

“What is the role of the high school in the choice of academic pathway for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia?”

Researcher:

Dr. Mohammed Khalid Saleh ALDUAILEJ

Assistant Professor of Psychology

Career Counselling | Education College | Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University



Abstract:

When planning their future education, first-year university students require thoughtful guidance and support to make informed academic decisions. Previous research highlights that cultural, social, personal, career, and educational factors can significantly influence these choices, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. This study explored how high school impacts students' academic decision-making. The central research question was: What is the role of the high school in influencing the academic choice for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia? Drawing upon Bourdieu's theory and Rational Choice Theory, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining questionnaires with follow-up interviews. Findings revealed that 40% (n=98) of participants chose "I strongly disagreed" as their response to the statement that their academic decision was influenced by their high school teachers. Notably, six interviewees agreed that there had been no influence on their academic choice from their teachers in high school. The results also demonstrated a gap between career guidance services and programmes and the educational and career needs of students. Based on these insights, the study recommends a comprehensive review of career guidance programmes to ensure they effectively address students' needs. Further research is needed to develop practical strategies for delivering impactful guidance to support academic decision-making.

Research: Career Guidance | Decision Making | First-year University | Academic Pathway | High School | Academic Choice.

Research Introduction

High school has a responsibility to achieve these goals to prepare students for the next stage of their educational or career journey. To reach them, the MoE offers several educational pathways for high school students, including scientific and literary pathways. Students have the opportunity to choose which pathway they will study after completing their first year of high school. School has combined methods; for example, teachers and student counsellors assist students in choosing the pathway suitable for their abilities and skills. From this step, the career guidance services should contribute to helping students understand themselves and explore the features of the educational pathways. In terms of the next stage of their academic journey, 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 allow them to make their academic decision based on these features and their abilities and interests (Education, 1995).

From high school to university

Saudi universities require applicants to meet admissions standards combining high school grades, a general aptitude test, and an educational attainment test. The National Centre administers these tests to evaluate students' high school knowledge. Admission criteria, set by each university's deanship, vary in weighting. For example, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal and King Saud Universities assign 30% each to grades and aptitude, and 40% to attainment. King Abdulaziz University allocates 50%, 30%, and 20% respectively. Since results are released after graduation, students choose their pathways based on final scores. This process significantly influences students' academic decisions during the transition from high school to university. The study focuses on students pursuing undergraduate studies motivated by teachers, interests, or career guidance.

The preparatory programme at the university

In Saudi Arabia, many universities implement a preparatory programme, also referred to as an orientation year, for first-year undergraduate students. At E University, this one-year programme offers a general curriculum tailored to students' intended academic pathways. For instance, students pursuing the health pathway study foundational subjects such as health, science, English, physical education, and Islamic culture. The programme aims to prepare students for undergraduate study by enhancing their English and IT skills, fostering innovation and creativity, and developing competencies in learning, research, critical thinking, and communication.

Moreover, the two main objectives are to develop the essential scientific knowledge required by students for their future specialities and to classify them for the upcoming years of study (Studies, 2016). The final grades of the preparatory programme determine the specific subjects that students can select in the subsequent years.

The gap or problem

In the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia, the decision-making process regarding academic pathways among university students has garnered scholarly interest. Research indicates that most students have already chosen their academic tracks upon entering university, with their choices influenced by various factors, including personal interests, social and familial pressures, labour market demands, and the availability of career guidance services.

Drawing on his personal and professional experiences as a student, high school teacher, and university lecturer, the researcher identified a gap in the literature concerning students' academic decision-making and the role of high school. His experience with students' concerns about academic and career choices highlighted the importance of effective guidance services. Relevant studies, such as Aldulaim (2012), have examined the effectiveness of career guidance in Saudi universities. Aldulaim's study, based on responses from 350 students across five universities, revealed that nearly 60% of students perceived no benefit from these services, attributing this to unengaging delivery methods. Although social and cultural factors were suggested as possible influences, the study did not elaborate on these aspects.

Several studies have highlighted persistent shortcomings in university career guidance services in the Gulf region. Abdelhamid (2002) reported that 2,515 students at a university in the United Arab Emirates faced challenges such as inadequate professional support and limited awareness of academic disciplines, with some students also experiencing parental pressure in their academic decisions. Similarly, Alkhatib (1994) found that half of the 676 Saudi university students surveyed had not received any career guidance, and 51% believed these services did not influence their academic choices. These findings, along with Aldulaim's (2012) study, underscore a longstanding issue: career guidance services in universities have been largely ineffective in supporting students' academic and career decision-making, failing to meet their evolving educational needs.

From a personal perspective, the researcher observed during his undergraduate studies in an education college that some students did not complete their degrees within the standard four-year period, while others changed their academic pathways or transferred to different colleges. Motivated by curiosity, he informally investigated the reasons behind these decisions through conversations with peers. He found that students' academic choices were influenced by various factors, including parental pressure, future employment prospects, particularly in teaching and alignment with personal interests and abilities.

The researcher's experience highlighted limitations in higher education career guidance. One peer temporarily enrolled in an education college while waiting for oil sector employment, demonstrating a lack of commitment due to unclear career plans. He also observed minimal structured career guidance during his undergraduate studies, primarily supporting students with low GPAs. Motivated by these observations, he pursued a master's degree in counselling, researching how high school programmes influence student decision-making. The findings indicated minimal change, which was affected by supportive, highly educated families. As a university lecturer and counsellor, he encountered numerous students in need of improved guidance, underscoring the importance of effective career services.

