Understanding Graduate Employability in Egypt: Comparing Graduate and Employer Perspectives

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Abstract

Employability has been viewed as a crucial issue in both industrialised and industrialising countries. However, it has not received much attention in the global South, especially the Arab World and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, including Egypt which faces a precarious market labour and a Higher Education system with numerous challenges. Egypt's demographics aggravate the situation straining sectors such as housing, health, education, and employment. While the HE system is constantly and rapidly expanding adding new HE players to the landscape, the labour market does not seem to keep up with the huge number of graduates.

In Egypt, while the majority of literature has focused on HE access, challenges, and reform, little literature has examined the perceptions of students of HE in relation to the labour market and none has looked at how both graduates and employers understand employability and how they develop it.

Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit, *forms of capital, habitus*, and *field*, this study examines how graduates of different university types and employers in companies of different types understand employability. Forty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted to generate data in both Arabic and English which were then coded and analysed using themes drawn from Bourdieu's notions. Data from both interviews sets were then compared to identify the matches and mismatches between the perspectives of both groups. A comparison was also drawn between the employability strategies graduates used and those valued by employers. It concludes that mismatches between two groups of stakeholders indicate the disconnect between the two key stakeholders and suggests that the Egyptian labour faces major barriers that hinder it from functioning effectively.

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إلي روح أبي الحبيب

To my beloved late father

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Signature: Hebatallah ElMatbouli

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a graduate of a public university and a university language instructor in Egypt, I have always had 'a foot in two worlds'. I am also a middle-class Cairene who have had the opportunity to teach students of different socioeconomic and regional backgrounds as well as age groups. The first day I joined the first private university as an instructor, I noticed that institution was completely different from my experience as an undergraduate. Having had the chance to teach students at low-income demand-absorbing higher institutes and the elite oldest private Western-style university in Egypt, I realised how different university experience for both groups of students. I have always wondered at the opportunities some students are offered and others are deprived of and whether these stark inequalities affect their job prospects, career, and even life. I have also had 'a glimpse' of the corporate world through: teaching adults in companies and banks; and meeting with HR professionals, training managers, and company owners. This experience has made me wonder about the extent to which these two ends, students/graduates and employers communicate, why employers select particular candidates, and what makes some employers decide to invest in their staff.

1.1 The Egyptian Context

Egypt, the Arab country with the largest population and largest HE system and the third populous African country, has witnessed major events over the past decade (Amira, 2017; Barsoum & Rashad, 2016). The Egyptian Uprising in 2011 combined with massive demonstrations, [Redacted Redacted].

With a population of over 100 million, 29% of which are aged between 15 and 29 and 60% below 30, Egypt faces serious infrastructure problems in the fields of health, education, housing and employment (CAPMAS, 2022; European Training Foundation, 2021; Fahim & Sami, 2011; Said, 2015). According to ETF, the constantly increasing population outpaces the rate of job creation, which makes the Egyptian labour market a precarious one. Ironically, though national policies show bias towards urban middle-

class educated youth, the 2011 uprising was initiated by this particular group (Sika, 2016). All these factors strongly put graduate employability on the 'research table'.

1.1.1 The Supply End in Egypt: The Higher Education System

Analysing the supply and demand ends of the employability equation, it could be argued that both ends are responsible for the current status of graduates. The supply end, represented by the Egyptian HE system, has been concerned mainly with access and overexpansion. The system has expanded tremendously over the past few decades while introducing private HEIs as a new player in the late 1990s in response to the "neoliberal tide" in Egypt (Barsoum, 2017, p. 106). Public universities have also increased in number either by establishing new universities or turning regional faculties into fully fledged universities (Buckner, 2013). Competing with private universities and adopting a cost-sharing policy, public universities have established at-fees programmes offering instruction in foreign languages. These policies have been hailed for widening access to HE to Egyptian youth yet two caveats might turn this long awaited achievement into a new barrier added to the wider sets of barriers the Egyptian HE suffer from. First, looking at statistics, private universities students/graduates constitute 7% only of the total number of university graduates in Egypt, while the rest attend public universities and Al-Azhar university, the oldest functioning university in Egypt and the region, which is not run by the state (Cook & El-Refaee, 2017). The second caveat is serious inequalities resulting from the huge difference between the tuition fees each university type charge, and hence the quality of education and other aspects of HE provides (Abou-Setta, 2015).

1.1.2 Challenges to Egyptian HE

Some of the challenges Egyptian HE system faces are: overcrowded classrooms, overexpanded facilities, low budgets, rote learning, outdated curriculum, poor pedagogy, low academic staff salaries, centralisation, and lack of academic freedom (Cook & El-Refaee, 2017; Kirdar, 2017; Loveluck, 2012). Classrooms in public universities are very large (i.e. the number of cohort in the faculty of commerce in a public university may exceed the number of students in a private university (Assaad et al., 2016). Due to the huge cohorts, facilities are in bad shape. Low budgets aggravate

the problem because public universities receive funds from the government unlike their private university peers whose income depends on the fees they charge (Assaad et al., 2016). Rote learning and an outdated curriculum that is disconnected from the needs of the market is another challenge which deprives students from opportunities of developing the skills much needed in the labour market (Cook & El-Refaee, 2017). Even STEM students are not provided with opportunities to apply the knowledge they have gained at university and therefore they may graduate with good theory and knowledge without skills required in the workplace. University professors play the role of knowledge providers while students are expected to study textbooks by heart and 'pour' the information in their exam booklets (Kenway, 2006). A serious problem is the imbalance of specialisations where more than 70% of graduates study social studies and humanities, an unusual pattern that could have contributed to skills mismatch in Egypt (Assaad & Roudi-Fahimi 2007; Fahim & Sami, 2011).

Extremely low staff salaries have been a serious problem that led to a number of issues: professors lack the incentive to provide proper teaching, a large number has resorted to moonlighting in private HEIs to make ends meet, another group have left to the oil-rich Gulf states for much higher salaries (Richards, 1992). Finally, centralisation impedes development in public HEIs (Cook & El-Refaee, 2017). All decisions have to go through heavy bureaucracy, including the budget which has to be approved by three distinct entities. Curriculum design and amendments, too, constitute a long process of approval due to centralisation (Cook & El-Refaee, 2017). HEIs in Egypt also suffer from lack of academic freedom which affects pedagogy and research (Loveluck, 2012). University professors realise that they might be monitored in their classrooms and their research work is scrutinised, and therefore they tend to choose topics that will not cause dispute with the government (Loveluck, 2012). It could be argued then that Egyptian HEIs experience serious challenges that impact the service they provide, including preparation for the labour market and enhancing graduate employability in general.

