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The Role of Liberal Arts Education on Academic Choices: The American University in Cairo Case Study

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The Impact of Liberal Arts Education on Academic Choices: The American

University in Cairo Case Study

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Abstract

Providing a qualified higher education is a crucial component of any developmental plan in any country. This paper tackles the issue of educational decisions and will mainly focus on presenting the American University in Cairo (AUC) as a case study. The paper addresses undergraduate college students' choices of their subjects and fields of study during the first year of university and how liberal arts education influence such decisions. The main aim is to build valuable recommendations to ease the transition of students from high school to universities, help them rationally choose their area of study, facilitate the financial burden on students and their families, eliminate discrimination among students, and highlight the importance of inclusivity of various types of students in the academic institutions to have well-rounded candidates who serve the developmental plans of their country. The research proves the close relations between the previously mentioned factors and students' academic decisions. Using the liberal arts concepts while updating curriculums and policies may benefit students. Realize career plans and have compatible jobs. Assessing and improving the relevance of the Egyptian higher education system could be one of the leading forces behind the country's development and growth.

1. Introduction

In light of understanding human behavior and preferences, social studies put high value on explaining and analyzing the decision-making procedures that human beings go through in their daily lives because such decisions shape their past, present, and future. People go through a very complex practice while taking any decisions, so understanding such process explains a lot and helps individuals, scholars, social scientists, and policy makers to reach better outcomes (Glaessgen et al., 2018). The selection process that people follow while making their different decisions is worth studying because it helps to understand human behavior and helps in making better judgements and predictions in social studies (Jaradat, 2017). To better explain this point, it is important to have a closer look on the decision-making pattern that individuals go through in a certain area such as the education area.

Educational decisions "ideally correspond to mainly self-interest, but also believed future security" (Andersson, 2016, p.69), that is why choices such as, which major to pursue, which institution to become member in, and which field of study to graduate with, have a great influence on students and their parents which subsequently impacts the societies they live in as well. In a study based in Sweden for example, when college students were asked about their majors of study and their willingness to either stick to their majors or switch to other majors, "most students (58.1 percent) would not switch while 15.4 percent were uncertain" (Andersson, 2016, p.40). Explaining how educational choices are made enables better understanding of how such information could be used in the discovery of how such decision could be made in the most suitable and useful ways to reach more successful results that will benefit not just students in their selection process, but also the whole society in having more qualified calibers in the different fields. It is also believed that the liberal arts education approach might help students in making more suitable educational decisions that fit their capabilities and ambitions, because it enables students to explore several fields of study until they settle on the one for them (Lewis, 2018). With a focus the educational decisions that Egyptian students make and especially during the higher education stage. There is an importance to study the impact that liberal arts education might have on the Egyptian higher education system by applying some of its main concepts into the system. However, it is key to firstly provide a background on the nature of the Egyptian higher education system.

The Egyptian higher education system is considered as one of the biggest and oldest systems in the whole Middle Eastern (MENA) region. Its structure is influenced by many European educational fundamentals due to the effect of the colonial era that Egypt went through (Barsoum,

2020). The system witnessed many changes and development since it was initiated and till present. Higher education takes place in most of the Egyptian public universities after high-school graduates pass the secondary education and get the Thanaweya Amma certificate, with a minimum score of seventy percent out of hundred. Bachelor's degree seekers spend around four to six years of college education while medical students take around seven years; six years of academic studies and then one final practical year (Abdelkhalek, & Langsten, 2020).

One of the main characteristics of this system is being highly centralized (OECD, World Bank, 2010) and it is mainly governed by the state authority "The Ministry of Higher Education has jurisdiction over all higher education institutions and is responsible for planning, policy formulation and quality control as stated in all regulating laws" (Barsoum, 2020, p.17). The ministry controls all regulatory actions in the system and evaluates all procedures and rules that are implemented in each public institution through the Supreme Council of Universities, and also some of the ones that are implemented in the private institutions. The Ministry of Finance helps in funding all necessary educational expenses through strict budgeting criterions That is why the Egyptian higher education system is based on a centralized governmental direction (OECD, World Bank, 2010). This structure is based on the aim to control most of the inputs in all institutions in a fair and candid manner that limits any notion of discrepancies or unfairness in order to foster constant improvement and development for the whole system and guarantee similar learning outcomes in most of the institutions.

Moreover, the emergence and expansion of the role of private universities is a global trend that aims at comprehending and responding to the increasing pursuit of higher education by the high-school graduates who cannot afford going to public universities due to their disqualified scores and also the large number of enrollments in public universities that force them to be selective, so they cannot comprehend over their capacity (Barsoum, 2017). Public universities all over the world are characterized by being overcrowded as they are much affordable compared to private universities, that is why the admissions' criteria in public universities are challenging. The emergence of private universities in Egypt could be dated back to the early nineteen-nighties when the Egyptian government started to adopt some reforms in the laws related to higher education in light of the liberal move and the 'open door' policy, which led to the way to establishing and administrating new private colleges. This resulted in a remarkable change to the higher education in Egypt because these emerging universities came with new directions such as providing various new academic possibilities and bringing in many new concepts in higher education that are up to the international standards (Barsoum, 2017).

With the noticeable existence of various emerging private universities in Egypt that incorporates many international franchises or as called "International branch campuses (IBCs)" (Barsoum, 2020), it seems that the competition in the Egyptian higher education market is enlarging. This competition is often measured by the infrastructure of the institution, how affordable is the institution and of course the accreditation or ranking that this institution has (Barsoum, 2017). However, there is a major need to base the competition on the development and improvement of the higher education system as well as shifting the focus on quality assurance and learned skills which will endure and will prepare the student to the labor market needs after graduation.

It is key that academic institutions focus on arming students with the needed skills and knowledge needed in order to meet the requirements of the labor market and the contemporary career opportunities. There is much work that needs to be done by private universities in order to have an active role in promoting innovative outcomes as well as good quality education rather than confine their roles to absorbing high demand and giving access of education to students. For this to happen, it should be backed up by the government true wiliness to help amending the situation and helping in renovating the educational system by putting a notion of accountability on private universities regarding the learning outcomes and the academic performance of their students (Barsoum & Rashad, 2018).

The American University in Cairo (AUC) is one of the first private universities operating in Egypt or part of the Egyptian Higher education system. The AUC was established in 1919 before that time, higher education in Egypt was mainly relying on public universities (Barsoum, 2017). AUC is a non-profit higher education institution teaching in English language and recognized by the accreditation from the United States. It is considered as Egypt's first global university that gives its member an international educational experience while staying at their home country. The university has a remarkable role in the region on many aspects socially, intellectually culturally. It is unique because it brought the liberal arts education aspect to higher education in Egypt which is based on critical thinking and skills learning (AUC, n.d.). Liberal arts education focus on making students more cognitively flexible and teaching them in a way that last longer by providing them "ability to learn new skills, accept new approaches, and cope with continual social change" (Lewis, 2018, p.15). These key features of liberal arts education that AUC students acquire are the main factors that differentiate between AUC graduates and any other graduates in Egypt or the region and that is why national and international employers seek to hire more AUC graduates because

they know that they not only have the knowledge required for the job, but also the skills required for the interactions in the market and career life.

This thesis tackles the issue of educational decisions and will be focusing specifically on Egypt presenting the American University in Cairo (AUC) as a case study. The paper addresses undergraduate college students' choices of their subjects and fields of study during the freshman year of education and how such decision is influenced by many variables such as their own performances, socio-economic statuses, gender, etc. bringing a closer view on the influence of liberal arts education on academic decisions and how it might (or might not) help students to make better academic selections and choose the most convenient academic paths that would best fit their capabilities and goals. The main aim is to build useful recommendations to ease the transition of students from high school to universities, help them to rationally choose their area of study, facilitating the financial burden on students and their families, eliminating discrimination among students, and highlighting the importance of inclusivity of various types of students in the academic institutions.

1.1 Problem Statement

In the transition phase from high school to university, students feel lost on what major they should pursue. With the growing number of universities that are newly opening in Egypt, it is important to analyze the decision-making process that Egyptian freshman students and their parents go through in order to select an academic institution and/or the program and filed of study to pursue. There is little research done in Egypt on the impact of liberal arts education on how freshman students choose their major of study due to the lack of academic institutions who follow the liberal arts education approach.

In order for this research to address this gap and be able to present an explanation of the rationale behind Egyptian freshman students' selection process of the academic major they want to study or the institution they want to belong to, based on their choice of major of study, it is important for scholars as well as the academic institutions to know the reasons why a student may favor a certain major over the other or a certain institution over the other. In the case of AUC, there should be an explanation behind students' preferences and choices of majors provided by the various departments or schools since it is a liberal arts institution that offers a plenty of options to its students.

The main research question is how do freshman undergraduate AUC students choose their fields of study and/or the schools they participate in during the transition phase from high school

to university? This question leads to more inquires such as how do students select between different academic programs provided at the AUC? And how can liberal arts education adopted by the AUC help them make more relevant decisions? It is important to look at the different factors and variables affecting students' decisions, within this context, another critical sub-question could be raised that answers: To what extent do factors such as students' own performances, socio-economic status, gender, and others affect their academic decisions? Finally, since AUC is a large institution with long history and experience in the Egyptian academic field, a challenging question to be answered is What are the main successful strategies used by the AUC and its academic departments which make studying there a beneficial experience to its students? These are the main questions that the research is trying to answer with an attempt to come up with better understanding of the selection process made by students and their families regarding their majors of study and academic programs which reflects their ambitions and affects their future career paths.

1.2 Policy Relevance

The importance of the research is that it tackles how can liberal arts education be useful in helping students make better educational selections that realize their future plans and targets. It is therefore crucial to shed light on this unique institution of higher education in Egypt which is unlike most of the Egyptian higher education institutions, take it as an example, and learn from its practices in order to enhance and develop new approaches in the higher education entities of Egypt that focuses on teaching skills more than content or disciplines. The outcomes of this research will be beneficial because it will enable policy makers not just at the AUC, but also in the different Egyptian academic institutions to take the findings into consideration while developing the admission strategies into their institutions as well as the programs they provide to be able to reach many different types of students who come from different social and academic backgrounds. The purpose is to approach a larger pool of students and motivate them to select what best fits their own ambitions and capabilities to help them grow successfully. It will also help students to become more aware of how to best choose and select their intended fields of study that would fit their long-term career plans based on the scientific analysis of the research outcomes, so that they become more advanced than the previous generations

The implementation of these proposed policies shall help academic institutions in Egypt to enhance their policies, systems, and practices in a way that fits the current modern era. It shall also help students to choose their future career paths at a younger age with minimal external social, familial, and financial sorts of pressure. The return of such measures is expected to improve the

quality of education provided to Egyptian students by the multiple academic institutions who will use this research's outcome, which will be reflected on the whole society on the long run by gaining successful calibers in the different fields who would bring more prosperity and development to their societies. Providing qualified higher education and helping students to select academic majors based on interest and capabilities could result in bringing in better-qualified employees. This will in return have a positive impact on the issue of unemployment that the Egyptian society suffers from (Barsoum & Rashad, 2017). When a student selects a major that he/she is interested in and have the educational capabilities to excel in a certain field, after graduation, the student shall be specialized in this field. Specialization is key to employment as because it is considered as "a growth engine for productivity, employment growth benefits from diversity and specialization becomes less important" (Kowalewski, 2011, p.792). The reflection of such outcomes shall be prosperous and shall help in the overall development of the Egyptian society.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

To further explain the research scope and aims, the conceptual framework shows the different variables and concepts included in the research as well as the explanatory factors of these concepts and the relationship to be found in the research in addition to the outside factors affecting this relationship.
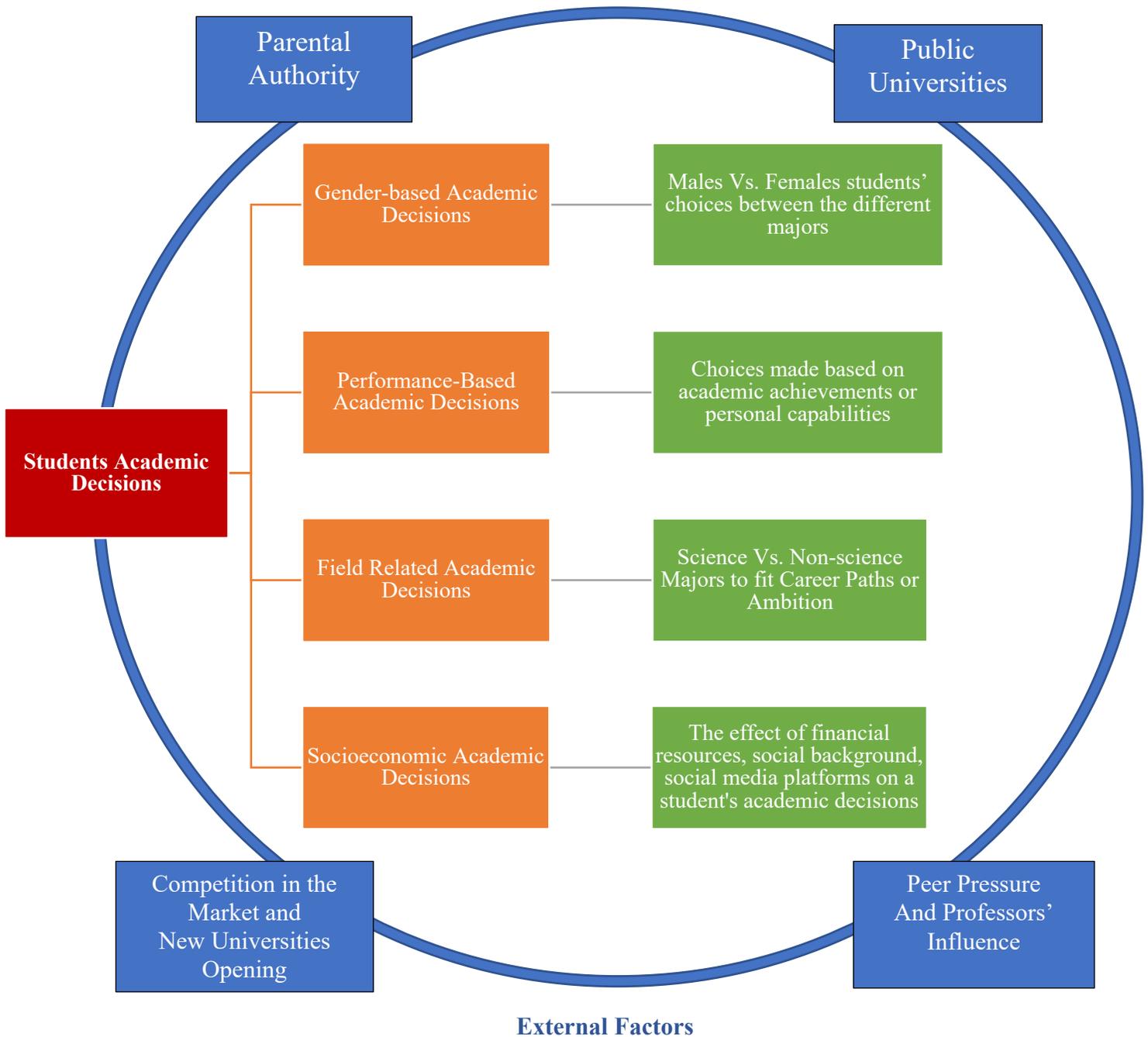

External Factors

Fig.1 The relationship between a student's academic decisions and the selected field of study

      The main variable is students' academic decisions which could be categorized into four main categories: gender-based academic decisions, performance-based academic decisions, field-

related academic decisions, and socioeconomic academic decisions. Gender-based academic decisions are the decisions that students make according to their gender and the difference between males and females while choosing certain fields of study such as science versus non-science (Porter & Serra, 2020). Performance-based academic decisions are the decisions a student make according to his/her academic achievements and personal capabilities that are reflected in the performance in the different subjects and how well or bad they perform in these subjects (Zimmermann, 2020). Students might go for a certain major due to the fact that they perform better in its subjects. The field-related academic decisions are the decisions that are connected to the students' desired fields of study. Some students prefer science fields over non-science fields and vice versa. They believe that these fields of study could bring them closer to their future career plans and goals (Hunter & Meshkati, 2020). Finally, the socioeconomic academic decisions are the decisions that are based on the students' socioeconomic statuses such as their social backgrounds or expectations, their financial resources and whether they can afford the tuition fees of the institution they apply for in addition to the social media effect on academic decisions and preferences (Zafar, 2013).

  The research addresses the relationship between the student's personal preferences, academic performance, socioeconomic status, and his/her academic choices of major or field of study. There are some external factors that affect this relationship such as the effect of parental authority on their children's academic decisions, the high number of admissions in the public universities in Egypt, the competition between private universities to attract more students, and the influence of professors on students' selection of their fields of study or continuation in this field. Many parents have high interference in the academic decisions of their children especially those who fund the education of their children (Boudarbat & Montmarquette, 2009). In addition to that, professors have an influence too because they encourage or discourage their students in many ways which affects their decisions and interest in the subjects these instructors teach Miller (2001). Finally, there are multiple of private universities operating in Egypt and new ones that are about to open, so the competition between these universities to attract more students is getting bigger (Barsoum, 2020). These factors have direct impact on students' academic choices and selection of their majors of study.

2. Literature Review

Reviewing the literature is one of the key factors that enable the study to be built on solid grounds and make it reliable and credible. Since this research is concerned with improving the relevance of higher education using some of the benefits of liberal arts education and it is a case study on the Egyptian students at the American University in Cairo (AUC), it is important to look in the literature on other research and studies that are closely related to the research topic and check their outcomes and results in order to make the outcomes and findings of the current research more robust. After looking at many studies, it is believed that the literature gathered could be divided into seven main categories, higher education development and practices, in general, higher Education in Egypt, in specific, the decision-making process in education, choosing the field of study, performance-based choices, as well as the socio-economic and gender effect on choices, and social media effect in higher education, which will each be explained in the upcoming paragraphs.

2.1 Higher Education Development and Practices

To begin with, it is critical to address some higher education practices in different parts of the word before focusing on the Egyptian higher education system in order to know more about the development of higher education concepts and areas. Throughout the years, higher education practices all over the world have faced various reforms and are developing every day (Abdelkhalek, & Langsten, 2020). The changes in practices are endless, but all around the world one can see increased technology use, globalization, and a focus on student-centered learning. Higher education is evolving to better fit the needs and skills of students today and it is important to understand how higher education has changed through the ages for both students and institutions as well. Academic institutions are developing, and they need to develop in a way that guarantees better quality education to be provided to their students. This can be achieved through the implementation of new methods of training and teaching staff as well as in the design and development of curriculum. That is why constant improvement is needed in order to ensure that higher education keep up with market needs and future trends, which could be achieved through the evaluation of previous results, assessment of processes in student learning and teaching, curriculum research and development of new curricula and guidelines, quality assurance in staffing procedures etc.

Sociologists and economic experts have tried to analyze the various characteristics of formal organizations which was later used by administrative theoreticians to describe and build

the foundations of formal academic institutions (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). This has significantly impacted the academic higher education systems and helped in revealing the deficiencies in the used practices in order to cure these deficiencies and bring in better standards and practices in the higher education aspect (Brennan & Shah, 2000). There is a critical role played by the different staff members in the academic institutions to ensure the improvement of the subjects, courses, and information delivered to students within the institutions (Clark, 1997). Existing academic organizations do not necessarily give much importance to the human interaction factor, the point that North (1990) highlighted in his analysis of the difference between developed and developing countries. For the interaction between individuals to be efficient and constructive for the greater welfare of the whole community, academic institutions offer rewards for demonstrable, actionable, mutual responsibilities. North's point of view suggests a useful approach to be used while assessing how institutions could foster the cooperation between its members to reach higher and more productive ends. Ensuring qualified education for students is linked to the measurements that are taken in order to maintain and enhance academic principles, which is reflected in the remarkable performance and accomplishments of the graduated students of the different institutions (Dill, 1995). Being member of an academic institution gives the chance to students to enlarge their capabilities, talents, and scope of knowledge. In that sense, using the academic performance of students as an indicator to assure the quality of education provided could be seen as a prominent factor for implementing and making policies that focus on students' achievements in higher education (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

Moreover, even though many economic experts have researched market mechanisms in higher education, the change in fundamental policy frameworks has gone completely uninvestigated in economic analysis or higher education. Since the mid-1960s, there have been compelling rationales for market-based public finance models in higher education (Freidman, 1962; Hansen & Weisbrod, 1969; Hearn & Andersen, 1995; Hossler, Lund, Ramin-Gyurnek, Westfall, & Irish, 1997). According to Dill et al. (1996), the United States had one of the earliest governmental experiences that used the new procedures as an initial supporter for mass higher education. The procedures include the execution of policies that draw well-defined strategies to evaluate education provided to students in the publicly funded institutions in order to enhance its public universities and their systems (Dill et al., 1996). From an economic point of view, the good quality of products or services provided to individuals indicate the efficiency of the operations taking place in the market. Measuring quality comes at a high cost, that is why governments apply some amendments to the public policies to enable more organized procedures and better practices

for the overall work scope of their institutions. Consequently, it could be said that public policies that focus on the quality of education provided to students could be considered vital for implementing more relevant institutional frameworks (Eggertson, 1990).

