agentic in the Arab Gulf countries. For example, the UAE Government launched a National Agenda for Emirati youth, which gives young people an opportunity to participate in the country’s development (Ministry of Cabinet Affairs and the Future, 2018). However, youth participation is not evolving across the Arab Gulf countries. According to Thompson (2017), this type of involvement is not being offered in Saudi Arabia but would be welcomed by young male Saudis as part of the ‘Saudi Vision 2030’.

The development of youth aspirations and expectations in the Arab Gulf countries

Numerous young people have aspirations and expectations for their future: family, community and social media greatly influences them. There are recognised cultural differences in regards to how young peoples’ aspirations and expectations are influenced and high ambitions and expectations are encouraged in many cultures. If a young person sets unrealistic aspirations and expectations, are they more likely to fail? Should they be convinced to set realistic ones? When young people view themselves as knowledgeable, competent, talented and capable of realising their goals, this is seen as a critical forecaster of results with regards to their academic outcomes and future employability (Multon et al. 1991; Lent et al. 1994). Young people view themselves from an ‘individual’ perspective, regarding “what they might become, what they would like to become”, and these views can be seen to represent their “goals, aspirations and motives”

(Markus and Nurius, 1986:954). Therefore, high aspirations can motivate young people to behave in ways that enable the achievement of the higher expectations. In due course, the behaviour of a young person results from the joint affiliation concerning judgments of their competence, the outcome expectations, and their goals (Bandura, 1986). However, a young person's culture can play a determining role in their judgements of their competence.

“Culture is now commonly defined as the set of values and beliefs people have about how the world (both nature and society) works as well as the norms of behaviour derived from that set of values. Given that definition, culture is considered to affect not only social norms but also economic behaviours such as the propensity to save or to innovate, fertility choices, labour supply decisions, investment in education, charitable contributions or the willingness to contribute to public goods (Gorodnichenko and Roland, 2013: 213).”

Cultural differences in regards to how young peoples' aspirations and expectations are influenced have been the focus of the work of Geert Hofstede, who is best known for his work on international cultural dimensions. Hofstede developed a model that measured cultural 'individualism' and 'collectivism' and researched the impact of such differences. Collectivist cultures express themselves as constructed



within groups and work cooperatively and jointly for the greater good of the group or the society (Triandis et al. 1990). In individualistic cultures, individual preferences are constructed and worked towards, individuals put their priorities first, and in-group conflict is seen as both normal and acceptable (ibid). Hofstede's (1984) criteria for individualism quantifies the degree to which individuals indicate they are responsible for themselves and value personal

freedom and status. In contrast to being powerfully unified and loyal to a collective group and valuing harmony and conformity (Ibid). Hofstede's criteria can also be linked to aspirations and expectations regarding employment. According to Gorodnichenko and Roland (2013), those who are understood from an independent culture, believe their skills and characteristics do not differ over their lifetime. However, those who are recognised as from a collective culture, think their skills and characteristics can change through determination.

“In collectivist cultures, the response to failure will thus tend to be to provide more effort to achieve success. One example would be taking more remedial courses in response to bad class grades. In a collectivist culture, individual achievements are seen as resulting more from effort more than from ability. In contrast, in individualist cultures, there is much more emphasis on unique talent as a cause of success. The response to failure will thus be more to look for an alternative task or occupation that is better suited to one's innate talents. (Gorodnichenko and Roland, 2013:224).”

Through the work of Hofstede, (1980; 1983; and 1984) and At -Twaijri and Al-Muhaiza (1996) all the Arab Gulf countries (except Oman in the 1996 study) were found to be collectivist cultures. However, research that is more recent has identified that Emiratis can alter between collectivism and individualism, subject to the social environment they are in. Al-Esia and Skok (2014) found that Emiratis identified with collectivism when interacting with other Emiratis, or those they had a strong connection with. When working or socialising with others, Emiratis demonstrated individualistic behaviours. Russell and Warner (2017) claim that many young people in the UAE (not just Emiratis) study degree subjects that are respected and valued by family members, but they are not necessarily interested in.