1.1.3 The Demand End: The Egyptian Labour Market

In Egypt, the public and the private sectors provide employment to graduates in different conditions. In 1962, national policies decided to guarantee employment to all university graduates, a legacy which ended in the early 1990s, resulting into an

overstaffed public sector (Barsoum & Rashad, 2016; Cook & El-Refaee, 2017). Despite that, the public sector remains the preferred employer for youth because it protects them against job informality[1] which means being a paid employee in an unregistered company or working at a registered company without benefits such as social security contributions (Barsoum & Rashad, 2016). Overall, despite the higher salaries the private sector provides, the public sector still offers more benefits including stability (Barsoum, 2015; ETF, 2021). It should also be noted that the rate of unemployment has been estimated as 7.4% and unemployment among university graduates has reached 34% (CAPMAS, 2021; ETF, 2021; Pettit, 2018). With the discontinuation of the job guarantee policy and the inability of the private sector to generate enough jobs for the large number of university graduates, given overpopulation and HE overexpansion, the labour market seems to be super saturated with scarce job opportunities for graduates to compete for.

1.2 Why Employability?

Over nearly three decades, countries like the UK (e.g. Pool & Sewell, 2007; Hillage & Pillard, 1998; Holmes, 2001; Knight, 2011; Knight & York, 2003) and Australia (e.g. Jackson, 2010; Kinash et al., 2015; Oliver et al., 2011) have looked into Graduate Employability (GE) from different perspectives and their research has been informed with a wide range of theories, on the top of which sits Human Capital theory. However, global south nations seem to be little concerned and research can be described as scarce. While some Gulf states may struggle with the nationalisation of their workforce (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Hassock, 2019; Hillman & Baydoun; 2019), other Arab countries suffer from high unemployment and congested labour markets with obvious imbalances in specialisations as well as imbalance in supply and demand (Barsoum & Rashad, 2018; Nauffal & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2018). Youth in the region, and in particular

[1] Job informality or employment informality or work informality is defined as "… employment without access to work contracts and social insurance …" (Barsoum, 2016, p. 430).

university graduates, feel frustrated due to their failed attempts of upward mobility (Assaad et al., 2019).

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, this research draws on a conceptual toolbox derived from the work of Bourdieu, in particular *capital*, *habitus*, and *field* (1984; 1986; 1990). Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital include: cultural capital which is divided into: embodied, referring to mannerisms, taste, and preferences; objectified, denoting books, works of art, and other artefacts; and institutionalised, referring to educational qualifications obtained through formal education, social (i.e. social networks), and economic (i.e. money and assets). According to Bourdieu (1986), capitals are characteristised by convertability and reversability, which means that one form of capital can be either reproduced or converted to another form of capital. Bourdieu (1986) also argues that economic capital is the root of the other two forms of capital which can be converted from and into economic capital through exerting effort over time. He also explains how agents possessing institutionalised cultural capital, earned through formal education, use their capital to compete in the labour market. According to Bourdieu, to invest in institutionalised cultural capital, a minimum return should be guaranteed. Scarcity, Bourdieu maintains, is another crucial factor that determines the value of the degree in the labour market where the scarcer the degree, the higher its value.

Habitus and field are two notions that are closely related to capital. Bourdieu (1977) describes habitus as dispositions that guide agents and shape their practices. He argues that the homogeneity of habitus makes practices predictable and understandable. According to Bourdieu, middle class habitus values children's education as an investment and a means of cultural and social reproduction. Habitus does not operate in vacuum: Instead, it functions in a social field (Bourdieu, 1989). In this social field, agents with the highest volume of capital, in particular economic and cultural, are the agents who dominate and other agents are dominated. These notions have been employed in previous GE literature to examine the strategies students adopt to enhance their employability (Bathmaker et al., 2013) and explore their university experience (Ingram, 2017). In this study, Bourdieusian notions are used to explore the understanding of graduates and employers of GE.

1.4 Research Questions

This research focuses on the relationship between HE and the labour market in Egypt. It particularly explores the understanding of GE from the perspectives of both graduates and employers, identifying the matches and mismatches in perception. It also examines whether these perceptions differ based on graduates' and employers' background. Three questions have been formulated for this investigation:

1. How do graduates of different university types understand employability in Egypt? How do they develop it?
2. How do employers of different company types and sizes understand employability in Egypt? How do they help their staff develop it?
3. How do graduates of different university types and employers of different company types and sizes understand employability in Egypt compare?

This study also aims at identifying the strategies graduates use at pre-university, university, and post-university phases as well as the strategies employers use to develop GE at university and at the workplace. It investigates whether the strategies used by graduates differ based on university type and location, and discipline, and whether those used by employers differ based on company size, type, sector, industry, experience, and educational background. The study looks at the concept of graduate readiness, responsibility, personality attributes, skills, the role of university, the status of the labour market and the overall political and economic picture in Egypt. Dimensions of public and private university; metropolitan and regional university; public and private sector are crucial to gain a broader picture of GE.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter two introduces the conceptual framework for the research. It includes different conceptualisations of employability and provides a literature review, covering employability research worldwide, in the Arab world and MENA region, including Egypt.

It also describes the Egyptian labour market and HE landscape in Egypt. The chapter also identifies gaps in knowledge and explains how this research aims to fill those gaps.

Chapter three introduces the methodology used for this research while justifying the use of a qualitative method. The chapter also describes the participants and discusses research ethics, and presents methodological challenges.

Chapter four provides an analysis and discussion of graduate interviews. It answers the first research question.

Chapter five provides an analysis and discussion of employer interviews. It answers the second research question.

Chapter six compares graduates' and employers' interviews, identifying the matches and the mismatches between the two groups. The chapter answers the third research question.

Chapter seven draws conclusions from the research, following the three research questions. In addition, it presents recommendations based on the findings and identifies potential future research arising from this thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review addresses the context of this study which is the nature of the labour market in Egypt, the economy rate, and the political system. Then a historical account of the Higher Education (HE) landscape in Egypt together with the current status of HEIs is presented through an analysis of empirical research and reports of Education, Economics, and Administration Policy in Egypt. The subsequent section of the literature review provides an account of socioeconomic classes in relation with HE and wasta, which is similar to nepotism. Then, it focuses on different conceptualisations, frameworks, and models of graduate employability (GE). Next, an examination of the perceptions of different stakeholders, mainly students/graduates and employers worldwide then narrowing down to the Arab World and the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), will be undertaken. Due to the limited amount of literature on the Egyptian context and to provide a wider understanding of the topic, the chapter includes research related to three regions: worldwide, including the Americas, Europe, and Asia, MENA and the Arab World, and Egypt. The chapter also identifies gaps in knowledge and explains how this research aims to fill those gaps. Finally, the theoretical underpinnings for this project, Bourdieu's work, will be presented and discussed.