A significant amount of scientific research has investigated the trends of dispersion of educational policy advancements across nations and recognized a range of factors associated with the adoption; even so, very little about this work examines whether or not states adjust these techniques to the existing public context (Doyle, 2006; McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006). There has been a worrisome reliance on the market model since the early 1980s, with insufficient federal investment in need-based grants and an increased emphasis on loans for low- and middle-income students. Indigenous cultural frameworks for the outside quality assurance varied by country, yet these frameworks could be divided into three main outlines: "The European model of centralized control of quality assurance by national education departments, the US model of fragmented quality assurance incorporating restricted government control with market competition, and the British model in which the state primarily surrendered regarding quality assurance to self-accrediting universities" (Dill, 1992, p.3). Quality assurance could be a serious issue for public policy and especially for higher education. Academic qualification frameworks could be useful in setting an example for setting exterior quality control and giving an understanding about the various educational results for every stage in the academic degrees (McInnis, 2005).

In the United States for example, most of the states have actively adopted ways to assess the academic rules in order to give national organizations the occasion to enhance the learning outcomes for their students during the nineteen eighties, yet this attempt had unnoticeable effect on the quality of education provided in these organizations due to the fact that they did not fully bear the responsibility of applying these rules or report their responses to these rules publicly (Peterson et al., 1999). The human capital theory has given a comprehensive framework for cost-benefit analysis and policy formulation in education. Using human capital logic, it is important to assess the economic benefit of funding for various types of programs (Levin & McEwan, 2000). This logic transforms the analysis of policy options into a set of rationally investigated and discussed options. This method can also include taking into account constraints, incentives, direct and indirect effects, and so on, all of which are necessary components of developing government and institutional policy decisions, which could be uncommon in the higher education field due to its reliance on a type of enormous economic theory that is rarely used in assessing the studies about higher education (Paulsen, 2001; St. John & Masten, 1990). In that sense, it seems that there are some doubts regarding the traditional United States' institutional accreditation system because of

many issues such as its broad scale and its high focus on requirements more than academic principles. That is why policymakers have expressed their discomfort with the decreasing educational quality, so the agencies responsible for the accreditation rules responded by establishing new measures to review their rules periodically (Dill et al., 1996). In that context, it is fair to say quality assurance in education is a key element that should be considered by policymakers in higher education sector in order to establish rules and regulations for institutions that would be based on prioritizing qualified education for students in order to raise better future generations who are up to the international standards and developmental trends. Information asymmetry has a role in the decision-making process that students go through in order to choose their majors. Therefore, the quality of education in an institution needs to address long-term gains rather than short-term gains. Institutions need to provide clear information to its students about the benefits and educational gains of their educational programs as well as the career opportunities they can have with these programs after graduation (Suri & Adnan, (2016).

2.6 Higher Education in Egypt

Moving to the main purpose of this research, the following paragraphs will provide more details about the education system in Egypt and especially the Egyptian higher education system in order to assess the relevance to the labor market needs and trends. The higher education system in Egypt could be considered a complex system. This complexity comes from the slow and unremarkable development that the system faces. It is true that the higher education system needs a large number of updates and improvements in order to keep up with both the market needs and also the international standards (OECD, World Bank, 2010).

Let us look a little back in time when education in Egypt was only exclusive to the fortunate and privileged ones from the higher classes. This was before the 1952 revolution and Nasserism (Cupito & Langsten, 2011). When President Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power with his socialist ideology of promoting social justice and economic reforms, he made education free for all Egyptians, the issue that influenced reshaping the whole society. The government back then did not only make education available to everyone in the society by eliminating the educational fees and expanding the number of admissions, but it also secured jobs and employment vacancies for graduates. Wealthier candidates had more privilege to continue and pursue higher education as well. Despite this expansion, gender gaps endured, and men were more dominant than women. However, it was remarkable that the number of women participating in higher education was larger than before and especially from the less fortunate category or class (Cupito & Langsten, 2011).

Egypt has a population, so if this population is well educated, then it will bring more prosperity to the whole country. Providing good quality of education to the Egyptian citizens could help in alleviating the community standards, updating social norms, helping Egypt to get rid of the old-fashioned mindsets that bring the country backward, and also have more productive and proactive citizens who serve the society. Updating academic curriculums and programs is now a mandatory act because we are living in a fast-changing era and in order for Egypt to be able to catch up with the global developments and innovations, it needs to well-educate the future generations on how to keep up with global challenges and international standards in all domains.

In that context, it was clear that there is a pressing need for reforms in the Egyptian higher education system. This urgency is derived from the need to keep up with international standards as well as the knowledge-based economies in which countries invest in human capital and empowerment to produce more knowledge and innovations (OECD, World Bank, 2010). The aim is to reach more inclusiveness among the educated population and give the chance to a diversified student body to reduce educational inequalities and provide more opportunities (OECD, World Bank, 2010). It was conveyed in the OECD, World Bank 2010 report on higher Education in Egypt that the Egyptian higher education system suffers from some critical problems such as the limited accessibility and opportunities for students, the modest and outdated quality of education in terms of inputs, research capabilities, and processes, the inability of many graduates to fit in the labor market and keep up with its requirements, and also the fact that universities are old-fashioned and need major development not only in their systems but also in their campuses and settings (OECD, World Bank, 2010).

The Egyptian government has initiated already many reforms in the higher education system and its operations, but they were mainly focusing on change in procedures while what is more needed is to have structured measures to change the culture and mindset of the educational institutions in order to enlarge the system's capacity to be developed and contribute to the attainment of national targets. The report highlights some measures that could be taken in order to update and proactively develop the higher education system in Egypt. These measures include enlarging educational choices for students, eliminating structured rigidities in the system, enhancing the national direction in higher education, and promoting better coordination and communication, extending the capacities of educational institutions and enabling them to be more adaptable to change and development, and also realize more equity and efficiency in financing the higher education system to endorse more sustainable ends (OECD, World Bank, 2010).

With the large number of the Egyptian population that grows day by day, it seems that the scope of the Egyptian higher education system is growing to be a large system that incorporates not only the traditional elite components from public universities but also a wider range of institutions including public and private universities as well (Fahim & Sami, 2011). This growth and expansion have significantly affected not only the number of the student population but also the nature and type of students who apply for higher education in Egypt as well as the type of programs and majors they join. It has been unfortunately reported by many studies on the higher education system in Egypt that access to higher education in Egypt could bear a notion of bias against the less fortunate population despite any measures to promote competencies or eligibility in the selection process. This bias results from the fact that parental resources still matter and that it highly affects educational access and fulfillment (Buckner, 2013). However, it seems that the ongoing expansion in the higher education system in Egypt has enabled more inclusiveness in the system, "Expansion in the public sector is benefiting some traditionally underrepresented groups, including females and some from the lower-middle classes, albeit to a small extent" (Buckner, 2013, p.547). This does not eliminate the parental effect or the role of family funds in educational attainment and access to good quality education and resources, but it helps in narrowing the gap somehow. It is time to look closely at the importance of the role of youth in the Middle Eastern area, especially after what happened during the time of revolutions in the region, and everyone witnessed the effective and strong role that the youth of these countries had during the uprisings and especially in Egypt. This affirms the urgency to provide good quality education for these youths as well as the need to constantly update and develop the education systems and programs so that they become well-rounded calibers within their societies.

Then with globalization, higher education in Egypt has changed to respond to global courses by moving from a peripheral form of national systems that follow the governmental lead that is bound by national contexts to a more central position that follows worldwide trends and scientific innovations (Ead, 2019). It seems that the Egyptian government is focusing on updating the whole education system and that it is trying to keep up with global standards and trends. In addition to the regular and common educational sections in high schools represented in the Thanaweya Amma certificate, in Arts, Math, or Science, and supported by the USAID, Egypt has adopted and implemented the Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) educational system earlier in August 2011 (Ahmed, 2016). The first school for STEM was established and various students from both genders who excel in science and math subjects and who have passion in innovation and technology were encouraged to join. The whole project is part

of a bigger project that the government officials are working on and putting it as a priority to enhance education as it is believed to alter the shape of the Egyptian educational system as a whole and promote its development which shall have prosperous outcomes for the development of the country as well.

In 2015, The United Nations Member States have agreed to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is a common plan that aims at realizing worldwide peaceful and prosperous ends for human beings and the planet on the present level and future levels as well. This agenda includes seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to humanitarian development. These goals are to be urgently reached by all developed and developing states equally within a context of global cooperation. These SDGs admit that "ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests" ("Egypt", United Nations, n.d.). Egypt supports this initiative, and it is committed to it with its own version of the 2030 sustainable development plan. SDG number four is for quality education, which proves that education is highly linked to sustainable development. The aim is to provide good quality education and make education more inclusive for everyone in order to narrow gender and financial gaps among students, provide equal and affordable opportunities in vocational learning, and reach global access to qualified higher education. SDG 4 encourages countries to adopt and enhance their policies to include sustainability in education ("Goal 4", UNDP, n.d.). To do so, there is a need to develop the educational curriculums of all disciplines by integrating the sustainability measures into these curriculums. Mouneer (2021) studies the importance of sustainable development in higher education for occupational health and safety using Egypt Vision 2030 under COVID-19 Pandemic circumstances. The study addresses the impact of SDGs on Egyptian higher and engineering education. The results show that there is a close interlinkage between engineering education and the realization of the desired sustainable development goals. The research concludes by shedding light on the significance of raising awareness of SDGs in Egyptian universities among students and staff members by prioritizing the advanced educational mechanisms simultaneously with verifying the engineering curriculums (Mouneer, 2021).

2.2 The Decision-Making Process in Education

The first aspect to look at is the decision-making process in education. This means how students make their academic decisions and choose between the different academic programs and

institutions. This entails how they weigh their options, how they consider alternatives, and how they select between the various offerings. Galotti (1999) presents the results of a survey that was conducted to measure how undeclared college students go through the selection process of their majors during their first year in college. Students were surveyed once more a year later in order to reach more credible results for the survey. Surveyed students were able to determine and prioritize their patterns of choices in a list with their own criteria of how they make the selection process and also how they consider the other alternatives giving useful impressions to be considered in the results. Then they were also asked to rate their own responses to such a selection process. During the first year of the survey, the students' list included around seven different criteria and four alternatives while in the second year the alternatives were reduced to three instead of four. Surprisingly, students used only half of the criteria listed in the first place again in the second phase of the survey and the rest changed. This finding indicates that it is hard to make predictions on students' overall impressions based on linear models of the decision-making process because their impressions, criteria, and expressions changed in only one year because students seem to deceive expectations about the pattern of effective real-life decision making. Instead, it seems that it is more accurate to consider the notion of cognitive effort exerted in the decision-making process over time including some measures of rational decision making.

On another level, the paper written by Breen (2001) proposes a model of educational decision-making based on a logical approach to choosing, with the goal of understanding why class differences in the rate of participation in education remained largely unchanged by applying the Breen and Goldthorpe 1997. The study is based on empiric research in the sociology of education which resulted in three main points. Firstly, the gaps in educational achievement between young people from various social groups. Secondly, the impact of social status or other social origin tends to be diminishing in intensity as students advance to higher levels within the education system. Finally, gender gaps in educational achievement have substantially declined over the past years. This paper demonstrates how these points affect students' decision-making process while choosing their fields of study and why they choose one program over another.

In their paper, Glaessgen & Others (2018) look at first-generation students with undecided majors through a qualitative study. They show that these students are daily thinking about their intended majors that they have to select. This pressure is due to the transition phase from high school to university and because they became aware of the difference in culture from high school to university and the change of environment or comfort zone. The study also shows that some students base their decisions on their family and friends' suggestions, so this is one of the factors

affecting students' decisions. The study concludes by saying that due to the transition phase that students go through during their first year at the university, they develop their own form of self-reliance in order to make themselves familiar with the new phase they are going through and take the responsibility for their own decisions. In that process, they rely on many factors such as program counselors, family, and friends to gather different insights, weigh these insights then take their own decisions. It is also worth mentioning that many students attempt to change their majors, so it is critical to look for the reasons behind such decisions. Jaradat (2017) looks at the factors affecting a student's decision to change his/her major of study, especially in Middle-East universities.

The freshman year in college is a very critical one for any student. It is a phase that shapes the student's personality, traits, and skills in his/her direction in becoming an adult and facing real life. Students go through hard patterns of decision-making processes in order to settle for a certain major of study, but some students become uncertain about their decisions after they spend some time in their majors, so they go and search for options to change their majors and seek other choices. It is believed that those who seek to change their majors, do that because "over time students may change their majors as they learn about their ability, taste and quality of match" (Jaradat, 2017, p.223), which is part of the journey of their maturity and self-exploration. When students explore their abilities, they become more aware of what fits them and what interests them the most. They also become more aware of the career paths they want to pursue or see themselves more fitting in. That is why when a student chooses a major at the beginning and then realizes that it does not satisfy his/her aspirations or capabilities, they tend to change it and seek another one that does. The results show that the students' decision-making is influenced by some factors including, the positive perspective outcomes in changing their majors, the parental effect on academic decisions, the peer and instructors' effect, and finally the market trends and job opportunities after they graduate (Jaradat, 2017).

Moreover, while reviewing the literature as well, there is an interesting aspect that was found which is looking at how international students make their academic decisions and choose between programs and institutions. In their study, James-MacEachern& Yun (2017) have assessed the factors that international students consider while making their choices. They look at what motivates these international students to select a certain institution over another especially how and why they might choose to go to smaller institutions. The study gives high importance to the influence of the sources of information, reference groups or peer effect, as well as structured incentives on international students' decisions. Another important factor that students consider is

the financial aspect such as the educational expenses and grants which affect their decisions. Finally, the study confirms that students also consider the future returns of their academic decisions and the anticipated career opportunities after they finish their studies as influencing factors in their decisions as well. Their decisions are mostly motivated by the best forms of direct communication like a clear website, educational facilities, and well-grounded environments.

Furthermore, Okano (1995) article is based on a year-long study of students in two vocationally focused high schools in Japan. It discusses how the students' decision-making in the formalized school-based job-referral method (JRS) is influenced by strengthening or undermining their ability to select a specific choice. The JRS method offers the schools work opportunities for their students. Not only this but also gives them the freedom of making a reasonable decision by providing a wide range of options and relevant information. Resulting in a more meritocratic distribution of jobs and a better entrance into the workforce for these high school students. Moreover, this method promotes a purposive decision-making process for the low level of resources of non-university-bound students, which is very impactful.

Finally, there is an interesting angle to look at which is the role of academic advising in guiding freshman students in their decision-making journey. Many universities and colleges have academic advising centers or offices. The role of academic advisors is to mentor students in their early years of college to choose the right track for them that matches their capabilities, interests, and future ambitions or career goals. Advisors also help students who want to change their majors in case they found themselves in a major that does not realize their desires. Jaradat & Mustafa (2017) present reliable research that clarifies the connection between the role of academic advising and maintaining majors. They look at the relationship between the guiding role of advisors and students' decisions to choose a certain major or to change their initial majors of study. It is believed that "research on selecting major proved that advising plays a very key role in the process" (Jaradat & Mustafa, 2017, p.9). Based on the findings of the study, researchers suggest that when students receive sufficient academic advising in their early years of college onwards, this highly decreases the possibility of their consideration to change their majors. Based on these findings, the researchers give some recommendations for policymakers in the academic institutions to give more attention to the importance of personal interaction for students as well as their need to be aware of necessary information and details regarding their academic paths and future career plans. Academic advising serves this purpose and helps students to stick to their majors without thinking to change or switch to other majors.

2.3 Choosing the Field of Study

After looking at how students go through the whole process of the selection process, it is important to consider the different factors affecting their choices. Looking at how students choose their majors or fields of studies is a very important aspect to consider. It is critical to know why students choose a certain field of study over another as well as the anticipated goals from such choices. Andersson (2016) presents a study that tackled the motivation of Swedish students behind their choice of post-secondary education. The school system in Sweden is highly affected by individualization, making the students accountable for their own education. Education is gradually geared towards individual circumstances and self-interest based on uncertain ground as potential opportunities in the job market are often risky. So, it directs students to balance between economic stability and self-interest. It also shows how they are influenced by the academic environment they are part of during their studies. The results indicate that students base their educational decisions primarily on their self-interest, but they are also affected by academic environments that surround them This study is beneficial since few education studies considered both economic and self-developing beliefs, and even fewer explored rationality in self-actualization.

In their research, Beggs, Bantham & Taylor (2008) focus on identifying the key foundations of the psychological process through which undergraduate students go through their academic fields of study. They show that students would still choose to rely on functional/utilitarian issues while making their academic decisions and choosing their majors. They also clarify that students rely on their own personal sources of information to be able to make more suitable selections. The paper also highlights an important point that students in the institution they conducted the research about, were not easily able to switch majors due to enrollment and financial obstacles which leaves them in a more critical position and pressure to make the most suitable and convenient decisions while choosing their major at the initial phase of selection.

From a general context, the study of Sullivan (2006) clarifies that students' genders and different socioeconomic backgrounds play a major role in assessing their own abilities which would affect their academic choices. For a better understanding of the variables that help a student assess his or her abilities in order to make a rational academic choice, the study is based on empirical tests that were conducted in order to analyze the beliefs and attitudes of students. They revealed that although girls have a lower estimation of their abilities than boys do, they are significantly more positive in their attitudes to education than boys. Boys and service class students don't perform in line with their self-assessed. Furthermore, students whose parents are of high

cultural capital, or of high social class are overestimated their own abilities and have more self-confidence. Ultimately, parents and teachers play a major role in identifying the perception of their attitude to education. This may explain why girls and women are less likely to participate in math and science at school and higher education.

Another study that analyzes the reasons behind graduating psychology students' choices of major and experiences shows the important effect of personal interests and personality characteristics on students' choices (Hunter & Meshkati, 2020). The study focused on surveying these students and collecting their responses to know why they chose to study this major, their level of satisfaction with their majors, as well as what were the experiences they gained, and also their recommendations for development and improvement. Students revealed that the main reason why they chose to study psychology was the fact that the field fits their interests and ambitions. They also clarified that becoming psychologists matches their personalities and characteristics and that is why they chose to pursue this degree. Participants clarify that the most valuable experience they gain in this major is the experiential learning method and the hands-on exposure in the field. This clarifies why their suggestion for improvements entails the expansion of the variety of the course offerings, the increase and development of the experimental aspects from the early learning stages and relating more to the applied side of the field (Hunter & Meshkati, 2020). It was remarkably stated that there is a certain gender difference as well in the selection of studying psychology which shows that female students tend to have more career goals behind this selection of major than male students as well, (Hunter & Meshkati, 2020) This could be related to the personality traits and nature of female characteristics which is key in choosing the major of study.

Choosing a major of study is not an easy process for many students, because it could be stressful and challenging for many of them especially those who are not so sure of what they want to study or those who consider so many options. The decision-making process involves so many factors and stakeholders as sometimes parents have a say too in what their children should pursue. The research of Kumar & Kumar (2013) examines this process using the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) in order to know the factors affecting students' decisions to join business majors. The TRA is a model that describes consumers' decision-making process. The TRA is derived from social psychology to clarify the intentions behind people's behavior, and it is also commonly used in the marketing field. Applying the TRA theory to explain why some students choose to study the business majors revealed many interesting findings. It is believed that business majors seem attractive to many students because they reflect reputable social images, and they also open the door for many diverse career opportunities. Business students get the chance to work in so many

fields because the major opens various tracks in front of its students after they graduate. They study some key subjects such as accounting, economics, management, entrepreneurship, and other business-related subjects which result in making its graduates well-rounded and enables them to fit in so many fields, which enables them to have many job opportunities in the market. The study also shows that there are other factors that impact students' decisions to join this major such as the role of parents and families as well as the influence of their professors and counselors in high school (Kumar & Kumar, 2013). It is a huge influence because freshman students are young and when they feel uncertain about their decision, they will automatically rely on their families and/or professors and especially those whom they consider role models.