In conclusion, both empirical studies and personal experiences highlight a persistent gap between university students' educational and career needs and the effectiveness of existing career guidance services. Students require tailored support to make informed academic choices aligned with their interests, abilities, and future aspirations, as these decisions significantly impact their career trajectories. Inadequate guidance may lead to academic challenges and broader implications for the labour market, government spending, and social outcomes. Despite the critical role of career guidance, current services remain insufficient, underscoring the need for further research into the disconnect between guidance provision and student decision-making.

Research aims and questions.

Given the context of this research, the main question guiding it is:

What is the influence of the high school role on the academic choice for first-year university students in Saudi Arabia?

Sub questions

1. What role did high school teachers and subjects 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?

The aims of the research

1. Understand the role of high school teachers and subjects concerning the academic choice of first-year students.
2. Explore the role of the career guidance services in the first-year university students' academic decisions.

Significance and outcomes of the study

This study is pioneering in its use of questionnaires and interviews with both male and female students to explore the factors influencing their academic choices. It notably includes the perspectives of female students regarding how key factors affect their decisions, marking a significant contribution to educational and career guidance. Understanding these influencing factors can help career guidance services better understand students' motivations and tailor their support accordingly. The research aims to identify the influence of high school guidance on students' decision-making, thereby enabling universities to develop targeted guidance services and recommendations.

Research Limitations

This research has some limitations that may have affected the procedures used to collect data through the questionnaire and interviews. These limitations were not significant enough to influence the outcomes of this research, but it would have been preferable if the researcher had been able to avoid most of them. He was an insider at 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, gathering its responses, and then analysing them consumed most of the data collection period.

The questionnaire was not piloted with students due to limited time and lengthy procedures at E university to obtain permissions. The researcher was unable to pilot the questionnaire or perform intercoder reliability testing before distribution. Instead, he solicited feedback from assistant, associate, and full professors within his department, whose constructive reviews contributed to enhancing the questionnaire's validity under challenging circumstances. A Cronbach's alpha test verified its internal reliability.

The interviews were conducted under various circumstances. The researcher offered multiple options for times and locations, aiming to facilitate the most advantageous conditions. The process of identifying suitable conditions consumed the majority of the interview time. Additionally, the examination period impacted the number of participants, as the researcher was unable to access exam schedules, which were determined by faculty members. Verifying the schedules for each student proved challenging. The target number of interviews was set at 10 to 15.

Arranging interviews with students proved more time-consuming than anticipated due to their demanding academic commitments, leading to some participants rescheduling or cancelling their appointments. Identifying a suitable time and mode of communication was particularly challenging for female students, considering cultural sensitivities and personal preferences within the Saudi context. The researcher persistently contacted interested participants through emails and phone calls to encourage their involvement. Due to limited availability and busy schedules, a total of ten interviews were conducted, including six males and four females.

Conceptual framework

In terms of this research, there are two key controversial concepts. The first concept is 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 the first-year university students are 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 about 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.

These definitions have demonstrated different points of view 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 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 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 the 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 following years of study. The final grades of the preparatory programme determine the specific subject that students can choose for the subsequent years.

literature review

- Career guidance in Saudi high schools

In most high schools across Saudi Arabia, there exists a student counsellor responsible for delivering various guidance services, including career guidance. Within high school, career guidance is inherently linked with educational guidance, as they are inseparable within the educational environment. According to Alghamlas, educational and career guidance are interconnected and mutually supportive. By making appropriate academic choices, students can secure suitable employment in the future. Additionally, he emphasised that assisting students in determining their academic preferences for subsequent stages of their educational journey is a crucial step toward positioning them effectively within the labour market (Alghamlas, 2000). However, career guidance in high schools is defined as a professional vocational training programme that follows a systematic process, wherein students gain awareness of their attitudes, aptitudes, and abilities, as well as the educational and professional opportunities available to them. This process enables students to make informed decisions regarding their educational and career paths (Alshahri & Alqasim, n.d.). Both perspectives highlight that career guidance and educational guidance must work collaboratively to support students in their educational and career development.

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 counsellors and school principals. He found some interesting obstacles. For instance, the school lacks material and moral incentives for implementing career guidance programmes, and teachers' participation in these programmes is poor in high schools. He also noted a shortage of student counsellors in schools and a scarcity of databases on professional choices and academic pathways (Almansour, 2011). Due to these obstacles and issues, a student counsellor 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 counsellors to overcome these issues with sufficient services.

- Bourdieu's theory – social capital

The educational environment reflects the larger society, with diverse backgrounds. Choosing an academic path is a key decision influenced by personal desires, family pressure, social views, needs, and job prospects. Some students base their choices on interests, while others are influenced by external factors, which can sometimes lead to less suitable options. These choices are shaped by interactions with external influences that can support or hinder them. Preferences vary among siblings

and social classes. Career paths linked to academic choices differ among students. Bourdieu's concepts like cultural capital, habitus, and social class help analyse these social and educational dynamics.

In recent years, 'social capital' has gained attention as a way to understand families' roles in children's education and university decision-making. The concept is complex and has multiple meanings. Morrow defines social capital as involving "sociability, social networks and social support, trust, reciprocity and community and civic engagement" (Morrow, 1999, p. 744), such as relationships between individuals and communities. These relationships foster objectives, cohesiveness, and trust. Individuals may also benefit from collective social capital (Fuller, 2013). Reay notes that family and society interactions create social capital through networks (Reay, 2000). These networks help individuals achieve personal or collective goals (Coleman, 1988).

From a societal perspective, social capital pertains to the individuals known by one rather than solely to one's knowledge. The interactions among members of a society are influenced by their social class (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Social capital encompasses features of social communities, such as networks and social trust, which facilitate collaboration and coordination for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995). According to 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 institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986). High school students are more likely to achieve high grades and attain higher levels of education when their families actively engage with the school, fostering a trusting and mutually supportive relationship that benefits educational outcomes. Such educational attainment can be regarded as a manifestation of the social capital possessed by the students' families.