2.1 The Context

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2.1.2 The Egyptian Economy

According to CAPMAS (2022), Egypt's population has reached over 100 million with 29% of the population between the age of 15 and 29 in a phenomenon known as "youth bulge" (Fahim & Sami, 2011, p. 57; Said, 2015). According to the European Training Foundation (ETF) (2021), around 60% of the population is below the age of 30. These figures indicate the status of the Egyptian labour market which is unable to create enough jobs for working age Egyptians. They also show how strained the infrastructure and sectors such as health, education, housing and employment to cope with the growing population with such a high proportion of youth (Said, 2015). According to ETF, unless the government takes serious actions to create jobs, the continuously increasing population will keep outpacing the rate of employment generation.

Looking closer at the Egyptian labour market, the public and private sectors are the two players that provide jobs to graduates, yet at different conditions. While most new jobs are being created in the private sector, the public sector remains as the 'favourite' destination for Egyptian youth for the 'perks' it offers which cannot be matched by the private sector (Barsoum, 2015; ETF, 2021). The public sector has protected graduates from "job informality" which is defined by Barsoum (2016) as the state of being employed at an unregistered company or being a paid employee at registered companies without benefits. While the public sector provides security and stability, private enterprises offer better payment (Barsoum & Rashad, 2016). Therefore, unemployment rate which was estimated as 7.4 in 2021 by CAPMAS should not be the sole indicator of HE outcomes without considering the percentage of informality in Egypt.

ETF (2021) argues that there is a skills gap between the skills developed through education and those needed in the labour market. The World Bank (2014) states there is no link between the skills acquired at universities and those required by the labour market, which may explain why employers in Egypt and in the region complain about skills shortage. It could also be indicative of the difficulty of finding "a good quality job" for graduates in this labour market (ETF, 2021, pp. 15-16; Pettit, 2018). HE seems to have exacerbated the situation because it does not respond to the knowledge economy, into four major ways: overexpansion of HE producing massive cohorts; imbalance in specialisations with humanities and social graduates representing 79% of

total graduates; the lack of employability skills provision, and irrelevant outdated curriculum, particularly private HEIs (Cupito & Langsten, 2011; Fahim & Sami, 2011; Schomaker, 2015).

2.1.3 HE Landscape in Egypt

To better understand employability in Egypt, it is worth describing its Higher Education landscape. Egypt is the most populous African, Middle Eastern, and Arab country with the largest and the oldest HE system (Barsoum, 2017). According to Buckner, after 1952 Revolution, the government set a number of HE reform policies to enhance social justice. One of these policies pertaining admission to national universities where school leavers must sit for a secondary school exit exam known as thanawya ama, the score of which determines the university school completers can join (Buckner, 2013). Another policy abolished HE tuition fees and ensured employment to all university graduates (Buckner, 2013).

2.1.4 "Neoliberal Tides" and the Inception of Private Universities

With the advent of Neoliberalism in Egypt in the 1990s and under the pressure of international donors, a new set of policies were set to allow for the inception of new HE players, which are private universities, hence ending the state's monopoly of HE provision (World Bank, 2008; Barsoum, 2017). According to Barsoum, four private universities opened their doors in 1996 followed by others. Proponents of private universities argued they may lift the burden off public universities that receive low state funds and provide seats for more students to absorb the high demand on HE (Barsoum & Rashad, 2016). Second, private universities could also provide small class sizes, better libraries, and offer academics higher salaries (Richards, 1992). Some advocates argued that private universities would improve the quality of HE in Egypt (Cook & El-Refaee, 2017).

2.1.5 Public and Private Universities: "A Two-Tiered System"?

These two types of universities are different in terms of a number of indicators: quality, tuition fees, admission criteria, density, access, and incentives (Abou-Setta, 2015;

Assaad et al., 2016). While public universities charge nominal fees and hence provide access to the less privileged, private universities charge far higher tuition fees which may go up to those charged by private US universities (Fahim & Sami 2011; Richards, 1992). However, students with affluent backgrounds may choose to attend a public university for a host of reasons, including the status of some degree subject offered by such universities. To address the challenge of limited funds, a cost-sharing policy has been adopted to alleviate the problem. Public universities opened at-fees programmes, in an attempt to self-finance (Fahim & Sami, 2011; Barsoum & Rashad, 2016; Buckner, 2013). Regionally, public universities seem to favour rural families, whereas private universities appear to target Cairo residents since the vast majority of these universities is located in Greater Cairo, including Cairo and Giza (Abou-Setta, 2015).

In terms of admission, public universities adopt a meritocratic approach where students secure positions in public HEIs based on their scores in thanawya ama exam. Private universities admit students with lower test scores which has triggered criticism against private HEIs for "selling" their degrees (Barsoum, 2014; Buckner, 2013, p. 533; Fahim & Sami, 2011). Clearly, the two types of universities are also different in terms of density, facilities, and incentives. Public universities admit large cohorts to the extent that the number of students in faculties of commerce, for instance, may reach 19,000 which significantly exceeds the number of students in private universities in Egypt (Assaad et al., 2016). According to Assaad et al., the ratio of student to faculty is higher in public universities than in private ones. Under these conditions, public HEIs facilities cannot keep up with the numbers and are thus strained (Cook &El-Refaee, 2017). With large cohorts, professors cannot help but play the role of "transmitter of information" with little, if any, chance to help students develop their critical, analytical, or creative thinking, leading to rote memorisation and "intellectual passivity" (Cook & El-Refaee, 2017, p. 296). Overall, Assaad et al. (2016) argued that private programmes adopt far better pedagogy compared to public ones. Curricula in public universities have been described as outdated and irrelevant to soft skills development (Daoud, 2012). Unlike public HEIs, the income of private universities is based on the tuition fees they charge from students and their families, which makes them more keen on providing high quality education to attract their 'customers' (Assaad et al., 2016).

2.1.6 Challenges to Egyptian HE

Barriers to the reform in Egyptian HE are not confined to overcrowded classrooms, strained facilities, limited funds, inadequate pedagogy, low quality of education, outdated curriculum, and low salaries of academics. Centralised and opaque governance that characterise Egyptian HE have a myriad of serious repercussions, including lack of organisational autonomy, rigid education and training programmes, lack of responsiveness to students' demands and to labour market requirements (Cook & El-Refaee, 2017). According to Cook & El-Refaee, three different entities, Ministries of Higher Education, Finance and Planning in addition to university presidents determine university budgets while departments cannot have their own independent budgets. According to Lindsey (2012), deans and heads in Egyptian HEIs who are loyal to the regime are appointed by the Egyptian president and evaluated by intelligence services. Another challenge is the absence of academic freedom where professors cannot design innovative effective courses and instructional materials must be approved and content is created to instil particular values and views (Loveluck, 2012). Absence of political freedom is extended to students who are not allowed to participate in any political activities without prior approval from university (Holmes, 2008).

