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Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center



STUDENT ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM IN SHARJAH

2024 Survey Report -
4th Edition

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Foreword

Entrepreneurship is not only a key driver in the United Arab Emirates' vision of transitioning to a knowledge-based economy, but also a core skillset that will enable our youth to adapt and thrive in the continuously changing world of work. The Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center (Sheraa) has recognized this from inception and has sought to foster an entrepreneurial culture with a particular focus on Sharjah's vibrant pool of university talent.

We are encouraged by the results showcased in this report: aligning with the global average, nearly 17 percent of surveyed students expressed an intention to become entrepreneurs. It speaks to the continued efforts of Sharjah's ecosystem builders and academic institutions to embed entrepreneurial skills and thinking within the curriculum and provide an enabling environment for students to explore their venture-building ambitions.

That said, we recognize that there is more work to be done to ensure students feel sufficiently supported on their entrepreneurial journeys. There must be more opportunities to experiment with – and learn from the mistakes of – startup ideas. We as entrepreneurship support organizations, educators, and regulators have a collective responsibility to ensure real-world, practical learning is at the forefront of university-based education so that students feel better equipped to become the next generation of innovators.

This seminal report, led by Dr. Rodrigo Basco at the American University of Sharjah, is enlightening. It is a guide for policy makers and fellow ecosystem builders on the crucial areas of focus that will further the entrepreneurial development of universities in Sharjah.

Sara Al Nuaimi

CEO

Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center (Sheraa)



Key
Takeaways and
Recommendations

Entrepreneurship as a Career Choice

Takeaway

Since 2018, there has been a positive trend in students' intentions to pursue a career as founders. By 2023, the percentage of surveyed students expressing an intention to become entrepreneurs has reached approximately **17%**, aligning with international levels.

Challenges

The entrepreneurial intentions of students in Sharjah have reached the global average, and from this point forward, growth is expected to occur at a slower pace. Therefore, the next strategy should focus on reinforcing awareness and shifting efforts towards converting intention into action. Furthermore, the awareness initiatives developed by educational institutions and other public organizations operate independently, leading to a lack of real integration.

Recommendation

Better coordination and connectivity are essential for a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem. While the existing government-led strategy has successfully mobilized resources towards establishing Sharjah's economy as an entrepreneurial hub, the next set of public initiatives should focus on creating incentives to foster interconnected and decentralized interactions among economic actors. This development and integration will facilitate the flow of information and ideas, ultimately leading to the development and commercialization of entrepreneurial initiatives.

Successors in Family Business as a Career Choice

Takeaway

There is a consistent pattern over time indicating that around half of the students surveyed come from business families. However, only **6%** of them express a desire to join their family businesses.

Challenges

Local family businesses face the challenge of fostering an entrepreneurial spirit across generations while managing complex family dynamics. Ensuring the continued success of these businesses requires cultivating a mindset that encourages innovation, responsible ownership, and effective wealth management, all while maintaining strong local ties.

Simultaneously, the personal-professional overlap within family businesses can lead to conflicts that discourage younger generations from continuing the legacy. Succession planning that focuses solely on leadership positions, without considering the different roles through which family members can contribute to wealth creation, can intensify competition. Additionally, the desire of younger members to forge their own paths complicates the transition and continuity of the family business.

Recommendation

Entrepreneurship should be understood as more than just the creation of new businesses. Family businesses and entrepreneurial families play a crucial role in Sharjah's entrepreneurial ecosystem because they are the natural economic actors that are capable of producing real change across generations. Therefore, family business education is vital in terms of management, governance, entrepreneurial finance, and transgenerational entrepreneurship, as many students will assume significant roles across the different institutions in the family, in the business itself or in parallel organizations such as family offices or foundations.

Students' Psychological Characteristics as Drivers of Entrepreneurial Intentions

Takeaway

Students' resilience and self-efficacy, which are psychological characteristics that foster an entrepreneurial spirit, are **moderate**. Self-efficacy has shown a positive trend since 2018, rising above the global trend. This indicates the maturity of the new generations of students in their self-contemplation, and it represents a parameter of how they feel about themselves in terms of being entrepreneurs.

Challenges

Educational institutions need to adapt to a new dynamic and technologically advanced environment to develop students' skills and knowledge. However, in a new multi-informational and technologically driven environment, the psychological development of students is critical and differentiates a successful from an unsuccessful entrepreneurial mindset.

This may require a different educational approach at various levels of the educational system, one that embraces both technical skills and soft skills in entrepreneurial education.

Recommendation

Even though psychological characteristics are strongly related to students' family life, there are other environments, such as the university, that can play an important role in developing the psychological qualities needed for a successful long-term entrepreneurial career. Universities, colleges, and other institutions should develop programs and initiatives to equip youth with soft skills needed to address and navigate the entrepreneurial journey, including its risks and the consequences of entrepreneurial failure.

Students' Perception of their Universities' Entrepreneurial Environment

Takeaway

Educational institutions are **moderately perceived** as supportive of students' entrepreneurial careers in terms of the university entrepreneurial environment, entrepreneurial studies, and entrepreneurial reputation.

Challenges

Universities risk falling behind if they continue implementing outdated teaching methods and focusing on the needs of the past century. Sticking to the status quo not only puts the future of educational institutions in jeopardy but also risks turning universities into mere extensions of secondary education. As the economy, society, and technology evolve rapidly, universities must adapt to these changes or risk becoming irrelevant in the entrepreneurial economy. The challenge is to move away from traditional approaches and focus on preparing students for the future, ensuring they are ready to succeed in a constantly changing world.

Recommendation

Educational institutions must re-orient their approach towards exposing students to entrepreneurial experiences, adapt existing programs to develop entrepreneurial skills and capabilities, and operate as entrepreneurial institutions themselves. This requires a comprehensive review of current curricula, incorporating practical and hands-on entrepreneurial activities, fostering partnerships with industry leaders, and continuously updating educational methodologies to keep pace with evolving market demands. Institutions should also become less hierarchical, encouraging and supporting bottom-up initiatives to foster innovation and creativity. By being entrepreneurial, educational institutions can play an important role in Sharjah's entrepreneurship ecosystem and contribute significantly to its evolution.



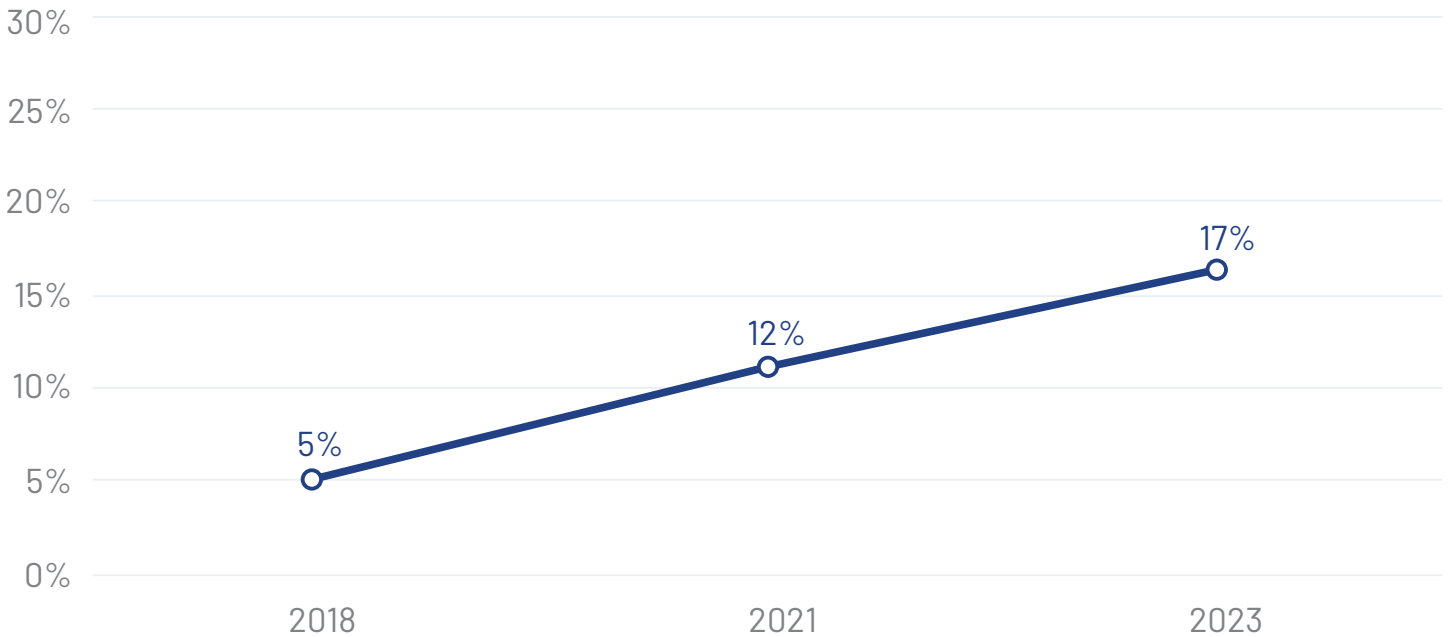
I. Entrepreneurship as a Career Choice

Entrepreneurship as a Career Choice

Short-term Preference

Over a five-year period, we have observed a significant and steady increase in the number of students preferring to establish their own businesses immediately after graduation, reflecting a clear rise in students' entrepreneurial intentions.