2.3.1 Performance-based Academic Choices

Moving to another important factor, the choices of the majors that students select are based on their own achievements, performances, and capabilities. This section looks at the extent to which a student's performance, grades, success, or failure in certain subjects or fields affect their selection of major of study. Zimmermann (2020) presents an example from Germany that studies the effect of the social class of a student on his academic performance and educational aspirations. It is a research study that assesses the academic performance of students in Germany, in accordance with their academic aspirations and social class using the Rational Choice Theory (RCT) and also the Wisconsin Model of Status Attainment (WIM). The research relies on data acquired from the comparison between the findings of both methods. The findings of the research support the existence of a close relationship between a student's class background and his/her ideal educational aspiration. It concludes that students' educational aspirations are affected by factors of social influences and rational choice as well. The research also provides important secondary findings that propose other factors that affect student's performance such as "parents' expectations, friends' aspirations, the motive of status maintenance, costs, and perceived probability of success" (Zimmermann, 2020, p.75). The finding that shall be taken into consideration while assessing students' choices in education.

From another aspect, Neimun and Stambough (1998) assess the academic performance in public schools and how it could be enhanced by reforming the public policies implemented to reach better outcomes for students. The article argues that the problem is that the public school's system in the US is a monopolistic system that is based on government bureaucracy and intervention, so it proposes that in order for the public schools to be able to perform better and provide good quality education with all needed resources, it should focus on maximizing the utility for students and parents. In that sense, public education would shift from the government authority

to the consumer sovereignty just like the case of private schooling in which the market values are the core values addressed while creating their policies and strategies.

Hong (2015) presents a study in which the author tackles the barriers that students with disabilities face in their academic journey and how they take their decisions given their special conditions. This qualitative study analyzes the experience of disabled students in their college and looks at their transition phase from high school to college. The study clarifies that moving from high school to college is a challenging experience in general for all students, so they confirm that it is even more challenging for those with a disability because, in order for them to be able to integrate into their new college phase, they need to have certain social, personal, and academic skills, which they often lack due to their special conditions. Within that context, the study confirms that students with disabilities face lots of internal and external barriers such as peer pressure, the perception of faculty towards them and the dispositions as well as the treatment of the specialized personnel who handle their cases and the advising they receive that may be unaware how to best help these students. There are more internal factors such as their desire to be treated normally like any other capable student, their pursuit of independence, and their ambition to finish their degrees on time as the rest of their class. All of these factors just make their experience and transition phase from high school to university even more challenging.

Beekhoven, De Jong, and Van Hout (2002) focus on the relationship between academic performance and the rational choice theory. The article compares the rational choice theory and the integration theory. It mentions that integration theory is classically the one used to explain students' choices of subjects and fields of their study linking the variation in students' academic progress to the extent to which they are academically and socially integrated into their higher education institutions. This integration theory proposes that when a student's values and principles contradict those of his institution, then S/he is most likely to perform poorly. It links academic achievement to students' well integration and interaction with their faculty as well as their integration socially with their peers and in the different extracurricular activities. On the other hand, the article also focuses on the influence of the rational choice theory and students' academic performances. It explains that there are three cost-benefit analysis mechanisms that affect students' educational choices which are family incomes and financial resources, social costs of dropping out and the educational level of the parents, and finally the influence of students' subjective perceptions of their own personal capabilities. The article concludes that a mixed model that combines both the integration and the rational choice theories enables making reliable predictions about academic progress and performance.

2.3.2 The Socio-economic and Gender Effect on Choices

Moving to the decisions students take based on their socio-economic status or gender differences. It is important to look at these variables because they do matter. Students may go for a certain option over another due to their financial state or their guardian's financial state. Sometimes they could sacrifice going to a better university than the one they settle in just because it is less costly. In addition to that, it is extremely common to see gender bias in the selection of majors, like when we see more males in the scientific majors and fewer women or more women in the humanities and social sciences majors than men. That is why it is important to know the root causes for such phenomenon and know how to alter the social perception regarding that matter. Miller (2001) proposes what is considered to be a specific teaching and learning approach, which can be effectively extended to a wide range of social science classes, both undergraduate and graduate. As a result, the students' sociological imaginations became more concrete and actual. The author demonstrates how the social behavior of individuals and groups depends on values, ideas, biases, and perceptions. The author supports the direction that students must grasp the creation of social reality not definitions of key sociological terms. In that context students will finish high school with a decent amount of ability that will allow them to know how to make suitable educational decisions when they enroll in universities, that are based on their interests and that will benefit their ambitions to reach more successful ends in their educational path.

From the economic perspective, Rochat and Demeulemeester (2001) illustrate the empirical finding of the thesis developed by Mingat and Eicher for France's higher education. This study implies that students weigh their anticipated economic returns while selecting between the different fields of study, taking their own skills and chances of academic performance success into consideration as well. Outcomes prove that science majors such as engineering and computer sciences at the university are less often preferred due to the lack of proper orientation unlike the humanities and social sciences, which are more desired even though they do not provide many work opportunities. Both disadvantaged and privileged students seem eager to study a discipline that will bring an economic return, especially since higher education is associated with high financial costs. After examining a sample of 641 freshmen Belgium students (French-speaking) with different socio-economic backgrounds, it was revealed that students coming from high-income families appear to be less risky in their choice of major than students from low-income families. However, it might also be true that less privileged students tend to avoid risks as well as disciplines where their work requires more social capital. Apparently unwise choices made by

students from poorer backgrounds for less demanded educational orientations are in fact the results of a rational decision process under severe socioeconomic constraints.

The literature detected a link between gender and the choice of a major. Female undergraduate students who initially intend to major in science majors change their minds compared to their male counterparts (Dickson, 2010). This highlights critical points that seem to exist for years. Furthermore, it is believed that female students' beliefs regarding their own capabilities is a key determinant of why they change their minds because they do not trust their own capabilities to excel in science and math subjects, so self-doubt is one major factor. Another important factor is that their choices are most likely to be influenced by social and familial backgrounds or perceived values unlike male students who are expected to choose more freely (Zafar, 2013). The study also confirms the close relationship between highly educated parents and their children's choices, because the more the parents are educated the most likely they will support their daughters to choose the majors that best suits their capabilities and ambitions whether a science major or a non-science major which is an important factor as well (Boudarbat & Montmarquette, 2009).

Moreover, it seems that females are still suffering from the idea that they are not well represented in the science, technology, and mathematics field compared to males. Despite the fact that societies are aware of the problem with all its complexities and consequences, there is still a missing point in understanding and reaching the root cause of this under-representation of women issue (Falkner et al., 2015). The literature reviewed some key explanations to the problem related to dissimilarities between genders in traits such as self-esteem or confidence, self-image, and also the effect of the common practices in schools that help in enlarging the problem and widening the gender gap between boys and girls due to the dominance of boys over interactions in classrooms as well as monopolizing computers and technological tools (Khalil et al., 2015).

In that context, it seems that one of the ways to fix this problem is to give equal opportunities for boys and girls within the classrooms settings to have equal access to the different resources and practices because the problem does not stop there at the school level, as it lasts in the higher education phase and also in the workplace, so it grows with them as they grow in time. The research also shows that other than the school influence, there is the cultural influence that presumes and makes the study of science, technology, and innovation exclusive for males (Khalil et al., 2015). It is mentioned in the article that there is a huge importance to the way teachers believe and the way they deal with the different students. Change is difficult and not many people have the ability to adapt to changes in ideologies or perceptions, that is why "There is evidence

that teacher ideologies set limits on what changes teachers are likely to accept" (Acker & Oatley, 1993, p.261). The whole idea behind this is that teachers and instructors need to be aware of the importance of the use of technology in classrooms and also have the ability to learn how to use this technology while teaching. In that sense, it is key to pay high attention to the urgency of looking for directions to reach gender equity in the education of science and technology by changing social and cultural beliefs as well as innovating the educational system as a whole to make it more inclusive for both genders (Gorbacheva et al., 2019). There is a global encouragement towards integrating women in the fields that mainly led by males. That is why there is a pressing need to change the historical cultural norms that confine female labor in some specific fields by shedding light on successful of female role models who were able to handle important roles equally as male role models in the fields that are commonly dominated by men because "Achieving higher gender diversity within majors is important and desirable as it may enhance productivity and overall performance in team work, and it may contribute to the production of novel ideas" (Porter & Serra, 2020, p.5).

Jonsson (1999) presents research conducted in Sweden that analyzes the educational choices, between the different educational programs and fields of study, of boys and girls through the rational choice theory measures since there is more equal attainment of educational levels in Sweden despite gender differences. It focuses on the educational choices that are based on students' perceptions of sex-typical fields of study as well as the problem of high-level segregation between men and women when it comes to choosing the different educational programs and fields of study. The conducted research proves that students' achievements in schools shape their educational choices more or less. It shows that boys and girls who have common 'ability profiles' usually make their educational choices based on sex-typical patterns. The comparison shows that the effect of students' genders on their educational choices in Sweden weighs almost 10%-30% percent.

The article written by Gabay-Egozi, Shavit, and Yaish (2010) shows Tel Aviv-Jaffa high school's usage of data on students' curricular choices. The disadvantaged social strata students have merged the riskier scientific subjects that are supposed to deliver long-term gains with social sciences and the humanities to reduce the short-term risk of failure. It was revealed that children from the upper class choose the risky option to keep them at the same level as their parents. Moreover, the study asserts that boys have more tendency than girls to study hard subjects like mathematics. Even though in the short term, the demanding road is risky, it may lead to promising results in the long term. On the other hand, in the short term the low road is less demanding and

safe; however, it can provide limited long-term rewards. Contrary to Breen and Goldthorpe's (BG) model of educational decision making, the choice of subjects is motivated by the abilities of the students and not by the relative risk aversion mechanism (RRA). Finally, in order to enhance equality of educational opportunities, the schools and universities have to offer many alternatives and a variety of courses to allow for students to hedge and combine between the short-term and long-term utility.

In Egypt, higher education is key in order for a person to have a decent job with a worthy salary. That's because the secondary school certificate is not sufficient and Egyptian students usually complete their college studies in order to have their own shares in the labor market as employees or business owners or entrepreneurs. The problem could be traced to the high-school level because high-school graduates in Egypt are still lacking some initial and essential skills to be able to strongly join the labor market (Abdalla & Langsten, 2016). That is why it is believed that not only there is a need to change the higher education system in Egypt but also the earlier educational system from the primary level and even before. The change shall include a change in the beliefs and perceptions of gender biases in education as well as how certain fields of study or domains are exclusive for a certain gender over another. Some studies on gender differences in education proved that sex segregation in the labor market is a result of the disparity between males and females in higher education across the various fields of study. The problem is rooted in the fact that women are underrepresented in certain fields especially those related to science, technology, math, and some other leadership fields (Abdalla & Langsten, 2016). That is why there is an urgent need to implement some egalitarian approaches that would enable gender parity in education and in the labor market as well. There is obvious change demonstrated in the increase of the number of women's enrollment in educational institutions over the years, yet this change has to be accompanied by allowing more inclusive measures and giving equal access for both genders in the various educational fields and later in the labor market as well after they graduate (Abdalla & Langsten, 2016).

Gender inequalities are not the only factor that affects students' decisions in higher education, there were pieces of evidence that show that social class impacts a student's academic choices as well. Hatcher (1998) focuses on the impact of the variation in students' social class levels and their education results in industrial countries like Sweden. It tackles the differentiation in academic abilities of students in the diverse institutions as well as the process of selection they go through and their parents to students to select or pursue the most suitable school system, higher education field which draws their future employment and training. The article explains the effect

of social class differences of students on their educational rational choices during the different transitional phases in the education system from schools to high education and so on. It also links the rational choice theory to the cultural reproduction theory of Bourdieu proposing a reconceptualization of the notion of rationality in educational decisions. Students and their parents need to make educational decisions based on "Rational, knowledgeable, skillful strategic action for culturally-situated utilitarian and non-utilitarian goals" (Hatcher, 1998, p.22) taking the issue of social class differences and imbalanced availability of resources and support among students in schools into consideration.

2.4 Social Media and Higher Education

The use of social media has expanded fundamentally internationally. Several researchers have investigated the impact of increasing social media use and reports suggest around 3 billion individuals globally utilize social media. The increment in the number of individuals in social media use has moreover expanded how much time is spent on social platforms, with insights demonstrating that individuals spend a normal of 4 hours daily on various social media platforms, sharing messages and pictures, uploading status, tweeting, and sharing their opinions.The exacting significance of "Social media" is those applications that give the user a platform to cooperate and socialize with various individuals globally (Tess, 2013). Social media assists us with making, sharing, and altering text-based audio and visual communication. Consequently, social media gives a different scope of administration and content that are either portable or web-based. These administrations contribute to connecting many individuals through correspondence, collaboration, investment, online data, and information that is just present in explicit web-based networks.

In the context of the education sector, social media is likewise considered to be a type of social help for most high school and college students, however, it can likewise adversely affect their psychological well-being, particularly for the individuals who as of now have significant degrees of social anxiety. Neier and Zayer (2015), assert that the worldwide populace could be gambling a lot of its psychological well-being and prosperity through social use. Zachos et al. (2018) found that the method involved with sharing, tweeting, loving, messaging, and undertaking different exercises normal in social media has been connected to an increment in pressure. Subsequently, a significant negative social effect of expanded social media use is that it has turned into a genuine wellspring of stress since individuals frequently share all ways of feeds, stories, and remarks that reach from legislative issues and financial matters to social and private matters of concern. Keeping the above in view, the motivation behind this research study is to recognize and

clarify the impact of social media on higher education and assess the type of association between social media use and education. This study intends to find those social media applications that the students use during their higher education and their impact on both the personal and academic life of these students.

Social media plays a huge job in the understudy's life in his socialization. It is an available and advantageous technique to get data for education or give data that's more conveyed using social platforms (Carusi, 2020). Educators and students who are associated with one another can acquire benefits from working with these platforms. The superior progression of data influences straightforwardly their education cycle. Teachers use their Twitter to represent a microblogging capacity to send and share significant updates. Utilizing the extra blog or social pages offers the chance to them have live talks and offer off-hours help for students. For instance, Facebook alongside LinkedIn has understudy discussions. With understanding to most recent investigations in the college of Massachusetts Dartmouth, pretty much every college, school, or school applied or used some structure of social media. It is an incredible open door, as instructors can safeguard pace with the dynamic nature of learning and socialization in the cutting-edge world. They ought to be found and further coordinated into the program or advancing course. Social media assists teachers with speaking with their students at any time.

Teachers can use social media as an innovative technique for educating by making gatherings and records for students. This platform turns into a useful wellspring of data that can be gotten to or shared immediately. Teachers can post their thoughts, ideas, what's more updates with students and guide them toward LinkedIn and Facebook. Teachers can make hashtags that permit students to tag or look through scholarly posts (Slevin, 2008). They also can survey entries to comprehend what the group has imaginatively delivered and transferred. The principal explanations behind teachers' reception of social media in homerooms are unique. Fundamentally, they can do advertising and advancement of themselves through social media. It tends to be an incredible researcher commitment with a capacity to make the work more viable. It is an opportunity to mark them expertly in the scholarly local area. The sharing and showcasing of instruments could make a name for them in the web local area. Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, various blog destinations, and YouTube channels stay the essential and primary sources where an understudy can see teachers' talks or introductions in their stream (Carusi, 2020). These platforms are exceptionally gotten to and thusly can help teachers in getting the acknowledgment and notoriety. At last, social media is being coordinated into confirmations, grounds life, graduated class relations in each school and college. Teachers can learn more about their enterprises through

social scenes and be taught about present-day education. They can associate with various teachers to share thoughts and experiences. It fosters educational interaction and honesty.

Social organizations have similar advantages for institutions in higher education. The platforms can go to consideration of expected students and get any input. The surer and present the data foundation presents - the better standing it has. The blog and Twitter data is an essential wellspring of passages and significant news. Higher education institutions can make insights from their guests also reporters to foster an arrangement to connect their researchers. Besides, a few institutes offer augmented reality journeys and visits that are uncovered on display or on video blogs. As a rule, social media is valuable for students and urges them to be occupied with education. It influences intellectual progress and headway; students generally keep with genuine information on learning courses (Tess, 2013).

However, there are certain challenges associated with excessive social media use. Zachos et al., (2018) viewed that those who are dependent on social media might burn through the greater part of their time on their social media exercises to assist them with forgetting about the issue that they are encountering all things considered of attempting to contemplate how to deal with the said issue. Feeling focused on adapting doesn't give sufficient adapting, as it just permits people to redirect their consideration from stress for a brief time (Carusi, 2020). The test is that social media offers one to be presented to various invigorating exercises and happenings, particularly for the more youthful age. This might draw in and keep them signed into various social media platforms for a long time just partaking in their time away. This regularly brings about lower efficiency, lower scholastic execution, and reliance on consistent feeling (Tess, 2013).

Moreover, there is additionally one more component of social media use that has been found to increment social tension in a few people. As per Rahma et al., (2019) social media use has expanded nervousness among the world populaces, with social media users frequently sharing disturbing and upsetting stories that could wind up as evident or counterfeit news, which impacts society through expanding the sensations of stress and fretfulness. Neier & Zayer (2015) laid out that people who read pessimistic, disturbing, or profoundly pessimistic realistic news experienced issues of dozing and experienced awful dreams, and bad dreams. Social media platforms remain significant platforms for interfacing individuals with their companions, families, and their general surroundings (Rahman et al., 2019). In any case, when the happenings spreading on social media are predominantly negative or produce sensations of desire or jealousy, levels of pressure, tension, and gloom will more often than not increment (Tess, 2013). Students can use various types of social media to associate, offer, and view a horde of content. When impacted by posts, social media

can fundamentally affect their lives. With the increment being used, social media can incite people to start self-contrasting or gain ridiculous assumptions about themselves and others. This can lead to bringing down confidence, fearlessness, and self-esteem. This exploratory review endeavors to decide the connection between social media use and its effect on pressure, nervousness, and discouragement among students in higher education. suggested a more profound examination into the relationship between social media use and enthusiastic prosperity.

To counter the adverse consequences of social media use in higher education, students should be careful about the use of social media devices in higher education. Instructors who wish to draw in students in an open conversation and articulate of thoughts all through the homeroom should look to social media as an expected educational device. Notwithstanding, they ought to recognize that the purported "digital tools" may not consistently acknowledge all social media apparatuses in the homeroom and may do as such for principally intuitive and instructive purposes (Neier and Zayer, 2015). Personnel should decisively join social media devices in the study hall and in a way that lines up with course objectives of expanded incorporation and intelligence as well as instructive conversation. It is an effective method for incorporating into the present-day culture and following the current social, educational, and social patterns. Social media stay a successful device for correspondence that should be helpful in the different associations such as business associations, partnerships, and organizations. It is an extraordinary method for making a worldwide local area and bringing benefits to society. The lucid, bound together and coordinated work in the higher educative organization can add to the science, social turn of events, progress, and the ascent of developments with new perceptions on life.

The presented literature not only a background on the topic of the research, but it also shows so many concepts and variable that affect the academic decisions and the educational choices. The research gap that this research aims to fill is connecting the role of liberal arts education to enhancing the decision-making process that these freshman students go through focusing on the Egyptian higher education and the American University in Cairo in specific. Using this literature helps in identifying the key points to be addressed and also the curious questions that the outcomes need to answer. AUC is a unique higher education institution in Egypt that carry and deliver a liberal arts approach in its curriculums of all its departments, so that is why the research will look at the benefits of such practices on improving students decisions as well as the quality of education provided to Egyptian freshman students.

3. Research Design & Methodology

The aim of this research is to get closer to the mind thinking of freshman undergraduate students and know what are the factors that affect their academic decisions such as how they select the institutions they apply for or the majors they study with all that comes with this selection process by shedding light on the importance of liberal arts education in helping them taking more fitting decisions. The target, as said earlier, is to provide useful research that helps policymakers to not only improve their policies but also to adopt and implement new policies that would help in making the higher education system in Egypt more relevant to the labor market needs, in an attempt to get Egyptian students, and especially those of the AUC, closer to international trends.

In order to achieve this aim, a qualitative case study is conducted to best investigate the topic since the research design rationale is interpretivist, so data were gathered and then analyzed in a thematic method to convey important messages and come up with useful conclusions. That is why it starts by identifying the issue, conceptualizing the research topic, collecting findings and divide them into themes, making a pattern from the collected data, triangulating the main observations for analysis, and providing new directions to address the research issues then come up with some general remarks regarding the case (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The study is based on cases, contextual analysis, examples; "In qualitative research, we usually emphasize the social context because the meaning of a social action, event, or statement greatly depends on the context in which it appears" (Neuman, 2006, p.177). That is why this research uses the qualitative method because it is "is exploratory or descriptive, it accepts the value of context and setting, and searches for a deeper understanding of the person's lived experience of the phenomena under study" (Marshal and Rossman, 2011, p.102), so it best serves the target to study the behavior of freshman students and analyze the factors affecting this behavior within the social context.