2.1.7 Capitals in Egypt and the Arab World

The analysis of HE landscape discusses the services the two types of universities offer graduates. However, a discussion of how graduates develop their own employability is needed to understand the strategic decisions they make to utilise the available capitals. One of the most researched capitals in the Arab World and the MENA region is the controversial *wasta* which can be classified into "mediatory" and "intercessory" (Cummingham et al., 1994). Al-Ramahi (2008) defines *wasta* as "both the well-connected, personal intermediary-intervener and the process of intermediation-intervention" (p. 35). To illustrate, the term *wasta* may refer to the person who does the act or the act itself. Lackner (2016) argued that there are counterparts of wasta in other parts of the world such as guaxni in China, 'old boys network' in English-speaking countries, and 'piston' in France.

Though historically *wasta* denoted the honourable act of connecting families and communities in Arab tribes, and therefore benefited all parties, *wasta* today has a completely different function which is obtaining an advantage for someone who would not have had it without *wasta* and who may not deserve it, which leaves others feeling frustrated (Cummingham et al., 1994; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011; Weir et al., 2016). Those with the most powerful *wasta* are the ones who obtain the benefit (Cummingham et al., 1994). Ironically, those who criticize *wasta* still seek it and use it if they need it (Cummingham et al., 1994; Hutchings & Weir, 2006). Like nepotism, *wasta* includes social networks that are mainly based on family and kinship connections (Hutchings & Weir, 2006). However, wasta, unlike nepotism, involves mediating for strangers as well (Mohamed & Hamdy, 2008). In the Arab World, wasta could help with university admission and employment since good jobs are scarce in the Arab World (Kropf & Newbury-Smith 2016; Lackner, 2016; Mohamed & Hamdy, 2008). In addition, HR departments in Arab enterprises usually adopt subjective criteria and rely on unstructured interviews and managers are more committed to their social networks, represented by family and friends, more than their business goals (Hutchings & Weir, 2006; Mohamed & Hamdy, 2008). Hutchings and Weir argued that Arabs are programmed to believe that nothing could be achieved without the help of a well-connected person.

A substantial body of literature in the Arab World and MENA region has explored various wasta-related issues, on the top of which the perceptions of key stakeholders of this controversial social capital. Wasta seems to be quite powerful during pre and post-employment. In Egypt, Roushdy and Sieverding (2015) explored the perceptions of youth of wasta in relation to employment. Results show that 50% of participants believed that jobs are obtained through this capital. It appears that wasta impacts some employers who may experience its negative effect on business operations and goals. In Oman, Al-Yahyaei et al. (2022) examined the perceptions of Omani employers of the impact of wasta on entrepreneurial values where employers were found willing to make some sacrifices in terms of competitiveness and innovation to satisfy cultural considerations and maintain business effectiveness. A key area that previous wasta literature has not thoroughly investigated is the link between wasta and company type. Does wasta operate differently in companies of different sizes and types and in different

industries? A study by Karolak (2016) in Bahrain looked at the perceptions of Bahraini nationals, including students and graduates, of wasta prevalence in the workplace. Findings suggest that though wasta exists in private enterprises, it is more prevalent in the public sector because the private sector is governed by profit.

An important subliterature in wasta critique details the perceptions of students and employers of wasta. In this research, students and employers shared the same perceptions of wasta as an unfair system that, despite its prevalence in this region, has its harmful effect on graduates' careers. In Egypt, Mohamed and Hamdy (2008) investigated how students at a private university perceived wasta. Findings indicate that wasta is associated with a stigma that tarnishes the reputation of its users and that wasta beneficiaries are thought of as less competent and less moral than those who refrain from using this capital. However, students' background, such as their socioeconomic class and their university type, may influence their perceptions of wasta. Mohamed and Mohamad (2011) compared public and private university students in terms of their perceptions of the morality and competence of wasta users. Results show that less affluent participants viewed wasta beneficiaries less negatively than their more affluent peers, which contradicts with the findings by Abrahams (2017) in the UK that less privileged students believed in the meritocratic rhetoric, disapproving of the use of nepotism, a contrast which could be attributed to the differential context. Surveying the perceptions of employers in 5 MENA countries of the impact of wasta on employment and career progression, Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) found that the majority of employers believed that though wasta is an unfair practice, it is important for 'good' employment. Respondents stated that 'who you know' is more important that 'what you know', which indicates the extent to which social capital overpowers cultural capital in this region.

2.1.8 Students' Conceptualisations of Employability in Egypt

There is a dearth of literature (Abou-Setta, 2014; Al-Harthi, 2011; El-Fekey & Mohamad, 2018) in this area and therefore the perceptions of different stakeholders in Egypt is still to be explored. This literature tends to address issues around students' perceptions of Egyptian HE (Abou-Setta, 2014), students' perceptions of the link between perceived employability attributes and perceived employability gap (El-Fekey

& Mohamad, 2018) and students' perceptions of the relationship between HE and the labour market (Al-Harthi, 2011).

Geographically, while it is noticeable that research in the UK have focused on the impact of social class on students'/graduates' employability (e.g. Bathmaker et al., 2013), studies conducted in Australia, Africa, and Asia (e.g. Ferns, 2012; Kinash et al., 2015; Shivoro et al., 2018; Tran, 2015) are largely skills-based. In the MENA region and the Arab world, a discernible trend is the controversial social capital, *wasta* (e.g. Al-Yahyaei et al., 2022; Mohamad & Mohamed, 2011). This is an addition to a few studies that echo the worldwide trends. In Egypt, research has mainly focused on the challenges in the Egyptian HE, reform, and access. Little research has examined the relatively new HE player, private HEIs in Egypt, and a very few explored students' perceptions of HE and employability (Abou-Setta, 2014; Al-Harthi, 2011; Barsoum, 2017).

Clearly, while these studies make important contributions to our understanding of employability in Egypt, they have exclusively focused on either public university students or their private university peers. Therefore, this study, with its focus on the perceptions of public and private university graduates across discipline and university location employers in the public and private sector across industry can add to the existing wealth of accumulated knowledge of GE worldwide and Egypt. Another contribution of this study is theoretical: it informs researchers of an interesting aspect about the theory, which is the potential overlap between the understanding of graduates and employers. Examining how different forms of capital combine in a non-Western context could also add to GE literature. Additionally, this study extends on the work executed by previous scholars by employing qualitative research methods.

