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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

Effectiveness of Career Services on Students Transition  
from University to Work in Egypt

A Thesis Submitted to the

Public Policy and Public Administration Department

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Administration

by

Marianne Elia

Fall 2021

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## List of Abbreviations

ALMPS	Active Labor Market Policies
AUC	The American University in Cairo
FCD	Facilitating Career Development Guide
ILO	International Labor Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organizations
MBTI	Myers Briggs Type Indicator
MoMM	Ministry of Manpower and Migration
NACE	National Association for Colleges and Employers
NCDA	National Career Development Association
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SFD	Social Fund for Development
SII	Strong Interest Inventory
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCCD	University Centers for Career Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WBL	The Inter-Agency Working Group on Work-based Learning

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EFFECTIVENESS OF CAREER SERVICES ON STUDENTS  
TRANSITION FROM UNIVERSITY TO WORK IN EGYPT

Marianne Elia

Supervised by Professor Ghada Barsoum

ABSTRACT

Career services is a newly introduced field in Egyptian universities especially the public sector. This study is aiming to assess the benefits of these services in public, private and non-profit universities through the perceptions of some students who have experienced two or more services offered by their university's Career Center and are about to graduate and join the job market. Qualitative in-depth interviews with university's students and a couple of career services professionals were used. The analysis of the study followed the conceptual framework of the influence of career services in easing the transition of students to the job market. The findings of this research highlight importance of career services in giving students clarity about themselves and the job market, preparing them with needed tools and techniques, and providing them with access to career opportunities and connections. The study recommends availing channels of communication between employers and curriculum developers and promoting career services in universities across the country to have prepared and ready workforce capable of penetrating the job market and landing relevant career opportunities.

**Keywords:** Youth Employment, Career Services, Career Readiness, Employability, School to Work Transition, Egypt.

## 1. Introduction

This study seeks to assess the effectiveness of career services offered by career centers established within universities in Egypt whether public, private or non-profit. It has been known that career services help preparing young people to the world of work and easing their transition. Career services are established on three important pillars. First, raise students self-awareness about their interests, values, skills and highlight potential careers for them. Second, prepare students by availing counseling appointments and workshops for writing their resumes, enhancing their interviewing skills, planning for their careers, choosing their majors, searching for jobs which are needed services to run-through before penetrating the job market. Third, Career Centers connect their students to the job market through announcing internship and career opportunities, engaging them in activities planned by employers and organizing networking and employment events (AUC Career Center official website). This research explores the different services and programs offered by some of the Career Centers in Egypt that prepare students and raise their awareness about themselves and potential careers paths.

Two decades ago, career centers did not exist not only in Egypt but in the region with the exception of AUC Career Center that has been established in 1991 (AUC Career Center official website). In mid-nineties, Egypt authorized the establishment of private universities which have been growing in number ever since but their career centers were not introduced until mid or late 2000s. Introducing these Career Centers in public universities was a different story that has been realized with the generosity of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in collaboration with AUC Career Center after the revolution. The American University in Cairo (AUC) was granted the project for establishing Career Centers at public universities ‘University Centers for Career Development – UCCD’ to create 20 sustainable Centers in 12 public universities in Egypt for developing the skills of the graduates of public universities and facilitating their employability. There are twelve Career Centers in eight public universities that are functioning and more than 8,000 graduating students benefited



from courses such as employability skills, entrepreneurship, English language and technical courses in addition to career development workshops and career advising sessions (Barsoum et al., 2019). Understanding the influence of career services on the beneficiaries may predict future employment trends in terms of having a well-prepared workforce ready to contribute to the economic development of the country. The purpose of this study is to evaluate effectiveness of Career Centers' activities on preparing the Egyptian workforce and easing students' transition from higher education to work.

The career services objective, in general, is to provide personalized 'career development' guide to higher education students and create networks for job and internship opportunities, experiential learning and mentorship. The role of the Career Center – designated office to offer career services – is providing career advising and counseling, partner with employers from different industries and organizing employment fairs, availing experiential learning and mentorship experiences, creating networks and providing life-long services to both students and graduates (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Career education and career programs are definitely needed from the first day in university life. It helps in expanding the students' horizon through availing opportunities for learning, networking and exposure to the job market as well as encouraging development and providing support.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

Education and professional career are two important milestones in everyone's life. Education may determine one's career path but not necessarily in a developing country like Egypt. It has an influence on the national level by feeding the job market with ready labor force that can work and contribute to developing the country's economy. Because of globalization and progress of information technology on society, it became more demanding that recent graduates be prepared with the skills needed to access employment opportunities in the job market. In

Egypt, it is widespread that in order to access employment, one must have connections or networks rather than individual capabilities and knowledge. Other problems include inadequate training, unqualified teachers, old-fashioned curriculum and lack of networking channels between employers and curriculum developers which create skills gap and mismatch between what education provides and the job market needs (Assaad & Barsoum, 2009).

In the past, Egypt promised public employment to higher education graduates. However, with the increasing number of graduates and the limited number of public employment opportunities, young people were left unemployed. Moreover, lack of training affected these recent graduates from acquiring the needed skills to penetrate the job market. Higher education and employment are correlated in terms that higher education institutions educate students, and provide them with knowledge, skills and techniques required to be employed and join the workforce (Allen & Weert, 2007). Nevertheless, the World Bank has also recorded that the skills gap between education and the job market in the region is more widespread than any other parts in the world (Diego et al., 2012).

Egypt has suffered from high unemployment rate throughout decades. The labor market report indicated that one of the highest unemployment rate in Egypt was 34.7% among young adults aged 20 – 25 in 2015 (Bruni & CAPMAS, 2017). This shows how significant the problem of unemployment is in Egypt especially among recent graduates who otherwise are about to enter the job market. It is hard to imagine a young adult, with aspirations and high hopes, feeling inadequate or incompetent because s/he can not find a suitable job to work in. This rate has dropped to 26.5% in 2019 according to the World Bank report, putting Egypt within the lower-middle income countries as per the ILO report (Gammarano, 2020). It is worth mentioning that there was improvement between 2015 and 2019 in the economic growth of Egypt which reflected positively on youth's employability.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

The main contribution of this paper is assessing the benefits of career services and programs in higher education, and the role of these services on employability of graduates and easing their transition to the job market. The literature available regarding career services offered at university level in Egypt and the region is limited. This gap in research is also reflected on identifying the effective type of programs and services needed to increase employability of the youth. The purpose of this study is to expand knowledge about career counseling and career services within higher education by surveying the perceptions and views of students who have been engaged in at least two or more activity with their university's Career Center. This will also highlight the most prominent service that helped students feel better prepared for the world of work or guided them in accessing and expanding their networking channels. Hence, assessing the effectiveness of services offered at each university's Career Center and identifying the correlation or differences among the centers' services. I will also present the views of career services professionals on the benefits of using career services and how it helps in the employability of graduating students. This study is embarked with the belief that today's students are tomorrow's leaders who need to be well-equipped for the future of the country. The main aim is assessing the opportunities for education, learning and development available for the youth in higher education to be prepared, and access the job market smoothly. Based on the study's results, recommendations will be presented to highlight the benefits and importance of having career services offered in higher education and its contribution in the preparation of Egyptian workforce.

## **1.3 Research Question**

Based on the above mentioned objectives, the research question proposed for this thesis is as follows:

‘To what extent career services offered in higher education ease students' transition to the job market in Egypt?’

Through this qualitative research, I am examining career services offered by different Career Centers in public, private and non-profit universities in Egypt. I am assessing effectiveness of career services through the perceptions and views of students who experienced their programs and/or engaged in their events. I am also highlighting the similarities and differences among these centers' services and programs. The research question involves addressing the outcomes of getting engaged with each university's Career Center and determining its influence on students' transition to the job market and employability. Answers to the question gave me considerable understanding of career services implemented in Egyptian universities whether public, private or non-profit as they offer different programs in tackling employability and preparing their talents to the world of work. The analysis of the study's findings is more or less similar; thus, reassuring that having career services have been benefiting young people in understanding themselves and what the job market needs.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is divided into eight chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 is the introduction that covers problem statement, research objectives and research question.

Chapter 2 consists of background about Egyptian context for youth employment including employment policy in Egypt Vision 2030 in addition to government's initiatives, employment policy and institutional setting, informality in the job market as well as taking a closer look at AUC Career Center as a model to other universities' Career Centers in Egypt.

Chapter 3 covers the conceptual framework that explains definition of key terms used in the study about career development, career counseling and career planning process as well as the conceptual framework for the study.

Chapter 4 presents review of the literature about challenges facing youth employment including the problem of skills mismatch, school to work transition and employers' perception on youth employment as well as career services and career readiness.

Chapter 5 covers the theoretical framework that presents career development theories to reinforce the importance of career services.

Chapter 6 tackles the research methodology conducted in the study. It discusses research design, sample selection and data analysis. Ethical consideration and limitations of the study are also covered in this chapter.

Chapter 7 explains the research findings and gives analysis of primary data collected.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion and presents recommendations for further research and policy development.

## 2. Egyptian Context for Youth Employment

### 2.1 Youth Employment Policy in Egypt Vision 2030

With reference to Egypt Sustainable Development Strategy or as commonly known Egypt Vision 2030, the country is seeking to reduce the unemployment rate from 12.8% in 2016 to 5% by 2030 (Egypt Vision 2030, 2016). A demand that requires extensive intervention in terms of economic growth and availing job opportunities to satisfy the supply of graduates every year in the job market. In addition, one of the key performance indicators for education and training focusing on higher education pillar is that the unemployment rate among university graduates to total unemployment according to specialization drops from 35.1% in 2016 to 20% by 2030 (Egypt Vision 2030, 2016).

Egypt is also aiming to create programs and enhancements to keep up-to-date with education development and employability. One of the programs targeted for education and training focusing on higher education pillar is creating connection between alumni and recruitment organizations within the country, the region and on the international side (Egypt Vision 2030, 2016). Another program is focusing on improving courses offered by schools, colleges and universities based on 'National Qualifications Framework' (Egypt Vision 2030, 2016) as the world is changing every day and education has to keep updated with new discoveries. A third program is improving quality of education in higher institutions (Egypt Vision 2030, 2016) which is a fundamental step in solving many other related problems. Encouraging life-long learning must also be embedded into our culture.

## 2.2 Government Initiatives Towards Youth Employment in Egypt

### 2.2.1 Employment Policy and Institutional Setting

Egypt has suffered from high unemployment rate for a long-time. A study has presented an analysis of the problem of unemployment in Egypt and declared that the unemployment rate is high among fresh graduates who are about to enter the job market. Interestingly, it has found an important progress on the educational level of workers but this did not result in their employability signaling skills mismatch problem among them. Consequently, university graduates unequipped with the set of skills needed in the job market, might be unemployed because of the problem of skills mismatch (Semlali & Angel-Urdinola, 2013). Even recent graduates who succeed in finding jobs are confined in low paying jobs, with no guaranteed stability, benefits or career advancement (Assaad & Barsoum, 2009).

In addition, employers sometimes face difficulty in the recruitment process because they assume that recent graduates do not have the skills needed for the vacant jobs. Through employers surveyed in Egypt, 50% agreed with the idea that workers are lacking skills matching with the requirements for their business growth (Semlali & Angel-Urdinola, 2013). Moreover, education and training are not linked to the demands of the labor market which results in having candidates uninformed, lack access to needed training programs and/or social network that they may depend on to find jobs (Assaad & Barsoum, 2009; Semlali & Angel-Urdinola, 2013). Thus, higher education as well as vocational training do not develop the needed skills to qualify young Egyptian graduates to find jobs in the labor market (Semlali & Angel-Urdinola, 2013). Unfortunately, preparing graduates for jobs is not part of the mission of the Egyptian higher education as career centers were rare in college and university campuses; hence, graduates were not equipped with job search tools and networking skills (Abou-Setta, 2014).

In the past, the Egyptian government promised public employment to university graduates through its labor offices. Approximately 50% of workers in Egypt reported that they got hired in public offices through the labor offices managed by the Ministry of Manpower and Migration (MoMM). The role of the Ministry was managing labor supply, increasing employability, and monitoring and directing the demand of the workforce in Egypt. This role has changed from a strategy to manage national employment to create jobs in the private sector as well as match between job seekers and vacancies through the labor offices existing around Egypt. Since the Egyptian labor offices staff did not have the capacity, they worked more as a point of contact between employers and job seekers rather than meeting and advising the latter or providing them with training programs (Semlali & Angel-Urdinola, 2013).

Moreover, Egypt has led the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) under the strategy of the Ministry of Education to aid many high school students develop their skills and ease their employment. The Ministry of Education has run around 1600 technical and vocational schools and the Ministry of Higher Education has administered 47 middle technical institutes; however, this policy did not achieve its goal of increasing employability of young Egyptian graduates (Semlali & Angel-Urdinola, 2013). On the contrary, this policy has added to the problem of skills mismatch by promising public employment which pushed families to invest in technical education at school and higher education levels that qualified for public offices only and unmatched with the private sector's needs (Assaad & Barsoum, 2009).

### **2.2.2 Active Labor Market Policies (ALMPS)**

The Egyptian government implemented a number of policies to create jobs, support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and improve the TVET system (Amer, 2012). Studies showed that there are three areas of development needed in the labor market which are insufficient supply of labor, unavailability of information and inadequate demand of labor (Angel-Urdinola et al.,



2010). The following figure is describing the situation as well as explaining the type of ALMP needed to overcome employment barriers.

Figure 3: Selection of ALMP Type by Objective and Employment Barrier

Needs assessment: Employment Barrier	Type of ALMP	Rationale: Program Objective
Inadequate labor supply	Training (on the job, in-class, and apprenticeships)	Enhance employability
Information asymmetries	Employment services Self-employment promotion	
Insufficient labor demand	Wage subsidies Public work programs	Promote job creation

Source: Angel-Urdinola et al. (2010b)

Policies that encouraged creation of jobs by offering “employment subsidies, self-employment or public work programs” can solve the problem of inadequate demand of labor. Other policies that tackled recruitment services can improve lack of information whereas the ones providing training can solve insufficient supply of labor and decrease the skills mismatch problem as they generate employment opportunities. Employment subsidies as well can avail career opportunities to the unemployed, and provide incentives for the private sector to hire the target group or those at risk of losing their work. Moreover, self-employment encourages entrepreneurship and provides incentives for young people to start their own businesses or develop their SMEs (Amer, 2012). The rising number of entrepreneurs created an entrepreneurial eco-system and is one of the noticeable phenomenon in the Egyptian labor market after the 2011 revolution. Different initiatives have also been supporting entrepreneurship with the provision of funds by Egyptian banks to encourage young people to establish their start-ups. Lastly, public programs were tailored to create jobs in the public and non-profit sectors for the unemployed and unskilled employees, and increase employment and

skills in collaboration with foreign and international donors under the supervision of MoMM. There are 360 labor offices around Egypt offering employment services. Supporting SMEs and micro-financing programs have been managed by the Social Fund for Development (SFD) to provide young people with funds whether received by international donors, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), banks or public agencies to offer loans and/or developmental services (Amer, 2012; Barsoum, 2016).