This brief outline of individual and collective cultures suggests several essential links between cultures and aspirations/ expectations of youth. Collectivism can be associated with the group taking precedence over personal needs, based on social obligations, harmony and cooperation. Therefore, young people in a collective culture believe they have a higher ability and a comparative advantage to overcome problems regarding employment. They possibly have high aspirations and expectations and are supported to believe these. Collectivism is associated with a higher demand for political and social stability and very little demand for trialling new ventures. How relevant is collectivism in meeting the aspirations and expectations of young nationals in the Arab Gulf countries is a matter for further study.

Current research on Youth in Arab Gulf Countries

As stated previously, the rate of population growth of nationals in the Arab Gulf countries between 2010-2015 was higher than the 1.2% world average. The Arab Gulf countries had on average, a population increase of 2.2%. It is essential to identify the specific lived experiences of the youth in Arab Gulf countries, from their comments. However, this research was carried at by using a systematic review of published international reports on the employability of youth. Therefore, the findings of the ninth and tenth editions of the annual ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2018, is included in this paper to give the recently gathered perspective of young Gulf Arabs.

The annual ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey can be seen as an important and unique piece of research that captures the voice of young Gulf Arabs. Although further questions must be raised about the selection of participants in the survey, it does provide an insight into the aspirations and fears of Arab Youth. This research has focused on the young peoples' responses from the Arab Gulf countries in the 2018 Arab Youth survey, that relate to youth employment, wants, aspirations and expectations.

The ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2018, was completed by 3,500 Arab nationals, aged between 18-24 years. This

It is essential to identify the specific lived experiences of the youth in Arab Gulf countries

was the tenth year of the survey. The sample was balanced between an equal percentage of male and female youth. ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller (2018) states that the survey provides "evidence-based insights into the hopes and fears of Arab youth". The survey includes research from nationals in the six Gulf Cooperation Council states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE), North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia) the Levant (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine) and Yemen.

According to the ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2018, the Arab youth stated that their most significant concerns facing the Middle East was terrorism. 34% of Arab Youth stated that this should be the priority for the region. This was higher in the Arab Gulf countries, where 41% of youth stated this should be the priority. In 2017, youth in the Arab Gulf countries stated that unemployment was their primary concern, closely followed by the rise of Daesh and the threat of terrorism. The second priority identified by the youth who participated in this survey in 2018 was employment. It is interesting to note that 30% of Arab Youth stated that 'high paid jobs' was a priority. In the Arab Gulf countries, 26% of young people also stated this. The third priority of all Arab Youth was for their governments to modernise the education system. In the Arab Gulf countries, 30% of the respondents agreed with this.

The questions in the ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey are different between 2017 and 2018. Responses from 2017 Questions in the 2017 survey did have a more detailed focus on unemployment and education. In 2017, in the Arab Gulf countries, 86% of the respondents to the survey stated that they believed their government "has the right policies to address the issues most important to young people". This high number of responses indicate that youth in Arab Gulf countries had a high level of confidence in addressing youth unemployment in their region. In 2017, 86% of youth in Arab Gulf countries also stated their "government has the right policies to address the issues most important to young people". However, 85% of youth in Arab Gulf countries stated that their "country should do better to address the needs of youth". Interestingly, the 2017 survey uses the terms government and country as different categories. In other words, one question is related to the 'government' while another one addresses the 'country'. This approach indicates that although a vast majority of youth in Arab Gulf countries stated they were happy with the work of their government, they believe there is more to be done. The way in which this question is presented and answered, indicates that the youth are happy with the strategic approach of the government but not happy with those that implement it. such as, non-governmental sectors, for example educators, community organisations, and NGOs.

In an era of economic diversification, the private sector must lead the way in providing jobs for the millions of youth seeking to join the labour force. Education systems must, therefore, produce graduates who have the skills to succeed in the private sector (Booz & Co, 2011: 22).