2.2 GE Conceptualisations

Reviewing GE literature worldwide, broad research trends can be identified. This section will discuss and critique how GE conceptualisations have evolved over two decades.

2.2.1 Earlier GE Conceptualisations

Earlier GE conceptualisations have focused on obtaining employment and remaining employed. Harvey (2001) defined GE as: "the propensity of students to obtain a job"-a definition which lacks all GE elements considerations and even sounds ambiguous because it does not explain what this 'propensity' entails and how students will possess this 'propensity' (p. 98). A more comprehensive conceptualisation is provided by Devins and Hogarth (2005), which is "… an economic concept [which is] concerned with entry to, maintenance in and progression through the world of work" (p. 247). One of the earliest definitions of GE is "having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required" (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Hillage and Pollard also explained that employability is based on the knowledge, attitude and skills individuals possess and are able to signal them to employers and the labour market to gain employment.

Employability as skills has been widely criticised by researchers (i.e. Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Holmes, 2001; Holmes, 2013; Knight, 2001; Tomlinson, 2017; Yorke, 2006). One of the concerns about the skills approach is made by Knight (2001) who argued that the lack of agreement in terms of the skills renders this approach invalid since employers might have different understandings of the same notion such as in the study by Penkauskienė et al. (2019) where employers presented unclear understanding of what comprises critical thinking and how it can be applied in the workplace. Holmes (2001) also considers that the skills agenda seems problematic because it does not take into consideration the potential difference between skills in educational contexts and the workplace. Another concern is that this agenda disregards the complexity of career trajectories and assumes a direct relationship between possession of skills and gaining employment.

A third key criticism of this agenda is the transferability of skills which is assumed in this approach (Yorke, 2006). The sheer possession of the skills does not guarantee that these skills are transferred to the workplace. If students were offered curriculum that enhance communication skills or problem solving, this does not mean that they can communicate effectively with their co-workers or resolve work-related problems.

In his definition of employability, Yorke has replaced the terms "skills" and "knowledge" with "skilful practices" and "understandings" to refer to an understanding of the field and the capability of functioning in complex and ambiguous situations. He defined GE as "graduate's achievements and his/her potential to obtain a 'graduate job" (p. 2). Similar to Harvey's (2001) "propensity", Yorke's (2006) "potential" is rather ambiguous as to what it entails. Like earlier conceptualisations, Yorke's understanding of employability does not refer to other GE elements such as the labour market. To illustrate, these approaches lack the sense of social context which make them generic and individualised, rather than contextual and variable.

Two other arguments against this approach have been presented by Holmes (2006; 2013) who called it "the possessive approach": First, it assumes that these skills and attributes can be possessed, and second, from a methodological perspective, research on employability skills and attributes adopted surveys to explore the perceptions of different stakeholders and, in particular employers, of a set of skills but none of these studies attempted to explain what these skills consist of and which levels of proficiency might be captured. Finally, the skills approach renders employability a supply-end issue (Tomlinson, 2010). This suggests that universities should be exclusively held accountable if graduates are not employable, which may get other stakeholders such as employers, representing the demand side, 'off the hook'.

2.2.2 The 'Skills and more' Approach

The criticism of the skills approach gave rise to a number of conceptualisations that include other elements of GE besides skills and attributes. Knight and Yorke (2003) define employability as "the confluence of understanding, subject specific and generic social practices (or skills), metacognition (reflection or strategic thinking) and … incremental self-theories" (p. 8). Other conceptualisations have included elements of success and satisfaction which suggests the quality of employment and therefore excludes jobs that do not meet these criteria. For example, Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) have defined employability as "having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful" (p. 280). A more comprehensive employability model has been proposed by Bridgstock (2009) who acknowledges the

significance of navigating the work terrains through the development of career-management skills that are divided into: self-management and career building. Bridgstock argues that this model with its focus on career is more compatible with knowledge-driven economies and is more inclusive compared to the ones which involve generic skills and attributes because these models seem to refer to immediate employment, rather than sustainable employability.

2.2.3 The Identity Approach

Previously discussed conceptualisations have exclusively focused on the individual, and hence holding graduates accountable for their own employability. Holmes (2013) denounced prior employability models, namely, "the possessive" and the "positioning" for what he called "the processual". As previously discussed, Holmes argued that the "the possessive" perspective has major flaws. He also criticised the "positioning" perspective in that it focuses on the positions of students of different social backgrounds where those who belong to wealthy families monopolise cultural capital, namely credentials, and are therefore better positioned compared to their peers of less privileged backgrounds. According to Holmes, this perspective can be regarded as "a counsel of despair" because if the elite are able to accumulate the desired cultural capital, then the less privileged cannot and should not make any progress (p. 548). It could be argued though that all 'players' should use all capitals at their disposal because those who choose not to play will be out of the 'game'. Although it is not a fair game, this should not discourage graduates with less affluent backgrounds to compete in the labour market using other forms and types of capital.

Alternatively, Holmes proposed the "processual" or the graduate identity approach which takes into consideration the interaction between graduates seeking employment and recruiters. This approaches entails that graduates should present themselves to recruiters as individuals who are worthy of employment. Though Holmes claims that this approach suggests a "more practical mode of action", it still highlights a tessera in employability mosaic leaving out the rest (p. 551). It could be also argued that the approach is another individual-driven one where other stakeholders seem to be absent. Another caveat is the somewhat simplistic relationship between graduates and recruiters which implies that graduates formulating and signaling a particular identity entails

obtaining employment-a proposition which may raise false hopes to graduates, especially believers in the meritocratic discourse.

Tomlinson (2010) argued for a more comprehensive identity approach that takes in consideration both structure and agency. He regards employability as "an active social process" which is impacted by how graduates position themselves and how they are positioned in a constantly changing labour market (p. 73). Another significant element is graduate identity which influences the interaction between graduates and the labour market. This suggests that graduates' position in a particular structure such as social background, gender, or ethnicity may drive them towards a particular labour market that is compatible with their dispositions, which Bourdieu refers to as *habitus*. According to Tomlinson, these dispositions, *habitus*, impact graduates' aspirations and their choice of employment. He further argues that these dispositions may mediate how graduates understand employability.

Nghia et al. (2020) provide a broader conceptualisation of GE as a "…lifelong, non-linear, and influenced by several personal, socio-cultural, economic, and political factors, which is contrary to the widely held perception of 'you are trained in this and you will be employed" (p. 256). Delva (2021) proposes a more comprehensive definition of GE: "employability is not simply a personal asset tied to the individual. Rather, employability should be understood as the chance of employment constituted by the interplay between field, capital and habitus. These insights reveal that employability is always "*in context*" and "*in relation to others"* (p. 9).