ALMPS have been accessible through different entities in Egypt including public, NGOs, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO), donors and businesses. A big portion of ALMPS included skills training followed by entrepreneurship but services for employment and subsidized employment were very minimal. ALMPS were offered through more than 1400 training centers and vocational education centers, and worked on developing youth in various technical 'hard' skills such as car mechanics or handcraft skills for instance, needle work. These training programs were usually offered with no cost or minimal cost for beneficiaries. Another contributor to ALMPS is the civil society organizations that focus on youth training, entrepreneurship and employment services. These organizations focused on developing youth's soft skills whether communication skills or problem solving skills which are actually needed in the job market in addition to offering micro-loans to young people. The challenge facing ALMPS falls in lack of monitoring and evaluation, quality of provided training, information documentation and sharing of information to ensure its sustainability (Barsoum, 2016).

In addition, the National Youth Employment Program was another program that aimed to create 80,000 jobs in the Egyptian public sector by absorbing the increase in graduates supply each year. A study stated that Egypt intended to hire 170,000 young graduates starting in 2001 in the public sector each year. Even after the 2011 revolution, the government hired around

400,000 young graduates and there was forecasting of additional recruitment for 400,000 graduates in full-time jobs within the public sector (Amer, 2012; El Baradei, 2013). This has differed than the governmental initial strategy of limiting public employment and encouraging the private sector to create jobs. The program designed training opportunities for young people in different industries through public training centers (Amer, 2012). All these programs are showing the efforts down by the government and other national and international contributors to enhance the state of young people by developing their skills and supporting their employment whether through availing opportunities for development or hiring. Still, how reflective these efforts are on improving the labor market outcomes for the youth to find suitable jobs and attain high salaries.

### **2.2.3 Informality in the Job Market**

The Egyptian government updated the labor law (law 12) in 2003 as an attempt to control informality, facilitate and encourage the private sector to recruit and absorb the pool of graduates, and legalize the conditions of employees (Selwaness & Zaki, 2015). Unfortunately, the Egyptian government failed to transform the transition from the public to the private sector, and open on competitive international markets as the private sector was and still dominated by SMEs that are limited and unable to develop and compete. Many SMEs would choose to continue with informality instead of paying huge costs and be linked to formality. Big private organizations were used to work in non-competitive ecosystem, and gained the benefit of subsidized energy, electricity and water that gave them no motivation to generate or open jobs for those who had the skills and knowledge. Even if the powerful private sector existed, it would have needed to adjust to graduates who were more suitable for the public sector, and the educational system would need to be upgraded, to deliver the caliber and skills that best suited for the competitive private sector (Assaad & Krafft, 2014).

Informal or insecure work entails no contract between employee and employer as well as no social security, no health insurance, and irregular or unpaid work. There are four types of informal work which are, full-time workers in the private sector with no contract or social security, temporary or seasonal work in the private sector, self-employment, or unpaid family work. In 2018, informal work in Egypt was the usual type of work among the youth regardless of educational attainment with 44% - 27% among university graduates, 76% - 66% among secondary graduates and 90% - 92% among less than secondary educated graduates for males and females consecutively; the latter group consisted of 10% - 37% unpaid family workers and 10% - 25% self-employed (working in a family business or farm) for males and females consecutively (Amer & Atallah, 2019). Observing the previous percentages, it is reflecting that a bigger portion of young people lays in informal jobs showing that whatever the educational level that they attained, they are still endangered to informality because the job market does not have the capacity to absorb the number of graduates each year. It seems that nothing can protect young people from either unemployment or employment in unfavorable and unhealthy conditions. Moreover, those who resided in urban areas had better conditions than those who resided in rural areas as 90% of those who worked informally were working in agriculture. Informal work does not necessarily mean being poor but not having or finding the right formal job opportunities; poverty became both a cause and a result of informality (ILO report, 2002).

### **2.3 Career Center Model in Egypt**

AUC Career Center is the first university career center in the region. It has been providing a wide-range of career services including career guidance, career planning and job search tools as well as offering networking events and job opportunities channels to both students and graduates since 1991. AUC Career Center has also contributed to the increase of employability rate of AUC graduates to 86% within one year of graduation in 2019 (AUC Career Center

official website). This has had a positive impact on the advancement of AUC's ranking among the list of universities in the world as per the QS ranking (Davenport & Al Nimr, 2019).

AUC Career Center is affiliated with the National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) and the National Career Development Association (NCDA) which are U.S. based associations concerned with career practitioners' professional development through different tools and resources. NACE created principles for career centers housed within universities to follow and build relationships with employers (NACE official website). These career centers are responsible for holding on-campus recruitment to benefit their students and for recent graduates to make informed decisions about their careers and facilitate their penetration to the labor force (Furbish et al., 2016). NCDA is also recognized as a leader in creating principles for the field of career development to provide career counseling services and programs, and evaluate information related to careers (NCDA official website).

Since 2017, career centers have become widespread in Egyptian public universities through the generous fund of USAID to set-up UCCD into 12 Egyptian public universities creating 20 sustainable Career Centers on a four year plan in collaboration with AUC Career Center (ILO, 2017). This project is expected to influence around 1 million students in public universities and is focusing on the capacity building of the Centers' staff to prepare their students with the skills needed to penetrate the job market, and connect them with career opportunities (AUC Career Center official website). Currently, there are 16 Career Centers established within the following universities: Ain Shams faculty of commerce, Alexandria, Aswan, Beni Suef, Mansoura, Menoufia, Minya, Sadat City, Sohag and Zagazig (.ibid). After establishing UCCD in public universities, some of AUC Career Center team are working on the capacity building of these Centers' staff and following-up on their progress and program development through individual monitoring and guidance (.ibid). This step is very promising as Egyptian young adults can find the support to develop and get prepared before joining the

workforce. They can also get accessed to job and networking opportunities through the employers engaged with their Career Centers.

Moreover, AUC Career Center with their expertise in the field organized their first regional career conference in 2019 to gather universities and employers, and “map the future for workforce development” (.ibid). The conference covered different tracks including career services’ best practices, toolkit for career professionals and organizations, employability and career readiness partnerships and trends in talent acquisition (.ibid). Career services professionals working in Egyptian universities whether private or public as well as employers were invited to attend the conference. The conference sessions were delivered by international and Egyptian speakers from educational institutions, non-profit organizations and corporations.

### **3. Conceptual Framework**

#### **3.1 Conceptualizing Career Development**

The career development theories studied the steps that a person can take and its impact on his/her life when it comes to his/her career and job (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 11). Some development theories stated that people have different personalities with distinct qualities, interests and skills. Jobs as well have distinctive features with regards to different tasks, qualifications, needed skills and incentives. Some theories concentrated on the learning process and change, and their impact on career choices. Other theories emphasized that careers develop over a lifetime as life can be divided into stages where in each stage, a person finishes certain tasks to develop and grow (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 9 & 26). Each theory differs but they somehow complement each other as they offer tools, methods and procedures for practice.

##### **3.1.1 Career Development and Career Counseling**

By career development, we mean making choices and ‘transitions’ related to one’s career in sequence and over lifetime (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 4). Career development starts by knowing who I am, what are my interests, what motivate me, what are my strengths and which work environment that best suits me and makes me thrive. Career counseling is the process that helps me as a person in my career development. It happens when a counselor meets with a client or a small group of clients, and helps them “make informed career choices and transitions” such as career planning or advises them with information about potential careers (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 4). Career counselors can also be called career advisors, career mentors or career coaches. For the purpose of this study, I am using career advisors to point to professionals practicing career counseling.

### 3.1.2 The Career Planning Process

Every individual can pass through several steps during his/her career planning process as per NCDA's Career Development guide (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 4-5):

1. Awareness about the need to make career choice
2. Self-awareness
3. Find and explore different potential careers
4. Get data about selected careers
5. Choose tentative careers from explored options
6. Study and acquaint himself/herself with selected choices
7. After this planning, start looking for a job.

The following figure illustrates the career planning process as a wheel that starts where a person knows himself/herself, passing by an exploration phase that involves research and reading, to planning and setting goals and finally taking action and start looking for a job. Another illustration for the career planning process that is sometimes used is a puzzle where there are four pieces that come together to make a whole picture. The four pieces are the same as in the wheel: know yourself, explore options, get focused and take action.



Source: <https://www.bethechangecareers.com/the-process>



The four steps are important for a person to plan his/her career. It can start at any stage but it might sometimes mean that if a person starts with exploring for instance, s/he might also need to go back one step to increase his/her self-awareness if s/he needs to understand their needs and what they like or dislike. That is why this figure is circular because it might start anywhere but might also need checking on the other parts to make sure that the person understands what s/he wants and is well-informed to be able to move forward and drive his/her career. The career planning process is important to increase students awareness about their skills, interests, values and capabilities. Carnevale and Landis-Santos (2017) presented a number of points to consider for assisting students in their career planning process. Career advisors support students when pursuing a career direction to think about what is important in life for them. If they change their career direction without thinking about what is important for them, they may feel frustrated. That is why career advisors encourage their students to consider two to three career directions to pursue after graduation to set their vision on these specific career objectives. Moreover, career advisors may assist in availing data about different careers and jobs to help students make informed career decisions, and address concerns or any inquiries that the students may have. This may also include information about salaries and career tracks for their majors as well as required certifications, qualifications or preparation needed to penetrate certain jobs. Career advisors can also highlight information on the skills needed by employers and urge students to seize opportunities whether through internships or extracurricular activities to develop these skills.

In addition, NCDA (2004) listed three steps to encourage students to think about career exploration and planning early on. In the first step, it encouraged students to learn about themselves, and spend time to increase their self-awareness in terms of talents they have, interests by thinking about activities that they enjoy, and values through what they cherish and what is important for them in life. It recommended that career advisors use online interests

assessments in individual or group discussions to help a person identifies his/her interests as self-knowledge makes a person feels good about himself/herself. In the second step, it motivated students to explore information about variety of career options in the job market and training options that serve the students' interests and career objectives. This step might seem overwhelming to students but it should not be postponed so, they need to consider career options early on because variety of options will continue on existing now and later. In the third step, it explained to students the importance of examining and assessing the information that they gather about different careers of their interests after answering some questions to be able to see clearly what feels satisfying and best for them. Again, it assured the importance to talk to someone interested in these topics in addition to self-exploration. The list of questions included but is not limited to listing three personal characteristics, top three interests or hobbies, three unfavored activities, top three skills and abilities, top three values, top three jobs, favored and unfavored study subjects and three areas for developments.

### **3.2 Career Services Facilitating Youth Transition**

In the ILO guide on 'low and middle income countries', OECD defined career guidance as the activities and programs that people pursue to help them in making career decision, education and training all lifelong (Hansen, 2006). Availability of information and resources about the job market is another important aspect to guide people in identifying their career interests, strengths and capabilities as well as developing their career goals and availing learning experiences through internship and full-time opportunities. The study also covered the aspects for career guidance in 'high income countries' which involved information, learning and education about careers as well as career advising, job search and placement. These aspects are the basis for the career services provided by Career Centers as illustrated in **Figure 1**. These services are based on four important pillars of career advising, career exploration, experiential

learning programs and recruitment services. The guidance for this study is inspired by career services offered at AUC Career Center and replicated into other Career Centers hosted within some of the Egyptian public universities as mentioned earlier.

In **Figure 1**, career services are at the heart of the image where higher education students get clarity and feel prepared for the job market when they use them. I am using the services of AUC Career Center (official website, 2020) to demonstrate the four pillars of career services. First, career advising that includes individual counseling appointments and group workshops for self-assessment, career planning, resume writing, interview preparation and job search. These services help in raising students' self-awareness about their skills, abilities, values and interests. They also prepare the students by mastering tools for developing their resumes, sharpening their interviewing skills, learning job search techniques and getting answers for their inquiries and concerns related to careers in general and career planning. Second, career exploration which consists of availing information and resources about different occupations, industry trends, career tracks and career exploration event(s). These services assist the students in exploring different careers through information and resources availability, career exploration events and career educational sessions by career services professionals or in collaboration with employers to explore different industries in the job market, and focusing their career directions. Third, experiential learning programs that involve internships, job shadowing, work study and competitions. These activities provide the students with opportunities to gain hands on experience in the job market, develop knowledge about work settings and work environments, and use their abilities and skills. This aspect of career related experiences enlightens the students of what to expect in the job market, their strengths and assets as well as highlights areas of development that they need to work on to improve themselves and their knowledge about certain career fields. Fourth, recruitment services that connect students with employers through employment fairs, on campus recruitment and soliciting full-time career opportunities.

These activities give the students exposure to the job market and avail job opportunities for them to apply to through the Center's career portal.

The ILO career guidance in addition to studies done by other international organizations such as the World Bank affirmed the importance of career services to assist individuals in reaching three key objectives which are “lifelong learning goals, labor market outcomes, social equity and social inclusion goals” (Hansen, 2006). By lifelong learning goals, they meant making sure that no one is left behind in terms of formal education, having access to knowledge, developing their skills and connecting between education, training and the job market. Labor market outcomes can be achieved by decreasing the skills gap between graduates and labor market's demands to combat unemployment and increase work mobility. Social equity and social inclusion goals are promoted by helping those who got out of school back into the system and availing training and employment opportunities for them.

Furthermore, some studies explained effectiveness of career services by concentrating on its results and followed procedures that enabled graduates get prepared and employed in no time (Jacquin & Juhel, 2017). Other studies focused on satisfaction with the services provided, advisors' methods in handling their clients and results achieved after career counseling sessions (Spurk et al., 2015) for clients to identify their career goals and make career decisions. Moreover, it is important to assess effectiveness in terms of resources, success and life-long learning mindset. Different studies also clarified that facing troubles in career decision making have often been used as a benchmark to measure career services' effectiveness (Spurk et al., 2015; Perdrix et al., 2012). A small number of studies implemented 'life satisfaction' as dependent variable in assessing research involving effectiveness but needed to be used in addition to other variables to present enough data about the services or programs used, and age was also used as a variable determining effectiveness where young people indicated their clarity about their career decision-making (Masdonati et al., 2009; Perdrix et al., 2012). Finally, one

study confirmed that effectiveness was determined based on clients' commitment and follow through for recommendations suggested by career advisors and satisfaction with their careers (Perdrix et al., 2012).

In addition to provision of up-to-date information about the job market, effective career services assist individuals in acquiring career management skills to make informed career decisions, designing their career paths, and facilitating access to employers and the job market. Career services include activities about career information, one-to-one career advising appointments, self-assessment, learning about career planning and career management skills as well as connecting with employers to gain experience and get knowledge about the job market. Hence, it is important to ease the transition of the youth from college to work (WBL, 2019). For the purpose of this study, by effectiveness, I mean the clarity and prepared state that the student gains and develops by using career services. It also assists him/her in shortening the transitional period from university to the job market.

### 3.3 Applying the Conceptual Framework on Effectiveness of Career Services on Students

#### Transition from University to Work

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



**Source:** compiled by the author based on ILO Career Guidance, 2006 and AUC Career Center official website, 2020.

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1 Challenges Facing Youth Transition to the Job Market

#### 4.1.1 The Skills Mismatch Problem

Dibeh et al. (2018) declared that the problem of skills mismatch happen because university graduates may not develop their practical skills through formal education. Skills mismatch describes the situation of a student educated in certain field but works in a completely different field or that the requirements of a job do not equal the requirements of a job that s/he is currently hired in (Lichy & Khvatova, 2019). The World Bank has indicated that education and matching skills are the core factors for having good job market results for people (2007).