3.1 Selected Research Tools

The research is a case study that is focusing a biased sampling from the freshman students at the American University in Cairo (AUC) and is looking at the issue from various angles relying on the concept of triangulation in order to "improve the accuracy" of the research (Neuman, 2006). The reason behind taking AUC as a case study is not only because it has a long history in the Egyptian educational field, but also because it presents a unique form of higher education institution in Egypt that adopts liberal arts education that enable students to go beyond their

designated majors or fields of study and take courses from various disciplines until they make sure they are on the right educational track that matches their future career goals and ambitions.

The main research tool is in-depth one-to-one interviews. Students, parents, university staff, and faculty members were interviewed. A number of thirteen one-to-one interviews were conducted in total. Interviewees were asked to share their experiences and answer some prepared questions to collect their general insights regarding the topic of the research. That is why the research rely on a biased sample to have more details about this specific case study that it represents. Freshman students were interviewed in order to know more about how their transition phase from high school to university went, how they chose their intended majors of study, whether they attempted to change or are considering changing their intended majors in the future or not, as well as knowing what are the factors that affect their educational decision-making process such as parental authority, peer pressure, or word of mouth locally or online on social media platforms. They were asked how and why they have selected a certain major, what motivated them while selecting this specific major and how they see the outcome of this selection in the future on their career paths. It was important to know their opinion regarding the factors that helped them in the selection process such as academic advising and the first-year program that the university provides. Finally, they gave their recommendations on what can the university do to ease their integration into the university's system or community during their first year as freshman college students.

Parents were interviewed to know more about the notion of their interference in their children's academic decisions; whether they let their children decide on their own based on their preferences and performances or whether they interfere in their children's academic decisions and especially when it comes to choosing a major which eventually leads to the career path. It was critical to how parents motivate their children to make the best decisions that suit their ambitions and capabilities as well as the factors that affect their decisions as parents on their preferred academic fields or institution for their kids and maybe the main ones that they rely on while deciding.

Staff members such as academic advisors and programs specialists as well as professors were asked about their own academic experiences and also their observations during their encounters with students. In addition, it was vital to know the main factors they believe that affect students' academic decisions given their socio-cultural, economic status, and gender differences. Finally, they gave their recommendations on how to improve the guidance provided to freshman students during the selection of major processes in their early stages at the university.

In addition to that, many field observations were made on how students feel or act during their first year at the university. It was beneficial to gather some remarks and collect notes on the behavior of students, parents, faculty staff, and professors that consequently affect the decision-making process. Records for every step of the data collection were kept during the whole process. It is also important to look at different case studies that reflect other experiences from different areas worldwide, which was mentioned in the literature review that includes various cases and similar research that are related to the topic of this research. The literature review helped in gathering some critical and eye-opening findings from previous studies. These findings helped in shaping the results of the study and comparing them with what was previously discovered in many other cases. These tools are selected to ensure maximum levels of validity and reliability of the research aims and outcomes.

3.2 Sample

The selected biased sample for this research is chosen by their relevance to the topic and the focus is on the American University in Cairo as a case study as the only university with focus on liberal arts education in Egypt. The system at the AUC allows students to pick and choose their majors and change their majors if they wanted as well, so relying on this case fits the scope and purpose of research. It also helps to gather more insights due to the long history and experience that this university possesses regarding this issue. Being a staff member at the university helped to reach more participants easily. Students, parents, staff, and faculty members were contacted and asked to voluntarily participate in the research. Luckily a total of thirteen one-to-one interviews were conducted with nine students, two parents who are also staff members, and two faculty members. Participants were firstly contacted by email, then they were asked to participate in the research either online using zoom meetings or offline by conducting physical meetings. The interviewees were all contacted in person and none of them was online. The interviewees were thanked for their participation, meetings were done as they saw fit with total respect for their time. They were informed that the information gathered is confidential and will only be used to serve the research purpose. They were also assured that their identities will be anonymous, and that non-information will be disclosed without their consent. It was also important to make sure that interviewed students have no direct connection with the researcher to avoid any sort of pressure or sensitivity that might result due to the position of the researcher. Faculty, staff, and parents were familiar to the researcher so it was easy contacting them, however it took some time to arrange the interviews' dates and times.

3.3 Data Collection

The first step after selecting the topic of the research was submitting the application to get the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Data were initially collected by making observations to know more about the targeted sample. Then the reviewed literature enabled us to look at the outcomes of different case studies and examples related to the topic of the research that was previously conducted in different areas over the world. The profession of the researcher allowed her to gather decent records on the students' initial intended majors and those they stick to or graduate with. It has also enabled her to have contact with students, parents, staff members, and professors which helped while approaching them and asking them to participate in the research. Once they agree and after taking the IRB approval, of course, interviews were conducted in order to get closer to the participants, build a trustworthy connection with them, so that it was less complex to ask the critical questions, have their honest answers, and collect their different responses. All interviews were recorded with the participant's consent and approval. Then each interview was transcribed, labeled, and numbered immediately after the meeting ended in order to keep the process organized. Finally, all collected data were gathered, got organized, put into themes, and analyzed in a way that enabled serving the purpose of the study and reaching more reliable findings and outcomes.

The whole data collection process took around three to four months. It is also worth mentioning that measuring the details come at the same time during in the stage of collection of data (Neuman, 2006). This means that the collected data is analyzed and written along the way while gathering the information as well in a simultaneous process, which will ease the writing procedure of the whole research.

3.4 Data Analysis

The research relies on content analysis of the information gathered using the grounded theory approach in order to best examine the data collected in order to come up with a general hypothesis and final outcome (Babbie, 2007). In that line, interviews were gathered and transcribed each separately, then there were some main themes or categories to help with the analysis, data were later compared and added to these categories, according to this, and some theoretical concepts emerged then a connection between these concepts was drawn, finally quotes and data collected from the interviews were used in the analysis part to make useful outcomes.

The Collected data are divided into categories and are coded, decoded then well organized. This is all done in order to identify all variables, make the collected data clear and make useful

analysis. There is a specific place for each section; a section for the records, a section for the recorded interviews with their transcription, the initial remarks gathered from interviews, a section for the main results from the interviews, and another section to combine the previously conducted research and studies on the topic or a similar topic that will be taken into consideration as well.

All gathered data has its own notes and annotation in order to stay organized and specific from the beginning of the process of this research till the end of the whole process. This has greatly helped while writing the research itself and saved some time too.

3.5 Limitations

Although the selected topic is tackled based on scientific measures, some methodological limitations happened to exist. For example, it was intended to conduct at least one focus group and a survey but could not be due to many factors such as the time constraints, and the fact that it was harder to reach participants on campus after the Covid-19 measures. The main limitation here is the bias selection of the institution or case study as well as the sample bias. It was a bit challenging to convince mainly parents, faculty professors, and staff members to talk freely about the topic as honestly as possible without hiding their true intentions. Another limitation is the lack of having more interviews with different parent, faculty members, and staff members at the AUC who are total strangers to the researcher and convince them to participate in the research, find time to do that, and share their experience or knowledge regarding their insight on the institution's academic problems related to the topic of research, what makes a student select a certain field of study over another and why, ...etc.

Other challenges occurred such as the duration that was taken in order to actually start conducting the interviews due to the long process to get the approval from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) to start the interviews, as well as the time-consuming transcription of these gathered data which might affect the writing process and make it a bit tight in time. Finally, there are some limitations to present and gather the records on statistics about students' initial intended major during their first semester and whether they kept this major or changed it but this limitation was compensated by interviewing and contacting as many students as possible to collect their feedback and know more about their own experiences and insights.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the code of ethics and the IRB's command, many ethical considerations are applied in order to make sure the research and its process do not negatively affect the participants by any means. Firstly, all participants were asked to voluntarily participate in the study

without any sort of pressure with their own agreement and consent. As previously mentioned, their identities are kept anonymous by using pseudonyms while referring to them in the analysis part. Secondly, several measurements were taken in order to ease tensions for the participants to feel comfortable and start to trust the process. It was critical for this research to reach aims to maintain good relations with participants and respect their boundaries and avoid sensitivity. All of this was positively reflected on the outcomes and enabled reaching more accurate and reliable findings. Due to covid, many precautionary measurements were taken, and all participants are vaccinated as well as the researcher herself. Masks were worn during the interviews in order to ensure maximum safety and eliminate any risks to the participants during these critical days of the contagion. Finally, the researcher made sure to consider situating the self and avoid any biases or personal subjective opinions throughout the whole process since the researcher is an alumnus and also a staff member at the university in order to make sure there was no power influence on the participants by the researcher and they were reassured that the participation in this research is purely voluntary and that if they abstained, the researcher will try to contact others with no pressure at all.

4. Findings

The conducted research resulted in some interesting findings that are worth sharing and explaining. There are multiple factors that can affect a student's academic decisions. These factors can be closely related to each other and will be explained in detail in the upcoming sections. The analysis will start by showing the main concerns that students may face during the transition phase from high school to university, then it will look at how students make their academic decisions as well as the factors affecting these decisions.

There will also be a highlight on the differences between the education system provided at the Egyptian universities versus the one taught at the American University in Cairo (AUC). Another crucial factor to be discussed is the social media effect on students' academic choices, especially since we are in the modern digital era. Finally, the analysis will end up with suggesting some ways and measures for improvements that will help make the higher education system in Egypt more robust and up to global standards as well as the national and international markets' needs.

4.1 Main Concerns of Freshman Students

It was essential to look at the main concerns a student faces in his/her first year of college or university life especially because it is believed that this transition phase from high school to college is a very critical one for each student Galotti (1999). It is a phase in which they are put in a situation in which they have to make crucial decisions that will affect their whole future at a very young age, so it is a big responsibility that puts high pressure on the majority of them. Joe, who is a nineteen-year-old freshman undeclared student at the AUC explained the main concerns he had in this period of transition.

> *"The main concern is the difference between college and school in assignments*
> *and exams and so on, as they are harder in university" Joe, student, interview,*
> *December 2021.*

The different teaching styles and methods between schools and universities can greatly affect a student's performance in this transition phase, especially since not all high schools prepare students for this transition. Many students find it hard at the beginning to know how to study or where to start, which of course differs from one to another, so they of course need guidance. Another freshman undeclared student called Melody who transferred from Ain Shams University, which is a public Egyptian university, to AUC, also stresses this point. She explains that when she

first joined the university, she was not really familiar with its system, and she wished she postponed taking some courses until she gets familiarized with the system and be able to know how to study the different subjects and material because these courses were challenging for her in her first semester.

> *"I think these are the decisions (to take challenging courses in the first year) we take and then regret later because they were hard, especially that I was only taking English courses in previous semesters here at the AUC" Melody, student, interview, December 2021.*

Moreover, some students have concerns regarding their future careers or ambitions as well as realizing their families' dreams or images for them or making a career out of their personal interests and hobbies as noted in Glaessgen & Others (2018). Many students feel passionate about certain subjects or fields, others want to satisfy their families' ambitions for them, so they translate these concerns while deciding on what majors to declare. A declared junior student called Karam explains that these could be some of the main concerns he thinks a student faces in his early years at college.

> *"I think the concerns could be the passion that students have for a certain career which they are dreaming about from their childhood, the responsibility and dedication in their willingness to control over their family business, and it could also be the will to develop their hobbies into a serious career" Karam, student, interview, November 2021.*

The same point was raised by Rania, a staff member at the AUC who works as a Senior Academic Advisor at the Academic Advising Center, she studied interior design at a public university in Alexandria and she dealt with many types of students for many years. She implies that hesitation could be the main concern for students during their first year of university. This doubt could be related to the fact that these students do not have enough experience in life, so they are distracted by multiple factors which makes the decision-making process even harder. She clarifies that many students hesitate between two and sometimes three majors that they intend to declare.

> *"Students are concerned about their future and what they will do after graduating, what major will help them work in a good environment or good*

workspace or even gain a lot of money or even achieve whatever they too, so
they have a lot of challenges facing them and they are really young and
inexperienced to choose the right root" Rania, interview, November 2021.

Furthermore, many participants explained that the main concern for a freshman student especially at the AUC could the declaration requirements and the required declaration grade point average (GPA) for each major. This is because the majority of AUC students enter the university as undeclared students, as previously clarified, so they face some challenges during the declaration process. The reason behind these challenges is the inability of some students to meet the declaration requirements for their intended majors whether because the requirements are highly demanding or because they lose interest in the major after they take the preliminary or introductory courses for the major. The point that was clarified in the study conducted by Beggs, Bantham & Taylor (2008) who mentioned that "many of the study's participants emphasized the importance of how well the major, and by extension the likely job prospects that will follow upon graduation, match with their personal interests and/or strengths" (Beggs, Bantham & Taylor, 2008, p.1). That is why a student might consider switching his/her intended major and pursue declaring one that fits his/her capabilities, interests, and GPA of course. Nabila, a Teaching Assistant at the AUC, who is also an AUC alumnus with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Media Arts, clarifies this point, stating that from her encounters with the different students, she believes that the major concern for freshman students could be the ability/inability to declare their intended majors.

"I believe they think of whether they will succeed in this major or if they can
reach and declare it or not" Nabila, interview, January 2022.

A freshman undeclared student named Baheya who is trying to declare a business major supports this belief, she claims that when she joined the university she was stressed as she wanted to declare business since this is the subject she enjoys studying and is ambitious about, then she was a bit discouraged due to the declaration requirements which are pretty mush challenging at the AUC for many students who intend to declare a business major. It is considered one of the highly demanding majors at the AUC in terms of both the required courses and GPA for declaration due to the high demand for this major.

"When I first joined, I was afraid of (pursuing) business major because of the
high declaration GPA and I felt that I will not be able to reach this GPA, so the
GPA was an issue for me" Baheya, student interview, December 2021.

There are multiple factors that concern students in their freshman year of college and these factors have a direct impact on the decision-making process these students go through in order to choose the most fitting major that they believe can help them realize their ambition, future career goals, and parental or societal validation and satisfaction (Beggs et al., 2008). A sophomore accounting major student named Amre, sums up the concerns he faced during his freshman year while choosing his major saying that there were multiple factors that affected his decision.

> *"I believe the main concerns would be the declaration GPA, the peer pressure or effect and professional future as well" Amre, student, interview, January 2022.*

These were the general and commonly stated concerns that participants shared regarding their own personal opinions on the points that freshman students take into consideration while choosing their intended majors once they join university and until they declare or settle for the major that they continue and graduate with. The upcoming section will discuss the decision-making process that students follow in order to choose their majors.

4.2 Freshman Students Choice of Major

After identifying the main points that concern freshman students during their early year in college until they settle for a major, it is important now to discuss how these young students take a certain decision to join a major.

4.2.1 Capabilities, Performances, and Preferences-Based Decisions

This part focuses on the academic decisions a student makes that are affected by his/her own preference or interest in the subject of study. This also includes not only the preferences but also the capabilities and performance of the student in these subjects. A student might take an academic decision to join a certain major just because he is interested to study its subjects or because he can do well in these subjects as well (Jaradat, 2017). Many candidates stressed the importance of this factor. When a student was asked about the main factors that affect his academic decision.

> *"The factors that mainly affect my decision are the courses or the subjects I am good at, for example, I am good with numbers, so I go with a major that involves numbers, and not a major that includes a lot of readings and writing" Joe, student, interview, December 2021.*

In addition to that, some students go to the first year in college with a background of what they want to major in or the field they want to study based on the courses and subjects they excelled in during their high-school years Sullivan (2006). A freshman undeclared student clarified that the courses she took in high school made her more aware of her preferences as well as her capabilities.

> *"I wanted to take business because when I took a business course in high school,*
> *I really liked it and loved it so much, so I was like, no I want business" Baheya,*
> *student, interview, December 2021.*

Interest is key for any academic decision because students need to feel passionate about what they study and feel eager to know more and learn more from the fields they are most interested in exploring (Hunter& Meshkati, 2020). Danya, a political science professor who is a faculty member at the AUC mentioned this point while interviewing her and she highlighted the importance of interest as a resort for students.

> *"When the student cannot cope with the major that he/she has selected then they*
> *go back to their interest because there is nothing else, they can do and they have*
> *to pursue what they want and I have seen that a lot" Danya, interview,*
> *December 2021.*

This supports the idea that a student's interest in the subject that he/she is studying can save him from taking the wrong academic decisions (Kumar & Kumar, 2013), they just need to follow their interest. Preference is an important and essential motive behind declaring a major, however, it has to be combined with a strong performance in order to meet excellence and success. For example, a student might be interested to join a certain major and then find out that his performance in its subjects is not that well, so he/she ends up changing the major. Another student might get the GPA for a certain major and then enroll in it, but if he/she is not passionate about or interested in it then the result will be a lack of motivation and he/she will eventually change this major. As previously mentioned, Rania, the Senior Academic Advisor studied at a public university in Alexandria, therefore, she could be a valid example of this point.

> *"I was not exactly sure whether I liked interior or graphic design more, but I*
> *went with interior design because I had the grade, I was proud of myself back*
> *then I got the grade and then I think I liked it more but maybe now after the*

years, I think I would have done better in graphic design" Rania, interview,
November 2021.

Sometimes students go for a certain track just to prove that they are capable or that they can do well in it, but they do not necessarily feel passionate about it. The problem here is that when they realize that this track does not meet their motives, it might be hard to change or go back in time. That is why many students at the AUC change their minds after taking the introductory courses of their intended majors, the point that was clarified by Joe when he was asked about the factors that might let him change his mind about his initially intended major.

"The only thing that can affect my decision is if for example I studied a similar
topic and found that I am better in it then I may choose it over my initially
intended major "Joe, student, interview, December 2021.

The point that shows the importance of interest and performance in students' decisions. It also shows the importance of making room for change and giving students the opportunity to check their capabilities in the introductory courses before they dig deeper into a major that they are not passionate about or one that they cannot excel in. In her interview, Baheya stresses this point clarifying how the introductory courses supported her academic decision to join a business major.

"I think (my decision) was influenced by taking courses at the beginning in the
first semester that guides you and gives you a picture of what your life would
look like, so do you want to continue like that or not" Baheya, student, interview,
December 2021.

Another freshman undeclared student called Jasmin who is in her first semester at the AUC explained that there are multiple factors that affect students' academic decisions when choosing the intended major to declare.

"First of all, I see your preference matter, as what you want to study, then the
reputation of the place you will participate in, and the career or market needs.
For example, sometimes you like to study some subjects, but there are no jobs
for it, so this influences your decision, and also the salary you will get as well
as the educational fees, and social media or word of mouth" Jasmin, student,
interview, December 2021.

In her explanation, Jasmin combined many critical factors that can influence students' decisions. She also shares her opinion and mind-thinking when it comes to choosing her major, which is business marketing, and how influenced she could be by others' opinions. The teaching Assistant has also mentioned some of these points stating that many students weigh their decisions based on critical factors such as,

> *"The factors that affect students' decisions are: their interests in the subjects, their dream job, and sometimes their parents or peer pressure" Nabila, interview, January 2022.*

All of the previously mentioned factors and points lead to a certain direction which is future goals and market needs. Most of the participants highlighted the importance of relating the major of study to market needs and future goals.

4.2.2 Future Career Goals and Market Needs

Choosing a major can be related to many factors but realizing the career goals and future plans could be one of the strongest factors that affect students' decisions. As previously mentioned, students are usually concerned with their careers, what they will work after graduation, and the prospective targets of holding a certain job. That is why many students take these concerns into consideration while choosing their majors because the major they study in the university is the gateway to their future career and it prepares them to a high extent for what is waiting for them after they graduate. Baheya and many other participants reaffirmed this point and clarified the linkage between career goals and intended major when she was asked about the factors that help her while choosing her major of study.

> *"I based my decision mainly on what I want to do after graduation, it is like the job is what I want to be doing all of my life, so whether I like what I am studying or not, to continue with it for the rest of my life" Baheya, student, interview, December 2021.*

Students' concerns about their future are very valid concerns especially since we are living in a fast-changing world that keeps developing constantly (Rochat and Demeulemeester, 2001). The labor market itself whether in Egypt or on the international level is updating due to the technological and digital advancements that integrate into people's lives every day. That is why many students take their future dream job into consideration while choosing their majors because they want to cope with the market needs and have decent jobs with worthy salaries (Okano, 1995).

Danya, a political science professor affirmed this point, and she encounters many situations with different students, so she understands how they think.

> *"Regarding the choices of majors, now it is more about the market, so it is market and also family pressure and then the interests come at a later stage"*
> *Danya, interview, December 2021.*

Not only the political science professor, but Ania, a psychology professor at the AUC has also mentioned this point in her interview. She is a mother of two freshman students too, so she shared her opinion from both a mother's and a professor's perspectives. She explicates that undecisive students may have a much harder path until they settle in a major that they truly feel themselves in. Here she stresses the importance of preference as a strong factor that helps students have better and more fitting academic decisions. The others who do not have preferences get lost, and they spend a long time until they find their true passion or success.