2.3 Understanding Employability: Graduates' Perspectives

Much of the literature on graduates' perceptions of GE revealed that non-technical skills (e.g. Nilsson, 2010; Wilton, 2008) such as communication, teamwork, interpersonal, leaderships, self-management, and flexibility (e.g. Osmani et al., 2015; Tymon, 2013) are crucial. Personal attributes and attitude (Little, 2001; Nilsson, 2010; Tomlinson, 2007), and experience (Tymon, 2013) constitute other important elements of GE from graduates' perspectives. Interestingly, these perceptions persist among graduates of different subjects, including STEM (Nilsson, 2010; O'Leary, 2017), across different European countries, the US, and Australia (Little, 2001; Osmani et al., 2015),

and different undergraduate years (Tymon (2013). However, other dimensions such as social class, gender, age, and discipline may affect graduates' perceptions of employability (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; O'Leary, 2017).

2.3.1 Perceived Employability

Perceived employability constitutes an integral part of graduates' understanding of employability. It appears reasonable to claim that if graduates develop a comprehensive understanding of the concept, then they would perhaps be able to evaluate their own employability, which is termed in the literature as "perceived employability". Dimensions that may influence perceived employability could be classified into: "individual", "structural" and combination of both (Forsythe, 2017).

The "individual" dimension involves graduates' institutionalised and embodied cultural capital. In Pakistan, Saher and Chaudhary (2019) demonstrated that though male and female students have the same level of perceived employability, private university students showed higher levels of perceived employability compared to their public university peers. The researchers attributed the differential perception to the updated curriculum, flexibility, responsiveness to the labour market, English language provision, and international collaboration private universities offer. However, they found that perceived employability was significantly across departments. In a study of young professionals in the Netherlands, Blokker et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between employability, career competencies, and career success. They found that the higher the career competencies, the higher perceived employability among young graduates and the relationship between the two variables is partially mediated by career satisfaction.

The second crucial dimension is "structure" which includes external factors out of the realm of the 'individual'. In the UK, Donald et al. (2018) reported that students' perceived employability increased as they progressed yet they felt less employable due to structural factors such as labour market status, competition for jobs, and high tuition fees as well as student debts and interest. After entering the labour market, perceived employability could be influenced by other dimensions. However, the perceptions of graduates of their own employability can be impacted by both individual and structural

factors. In the UK, Forsythe (2017) showed that students' employability is affected by their mindsets, resilience, and social capital. Results indicate that "fixed mindsets", mediated by resilience, contrary to previous research, enhances self-confidence, self-respect, and acceptance of oneself and enhances the process of setting goals. According to Forsythe, students with high interpersonal skills are more likely to build networks that are beneficial to their future employment.

2.3.2 Capitals

Previous sections have reviewed graduates' understanding of GE and their perception of their own employability. These discussions lead to a review of the process of accumulation and mobilisation of different forms of capital students and their families undergo to better position them as graduates in the labour market.

2.3.2.1 Cultural Capital

Before entering university, upper-middle class and upper class families tend to send their children to elite schools and enrol them in prestigious programmes to help them become high-skilled internationally sought-after individuals (Brown & Tannock, 2009; Espinoza et al., 2019). In this phase, university choice comes as another strategy to enhance future employment prospects. It could be argued that university students strive to accumulate two types of cultural capital in undergraduate years: academic and non-academic. In this study, academic cultural capital refers to formal education and educational credentials obtained at university while non-academic cultural capital refers to the participation in non-academic activities such as extracurricular activities (ECAs), internships, volunteering, work experience, career advising, and employment fairs. Courtis (2019) defines "academic capital' (*capital scolaire*) … as a form of cultural capital, accumulated primarily through formal education" (p. 193). Evidence indicates that students may benefit from participating in ECAs in both during and post-university phases. Graduates who participated in ECAs reported having their skills developed (Lau et al., 2014), which have contributed to their success in obtaining their first employment (Clark et al., 2015) because employers reported using ECAs as a selection criterion (Clark et al., 2015; Pinto & Ramalheira; 2017). However, this invaluable cultural capital could contribute to social inequality because of the uneven access

students of different social classes may have to different forms of ECAs (Bathmaker et al., 2013). Another valuable cultural capital is volunteer work which students strategically choose to participate in for various reasons including enhancing their GE (e.g. Barton et al., 2019, in the UK; Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017, in Australia) among other benefits (e.g. Bathmaker at al., 2013, in the UK; Bilsland et al., 2019, in Vietnam).

2.3.2.2 Social Capital

Social capital that graduates may accumulate and mobilise for future employment are primarily networks and nepotism. Batistic and Tymon (2017) found that there is a link between networking on one hand and access to resources as well as internal and external employability on the other. They explained how networks provide graduates with useful contacts which give them access to information and resources, which subsequently leads to increased employability.

Comparing three perspectives of graduate employability presented by Holmes (2013), Okay-Somerville and Scholarios (2015) found evidence to the process approach by which career self-management, including networking, contributes to employability. Results show that networking increases employment prospects and the chances of being employed. However, networking does not only contribute to graduate employability when transitioning to the labour market, but it also impacts careers as well. Rodrigues et al. (2017) examined the relationship between career orientations and perceived employability whereas a large network is important for a boundaryless career characterised by inter-organisational mobility, and a smaller but closer network is necessary for a protean career, marked by self-direction. While networking is widely recommended by career counselling professionals (Abrahams, 2017), nepotism remains a controversial social capital. Having investigated the predispositions of two groups of undergraduates, working-class and middle-class, students, Abrahams (2017) found that while middle-class students were willing to use nepotism “to secure a foot in the door”, their working-class peers adopted a meritocratic discourse where they had the desire to prove themselves and showed reluctance to utilise contacts to secure employment-a process which the researcher called “non-accumulation of capital” (pp. 625-626). Abrahams attributed this discrepancy to the differential habitus the two groups of

students possess.

2.4 Understanding Employability: Employers' Perspectives

2.4.1 Employers' Conceptualisations of Employability

Employers' understanding of GE is closely intertwined to their needs and demands. However, very few studies talk of employers' understanding and conceptualisation of GE. Comparing employers and educators in terms of their understanding of GE, Williams et al. (2019) found that while both groups of stakeholders believed that confidence, professionalism, and emotional management, mismatches were identified in elements such as commitment, interpersonal skills, and proactivity.