Social capital fosters relationships within families and with external agents, aiding resource access. These connections enable sharing objectives and knowledge. In higher education (Fuller, 2008), students from families with strong community ties are more likely to get help in choosing academic paths. Bourdieu linked students' academic performance to socio-economic backgrounds, a pattern seen in schools (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This may influence students' academic choices. Thus, this research suggests that social capital impacts preparatory year students' academic decisions.

Indeed, Bourdieu's theory facilitated the researcher in interpreting and understanding the data collected. Academic choices were made based on various reasons that differ among students. The diversity of social and cultural backgrounds, along with habitus, contributed to the differences in students' academic decisions. This theory is concerned with exploring and understanding actions and causes across multiple fields, including educational and social domains. Consequently, it proved helpful in comprehending and explaining the roles and effects of influencing factors related to students' backgrounds concerning their academic choices. In this research, it was particularly insightful to examine the role of these factors from the perspectives of Saudi students, such as their families, parents, schools, friends, and teachers.

- The rational choice theory

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. The essential 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'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 sensible choice for their academic pathway (Need & De Jong, 2001).

The rational choice theory explains how students can make an educational or academic decision. 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 participating students chose their interest in the field as the first influential factor. Moreover, the second factor was good job opportunities, which were selected by 20.5% (n=137) of 671 participants. The other 13.2% (n=88 of 671) chose "good fit", indicating that the academic choice was appropriate for their abilities and tendencies, as the third influential factor on their academic choices (Kim, Markham & Cangelosi, 2002). Rational choice theory is a valuable framework that helps researchers gain a deeper understanding of some people's actions. However, this

theory has no answer to ‘why’ questions regarding those acts. It can explore ‘how’ people make rational choices or make their

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to align with its research paradigms. While each method follows distinct procedures and serves different purposes, both adhere to scientific standards. As noted by Punch (2005), quantitative research is characterised by numerical data analysis, whereas qualitative research involves the interpretation of non-numerical data. The subsequent sections elaborate on the distinctions between these two approaches.

- Qualitative research methods

This research aims to explore the role of high school and career guidance services in influencing first-year university students’ academic choices and to understand how these factors shape their decision-making processes. As Ritchie and Lewis (2003) note, qualitative research enables the exploration of social phenomena from diverse perspectives. It is typically grounded in inductive reasoning, allowing for a gradual and flexible interpretation of findings based on the data collected (Kumar, 2011; Neuman, 2013). Employing a qualitative methodology enables an in-depth examination of students’ experiences and provides valuable insights into the role of social and educational influences on their academic pathways. It is typically grounded in inductive reasoning, allowing for a gradual and flexible interpretation of findings based on the data collected (Kumar, 2011; Neuman, 2013). Qualitative research offers a flexible approach for obtaining rich, detailed data through open-ended questions, which allow participants to express their perspectives freely.

- Quantitative research method

Collecting a large number of participants’ responses offers a broad perspective on the research problem due to the diversity of data and cases, which typically facilitates a deductive analytical approach (Neuman, 2013). In quantitative research, variables are employed to determine the required data types. These variables pertain to the attributes of participants’ cases and subjects, as well as the relationships between them; for instance, the causal link between students’ achievement and family stability (Porta & Keating, 2008). Quantitative research inquiries are typically closed-ended and fixed, meaning that all participants are asked identical questions in the same sequence. Nevertheless, researchers occasionally include a few open-ended questions to explore specific responses to the closed-ended questions. The primary distinction is that respondents’ answers are limited to ‘yes’ or ‘no’, or sometimes other predetermined options within multiple-choice options. The principal advantage of such questions is that participants’ responses facilitate meaningful comparisons, owing to the restricted flexibility of the questions and answers (Mack et al., 2005).

- Mixed methods research

Mixed methods research, as defined by Bryman (2012) and M. Given (2008), involves the integration of both quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single study to enhance the depth and breadth of analysis. This methodology typically combines tools such as questionnaires and observations, rather than overlapping qualitative techniques like interviews and focus groups. While some scholars equate the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods with differing epistemological stances, such as positivism and interpretivism, this view is considered overly simplistic (Porta & Keating, 2008). Mixed methods allow for the collection of both numerical and narrative data, offering a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). By leveraging the strengths of both approaches, this design helps to mitigate the limitations and biases inherent in each method individually (Creswell, 2013).

Mixed methods research offers a comprehensive approach to understanding complex research problems by allowing quantitative findings to be supported or contrasted with qualitative insights (Creswell, 2013). In the present study, a mixed methods approach was used to investigate the role of high school and career guidance services in influencing first-year university students’ academic choices in Saudi Arabia. The quantitative component, a questionnaire, provided a broad overview of relevant factors, while qualitative interviews offered more profound insights into participants’ responses. The integration of both methods enabled a comprehensive understanding, as interviewees elaborated on their questionnaire answers, explaining the underlying reasons and mechanisms behind their academic decisions.

Methods of data collection

- Questionnaire

The questionnaire is defined as “a written list of questions, the answers to which are recorded by respondents” (Kumar, 2011, p. 138). Bhattacharjee states it “is a research instrument comprising a set of questions (items) intended to gather responses from respondents in a standardised manner” (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 74). Both highlight that a questionnaire contains fixed questions on the same subject. This research used a self-completion questionnaire, “a questionnaire that the respondent answers without the aid of an interviewer”, also called a self-administered questionnaire (Bryman, 2012, p. 716). Its goal is to examine responses to the same questions and enable response comparison. For mixed methods, the questionnaire provides a comprehensive database to support qualitative data collection.