> *"I believe that those who suffer the most are the ones who really do not have a preference, the one who goes in really not knowing, they are not into arts, so they do not have the creativity or artistic side, they are not into math and so they do not know what to do or where to go"* *Ania, interview, December 2021.*

The psychology professor adds to that by sharing some of the issues she encounters with psychology major students and their doubts about their future careers due to some of the discouragement they face.

> *"What I feel is not the pressure of deciding to go into psychology or not, but I feel the doubt of the major itself. So, it is ok, do what you want but I am telling you (you) are not going to find work when you graduate, and this is the lack of awareness I believe in this field"* *Ania, interview, December 2021.*

In this point, she sheds light on the importance of spreading awareness about the different majors as well as the career opportunities that these majors will bring or facilitate, which could be a societal issue or a market stigma. Some majors have high demand while other majors are unfamiliar and not publicly known. However, there should be many attempts to spread awareness about these majors and give them their right reputation and importance in the different fields. The American University in Cairo tries to realize this by having a specific Career Center that helps in guiding its students and community members. The center provides many services such as

providing the needed career guidance, helping students to decide their majors, offering many experiential learning opportunities, connecting students to the market and the different employers by conducting many employment fairs on a periodical basis, and many other services that help young students to become more aware of the market needs as well as how to achieve their own personal career goals and future plans. It arms students with the needed tools to become useful and successful candidates in the labor market, which makes AUC graduates more favored in the Egyptian labor market because they have the unique skills needed for success and productivity Bertelsen, 2012).

4.2.3 The Parents' Role in Students' Academic Decisions

The Egyptian society is generally seen as a collectivist society as mentioned in (Prosick, 2013) not an individualistic one. That is why many of the decisions that an individual makes are somehow affected by societal norms, values, or opinions. In addition to that, there is the undeniable effect that parents have on their children's decisions and especially the academic ones (Andersson, 2016). This effect comes from the fact that they have financial authority over their children. Many parents have a direct and indirect influence on the academic decision of their children; sometimes they draw a certain path for their children to follow, and they think that they understand more or that they know more than their children based on the experience they gained (Buckner, 2013). Other parents just raise their kids on some presumed ambitions or career plans. For example, parents who have family businesses are usually expecting their children to work in their family business and they raise them on this assumption whether their children are really passionate about the field they work in or not. Other parents think that certain jobs or fields are better than others such as engineers, medical doctors, bankers, etc., so they force their kids to major in these fields and sometimes students fail in these majors after spending many years trying to please their parents and study subjects they are not good at or subjects they cannot perform well in. Hadya, an Academic Advising Manager, who has a very long career in academic advising, and many other participants have highlighted this point and shared their opinions on what they encountered as well.

> *"From my job and my experience in advising we can say that 50% of the students come making up their minds on the major they want to declare, and we can say that the other 50% you can see the parents' opinion imposed on their children and mostly to declare engineering, but most of them are not capable of doing science classes and then they tend to change to non-science majors, and this is*

the usual hassle that keeps going every year and every semester" Hadya, interview, October 2021.

Both the Academic Advising Manager and the Senior Academic Advisor agreed on this point in their interviews. They both highlighted the role that parents play in deciding the majors for their children.

"The parental effect has a huge impact on the students' decisions" Rania, interview, November 2021.

Ania, the psychology professor also shares her opinion regarding the parental effect from what she sees with students and as a mother too, although she states that her approach as a mother could be unusual because she gives room for her kids to choose what they are interested in or what they are good at.

"From what I see as a counselor and working in the student well-being office, I see a lot of pressure from the parents' side regarding choosing majors for their kids, so if the parents are all families of engineers, they are like oh no you have to go for engineering... So yes, we still have this major major pressure on students to choose their own majors according to the preferences of their families" Ania, interview December 2021.

Many students confirmed this point and admitted the high influence of parents on the academic decisions of their kids whether they faced this effect themselves or have seen it happening with their colleagues (Jaradat, 2017). Student Mira clarifies this point and shares her opinion as well.

"Some students are affected by their families like their mother or their father like some parents force their children to study a specific major or something Fathers have their own directions and hobbies like they want them to study certain things and they are driven by their own personality" Mira, student, interview, December 2021.

Nevertheless, it is critical to say that today's generation is different from before. Many young students have their own say, their own aspirations, and their own track of thinking about their studies and their future career goals as well. Then they encounter some conflict with their parents in case they want them to follow their planned track or personal opinion.

"I rely on my personal capabilities more (while choosing) because, for example, my mom and dad wanted me to major in engineering and be an engineer, but I took the decision not to because I know my capabilities and I am not that person who would stay at home study. I love to go out every day and not overwhelm myself" Joe, student, interview, December 2021.

On the other hand, there are some cases in which students may not necessarily follow what their parents want, but they try to have another way out. Like, sometimes students want a certain major that their parents do not support, so they go for another similar major. With this, they study something they like, and they satisfy their parents at the same time. The point that a student clarified when she was asked about the extent to which her parents influenced her major decision.

"At first, I wanted to major in film but my parents started, like, tell me but it is not a job, so I wanted something close, I can minor in film, But I wanted something close to I went for IMC major" Mira student,, interview, December 2021.

It is believed that raising the awareness among the society will help in changing the minds of many parents regarding the different majors that are not very commonly popular or desired. This is because the labor market is growing and changing, some jobs are becoming more important than others, and there are several new jobs that are taking a reputable place in the market, so changing social norms and stigmas would help children in being closer to their interests and ambitions. It also helps to raise the concept of specialization and giving jobs to those who are specialized in because the Egyptian labor market suffers from this issue as not every employee work with his degree, which became common.

4.3 The AUC Liberal Arts Experience

As previously mentioned, the higher education system in Egypt is one of the oldest systems in the region (Cupito & Langsten, 2011). It went through several phases of adjustments, yet it keeps its original schemes. What happens in the public and most of the private universities in Egypt, is that students are enrolled in the majors from the admissions phase and since their first day at the university, which is called the declaration from the gate. In that context, the student starts to take the courses of his/her enrolled major immediately and they do not get the chance to explore other disciplines or take many other courses from another field. In that context, it could be easily seen that there are fundamental differences between the regular higher education system and

the one provided at the AUC. The reason behind these differences is that AUC is the unique example of liberal arts education in Egypt since it is the only university providing its concepts and curriculums upon it.

Only at AUC, students and especially the ones intending non-science majors are enrolled as undeclared students. They take introductory courses of their intended majors along with other general, or as they name them "core curriculum" courses, and then apply for the declaration then they get accepted or rejected based on whether they met the declaration requirements or criteria or not. In this research, the aim is to shed light on the differences between the education system provided at the AUC and the one provided at the other Egyptian universities. Participants were asked about their different educational backgrounds, and they shared their experiences with higher education as well as their opinions regarding the difference between the AUC system versus the other universities' systems as well as the advantages and/or the disadvantages of each system. A double major student, who studies political science major at the AUC and also law at the Cairo University shared her opinion from her own experience with both systems and highlighted the differences.

> *"I feel that in private, it is more organized and clearer, and you have people*
> *who help and guide you while in public universities you are alone and on your*
> *own. There is also a problem with public universities which is that students rely*
> *on private lessons" Laila, student, interview, November 2021.*

Danya, the political science professor has also mentioned some of the differences she has personally faced between Ain Shams University and AUC since she spent two semesters at Ain Shams University before she moved to AUC when she was still an undergraduate student.

> *"There at the public universities, you have your fixed plan for each year, but it*
> *is really liberal arts here (that makes difference), so I remember there that we*
> *had year one, year two, but when I moved to AUC, I remember there are core*
> *courses, there are elective courses, you can double major, so you have many*
> *options, so it involves more freedom and flexibility for the student" Danya,*
> *interview, December 2021.*

Ania, the psychology professor shares a similar opinion from her experience at Ain Shams University, but from her experience there as a graduate Ph.D. student.

> *"When I am finishing my Ph.D. in Ain Sham ... it is very systemized, I used to take preliminary doctorate courses, I took twelve courses that are so outdated and so not needed and I wish I had the choice that out of the ten (courses) they gave us like five for example that I can choose from, like the masters here at AUC, you have the basic courses and then you have elective courses, so I wished I had this because this limits the mind of the student" Ania, interview, December 2021.*

The comparison between both systems sheds light on the critical qualities of each one of them, which is useful for policymakers to know more about each system, the pros, and cons of each, and try to develop new measures to reach better outcomes for the higher education policies. A participant listed some of the advantages and disadvantages of the public higher education system from his own view.

> *"I think the advantages of public universities are low college fees, the recognized (accredited) certificates, and the varieties in majors and campuses available in each city. The disadvantages could be the high number of enrolled students, which make it difficult to understand the materials and ensure that students are well educated to fit the career-life and weak curriculums" Karam, student, interview, November 2021.*

Here, Karam stresses some critical points which affect students' decisions as well. For example, not all students can afford to go to a private university, so here the educational fees play a role. In addition to that, sometimes the students graduating from private universities in Egypt face some issues while trying to get any official government documents or enroll in certain syndicates because their degrees have to be certified by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Universities and so on. That is why many students choose to go for the public universities track from the beginning, yet they still face other difficulties such as the high number of enrollments, and the outdated curriculums that are way past the current market trends.

Moreover, many participants have mentioned the declaration from the gate aspect several times in their speech and clarified it as a key difference between the AUC and the other universities. the teaching assistant, for example, mentions the "declaration from the gate" option, which enables students to be declared in their desired majors from day one of joining the university

without the need to take the declaration requirements and meet them first, as one of the advantages at the regular Egyptian universities.

> *"I think that the advantages (of public universities) could be that there is no stress of declaration because students there take specific subjects. The disadvantages could be that they do not know the other subjects and they do not get to try other disciplines and also that they do not have a bigger educational background" Nabila, interview, January 2022.*

The point that the Academic Advising Manager has also mentioned from her experience with the different students and what she observed over the years.

> *"The advantage in the regular Egyptian system is that you are declared from the gate, whether in business, engineering, economics, whatever. You know your field from day one and nothing can change it. This is the only advantage" Hadya, interview, October 2021.*

She also mentioned that declaring a certain major at the AUC could be sometimes challenging for some students.

> *"For AUC, the only disadvantage that I see is being undeclared and struggling sometimes for two to three years to declare your major and be on solid grounds and safe that you are declared" Hadya, interview, October 2021.*

The issue that Melody has also clarified, and she is currently doing her best and maximum effort to declare her intended major which is Mass Communication.

> *"I mean the problem here is that sometimes the requirements are a lot and heavy and this makes students want to change their majors" Melody, student, interview, December 2021.*

That is why the declaration from the gate option may help some students and make them feel less stressed out with the declaration process and requirements as they feel more secure. However, it seems that even though the declaration from the gate has a good side by guaranteeing a certain specific major for students, many participants do not see it as a worthy advantage, and they showed their preference for experiencing different disciplines and getting to know other fields

until settled on a major of interest. Amre has highlighted this point in his comparison between the AUC system and the other universities.

> *"The major from the gate system may save time and money but it will definitely not give you a sense of what to study and will deprive students of general knowledge" Amre, student, interview, January 2022.*

Jasmin also mentioned this point from her experience as a freshman student who came to university with minimal knowledge about the subjects that she had to take in order to declare a business major.

> *" I had no experience in high school about anything related to business, unlike those who were taking accounting or economics in school, it was not the case for me, so now that I have taken some classes I understand more if I can see myself in business or not and also sometimes you enter thinking that want something and then change your opinion, so I think declaration from the gate is a disadvantage" Jasmin, student, interview, December 2021.*

Students who are indecisive or unsure about the major they want are those who will not benefit from the declaration from the gate option because for them it is better to study various subjects and then decide rather than being enrolled in a major and then feel that they dislike or do not want to graduate with. In her interview, Hadya, the Academic Advising Manager mentions another beneficial comparison between the public universities versus AUC.

> *"In public universities, for engineering, you get to have the technical part, you are mechanical, construction, or whichever field, you get to know the technicalities of your major very well and maybe better than in AUC, but no skills at all" Hadya, interview, October 2021.*

She adds to the comparison by stating the benefits of studying at a university like the AUC and she mentioned the key differentiation qualities of being an AUC graduate.

> *"They lack presentation skills, writing skills, communication skills. If you are an engineer and want to work for example at Schlumberger, you have the technical part, but there are other parts that complement the technical part of engineering and this is what these big companies or multinational companies*

seek in AUC employees, they will not find it in employees from the national universities" Hadya, interview, October 2021.

There is another important point that was raised by some participants as an important factor while talking about the comparison between public universities versus other private universities according to their own perceptions. This point is the role that professors play in encouraging the students to continue in certain majors and do well in certain subjects and the contrary (Miller (2001). The point that student Melody supported from her own experience as well at Ain Shams University.

"Doctors in the public universities, they deal with the student in a way that is unfair and is like "will make you fail" and there are many students who go for the summer session there and of course there in the public universities, summer is not like here (at AUC), students go for the summer session to repeat the course they failed not to take or finish extra credits" Melody, student, interview, December 2021.

Coming from a public university as well, Rania, the Senior Academic Advisor has explained her view regarding the role of professors in that matter.

"I believe that the quality and of course the background of the professors have a high impact on every student, college students, so some of the professors are coming from entirely different backgrounds so they might be bias or be unfair to them regarding the grades and so" Rania, interview, November 2021.

The Senior Academic Advisor here also mentions a critical part which is a psychological and an authoritative aspect that the professors may follow, and it will have direct and indirect impacts on students' decisions on whether to continue in certain majors or not. She then adds what she sees from her point of view, and she makes a comparison between the professors at public universities versus those in private universities.

"I believe that in private universities there is a bit of filtration or choosing of professors and Teaching Assistants in a different way" Rania, interview, November 2021.

While even if sometimes the same professor may be teaching at public and private university at the same time, his/her approach may be different in each campus depending on many factors such

as the number of students they teach, the attitude and commitment of students, the attendance rate, and so on.

Some participants have also highlighted the importance of the multiple services that AUC provide to its students and especially the academic advising service that helps students to be on track and help them follow their plans. Each student is assigned to an academic advisor since his first semester. The advisor has a role in identifying the intended major of the student, explaining the declaration requirements of this major to him/her, making students more familiar with the system of the university, and guiding the student each semester until he/she safely declares the major. Student Mira mentioned how an advisor helped her to know more about the system.

"I was so lost I came to one of the advisers, she was very helpful, but I didn't really understand the system at first" Mira, interview

Melody has mentioned the role that advising played in her transition from the public system to the private system.

> *"I believe that any freshman needs to have this advising session from the beginning because many students are unaware of the courses, majors, the catalog we need to know everything from the beginning and how to register for courses" Melody, student, interview, December 2021.*

Rania shares the benefits of having academic advisors who help students throughout their path towards declaration of major.

> *"They help and support the student and walk him/her through this phase and they help them to adapt well between this change from high-school to university" Rania, interview, November 2021.*

That is why many students find academic advising, and many other services provided at the AUC, useful in helping them in the transition phase from high school to university. Such services benefit the student on so many levels and have direct and indirect positive impacts on shaping their academic decisions (Jaradat & Mustafa, 2017).

The liberal arts education is a unique type of education that is only provided at the AUC. Many students from AUC, and outside it, believe in the benefits of this type of education. The aim of liberal arts education is to arm students with many needed skills outside the scope of their main studies (Lewis, 2018). At the AUC for example, the core curriculum courses give an opportunity for the students to explore other disciplines and take courses from different departments other than

their own departments. Many students like the idea of getting the chance to explore various subjects and building decent background in some other courses that they find interesting. Student Laila, who goes to Cairo university in addition to AUC shared her opinion when she was asked about how she thinks about liberal arts education.

> *"I personally believe that liberal arts help, of course, to be honest, because it opens your scope and mind on things you would have never thought of" Laila, student, interview, November 2021.*

Another student has shared her own experience with liberal arts education and how she feels that liberal arts education helped her in her studies.

> *"I see many people outside AUC, in other universities in Egypt, they only take and study courses from their majors not outside, so it is like I feel that when we take courses from outside our majors it is more enlightening, and it helps in the major itself" Baheya, student, interview, December 2021.*

At the AUC, in addition to the major courses, students take the core courses and also some general electives courses, in the sense that they go out of the confinement of their own majors and check other possibilities. Danya, the political science professor explains that out of her own experience at both Ain Shams university and when she moved to AUC, it was obvious to her that liberal arts education helped her to make more convenient academic decisions that realize her ambitions.

> *"I chose (my major) easier because I had the chance to explore (various subjects), you have electives to choose from, so if you have a sub-interest you can minor in it, you can double major if you cannot really choose between the two, so like yes I would go for the liberal education and especially after my experience" Danya, interview, December 2021.*

In addition to that, many participants highlighted that some students might actually change their majors after taking the core curriculum courses because when they explore other subjects, they sometimes find themselves more interested in these subjects and doing well in them, so they start pursuing a major in this field.

> *"I like the idea that I have the option to change and that it is flexible, and that even if I took courses and they are not related to my major they still count, so*

this encourages that you can have knowledge about different fields, and you do not stick to just one, so yes this is good" Jasmin, student interview, December 2021.

Out of her experience with many students as a teaching assistant, Nabila has also highlighted this point.

"Honestly, I meet a lot of students who change their mind after taking some core courses" Nabila, interview, January 2022.

The idea is that sometimes when students explore different disciplines, they find themselves more passionate about these disciplines, and they become more eager to study these subjects, so they end up changing their majors. Some freshman students may encounter this and here Mira talks about what she has seen with her colleagues in regard to that issue.

"I know many students who started to take many courses to declare a certain major then after they take the core courses, they start to like realize whether they like to continue their intended major or not and they start to think of a different major and they start shifting, but in other universities, it is like too late. AUC prepares you from the beginning before it is too late" Mira, student, interview, December 2021.

The core curriculum courses are the essence of the liberal arts education provided at the AUC. These courses are what make the students graduating from AUC good calibers in the labor market and that is why many employers prefer to hire more AUC graduates because they know that these calibers have not only the knowledge, but the skills that back up this knowledge coming from multiple backgrounds. Hadya, the Academic Advising Manager has referred to this point in her interview and shared her view of her encounters.

"This is the importance of liberal education, and this is what distinguishes AUC from other universities in Egypt or USA in some cases because, in many universities in the US, you are declared from the gate as well" Hadya, interview, October 2021.

She adds to this point by clarifying that skills are key nowadays in the labor market, so liberal arts education help in that matter.

"I believe that the idea of liberal education is very important in shaping the personality and this is more important other than the major. You can have your certificate in engineering, but your skills are very bad, and recruiters now are seeking skills more than the GPA" Hadya, interview, October 2021.

It is believed that the liberal arts education that AUC applies, is one of the main reasons that make studying at the AUC an unforgettable experience for many students who go there. It gives them an international and a global experience without the need to travel abroad and bear the burdens of living outside their countries. This point was conveyed by Joe who used to live abroad before joining AUC.

"I like it is in my country and that I do not need to go abroad and live alone because I tried to live alone abroad, but now there is a big difference and here is much better" Joe, student, interview, December 2021.

Many Egyptian universities have tried to implement some of the essences of the liberal arts in their systems and they started to adopt the credit hours system, but it is believed that they need more developmental actions in order to reach better outcomes for their students. They could also benefit from the AUC experience and seek guidance from some AUC members to develop their systems by integrating some of the liberal arts concepts and values into their curriculums. The idea that will have more beneficial returns on the Egyptian higher education system.

4.4 Social Media Effect

Social Media has become an essential aspect of humans' daily lives and especially the younger generations who spend so much time using the different online applications (Neier & Zayer, 2015). Social media may have a critical impact on their decisions as well and its users may take certain decisions based on their experiences or others' experiences that are posted on social media. Academic decisions are no exception, many social media users are students too, and since social media connects a large number of users all at once on groups and pages and so on, they start to share their own opinions on the different academic topics. There are multiple Facebook groups for each university, school, and college. The members of these groups connect together and spread many announcements and opinions with each other. Interviewed members were asked a few questions regarding the effect of social media on academic decisions (Slevin, 2008). Some clarified that they can use social media to gain more knowledge. When Joe was asked whether he thinks the social media effect is real or just exaggerated he shared his belief regarding the topic.

"I believe that it is real because anyone graduating from high school would search the different majors on the internet and check what is engineering and what I would work if I studied engineering for example?" Joe, student, interview, December 2021.