Moreover, researchers clarified that one of the major problems that decreases productivity of organizations is incompatibility between required qualifications of a job and the skills of the jobholder. They concluded that the impact of skills mismatch on the recruitment process in a company increases costs of operation as well as turnover. That is why multinational organizations specifically find skills mismatch in the MENA region as one of the main obstacles for production (Dibeh et al., 2018). Lichy & Khvatova (2019) also pointed out that even on the international business side, recruiters are aware of the problem of mismatch between the skills of university graduates and the skills required in the job market. They concluded that although graduates are excellent in non-technical skills, some of them still lack critical thinking and problem solving skills. They have also advised that business schools may need to offer courses focusing on managing projects, risk analysis, management and leadership skills to improve employability.

The problem of skills mismatch in the job market happens where there is a gap between the graduates' level of education and the required skills in the labor market with emphasis on the word 'employability' (Dibeh et al., 2018). The latter concept is related to the set of skills

that enable fresh graduates to join the workforce in a timely manner (Chan & Lin, 2016). Whereas Dibeh et al. (2018) emphasized that employability is the set of characteristics that ease the transition of graduates from higher education to the world of work. For graduates to get these set of skills or characteristics, they have to go through certain activities and experiences that are known as career services and programs. Importance of career services is focused on raising awareness about the different available professions and helping in career advising and job search (Newsome, 1975; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Thus, career services educate and support students through different programs.

In addition, career advisors main focus is to help clients know their interests, abilities, values and strengths, encourage them to explore options, set career goals and take actions (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 6-7). Dey & Cruzvergara (2014) explained that universities and colleges' career centers play active roles in the employment and success of their students even after they finish their universities. They also clarified that talents and capabilities needed in the competitive market are various than the skills acquired in higher education, and require the intervention of career services professionals to support their students through their vision, strategy and connections. I believe that career services have an integral part in preparing higher education graduates and ease their transition to the labor market. Thus, engaging with career services will have a positive impact on graduates and better equip them with the set of skills needed to penetrate the job market.

#### **4.1.2 School to Work Transition**

Examining the caliber of Egyptian youth, researchers found that the common educational level was secondary education with 39% within the ages of 15 – 34 (Assaad & Krafft, 2014; Amer & Atallah, 2019). Recently, secondary education rate has reached 78% and young adults access to higher education rate is 31% on average in 2019 in Egypt; the latter rate



is also similar to other countries in the region (CAPMAS, 2020). One would think that higher education would comprise the bigger share of educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but not in the case of a developing country like Egypt. Studies emphasized that the level of education determines the timeframe to become employable, so educational degree level facilitates for men especially the transition from being unemployed to employed, and chances to find jobs increased by attaining higher educational level as well (Amer & Atallah, 2019; Assaad & Krafft, 2014). They highlighted that the unemployment rate for Egyptian youth laid among the highly educated people with 22% in 2012 and 2018 (Amer & Atallah, 2019).

In addition, recent graduates take time to transition from university to work and this period consists of unemployment duration that might be long; when it ends, it results in employment for men but may discourage women to continue pursuing jobs (Assaad & Krafft, 2014). Because gender has an impact on the duration of transition, female's transition usually takes more time than male's transition (Dibeh et al., 2018). It is with no surprise then that the unemployment rate for female youth in Egypt is five times bigger than male youth (Barsoum, 2016) especially that females prefer the public sector's jobs which became very rare with no alternatives in the private sector (Assaad & Krafft, 2014).

Some of the reasons that individuals attained higher education are able to stay unemployed while seeking jobs maybe because of their family backgrounds unlike those with secondary education or lower, they have no chance to survive while staying out of jobs (Amer & Atallah, 2019; Assaad & Krafft, 2014). Socio-economic is then one of the factors for unemployment; the high the social class is, the more successful the transition will be for graduates though it may take more time than expected. Assaad and Krafft (2014) have also emphasized that Egyptian youth transition from higher education to work is greatly based on socio-economic factors more than educational attainment; consequently, young adults with the

same level of education do not gain the same opportunities in the job market because of social class and connections. Some studies highlighted that the unemployment rate is higher among young Egyptian men from wealthy families with parents working in professional and management occupations. They also explained that more than 90% of young men who worked for four years after graduation stayed in the same type of sector whether public or private which shows low mobility rate as well (Amer & Atallah, 2019).

#### **4.1.3 Employers' Perceptions on Youth Employment**

Employers, especially the private sector, are derived with increasing productivity and reducing costs for their firms. They usually seek a number of qualifications for different type of jobs which include educational background, years of experience and skills needed to perform the job. Angel-Urdinola et al. (2010) explained that the private sector may not consider recent graduates because they assume that these graduates do not have the needed capabilities and hands-on experience required for vacant jobs. These graduates may finish their education unqualified for the demands of the job market which is supposed to equip them with needed knowledge and skills. This gap between educational system and labor market's needs is due to outdated curriculum that is not compatible or matching with employers' required qualifications. The result is recent graduates are pushed to work either in informal jobs or opt out of the job market completely due to unavailability of formal jobs. A wasted and unutilized investment in both the public and private educational system because the product of job seekers is not fully used and developed.

A study surveyed employers in Egypt clarified that skills and education are within the five top challenges for business growth in addition to skills mismatch that is considered also a hindrance for developing businesses, where 50% of interviewed employers indicated that (Angel-Urdinola et al. 2010). The World Bank (2009) noted that manufacturing organizations

needed highly skilled employees but the labor market supply is not matching their needs. Because education in Egypt is not connected to employment policies, technology advancement or economic development, the product is usually unqualified workforce missing hands-on experience. Employers also criticized young graduates for lacking not only technical skills but also soft skills that are related to interpersonal, social and communication skills essential to deal professionally in the work settings as well as creative thinking and problem solving skills (ILO, 2007).

In addition, Bremer & El Baradei (2008) surveyed employers through their study on public administration and public policy master's programs in Egypt, and concluded that there was a gap between needed skills in the job market and those developed by the programs. They identified capabilities as critical and valuable that are required by 85+ surveyed employers including but not limited to oral presentation skills, interpersonal communication skills, motivation skills, leaderships skills and decision-making skills. Angel-Urdinola et al. (2010) also declared that not less than 70% of university students are concentrated in social sciences with no strategy to expand secondary education and academic degrees towards programs that build students skills and prepare them for the job market. Some studies have suggested to change university and teaching system into degree programs in collaboration and connection with businesses as a plan for work readiness of the students for future careers (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). This call is in alignment with recent universities' attention to keep their ranking high among worldwide universities by assessing their students' employability and developing career readiness programs to better prepare their students for the world of work.

#### **4.2 Career Services and Career Readiness**

Creating career centers within schools and universities provide services that add value to both the students and the community at large (Garis, 2014). Career services in general as a concept

started in 1900s in the United States and evolved during 1970s and 1980s to offer career planning and counseling in college campuses' career centers. The idea of career centers became more dynamic during 1990s and 2000s due to progress in IT and social media which drove these centers to lead on-campus recruitment activities with companies seeking to hire and avail networking channels between the students and human resources of these organizations (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Perceptions of students on career planning can actually be developed by engaging them in events or activities where they interact with the industry to observe recruitment trends as well as build their networking skills to enlarge their connections and seize any career related opportunities. Building hands-on-experience for students definitely give them insights on what is available in the job market and what they need to develop to match what is there and explore different career paths. Availing different experiential activities is needed in higher education as well for students in all majors and degrees to move smoothly to the world of work and find decent jobs (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020).

Dey & Cruzvergara (2014) were the first to note that students will need to pursue significant experiences through mentors/business experts in their interest areas/industries and networks to “design their career journeys” rather than through common career programs offered by career centers, majors or jobs. For the Middle Eastern developing countries including Egypt, it is not easy to speculate whether students in higher education will have the opportunity to explore career options, enjoy using career services and be employable. Having higher education students who can connect with industry experts to ‘design their career journey’ seems like an unattainable reality. Moreover, Jackson & Tomlinson (2020) clarified that proactive students who tend to set career goals in their early school years, acquire a wider perspective on the job market and employability as they get engaged with the industry and develop plans to manage their future jobs. They also work on gaining work experiences through internships or

extracurricular activities, and basically own their career planning process which is very important for job search, job satisfaction and hiring.

Taking a closer look on Singapore, the world's most competitive economy in 2019, they focused heavily on education as an essential pillar for developing the economy and the country (World Economic Forum, 2019). Singapore's policy on education emphasized that "all Singaporeans should have a strong foundation of knowledge and skills to achieve their potential and build their careers." (Wong, 2016) Singapore introduced the career development policy 'Skills Future Council' in 2014 with the aim of creating an educational system that takes into account training, career path and developing skills to ease employment. They hired education and career guidance officers to guide students in their career planning journeys through individual appointments and activities while they are still studying at schools or technical institutes so that "they make better career choices" (Wong, 2016). Business leaders were also engaged with educational organizations to improve the curriculum taught at schools and match the skills needed in the job market. Singaporean students were encouraged to pursue experiential learning through internships and career related activities to learn and employ what they have learned at schools in the workplace. Singapore also encouraged its adults to pursue life-long learning and be up-to-date with what is required in the market through funded training courses.

In addition, NACE has recently released its list of competencies for career readiness. These skills are needed for the graduates to be prepared to move successfully to the job market and enjoy career management (NACE official website, 2021). It provides a structure for assessing objectives and outcomes related to careers by any activities that the students get engaged in whether related to studies or additional activities outside the classroom whichever the major of the student (.ibid). Career readiness is important for employers as well, as it gives them a guide for core skills needed for every job and identifying talent and developing it through

internship programs offered by the employers (.ibid). NACE identified eight competencies for career ready workforce which are career and self-development, communication, critical thinking, equity and inclusion, leadership, professionalism, teamwork and technology (.ibid). NACE has also defined each competency and shared sample behaviors to assist graduates and professionals to have a common ground and frame “as a shared understanding of what is needed to launch and develop a successful career, a common vocabulary by which to discuss needs and expectations” (NACE official website, 2021). This framework would work as a reference to identify common skills needed by employers and for career services practitioners to develop in their students. For the students, they may look at it to improve themselves, get ready to join the workforce, and manage their careers successfully.

Through reviewing the literature, I presented some of the challenges that face young people to transit smoothly to the job market whether skills mismatch problem or perceptions of employers that the youth do not possess needed skills and hands on experience as well as some of the factors that shorten this transitional period. The importance of career services emerges when they assist in raising students’ self-awareness about themselves and exposing them to the job market early on which gives them clarity about what they like or dislike, what their strengths and values are. Career services prepare the students with tools and techniques that facilitate the transition to the job market, and assist them in presenting themselves well and identifying different ways to search for jobs. They also work on equipping the students with knowledge and skills when they get engaged in career activities and events focusing on developing their career goals and identifying their career directions. Career services give the students access to opportunities to land internships or jobs, grow and develop their skills which is the ultimate goal of undergoing career services in the first place.

## **5. Theoretical Framework**

### **5.1 Career Development Theories**

Through this section, I am presenting some of the career development theories to explain how these theories aid career services professionals in supporting their students and helping them understand themselves, their behaviors and the environment as well as seize opportunities that they come across. The theories that I chose to focus on in this study are Krumboltz's learning theory and happenstance, Holland's theory of vocational choice and Super's career development theory.

#### **5.1.1 Learning Theory and Happenstance**

John Krumboltz (2009) conceived the learning theory that simply explained by realizing that the behavior of a person is influenced by his/her environment and hereditary. He identified two types of learning: 'instrumental learning' that is reward given after instructed behavior, and 'associative learning' that is taking someone as a role model after noticing the reward s/he receives. He used two alternative terms, 'positive reinforcement' for rewarding behaviors and 'negative reinforcement' to end disliked behavior. The role of career advisor is to guide students to build satisfying lives and use positive reinforcement to encourage them explore options and opportunities, and work on planning their careers as well as focusing their career goals. He also pointed out that many researchers worked in their jobs based on coincidence or unarranged incidents that is when happenstance concept came out. Happenstance means staying attentive to unexpected incidents that happen in one's life as chances have effect whether positive or negative. This concept reinforced the idea of accepting chances that happen in one's life with an open-mind and occasionally turn them into opportunities.

Krumboltz (2009) also identified four positions to develop for unexpected incidents which are "curiosity, persistence, flexibility and optimism". He supported the notion of ongoing

planning instead of planning-ahead, and encouraged career advisors to educate their students about being open to each and every opportunity they encounter, engage in different useful activities, learn skills to be active and enrich their lives. Assessments also have a role in raising one's awareness about their personalities and not to mix and match personalities with careers. That's why career advising is designed to assist and guide students to untap their potential and discover their talents. The role of career advisor is to encourage their students to get involved in assignments that support learning, how to network and solicit unarranged job opportunities.

### **5.1.2 Vocational Choice Theory**

John Holland theorized the vocational choice theory where there are six type of personalities: artistic, conventional, enterprising, investigative, realistic and social. He relied in his theoretical concept on the trait and factor theory that explained individual differences by categorizing personalities (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 12). Holland (1997) argued that individuals' personalities are reflected in certain career interests, and each person can be portrayed as a mix of two or more out of the six types. Work and school environments can also be labeled as a mix of the six types. That's why individuals of certain types pursue similar work environments or with the same type as their personalities where s/he will be most likely creative, satisfied and productive. He called this "congruence" where an individual's personality fits the work environment where s/he works.

He believed that people obtain these personalities' types through heredity, environments such as home, schools and communities as well as engaging in activities. Once these individuals get involved in activities and receive praise for it, they somehow turn these activities into interests and also pursue talents and capabilities to support their interests, and develop values matching with their interests and abilities. He also used the term 'differentiation' to explain when a person is clear about what s/he likes and/or dislikes. A 'differentiated profile' means



where some of the scores are high and low and the person is sure of his/her areas of interests and disinterests. On the other hand, 'undifferentiated profile or flat' where a person has either all the six types high or all the types low which means that the person is unaware of his/her strong interests, did not have enough exposure to activities to build and recognize interests or has many interests that need to be focused (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 14-17).

Career advisors have actually been using Holland code of assessment to help students discover their personality's type and consequently assist them in identifying their career interests to make choices that are consistent with their interests and abilities. The role of the advisor is also guiding those who have undifferentiated profiles to explore careers through informational interviews, job shadowing, researching careers or volunteering to name a few. On the other hand, employers are most likely looking for candidates with characteristics matching with the job qualifications that they are looking for (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 12 & 15). Allen & Weert (2007) emphasized that if employers can get the right fit to vacant jobs, then they can improve salaries, profits and job satisfaction but in case of mismatch between an employee and the job, there are restrictions on productivity gains whether by the imposed job on the employee or his/her limited capabilities. The perfect scenario happens when the most qualified employees are placed in the most difficult positions.