The questionnaire for first-year university students provided an overview of high school and career guidance services’ impact on their academic decisions. It also included students’ backgrounds, social classes, decision-making processes, and academic tendencies. The main goal was to help develop the qualitative instrument for the study. Although grounded in an interpretative framework, the self-administered questionnaire was chosen as the most practical method to capture key areas. It was suitable for gathering experiences from both male and female students in a culturally sensitive way in Saudi Arabia, ensuring inclusivity.

- 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 the interviewer and interviewee is related to the research problem, aiming to obtain adequate and precise, relevant information from the interviewees’ perspective. 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 is an interaction between them through a process of asking questions and providing answers, accompanied by comments. The primary purposes of the interview are to obtain relevant information, measure participants’ feelings and expressions, and ask specific questions about interesting details in their responses to the questionnaire.

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. It relied on respondents’ answers to the questionnaire, especially those who were interested in the interview. Students indicated willingness to participate by selecting ‘agree’. Responses were reviewed to identify notable points. Some responses had underlying reasons that were hard to articulate due to closed-ended questions or limited open-ended responses. Verbal responses are often more direct. The researcher observed reactions, emotions, and facial expressions during interviews. Participants chose preferred interview methods: face-to-face, phone, or email. Male interviewees had face-to-face interviews, while females preferred phone and email, reflecting Saudi cultural norms that respect females’ choice for comfort. These options provided alternative modalities for female participants.

Sampling and participants

Researchers face challenges in obtaining interesting data from large groups 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 generalised (Neuman, 2013, p. 247). Concerning the current research, the population was the first-year university students at E University. According to these definitions, the researcher had to consider estimating the average specifications of the sampling population to determine the representative sample. 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.

In 2017, approximately 5,000 students were enrolled in the preparatory year deanship at the university, distributed across pathways such as science, engineering, health, and humanities. This study focused on the health and humanities pathways. The health pathway had 490 male and 370 female students, while the humanities pathway included 60 male and 1,200 female students. The researcher aimed for a sample of 300-400 students, selected from all students via email, depending on questionnaire responses. For interviews, the target was 10-15 respondents, determined by interest expressed at the end of the questionnaire.

Data analysis

The research employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies within a mixed-methods framework. Quantitative data were examined using SPSS, utilising descriptive statistics where responses such as “I strongly disagree” were encoded as 1 and “I strongly agree” as 5. Qualitative data derived from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis. The study identified two principal themes: school and career guidance during high school. Data analysis incorporated both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including cross-sectional comparisons between male and female students, as well as between students enrolled in health and humanities pathways. These analyses facilitated a detailed understanding of participants’ responses and assisted in the selection of interviewees.

The interview consisted of 10 out of 58 participants who expressed interest in the interview process, a relatively low number due to examinations during data collection. All received two reminder messages, and ten confirmed participation. Neuman describes descriptive analysis for quantitative data as “a general type of simple statistics used by researchers to describe basic patterns in the data” (Neuman, 2013, p. 396). This study aimed to understand key factors influencing first-year students’ academic choices, using basic descriptive statistics. Interviews were transcribed, including context, facial expressions, and body language, lasting 30 to 45 minutes. Data analysis revealed two main themes with sub-themes addressing research questions. The researcher used the data to explore academic decision-making and its challenges, with iterative theme clarification highlighting significant factors from interviewees’ perspectives.

Results

The research findings were gathered through questionnaires and interviews. Occasionally, students select an academic pathway based on their personal academic preferences or external influences. For instance, factors such as their high school environment may impact their decisions. The decision-making process is often intricate, as students seek to balance their own desires with external considerations. The potential consequences of their choices add to this complexity, which can result in students feeling excited about their academic selections due to their academic and career aspirations or feeling confused because they may lack alternative options or clarity regarding their preferences.

- The questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to target first-year university students to investigate the influence of school and career guidance services on their academic decision-making processes. It was structured in two stages to elicit relevant and significant responses from participants. The initial stage collected personal and family information and background, providing essential insights to understand the students’ social standing better. The second stage examined the role of high school, which is presumed to play a significant part in preparing students for the transition to higher education, namely university. A total of 246 valid responses were received, comprising 117 from male students and 129 from female students. The primary objective of this questionnaire was to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the factors critical to the role of high school and career guidance services.

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

Typically, female and male students differ in interests and perspectives on factors influencing academic choices. This research explored these differences but found no significant variation in how high school and career guidance impact their decisions. Tables show independent samples tests reveal no significant difference in the role of these factors between female and male students. A Sig. value below 0.05 indicates no significant difference; above 0.05 suggests a difference.

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

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

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

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

To understand the role of factors in participants' academic decisions, this research explored differences in the roles of high school and career guidance among humanities and health pathway students. Decision variations may result from these influences. However, independent samples tests show no significant difference in the role of family, school, or guidance in choices between the groups. See tables. If the significance level (Sig.) is less than 0.05, there is no significant difference; if it is more, there is.

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

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

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.

- The interview

The interview aimed to gather more detailed information regarding the respondents' answers to the questionnaire. The questionnaire included a question at the conclusion requesting respondents' consent to participate in the interview. The total number of respondents who consented and expressed willingness to participate was 24% (n=58), whereas 76% (n=188) declined to participate. Following the analysis of the questionnaire results, follow-up emails were dispatched to the 58 interested respondents to remind them and inquire about their continued interest. Additionally, a short message service (SMS) was utilised to send reminders to all participants, ensuring comprehensive outreach. While awaiting responses from participants, students' midterm exams were scheduled, which may account for the limited number of interviewees, totalling ten students, constituting 17% (n=10) of the 58 interested respondents. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. The interview was conducted in Arabic, then translated into English and verified for accuracy by fellow students.