Employers' understanding and perspectives can be influenced by their background which includes company type and sector. Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) examined graduate identity from employers' perspectives and argued that it constitutes of: *values,* which comprises personal ethics, and social and organisational values; *intellect* referring to graduates' ability to think critically think, reflect, and communicate; *performance,* which involves learning agility and application of skills in the workplace; and *engagement*, which denotes the willingness to deal with different types of challenges in a confrontational manner considering the interests of others. However, the researchers argue that 'the mix' of constituents of employability will differ based on company size and sector. Anderson and Tomlinson (2020) explored the qualities of what they have called "standout employability" from employers' perspectives across companies of different sizes and sectors (p. 5). The first characteristic is *qualifications and credentials* which employers consider basic employability expectations. The next element is *personal and psychological qualities* which refer to resilience and adaptability and was found to be prevalent in the narratives of specialist with graduate employment experience. Findings indicate that resilience was dominant in the expectations of employers in smaller organisations. The third characteristic of *standout employability* is *personal brand expectations*, which refers to graduates' qualities that signal to employers graduates' potential to belonging in the organisation. *Work-related experience* is the component that refers to the experience gained at work placements and/or internships which signal high performance and readiness to attend to clients. The

fourth element is *person-organisation fit* which denotes graduates' ability to fit within the culture of the organisation. ECAs and other experiences represent the last element which Anderson and Tomlinson called "an extended back-story" (p. 12).

2.4.2 Skills Research

A vast body of employability research has focused on employers' perceptions of graduates' skills covering a wide geographical area, from the UK (Lowden et al., 2011) to Australia (Jackson, 2010; Rayner & Papaonstantinou, 2016) to Canada (Chhinzer & Russo, 2018), to Malaysia (Husain et al., 2010; Jaffar et al., 2016), Bangladesh (Chisty et al., 2007), and Nigeria (Adebakin et al., 2013) as well as regional reviews (Penkauskiene et al., 2019). While communication and problem solving seem to be the most desired skills across different countries (Chhinzer & Russo, 2018; Jackson, 2010; Jaffar et al., 2016; Lowden et al., 2011; Rasul et al., 2012), entrepreneurial skills appear to be the least required (Rasul et al., 2012). A smaller body of research has explored the significance of other dimensions of employability such as personal attributes (Devins &Hogarth, 2005), attitude (Jayasingam, 2018), and cultural fitness (Hora, 2020).

2.5 Employers and Students/Graduates: Perspectives Compared

Little research is preoccupied with the comparison between employers' and graduates' understanding of employability. Andrews and Higson (2008) compared the perspectives of employers and graduates in three EU countries and the UK. Results show that employers in the four countries value a combination of advanced discipline-related skills and interpersonal and communication skills as they expect graduates to be ready to work with the least level of supervision. Both employers and graduates agree on the main elements of business graduate employability which are: the significance of "hard business-related skills" and "soft-business related skills", and the requirement of work experience (p. 413). In Australia, Kinash et al. (2015) compared the understanding of students, graduates, and HE personnel of GE. Results indicate that all stakeholders believe that wide-ranging experience and the articulation of personal brand characterise the most employable graduates.

A larger body of research compared the perspectives of employers and graduates of the skills and attributes required in the labour market. It can be classified into three categories in terms the dimension of similarities and differences: matches, matches and mismatches, and mismatches in perceptions. In a study by Sarkar et al. (2016), both employers and graduates highly valued generic skills over technical knowledge and skills. Both groups also believed that universities should provide more placements and effective career advising to help students network and gain generic skills such as business awareness. Saunders and Zuzel (2010) found matches between the perceptions of employers and STEM students/graduates of the ranking of employability skills. Both groups agreed that enthusiasm, team-working, and dependability are the most significant skills and attributes whereas negotiation, networking, and commercial awareness are the least important. However, employer participants ranked technical skills less highly than students/graduates. The conflicting result of the two studies, the agreement and disagreement between both groups of stakeholders, could be attributed to the differential discipline and/or context, namely the HE system and the labour market in both countries, the UK and Australia.

The second category of research comparing the perspectives of graduates and employers shows agreement in terms of skills and disagreement with regards to personality attributes. In the Papua New Guinea, results by Bhanugopan and Fish (2009) show that both senior business students and employers perceived "general business skills" to be more important than technical skills. However, employers believed that students do not possess the skills and personal attributes needed at the workplace. Disparity was only found in the skills and personal attributes both groups perceived as the most effective in the local labour market. In Namibia, Shivoro et al. (2018) compared the perceptions of graduates, employers, and academics of the necessary attributes for GE. While matches were found among the perceptions of the three groups with relation to innovation and accountability as the most important attributes, mismatches were identified regarding the attributes enhanced at university, those required in the labour market, and those that graduates need to develop further. In Australia, Ferns (2012) found that while discipline has an impact on the perceptions of important skills, surveyed graduates reached a consensus that writing, speaking, knowledge, teamwork, and problem solving are the most significant. According to

Ferns, minor differences were identified between the skills students and employers perceived as important.

The third category of research reveal disparity between the two groups in terms skill importance, availability, and ranking. In Greece, Matsouka and Mihail (2016) compared the perceptions of Human Resources managers (HRMs) and graduates of the soft skills needed to enhance GE. While the graduates overestimated their possession of the necessary soft skills, HRMs stated that graduates lacked those skills. Emotional intelligence, professionalism, and goal setting are the skills that show the greatest mismatch in perceptions of both employers and graduates. In Vietnam, Tran (2015) found that while employers consider work experience the first and foremost employment selection criteria, students and graduates regard work-related knowledge, rather than skills, are the most crucial GE assets. In a study by Succi and Canvoi (2019) of European employers and graduates, mismatches were identified in both the importance of soft skills compared to technical skills and in the ranking both groups attach to the examined soft skills. Results revealed that while students highly value conflict management and networking skills, employers place a great value on work ethics, creativity, adaptability, and teamwork.

2.6 Employability in the Arab World and MENA Region

Though Arab countries share the same language and are culturally homogeneous, they differ in terms of politics, modernity, urbanization, and religion (Weir et al., 2016). Arab nations share certain features in their educational systems, which have been described as “indoctrination”, such as poor educational quality leading to strong skills mismatch, irrelevant curriculum, overexpansion of HE with particular focus on credentials and teaching rather than research, lack of academic freedom, and centralisation (Kirdar, 2017, p. 290). A skills gap in some of the Arab nations has forced private sector employers to hire foreign labour, rather than nationals who have obtained degrees that are not highly valued in the labour market (Kirdar, 2017). Among other regions in the world, MENA region has the highest unemployment rate with one-third participating in labour force compared to 50% globally, and the lowest returns to education (Kirdar, 2017; Krafft et al., 2019).