Percentage of Students' Short-term Preference for Starting their Own Business



14% of Emirati students in Sharjah aspire to establish their own businesses right after graduation (in 2023).

This emerging trend, which appears to be gaining momentum over time, may be attributed to the government's strategic shift toward fostering an entrepreneurship-oriented economy. Both federal and local government institutions have established laws, regulations, and initiatives to raise awareness, support, and promote entrepreneurship.

Specifically, in the Emirate of Sharjah, the creation of the Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center (Sheraa) and the Sharjah Research Technology and Innovation Park (SRTIP) has significantly influenced students' entrepreneurial spirit. For example, Sheraa has strongly focused on youth initiatives since establishing its first hub at the American University of Sharjah in 2016. It runs hackathons, student pitch competitions, and incubation programs designed for early-stage founders. By strategically integrating the vision of creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and proactiveness into student life, these institutions have effectively bridged the gap between students' academic experiences and practical entrepreneurial pursuits.

Medium-term Preference

The landscape of students' career intentions shifts when we project them into the mid-term future, five years after graduation. The intention to create their own businesses becomes predominant among student career paths, surpassing the percentage of students who prefer a position in the private sector. This trend remains relatively constant over time.

Around 40% of surveyed students showed a preference for starting their own business five years post-graduation, peaking in 2021 with 45%.

The differences in chosen career paths in the short versus medium term could be attributed to various factors, including the development of experience and skills, levels of risk aversion, financial stability, and the expansion of professional networks.

Experience and Skills

Students often feel that the knowledge and skills acquired at university are not directly applicable to the entrepreneurial world. They believe they need time after graduation to acquire practical experience and develop the specific skills necessary for starting their own businesses.

Risk Aversion

Students' perception of risk is influenced by time. The idea of launching a business immediately after graduation is perceived as a higher risk compared to five years later. Being close to graduation, students have a more immediate sense of the risks involved in starting a business.

Financial Stability

For many students, their economic situation at graduation is a barrier to entrepreneurial activities. With generally high costs of living, there is a contradiction between wanting to become financially independent from their parents and the initial financial vulnerability of starting a business. Envisioning a time frame five years after graduation allows them to imagine achieving financial independence.

Network Building

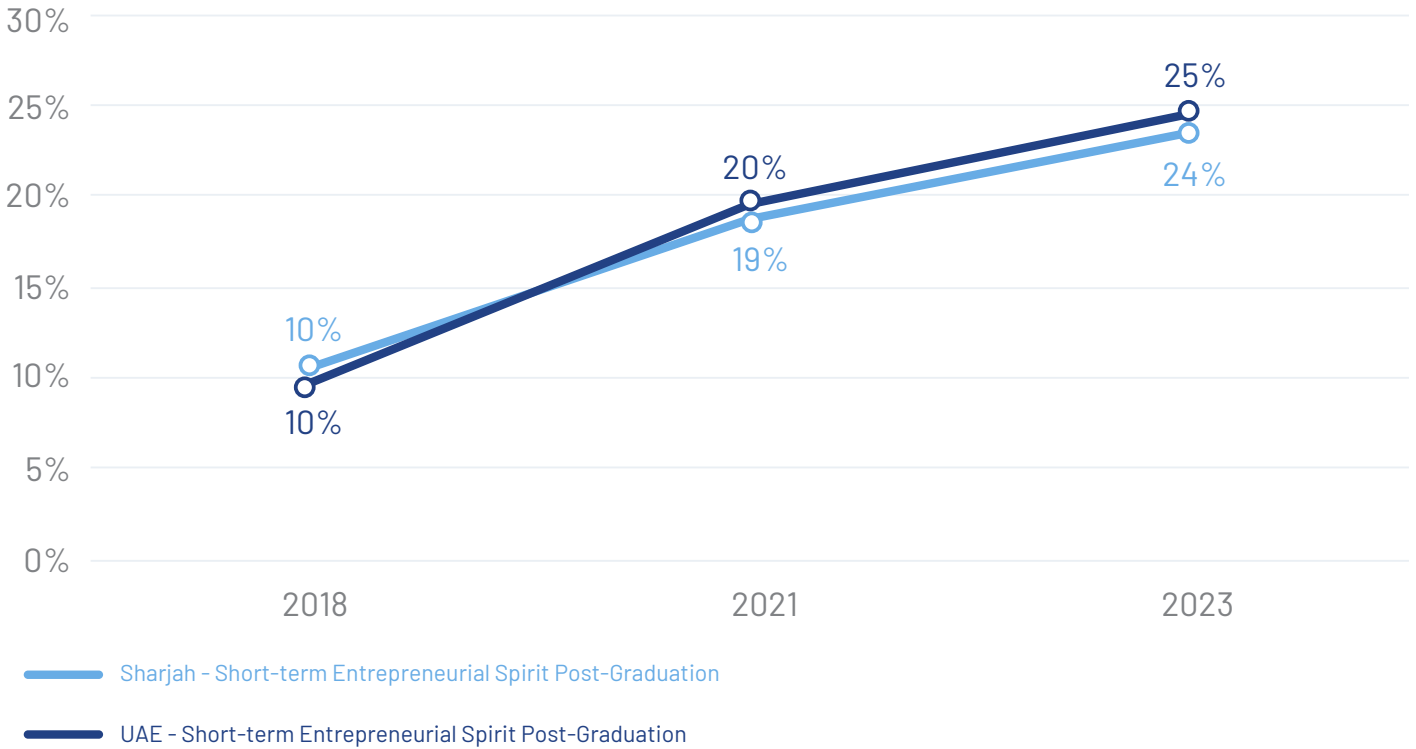
Building a robust network is recognized by students as crucial for entrepreneurial success. Most feel that university does not provide the extensive networking opportunities needed, and they anticipate that experiences gained post-graduation will help them establish the vital connections necessary for their entrepreneurial endeavors.

Sharjah Student Entrepreneurial Spirit Index

To gauge the entrepreneurial spirit among students in Sharjah, we define those who express an intention to establish their own businesses, lead their family enterprises, or buy an existing business to give continuity, as embodying a strong entrepreneurial spirit. The entrepreneurial spirit is a mindset or attitude marked by innovation, risk-taking, and the capability to capitalize on opportunities with the aim of creating and managing new or existing ventures.

Over the last five years, there has been a notable increase in the entrepreneurial spirit among Sharjah's students. This trend in the growth of the entrepreneurial spirit among students in Sharjah aligns with the broader patterns observed across the UAE.

Percentage of Short-Term Entrepreneurial Spirit



Federal and local governments have been instrumental in fostering the entrepreneurial spirit among the youth as a strategic move to transition from a resource-based to an entrepreneurship-based economy. Institutions like Sheraa have made significant efforts to cultivate this spirit through inspirational entrepreneurship-focused events such as the annual Sharjah Entrepreneurship Festival, which has drawn over 30,000 attendees and 700+ speakers from around the world, in addition to multiple programs focused on cultivating entrepreneurs' business ideas. Additionally, SRTIP and SoiLAB launched the SoiLAB Startup Boot Camp, a six-week program that combines training and mentorship to help founders refine their startup ideas.

This leads policymakers and leaders from public institutions to ponder a crucial question:

At what point will the growth of entrepreneurial spirit plateau?

This inquiry is pertinent because the initial objective of government institutions was to heighten entrepreneurship awareness among the youth. While these strategies have successfully broadened students' perspectives on entrepreneurial careers, it prompts policymakers and government leaders to consider the future trajectory of the student entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Inevitably, the level of entrepreneurial spirit will reach its peak and stabilize, as not every student possesses or will develop a high entrepreneurial inclination. Understanding when and how this stabilization will occur is vital for strategic planning and for the continuous support and enhancement of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The next step is not only to keep the entrepreneurial spirit high among the youth community but also to transform it into viable and scalable business ideas. This involves providing the necessary resources, mentorship, and support systems to help young entrepreneurs turn their innovative concepts into successful businesses that can grow and thrive in the market.





Sherif Ismail,
Engineering Graduate,
American University of Sharjah (AUS);
Founder,
Azure3DP

Sherif's journey into entrepreneurship began during his third year of undergraduate studies in 2021 when he started Azure3DP, a 3D printing business. He has also recently been working on a robotics startup.

The supportive environment at AUS, along with exposure to successful startups and the vibrant entrepreneurial culture fostered by Sheraa further fueled his ambition.



Sheraa has been incredibly supportive from day one. We joined the Startup Dojo program, and then qualified for the six-month S3 Incubator program, and we also received support with getting a license with SRTIP, which we are happily in the process of renewing.