Then he later clarified that he would not follow opinions posted on social media blindly as he mainly relies on his own judgment, so he needs to check by himself first whether what is posted on social media fits his case or not. That is why it was essential to know the extent to which social media affects students' academic decisions and whether they get influenced by what is posted on social media or not (Carusi, 2020). Jasmin was asked about social media's influence on her academic decisions, and she confirmed that it somehow helped her to choose to join AUC.

"When I was thinking to go for AUC or any other university, the majority of people on social media and even people I do not know used to say that of course, AUC is better, so this encouraged me more to join AUC" Jasmin, student, interview, December 2021.

The point that Karam has also shared while asking him about social media's influence on his academic decisions.

"I was affected by social media and I made a decision to enroll in music major courses for a certain period, but then I did not complete the music major and focused on my political science major instead" Karam, student, interview, November 2021.

It has a psychological aspect because the opinions shared on social media are coming from personal experiences from normal users, so it gives a kind of validation to the one reading them which in return influences his/her decision. Amre has also pointed out a critical case from an experience that happened to one of his friends because of social media.

"A friend of mine changed his major from engineering to business because media glorified business major and the professional future of business students" Amre, student, interview, January 2022.

It is critical how social media can influence a student's decision to the extent that would make him/her change majors based on what is shared on social media. In her long career in the academic field, the political science professor has observed this social media impact on students.

"It is very strong, I mean in my days no, but now like when students come to take a course always like to check courses before taking them through the peers' experiences and I always tell them not to do that" Danya, interview, December 2021.

The reason why the political science professor advises students not to be highly influenced by social media or not to follow what is there blindly is that ideas and opinions posted on social media are very personal and subjective. What fits someone might not fit the other because they have different personalities, preferences, and capabilities.

"It is very strong we cannot help it, sometimes it makes sense, other times you just hear something bad about a name and you just follow it then they come back later and say that people were not right, I took this course with the professor and turned out to be good, so it is very strong, but I cannot say it is very positive" Danya, interview, December 2021.

The point that the political science professor raised was also highlighted by many other participants. They shared their own experiences and also the experiences of their friends on social media, and many of them agreed that not all opinions posted on social media are accurate because it depends on many other factors. Laila, for example, shares the experience of one of her friends who got influenced by opinions shared on social media regarding joining an architecture major then when she took the courses, she discovered that this was not what she wanted to do or even capable of doing.

"Many people told her that it is about projects and that she will not use math or physics and so then she is now misled and unable to declare because they made her feel that it is much easier than what she thought" Laila, student, interview, November 2021.

That is why many would think that ideas and opinions posted on social media could be misleading because they do not necessarily fit everyone. Not all participants shared the same contribution around social media, Melody for example, has explained that she did not pay attention to what is said on social media because it could have discouraged her or demotivated her from moving to AUC.

"If social media or anything that anyone says to me would have highly affected me then I wouldn't have been here at the AUC, that is why I depend on my own judgement not social media" Melody, student, interview, December 2021.

In her interview, Baheya has also agreed with Melody and expressed that when it comes to academic decisions to join a certain institution, she does not follow what is said on social media.

"If it is something academic then I cannot rely on social media and I have to look for rankings whether they are actually good or not. What are the courses offered? Do I like them or not? Do they have good plans?" Baheya, student, interview, December 2021.

As for the AUC case, there is a famous Facebook group that AUC students join called "Rate AUC Professors", the purpose of this group is to assemble all students from freshman level to senior level and also alumni altogether, so they share their experiences with courses and professors. Students go to the group and ask their peers about their opinions on courses, what are the "easy" courses, what to take as an engineering major for example, which minors to pursue, etc. Some students used to follow the opinions shared by this group without making their own judgment and they only rely on the group, however, by the time they discover that this was not the right approach and that each one has his own experience. Jasmin for example explained that she can check the group but not follow it blindly.

"In all cases, my decision will not be based only on what they say, but I would consider it because they have the experience, they are people who have already tried what I will go through I did not try yet. This would be regarding courses, but majors, it is a big decision to be taken based on someone's recommendation" Jasmin, student, interview, December 2021.

On the other side, students are used on going there and rate the professors by labeling them with either "avoid" or "go for him/her". However, many participants clarified that many of the opinions posted could be misleading especially those related to opinions on professors. Baheya who is still a freshman student mentioned this point out of her own experience.

"For example, in one of my courses, I took it with someone "avoid" (an instructor that social media users advised to avoid), then when I took the course

with her, I found out that she was a good one" Baheya student,, interview,
December 2021.

Mira has also faced the same issue and she explains that out of her experience, opinions on professors are not always accurate.

"I encountered several situations when people say this professor is not that good
or something, then when I get enrolled in his course and it turns out that he is
not that bad" Mira, student, interview, December 2021.

Melody had another contribution to add to that matter because for her, she follows her own mind-thinking and she focuses on herself more than the other outside factors.

"For example, when someone writes a post and says "avoid a certain class or
doctor, you feel scared, but it depends on every student as well. I took a course
with a doctor and half of the students were saying avoid,... but I took it anyway
because it did not matter for me since I work and I submit my assignments on
time " Melody, student, interview, December 2021.

There could be a lesson learned from what Melody shared, is that as long as the student do whatever he/she has to do, they will still succeed regardless of how harsh or lenient the professor is or how hard or easy the course is. She sheds light on the importance of self-commitment and that students can still pass the hard courses if they submit their work on time, attend classes, ask whenever they need help, and be proactive in the classrooms.

One of the participants shed light on a critical side of social media influence, she shares her opinion on how information posted on social media could be used as indicators of social standards, she believes that some students write in their biographies on social media that they are studying at certain universities, such as AUC, because they have high reputation, so people will think they are coming from reputable social backgrounds.

"I also feel that social media has an effect in the case like when someone wants
to impress others by writing in his/her bio on social media that he is studying
business major for example" Baheya, student, interview, December 2021.

She explains that the impact of social media in these cases is not about influencing academic decisions, but also social images and a tool for social acceptance which is key for young

students who seek social integration and acceptance especially since it is their first years in college, so they want to fit in and make good friendships.

From another perspective, many participants shared their opinions on how social media is growing as a desired career field. A student clarified that social media has an influence on the career goals of the new generations.

> *"For example, the people you see on social media most of them are influencers on social media they are called freelancers or businessmen, so this encourages you more towards their majors and you feel that this is more fun than medicine for example" Jasmin, student, interview, December 2021.*

The use of social media created new concepts in the market field as well as new job titles such as influencers, and bloggers, so these new trends attract the younger generations more than the old robust mindsets. Mira who is a young student studying mass communication confirms this influence.

> *"It definitely has an effect especially recently like everyone wants to be an influencer and work in social media and videos, so yeah it definitely has an effect" Mira, student, interview, December 2021.*

Ania, the psychology professor also believes in the social media effect on shaping the new career opportunities and market trends which are changing away from the commonly popular jobs and moving towards new emerging and as important career opportunities.

> *"I believe that social media has a very strong effect because back then the success was more around doctors and engineers, ten years ago the success was around business and economics, now the success is around the wellbeing and psychology, so there are waves you know, and it goes not only with the needs of the country but also social media" Ania, interview, December 2021.*

The Senior Academic Advisor has also mentioned a possible reason behind this boom in social media and its careers and she related it to the covid-19 era and the two years the whole world spent online in quarantine.

> *"We became more focused on the digital part or the social part on digital planforms, maybe this kind of jobs would not be as popular as now if we did not stay in quarantine, we stayed at home, and everyone did their thing at home and*

so. I believe this made a huge impact on the upcoming major choices for the
students" Rania, interview, November 2021.

In that sense, it is believed that social media will have a much bigger influence on students' academic decisions in the future to keep up with the current and emerging trends. Many graduates now are seeking to work in social media, digital marketing, entrepreneurship, and fintech which could all be due to the technological advancements and the digitization approaches that are growing each day.

4.5 Ways for Improvements

One of the most key findings comes from interviewees' suggestions of ways for improvements. It was important to know what they think about the current situation of the higher education system in Egypt in general and also the institutions they are part of in specific as well as their vision or suggestions for improvements and development. They were asked about how can universities best help students in their freshman years and guide them to ease the decision-making process of selecting their majors. Jasmin who transferred from the University of Coventry to AUC explains that there should be a better way to explain the majors to students and help them choose.

> *"I think they should not just add the majors offered on the website and that is it,*
> *for example, they should bring people to present each major for students to be*
> *able to better envision it. I remember in Coventry University; you just choose*
> *two preferences and I felt that I want to choose more" Jasmin, student,*
> *interview, December 2021.*

Karam's suggestion also leans towards the same direction, as he values the fact that peers have an effect on each other so declared students might help undeclared students to make better decisions.

> *"I think they can make group or peer to peer interviews, freshman programs,*
> *and activities through which students could discover the several majors offered"*
> *Karam, student, interview, November 2021.*

Another student suggests that there can be some shadow days in the life of current students so that freshman students get to know more about these majors.

"I feel maybe a day or two in the life of a current student of the major they want to declare (would help), just to see and try the subjects that these students study" Laila, student, interview, November 2021.

It is also important to know how to better approach the young generation and know-how to let them reach the decisions themselves by exploring their needs. Amre suggests that this could be one way of development and he also mentioned a startup that actually does this.

"I think to be more personal with students and encourage them to explore various sectors. I talked to a company in this field, they do that in a gamified way" Amre, student, interview, January 2022.

More knowledge is what students need; they need to know more details about their intended majors from day one so that they become aware of what they are expected to do and become more aware of the nature of their studies. The point that Baheya suggested as a freshman undeclared student.

"I think to give a better understanding of the different majors. Also, to offer an understanding of the expected career opportunities after graduating from such majors" Baheya, student, interview, December 2021.

There could be some guiding services that a university can provide, just like at the AUC where there is the academic advising center and other students-based services such as the First-year Program (FYP) and the Student Union (SU) which are led and managed by current students. In her interview, Melody has highlighted the importance of such entities that helped her.

"The idea of having advising and students services surely helps and of course, we feel lost in any place, not just here at AUC, for example, I used to suffer as well at Ain shams, also the other guiding options from the SU and FYP, so I go to older students who help me a lot because they explain everything (the system of the university) from the first day" Melody, student, interview, December 2021.

From an advisor point of view, Rania, the Senior Academic Advisor also shares her suggestions to make students more familiar with their intended majors as well as the system of their universities.

"They need to do a presentation where students can attend to know more about the major, some orientations, meet the professors or maybe seniors who are about to graduate and they can discuss with them their struggles as well as the pros and cons about this major" Rania, interview, November 2021.

Finally, Hadya, the Academic Advising Manager suggested a new initiative that has not been implemented yet at the AUC or any other university in Egypt. This initiative is based on what is implemented in other international universities which is a zero-credit course for freshman students that guide them throughout their first semester.

"I believe that for AUC for example, as a liberal education system, we should develop a zero-credit course that introduces the university system to students, since freshman students are very confused and the first year is usually tough on them moving from high school to university" Hadya, October 2021.

All of the ideas presented by the interviewees are coming from their own interpretations and from what they have themselves encountered either as students or as faculty or staff members. Universities could take what is already implemented at the AUC and start having their own original models and AUC itself can also use these suggestions to better enhance its services and approach students in many different ways so that they become more capable of taking better academic decisions.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to say that the Egyptian higher education system needs do develop new policies as well as reviewing its current policies in order to make higher education more relevant to students' academic choices and futures career plans (Barsoum, 2020). Educational opportunities globally have been a central progressive value, but lately, living up to this idea has become more imperative as the economic gains of education have expanded. The students' initial plans for their future are ambiguous, formed by their often-unconvinced desires and often-limited awareness of external circumstances. Implementing the liberal arts education concepts could be one useful approach that would help students to make more relevant academic plans and educational choices when it comes to selecting the field of study that would help them to get the needed knowledge and background to go into the career life in the future. It enables students the opportunity to get more familiar with various fields and take a glimpse of different disciplines in order to test what could be the most suitable one for them, which make them well-rounded candidates as well. The idea behind this approach is arming students with several skills that would help them shine in their future career paths. The American University in Cairo (AUC) provides a remarkable example in that context as a leading institution in the area that adopt liberal arts education, which makes its graduates very unique in the Egyptian and the international labor market (Bertelsen, 2012).

Moreover, students and their parents base the choice they take on many aspects such as their gender differences, social class, financial abilities, available resources, as well as academic performance and abilities. There are also other issues to consider such as the peer effect, emotional and psychological support, parents' understanding and way of communication with their children, and also the perceived outcome or expected successful achievements (Porter, 2020). All these factors affect the decision process made by students and their parents while choosing the most suitable or convenient institution and area of study as well. The return of such measures is improving the quality of education provided to students which will be reflected on the whole society that will gain successful calibers in the different fields who would bring more prosperity and development to their societies. The aim is to realize more relevance in the education sector so that it copes with the developmental plans in the country. With each passing day, technology progresses in inconceivable ways, which has a major influence on the increasingly competitive economy in the world. Social Media has also proved its strong existence and importance for the

contemporary career interests. That is why there are new emerging career trends and students need to be prepared for such opportunities.

5.1 Policy Recommendations

The research proves the need to develop policies that would take all findings into consideration. Hence, it is crucial to give special attention to students and support them in choosing their study field which will lead to their future career path. Some policy should be improved, and some others should be imposed.

Firstly, a Career Day and Job shadowing events once every semester at schools must be mandatory in high schools due to their role of exposing students to their potential careers. In which business partners from a range of organizations at the schools' ground exchange, with the students, knowledge about their organization, work, and skills needed to help them find their field of interest. This event enables a connection between the students' academic pursuits, skills and their future careers. As it offers the students an up-close and personal view of different kinds of jobs to explore career paths, build a process of self-awareness, and develop a plan to reach future goals. Not only will they gain insight into that specific area of work, but they will have a perception about the work environment in general, which can be much more effective. As a result, the students will be able to make a rational choice for the major they want to concentrate in and will be able to identify whether they see themselves following the same career path or not. In addition, they will determine whether to pursue a particular field without wasting time in applying for jobs or internships. This policy can easily be implemented in schools alongside the educational field trips by arranging these job shadows with well-known companies to get the most value.

Secondly, it is important also to take all possible measures to prepare students in their transitional phase from high schools to universities such as having orientation programs to enable better integration of students in their university lives and also to provide parents with much needed information regarding their children's futures in such universities. University preparatory academics opportunities can be associated with technical training and workplace experience. The students must have access to opportunities to experience first-hand how their academic practice is translated to possible career pathways. Programs which allow this exposure and offer students meaningful results has to be available in each school. Hence, grant programs can be developed to allow flexibility for students to study beyond regular school hours and outside school premises. It can be in forms of summer or winter internships or even a semester of credit. Mixing standard

academic classes and real-world job planning trains the high schoolers for their next move and helps them develop professional knowledge in growing fields (Partelow & Brown, 2018).

Moreover, certified Career Advisors should be employed in every school, where they inform the students about the options of the job market and alter their perceptions of labor market conditions throughout the academic year. In order for these students to be able to make better decisions that fit their desired career paths. Also, the advisor must provide the students with a framework for evaluating their options with no interference from a third party. Consequently, they will be able to allocate the field and major they are interested in and have a smoother entry into the workforce in the future.

Finally, there is a need to implement critical policies that support students in their academic paths. For example, schools and universities need to have clear policies that layout important values such as equality and integrity then make sure to raise the awareness of students and their parents about them. There should be clear policies that eliminate any sort of gender, social class, ethnic discrimination among students by enabling more inclusion to different types of students in each program. Schools need to regularly assess and shuffle the distribution of students in the different classrooms, since it is an important factor that affects student's performances as well. There should be better policies to ease the financial burdens on students and their families like having scholarships, financial aid plans, and allowing various deferred payments plans to support the least fortunate students and allow more opportunities to different students. By implementing these policy recommendations, the students will be able to make rational choices on their own and choose their future career path at a young age with minimal external social, familial, and financial sorts of pressure.

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Appendices

Appendix 1- Interview Questions

1. Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?

2. What is your education background? School, university, and major

3. In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?

4. Are you a current student or an alumnus of the American University in Cairo (AUC)?

5. What could be the main concern for students in their first year of college while choosing their major of study?

6. Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance

7. Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?

8. Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?

9. Do you think the effect of the social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?

10. Can you please tell an incident, or a case related to this? Whether happened to you personally or that you encountered with someone you know

11. Would you take an academic decision to join a program, or an institution based on social media users' experiences that they share?

12. In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university

Appendix 2- Interviews

Interview 1

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?

Joe: Joe Adel I am a freshman 19 years old and intending to major in BADM finance.

Nourhane: What is your educational background?
Joe: I was in an American school all my lifetime

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?

Joe: Mainly the courses or the subjects I am good at, for example, I am good with numbers, so I go with numbers, not a major that includes a lot of readings and writing

Nourhane: What could be the main concern for students in their first year of college while choosing their major of study?
Joe: For example differences in the way of studying like assignments. In my school I was not used to have a lot of assignments, maybe less exams, midterms are much harder than in school, so that is what affected my studies
The main concern is the difference between college and school in assignments and exams and so on they are harder in university.

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance
Joe: It differs from one person to another. For me, it is the personal performance, peer and social effect, then the financial burden

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?

Joe: I feel that I am more used to the system in AUC than the public universities system. The uni system at AUC is a system I am used to, the same method of studying but a bit harder than school so this I see helping me a lot while studying and will enable me to get better grades.
Also at the same time, I like it is in my country and that I do not need to go abroad and live alone because I tried to live alone abroad, but now there is a big difference and here is much better.

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?
Joe: Not much to be honest, but liberal arts can help me to understand other majors and have a background regarding other fields

Nourhane: Would you change your opinion based on the different subjects you take that are not related to the major you are initially intending?
Joe: I do not think so, because like I said before, if I am good in a subject then this is what I am going to study. The only thing that can affect my decision is if for example I studied a similar topic and found that I am better in it then I may choose it over my initially intended major

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?

Joe: No I believe that it is real because anyone graduating from high school, they search the different majors on the internet and what is engineering for example and what I would work if I studied engineering for example.

Nourhane: But would you choose a certain academy decision based on someone's opinion on social media?

Joe: No, personally I would not do that because I am skeptical regarding these matters and I do not believe or trust anything I see on social media, to be honest. Even if it is from a reliable source I can go search again myself and ask those who did it before as well as people who I already know.

Nourhane: Can you please tell me an incident or a case related to this? Whether happened to you personally or that you encountered with someone you know

Joe: For example regarding the core curriculum courses options, everyone goes ask and check on the famous Facebook group "Rate AUC Professors" and then take courses based on others' recommendations and most of them get good grades. But I believe that this is not social media, it is more of you asking your friends and colleagues who have been there too.

Nourhane: Would you trust their opinion there?

Joe: My friends?

Nourhane: Yes, your friends or anyone else in the group?

Joe: Yes I trust the majority. The common opinion on the group

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university

Joe: Honestly, for me, I was aware that I am in a transition phase between college and school, but the difference is that I knew that I am not obligated to take hard courses from the beginning or the first semester for example and this is because I am not used to the system her or the difference so I could have got bad grades. I rely on my personal capabilities more because for example, my mom and dad wanted me to major in engineering and be an engineer but I took the decision not to because I know my capabilities and I am not that person who would stay at home study. I love to go out every day and not overwhelm myself

Nourhane: what can the University itself do?

Joe: For example, when I was a freshman, there were many things that I did not know in the system like registration, banner, and the declaration GPA and so that were not always provided so I needed easier access to information.

Nourhane: I am done, Thank you so much Joe and please let me know if you have anything more to add.

Interview 2
Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?
Jasmin: My name is Jasmin Weshahy, I am a freshman and this is my first semester, I am still undeclared but I am intending to declare business marketing, I am not sure, but yeah I guess so. I am from Alexandria actually.

Nourhane: What is your educational background?
Jasmin: I went to the German school in Alexandria so I took my Abitur certificate, it was a German system.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?
Jasmin: First of all, I see your preference, what you want to study, then the reputation of the place you will participate in, and the career or market needs. For example, sometimes you like to study some subjects, but there are no jobs for it, so this influences your decision, and also the pay, the salary you will get as well as the educational fees, and social media or word of mouth

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance
Jasmin: Firstly Financial burden, secondly peer or social effect, and lastly student's personal performance

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?
Jasmin: I see that the declaration from the gate is an advantage for the few who enter university knowing what they want but I think that most people do not know, I did not know and still don't know till now, but the difference is that I now take courses, so I started to understand more. For example, I had no experience in school about anything related to business, unlike those who were taking accounting or economics in school, it was not the case for me, so now that I have taken some classes I understand more if I can see myself in business or not and also sometimes you enter thinking that want something and then change your opinion, so I think declaration from the gate is a disadvantage.