The International Labour Office (2018) reported

".....GCC citizens,are predominantly employed in the public sector. Over the longer term, the return to more robust growth and employment creation in GCC countries is closely linked to change the primary locus of growth from the public to the private sector." (ibid;19)

This is a situation that is reported in many Arab Gulf countries employment reports. For example,

"[t]he public sector employs a majority of the national workforces within the GCC states: more than 75% of Nationals work in the public sectors in Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while the proportion in Saudi Arabia is 63% and in Bahrain, 53%." (Halaoui, et al. 2017:5)

Unemployment is not a new concern for young people in Arab Gulf countries. In 2011, a Booz & Company survey of young people in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates identified the challenges young people perceived at that time. The results (Booz & Company, 2011) were:

- 62% feel the high cost of living is their biggest concern;
- 55% believe their biggest concern is finding a job;
- 87% think unemployment is a significant problem in their country;
- 32% think their education system has not prepared them to find a job.

A recent research project carried out in Saudi Arabia in 2017, on the Saudi Vision 2030, Youth Aspirations and Concerns, invited male Saudi nationals between the ages of 19-25 years, to give their perception on this National Transformation Programme (Thompson, (2017)). The participants commented that they hoped the programme would increase job opportunities but believed that this would only be successful if individual Saudis provided meaningful contributions to this development.

According to Hertog (2014), the way in which unemployment is monitored in the Arab Gulf countries are very relaxed and a young national 'actively looking for work' requires no more than a one-time registration visit to an employment agency. According to Sayre and Yousef (2016), young nationals in Arab Gulf countries have historically made rational choices regarding employment. For example, in 2011 when Oman introduced unemployment benefit, a high proportion of employees resigned. Most of these were from the private sector (Ibid).

According to the ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2017, 41% of youth nationals in Arab Gulf countries were concerned about the quality of education in the country, but 80% were satisfied with how their education system prepare them for employment in the future. In the ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2018, 30% of Arab Gulf countries youth stated that their countries education systems required modernisation. As identified earlier, young peoples' aspirations and expectations can come from within the school environment, personal connections within the family or the community, or a combination of all.

A recent study in the UAE on levels of motivation and self-regulated learning in students aged between 17 and 19 years, identified that students would benefit from learning and developing self-efficacy strategies (Russell and Warner, 2017). This is another example of a 'soft skill', discussed previously and one that employers are looking for in potential employees.

Methodology

Youth unemployment is a contemporary topic with a vast range of published research. On-going efforts to research have furthered our understanding of how to identify, develop and evaluate evidence-based projects, adapt and refine recognised effective practices. These practices are then defined as ‘evidence bases’ and reported upon as examples for governments across the world to emulate, adopt or at least consider. However, not all of these effective practices are transferable across the globe. What is useful in one culture may not be effective in another.

In seeking to «arrive at an overview of a field of study through a reasonably comprehensive assessment and critical interpretation of the literature» (Bryman, 2015: 91). I carried out a systematic review, to identify published youth employment reports. Systematic reviews «are a method of making sense of large bodies of information» (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006:2). This approach involved a broad and thorough search of the literature and a critical analysis of the search results, which resulted in a wide range of sources on youth employability and projects.

Systematic reviews compare and summarise issues that address a similar situation or topic (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). This process can be used for researching particular members of a population or specific members situated in a given geographical location (Ibid). The methods carried out by the researcher in conducting this systematic review of published reports required the researcher to consider the following points:

- How best to find relevant sources;
- How to review the selection and acknowledge this process;
- How to quality assess the identified reports;
- Protocols were pre-planned to enable readers to reduce any bias in the interpretation of the review results and conclusions.

Conventional internet search engines and keyword identification was used. The key words were ‘employment’, ‘employability’, ‘employment programmes (programs)’, ‘youth’, ‘young people’, ‘report’. The quality and scope of identified published reports varied widely. A critical assessment of the published reports was carried out by the researcher, to ensure the inclusion of reports met a minimum standard of quality (Bryman, 2015). When assessing the quality of the



published reports, the researcher used pre-planned protocols, which focused on the methodological standards of the published reports and related to which organisations had commissioned or carried them out. From these, the researcher selected those reports only published by or affiliated to the ILO.