Also, after professors learned about my startup, they were supportive and enthusiastic. This positive environment led to my participation in events for the engineering school as a service provider, and to receiving several orders through AUS. Overall, the support has been exceptional.





Ahmed Al Qawasami,
Computer Engineering Student,
American University of Sharjah (AUS);
Founder,
3DVortex

Ahmed started exploring entrepreneurial ventures at the age of 17 while studying at university, aiming to gain insights for his future endeavors. This early start allowed him to launch his own startup, 3DVortex, with the aspiration of building more in the future.

3DVortex is focused on providing a personalized and customizable wallet option for consumers, leveraging 3D printing technology. While Ahmed plans to work as an employee for a brief period, his main goal is to pursue entrepreneurship as a career, with the ambition to build a successful business rather than follow a traditional career path.

“ A member of the Sheraa team approached me and introduced me to the Sheraa environment. The experience at the Hub was overwhelmingly positive. Everyone there, regardless of the strength of their ideas, shared a common mindset—they all wanted to achieve something significant. The Sheraa environment, especially within the university, helped me connect with like-minded students at AUS.

My network grew significantly. I also was greatly impacted by the mentorship I received as part of Sheraa's Dojo+ program.





II. Family Business Succession as a Career Choice

Family Business Succession as a Career Choice

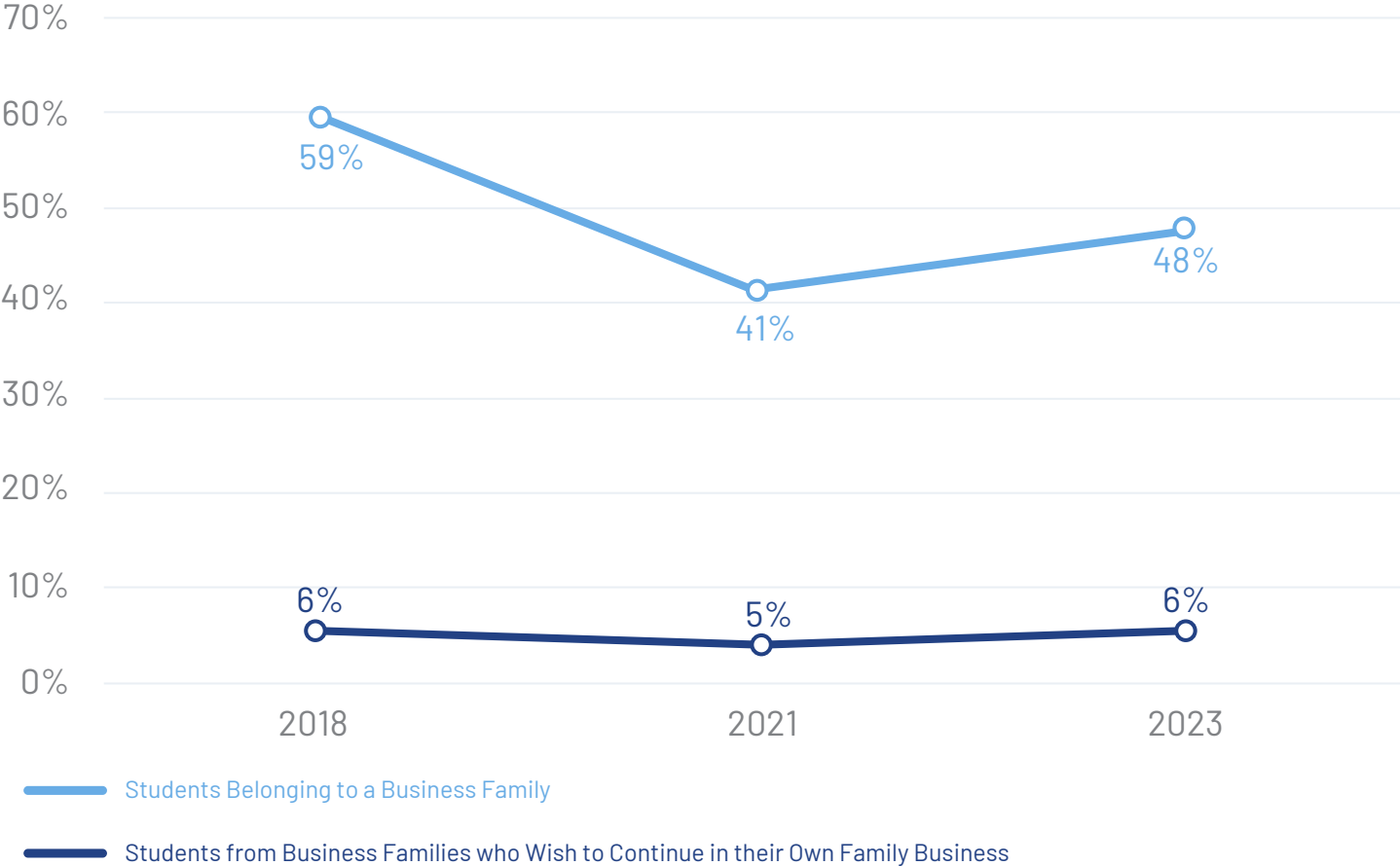
An important factor when considering students' entrepreneurial intentions is whether they belong to a business family. We define a 'business family' as a family where one or both parents own and/or manage a business, which is considered a family enterprise.

Considering the three waves of data collection, nearly **50%** of surveyed students identified themselves as belonging to business families, highlighting the prevalence of entrepreneurial backgrounds among UAE students.

Despite the high prevalence of students from business families, the percentage of those who aspire to continue their careers within their family business remains relatively low and stable.

In the medium-term preference, looking at five years post-graduation, half of the students sampled are considering the option of becoming a successor in their parent's family business. This suggests that students may find joining their family businesses more desirable when considering a longer-term perspective.

Percentage of Students from Business Families



Several factors have emerged to explain why students from business families might choose to pursue a different path outside their family's businesses:

Number of Siblings

Family businesses in the Gulf are often large, increasing competition for leadership positions. In some cases, predetermined criteria for succession, such as choosing based on birth order or gender, may exclude some siblings from consideration for leadership roles.

Succession Planning

Parents and children may view succession as the transfer of power to a single position, typically the managerial role, seeking the 'ideal' successor. However, leadership in a family business is multifaceted, requiring a range of roles across the family, the business, and the ownership. Students should be educated on the different options, actions, and positions that can contribute to the success of their family businesses.

Independence and Entrepreneurship

Many students perceive starting their own business or working in a different sector as more innovative and challenging than joining the family business, driving their interest in paths outside the family firm. This could be a normal reaction among the next generation of family members and should be viewed as a positive behavior in their transition from young adults to grown adults.

Generational Perspective

The younger generation within family businesses often cultivates values and priorities that may not align with those of the senior generation. Students tend to prioritize personal fulfillment, work-life balance, and social impact over traditional business success metrics.



Ahmed Al Marzooqi,
International Studies Student,
American University of Sharjah (AUS);
Chief Operating Officer,
Netaq Investment;
Founder,
Flavor Corner

Despite being passionate about a future diplomatic career, Ahmed is equally committed to continuing the legacy of his family business, believing that “the success of his family is his own”.

“When it’s your own family business, one simple mistake can cost them a lot, or if you succeed then it’s going to upgrade your life, then you are much more motivated to be creative and go beyond the bare minimum.”

While Ahmed is thriving in the family business, it was his participation in Sheraa’s Young Explorer Camp 2022 that truly ignited his passion to start his own venture. Inspired by the camp, he went on to create his first Food & Beverage startup Snackshak, focused on importing and selling unique snacks and drinks from countries like Japan, Taiwan, and the US at local carnivals and events in the UAE. He later expanded this concept into Flavor Corner, offering a broader range of international treats.

“ I honestly fully believe that entrepreneurship is not something you study. You do not learn, unless you do it, and fail once, twice, even three times. If you don’t try to do something, you won’t learn about it. You won’t excel in it. You won’t even know if you can do this thing or not. ”



Omar Al Ali,
Politics Student,
American University of Sharjah (AUS);
Family Business member

Omar Al Ali's family boasts a rich history of entrepreneurship, with roots stretching back to the late 1970s when his grandfather started one of the first and most successful furniture companies in the region. Omar acknowledges the valuable lessons he has learned from observing his family, which have shaped his cautious approach towards entrepreneurship.

Omar finds himself drawn away from the business world. He is more inclined towards social impact rather than profit and is passionate about starting a social enterprise.