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?
Jasmin: Yes, I actually can and I like it when they were explaining the liberal arts education and so, I like the idea that I have the option to change and that it is flexible, and that even if I took courses and they are not related to my major they still count, so this encourages that you can have knowledge about different fields, and you do not stick to just one, so yes this is good.

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?

Jasmin: I did not think about it much, but yes there is an effect of course, for example, half of the people you see on social media most of them are influencers on social media they are called freelancers or businessmen, so this encourages you more towards their majors and you feel that this is more fun than medicine for example, but of course, it depends how it affects you, I mean some people will not be affected by this.

Nourhane: Would you choose a certain major based on someone's recommendation?

Jasmin: In all cases, my decision will not be based only on what they say, but I would consider it because they have the experience, they are people who have already tried what I will go through I did not try yet. This would be regarding courses, but majors, it is a big decision to be taken based on someone's recommendation.

Nourhane: How would you choose your major?

Jasmin: Firstly, the preference, and I of course in all cases you will think about the career and what will you work and you want to get well paid as you grow, but do you enjoy what you do or not? I mean it must be something I like, so the most important thing should be the preference.

Nourhane: Can you please tell me an incident or a case related to this? Whether happened to you personally or that you encountered with someone you know

Jasmin: Not social media but for example I have one of my friends who always wanted to become a doctor because she was watching Grey's Anatomy all the time, so of course this influences and at the end, she went to study medicine and it is not the same at all, but in all cases, it has an influence.

Nourhane: Would you take an academic decision to join a program or an institution based on social media users' experiences that they share?

Jasmin: Yes, I think it plays a role. For example, when I was thinking to go for AUC or any other university, the majority of people on SM and even people I do not know used to say that of course, AUC is better, so this encouraged me more to join AUC.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university

Jasmin: I think they should not just add the majors offered on the website and that is it, for example, they should bring people to present each major. I remember in Coventry, you just choose two preferences while I felt I want to choose more. I think they should make it open for everyone and then you go ask current fellow students as well faculty and talk to them and let them explain what they do in such majors to be able to better envision it.

Interview 3

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?

Rania: Hi Nourhane, this is Rania, I am thirty-two years old, I am an interior designer, used to be an interior designer, and now I work in the academic field. I am a senior academic advisor at the AUC, I am a mother of a five-year-old child too.

Nourhane: What is your educational background?

Rania: My high school degree was Thanaweya Amma, basically I was not interested in most of the universities and I struggled a bit when I was in school, I did not know which major I was interested in, and this is a huge difference between Egyptian public universities compared to private universities because you need to be specific in choosing your major from the beginning not like here at AUC, you have the option to choose and see majors then decide. I was Thanaweya Amma arts, I was not actually the type of student who can focus too much, I did not like math or science, I mostly liked history, theoretical courses maybe, I used to perform better in this type of courses. I used to love arts, I love drawing, colors, and anything related to arts, and this was maybe the thing that sparked the faculty of fine arts, in which we had to also decide from the beginning which major in arts we want.

We had three, actually, four types of majors; we had interior space and it has two sections (interior space and theatre, like theatre design). We had graphic design which is a separate major with a separate university it was not in the same building every university was in a different place as well. We had also sculpting and photography and these were the four main majors in fine arts. Then we had to choose according to our grades, Thanaweya Amma grades. The highest was interior design and then graphic design. I was not exactly sure whether I liked interior or graphic more, but I went with interior because I had the grade, I was proud of myself back then I got the grade and then I think I liked it more but maybe now after the years, I think I would have done better in graphic design.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?

Rania: I think it is a loaded question because most of the students do not have enough experience on what is coming next, they have two roads, either they know this from school, which is the school prepares them on what is coming next and helps them to choose the right major for them, or they have a parent, a family member whoever that can discuss this matter with them and guides them towards the right direction, so basically if they are normal parents I believe they will choose like your cousin chose this university or this major, so they like their kids to choose the same major they chose or even explore something entirely different. But mainly, parents who are involved in education, they can truly make their children decide correctly about their major. The parental effect has a huge impact on the students.

Nourhane: What could be the main concern for students in their first year of college while choosing their major of study?

Rania: I believe they do not want to waste their time; they are concerned about whether the path they chose is the correct path for them or that they might need to explore something different in order to choose between like both majors. Maybe we meet a lot of students who are hesitant between two or three majors, they do not know which major they will do better in or even a lot of students are concerned about their future and what they will do after graduating and what major will help them work in a good environment or good workspace or even gain a lot of money or even achieve whatever they to, so they have a lot of challenges facing them and they are really young and inexperienced to choose the right root.

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance
Rania: I believe the personal student performance and the financial factor. But maybe for me, I met a lot of students who are equally, we can say it is equal for them the financial factor or burden and the family influence or impact on their decisions.

Nourhane: Can you arrange them From one to three?
Rania: I believe that one is the personal student performance, then the financial burden and three the peer and social impact.

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?
Rania: I think the difference between the two like I mentioned before, maybe the positive point here at the AUC or private universities for students is that they can experience more than one major before making the decision on what is the correct major for them, but compared to the fees in any other university, I believe it is way higher than the public universities in Egypt.
I think that in public universities, some of the struggles are the social aspect. You are coming from a social bubble and you meet people from other or different backgrounds and social levels, maybe also many different cities or areas, some of them live in the countryside and then come and sit or move to the big cities like Cairo or Alexandria only to be able to attend the university so you get to meet too many people who are entirely different from you completely, so I believe that this is a bit controlled here at the AUC or at the other private universities, they do not get to face this. They face it but in a very low percentage not a high percentage. Other than public universities where you meet people from so many different backgrounds.
The professors, of course, the professors, the quality of learning. I believe that in the public universities there are great professors, which makes Engineering or even medicine at Alexandria University or Ain Shams University or Cairo university one of the best, or they are the best. However, I believe that the quality and of course the background of the professors they have a high impact on every student, college students, so some of the professors are coming from entirely different backgrounds so they might يستقصدوهم or be unfair to them regarding the grades and so.

Nourhane: In public universities you mean?
Rania: Yes in public universities. Of course, I believe that in private universities there is a bit of filtration or choosing of professors and Teaching Assistants in a different way. For me I did not face this kind of major or drastic different backgrounds in professors, because in fine arts, most of the professors they come from open backgrounds, they are open to people who are different, they accept different kinds of people, so maybe the struggles were more with Teaching Assistants.

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?
Rania: Yes I do and they have support from so many offices here at the university that help and clarify a lot of their concerns, they get to explain things for them before choosing their majors, they help and support the student and walk him through this phase and they help them to adapt well between this change from high-school to university.

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?

Rania: Honestly, maybe lately yes, in the past three years, maybe after covid hit the world I believe that there are certain jobs became very important to the world, like everything related to social media, influencers, entrepreneurs, we became more focused on digital part or social part on digital planforms, maybe this kind of jobs would not be as effective as now if we did not stay in quarantine, we stayed at home and everyone did their thing at home and so. I believe this made a huge impact on the upcoming major choices for the students.

Nourhane: Do you think they can take academic decisions based on recommendations on social media?
Rania: Yes, maybe they read about the course or hear other reviews from other students, from a professor if he did promote well about his course or a certain course, I believe this has a major impact on the choice of the student.

Nourhane: Would you take an academic decision to join a program or an institution based on social media users' experiences that they share?
Rania: Yes I would do of course I would.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university
Rania: Ok I believe that they mostly need to discuss with them the possibilities for each and every major, they need to do a presentation where students can attend to know more about the major, some orientations, meet the professors or maybe seniors who are about to graduate and they can discuss with them their struggles as well as the pros and cons about this major, I think they will learn a lot from it before they choose whether to do this major or choose another major of course this will help them take a better decision.

Interview 4

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?
Melody: My name is Melody, actually I am a student at the AUC, I am still undeclared but I will hopefully declare next fall.

Nourhane: What is your educational background?
Melody: My high school degree was Thanaweya Amma Maths.
When I was in school, I studied so hard to join CAMA, not at AUC, but I am not getting the grade, so I had an opportunity to join at AUC and I worked hard for it and was able to join and I am still working hard to declare since I joined on a basic English level English 98.

Nourhane: Did you join another university before AUC?
Melody: Yes, I joined Ain Shams university before going to AUC for just one semester, and we were studying online and I was in the faculty of archaeology studying monuments and it was very interesting for me because I used to go to new places and it was a new experience for me so I was happy with it, but the idea of joining AUC was not to be missed at all.

Nourhane: How did you move to AUC?
Melody: Actually I succeeded in all the courses I took in Ain Shams and got a good IELTS grade, so I moved to AUC and was able to join on the first day of classes.

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?
Melody: In like doctors at the public universities, they deal with the student in a way that is unfair and is like "will make you fail" and there are many students that go for the summer session there and of course there in the public universities, summer is not like here, students go for the summer session to repeat the course they failed, but here I go for the summer session as an option to finish more credit hours quickly. However, when I went there, honestly, I think it depends on the student, I was dealing with the same doctors and they were nice to me, maybe I did not feel what they used to say because I only spent one semester there.

Nourhane: And you got good grades too…
Melody: No it was researches but I passed them all and I was happy there, I don't know how it is now because my friends there are complaining from the workload and so, but at AUC we are treated well and respectfully and it is very perfect, and now we care for grades and want to learn at the same time.

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?
Melody: That depends on the majors, I mean some majors have very high courses but other majors are fine, but the very high majors are disappointing to many students and lead them to change to other majors. I mean the problem here is that sometimes the requirements are a lot and heavy and this makes students want to change their majors. For me for example, all my friends have changed their majors, it is like I am. The only one who is still interested in CAMA.

Nourhane: How do you see the fact that you take the core courses that are different from your major? Do you think that this helps you choose better? Or Do feel they complement your intended major?

Melody: I think that the major I am choosing, CAMA, anything I will take it will benefit me because if I work as a TV presenter, anything will benefit me, firstly the RHET and CORE will help me to enhance my English language for the rest of the upcoming classes and in my future career whether as a TV presenter or any other job. As for the scientific thinking course for example which I dislike, I know that it will eventually help me in the future when I work in the sense that when I work I will have a background from many areas in the world.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?
Melody: Timing, I mean to choose a class that I was not supposed to take at that time, for example in my first semester, I think I could have postponed taking some courses like scientific thinking until I get familiar with the university's system and try the study on campus for the first time, so I think these are the decisions we take and then regret later because they were hard especially that I was only taking English in previous semesters here at the AUC, so I did not face the type of courses with different materials and so.

Nourhane: So you wanted to be more familiar with the system before taking the courses?
Melody: Yes and also the registration because we suffer a lot from registration.

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance
Melody: Peer or social effect first, then Personal student performance, and then the financial burden, especially that I am on scholarship so the financial aspect does not affect me like others.

Nourhane: What could be the main concern for students in their first year of college while choosing their major of study?
Melody: I think we already suffer from this at first but then we get used to it, if we already know people, they will help us, we do not suffer much. Because at the beginning we face everything on our own, but the idea of advising and departments, they surely help and of course, we feel lost in any place, not just here at AUC, for example, I used to suffer as well at Ain shams.

Nourhane: So do you feel that advising helps?
Melody: Yes and for example, we did not have this option back at Ain shams, and we have many other guiding options from the SU and FYP, so I deal with other older students who help me a lot and especially the FYP is a good one because they explain everything from the first day and then we have a leader that you can resort to whenever you need help.

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?
Melody: Talking about the rate AUC professors group, for example when someone writes a post and says "avoid a certain class or doctor, you feel scared, but it depends on every student as well. I do not get highly affected by social media, because I feel that as long as I do my assignment and participate with the doctor why would S/he treat me bad? For example, I took a course with a doctor and half of the students were saying avoid and the other half were like no it is fine to take it with him be, but I took it anyway because it did not matter for me since I work and I submit my assignments on time.

Nourhane: And do you see you are doing well so far in the course?

Melody: Not much but it is due to the high workload of the class itself and it is the case with the rest of the professors not mine only.

Nourhane: So, if you can give me a percentage of the social media effect?
Melody: 30-40% because if social media or anything that anyone says to me would have highly affected me then I wouldn't have been here at the AUC.

Nourhane: Would you take an academic decision to join a program or an institution based on social media users' experiences that they share?
Melody: yes we already see a lot of cases on social media and that is what we already do on Rate AUC, so I follow it

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university
Melody: Like the advising, I believe that any freshman needs to have this advising session from the beginning because many students are unaware of the courses, majors, the catalog we need to know everything from the beginning and how to register for courses.
Also, they can hold sessions to make us more aware because some people enter knowing what they really want, others don't so we need sessions that describe more details.

Interview 5

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?
Laila: My name is Laila sobhy, I am an AUC student majoring in POLS and I am also pursuing another degree in law at Cairo University.
Nourhane: What is your educational background?
Laila: I was in the French Baccalaureate system

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?
Laila: I think there are a lot of things such as what you are passionate about, the subjects you are good at in school, your parents a little bit and social pressure also.

Nourhane: What helped while taking the decisions you are currently making?
Laila: Professors in school, and I tried to think about what I really love and want to do and then imagine myself in the future and so on.

Nourhane: What could be the main concern for students in their first year of college while choosing their major of study?
Laila: They could choose something that their parents do not like or not agreeing upon, or that they could try to enroll in a major but can't because of their grades, or just pick a major because they feel that this is right but not what they love.

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance
Laila: I feel Personal student performance, financial burden, then peer or social effect.

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?
Laila: I feel that in private, it is more organized and clearer and you have people who help and guide you while in public universities you are alone and on your own. There is also a problem with public universities that you rely on private lessons.

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?
Laila: Yes I personally believe that liberal arts help, of course, to be honest, because it opens your scope and mind on things you would have never thought of.

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?
Laila: It is really, to be honest. Personally, it did not influence my decision that much but I felt that for others, yes, it had affected them.

Nourhane: Can you please tell me an incident, or a case related to this? Whether happened to you personally or that you encountered with someone you know
Laila: I know a friend who wanted to pursue a degree in interior design and she is smart but does not have the best academic performance, but due to the perception nowadays that you should be an architect and on social media, many people told her that it is about projects and that she will

not use math or physics and so then she is now misled and unable to declare because they made her feel that it is much easier than what she thought.

Nourhane: Would you take an academic decision to join a program or an institution based on social media users' experiences that they share?
Laila: No, honestly I would get scared, I have to talk to someone or if one of the users I know personally and I can talk to them ok, but if it is just comments, so no I won't trust them.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university
Laila: I feel maybe a day or two in the life of a current student of the major they want to declare, just to see and try the subjects these students study, or maybe go to these classes and just watch what they are about or anything from that sort just not to get surprised or feel that this is not what I wanted to do and so

Interview 6

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?
Baheya: So my name is Baheya, I was in Hayah International Academy, my intended major is Business Marketing at the AUC

Nourhane What made you choose Business Marketing in specific, did you have another major in mind and then settled on BADM?
Baheya: Yeah at first, when I first applied for the university I applied for IMCM, but when I chose Mass Com. I felt that this is not what I wanted to take from the beginning and I wanted to take business because when I took BADM in high school, I really liked it and loved it so much, so I was like, no I want business

Nourhane: In your op. Main factors, what made you believe in the decision you are taking or directed you to the decision you are making?
Baheya: I think it was by taking courses at the beginning in the first semester that guides you and gives you a picture of what your life would look like, so do you want to continue like that or not?

Nourhane: So you prefer to try courses first then decide right?
Baheya: Yeah

Nourhane: What could be the main concern for students in their first year of college while choosing their major of study?
Baheya: The concern is the major requirements especially the GPA, when I first joined, I was afraid of business because of the high declaration GPA and I felt that I will not be able to reach this GPA, so the GPA was an issue for me, but later once I realized that I can well and get grades and that this is what I want so I will work towards it.

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance
Baheya: I think it is the personal student performance, then the peer or social effect, and then the financial burden.

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?
Baheya: Here at AUC I feel it is the liberal arts, for example, someone could be an engineering student and take a POLS course which is totally away from his initial field of study. For example, I see many people outside AUC, in other universities in Egypt, they only take and study courses from their majors not outside, so it is like I feel that when we take courses from outside our majors it is more enlightening and it helps in the major itself.
For example, I can take a psychology course that would help in marketing too, so it gives you insight and helps your major even if it is not a major requirement.
Nourhane: So do you believe that they complement each other?
Baheya: Yeah

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?

Baheya: To an extent yes, because I feel that someone can take a course as a core requirement and he feels forced to take it, then realize that he/she likes it and can continue in its field as a minor. However, sometimes a student may feel obligated to take a certain course even if he/she does not like the topic or the course as a whole just because it is a requirement.

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?
Baheya: For me, it was exaggerated, but I also feel that social media has an effect in the case like when someone rights in his/her bio that he is studying BADM at AUC, it is like "Oh Wow" and so, but for me honestly I do not feel that but someone else can feel it this way.

Nourhane: And do you use the Facebook group, "Rate Auc Professors" and check the rating of different courses or professors?
Baheya: Yes

Nourhane: To what extent do you feel this affects your decisions?
Baheya: I feel that when I choose a course, I go there to check to make sure which professors to take with, but sometimes they go wrong.
For example, in one of my courses, I took it with someone "avoid", then when I took the course with her I found out that she was a good one.

Nourhane: What are the main factors that affect your academic decisions?
Baheya: Mainly what I want to do after graduation, it is like the job is what I want to be doing all of my life, so whether I like what I am studying or not, to continue with it for the rest of my life.

Nourhane: Would you take an academic decision based on social media users' opinions or comments?
Baheya: No for me, if it is something academic then I cannot rely on social media and I have to look for rankings whether they are actually good or not. What are the courses offered? Do I like them or not? Do they have good plans?

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university
Baheya: I think to give a better understanding of the different majors, I think that when I joined I didn't quite understand everything and was a bit lost in the many details. Also to offer an understanding of the expected career opportunities, like if you graduated from a certain major then these are the job opportunities you might get in any field basically, I think to give an idea about each major will lead where.

Interview 7

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?
Hadya: I am Hadya and I am a senior manager of the academic advising center. I graduated from the AUC class of 97 and since that time I have been working in advising that is it.

Nourhane: You are a parent too right?
Hadya: Yes

Nourhane: Your children are at AUC or outside?
Hadya: Yes Omar graduated last fall with an Integrated Marketing Communication major and now I have Rawan she is doubling major in Mass com and Chemistry the two are AUCians.

Nourhane: What was your major?
Hadya: Mass communication major and minor economics

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?
Hadya: From my job and my experience in advising we can say that 50% of the students they come making up their minds on the major they want to declare, and we can say that the other 50% you can see the parents' opinion imposed on their children and mostly to declare engineering. In the sense that "you have to be engineer, try to work for engineering", but most of them are not capable of doing science classes and then they tend to change to non-science majors, and this is the usual hassle that keeps going every year and every semester.

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance
Hadya: Peer or social effect first, then personal student performance finally the financial burden.

Nourhane: And as a mother how do you see these factors, how do you think your kids chose their majors?
Hadya: In my case, my son, for example, it was a personal performance and same for my daughter, she chose major Chemistry at first and then mass com was a peer influence. For my son, it was the same, he tried major business at first and did not do well in economics classes, so he changed his intentions, so it was also based on personal performance, but from my experience here in the advising, most of the students they come to say, "My friend told me to major in Political science, it is easy, the GPA is low, around 2.7, you will be able to get his GPA", same for mass com, they say "try to join journalism, it is easy, the GPA might be below 3, so they keep on listening to their peers on the majors to choose and sometimes they stick to the word "easy majors". This is why the peer or social effect is more influential.

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?

Hadya: It is a huge difference, the advantage in the regular Egyptian system is that you are declared from the gate, whether in business, engineering, economics, whatever. You know your field from day one and nothing can change it. This is the only advantage.

The disadvantages are many and we cannot sort them right now, but for AUC, the only disadvantage that I see is being undeclared and struggling sometimes for two to three years to declare your major and be on solid grounds and safe that you are declared. This is the only disadvantage but the advantages are many in AUC. The idea of a liberal education while you are undeclared, if you are not sure about your major, you keep trying courses from the core curriculum which is the liberal education you get to be exposed to different fields, you get to know yourself, you get to explore skills that you are not aware that they exist or that you have these capabilities. And this is the importance of liberal education, and this is what distinguishes AUC from other universities in Egypt or USA in some cases because, in many universities in the US, you are declared from the gate as well.

I believe that the idea of liberal education is very important in shaping the personality and this is more important other than the major. You can have your certificate in engineering, but your skills are very bad, and recruiters now are seeking skills more than the GPA.

Nourhane: Can you give me one or two disadvantages of the regular system in Egypt?