In a systematic review of published reports, the search should be as comprehensive as possible to maximise the likelihood of capturing all relevant data and minimising the effects of reporting biases (Bryman, 2015). The ILO is an internationally respected organisation, of which all of the Arab Gulf countries are members. The researcher appraised the quality of each report and based the selection on pre-defined eligibility protocols. The report criteria for 'inclusion' (I) or 'exclusion' (E) in this research, were:

- Countries in the Middle East (I), just members of the Arab Gulf countries (E). (This was to widen the research as there have been several projects that have just concentrated on the Arab Gulf countries);
- New forms of employment for youth (I);
- Project approaches and design (I);
- Employment skills of the future (I);
- Data, projects and range of future employment opportunities and skills for youth from 2017, 2018 (I). Only data from 2016 or before (E). (The researcher decided to retrieve the most recent reports, those published in the last 12 months, with the aim of identifying the most contemporary actions that can be proposed now and in the future).

Identifying and retrieving relevant sources was challenging due to a large number of examples that were identified by using the internet search engines and keyword identification. To be eligible for this review, reports had to be considered from the pre-planned protocols as described previously. Only reports that included this criterion were suitable for the primary analyses of this review. This identified only two reports. They are:

- *The New and Promising Approaches in Youth Employment Programs: The S4YE Impact Portfolio, 2017.* This includes 19 projects, carried out within 15 countries, across six continents. Some have multiple locations. S4YE (2017:4) describe the projects as “diverse and high-potential youth employment projects”.
- *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017 Paths to a better working future.* Published by the ILO in 2017. This is an annual report published by the ILO which provides an update on crucial international youth labour market indicators, trends and policies. The report also outlines different youth pathways to the world of work, key factors determining transitions to employment and the future of work for youth, (International Labour Office, 2017).

The selected published reports provided the information from which evidence, conclusions and recommendations are drawn.

The objective and the reasons for conducting a systematic review was to identify relevant reports that best fit the pre-planned protocols. Due to the small number of reports matching the criteria, the researcher decided to carry out a narrative review of the reports. A narrative review consists of a critical qualitative analysis of published materials (Bryman, 2015). Narrative reviews have an important role in analysing sources because they can provide readers with up-to-date knowledge about a specific topic or theme. Although narrative reviews can be seen as potentially biased at the selection of sources stage (Bryman, 2015), in this paper, the sources have already been selected by systematic review. Therefore, the narrative review will analyse “what other studies had found” (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006:13).

These recommended actions will be considered in regards to the aspirations and expectations of young citizens Arab Gulf countries.

Youth Employability Projects and Skills

The tables below outline the characteristics and recommendations identified from a narrative review of all the projects and skills for youth included, published in the two reports. *The New and Promising Approaches in Youth Employment Programs: The S4YE Impact Portfolio, 2017*, included 19 projects. This *Portfolio* contains 19 diverse and high-potential youth employment projects, representing 15 developing countries from 6 continents. *The Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a better working future*, published by the ILO in 2017, outlines different youth pathways to the world of work, key factors determining transitions to employment and the future of work for youth.

All projects and skills were reviewed. Each project or skill has not been reported individually, as the researcher found similarities between several of them and has therefore combined these within the narrative of ‘Characteristics’ and ‘Recommendations’.

Table 1. Projects: Characteristics, Recommendations. SY4E, 2017.