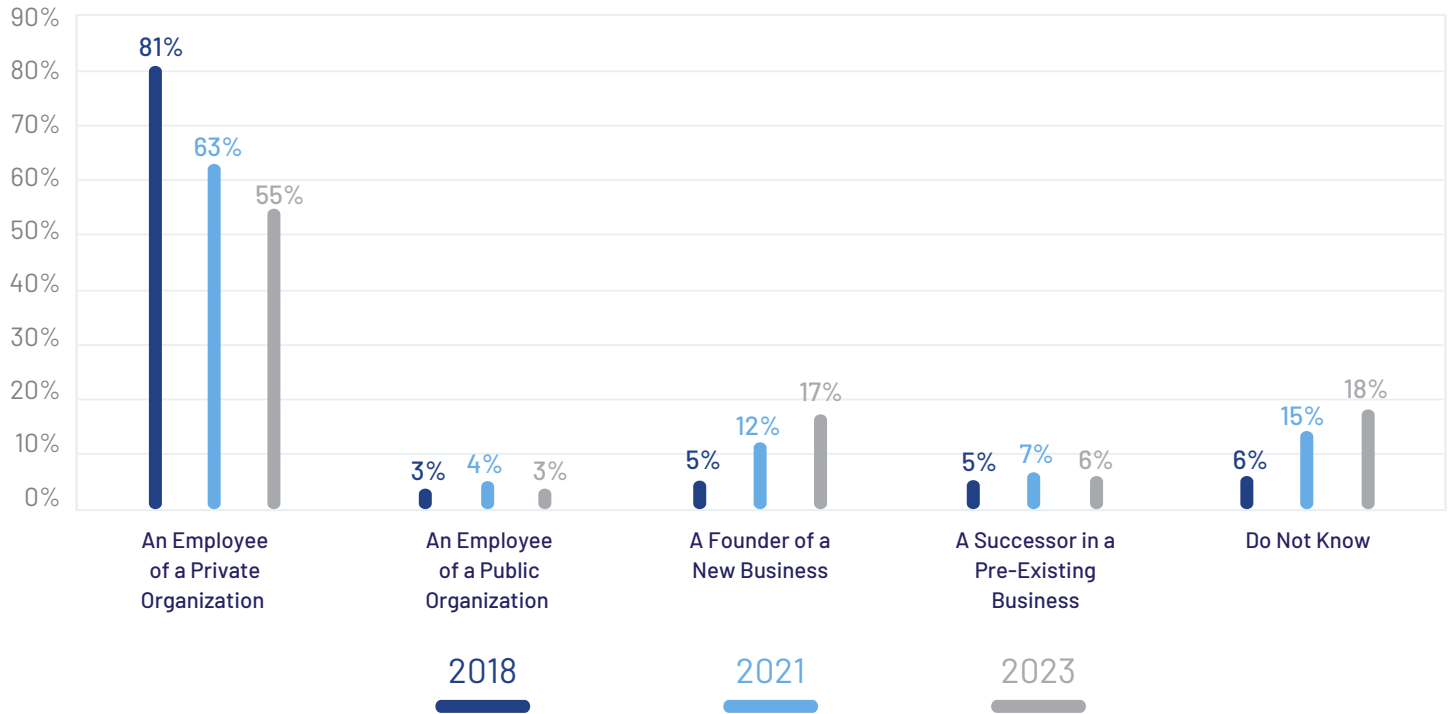
Watching my family's business has taught me that success often comes with challenges, leading me to approach entrepreneurship carefully. Many peers face similar familial pressures, but there's a growing trend of students exploring new, innovative paths. Some of them are still involved in their family businesses, while others like me are trying to find new ways to make an impact.



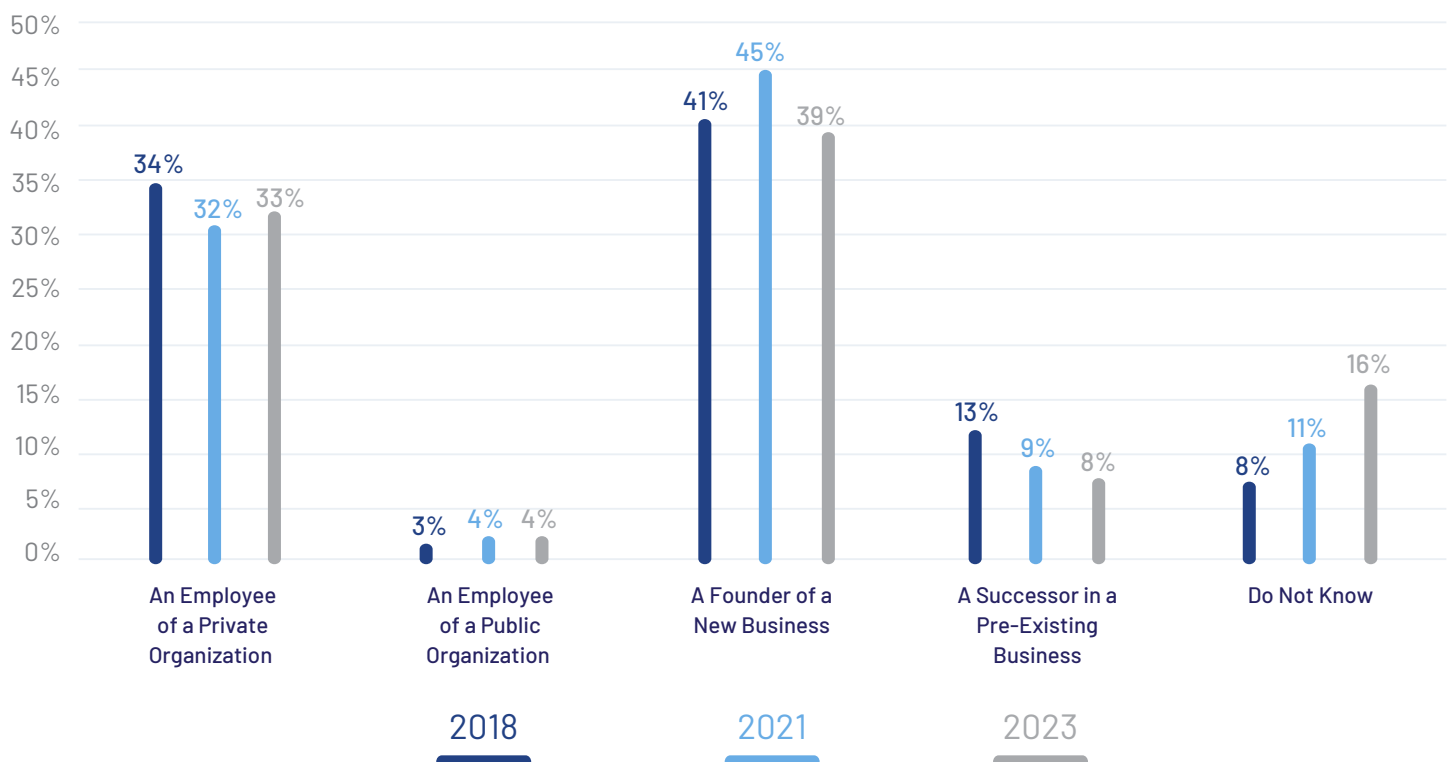
III. Additional Career Choice Insights

Additional Career Choice Insights

Students' Intentions Right After Graduation Across Different Career Choices



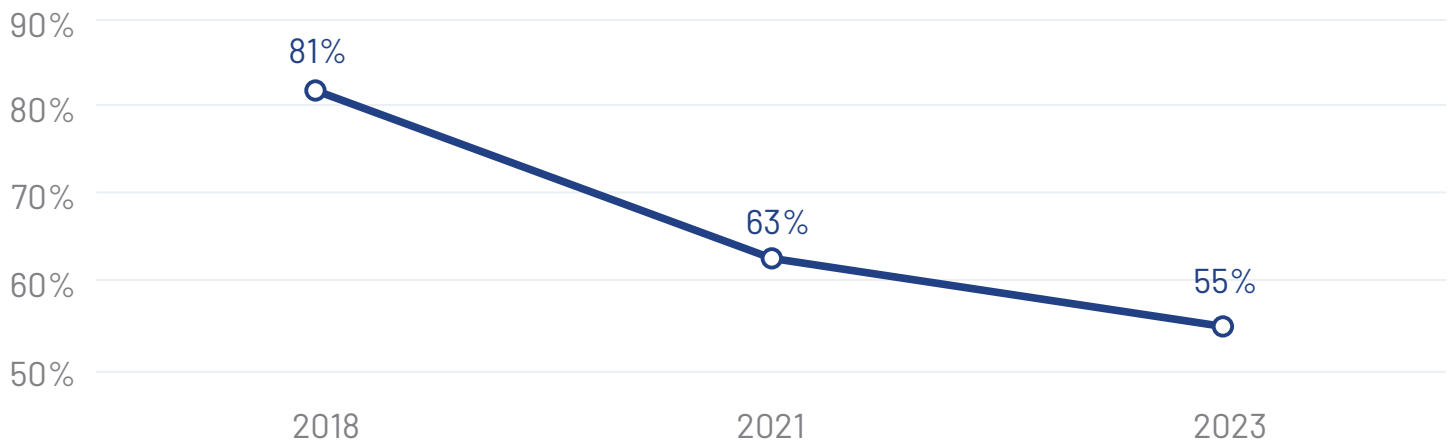
Students' Intentions Five Years After Graduation Across Different Career Choices



Private Sector Employment as a Career Choice

In 2023, most students in Sharjah preferred joining the private sector immediately after graduation, with **55%** of those surveyed expressing this intention. However, this represents a significant decline from previous years, as the preference for private sector employment has steadily decreased.