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

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, prompting the interviewer to ask more questions to gather more details about their answers to the questionnaire. For example:

- School section
 1. Which teachers have influenced your academic decisions?
 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?
 5. How did that influence your academic decision?
- Career guidance in the high school section
 1. Why did the student counsellor 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. Did the demand in the labour market influence your choice of specialisation?

The role of high school

High school plays an essential role in equipping students with the qualifications necessary for university admission. The range of subjects provided facilitates the exploration of academic interests. Educators support students in understanding university alternatives and the mechanisms to acquire knowledge. Peer influence significantly impacts academic decision-making. Achievement standards also affect university choices. The primary focus of this section is on the role of high school, specifically: 1) teachers, 2) subject preferences, 3) friends, and 4) achievement standards. Participants discussed these themes through questionnaires and interviews.

- The questionnaire

The table presents the most common responses from the participants regarding the role of teachers, students' preferences for specific subjects, the influence of students' friends, and the impact of the required standard on 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

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

Given that this research pertains to first-semester first-year students, it is premature to ascertain whether their subject preferences and standards have exerted a positive or negative influence on their academic decisions. Additionally, it remains uncertain whether they have made correct or incorrect choices, as some may have selected their current field based on

personal interest or employment prospects. Others might be pursuing their studies to ensure future employment, and no definitive judgment can thus be made regarding their decisions.

In summary, the respondents gave different responses to the role of high school in their academic choices. 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 decisions. However, up to 40% of respondents agreed that their preference for specific curricula in high school and the required standard influenced their decision about their academic choice, as well as their level of achievement. Moreover, a few other participants were unsure whether their preference for specific subjects and the required standard in levels of achievement had influenced their academic choice.

- The interviews

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

Teachers in schools play a key role in developing students' cultural awareness and future career ideas. This is especially important in high school, as students near graduation and plan to pursue college. They may need guidance from teachers on academic decisions. According to a questionnaire, 40% (n=98) of participants strongly disagreed that their high school teachers influenced their academic choices. Six interviewees agreed their decisions were unaffected by their teachers.

Overall, there was consensus among these interviewees regarding the role of teachers in high school. All participants noted that teachers were occupied; however, each provided different reasons reflecting their individual perspectives. For instance, the classroom size kept teachers engaged in instruction. 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." Increased teaching workload and high student numbers served as barriers to teachers providing career guidance to high school students. For example, one participant stated, "There were many students in my school which distracted teachers sometimes from advising students who may need guidance about their academic choice." At times, students in high school preferred and trusted certain teachers, which prompted them to discuss personal issues or academic concerns. In such cases, students had the opportunity to do so if the teachers had sufficient time available. Unfortunately, some participants mentioned that teachers were often busy, which limited their influence on students' academic decisions.

However, there were 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. These four participants shared a positive experience with their teachers during their high school years. Their teachers influenced each of them in various ways. Indeed, teaching methods and the personalities of teachers impacted the students' academic choices.

Furthermore, innovative teaching techniques rendered some teachers' support more acceptable and their advice more 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 highlight this point, teachers represent the most significant influence on students' knowledge, learning, behaviour, and prospects, provided that students accept and emulate teachers as role models. The responsibilities of teachers extend beyond merely instructing and assessing students. When teachers serve as positive role models, they can effect substantial and beneficial changes in students' present circumstances and prospects.

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

Students often base their academic choices on their preferences for certain school subjects, which can influence their decisions. According to the questionnaire, 43.5% (n=107) of participants said their preferences affected their choices. Nine interviewees reported that their preferred subjects influenced their decisions. However, most could not say if they chose the right or wrong academic path, as some were still in their first semester at university. Four responses regarding the influence of teachers on choices matched those about subject preferences, from Adel, Mona, Manal, and Hamad.

Nine of the ten interviewees emphasised that their academic selection was influenced by their preferences for specific subjects during high school. Four of them had correlated their preferences for particular high school subjects with the teachers

who impacted their academic decisions. For instance, Adel was influenced by his chemistry teacher, and his preference for chemistry in high school subsequently affected his academic choices. The academic decisions of Manal and Mona were guided by their preferences for English and their respective English teachers in high school. Furthermore, Hamad favoured three subjects — mathematics, biology, and English — which influenced his academic trajectory, along with the teachers of these disciplines who affected him. These preferences suggest that students enjoy their areas of study and wish to continue their education at university in order to pursue careers in these fields. They responded, 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.” Additionally, they stated, “I agree that my preference for biology, physics, and maths has affected my academic choice. All these subjects are in the health pathway.”

Occasionally, students may be uncertain about their preferences but are aware of their dislikes. For instance, one student expressed a dislike for advanced mathematics. Consequently, Saleh opted to pursue the health pathway, as he understood that this pathway does not entail advanced mathematics. He stated, “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 such cases, students who base their academic decisions on inaccurate information from personal sources may risk pursuing a chosen academic pathway that may not align with their interests or capabilities.

Conversely, 11% (n=27) of the participants were uncertain whether their preferences for specific high school subjects influenced their academic choices. Notably, one interviewee indicated that his preferred subjects during high school did not impact his academic decision. From Fahd’s scenario, it appears that some students may have an affinity for most high school subjects, which consequently leads them to base their academic decisions on other factors instead of their specific preferences during high school.

• The role of friends and their potential influence on decision-making

The majority of high school students maintain diverse friendships that influence their academic decisions. Friends share experiences related to daily life, studies, hobbies, and future aspirations, originating from various backgrounds. This research investigates the extent to which friends affect the academic decisions of first-year university students. According to the questionnaire data, 43% (n=106) of participants strongly disagreed with the notion that friends influenced their academic choices. Additionally, eight interviewees expressed similar perspectives.