| Age Range | Characteristics of the project (s) | Recommendations |
|-----------|---|--|
| 17-24 | Professional skills development, career counselling and work experience | <p>Work-study programmes/ apprenticeships, developed with employers and young people.</p> <p>Having a career service that is well trained and respected (and utilised) and can be accessed by young people while in school.</p> |
| 11-17 | Leadership, entrepreneurship and workforce readiness education and support at a systems-level to youth in secondary schools. | <p>Teacher training, and curriculum linked to skills discussed and agreed with employers and young people</p> <p>Staff with knowledge and teaching experience of 'soft skills' to train young people.</p> |
| 18-29 | Working with employers, with job vacancies, and place young people with the most appropriate qualifications / relevant subject area. Incorporate work readiness training. Mentoring in the workplace. Young people complete a diagnostic test to match the person to the conditions of jobs that will open up, the skills the employer/ job requires. | <p>Combing diagnostics to identify the person to a job, job finding and liaison with employers, preparation for the role the young person will be going into and a workplace mentor.</p> <p>Expectations from the young person and the employer can be captured and matched in this example.</p> |
| 18-30 | <p>Skills training, entrepreneurship and enterprise promotion.</p> <p>Working with local employers/businesses to adopt new business models and expand the number of jobs available for youth.</p> | Match supply and demand by providing development support to small and medium businesses and, at the same time, offering youth skills training. Encouraging and supporting youth entrepreneurs |
| 15-24 | National Volunteer Programme. Combines soft skills training with volunteering. Provides small grants to partner organisations (municipalities, NGOs, universities, and schools); builds institutional capacity for promoting volunteerism | <p>Digital platform to facilitate matching between youth and volunteer opportunities with NGOs, community centres, education settings, and the private sector.</p> <p>Staff with knowledge and teaching experience of 'soft skills' to train young people.</p> |

Table 2. Skills: Characteristics, Recommendations. International Labour Office Youth report, 2017.

| Age Range | Characteristics of the Skills needed | Recommendations |
|--|---|--|
| 16-29 are better equipped to solve problems using technology | <p>New technologies, new jobs. Four areas of innovation (technologies) have been identified by researchers that will 'shape the future' and offer job opportunities to young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artificial intelligence (AI) • Robotics • Devices that connect to the Internet and each other • 3D printing | <p>It is reported that this technology will not be able to accomplish non-routine, non-repetitive, more complex cognitive and social tasks. Including soft skills such as</p> <p>problem-solving, communication, critical thinking, creativity and imagination. Staff with knowledge and teaching experience of 'soft skills' and new technologies to train young people. Encouraging and supporting youth entrepreneurs</p> |
| No age stated | <p>Financial Services – this area is continuing to grow, and the majority of those employed are young people. Although technologies may reduce employment opportunities for older staff, this area is expected to increase chances for young people.</p> | <p>Fintech companies – start-ups.</p> <p>Skills to generate and store data</p> <p>Staff with knowledge and teaching experience of new technologies to train/mentor young people. Encouraging and supporting youth entrepreneurs</p> |
| No age stated | <p>Health Services – the ageing population is global and continuing to increase. This will further enhance the demand for health and social care.</p> <p>Training, data management, electronic medical records systems, 'fluent in technology',</p> | <p>Technology is transforming this sector. Specific care and training to the carers are being offered online.</p> <p>Skills to generate and store data</p> <p>Staff with knowledge and teaching experience of new technologies to train/mentor young people.</p> |
| No age stated | <p>How people communicate with each other. This includes the areas above but also transport and storage, information and communications, how human beings interact with technology and each other through technology. Although technologies may reduce employment opportunities for older staff, this area is expected to increase opportunities for young people.</p> <p>This is a fast-moving sector, and developments are being advanced all the time.</p> | <p>Demand for technologically trained workers will increase. Young people adapt quicker and accept easier for technological innovations. They are 'digital natives'.</p> <p>A combination of technological and soft skills will be required.</p> <p>Staff with knowledge and teaching experience of technological innovations (vocational) and soft skills to train/mentor young people.</p> <p>Encouraging and supporting youth entrepreneurs</p> |
| No age stated | <p>'Gig Economy', crowd work. Temporary positions, employers contract with independent workers for short-term engagements. Tends to be technologically based and due to this is and will continue to be, more popular with young people. Tends to be temporary.</p> | <p>Gig workers tend to be self-employed therefore will need support, training or services that take care of their self-employed status.</p> <p>knowledge and support with being self-employed, mentoring</p> |

The two tables outline the characteristics and recommendations identified from a narrative review of all the projects and skills for youth included, published in the two reports. A range of proposals can be drawn from these tables. However, to ensure these recommendations will work effectively and efficiently, a variety of other criteria identified earlier in this paper must be considered alongside, and in some cases, acted upon to support the success of such suggestions.