Percentage of Student Preference for Private Sector Employment



Students often choose jobs in the private sector because it offers a steady monthly income, valuable experience, and social recognition from working in prestigious global companies. Furthermore, the preference for stable employment among students can be influenced by the UAE's economic model, where the attractive salaries and labor conditions for white-collar employees make it a desirable career path. In line with this, Emiratization initiatives such as the federal program 'NAFIS', which emphasize the hiring of Emirati candidates within the private sector, allow national youth to gain experience, open new opportunities, and encourage local development. This initiative also reduces the pressure on the public sector.

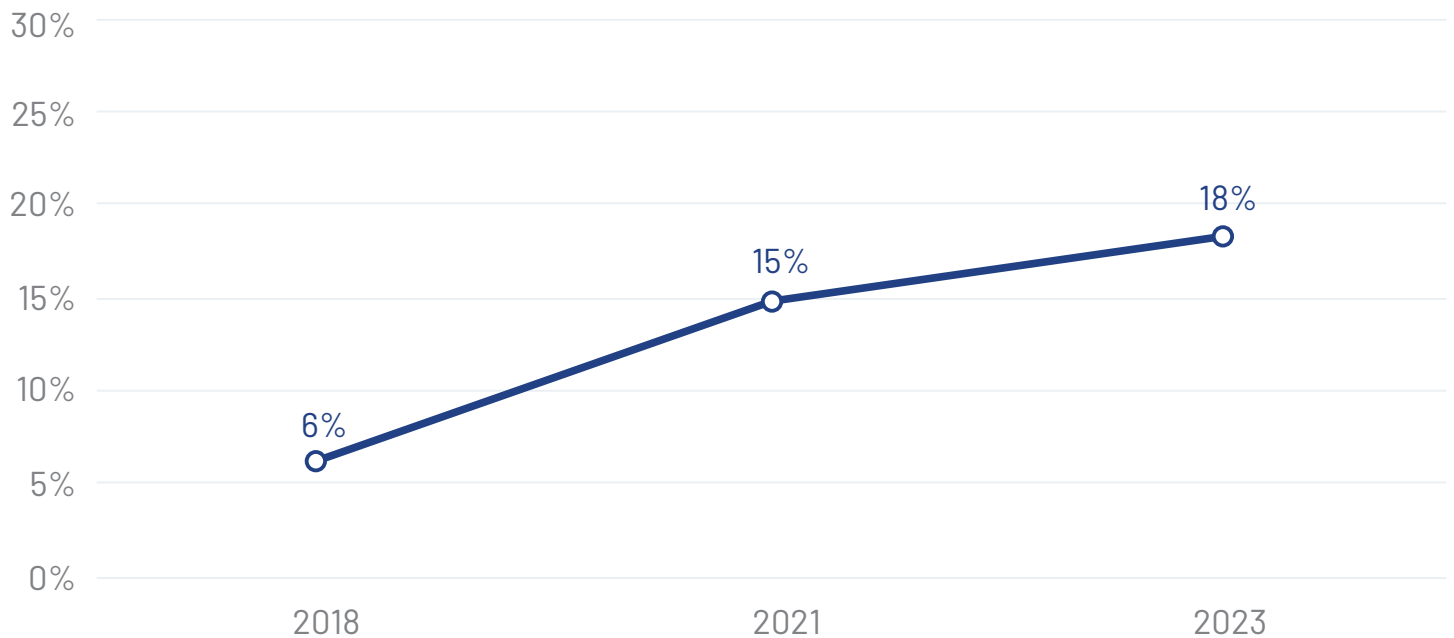
Medium-term Career Intentions

When students are asked to visualize their career preferences five years after graduation, the preference to pursue careers as employees in the private sector drops and stabilizes at around **33%** of those surveyed. A group of students tends to shift their preferences when considering a long-term perspective, opting for other paths such as entrepreneurship or joining their family businesses. While some students view employment in the private sector as a secure option and important for gaining experience in the short-term, another group envisions their careers progressing within the hierarchy of existing organizations.

Career Choices Amid Uncertainty: When Students Opt for Undefined Paths

There is growing uncertainty among some students about their career path after graduation. The percentage of students who perceive uncertainty in their career remains high, even when shifting the temporal reference from immediately after graduation to five years later.

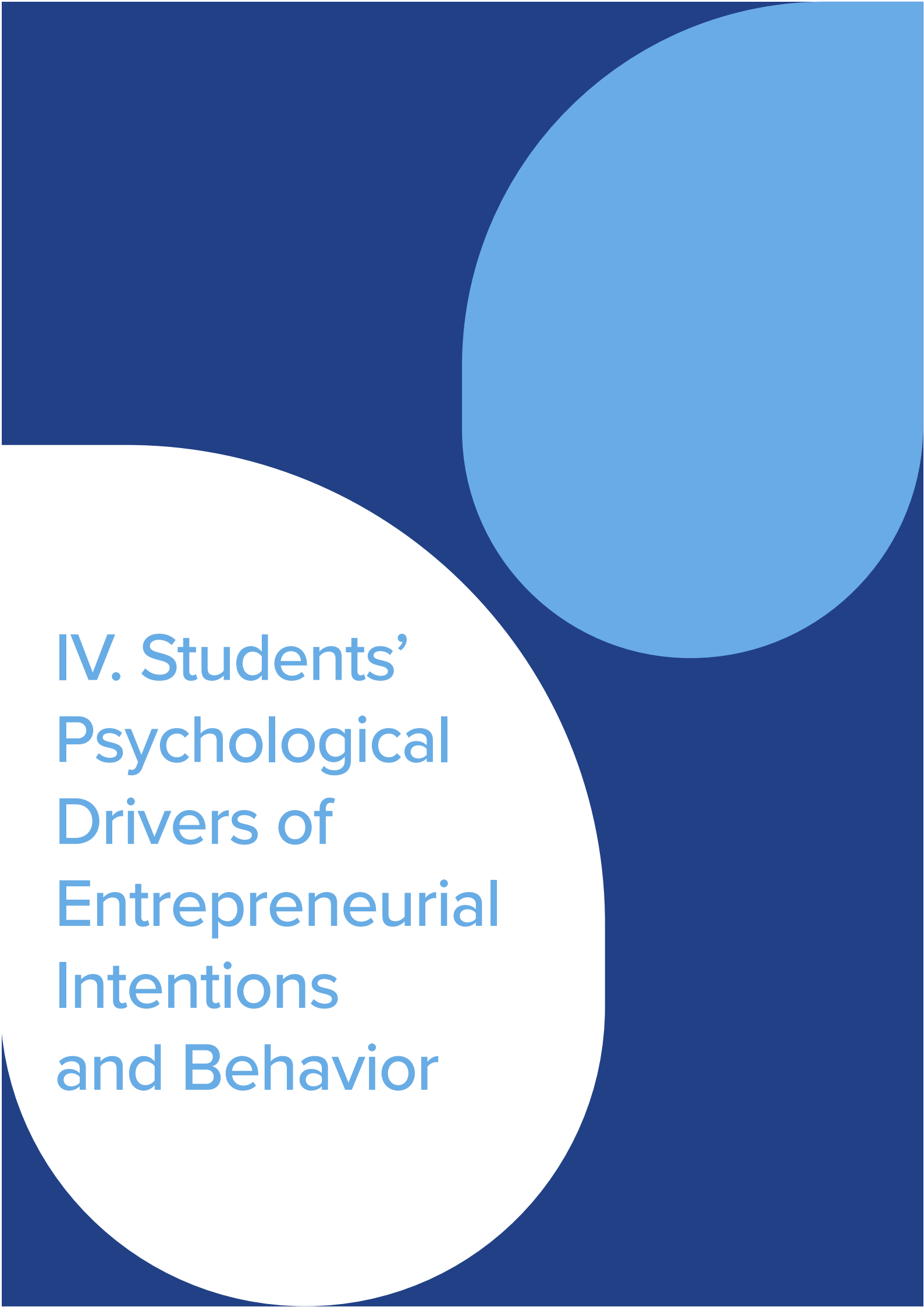
Percentage of Students Facing Career Uncertainty



Potential contextual factors influencing career uncertainty among students include political and economic situations in certain regional countries, which can create instability and impact job availability and security. Personal and family circumstances also play a significant role, as individual responsibilities and family expectations can affect career choices and flexibility. Additionally, as the UAE economy becomes more attractive, the UAE labor market's intensifying competitiveness contributes to this uncertainty. Firms are becoming increasingly demanding, and the number of qualified candidates often exceeds the available positions, making it more challenging for graduates to secure stable employment.