Overall, these eight interviewees emphasised that the role of their friends did not influence their academic decisions. The classroom comprises diverse students from various backgrounds, leading to both similarities and differences among them. While students occasionally share their academic choices, each possesses individual academic concerns. Several reasons were identified for their lack of influence from friends. For instance, some participants discussed their academic choices with friends but noted, “I found that they were interested in different academic pathways.” Others preferred not to engage in such discussions, believing their friends lacked interest, as one participant stated, “I was not interested in talking with my friends about my academic choice.” Some participants shared similarities with their friends; however, that did not impact their academic decisions because they maintained, “We respect each other’s academic choices.” This demonstrates their independence in making academic decisions. Additionally, some participants chose not to disclose their academic choices, citing, “I had made my decision already, so I think there was no reason to talk with them.” In conclusion, all participants reported making their academic choices autonomously, without external influence from their friends.

Nevertheless, 3% (n=7) of the participants strongly concurred with the influence of their peers on their academic decisions. Two interviewees highlighted that their choices were affected by friends. The role of friends may influence academic decision-making in various ways. For instance, students frequently seek advice from older friends who have experienced similar academic pathways to acquire insights from their experiences. They tend to share common academic interests. One participant noted, “They clarified some misunderstandings about the realities of this academic pathway”. Other students may engage in discussions with peers of the same age, owing to their familiarity, as exemplified by, “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.” Such interactions may assist students in developing greater self-awareness through their friends’ perspectives. Peer influence is often perceived as more acceptable and beneficial among students, as they can mutually derive advantages from each other.

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

Most universities require a standard including high school grades, a general aptitude test, and an educational attainment test by the National Centre for Assessment. This poses a challenge for students, as high scores open various academic options, but results are only known after graduation, leading some to decide based on expected scores. A survey showed only 38% (n=93) believed this standard influenced their choices, despite grades being crucial for university admissions. Six interviewees confirmed it affected their decisions.

These participants believed that their required standard in levels of achievement had affected their academic decision-making. A high score for the standard needed 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 studied hard and did their best to achieve a high score, as they aspired to join the current academic pathway. Some participants made their academic choice based on the required score; for example, “that encouraged me to persist with my academic decision and choose the health pathway”. Other participants were expecting a range of scores for 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 students make their academic decisions based on the score of the required standard in terms of achievement levels.

Conversely, 7% (n=17) of the participants selected “I do not know” when responding to the inquiry regarding the impact of the required standard on achievement levels. Indeed, the remaining four interviewees indicated that neither their grades nor the standard required influenced their academic decisions. To summarise, the process of making academic choices is intricate, as numerous factors may contribute to influencing such decisions. The required standard in achievement levels constitutes one of these factors. The interviewees who stated that these factors did not affect their decisions had dedicated considerable effort to their studies and strived to realise their academic aspirations, as exemplified by the statement, “I managed my time and studied hard to achieve higher than that level.” These individuals had already decided on a specific academic pathway prior to receiving their achievement level results. They had reviewed the previous scores of the required achievement levels for their chosen university. Their confidence in their academic choices was primarily attributed to their diligent efforts during high school; for instance, one interviewee noted, “The reason for that is I was confident about my study and educational achievement.” Consequently, the required standard in achievement levels did not influence the academic choices of certain students.

The role of career guidance in high school

High school career guidance is imperative, comprising two primary themes: the role of student counsellors who provide advice and support in exploring students’ abilities, and career programs designed to assist students in selecting appropriate academic pathways. Satisfaction in one’s professional life is contingent upon making informed academic decisions, a responsibility shared by student counsellors. Literature indicates that collaboration among student counsellors, school personnel, and organisations can deliver diverse career-related services to high school students.

- The questionnaire

The table 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 counsellor 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

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

The respondents indicated that the student counsellor and the career guidance programmes in high school did not influence their academic decisions. This consensus among participants may be attributed to the absence of guidance programmes facilitated by the student counsellor, such as professional aptitude assessments and personalised career counselling. Furthermore, the disagreement might also stem from a lack of information regarding the career guidance programmes among the students. For a more comprehensive understanding, the subsequent interview results offer additional insights into the participants' negative responses.

The student counsellor'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. The student counsellor in high school should prepare students nearing graduation to make informed decisions about their academic pathway choices at the university. It is the student counsellor's responsibility to provide various programs and services for high school students, encouraging them to attend and benefit from these, to prepare them for undergraduate life. Rarely did the students seek the student counsellor's advice about their academic choices or academic decision-making. This may be due to the lack of information regarding the student counsellor's responsibilities towards them. Furthermore, the student's decision not to seek the student counsellor's advice may be due to the lack of sufficient information provided by the student counsellor on career guidance for students.

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 with respect to all the sub-themes of career guidance in high school.

- The interviews
- **The role of the student counsellor in high school and his/her potential influence on decision-making**

High schools appoint a student counsellor to deliver guidance services, including vocational assessments and career counselling, with an emphasis on individualised guidance. The counsellor assumes responsibility for this function. The study investigates the counsellor's influence on first-year students' academic decisions. Findings indicate that 1% (n=3) of respondents strongly agreed that the counsellors impacted their decisions, whereas 64% (n=158) strongly disagreed. Additionally, ten interviewees, comprising both males and females, reported that the counsellor did not assist them in their decision-making processes.