### **5.1.3 Career Development Theory**

Development theory concentrates on the idea that occupations develop over lifetime and assume that life can be divided into stages where in each stage, a person finishes certain duties to develop and grow. If some duties are achieved in a certain stage, then the person is developmentally mature and ready for the next stage. On the other hand, if a person does not finish a duty in the assigned stage, his/her development is behind schedule and may face trouble in the following life stage (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 9). Donald E. Super's career

development theory is derived on the concept that occupations develop over lifetime and involve three features which are self-concept, life span and life space. First, self-concept is an image of how a person sees himself/herself, how s/he wants to be seen, and how s/he thinks others see him/her to recognize one's career plans and objectives. This self-image development is influenced by our family, culture and experiences and events that we go through and can be improved or decreased depending on the kind of encouragement we receive. Thus, positive feedback is key. If a person negatively sees himself/herself, s/he might make unsatisfying career choices. If a person sees his/her work as a reflection of himself/herself (skills, interests and values) that is where s/he would mostly be satisfied. Second, life span is the duration of a person's occupation, and he divided them into five stages: growth (0-15), exploration (15-25), establishment (25-45), maintenance (45-65) and disengagement (65-?). The five stages of career development go hand in hand with five developmental duties associated to learning and development: crystallization, specification, implementation, stabilization and consolidation. He later on admitted that age range related to each task was not important or fixed and it was more important to accomplish the duty. Moreover, people can go through different stages at different times in their lives with no specific order and for many times, and depending on the situations and opportunities available to them. Finally, by life space, he meant that we all play different roles in our lives such as being a daughter, a mother, a sister and so on at different times and used the term of 'life rainbow' to illustrate this concept. That is why career advisors need to consider a client's different life roles while meeting him/her and not only focus on the employee's role (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 26-35; Super, 1990).

## **5.2 Integrating The Three Career Development Theories**

The first step in the career planning process focuses on increasing students self-awareness about their strengths, interests, abilities and characters. Holland characterized individuals into six

personality types with common interests and also mentioned that the same types are applicable for work environments. When a person with a personality type works in a similar work environment sharing related values, s/he can feel fit in the workplace. Moving to the second step of exploring options, students gain knowledge about different careers and industry trends when they get exposed to the job market and explore work environments, for instance through experiential programs. Individuals who pursue similar work environments, they would be productive and satisfied. In **Figure 2**, this stage along with the previous one improves students' self-concept as per Super's theory that self-image development is influenced by how we see ourselves and the experiences and events that we go through. Both steps improve students' awareness about themselves and the job market. Hence, they gain clarity about who they are, what they want to do, what motivate them, and set manageable expectations on what the job market offers.

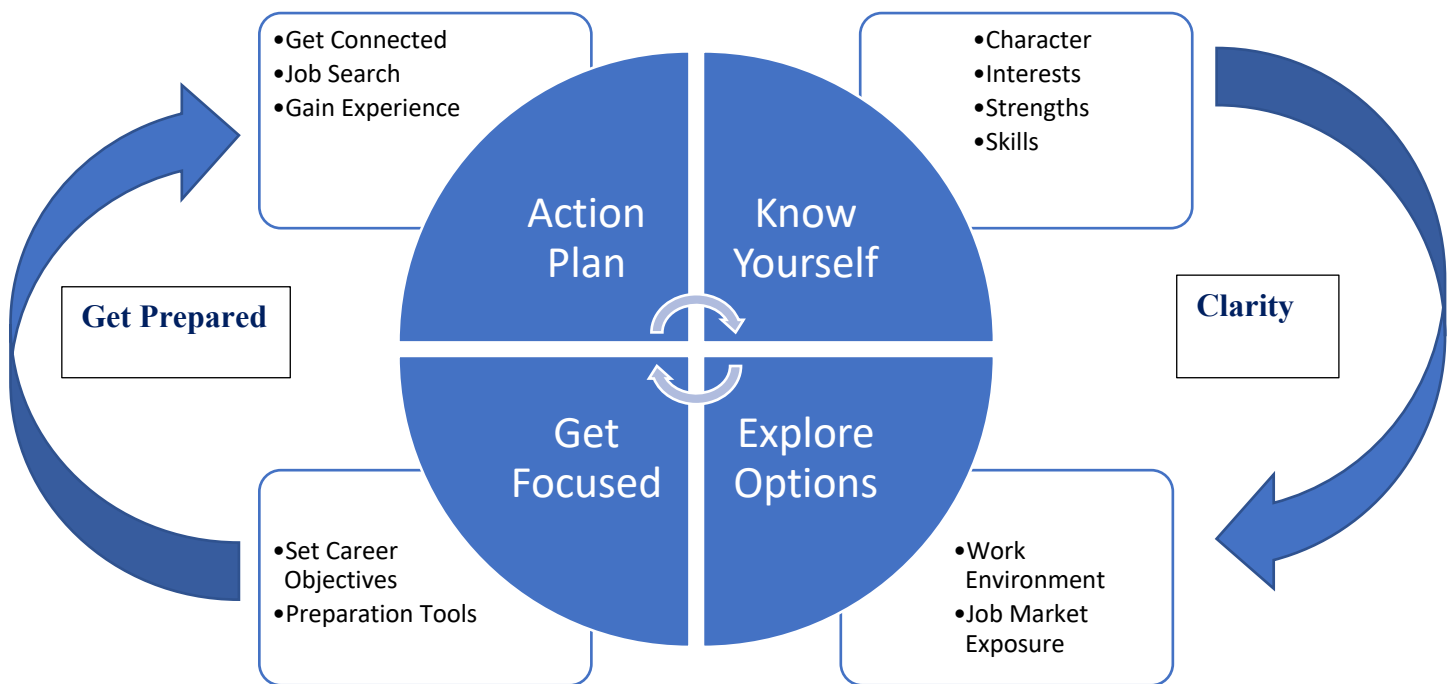
The third step in the career planning process concentrates on getting focused. It encourages the students to set short-term and long-term goals. Setting goals while visualizing positive rewards would motivate the students to work harder and reach their goals as per Krumboltz's positive reinforcement. The short-term goals could be related to getting prepared for the job market by writing their resumes, practicing interviews and developing their employability skills. The long-term goals might be considering two to three career objectives to pursue after graduation, and set their vision on specific career objectives. The fourth step, the students take action by expanding their networks, undergoing job search, and gaining

experience. When the students get engaged in work settings or work experiences such as internships, they gain hands-on experience and gain insights about their favorable work settings and career fields. In this stage, the students might need empowering role models to get connected with or identify with as per Krumboltz's associative learning. In **Figure 2**, the latter two steps are where the students get ready for the job market whether through focusing their career goals, preparation tools, expanding their connections and gaining experience. In **Figure 2**, the career planning process is circular and presents a continuous cycle that could start at any step when needed and where the students or the graduates seek the Career Center assistance during their life span as per Super's theory.

### 5.3 Theoretical Framework to Reinforce Career Services

**Figure 2: Theoretical Framework**

**Source:** Adopted based on Krumboltz’s Learning Theory (2009), Holland’s Vocational Choice (1997), Super’s Career Development Theory and Career Planning Process (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017)



## **6. Research Methodology**

I work as a recruitment manager at AUC Career Center where I have been involved in the services offered for students and graduates for more than ten years now. My work is focusing on dealing with employers to build relations, connecting them with our talent as well as soliciting career opportunities and managing recruitment events. Building on my interest and knowledge about career services, I wanted to complement my experience with academic research on effectiveness of career services offered at different universities' career centers in Egypt. Unlike other professions, I learned my work by doing and not by studying, and carried out these years based on my acquired knowledge, building my experience on the job, explored resources on-the-go and sought advices whenever needed. Standing on academic research, I think it would give me more depth and growth in the field. Moreover, since career service profession has been newly introduced in some universities, this will give the study a current perspective about the role of career services on transition of the youth from higher education to work, and fill the research gap existing about the field.

### **6.1 Qualitative Research Design**

The aim of the study is to assess effectiveness of career services on students' transition to the world of work and facilitate their employability. I employed qualitative research methodology. Data has been collected using a semi-structured questionnaire based on the main issues discussed in the literature review. These issues are as follows; overcoming challenges facing youth employment through services and programs offered at the career centers, whether the knowledge acquired in university corresponds to what is required in the job market and whether their skills match what is required in jobs. The questionnaire will tackle different points. Part will focus on the perceptions of participants of the relationship between career services that they engaged in and their future careers. Another part will focus on participants' acquired skills,

knowledge and experiences that they attained through their engagement with the university's career center. A third part will assess participants' clarity about their career options and perceptions about the transition to the job market. "[Qualitative research] can provide data and raise questions that no quantitative methods could generate, in great part because it allows for the emergence of the unexpected." (Ambert et al., 1995)

## **6.2 Sample Selection and Interviews**

I have conducted 12 semi-structure interviews with higher education students in three Egyptian Universities: an elite non-profit, a private and a public university. The criteria for data sample and selection was based on youth currently enrolled in higher education and about to graduate aged 20 – 23 years old, and have used two or more services offered at their university's Career Center. I have also conducted two interviews with career services professionals who are working at universities' career centers as experts in the field of career services. These professionals are in contact with the job market and graduates, and aware of the benefits of career education and early-on experiences in the job market to develop students and sharpen their practical and networking skills.

Recruiting and identifying the subjects has started from AUC Career Center as I work there and I relied on snowballing technique to reach other potential subjects. The in-depth interviews have been conducted in April 2021 to express participants' views and perceptions about their experiences with their university's Career Centers. "Qualitative research seeks depth rather than breadth; it seeks to acquire in-depth and intimate information from representative sample of an entire population of interest." (Ambert et al., 1995) The final sample consists of 14 participants that includes four students from an elite non-profit institution, three students from a private well-known university and five students from a public university in addition to two interviews with two career services professionals: one from the non-profit university and

the other from the public university. I also sought to interview a career service professional from the private university with no success. My aim is to present the views of those who are engaged in the field and how their role affects university's students and their employability. It is worth mentioning that the elite non-profit institution's Career Center has been operating for three decades now; thus, they have huge expertise in the field and they also serve in transferring their knowledge in establishing other career centers in public Egyptian universities as well as recruiting, training and guiding their career service professionals. The private Career Center is functioning since 2005 and serving the university's students and alumni while the public Career Center was recently established in 2018.

Sample selection intended to present in-depth perceptions of a small group of participants and I am not claiming that the sample is representative as is the case in qualitative research. "Qualitative researchers use a lens ... based on the views of people who conduct, participate in, or read and review a study." (Creswell & Miller, 2000) The interviews have been conducted over the phone due to social distancing currently taking place because of coronavirus, and to ensure the safety of the participants. I checked with my subjects regarding recording our calls and took their consents beforehand, and transcribed the interviews later on. At the beginning of the interviews, I explained to my subjects' the purpose of this research and informed them to feel free to answer the questions as they see fit, and have all the right to opt out of the interview anytime they needed to. A set of questions have guided the data gathering process and there was room for probing during the interview (see appendix A for interview questions).

### **6.3 Data Analysis**

I was expecting to see a positive impact from the services offered by the career centers to prepare graduates for the world of work especially that they undergo career exploration



activities and develop their skills as they receive employability training to prepare their resumes, do mock interviews, to better ace work interviews and present themselves well to prospective employers as well as land internship experiences. I started the data analysis once I collected the data from few subjects as “qualitative research often begins initial analysis even while data are being collected.” (Ambert et al., 1995) Data was organized into themes followed an open coding approach and allowed the analysis of the data using inductive reasoning analytic approach as common in qualitative research (Rossman and Rallis, 2003).

It is worth mentioning that with the current situation of social distancing because of COVID-19, Career Centers’ operations were shifted to virtual mode. The Career Centers delivered their career counseling appointments, career education workshops, training courses and employers’ sessions virtually even their events including the employment fair became virtual. The Career Center at the non-profit university organized three virtual employment fairs in July 2020, November 2020 and April 2021 as well as other career education events and sessions. The Career Center at the public university joined other public universities in two UCCD virtual employment fairs in September 2020 and March 2021 that connected students and alumni from 12 public universities with employers. Although the Career Center at the private university canceled their employment fair in 2020 and postponed to 2021, they were able to organize it virtually in May 2021. The students appreciated the fact that they were able to reach their Career Centers during this critical time as well as still enjoy the variety of services. However, they remarked that they lost the human face-to-face interaction and were looking forward to going back to normal operation. Agility and flexibility during the pandemic and lockdown brought hope for the students during this time of uncertainty.

## **6.4 Ethical Consideration**

Data presented in this study is anonymous following ethical considerations in qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman, 2015) as indicated to participants in the interviews. I believe that this has improved the data collection process received and shared sincere thoughts from the participants. I have taken care of ethical consideration of interviewing young people and keeping them out of any harm by participating in my study. I hid their identities, kept their privacy and made sure that they willingly participated in my research (Marshall and Rossman, 2015).

The subjects have been protected and their identities were kept anonymous. I sought their consent before conducting any interview and put every effort to ensure that interviewees are comfortable with my questions. I explained the purpose of the study clearly for each interviewee before the interview started. I informed the subjects verbally before starting the interviews that their identities and personal information will be kept anonymous. I used the consent forms to document their participation and ensured that their information will only be used for the purpose of this study analysis. I also assured them that participation is voluntary and refusing to participate in the study will not affect their access to career services offered at their university's Career Centers. Finally, I audio-recorded the interviews after receiving their verbal consent and transcribed it later to start my data analysis process.

## **6.5 Limitations**

When I approached potential students studying at the private and public universities for data collection and asked about their experiences with their university's Career Center, I was surprised that many of them did not know if they have Career Center or even aware that career services existed. Though Career Centers staff put a lot of efforts to engage and assist their students, it came to my attention that these centers are not very popular among all the student

bodies. They reach approximately 20 – 30% of the students in their university. I was also shocked that some of the well-known private universities that have been existing in Egypt for more than a decade now, they do not have established Career Centers within its premises. In addition, some of the students who used career services at their universities, did not recognize what I am talking about if they did not hear the exact name of the Center as it is called by their university. Many students who know about their university's Career Center and participated in the study, were not willing to recommend students at other universities as if they are living in a bubble that they did not want to get out of it. All these factors made it difficult to reach a bigger number of students to interview for the study. Moreover, due to the current situation and the spread of coronavirus, it was not feasible to meet the subjects face-to-face; hence, I ought to conduct the interviews over the phone and was not able to observe and document their non-verbal communication.

## 7. Data Analysis and Findings

The interviews provided beneficial information on the services offered by three Career Centers hosted within three universities in Egypt: non-profit, private and public. Throughout the data collection, the interviewees described their experiences with their university's Career Center, what type of services or programs they used or events that they attended, how did their university's Career Center help in identifying their career interests, how did their university's Career Center prepare or support them in focusing their career goals, whether their university's Career Center developed their skills or raised their awareness about the job market, and whether they landed any internship or job through their university's Career Center.

The primary data collected were clustered into three themes. The analysis followed the model presented in the conceptual framework - **Figure 1** illustrating that when the students use career services, they get clarity and feel prepared for the job market in addition to career development and connections they get into through the services. First, the clarity that the students get flow out of high self-awareness about their skills, capabilities and interests as well as awareness about the job market. This rise in self-awareness was experienced after using career services that tackled knowing one's self and his/her skills through attending training courses, assessments or sitting one-on-one with career advisor, and exploring the job market whether through researching career information, reviewing career opportunities or attending career events.