Hadya: It is more like the schools, that is based on memorization for non-science majors, for engineering, you get to have the technical part, you are mechanical, construction, or whichever field, you get to know the technicalities of your major very well and maybe better than in AUC, but no skills at all. They lack presentation skills, writing skills, communication skills. If you are an engineer and want to work for example at Schlumberger, you have the technical part, but there are other parts that complement the technical part of engineering and this is what these big companies or multinational companies seek in AUC employees, they will not find it in employees from the national universities.

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?

Hadya: No I do not think social media has an effect, for example, if they write "be an engineer, chemist, or join mechanical engineering it is the top", it is not based on social media opinions, it is based on background, educational background plus personal decisions, or the usual idea other if you want to get money then join business, work in finance, marketing, etc.. for non-science majors. For sciences, what is mainly booming now is computer sciences, data science, artificial intelligence, of course, the world is becoming more and more digitized now and these people really will be the most selected employees in the coming future. That is why even here at AUC the intention of computer science majors have highly increased, I heard that the starting salaries are twelve thousand for an engineer, construction, or mechanical starting salaries are five thousand, so it is a huge difference and that is why this will affects the intention in the future for computer science, so it is not a matter of social media.

Nourhane: So you do not think that students might choose a certain major or a certain course based on recommendations on social media?

Hadya: No I do not think so.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university

Hadya: National universities will not even think of what to offer for students, they are following the old system, and this is it, this is the curriculum that you have to follow whether you like it or not, it is ok, whether it matches your interest or not, they do not care about this at all.

In private universities, I believe that for AUC for example, as a liberal education system, we should develop a zero-credit course that introduces the university system to students, one of the advisors was really intelligent and wanted to develop a course introducing the university to students since freshman students are very confused and the first year is usually tough on them moving from high school to university. They do not know the system, coming from the Egyptian system or the German system or French systems joining the American system. Same for those coming from the French system joining Cairo university or so, it is a different system for them, they get to understand the system and the way to student and get grades and so on. Plus, the system, the policies on campus, and so on. This is one thing, another thing is that the university should pay attention to the fact that most of the Egyptian students they do not read; give them manuals, brochures, any information, they are always like "I do not know, I did not know, I did not read it". The idea of helping them be involved and read to know the information, this is very important, and they should pay attention to this.

Interview 8

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?
Danya: My name is Danya Hosny, I started to study literature then I moved to political science, then I did my master's in teaching English, teaching Arabic, and then in political science and then I did my PhD in political anthropology.

Nourhane: What was your High school certificate?
Danya: I was in a catholic sisters school it was like a private language school. At my time, international schools did not have a very good reputation, I was a good student but at my time the IGCSE was not very stable, so I thought about it but I ended up not doing it, so I did the normal Thanaweya Amma Arts. I was very good at math but then I did Arts.

Nourhane: What is your current position?
Danya: The written title at the university is senior officer, student liaison, political science department. I am also a lecturer faculty at the academy of liberal arts.

Nourhane: Do you deal with freshman students?
Danya: Sure yes, I deal with freshman students who are interested in majoring in political science.

Nourhane: Did you study at the AUC?
Danya: No, I moved from Ain Shams to here at the AUC.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?
Danya: Regarding the choices of majors, now it is more about the market, so it is market and also family pressure and then the interests come at a later stage, when the student cannot cope with the major that he/she has selected then they go back to their interest because there is nothing else they can do and they have to pursue what they want and I have seen that a lot.

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance
Danya: Financial pressure I am not because they pay the same when go to any major.

Nourhane: I mean in general not just here at the AUC.
Danya: I would say the financial burden, then the personal student performance, then the peer or social effect

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?
Danya: Yeah, I had a chance because I moved so I could see the difference. There at the public universities, you have your fixed plan for each year, but it is really liberal arts here, so there like I remember we had year one year two, but when I moved, I remember there are core courses, there are elective courses, you can double major, so you have many options, so it involves more freedom and flexibility for the student. It might be difficult for some but the older you get it is easier to choose from one or two, so I think it is an asset to study this way and they are applying it at the public universities now. They are learning from our practice and they are having the credits system in the faculty of engineering for example at Ain Shams university, they are doing this so this means that people believe in the importance of liberal education. As for extracurricular activities, for me

I was active there and I was active here as well, so I do not see much difference, but curriculums are different, the environments are different. I like the environment here more, I like the culture here more, so you are very connected. Like at other universities, you choose the people you feel you belong to, here there are more people you can relate to, so I can see the difference.

Nourhane: From your experience as well, what is your insight on the declaration from the gate option there?

Danya: Well, it has its pros and cons, from one point, yes, it is good to know especially that when you graduate from school, and for me I just did the national degree at school, so it was not easy to decide I did not know what I wanted to do but later I did. So yes it is hard and of course, there are personal differences, but I think like with people who are ten years younger than me they are getting used; like my daughter, for example, she goes from KG to an international school, so she has these options that I did not have at my time, so for the new generations, I think it is needed to have this kind of education that you have a choice, you have to explore. I did not have this exploration option before, maybe if I had it, I was afraid to have it at the beginning and I joined a national university at the beginning, but I felt at some point that I am ready to go for this and I chose easier because the chance to explore, you have electives to choose from to choose your major, if you have a sub-interest you can minor in it, you can double major if you cannot really choose between the two, so like yes I would go for the liberal education and especially after my experience.

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?

Danya: Yes but of course the very first years are the most critical years because they need guidance as I said, for me it was hard but at some point, you feel you can be on your own but you need a lot of guidance at the beginning.

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?

Danya: It is very strong, I mean in my days no, but now like when students come to take a course always like to check courses before taking them through the peers' experiences and I always tell them not to do that. It is very strong we cannot help it, sometimes it makes sense, other times you just hear something bad about a name and you just follow it then they come back later and say that people were not right, I took this course with the professor and turned out to be good, so it is very strong but I cannot say it is very positive.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university

Danya: I think it is already doing its job, like it was not there years ago, but now there is the first year program, we have open days, we did not have that before, and a lot of other things that students can make use of, so I think people are becoming more active in introducing majors especially yes, there is a business component like people want to market their product but other people are benefitting from it because you know more about your product and it is right to know more there is nothing wrong if knowing that.

I do not think there is anything else, it is just being available, having more time for the people who need support, because we have other pressure so how to manage responsibilities of people who can perform these jobs is what matters because they need to have more time to listen to students. I had this problem in advising like I wanted to talk to students more but I have other things to do so I do not have enough time to answer their questions, so maybe if the many procedures or bureaucratic things I do not have to do, I think that might be useful, so I think something is going on and that it is getting better. Getting people to know about these events is what matters, so there are events but students sometimes miss them and they do not check because they have too much like publicity of many things they get tired of this, so there is a need for a form of control of media, emails and what is sent to students so they start listening and being alerted maybe there are different alerts that students should be directed to.

Interview 9

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?
Mira: My name is Mira I'm 20 years old And I'm a junior at AUC and I study IMC

Nourhane: What was your high school education background?
Mira: Ok I studied I GCSE at Smart Village school

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?
Mira: Ok so several factors and it depends on the personality of the student. Some Students are affected by their families Like their mother or their father like some parents force their children to study a specific major or something Fathers have their own directions and hobbies like they want to study certain things and they are driven by their own personality

Nourhane: How did you choose your courses in your Freshman year?
Mira: I was so lost I came to one of the advisers, she was very helpful but I didn't really understand the system at first , so she was like you have to take chemistry course and I was like why I don't want to take a chemistry course, So I was having a hard time at first but then I started to like understand Why I should take them and so.

Nourhane: Which major did you declare?
Mira: Integrated Marketing Communication (IMCM)

Nourhane: How did you choose your intended major that you declared? How did you settle on IMC?
Mira: At first I wanted to major in film but my parents started, like, tell me but it is not a job, so I wanted something close, I can minor in film, But I wanted something close to I went with IMC.

Nourhane: Who helped you to settle for this decision?
Mira: Hmmm, No one, it was me

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance
Mira: peer and social effect, personal student performance, and then the financial burden. That was for me I think

Nourhane: From your opinion do you think that this is what mainly happens?
Mira: Umm, I think so yeah

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?
Mira: The advantage is that umm, many students think that they are sure of the major they want to pursue but then maybe in the middle of their studies they start to think like no this is not my place but there is nothing else to do.
But at AUC like from the begging you start to take several courses from several departments, so you, like, get a glimpse of different majors and it helps you decide which study you want to continue with.

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?

Mira: yes, because I know many students that have, like they started to take many course to declare a certain major then after they take the core courses, they start to like, no I do not want to continue in my intended major and they start to think of a different major and they start shifting, but in other universities, it is like too late, but AUC it prepares you from the beginning before it is too late.

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?

Mira: It definitely has an effect especially recently like everyone wants to be an influencer and work in social media and videos, so yeah it definitely has an effect, but I haven't, like, I see this effect like in my younger sister but she hasn't still reached the university level, but still I don't see it in my generation, I think we are aware that we are affected by social media but we do not let it penetrate this part, not reaching the part of studying no.

Nourhane: Would you follow recommendations? Like rate AUC professors and what happens there, people go ask about professors and courses, do you follow this or do you have your own decision-making process?

Mira: Like regarding professors or whole majors?

Nourhane: Either or

Mira: Regarding professors, I definitely follow, like I have an eye, I think when I see people say "low workload, zero workload, amazing", like no I do not want this, but "good explanation, and lenient this I can take

Nourhane: So you read the comments carefully and then have your own decisions right?

Mira: Yeah, and I encountered several situations like when people say this professor is not that good or something but I get enrolled in his course and it turns out that he is not that bad.

Nourhane: Would you take an academic decision based on social media?

Mira: No, I have to take it from people I trust

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university

Mira: I am not sure, but in my case, I needed more explanation, I needed a simpler explanation to the system as a whole, I felt like in IG especially, I was like you have to take these courses, or like if you want to go to a certain university, then you have to take these courses, but the fact that you take whatever you want, I did not understand and I needed more guidance at the beginning.

Nourhane: That is it, thank you so much, Mira!

Interview 10

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?
Ania: My name is Ania, I am a licensed clinical psychologist and I am in charge of the disability unit at AUC.

Nourhane: Do you teach as well?
Ania: Yes I do teach at the psychology department

Nourhane: What is your educational background?
Ania: I am an AUC graduate with a psychology BA and then I did another MA in Spain in addiction and families and then I came back and did another MA in the psychology department for counseling and now I am finishing in a few months my Ph.D. in St. therapy.

Nourhane: What was your high school background:
Ania: I was in a school in southern America, in my days, all schools were like this, it is called Ramses College for Girls, it is called the Ex-American school, so we did Thanaweya Amma.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision since you are a mother too?
Ania: I am not the type of parent to influence my kids' decisions but definitely I will guide them if I see that they have a preference in certain subjects they like something, they are weak in something, so I try as much as possible to, and of course with a help of an advisor like yourself, they help a lot in doing the final decision. But from what I see as a counselor and working in the student well-being office, I see a lot of pressure from the parents' side in regards to choosing. Majors for their kids, so if the parents are all families of engineers, they are like oh no you have to go for engineering, if they have private businesses then they are like why don't you take business so you can run the business and so forth. So yes, we still have this major major pressure on students to choose their own majors according to the preferences of their families.

Nourhane: Do you see this as a professor too, do you feel it in the classroom?
Ania: I teach intro and then I teach classes abnormal theories and so forth which are advanced courses for those who went already into the major. What I feel is not the pressure of deciding to go into psychology or not but I feel the doubt of the major itself. So it is ok, do what you want but I am telling you are not going to find work or do ok if you like this fine but we are not very happy about what you are going to work when you graduate and this is the lack of awareness I believe in this field.

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance
Ania: I will say performance, family peers, and then the financials.

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?
Ania: You are here comparing two major systems that are totally different, one is a credit hours-based system and the other is a bulk that you go inside. Now they started to implement the credit hours system in a lot of public universities, but they are still tiptoeing they are not still very one hundred percent on it, but I feel is much better than the one-mind track system.

Nourhane: I was just going to ask you about this because there they adopt the declaration from the gate system, so what are the advantages or disadvantages you see in this system in comparison to AUC? I mean what is there that is not here and vise versa?

Ania: I like the way, it has a cultural aspect here, why? Because if you let the majority of Egyptians who are not capable of paying a lot of money in education have, or giving them the liberty for students to choose and lay back and see this or that, you will get to feel that the parents will not be very happy in regards of spending money and just do not know where to go.

We do not want to fool ourselves, in AUC there are many students who enter then change major and swipe into something else or they go and drop course so they lose the money and so forth, so I like the liberal arts system but that is because I am there since twenty years ago and I studied it. When I am finishing my Ph.D. in Ain Shams, no it is very overcrowded, it is very systemized, I used to take preliminary doctorate courses, I took twelve courses that are so outdated and so not needed and I wished I had the choice that out of the ten they give us like five for example that I can choose from, like the masters here at AUC, we have here, you have the basic courses and then you have elective courses, so I wished I had this because this limits the mind of the student, so the liberal arts is much better but at the same time, I am not sure how the community will take the point of letting them do whatever they want, I am not sure how will this be on the majority of the population.

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?

Ania: Look, you have 50-60 percent who enter focused, and they know what they want, they know their abilities, they know their wishes, and so forth. Then you have the other 30-35 percent rest, they are for example 10-15 who are not sure what they want, I believe that those who suffer the most are the ones two really do not have a preference the one who goes in really not knowing, they are not into arts so they do not have the creativity or artistic side, they are not into math and so they do not know what to do or where to go. They take a course, they do not like the course, they drop the course, then they take another course, they do not like the course, and so on. So they are the ones who I feel need a different path of support. I do not what is it is for exact, but I don't know, I think for those who are not one hundred percent sure of what they want, they need an extra mile of advising or support, just like those who are at risk, but they are not at risk. Because for you for example the at-risk students are the ones that have or will have a junior-level hold or low GPA, no I think the ones lost, they need this kind of support.

Sometimes the girl or the boy become frustrated even after the first year, till now I am not really sure what to do, because sometimes when you give a lot of choices, and you are not a decisive person or you do not know where are your strengths and your parents are liberal in the sense of you do what you want, you are a grown-up so you choose what you want, so they become cornered in a way that they cannot do, and sometimes they just go with something just like mass communication, and then they go for mass communications and then discover that they hate it.

Nourhane: Do you think the liberal arts education plays a role here or it depends on the personality of the student?

Ania: Both, because it is the personality first then the liberal arts, I always tell them it is a double-faced weapon and don't be happy that you can mix and match or that you can go for summer or winter sessions and so then you find yourself stuck for seven years for example at university and unable to graduate.

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?

Ania: No, I believe that social media has a very strong effect, why? Because back then the success was more around doctors and engineers, ten years ago the success was around business and economics, now the success is around the wellbeing and psychology, so there are waves you know, and it goes not only with the needs of the country but also social media.

Nourhane: How do you see the opinions shared on social media on certain professors or courses like on the most famous "Rate AUC Professors" Facebook group?

Ania: Actually, I feel it is good to have back door assistance, I always tell them ok look on the group and see what they say, but the thing is I always tell them do not take one opinion, search for several ones, get the majority opinions in order not to follow one opinion that says, for example, it is perfect then you discover that it is not good.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university

Ania: Honestly, regarding the AUC case, for example, I feel that the freshman advisors need to know the majors, not reading it thorough catalog, not just reading about it, not just from their perspectives or experience when they were students, not anything, they need to go for each department, get to know the professors, get to know the majors and the component of the courses.

Interview 11

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?
Amre: Hi my name is Amre, I am a sophomore accounting major student. I graduated from IB

Nourhane: What is your education background? School, university, and major?
Amre: IB at King Faisal School, majoring in Accounting

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?
Amre: I believe the main factors are Family and peers in addition to media as well

Nourhane: In your opinion, what could be the main concern for students in their first year of college while choosing their major of study?
Amre: I believe the main concerns would be the declaration GPA, the peer pressure or effect and professional future as well

Nourhane: can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions:
Amre: I think that the first factor would be financial burden of study, peer or social effect, and finally personal performance

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?
Amre: The major from the gate system may save time and money but it will definitely not give you a sense what to study and will deprive students from general knowledge

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?
Amre: Yes I think it helps me experience many different subjects and know what are my preferences

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of the social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?
Amre: yes I do believe it is real, actually very very real and impacts so many decisions

Nourhane: Can you please tell an incident, or a case related to this? Whether happened to you personally or that you encountered with someone you know
Amre: A friend of mine changed his major from engineering to business because media glorified business major and the professional future of business students

Nourhane: Would you take an academic decision to join a program, or an institution based on social media users' experiences that they share?
Amre: Nope not personally because I like to weigh the decision myself first

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university
Amre: I think to be more personal with students and encourage them to explore various sectors. Actually I talked to a company called Coligo, they do that in a gamified way.

Interview 12

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?

Hi, my name is Nabila, I am 25 years old and I have one brother.

I was in a French School 'Sacrecoeur'

I graduated from AUC with a CAMA major and double minor in Entrepreneurship and Arabic Reporting.

I have been working as a Teaching Assistant since I graduated from university and currently I am working as an Academic Advisor at AUC.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?

Nabila: Their interests in the subjects, Their dream Job, and Sometimes their parents or peer pressure.

Nourhane: Are you a current student or an alumnus of the American University in Cairo (AUC)?

Nabila: Actually I am an alumnus of the American University in Cairo (AUC)

Nourhane: What could be the main concern for students in their first year of college while choosing their major of study?

Nabila: I think they think if they will succeed in this major or they can reach it (declare it) or not. Also, the transition from high school to college is a big thing for them in the educational life.

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance

Nabila: For me it is the Personal Student's Performance then the financial burden of study, and lastly the Peer or social effect.

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?

Nabila: I think that the advantages could be that there is no stress of declaration because students there take specific subjects

The disadvantages could be that they do not know the other subjects and they do not get to try other disciplines and also that they do not have a bigger educational background

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?

Nabila: Yes, honestly I meet a lot of students who change their minds after taking some courses.

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of the social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?

Nabila: It can be real for some people.

Nourhane: Can you please tell an incident, or a case related to this? Whether happened to you personally or that you encountered with someone you know

Nabila: I have actually never met someone who was educationally affected by social media.

Nourhane: Would you take an academic decision to join a program, or an institution based on social media users' experiences that they share?

Nabila: Honestly, I don't know, maybe if I saw many reviews I could be affected.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university?

Nabila: I really like the foundation year idea where students can know more about the system and the education at this university.

Interview 13

Nourhane: Can you please give me a brief introduction about yourself?

Karam: Hi, my name is My name is Karam. I am 20 years old. I live in Cairo, Egypt.

I graduated from College de la Salle, it was a French national school in Cairo. I am a declared Political science student at the American university in Cairo, also I have a minor in Arabic and Islamic civilizations.

Nourhane: In your opinion, what are the main factors that affect a student's academic decision?

Karam: In my opinion, the main factors are passion, responsibilities assigned by family and knowledge

Nourhane: What could be the main concern for students in their first year of college while choosing their major of study?

Karam: I think the concerns could be the passion; that the students have for a certain career which they are dreaming about it from their childhood, the responsibility and dedication in their willingness to control over their family business and it could also be the will to develop their hobbies into a serious career

Nourhane: Can you please arrange the below factors from one to three based on how you see their effect on students' academic decisions: Financial burden of study, Peer or social effect, and Personal Student's Performance

Karam: I think number one is Personal Student's Performance, then the financial burden of study, finally the Peer or social effect.

Nourhane: Can you list the advantages and/or disadvantages of the regular public and private universities in Egypt that follow the general education system with specified majors from the gate?

Karam: I think The advantages of public universities are: low college fees, certified and recognized certificates, varieties in majors and campuses in each city. The disadvantages could be the high number of enrolled students; which make it difficult to understand the materials and ensure that students are well educated to fit the career-life and weak curriculums

Nourhane: Do you believe that the liberal arts education provided at the AUC helps students to choose more suitable majors that fit their capabilities and ambition?

Karam: Yes, I think it does

Nourhane: Do you think the effect of the social media on academic decisions is real or just exaggerated?

Karam: Yes, it has an effect of course

Nourhane: Can you please tell an incident, or a case related to this? Whether happened to you personally or that you encountered with someone you know

Karam: I was affected by social media and media in general and had a decision that made me enroll in music major for a certain of time, but I did not complete it and focused on my political science major instead

Nourhane: Would you take an academic decision to join a program, or an institution based on social media users' experiences that they share?

Karam: No, I don't think so because there are other factors that contribute into my decision

Nourhane: In your opinion, what can a university do to help freshman students better take their academic decisions in the transition phase from high school to university?

Karam: I think they can make group, peer to peer interviews, freshman programs and activities through which they could discover and encourage themselves more in taking their major decisions.