Public Sector Employment as a Career Choice

The pattern of choosing a career as an employee in a public organization has remained stable over the years. The relatively low percentages compared to other career paths are because these options are specific to sub-populations. The inclination to be an employee in a public institution is primarily associated with the sub-population of Emiratis, which represents less than a quarter of the surveyed population.



IV. Students' Psychological Drivers of Entrepreneurial Intentions and Behavior

Students' Psychological Drivers of Entrepreneurial Intentions and Behavior

Students' Self-Efficacy

The perception of self-efficacy among students is a critical determinant in entrepreneurship, as it directly impacts their confidence in their ability to perform tasks and achieve goals, especially within the unpredictable and challenging environment of initiating and managing a business.

Since 2018, there has been a notable increase in student self-efficacy. On a scale of one to one hundred, the average self-efficacy of Sharjah students is **moderate**, surpassing the global average in more than **16 percentual points**.

Students' Self-Efficacy Score



The steady increase in student self-efficacy suggests a positive correlation between enhanced self-efficacy and students' intentions to become founders or successors in an existing business.

Parental education, formal schooling, and universities stand out as significant contributors to equipping students for future entrepreneurial endeavors such as risk-taking, problem-solving, resource acquisition, innovation, creativity, and networking. Additionally, entrepreneurial support organizations like Sheraa further enhance students' self-efficacy by providing them with the skills and confidence to build and launch their own ventures. Even among students who do not go on to launch a business, there are valuable job market skills learned through entrepreneurial programs – such as Sheraa's Startup Dojo – and entrepreneurship courses at university. These skills increase employability, ensuring that graduates are empowered to become leading members of the workforce.

Student Resilience

In the 2023 survey, we started collecting information about students' self-perception of their resilience. Resilience refers to an individual's capacity to grow and evolve positively through challenging circumstances. In the entrepreneurial context of this report, resilience involves a student's belief in their ability to navigate and overcome difficulties and actively seek solutions to mitigate losses encountered along the entrepreneurial journey. It encapsulates the student's confidence in controlling their responses to various situations, coupled with a proactive approach to creatively transforming obstacles into opportunities.

Resilience is a critical psychological characteristic in entrepreneurship because it equips entrepreneurs with the mental and emotional tools needed to face uncertainties and challenges when building a business.

The student resilience score for the surveyed population is **68 points**, indicating a moderate level of resilience among students.





Yedhu Gopan,
Chemical Engineering Graduate,
American University of Sharjah (AUS);
Founder,
Hutch

As a young entrepreneur and the first in his family, Yedhu faced the challenge of trying to navigate an unfamiliar sector- entrepreneurship – and find the right resources and information to guide him on his journey. The initial leap into entrepreneurship required courage, and Yedhu found strength in taking small, manageable steps.

His startup journey began by addressing his colleagues' lunchtime struggles with decision fatigue from food delivery apps. By initially focusing on a small group, he ensured a positive experience and planned to expand gradually, iterating and improving along the way

towards scalability. To maintain resilience and self-efficacy, Yedhu emphasizes the importance of seeking assistance as a crucial part of navigating the early stages of entrepreneurship.

“ I believe the ecosystem at AUS, combined with Sheraa, is currently growing and evolving. Sheraa's Dojo+ program is a great initiative that can bring students into the entrepreneurial space. It's really helpful. As a student and as someone who's been part of it, I would really recommend any students who even moderately think that they might be a good entrepreneur to attend Dojo or even the subsequent seasons of Dojo+, because it provides you with all the mentorship you need to take your startup from zero to one. It actually really helps you build anything.”

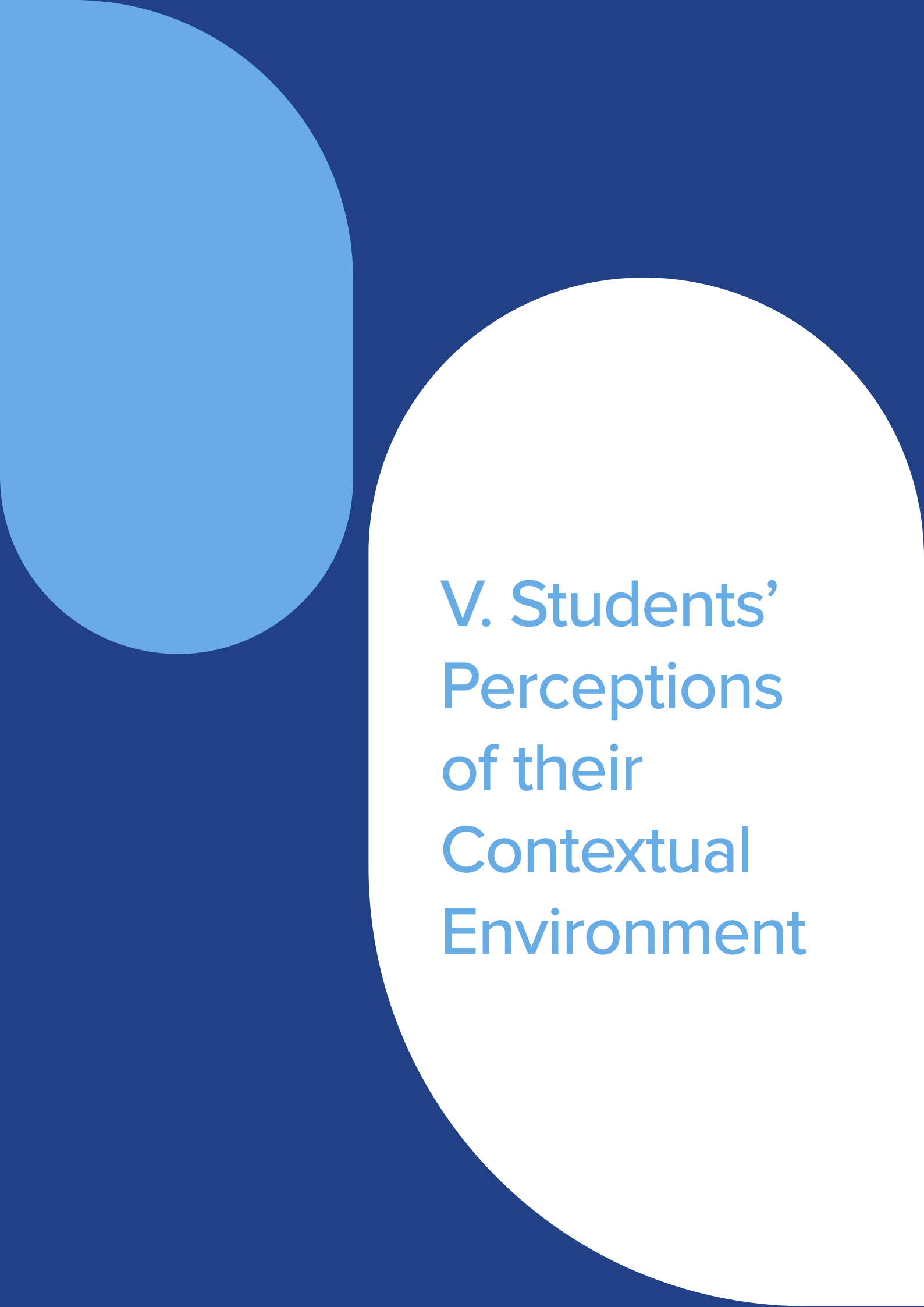


Omar Bakheet,
Business Graduate,
American University of Sharjah (AUS);
Founder,
Finalytics

In 2021, Omar, along with a friend from AUS, started his first business – a small boutique translation firm. Unfortunately, the business had to be liquidated in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19. Despite this setback, Omar’s entrepreneurial spirit remained undeterred.

In January 2024, Omar, along with two friends, launched Finalytics, the first finance-as-a-service business in the UAE. Finalytics offers a comprehensive finance and accounting service, allowing business owners to focus on growth while the company handles their financial needs. He leveraged the lessons learned during the pandemic, applying a more resilient and adaptive approach to his new venture.

“What built resilience in me was a mix of things. The first was knowing I had the knowledge within me to create something good. I gained this knowledge from multiple sources, with the first being AUS. The material from the courses I took at AUS - whether it was marketing, accounting, psychology, philosophy, or even biology - gave me a pool of knowledge that I could implement in the world to make a change and improve lives. Knowing that I am still competent, that I still have my knowledge and experience, and that I can do it again—because I’ve done it once—kept me going and motivated me to pursue another business.”



V. Students' Perceptions of their Contextual Environment

Students' Perceptions of their Contextual Environment

Student Perception of Entrepreneurial University Environment

Student perception of the entrepreneurial environment at their university is closely linked to their actual student entrepreneurial engagement and outcomes. When students perceive their university environment as supportive and conducive to entrepreneurship, it can significantly influence their willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Next, we explore this relationship further to gain a deeper understanding of the university's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Students' Perception of University's Entrepreneurial Environment Score



Despite the profound impact of technological innovation on both the content and methods of teaching, i.e. what students are taught and how teaching is conducted, many educational institutions still adhere to the last-century model of education. Instead of embracing disruptive changes, they often make only minor adjustments to their institutional structures, programs, and course topics.