Overall, the role of the student counsellor in high school did not significantly influence the participants' academic decision-making for various reasons. For instance, the school's population was such that the student counsellor primarily offered only broad guidance programmes or services to students. Participants remarked, "He has provided some general guidance programmes for the students there." Additionally, some students did not seek advice; for example, "I did not seek or ask for any advice from the student counsellor in my high school." Moreover, delivering guidance was not a primary responsibility listed for the student counsellor; for example, "He was doing other work rather than advising students." The large student body prevented the student counsellor from offering personalised guidance to individual students, as noted by some interviewees; for instance, "The number of students in my high school was over the student counsellor's capacity." Consequently, individual career guidance was neither active nor effectively provided. This situation resulted in a misunderstanding of the actual responsibilities of the student counsellor within the high school context by both students and the student counsellor, which contributed to subpar performance.

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

Career guidance programmes involve student counsellors, school administration, and organisations. Two main approaches are individual guidance and public events. The former relates to student counsellors in high schools. The latter includes diverse subjects and organisers. This research focuses on career guidance services for high school students, examining their influence on first-year university students' academic decisions. The questionnaire shows 50% (n=123) strongly disagreed that guidance affected their decisions. Interviews support this, with nine of ten respondents saying guidance did not influence their choices.

Nine out of ten interviewees indicated that there was no influence from high school career guidance on their academic decision-making. Several respondents articulated similar reasons; for instance, the number of students in the school was cited

as a factor, with one stating, “The number of students did not help to provide such programmes.” In some instances, guidance services were accessible; however, they were regarded as insufficiently focused on career guidance relative to general guidance. Responses included statements such as, “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 these reasons reflect the interviewees’ perceptions of the role played by career guidance services and programmes during their high school years in shaping their academic choices.

In contrast, 3% (n=7) of participants strongly agreed that the career guidance programmes influenced their academic choices. Additionally, one interviewee held a differing perspective regarding this role. She stated that the school’s visit to the career exhibition impacted her academic decision, as she acquired extensive information about various academic pathways. She received satisfactory responses from representatives of the humanities pathway to questions that concerned her. She remarked, “The exhibition was a significant event for other students and me.”

Discussion

- The role of high school

Students spend up to a third of their day at school studying with peers and learning from teachers. School is a key educational and social environment where students learn academic content, explore interests, and develop knowledge. Students’ subject interests can influence their academic choices, and final grades affect their decisions, as each pathway has specific achievement standards required by Saudi universities.

The social aspect of school involves relationships among students and between students and teachers. Social capital includes social networks and trust, which facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995). These bonds can impact students’ achievements and knowledge, as good relationships allow students to share concerns and aspirations. Strong student-teacher relationships help students gain more knowledge and seek advice. School provides opportunities to learn from peers, teachers, and subjects while discovering personal academic interests. Social networks help individuals achieve personal or collective goals (Coleman, 1988). For example, students’ social networks can support reaching academic and career aspirations by exposing them to engaging teaching methods and the personality traits of teachers. Preferences for specific subjects can influence academic decisions, helping students focus on suitable paths.

Surprisingly, two factors influenced participants’ academic choices. In the questionnaire, 43.5% (n=107) of respondents and almost all interviewees cited the “preference for some high school subjects” as influential. Four interviewees said they favoured subjects because of their teachers, noting that teachers’ teaching styles and creative methods impacted their choices. Coleman’s comments on social networks suggest that strong teacher-student connections can affect decisions. Additionally, 38% (n=93) of respondents and 6 of 10 interviewees agreed that achievement standards influenced their choices, though 4 interviewees disagreed, and 7% (n=17) were unsure. Overall, preference and achievement levels were key factors. However, both students’ subject preferences in high school and achievement standards influence their academic choices. These results can be better understood through rational choice theory, which explains the reasons behind students’ decisions. Wittek (2013) identifies three key factors: individual preferences, beliefs, and constraints.

Students’ preferences, the first element, refer to their evaluation of the potential consequences of academic choices, positive or negative. Preferences may stem from cultural background, personal habits, or commitments, like tendencies toward specific study paths or enjoyment. Students aim to select a university pathway that aligns with their preferences. Based on their preferences, students evaluate high school subjects and choose an academic path accordingly. The second element is beliefs, which shape perceptions of cause-and-effect relationships and potential outcomes. For example, believing in their high school preferences motivates students to achieve the required standards to access their chosen pathway. Thus, students select their pathway due to positive beliefs about their subjects and achievement levels. The third element is constraints, which limit available choices and will be discussed in relation to the challenges faced after choosing an academic path.

Breen and Goldthorpe identified three main factors influencing academic choices: the cost of continuing study, prospects of success, and potential earnings after graduation (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). Participants’ preferences for specific subjects and achievement standards shape their belief in their ability to pursue related academic paths. According to

them, students' knowledge of their capabilities and desires helps form their goals for success, influencing their academic decisions.

Kim, Markham, and Cangelosi examined factors influencing students' choice of business majors across universities. They found 30% (n=202 of 671) chose their interest as the main factor, while 13.2% (n=88) picked "good fit," indicating the academic choice suited their abilities and tendencies (Kim, Markham, & Cangelosi, 2002). Students chose pathways based on their high school interests, and "good fit" reflected their achievement levels, aligning with their abilities. These factors shaped educational and academic pathway decisions for first-year students.

High school plays a significant role in influencing first-year university students' academic choices in Saudi Arabia, mainly through their subject preferences and achievement scores. Although other sub-themes did not impact their decisions, students used rational thinking to select suitable pathways by focusing on subjects they enjoyed and aimed to excel in. They studied hard to meet admission standards, feeling confident when successful. Overall, high school supports students by encouraging high scores and monitoring achievements, which helps them choose appropriate university pathways.