Second, the preparation phase is versatile and it differs from one Career Center to the other. The Career Center hosted in the public university actually works on developing students' skills by offering various courses that build students' knowledge about specific career fields, their skills and English language in addition to workshops offered for resume writing, job search and interviews preparation. They offer resume critique appointments and employability skills course that cover different topics related to career development. They organize mock

interviews, career days, information sessions, recruitment days and career talks by employers, and announce internship opportunities and competitions. They also took part in the job fair organized for all UCCD called Career Expo that included 12 public university, more than 6000 students and more than 50 employers (UCCD Virtual Platform website).

The private university's Career Center also offers counseling services and workshops for resume writing, interviews preparation and LinkedIn review whether by staff or employers as well as individual appointments by staff and a mix of career events and services such as the annual employment fair and start-up fair, announces career and scholarship opportunities, and sends weekly bulletins with available internship and job opportunities. They also organize career days, mock interviews, on-campus interviews and tests and on-campus workshops by employers as well as alumni fair to transfer their knowledge to students.

The Career Center established in the elite non-profit university offers comprehensive career programs, services and events that cover the four phases of the career planning process. For career advising, they offer workshops for resume writing, job search, interview preparation, choice of major, career interests and personality, career planning, case interview, cover letter as well as individual appointments. They also organize graduate study fair and information sessions by universities, and announce scholarships and fellowships opportunities. They coordinate career conversation, a day in the life, job shadowing, consulting network, CO-OP, and organize employability skills conference, career day and mock interviews week. They announce internship and job opportunities, competitions and challenges, work study and send weekly newsletters with job and internship opportunities. They also organize the employment fair twice per year, corporate information sessions, on-campus interviews and assessments and the campus recruitment week.

Third, career development and connection that the students get throughout their engagement with their Career Centers' programs, services and events. These services support

them in focusing their future career goals and enabling them to get in contact with the job market early on whether through experiencing it or building knowledge before they graduate.

## **7.1 Career Services Increase Students' Clarity about What They Want and What the Job Market Needs**

This part of the analysis presents the perceptions of the participants on the role of their Career Centers in recognizing their skills and abilities, and identifying their career interests through the guidance of career advisors and/or the programs that the students got engaged in. Self-awareness about skills and interests was clearer when the students experienced counseling appointments or assessments, attended career educational sessions, and participated in employability skills and educational courses, or worked in an internship or work study program. Awareness about the job market was achieved through attending career events, reviewing career opportunities, joining career related courses and career educational sessions. Clarity means that the students enjoy high self-awareness about their skills and interests as well as getting to know the job market that they are about to navigate after graduation. Through the interviews, most of participating students voiced their enthusiasm about what they are planning to do after graduation and how their Career Centers helped them in figuring out what is next in their journeys by availing services that increased their clarity about themselves and their interests, and sharpening their skills to be ready to join the job market as illustrated in steps 1 and 2 in **Figure 2**.

### **7.1.1 Awareness about One's Skills and Strengths**

#### **Career Counseling Appointments and Assessments**

Students might sometimes feel overwhelmed about their future and what they will do after graduation. This feeling is developed out of confusion and fear of the unknown that is coming

after they finish their studies. This confusion also might be out of the many options that they see through the internet. The first step in managing this confusion is knowing one's self with his/her strengths to be able to move forward and focus on the next phase.

Career counseling is part of the services that the Career Center offers. Studies presented that there was a positive and lasting influence from the one-on-one career advising appointments with career advisors on the individual (Perdrix et al., 2012). The main aim of career counseling is guiding students during this phase of overwhelming feelings and confusion, and supporting them in understanding their unique self. Mona is the Associate Director for Employer Relations who has been working in the career services field for almost 15 years in the elite non-profit university. She is passionate about helping younger generation figuring out what they want to do in life. Through our conversation, she categorized students into two types, the ones who come with unlimited options and multiple interests, and the others who see limited options for their careers. She emphasized the role of one-on-one appointments in helping and guiding students in either focusing or expanding their career options.

*“We help those with limited vision to expand their options to be able to go beyond the obvious because you can give them the job market insights even if they cannot see it or better educate them about the recent trends so that they can see better.” (Mona, Career Services Professional, April 2021)*

With the approach of graduation phase, students may feel overwhelmed and challenged about what they are going to do next in the unknown world called job market. With many options available for the students, this feeling becomes bigger than it has been decades ago. Mona elaborated that in our modern times, there are a variety of trendy careers that are coming out in addition to entrepreneurial opportunities and options. In the past, there were specific traced career directions that a person follows relevant to his/her attained degree. These career directions are also endorsed by parents or social circle. For instance, if a student majored in mechanical engineering, s/he would be expected to work as a mechanical engineer. As Mona

mentioned, career advising guides the students in expanding their horizon by giving them job market insights to know about all the new available occupations. Majors are not supposed to dictate certain careers but focus on providing the students with knowledge about specific fields, and developing their career related skills. Mona also shared her thoughts about the type of students who have multiple interests:

*“We also help those who have endless options and they think that they have multiple interests and multiple things that they could be good at. They also feel overwhelmed with the variety of options that exist nowadays. Helping them to really go back to the core questions of, who you are, what would you like to do next, what would fit you best and how to go beyond the peer pressure and the parents pressure, and really decide on what you would really like to choose and pursue is the other way around. Bringing them from a variety of options to two or three directions so that they are more focused and targeted in their job choice.” (Mona, Career Services Professional, April 2021)*

Career Services seem like the compass that guides the students in navigating through the confusion phase of what to do next in life. As Mona clarified that they assist students who have multiple interests to focus through this phase by asking them the basic questions of who you are, what would fit you best and what would you like to do next because this overwhelming state might turn into indecisiveness and uncertainty. This type of students might fear that they would be missing out on something if they settle on the first choice that comes across. This is where the importance of career advising lays in tuning the variety of options into a focused number of career directions for the student to be able to move forward purposefully.

Reham is a senior student who is majoring in computer science at the elite non-profit university. She presented her perception on the importance of career advising appointments and how it helped her in increasing her self-awareness, and highlighted her strengths and areas of developments. She also pointed out that she was able to identify the work environment where she can fit and feel satisfied.

*“I think it helped me in identifying the skills that I have and values that I care for in the work experience. It raised my self-awareness for what I want to work in, what I am good at and what I should work on. It did not teach me the skills such as communication skills*



*but it highlighted the area for development to me through the services.” (Reham, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Counseling appointments is a powerful and influential tool for the students to use and benefit from through their communication face-to-face, individually with a career advisor. These appointments assist the students in knowing themselves and better understand their strengths as well as highlight areas for development as shared by Reham who explained her awareness about her skills, values and career interests. The same idea resonated with Lamia who is a graduating senior student double majored in economics and political science at the elite non-profit university:

*“By talking to career advisors, I was able to understand what I like and what I don’t like and possible career prospects and what kind of companies people from my major have worked in.” (Lamia, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Sometimes, students might need to narrow down their career options to two or three directions so that the confusion and overwhelming feeling fade away and this is where a conversation with a career advisor helps the student to identify his/her career interests and focus on relevant career options to work on and be prepared for the future. Ahmed is a graduating senior student majoring in mechanical engineering at the elite non-profit university as well who pointed out that counseling appointments helped him in identifying his career interests and thought that this is the most effective service offered by the Career Center.

*“I would say the most beneficial program is the counseling appointments because you have 1:1 50 min with a counselor or senior counselor where you tell her your concerns, and get to have answers. Even if it is for resume critique, you have 50 min to talk about what you have done, how to show this in your resume in the best way. If it was for cover letter, you get to show who you really are. If it was for career planning, it helps you to discover your passion. Throughout counseling appointments, they guide through what other services that would be beneficial to you. It is not only one service but a network of services. For example, when I met the career counselor, I was confused about what job I want, she recommended to me another service that was SII because it would be beneficial for me to know about my career interests, what would be good industry for me.” (Ahmed, 23 years old, April 2021)*

Counseling appointments guide students in planning their career journeys. Ahmed was frequently emphasizing during the interview the importance of counseling appointments throughout different phases of his career development. It directed his steps where the career advisor would give him the time and care to listen and assist him in analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of each career decision he wants to make.

Another key tool for raising one's self-awareness is the assessments. Holland explained in his vocational choice theory, the relation between personality types and work environments. Holland assessment or as known by the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) is one of the preferred assessment tools used by Career Centers to assist their students in identifying their career interests as Ahmed described:

*"The Career Center did not tell me about my career interests but it helped and guided me through my career path to find where my passion is. MBTI or SII tests helped me in identifying my interests. The Center guided me through assessments to know about my interests." (Ahmed, 23 years old, April 2021)*

The Career Center does not list or categorize students; however, it guides them to better know themselves, and identify their interests through assessment tools. Ahmed explained the role his Center played in helping him recognize his interests and his personality through these assessments. It is relieving to know that these assessments are based on research and are not a mere assumption and guesses but have been tested and proven its validity. That is why assessments are administered by certified career advisors and not every career services professional can run it without taking training and becoming a certified administrator for each assessment. The most used assessments are Strong Interest Inventory – SII by Holland and Myers Briggs Type Indicator – MBTI among others.

Moreover, the role of career advisors is to be skilled in assisting their students learn about themselves, discover careers, focus their career options and implement career plans. Career advisors usually undergo training to develop their helping skills, assist students and

build helping relationship. They work on cultivating skills that guide the helping relationship during their one-on-one appointments or group workshops with students which include being fully present, understanding and interpreting what the students say whether verbal or non-verbal, summarizing and paraphrasing, encouraging and asking closed-ended and open-ended questions. (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 7-8 & 15-16)

During a student first appointment, the career advisor gets to know him/her through establishing a helping relationship, and identifying his/her needs, strengths and barriers to put the plan forward and match it with relevant services while keeping the student confidentiality. Common strengths and barriers include students motivation, education and transferrable skills, decision making skills, job search duration, connections and networks (including family members, friends, acquaintances) and any health or familial issues that may influence the students' job search process. In addition, career advisors assist students in formulating short-term and long-term career goals, and implement an action plan to recommend relevant offered services based on the student's needs. (Jordon & Marinaccio, 2017, P. 21-33)

### **Career Educational and Exploration Sessions**

Since the Career Centers are hosted within higher education institutions, they are also playing an educational role in students' lives. Their role focuses on raising students awareness about different career options available for them through availing educational sessions and workshops offered by the Center's staff, employers or by site visits to employers' premises. These exploration and educational sessions and visits assist students in choosing their majors or expanding their awareness about different available career fields in the job market. May is a graduating senior student majoring business administration specialized in marketing at the elite non-profit university, and has attended some of the educational sessions and shared her experience:

*“I attended several sessions since I enrolled in the university that helped me in choosing my major, another session to discover my interests, other sessions to discover my personality and which career better fits my personality, and another one to develop my resume in addition to the skills needed in the job market.” (May, 23 years old, April 2021)*

As much as these exploration sessions or visits expand students’ knowledge and awareness, they also help eliminate the options that they did not like or feel excited about it. Hence, helping them to decide early on the options that they might like or work in with their interests and skills. May expressed her opinion about the sessions and elaborated that because the staff are in close contact with the job market, they translate its needs into sessions and events that serve students and better equip them with skills needed when they graduate. Lamia also described the benefits she gained from her job shadowing session with an employer:

*“In general, the job shadowing was helpful. I did one in Deloitte virtually this last year. In my case, I understood that I was not very interested in auditing and taxation. Although it was very organized, it helped me in discovering that this is not what I wanted to work in.” (Lamia, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Career exploration is very important for students to spot on the fields that they might like to pursue careers in. Lamia was very clear in her explanation of the benefits of attending such exploration career sessions. Even though this session was organized with a multinational company, she was able to discover that this is not the field that she would like to work in. These educational sessions work on expanding the students’ horizon on different career fields available in the job market. It gets them in touch with the professional world and gives them the reality check of what is there in the world outside school and university premises. Mona emphasized that the main advantage of career services is availing for the students a room to experiment before graduation.

*“This can be done through job shadowing visits or career talks or networking of any sort during career education events where they get in touch with professionals who have been doing such careers for years and years and it is a chance for them to really get the real life insights from a professional who is not just sharing facts or general assumptions about these careers but have tried these careers and experience it firsthand for years. They can really give them the essence of their experience when they advise*

*them on how to go around choices or how to either stick to the choices or rule out choices that they decided that they are not fit for them. It decreases confusion and increases their clarity on the path that they are deliberately want to pursue.” (Mona, Career Services Professional, April 2021)*

Connecting students with professionals in the job market is definitely insightful as the students can get inspired by these figures who genuinely and willingly share their stories and career tracks, and educate the students at the same time. Career services means career education that its base is built on increasing self-awareness, understanding what they are good at, what motivate them, what their strengths are, what interest them and what is there in the job market to be able to identify their directions and match it with what is suitable for them.

### **Courses for Career Development and Skills**

Career Centers differ in the type of services that they offer; however, they all hold the same purpose of guiding their students and preparing them for the world of work. The Career Centers hosted within Egyptian public universities have been established through a fund given by the USAID-funded project. Part of this fund was dedicated to offer courses in different career tracks to all enrolled students who are interested in career services. There is a basic course for all the students called the employability skills course. Each student has the option to choose another course to take that is specialized in a certain career field including but is not limited to customer service, entrepreneurship, marketing and sales. Roba, who is a senior student majoring in faculty of commerce at a public university, shared her experience with one of the courses offered by the Center where she focused on two career objectives to pursue opportunities in after graduation.

*“One course was related to skills and it helped me in focusing my career goals. My first goal is related to my interest in economics as I got excellent in my accumulative score in the past two years so, I am thinking maybe I should teach at the university after I finish. My second goal is to work in HR if I do not achieve my first goal. It was part of the course to set and focus on a number of objectives to decide on your career goals and directions.” (Roba, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Courses offered by the Center not only build the knowledge of the students in certain fields but also work on their skills and encourage them to set their career goals. Roba explained that she developed her soft skills through the employability skills course and set her career goals. She described her career aspirations and objectives for teaching at the university since she is a high achiever student as well as setting another career goal in case, she could not achieve the first goal. This is part of the career planning process discussed earlier in the conceptual framework **Figure 1** where career services professionals encourage students to set and focus on two to three career objectives to pursue and work in after graduation. These objectives can be relevant or irrelevant to their majors but the student has gained knowledge and experience in before graduation.

Another aspect of offering courses is developing the students' knowledge, information and awareness in specific career fields of their interests to be prepared for the job market. Roba also described her experience in discovering her hidden abilities of leadership and managing a team through the entrepreneurial course she took at her university's Career Center.

*"I learnt about my skills through the entrepreneurship course where I worked with different teams at different times. In the last class of the course, I realized that I can be a good leader and speaker through the feedback I received from my teammates. I did not know this about myself before." (Roba, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Honing and developing students soft and career related skills seem to be part of the Career Center at the public university where they dedicate time, efforts and resources to build the capacity of their students before graduation. As mentioned, Roba was interested in managing her own business which encouraged her to take the entrepreneurial course offered by the Center and along the way, she also discovered her untapped talents and realized it through the feedback she received from her teammates. She elaborated that she understood that employers no longer look for high scores but instead look more for developed skills and that's why they may ask in

their interviews about student involvement in extracurricular activities as a sign for owning the skills needed in the job market. She herself tried to seize every opportunity to grow and develop.