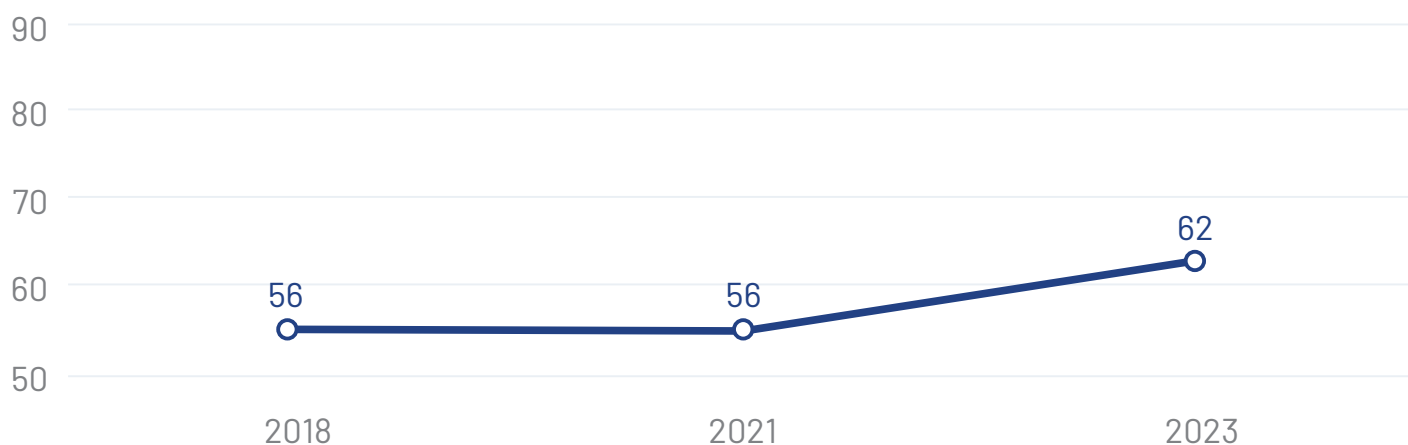
Given the concentration of educational institutions within University City of Sharjah, there is a unique opportunity for at least one institution to reinvent itself as an entrepreneurial educational institution. Such a transformation would involve a radical rethinking of how entrepreneurial education is delivered, aiming to cultivate an environment that not only inspires and generates ideas but also promotes a favorable entrepreneurial atmosphere, supports risk-taking and the acceptance of failure, nurtures an entrepreneurial culture, leverages peer influence, and encourages real-world engagement.

Student Perception of Entrepreneurial Studies

In alignment with the broader university entrepreneurial environment, a detailed examination of students' perceptions of their entrepreneurial studies – which are pivotal in molding their entrepreneurial intentions and actions – reveals a significant level of dissatisfaction.

On a scale of one to one hundred, surveyed students have expressed disappointment with their coursework and experiences in entrepreneurship education.

Students' Satisfaction with University's Entrepreneurial Studies Score



When it comes to the cultivation of an entrepreneurial spirit within their educational journey, students are seeking:

- An understanding of the entrepreneurial mindset that enables them to embrace essential qualities like risk-taking, resilience, persistence, and proactiveness.
- Comprehensive knowledge of the startup process, transcending their main field of study, to develop skills related to ideation, market research, business planning, funding, and other facets of entrepreneurship.
- The opportunity to acquire practical managerial skills that are specifically tailored to enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities within the context of entrepreneurship education.
- Enhancement of innovation and creativity across various subjects, aimed at fostering critical thinking and the ability to approach challenges from unique perspectives.
- Inclusion in initiatives that bridge academia and practical experience, ultimately offering them the opportunity to venture into creating their own businesses.
- Teaching opportunities for professionals, owner-managers, and entrepreneurs to link academia and practice.

For educational initiatives to be truly effective and sustainable, it is essential that universities maintain strong connections with key stakeholders, including industry partners, government entities, and the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. This collaboration helps avoid the lock-in effect, ensuring that the education system remains dynamic, responsive, and aligned with the evolving needs of the market.

Directly addressing these points, Sheraa is working closely with local educational institutions to develop not only entrepreneurship-related courses, but to also help integrate entrepreneurial learning into core courses across disciplines, from engineering to fashion. The recent launch of the Sheraa-supported Student Marketing Agency is another initiative aimed at encouraging students to engage with real-world clients and develop critical managerial and entrepreneurial skills prior to graduation. Through their hubs in the American University of Sharjah and the University of Sharjah, they strive to create a safe space for students to experiment with entrepreneurial ideas, hosting student-focused entrepreneurship competitions and early-stage entrepreneurship programs.





Latifa Alnoaimi,
Sophomore Engineering Student,
University of Sharjah (UOS)

For Latifa, the biggest challenge in pursuing entrepreneurship is risk-taking. Investing time, energy, and money into something with the possibility of failure is daunting. Although she recognizes that failure is a natural part of the process and essential for eventual success, overcoming the fear of initial failure is difficult.

Latifa believes that Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) students can become excellent entrepreneurs due to the problem-solving skills they gain throughout university.

As a STEM major, we already have strong problem-solving skills, which makes us naturally inclined to be good entrepreneurs. UOS offers a variety of electives like Introduction to Business, Introduction to Economics, Innovation and Entrepreneurship. These subjects, which you can take outside of your major, are incredibly helpful for your entrepreneurial journey. Additionally, there's the Sheraa Hub at UOS, which hosts entrepreneurial events and activities. This combination of academic and extracurricular activities is really beneficial.



Juma Al Shamsi,
Security & Forensics Graduate,
Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT);
Founder,
Exploit3rs

Exploit3rs, which runs cybersecurity workshops and themed competitions, began by running small sessions that initially had only 7 participants but quickly expanded to 70. To scale further, Juma collaborated with other universities, enabling them to organize their largest student-led hacking event with nearly 500 participants from around the world, all managed entirely by students.

For their first event, Dr. Samer Aoudi, a professor at HCT, provided crucial support by offering his website and introducing them to the Capture the Flag (CTF) competition concept, helping them get started. Recently, they developed their own platform for the hacking competition, marking a significant milestone. Dr. Samer also encouraged Juma to create his own CTF platform and introduced him to the CTF framework. HCT fully funded and marketed the event, significantly boosting their efforts.

Juma holds a high opinion of HCT's support for students in their entrepreneurial endeavors.

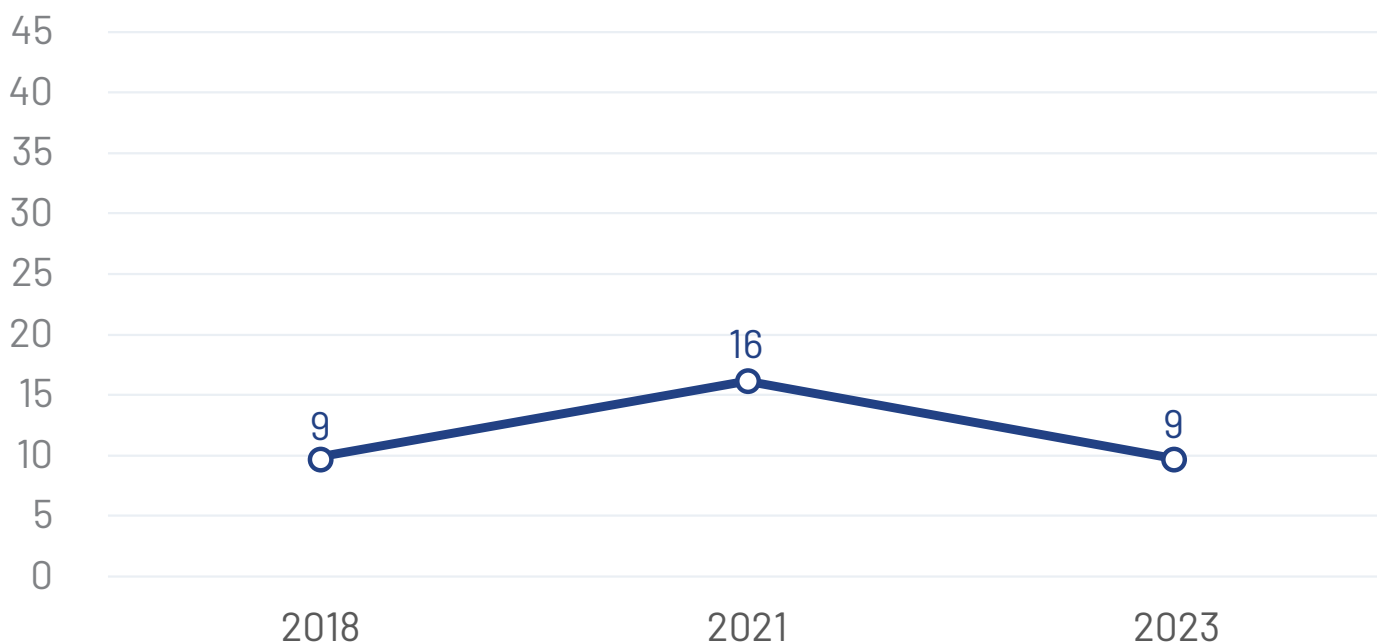


HCT supports around 140 startups through a dedicated office that helps students develop their ideas and provides workspaces. They offer training in business development, market analysis. One of the startups they've supported now generates millions in revenue, highlighting their effective support for emerging ventures.