- The role of career guidance in high school

All Saudi high schools have a student counsellor responsible for providing guidance services, including career guidance. Students nearing graduation need educational and career guidance to choose suitable academic paths, understand factors affecting their decisions, and learn university admission requirements. They also want information on the labour market demands to select appropriate pathways. This research explores the reality of high school career guidance services from students' perspectives.

This research focused on two aspects of career guidance: 1) the student counsellor's role in advising students, and 2) career guidance programmes helping students explore abilities and choose suitable courses. Participants reported that almost 75% felt the student counsellor did not influence their academic decisions, and they strongly disagreed that career guidance programmes affected their choices. This suggests that high school guidance resources were ineffective despite their intended purpose.

There is limited research on career guidance in Saudi high schools from students' perspectives, except for one study by Almansour. He identified issues like a lack of incentives for schools, low teacher participation, few student counsellors, and inadequate databases on career paths (Almansour, 2011). In this study, the large student numbers meant counsellors could only offer general advice, not individualised support. Both Almansour's findings and current participants' responses highlight significant obstacles in high school career guidance, hindering both counsellors' ability to provide proper services and students' access to needed support. An economic model shows why career guidance services are insufficient due to administrative constraints, misunderstandings among students, and limited collaboration between school principals, student counsellors, and the Ministry of Education's counselling department.

The Conclusion and Recommendations

Initially, the researcher aimed to explore students' academic choices and decision-making processes. During his master's studies, he examined vocational tendencies among Dammam high school students and evaluated the effectiveness of the Knowledge Programme in supporting their university pathway decisions. In this research, he focused on the key factors influencing first-year university students' academic choices and how these factors affect their decision-making.

When students make the right academic choice, most will succeed in their preferred pathway, finish their programme successfully, and obtain a suitable future job. They are more likely to overcome challenges because they enjoy their studies and see them as relevant to their careers. Problems become just part of their educational journey. The researcher sought to understand why some students select specific pathways over others, as many overlook opportunities or make ill-advised choices, resulting in dissatisfaction, dropouts, or prolonged course durations. The study also explored what influences these decisions and the family's role, continuing the researcher's interest in student guidance.

To meet the research aims through answers to the research question and sub-questions, the researcher chose a questionnaire as the primary tool to collect diverse responses, which formed the basis for subsequent interviews. These

interviews aimed to explore significant responses from willing participants. Both tools were valuable, providing meaningful insights into the key factors influencing first-year university students' academic choices. The questionnaire offered a range of responses, while interviews provided a more profound understanding from participants' perspectives.

High school plays a crucial role in students' education, influenced by two key factors. Nearly half of the respondents and most interviewees said their preferences for specific subjects affected their academic choices and performance. This underscores that, besides personal interest and ability, the school's priorities and support also shape decisions. These factors are likely shaped by students' cultural and social family backgrounds. Furthermore, high school career guidance aims to influence students' academic choices but has no effect. Poor guidance results from the lack of individual advice and the large student body, which limits personalised support. This creates a gap between practical and theoretical guidance, reducing professionalism and quality, and negatively affecting students.

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ما هو دور المدرسة الثانوية في اختيار المسار الأكاديمي لطلاب السنة الأولى الجامعية في المملكة العربية السعودية؟

إعداد الباحث:

د. محمد بن خالد بن صالح الدجيلج

أستاذ علم النفس المساعد

الإرشاد المهني | كلية التربية | جامعة الإمام عبدالرحمن بن فيصل

الملخص:

عند سعي طلاب السنة الأولى في الجامعة للتخطيط لمستقبلهم الأكاديمي، فإنهم بحاجة إلى التوجيه والدعم المناسب لاتخاذ القرار الأكاديمي الأفضل لهم ولقدراتهم وميولهم، تسلط العديد من الأبحاث السابقة الضوء على إمكانية تأثير العوامل الثقافية والاجتماعية والشخصية والمهنية والتعليمية بشكل واضح على هذه الخيارات، أحياناً بشكل إيجابي وأحياناً أخرى بشكل سلبي. وقد قامت هذه الدراسة بالبحث في دور المدرسة الثانوية في التأثير عملية صنع القرار الأكاديمي للطلاب. حيث كان سؤال البحث الرئيسي هو: ما هو دور المدرسة الثانوية في التأثير على الاختيار الأكاديمي لطلاب السنة الأولى بالجامعة في المملكة العربية السعودية؟ وقد الاستعانة بنظرية بورديو ونظرية الاختيار العقلاني لتفسير النتائج، وقد استخدمت الدراسة نهجاً مختلطاً، يجمع بين الاستبيانات والمقابلات، وكشفت النتائج أن 40% (ن = 98) من المشاركين اختاروا "أنا أعارض بشدة" كإجابة على العبارة التي تقيد بأن قرارهم الأكاديمي تأثر بمعلميهم في المدرسة الثانوية. والجدير بالذكر أن ستة من المشاركين في المقابلات اتفقوا على عدم وجود أي تأثير على اختيارهم الأكاديمي من قبل معلميهم في المدرسة الثانوية، وأظهرت النتائج أيضاً وجود فجوة بين خدمات وبرامج التوجيه المهني والاحتياجات التعليمية والمهنية للطلاب، وبناءً على تلك النتائج، توصي الدراسة بإجراء مراجعة شاملة لبرامج التوجيه المهني لضمان معالجتها الفعالة لاحتياجات الطلاب، وكذلك إلى إجراء المزيد من البحوث لتطوير استراتيجيات عملية لتقديم إرشادات مؤثرة لدعم عملية اتخاذ القرارات الأكاديمية.

مصطلحات البحث: التوجيه المهني | اتخاذ القرار | السنة الجامعية الأولى | المسار الأكاديمي | المدرسة الثانوية | الاختيار الأكاديمي.