### **Experiential Learning**

It is with no surprise that the students not only need to explore but also to experience work early on to build knowledge and be better prepared. Self-awareness is key in the process of planning for their future. Reham narrated the experience she got through an internship that she landed in a field that she did not think about before and how this experience shifted her career focus.

*“Before I landed the internship in cyber security, my goal was focusing on machine learning and deep learning and took many online courses to be better fit for this area but through the Career Center and the internship I landed in cyber security, my focus expanded to cyber security because it is more exciting for me. The Career Center was helpful because I was never going to think of cyber security and apply if I did not land this internship.” (Reham, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Internships give the students hands-on experience and also work on building students’ knowledge but sometimes it even challenged their mindset. Reham described her experience where the Career Center announced an internship opportunity that she would not have think about before but through this experience, she explored a field that she was ignoring. After her internship, she realized that this is a field that she felt excited about and would consider for her future career. The learning that the students get in the real world adds a complementary and practical education that they would not get in the classroom.

Another interesting program that is offered through the Career Center at the elite non-profit university is the work study. This program offers the students opportunities to work on campus in different offices whether academic or non-academic to develop their skills, acquire knowledge and gain pocket money. May thought that the work study program is the most effective program offered by the Career Center. She shared her input on the program and how it helped in developing her personality.

*“The Work Study program in general gave me a sense of commitment because I had certain tasks to do and in a specific timing. It depended on the place where I worked so*

*it developed certain career related skills. In the Career Center, I developed my presentation skills, communication skills and team building related skills. In the office of Student Well-being, I learnt the email etiquette, commitment and responsibility towards the students assigned to me. In the Philosophy department, I helped them to build organizational system on Excel so it was more of a technical job. So I got different experiences that I will use later on in my job.” (May, 23 years old, April 2021)*

Work opportunities whether internship or part-time jobs are needed now more than ever. With the competition available in the job market, students need to test the real world and be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, gain knowledge early on to be prepared with all the skills needed to penetrate the job market and succeed. When the students start engaging in work, they would realize what kind of work environments they would fit in. They would know about the real life roles rather than just imagining them or relying on what they hear from their friends. Being in a work setting would help them identify the roles that they are interested in or the ones that they are not interested in and also develop their professionalism and acquire the right attitude to convey in a professional set-up.

### **7.1.2 Tools for Raising Students Awareness about the Job Market**

Awareness about the job market does not come without exposure. That is why Career Centers prepare students early on through different programs and career events. The first aim of these activities might not be exposure to the job market but it comes by product since the students get connected and network with professionals and employers; thus, they get a glimpse of what the job market offers and gain knowledge about it. Dora, who is the data and information specialist and also manages a group of students leaders to promote career services at the public university’s Career Center, explained that the challenges that students face before graduation lay in lack of experience, knowledge and expectations that need to be changed.

*“The students lack practical experience and totally rely on a bachelor degree in a very competitive labor market. Academic background is only related to expanding the knowledge and awareness of the student in a specific field and not in what the job market needs. They also lack knowledge of the most effective techniques that save time*



*and efforts in searching for jobs and have unrealistic expectations with regards to work conditions, salaries, etc.” (Dora, Career Services Professional, May 2021)*

Dora considers career services as the basic foundation for preparing the students to the job market as they equip them with required tools and techniques, and avail for the students opportunities to witness what the job market needs and can offer for them. Career Services train students on effective job search tools to shorten the duration of their transition from university to work, and set manageable expectations to decrease the shock that they might endure with this new phase. Mariam who is a senior student studying applied arts and sciences and specialized in graphic design at the private university shared her first encounter with the job market through the employment fair that her university’s Career Center organizes every year.

*“I attended the employment and start-up fair where they gathered businesses, companies and start-ups in one place. In the opening of the event, they gave us a brief talk on what companies are available and what do they offer. They also availed brochure for each company that they distributed so it was easy to reach them if we decided on who to meet with.” (Mariam, 22 years old, April 2021)*

Employment fair is a recognized recruitment event known by students everywhere. It is the most classic and bigger recruitment event that universities’ Career Centers organize by inviting employers to participate and offer career opportunities. The fact that universities in Egypt whether private, non-profit or public are organizing job fairs, it means that they are making it easier for their students and graduates to get access to the job market, and gain knowledge about it before they graduate. The same idea resonated with Rania who is a senior student studying accounting at the public university:

*“Through the fair, I saw many companies that I did know before so, my awareness expanded more.” (Rania, 21 years old, April 2021)*

It seems that there is an unanimous agreement across different universities that the employment fair is one of the main sources of getting closer to the job market and understanding what it needs. Youssef who is a graduating senior student studying media engineering and technology

at the private university also agreed that the fair as well as the booklet of the fair provided him with this closer look at the job market.

*“The Center helped me gain knowledge about the job market through the Employment Fair. I was able to see and review jobs relevant to my field in the fair booklet. I was able to know what does the HR requires in terms of qualifications. For instance, I learnt at university, as a CS Engineer, the Java language; however, the job market requires different languages such as Native or advanced HTML. The scope of work is different and it is not hard to cope with what is required in the market but it needs different things than what is learnt at university. So more awareness about what is needed in the job market.” (Youssef, 23 years old, April 2021)*

The employment fair booklet is very useful source of information on what is needed in the job market. Youssef highlighted its importance in reviewing what type of jobs are available and what requirements are needed for each job. He was able to identify the up-to-date computer languages needed in the market that, to his surprise, were not taught at his university. He appreciated the opportunity he got to know that before he graduates and increased his awareness about what the job market needs. The fair booklet is a useful resource because it is not only giving information about the job market but also availing internship and career opportunities that he was able to apply to at the fair.

Another way of gaining knowledge about the job market is through the board of job announcements whether it is available through an online system, emails or newsletters. Mariam also highlighted the benefits of receiving emails with internship or job announcements from her Career Center.

*“They sent emails for internships. I applied to many of them, and landed an internship. These emails included the companies that were offering internships and collaborated with the office to announce it. These emails were targeted by major and class level to facilitate the process.” (Mariam, 22 years old, April 2021)*

This service of availing internship opportunities for students is valuable because the student can receive emails and apply to internships from the comfort of his/her home. Career Centers usually deal with established employers – those who have legal existence where they present their legal documents such as commercial registry and tax classification to the Centers before

they use their services and/or access their career portals. Hence, Career Centers try as much as they can to preserve the rights of their students before they graduate to apply and work at these corporations by asking for their legal papers once they start interacting with them. Career Centers also usually announce and reveal the names of organizations seeking to hire their graduates, and guarantee the confidentiality of their alumni's data. Moreover, Mariam appreciated the fact that she receive targeted emails with internships relevant to her class level and major, and was also able to land one of these internships to fulfill the internship requirement set for her university degree. The same service was also implemented by the Career Center at the elite non-profit university as Lamia explained:

*“By just looking at the jobs announced on the system, I was able to identify what is relevant and what is not relevant to me.” (Lamia, 21 years old, April 2021)*

In addition, other Career Centers offered courses to prepare their students for the job market and part of these courses focused on raising their awareness about what to expect after graduation. Hassan who is a senior student studying accounting in the public university emphasized the importance of taking the skills course to know about the job market.

*“The Center made a difference for me especially the employability skills course because I did not know anything about the job market earlier but now, I feel that the road is open for me. Now I know what I want to do and what my vision is.” (Hassan, 22 years old, April 2021)*

These offered courses develop the skills of the students as well as prepare them for the job market. Hassan expressed his experience about his involvement with the Career Center and how this has helped him in knowing what he wants to do and what the job market needs before he graduates.

Another important point is that the Career Center explains for the students how to search for jobs and where they should pursue career opportunities. Thus, it guides them in their paths to find the right jobs. Adam who is a senior student studying management in the public university expressed his opinion about his Career Center guidance of how to search for jobs.

*“The Center educated me that there are different types of work and each job has certain requirements and way to deliver the work. The Center helped me to know that there are websites to apply on for different jobs. I need to prepare and gain knowledge of what is required for different jobs. It organizes the job fair that makes it easier to have access to different companies. It gave me a different and wider perspective on the job market.”*  
(Adam, 21 years old, April 2021)

The confidence that the students feel after getting involved with the Career Center gives them an edge in the job market as expressed by Adam who appreciated the efforts done by the staff at his university’s Career Center. This has given him a broader outlook on the job market and equipped him with knowledge and tools to maneuver the job search and application process. This is also complemented by other services that the Center offers to prepare the students for different types of interviews, and inform them about how to dress and behave in an interview.

Moreover, some Career Centers organize educational sessions and visits by employers to get the industry closer to the students. Ahmed emphasized the importance of these sessions in understanding a specific career field through the lens of a professional who shares his/her story with the students.

*“The Center organized information sessions where they get professionals to talk about the industry or the company itself and KPI of the company. These sessions were called ‘A Day in the Life of’ where the professionals talked about how their working day goes from A – Z.”* (Ahmed, 23 years old, April 2021)

Sharing a personal story and talking about a specific career field is very relevant and impactful for the students. These types of sessions are not only educational but also touch upon the personal connection that is built out of encountering a professional person. It gives room for genuine conversation between the students and the professional presenting the session, and allows an opportunity for the students to ask all the questions that they might have and related to a career field and working life. Ahmed explained how these sessions gave him the perspective he was looking for in terms of understanding how a professional in a career field of his interest acts and performs on a daily basis. The same idea was shared by May who also

agreed on the importance of such educational sessions to understand what a professional does in his/her day-to-day job.

*“I think that one of the programs that helped me in particular is the job shadowing program. If I was interested to pursue a career in marketing; however, marketing is a big industry. When I go on a visit and shadowed an employer for one full-day, to see what they are doing, and ask questions I needed that was very important to me.” (May, 23 years old, April 2021)*

This type of career exploration programs remains very important in expanding the horizon of the students about the job market. May shared her experience on this program that gave her access to an employer relevant to her field of study and interest. Since she is looking to work in this field, employer’s visit made her think that this is a priceless experience.

Finally, in their path to learn about the job market, students realize that the role their Career Center plays may not be complete due to the fact that the job market challenges them in creating job opportunities that suit everybody and every major taught at the university level. Ahmed expressed his opinion about the issue.

*“The Career Center helps in connecting the students with employers. That is one of the goals. Sometimes, students’ majors do not have demand from the employers or the employer does not need a big number in his/her company. It is on the job market and not the Career Center to avail opportunities for instance for the arts students compared to business students. The Center would not have a hand to offer career opportunities to undemanding majors. I think that the job market is not offering enough opportunities to serve all the majors out there.” (Ahmed, 23 years old, April 2021)*

Availing career opportunities to all the majors offered at universities is one of the challenges facing Career Centers. As Ahmed explained clearly that this lays in the hands of employers and not the Career Centers. It actually requires a policy that enables linking majors offered at university level to the job market so that graduates of different majors and degrees find suitable career opportunities after graduation.

## 7.2 Career Services Help Students Get Ready for the Job Market through Skills Development

One of the main goals of Career Centers is to prepare students for the transition from higher education to the job market. The tools that the Centers use are most likely similar where they support their students in knowing themselves, exploring careers options, testing or experiencing these options to making informed career decisions and learning how to search for jobs. These steps are combined with knowledge and skills for writing good resumes and presenting themselves well in interviews. Students participating in the study expressed their perceptions on the different services offered by their Career Centers and specifying the services that better prepared them to penetrate the job market as illustrated in step 3 in **Figure 2**.

### Resume Writing and Interview Preparation

First, students explained that the skill of writing their resumes and getting evaluation or feedback afterwards was valuable. They also appreciated the counseling appointments because it gave them the opportunity to express all their career related concerns and getting answers for it. Ahmed expressed his input on offered services at his Career Center.

*“The most useful service at the Career Center is resume critique and cover letter because I am applying to many multinational companies that require these in their application process. Another useful service is the career planning session or 1:1 session with career advisors.” (Ahmed, 23 years old, April 2021)*

A resume is not just a document of where a person has studied and worked. It is more of a professional document that shows one’s achievements and successes. A resume must be presentable and reflective of a person. To have a good resume that sells, it needs to be well-written, consistent and following specific format. That is why Career Centers staff take the time to teach their students how to write good resumes and assist them in reviewing, critiquing and giving them recommendations to improve it. Lamia also agreed on the importance of resume writing:

*“I think at the very early days when I was Freshman, I used to go for my resume critique. It is very good that they encourage you to have your resume from your first year in college, you start working on it and you have this awareness from the very beginning. They help you with organizing it, what kind of skills and how to highlight your skills and what skills you might want to work on later so by the time you graduate, you already have them.” (Lamia, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Resume writing is a skill that the student develops at the Career Center, and it assists him/her throughout his/her career journey to continue presenting himself/herself well on paper. The fact that Career Centers put time and efforts to develop this skill in their students is impressive as they indirectly assist them all lifelong. Career Centers also work on developing their students interviewing skills to be better prepared for the next phase. Adam shared his experience:

*“Other courses that we took focused on resume writing, and interview preparation and etiquette of how to present yourself in an interview.” (Adam, 21 years old, April 2021)*

These services of resume writing, cover letter and interview preparation come into two forms either through workshops organized by the Centers’ staff, and presented by employers or themselves. This can also happen individually through one-on-one appointment between a career advisor and a student where the former gives the latter individual personalized feedback. The Career Center at the private university has also availed LinkedIn review to assist their students better present themselves on this online professional platform. All the Centers also organized mock interviews where they invite graduating students to practice and simulate interviews with employers to hone their interviewing skills, and receive constructive feedback directly from the employers. Dora shared that career services assist the students to feel confident about their abilities when they have ready resumes and receive interview training.

*“It boosts the students self-confidence, when they are ready with a well-written resume to attract employers and well-trained to nail work interviews. Career Services alert the students that they need to start developing their skills and experiences from their freshmen year in college, and not to wait after graduation and find out that their experiences are zero. It plants the idea of self-learning in the students; we avail some websites that help them do so and make sure that they understand the importance of research on what they lack.” (Dora, Career Services Professional, May 2021)*



Career services establish in students the love for learning and developing, and avail for them venues and opportunities to connect with professionals from the field to break the fear, and expand their networking channels. It also builds the students' self-confidence in themselves and their abilities to be able to search for jobs, land in good opportunities and gain experience.

### **Employability Skills**

Second, the Career Center at the public university created a course called 'Employability Skills Course' to develop the students' soft skills before graduation. Hassan shared his experience and feedback on the content of the course.

*"The employability skills course focused on developing our personalities. It helped us recognize what we want to do in the job market and specialize in so, each one knows how to deal with customers and everyone else, how to be a good leader, how to work in a team, how to decide on a vision. It asked me all the questions I should have asked myself since I was little to decide on my goal." (Hassan, 22 years old, April 2021)*

The employability skills course seems to be a comprehensive course that teaches the students soft skills needed in the job market including teamwork, communication skills and leadership skills. It also highlighted the importance of self-awareness which is the starting point in the career planning process as in **Figure 2** and from which all the other parts follow. Adam also described the course and his input on the learning he got out of it.