In alignment with the preceding analysis, we observe that academic institutions lack a recognized entrepreneurial reputation. On a scale from one to one hundred, students do not perceive their academic institutions as being committed to fostering entrepreneurship. Specifically, in Sharjah's academic institutions, students perceive a notably low entrepreneurial reputation:

Strength of University's Entrepreneurial Reputation Score



This suggests that academic institutions have either not embraced an entrepreneurial ethos, struggled to adapt their curricula to provide entrepreneurial education, or failed to position themselves as entrepreneurial educational entities. Consequently, educational institutions must strategically reassess their roles in contemporary social and economic development.





Concluding Remarks

Sharjah is actively shaping its destiny to become the “Great Incubator” and contribute to the knowledge and entrepreneurial economy of the United Arab Emirates. The government is at the forefront of this effort, driving institutional changes that create a favorable environment for entrepreneurship. A key pillar of this strategy is anchored in the educational sector.

Focusing on the youth population, the new strategic vision aims to establish a strong foundation for their entrepreneurial aspirations, positioning them as the source of the next generation of economic development. In this context, the University City of Sharjah, an exclusive educational district with over 20 educational institutions and more than 40,000 students, professionals, and academics, plays a central role. The government has concentrated on education as a catalyst for radical and disruptive changes.

Since the first data collection round in 2018, the Sheikh Saoud bin Khalid bin Khalid Al-Qassimi Chair in Family Business at the American University of Sharjah and Sheraa have implemented the Student Entrepreneurial Spirit Index to measure the entrepreneurial intentions and behavior of Sharjah’s student community. Reflecting a positive trend, **24%** of surveyed students today express interest in either becoming entrepreneurs, owning existing businesses, or taking over family enterprises. This positive pattern results from actions taken at three levels.

Firstly, the government has articulated a clear entrepreneurial vision for the local community and developed institutions to operationalize this vision. Key ecosystem builders like Sheraa and SRTIP have been empowered to lead the shift in student entrepreneurial spirit. The creation of new freezones has further supported the knowledge and technology economy, attracting entrepreneurs. Additionally, internal efforts to stimulate entrepreneurship have been bolstered by an intensive program developed by Invest in Sharjah to attract foreign investors, channel innovative ideas, and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Secondly, there has been a cultural shift toward embracing the new economy in the UAE, particularly among the youth of Sharjah. The concept of entrepreneurship has become a common language among the youth, recognized as a viable career path. Public and private incentives have been realigned to prioritize entrepreneurial behavior over rent-seeking behavior. The social recognition of entrepreneurs as wealth creators and future leaders of the UAE provides strong incentives for youth to explore non-traditional career paths.

Finally, educational institutions in Sharjah have gradually incorporated changes in knowledge transfer and entrepreneurship education. In collaboration with the emerging Sharjah ecosystem builders, local universities and other institutions are developing initiatives to promote entrepreneurship. These initiatives, as reflected in student feedback, are often extracurricular, such as fostering alumni networks or connecting local stakeholders. However, local universities are still transitioning towards fully supporting Sharjah's new entrepreneurial vision, and many continue to embrace the status quo and traditional educational models supported by rent-seeking behavior. They have yet to carve out their own distinctive paths and develop innovative educational systems. Doing so will not only ensure that students are equipped with the skills and mindset necessary to navigate a rapidly evolving global economy, but will also enhance their entrepreneurial reputation and set them apart in both national and international markets.

Rodrigo Basco, Ph.D.

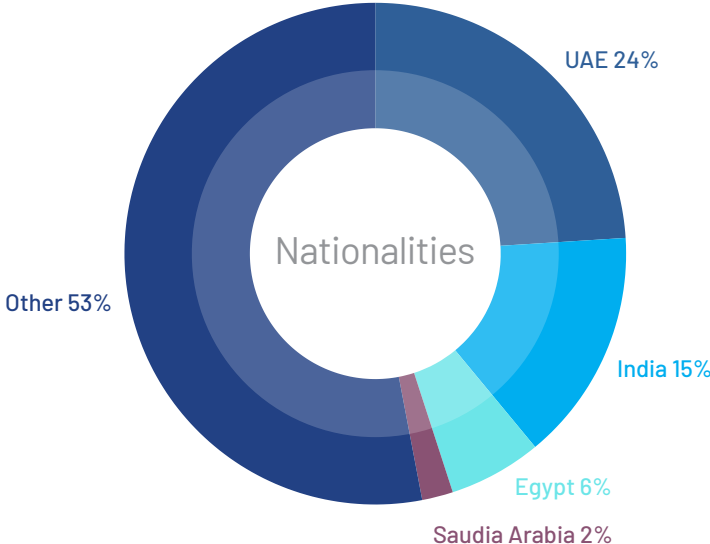
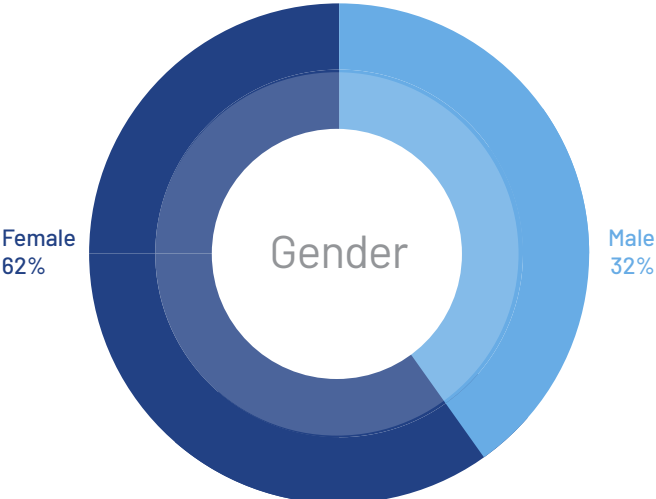
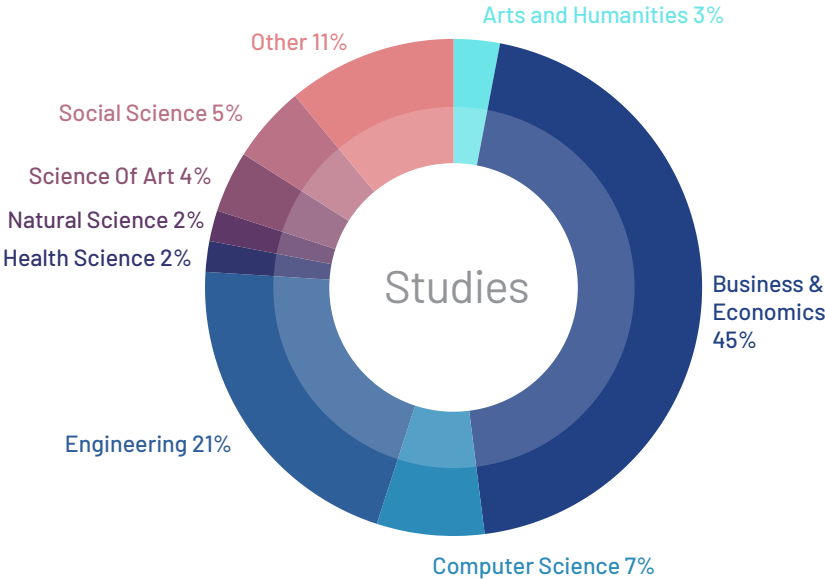
Professor & Sheikh Saoud bin Khalid bin Khalid Al-Qassimi Chair in Family Business at American University of Sharjah

Chairman at STEP Project Global Consortium

Appendix

Demographic overview of the sample

This report draws its main findings from the GUESSS Survey, one of the largest entrepreneurship research projects in the world. In the 2023 data collection, over 226,000 students from 57 countries participated. To specifically focus on the Sharjah Student Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, we supplemented the GUESSS data with results from the Sheikh Saoud bin Khalid bin Khalid Al Qassimi Chair in Family Business student survey. The final sample for the UAE included 2,776 students, with an average age of 21 years. The gender distribution of the sample was 62% female and 38% male. The academic backgrounds of the surveyed students, as detailed in the figure below, show that business, economics, and engineering students made up the largest groups. The most represented nationalities among the students were from the UAE, India, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.



AUS
American
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of Sharjah



مركز الشارقة لريادة الأعمال
Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center