Recommendations

1. Most future employment will be technologically linked. Young people are best placed to adapt to the ever-changing technological world. Governments should create an opportunity for Schools/Colleges/Universities, young people and employers, more so the private sector, to develop work-study programmes, similar to apprentices or a form of 'learn on the job' programme. Involving young people in the development of such programmes helps them to build their skills and confidence. Also, this will ensure that the programme matches young people's aspirations and expectations. However, young people will frequently consider the viability of being involved in such a process, and if the programme is old, uninteresting or monotonous, they may not attend. The subjects/role of the programmes could be linked to government priorities, for example, renewable energy, education, or health.
2. Create a National Careers Service, where staff are well trained and who receive appropriate continual professional development. This service could then develop an employability strategy to support the employability of young people. This could also include helping young people leaving school or university to search for jobs actively. This service should be offered in secondary/high schools as early intervention, to ensure young people begin to consider the 'world of work', while at school. This will give them a sense of empowerment in discussing and identifying the role and to develop an understanding of what being employed is all about. A further service could be offered to parents in regards to informing them of future jobs/ skills for future employment and providing information regarding sectors and types of jobs that parents may have no knowledge or experience of. Consulting with young people about what form this should take and how they would use such a service is paramount. It is recommended that consulting with young people on this should be continual to ensure the facility meets the expectations and needs of each cohort and generation.
3. Develop a national volunteering process that encourages and expects all young people to participate. By working with the private sector, this would be an excellent opportunity to offer young people the chance to experience working in this sector. Many of which have no family link or connection and as previously stated, if this is an unknown, it may be the reason they are discouraged from pursuing a position in the private sector. However, young people should be involved from the start to develop such a process.

4. Schools must provide young people with the foundations of knowledge and the skills to be lifelong learners. To ensure young people are prepared for employment, it is crucial that teacher training and the curriculum are meeting the needs of future employers and employees. This can only be done by closer links to industry and developing the curriculum with employers. Teachers are, without doubt, the most important resource that a student will encounter in their learning process. They can influence whether learning is a positive or not so positive experience for the learner. This, in turn, will shape future learning experiences such as learning in a new job. The learning and development of 'soft skills' are crucial and should be incorporated into the teaching and learning in classrooms by skilled, enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers and lecturers. These were fundamental to the future employment opportunities identified across many of the projects and future pathways.

5. Entrepreneurship is being successful in business. Entrepreneurs have many traits in common with one another. These include high levels of confidence, creativity and optimism; highly disciplined, determined and focused on making their business work; open-minded and they realise that every occasion and circumstance is a business opportunity and highly competitive with strong people skills (soft skills), passionate about their business. Reiterating the previous recommendations that 'soft skills' and technological knowledge and skills are fundamental to success, they must be taught, developed and acknowledged as skills highly sought after by employers. Including young people and employers in the development and reviewing of skills acquired, would ensure this meets the needs of the future employees and employers.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was threefold: to identify the aspirations and expectations of young nationals in the Gulf Arab Countries; review international contemporary reports that include projects to increase employment opportunities for young people and future employment areas/skills, and make recommendations that align to the aspirations and expectations of young nationals in the Arab Gulf countries. From the tables and list of recommendations, it is clear that the involvement of young people, in identifying, developing and reviewing, is key to the success of any employment projects and skills development. All the recommendations strongly endorse the active participation of young people in the identification, development, implementation, and evaluation of future employment projects and services. Involving young Nationals will identify their aspirations and expectations. By providing their views, aspirations and expectations can be discussed and in some cases, revised by the young people themselves. An ever-expanding dependent population can offer an expanding workforce. The projects and services included in this paper can be tailored to meet the future employability of young Nationals and the future requirements of employers in the Arab Gulf countries.

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