*"The employability skills training focuses on developing our soft skills, how to deal with people whether your supervisor, colleagues or those reporting to you in the workplace. It helps you to learn how to cope with stress. It gives you basic skills to work and it is one of the very important courses we took." (Adam, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Participating students explained that the employability skills course is the foundation course that everyone takes and then each student takes another course of his/her choice as s/he would like to specialize whether entrepreneurship, HR, marketing, sales, etc. The employability skills course prepares students with soft skills that they may not develop through their studies at university. Through the conversation, it seemed that the course worked on developing the students' communication skills, interpersonal skills, how to cope with stress, how to present



themselves, setting career goals and character building. Adam also wished to have the courses back offline rather than online as he missed the human face-to-face interaction because the Career Center is operating virtually in the time being. Taking care of training before graduation is a step that has been required for a long time to combat the problem of skills mismatch discussed earlier in the literature review. Thus, students graduate prepared for the job market as well as informed and having managed expectations with reduced confusion and overwhelming feelings.

Dina who is studying at faculty of commerce in the public university also expressed the value of specialized courses offered by her Career Center before graduation.

*“The Center offered good courses and gave certificates for it that if I have taken them outside the university, I would have paid a fee. The variety of courses suit my future career and my personality and provided me with knowledge. The employability skills course also developed so many things in me.” (Dina, 21 years old, April 2021)*

These courses opened the door for the students to gain knowledge in a field of their choice beside their studies that they may have taken it out of scores rather than out of interest. I believe that this is an interesting way of serving their students and managing their needs for skills development and building knowledge in fields of their interests. Dina also hoped to have the courses back offline where they would spend longer time in training versus and cover more comprehensive material unlike the shorter version in the virtual mode.

Another important aspect of the employability skills course is that the students learnt how to set goals for their future careers. The Center not only worked on assisting students to acquire skills but also helped them in their career planning process by focusing on setting career goals. Hassan described his experience in setting his career goals:

*“I learnt that I should decide on two goals for myself in case one did not work, the other one works. My first objective is to work in accounting which I really like as a field that I was convinced to study by choice and not based on my high school score. I am also thinking of working in marketing because my part-time job is in marketing. My third objective is to work in customer service.” (Hassan, 22 years old, April 2021)*

The third step in the career planning process focuses on setting career goals as in **Figure 2** and that is why part of the employability skills course covers career objectives. It encourages the students to list a number of goals for themselves of where they would like to work so that by the time they graduate, they have a clear vision of what they want to do next in life. By setting career goals, this means that students have developed increased self-awareness and clear career interests to be able to have clear goals. Through the conversations with the students studying at the public university, it became clearer that the employability skills course covers all the steps in the career planning process starting with self-awareness, passing by exploring options, getting focused career objectives and finally learning job search tools.

Moreover, one of the roles of Career Centers is availing networking venues for their students with professionals, employers, the industry and anything related to the job market. Career Centers tend to do this through organizing massive event such as the employment fair. Other Centers started to organize other specialized events. The Employability Skills Conference is an event organized by the Career Center at the elite non-profit university that aimed to prepare their students for the world of work. Ahmed expressed his opinion about it:

*“The Employability Skills Conference is one of the most important conferences that happened in the university because it is basically transitioning the students from university life to career life. It shows them what are the skills needed, they bring professionals from everywhere to talk about what are the skills required, how to work and develop.” (Ahmed, 23 years old, April 2021)*

Preparation for the job market before graduation is a key function of Career Centers. This specialized event is organized once a year and serve senior and graduating senior students so that the focus is on developing and benefiting them. It consist of a series of talks and workshops that stimulate students thinking of what is coming next in their lives. Sessions topics included how to act in your first year on the job, your major does not dictate your career, your legal rights, and workshops designed for skills development such as leadership skills, communication

skills, interviewing skills, delivering your elevator pitch and design thinking. May also agreed with Ahmed on the importance of the conference.

*“My favorite experience was the Employability Skills Conference. There were several sessions and the content of these sessions was not easy to get outside the conference. One of the sessions was related to legal rights and the contract, and what to look at before signing a contract with an employer as we are not even taught such information in any courses at the university. It is so much related to our graduation stage and very essential and we would not have known on our own.” (May, 23 years old, April 2021)*

Students favor anything that is tailored and related to their needs and the stage that they are in. Several students, if not all of them, acknowledged the importance of the employability skills course or the employability conference, and how it is needed with its comprehensive and timely material offered. Both options gave the students information related to the next stage of their lives. Information is powerful because if someone knows what is needed from him/her and understands what are his/her rights and responsibilities, s/he can have clear expectations and commitment to the work that s/he will do and succeed in his/her career.

### **Specialized Network**

An interesting idea that the Center at the elite non-profit university implemented was creating a small group or community of students with similar career interests. Lamia shared her experience with the Consulting Network established by her university’s Career Center.

*“It is really helping us in preparing for the case interviews. I am aiming to have a better job offer from Mckinsey or Bain. It helped in connecting me with other students who want to do the same thing. Students who got job offers or interned in one of the consulting firms gave us insights and tips and tricks to ace the case interviews.” (Lamia, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Management consulting firms have certain requirements for screening, selection and recruitment. They usually request consulting resumes and cover letters, and conduct case interviews where they give an interviewee business cases to solve with different interviewers. This specialized type of recruitment also requires specialized preparation. This Career Center seized the opportunity of having graduates who are interning or working in management

consulting firms to prepare other students interested in the field. Lamia, who already got a job offer before graduation in a financial services multinational company, is planning to work in a management consulting firm in the near future. That is why she was interested in joining the consulting network to prepare for her next job. This also resonated with Ahmed who had the same interests in consulting.

*“The network made it easier for me to connect with those who are working in the same industry or interested in the field like me. They organized sessions and helped us know how the industry operates, how to prepare for the interviews, how to study for the case interview or business case interview. They also connected us with others to practice case interviews. It was really beneficial.” (Ahmed, 23 years old, April 2021)*

Connecting people with same interests is empowering as it gives both parties the opportunity to share and exchange knowledge. It also gave students room to practice together and master the skills needed to pass the selection and recruitment process for consulting interviews. This effort is admirable and worthy of every appreciation given by the students whom I interviewed. It also comes under the preparation phase needed to penetrate this type of competitive job.

### **Specialized Courses**

Training courses offered by the Career Center at the public university offers a variety of options for students to choose from and gain knowledge. These courses availed the opportunity to develop the students’ soft skills along the way because they interacted with other colleagues attending the courses. Adam expressed his opinion on the benefits he got from attending the training courses.

*“The courses were very good. It helped me in dealing with people professionally and personally in life and not only focused on career development. These are skills that help in general and later on in your career. It gives you an outer view of the work life. My viewpoint about work was limited. The Center educated me that there are different types of work and each job has certain requirements and way to deliver the work.” (Adam, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Learning and development is an ongoing process. Educational system that is linked to memorizing and learning to pass the exam only, limits students’ capacity and passion for

learning. I believe that if the aim of these courses was just to restore this ability in younger generation, this would be very helpful for a brighter future of our country. Adam described his takeaways from the courses and how he learnt to deal with people professionally. It also helped him develop a broader perspective on the job market and its needs.

Another important aspect is learning how to work in a team. Rania explained that during the courses she took, students were asked to work in a team which is essential in modern times in the competitive job market.

*“I think that the courses are the most effective service where we used to collaborate as a team in any given course to deliver a project at the end. We brainstormed and worked together.” (Rania, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Sometimes, working in a team can be hard. Educational institutions can develop this asset in their students by giving them teamwork projects. However, this may be neglected in social sciences within public universities. Since the students practiced teamwork during these training courses, they will surely develop the skill before they graduate, and be able to work in teamwork settings. Rania appreciated offered courses by her university’s Career Center as she became motivated to work within a team and acknowledged the impact of these courses on her life.

### **7.3 Career Centers Avail Opportunities for Students to Build Connections and Develop their Careers**

#### **Access to Internship Opportunities**

One of the valuable resources that the Career Centers offers is building connections with the professional world and getting the job market closer to students. This happens through different mediums whether job announcements, internship opportunities or career events as illustrated in step 4 in **Figure 2**. Ahmed shared his internship experiences that he landed through the Career Center and how these internships provided him with professional learnings.

*“I got to work on humongous tasks. It was an eye opener. It showed me the difference between the academic and corporate life. It is not always that what you learn is what*

*you are going to use in real life. I learned how to have perseverance, how to have patience with the clients, how to utilize your problem solving and analytical skills to solve problems.” (Ahmed, 23 years old, April 2021)*

The importance of internship lays in the practical learnings that the student absorbs out of the experience. As Ahmed mentioned, this internship opportunity was related to his field of study in a multinational company. He learnt to have patience with the clients and used his analytical and problem solving skills. This type of work even for a shorter duration provides reality check for the student of how the work setting looks like and what to expect in this type of work. He has also shared the learnings he got in his second internship and the life lessons he grasped through this experience. This internship opportunity was in a local management consulting firm and he took it because he had an interest in the field and wanted to build experience in it.

*“I learned life lessons in terms you are going to have quarrels with the clients. You are going to have dissimilarities or things you are not going to agree on. You always need to find a common ground. You always have to deal with your co-workers or your manager. You always need to have patience, and make your voice heard.” (Ahmed, 23 years old, April 2021)*

These experiences seemed to give Ahmed life learnings and not only job related learnings which is insightful for a young man to know before embarking on his long career journey. The same thought was shared by May who also landed two internships through the Career Center. One of them was in the Ministry of Public Business Sector for one month. She shared that this was not directly related to her major concentration; however, she wanted to explore the public sector early on before graduation. She appreciated the fact that the Center facilitated the process for the interns in terms of communication and coordination with the Ministry.

*“I wanted to explore this field because I took a couple of courses in the subject and I had theoretical knowledge but did not have any practical experience in real life. Even though it was a virtual internship, the coordination between the students and the Ministry was through the Center so, it facilitated the process. When we faced a problem, we communicated with the representative at the Career Center.” (May, 23 years old, April 2021)*

The facilitator role that the Career Center plays, was highly appreciated by the student. These Centers usually solicit career opportunities, announce them and prepare their students with tools to do job search and present themselves well in interviews. They only intervened to facilitate the process for the students but do not place them in jobs as the students will need to do part of the work to land the positions of their interest.

Another interesting opportunity that May got was an international virtual internship with a company in India. International exposure is one of the advantages that the students enjoy at the elite non-profit university as part of its strategic plan to promote internationalization. It is with no surprise that the students also get international internship opportunities. May elaborated that she would not have thought of doing an international internship except when she saw an announcement about it on the Center's career portal.

*"I did a six-month internship virtually with the time difference and in another country and culture. This was a marketing internship so it was related to my major. The overall experience was very beneficial and educational." (May, 23 years old, April 2021)*

It is amazing how young people can enjoy priceless experiences through their Career Center's connections and communication. May also appreciated that when she faced some difficulties with the employer, the Career Center staff were very helpful in assisting her to overcome and solved the issue with the employer. Moreover, Mona explained that the Career Center fosters the learning of their students because it helps them develop a real view on the outer world.

*"The ones who have tried career services, at least they have got glimpses of this reality check even if it is not that intense, but still they have got bits and pieces of it by trying things out such as experiential programs either by doing internships or expanding their networks and talking to people who really give them a better reflection of what is out there. All this manages their expectations on what is happening in their next phase. They graduate understanding that job search is a process and it takes time. They are more deliberate about it and also more patient about it so that they would eventually land opportunities that they are seeking and are keen about it." (Mona, Career Services Professional, April 2021)*

The Career Center facilitates availability of opportunities for internships, jobs and networking but it is in the students' hands to seek and make use out of it. If they seize these opportunities,

they definitely end up having a clear understanding of the job search process and what it takes to land their long awaited jobs. The other scenario would be that the students who did not use career services and have low self-awareness or lack awareness about their interests, they might feel less satisfied or shocked when they face the outer world. They might also fell in the trap of applying to every job they find without focusing on certain career directions. Thus, instead of owning the process, they go with the flow.

In addition, I think that having an internship requirement to finish higher education degree is an advantage. The Career Center at the private university assisted its students to land internships that were relevant to their majors and class level to fulfill this requirement. Joseph who is a senior student studying mechatronics described his experience with the Center where they assisted him in taking two internship opportunities to complete the three months internship required for his major.

*“The Center facilitated the process for me to complete my internship requirement because they are in charge of internship.” (Joseph, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Joseph also explained that after the internship, students are required to submit a completion report to the Center and get their approval. Mariam who is also studying at the same university shared a similar story. She landed her internship through the Center’s targeted email blasts at a start-up company to fulfill her internship requirement. Through our conversation, I got to know that the company selected her because of her knowledge of certain design software that the company needed to complete the delivery of their projects.

*“I joined the team because they were looking for a person with good InDesign skills which I have. When I was doing the interview, they told me that this is a privilege because most of them are marketers who don’t have background about InDesign so I will help them.” (Mariam, 22 years old, April 2021)*

The idea that the intern not only learns and works but also adds value to the place where s/he is working is exciting. Mariam elaborated that she was working on preparing, designing and delivering clients’ presentations. She also gained knowledge that her job was part of a



department called the strategic department which she did not know about it before the internship. She expressed that her idea of work division within a marketing agency was clearer after her internship. Although she was still a student, she felt as part of the company's team who worked on delivering the final product to the clients.

Moreover, experiencing internships assist the students in deciding the type and field of work that they would like to work in after graduation. Reham also landed an internship in cyber security through an announcement on her Center's career portal. She admired the type of work she did in her internship and thought of pursuing it after graduation.

*"It was very useful in identifying the career I want to be engaged in and the skills needed to work in this field to be the right fit for the job. They offered an intensive training about technical skills and touched base on the soft skills needed in the work life."*  
(Reham, 21 years old, April 2021)

Having an enriching internship experience expands the students' career aspirations as well as gives them a work to look forward to do in the near future. Reham elaborated that the internship was full of trainings in this new untapped field for her and that is why she discovered her passion for the field. Getting to know new field of work, division of work among a team, handle a load of real work, and familiarize themselves with the work settings before graduation is beneficial for both the students and their potential employers.

### **Access to Job and Networking Opportunities**

It is with no surprise that these established Career Centers focus on getting the job market closer to their students and that is why they have career portals that they use to announce current available job vacancies in different fields and industries. Several participants in the study mentioned the importance of their Centers' career portals in knowing about vacant jobs and internships. Lamia mentioned that she was able to land a job offer through the career portal before her graduation.

*"I got a job offer through the Center's career portal at Mastercard."* (Lamia, 21 years old, April 2021)

Career Centers are resourceful and work on soliciting internship and career opportunities for students through their connections and relationships with employers. Lamia explained that the career portal is very important because this is where all the job announcements are placed and students can get access to all recent job vacancies and directly apply through the site or if the employer prefers direct application, employer website's link is available to apply. She also elaborated that she always receives emails on weekly basis from her Career Center which she really likes. These emails are directed as the student moves from one year to the next at his/her university. They make sure it is targeted.

The same thought was shared with other students at the private university where their Career Centers put efforts in sending targeted email blasts with internship and job opportunities to students. Mariam described how she got to know about the recent available internships.

*"I think the filtered emails is the most effective because instead of accessing the server and see all the opportunities, it is very much easier. Personally, I will not be interested to go through all the list of jobs/internships announced and see if each job requirements fits for me. Specified emails by major and class level for each student is much easier."* (Mariam, 22 years old, April 2021)

These Centers' staff do not save any efforts for the sake of students who were appreciating that the Centers not only solicit internships and jobs but also facilitate the process by sending targeted email blasts with opportunities relevant to each class level and major. Hence, students can only check the opportunities and apply if interested.

Another source for career opportunities is the employment fair. Career Centers seek to organize this type of recruitment event to avail networking as well as recruitment opportunities for students. May who attended several employment fairs saw that the event is the most effective event that the Center organizes.

*"The most effective event was the Employment Fair because as a student I was able to apply to job or internship and at the same time, because it was a full-day, I got enough time to talk to different employers. Also, sometimes there were companies that I did not hear or know about it before but when I know them, I was becoming aware of them and might be interested to apply to and work with them."* (May, 23 years old, April 2021)

The event gives students the opportunity to have a broader look at the job market, getting to know established companies, and involve with the professionals presenting these companies at the fair. This is a networking venue because sometimes students are able to land internships that are not announced in the fair booklet but out of their communication with participating employers, they are able to present themselves well and get internship offers.

Other interesting educational event for connecting students with the professional world is the Career Day organized by the Center at the elite non-profit university. This event gives the opportunity for the students to explore different career options, talk to professionals and ask them questions about their career paths and industry related questions. Lamia shared her experience with the event where she got access to professionals in an organization that she was interested in.

*“The Career Day used to be very insightful and very useful because I was able to seek representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and consulting companies that I was interested in so, I found it useful.” (Lamia, 21 years old, April 2021)*

May shared the same feelings and described the event beneficial for asking all the questions related to career directions and requirements.

*“We asked the professionals not only industry related questions but also career related questions in the sense if I want to pursue this specific career, what should I do.” (May, 23 years old, April 2021)*

Questions that seem very specific to a certain career field is better to be asked to a professional in the field because s/he would be the best person to talk to as s/he would be aware of what is happening in the field, how to start a career in this field and how to gain knowledge and grow within the field or get prepared to join this field. Networking and connection with professionals in a field of interest cannot be matched with reading a textbook or hearing about it from other people who may or may not have experienced this field before.

## Access to Career Development Courses

Career development courses are opportunities for students in the public university to gain knowledge in fields of their interests through the coordination of the Career Center. Roba who was interested in starting her own business, chose the entrepreneurship course and got motivated to pursue her dream.

*“I was already thinking of starting my own business but undecided about the idea of the project. I was good at teaching others and delivering information so, I decided to open a nursery. I attended the course at the Center, prepared a feasibility study and interned at a place. Because of the coronavirus, I postponed my project for the time being.” (Roba, 21 years old, April 2021)*

These specialized courses assist students to get started with careers of their interests and motivate them to work on the projects from day one at the course as Dina shared her story of dreaming to establish her own business, and prepared a feasibility study. She was also wise in postponing the opening of her business in the time being so that she does not lose her money, and make sure there will be a return on investment that the circumstances would not avail at the time. Similar story was shared by Dina who also would like to establish her own business.

*“I would like to start my own business and what motivated me was the marketing course I took in the Center because they assigned us to work on a real project from the start till the end, starting with the idea, its name till we market the project.” (Dina, 21 years old, April 2021)*

What is inspiring is not only providing the students with resources of information but also motivating them to think big and work early on their career aspirations. Dina is an example of a young woman who owns her career development process. She is in the driving seat of her career, empowered by knowledge and encouraged to start her business; sooner or later she will definitely do. The excitement that these young people have is hopeful and promising.

## Continuous Connections

Career Centers avail educational and informational sessions by employers that are also a venue to network with employers from the industry and career of interests to the students. These

sessions may target students or graduates depending on the type of opportunities that employers are announcing to hold the sessions. Ahmed saw that these sessions were beneficial to him as a student.

*“In the career conversation sessions, you get to network with employers through these informational sessions to know more how the corporate life works.” (Ahmed, 23 years old, April 2021)*

These information sessions are usually held during a convenient time for the students to give them the opportunity to get engaged and network with employers. Through these sessions, employers can announce career opportunities that they offer, and explain the application and selection process as well as the requirements for vacant jobs. Other sessions are more general to cover a topic or career of interest to the students.

Connecting with the university’s Career Center can continue after graduation since the Centers are also offering services for graduates. Although the services might be limited to graduates than undergraduates, they are still opportunities for keeping the graduates connected to their university in one way or another. Lamia explained her view regarding the advantage of having a Career Center at her university. She saw that they provide continuous support to students even after graduation, and keep the connection to the job market consistent with what is new in terms of companies and jobs.

*“Having a career center is an essential part to any university. The Center continues to provide services even for alumni so, my connection with the university continues. It gives you an edge in the job market, and they connect you with potential employers and keep you updated with what is available in the field, new positions that you might not know of.” (Lamia, 21 years old, April 2021)*

Having a Career Center differentiates its students from other universities who might not have this advantage because they keep the students aware of what is happening in the job market. It avails for them resources and opportunities to know themselves, explore the market, get focused and search for jobs. Lamia elaborated that through her acquaintances, she knew that those who

studied abroad and came back home lost their connections with their universities' Career Centers and with it, they lost connection to a source of information to the job market.

## 8. Conclusion

Career Centers have become an integral part of educational institutions. They work on bridging the gap between university life and the job market; hence, facilitating students' transition from university to work. I believe that career education and programs are needed from the first day in university life because all the previous stages were leading to each other. Students would go through the typical stages of school system till they get their high school degrees and moving to higher education, and choosing a major from limited options. All of a sudden, students leave the limited options and go through a world of unknown where there are unlimited options and they are not necessarily sure how things would look like when it comes to their careers. Some graduates would decide to work in a place that is directly related to their majors following the typical path of a profession. Other students might figure out during their university years that they do not want to pursue a career related to their majors and this is where the importance of career services comes to help them better understand themselves. They cannot jump into choices without first increasing their self-awareness of what they are good at, what their strengths are, which work environment they would fit in and explore what is available in the job market to identify the direction that best suits them.

Career Centers work on equipping their students for what is going to happen in the job market. It raises their awareness about it, what is needed, what is not important and what are the skills needed. It works as an eye opener about what kind of job opportunities are available in the job market. It gives students exposure to what the companies need or require. They make it easier to apply to jobs through the Career Center's system. It decreases the confusion that a recent graduate might feel; hence, shortening the transition phase and saving time. If the students are interning or working while studying at the university, they recognize early on what are the most suitable jobs for them. It also gives them knowledge and understanding of what type of work they are going to do which differs than what they study at the university. Through

all this information, Career Center assists their students to start their career journeys. Since the job market is very competitive, Career Centers equip their students through workshops and/or courses to be prepared for it. Career Centers develop their students so that they are more aware of who they are and what they want to do.

Moreover, recent graduates may face challenges after university ends because the real world is totally different than what they are used to experience for more than 20 years of their lives. The main challenge would be to figure out how to start a career and how they would sustain this career or else decide to pursue graduate study first then join the workforce. When it comes to career decision making, it is more challenging than what they have expected. What will make a difference is whether this student has tried career services or not. If they did, then they have more awareness about themselves and got glimpses of the job market by doing internships or networking with professionals in the field and acquiring knowledge and understanding. If they did not utilize career services, they might apply to every job opportunity they find and feel disappointed because they have no plan or career direction to pursue.

Career services work on raising students' self-awareness about their interests, skills, values and strengths. Career advisors educate and support their students through counselling appointments and workshops for resume writing, interviews preparation, career planning, job search and assessments. They encourage students to pursue career exploration through researching different industry trends, employers, different career tracks and work environments. Career Centers connect their students to the job market through announcing internship and job opportunities, engaging them in activities planned by employers whether educational or informational, and organizing networking and employment events.

The main differences among the Centers were observed in additional services offered by one of them. With reference to the conceptual framework **Figure 1**, on the **career advising** side, the Center at the elite non-profit university offers choice of major session, assessments for



interests and personality such as SII and MBTI, cover letter writing and review, case interview preparation, info sessions by international universities, advising workshops in the classroom, and organizes the international graduate study fair. On the **career exploration** side, the Center at the public university develops students' soft skills and career related skills, and offers career related courses for marketing, customer service, HR, digital marketing, supply chain, entrepreneurship, sales, fintech as well as English course and English conversation sessions and seminars. The Center at the elite non-profit university organizes the consulting network and 'A Day in the Life of a Professional' program whereas the Center at the private university invites motivational speakers and researchers. For the **experiential learning programs**, the Center at the elite non-profit university offers work-study program and job shadowing program as well as CO-OP program to complement academic with real-life job training. For the **recruitment services**, the Center at the private university organizes alumni fair to gather alumni with students where they share their experience and knowledge. The Center at the elite non-profit university organizes campus recruitment week to avail recruitment opportunities for their graduating students. The Center at the public university hosts virtual recruitment days by employers. Programs offered by the Career Centers whether public, private or non-profit are versatile but not different from the core and basic skillset needed to be offered to young adults. These services assist them in understanding themselves and what is there in the market as well as experience and be prepared with needed skillset to enjoy a smooth transition to the job market.

All the students who participated in the study were satisfied and gave positive feedback about the services they experienced at their Career Centers whether they used a couple of services or have tried several services. Some of the students shared that through career services, they became more aware of their skills, interests, career goals and understood themselves better as conceptualized in the first quadrant of '**Know Yourself**' in **Figure 2**. The activities that gave

them this clarity were counselling appointments, assessments, educational and exploration sessions, employability skills course, work study and internships. Most of the students agreed that career services gave them clear vision on what they would see later in the job market, different employers, different type of jobs, and skills needed as abstracted in the second quadrant of **'Explore Options'** in **Figure 2**. It gave them exposure and provided them with reality checks; hence, they have clear expectations and understanding of the job search process. Moreover, all of the Career Centers work on developing students' skills in terms of resume writing, interviewing and job search as well as employability skills and preparation as conceptualized in the third quadrant of **'Get Focused'** in **Figure 2**. Some of the Centers offered career related courses for their students to gain knowledge in a specific career field or created specialized networks to gather students with similar interests to exchange information and motivate each other to prepare for this career field. Finally, most of the Career Centers opened the gateway for internship, networking and job opportunities as well as provided career development courses and continued the connection with their students even after graduation as hypothesized in the fourth quadrant of **'Action Plan'** in **Figure 2**.

When the students were asked about the most effective service that they utilized, the students studying at the private university agreed about the employment fair. While the students studying at the public university agreed that the training courses were the most effective service. Most of the students studying at the elite non-profit university agreed that the counseling appointments were the most effective service. Though the students had different views, they all agreed that Career Centers are extremely needed and they would not have imagined going through university and moving to the job market without the support of the Centers. They thought that the Career Centers differentiated them from other universities' graduates, gave them exposure to the job market requirements and offerings, and an edge in the competitive market.

Finally, researchers noticed that with the spread of coronavirus there is a decrease in the number of low paid jobs and an increase in high paid jobs which demands a higher skilled workforce suitable for these jobs. Young people are the most affected because they held these low paid and temp jobs (OECD, 2020). With social distancing taking place, researchers also thought that remote work may persist for a while with a hybrid mode of few days working at the office and other days working from home which can give workers more work-life balance and productivity as noted by some employers as well as less commuting and less office space. On the impact of Covid-19 on future workforce, researchers noted that there will be more demand in certain industries such as technology, science, engineering and healthcare as well as logistics. This is why the youth needs to concentrate on acquiring skills that assist them in joining these demanding businesses. Other needed skills involve social and emotional skills such as negotiation and decision-making. (Lund et al., 2021) Researchers indicated that Generation Z (those born between 1997 - 2015) shows preference to be entrepreneurs more than being employees as they seek non-traditional jobs and for this, they must develop resilience (Collins, 2016). Talent acquisition is also changing with employers focusing more on skills assessments rather than degrees, where some of them started to use career websites to match candidates with jobs by skills. Organizations are also adopting the new terms of agility and flexibility, and updating their management style so that they make better and quicker decisions. (Lund et al., 2021)

To conclude, Career Centers in Egyptian universities are providing their students with clarity about themselves and the job market, and equipping them with tools and techniques that facilitate their transition smoothly and effectively.

## Recommendations

The Career Centers involved in this study are putting a lot of efforts and doing great work with their students who have also raised a number of issues that triggered the following recommendations.

- First, I would recommend availing channels of communication between curriculum developers and the industry (Assaad & Barsoum, 2009) so that students from different majors may find relevant career opportunities in the job market. A couple of interviewed students expressed that they faced difficulty in finding relevant internships and companies willing to offer opportunities for them because of their major specialization. Moreover, making sure that the curriculum is updated regularly to suit the rapid advancement in technology. In general, Egypt needs to adopt curriculum enhancement into the educational system.
- Second, promote the idea of including career related activities into the classroom at university level to encourage students to seek career services and work on their career planning process early on (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Thus, integrating career into academics.
- Third, new established universities need to create Career Centers to serve and support their students' preparation. Earlier, I was assuming that all private universities in Egypt have Career Centers. After embarking on this study, I found out that a few private universities have established Career Centers. Even the ones with Career Centers, not all the students are aware of its existence which made it difficult to reach students in some private universities.
- Fourth, introducing career services into schools to increase awareness about the importance of career education and support the younger generation to discover their interests and raise their self-awareness so that their next move to university is easier and

the one that followed to the job market is smoother. This may also promote accessing university based on interests rather than scores only.

- Fifth, availability of information and resources about labor market outcome is needed and inevitable to guarantee that the workforce is aware of their rights, and increase transparency about companies or industry information and salary scale.
- Sixth, encouraging internships and summer training for all the students and provide employers with incentives to avail these opportunities.
- Finally, encouraging a culture of life-long learning especially among the youth because they are in a stage where they have passion for development and growth and they are the future of the country.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

**The list of questions for the youth is as follows:**

1. Please give me a brief background about yourself and your field of study/major.
2. What are the programs/services that you have been engaged with your university's career center?
3. How did your university's career center help in identifying your career interests?
4. Did you land any internship/job opportunity through your university's career center? How was your experience? What did you learn from it?
5. How do you think your university's career center prepared or supported you in identifying your future career/job?
6. How do you think your university's career center helped you in acquiring skills and/or knowledge needed in the job market?
7. From your point of view, what is the most effective service/program you have been engaged in with your university's career center?
8. What changes would you recommend to improve services offered by your university's career center?
9. From your point of view, what are the advantages of having a career center at your university?

**The list of questions for career services professionals is as follows:**

1. Please give me a brief background about yourself.
2. How do you think your programs and services contribute in the employability of your students and preparing them to the world of work?

3. What are the advantages that the students experience if they engage in your services and programs?
4. From your point of view, what are the challenges a fresh graduate may encounter after finishing his/her studies?