Employability research in this region is scarce. Research trends include exploring the perceptions of employers of the skills needed and possessed by graduates and the importance of foreign language mastery as an employability skill. Across Arab nations with differential labour markets, findings by Al-Azri (2016) in Oman; Al-Mutairi et al. (2014) in Kuwait; and Ayoubi et al. (2017) in Syria show that employers of business graduates value soft skills such as communication and teamwork which they reported to be lacking among these graduates. A study by Ramadi et al. (2016) has explored the perceptions and satisfaction of MENA managers of the skills required of engineers. Results show that out of 36 skills the ones that need improvement the most are: communication, time management, and learning agility and that the level of preparedness of recently graduated engineers is generally low. Therefore, soft skills, in particular communication, are the most significant in graduates of two different degree subjects and in different Arab and MENA countries.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This section presents a justification of the use of Bourdieu's work, compared to other models. It then discusses Bourdieu's (1984; 1986) *forms of capital*, *habitus*, and *field* and how they are used in this study to inform interview questions and data analysis. It sets out to highlight the relevance of the theory to university graduates, employers, and labour market, which is the focus of the study. It then demonstrates the works of the key authors who have employed Bourdieu's work to understand the process of accumulation and mobilisation of capital, social mobility, inequality, and graduate outcomes in relation with employers' selection criteria of employees.

2.7.1 Why Bourdieu?

Reviewing different approaches to GE, Bourdieu's work provides the most feasible framework for this study for its comprehensive nature. More recently, Tomlinson (2017) presents the Graduate Capital Model which explains how graduates use capitals while transitioning to the labour market. Further, he argues that this model offers an understanding of employability that may unravel the complexity of this phase. In this model, capitals are: human, social, cultural, identity, and psycho-social. Whilst this model successfully addresses the capitals recent graduates need to cope with the

challenges of transition to the labour market, these capitals may be altered or modified when these graduates move further in their career paths. It seems that it primarily focuses on the individual while overlooking the role that the structure may play in determining the possibility and the efficacy of utilising these capitals. To illustrate, if one assumes that graduates possess the resilience and career adaptability to better position themselves in the labour, how can the model account for a congested labour market or a corrupt political system?

On the other hand, Bourdieu's *forms of capital, habitus,* and *field* provides a stronger theoretical lens for two main reasons. First, compared to Tomlinson's aforementioned capitals, Bourdieu's forms of capital are less, which allows for better coding and themes development. In addition, Tomlinson's cultural and human capitals could be collapsed under the same term which is the cultural capital in Bourdieu's work. Second, Bourdieu's forms of capital can offer a clear answer to the first parts of the three research questions formulated for this study where graduates and employers' perspectives of GE can be identified and compared using the three forms. Similarly, the strategies graduates use to develop their GE and the strategies employers use to help their staff to develop their GE, which constitute the second part of the research questions, can be answered through identifying the capitals both groups accumulated and mobilised/help other accumulate and mobilise. The aspect of background featured in the research questions can be understood through the lens of habitus, which according to Bourdieu does not function in vacuum but rather in a field, represented mainly by the Egyptian labour market.

2.7.2 The Forms of Capital

Bourdieu (1986) defines capital as "the accumulated labor" which when collected by agents over time leads to the development of the social field (p. 15). He also argues that capital constitutes both a force embedded in structures and a principle that underpins the regularities in the social field. To illustrate, individuals accumulate capitals because these capitals are powerful enough to cement individuals' position in the field. For example, a university student may pursue a degree in Marketing, which is a capital, and participate in ECA, another capital, to create social networks that help them secure

future employment. These accumulated capitals may change the agents' position in the social fields, from a student to an employed graduate.

According to Bourdieu (1986), capitals are classified into: cultural, economic, and social where the former is further divided into: "objectified", "embodied", and "institutionalised" (pp. 17-18). Objectified cultural capital refers to material items such as paintings, books, and laboratories whereas embodied denotes predispositions and propensities that manifest themselves into body language, accent, and mannerisms. Institutionalised cultural capital refers to academic qualifications earned through formal education which may result into economic and social yields yet with the support of inherited social capital. Bourdieu (1986) maintains that agents who possess institutionalised cultural capital can be compared and valorised and their capitals can be exchanged into monetary value. A good example could be engineers who hold a Bsc. in Engineering yet these degrees may have been obtained with different GPAs from different universities. Therefore, if these engineers apply for the same job, recruiters would compare them to create a short list of the top candidates. For the conversion process to succeed, Bourdieu argues that there must be minimal return to the academic investment, namely "reversibility" and "scarcity" which guarantees profits (p. 25). An individual would not pursue a particular degree if they think this degree would not accrue certain benefits such as employment, promotion, or a higher salary.

Economic capital is money but it can be also institutionalised in the form of property such as a house or a piece of land. Bourdieu (1986) maintains that economic capital is "the root of all the other types of capital". It can be converted into economic capital under certain conditions and social capital can be also converted into economic capital (p. 24). He also explains how the relationship between economic and cultural capital is mediated through the time required for acquisition. According to Bourdieu, social capital is the sum of the possessed networks of relationships that make agents members of a group. He explains how the size of the agents' networks and the volume of different forms of capital possessed by the agents the agent is connected to determine the volume of social capital. Bourdieu also argues that the network of connections is not granted to the agent at birth but is rather obtained through constant effort over time in order to maintain useful relationships that can accrue material and symbolic profits.

2.7.3 Social Class

Bourdieu (1990) defines class as "identical or similar conditions of existence and conditionings - is at the same time a class of biological individuals having the same habitus, understood as a system of dispositions common to all products of the same conditionings" (p. 59). He explains how social class is not determined by race, or age, or gender, but rather through the relationship between these dimensions. According to Bourdieu (1984), the movement of agents in the social space is determined by both: the forces structuring the space and agents' resistance of these forces using their embodied or objectified properties such as educational qualifications.

Bourdieu (1984) argues that social classes are competing for educational qualifications which have resulted into "schooling boom" due to the change in the relationship between different social classes and the educational system on the one hand, and between qualifications and employment on the other (p. 132). He further argues that the dominant and the middle classes possess higher volume of economic capital which enables them to take advantage of the educational system to guarantee social reproduction. In a tight labour market, individuals may invest in educational qualifications with the aim of obtaining better employment. However, this investment requires financial resources which upper middle and middle class possess, enabling them to obtain as many degrees as they wish.

2.7.4 Social and Cultural Reproduction

Bourdieu (1984) describes "reproduction strategies" as "the set of outwardly very different practices whereby individuals or families tend, unconsciously and consciously, to maintain or increase their assets and consequently to maintain or improve their position in the class structure" (p. 125). Reproduction strategies depend on: the capital aimed to be reproduced and reproduction tools such as the labour market and the educational system, which are determined by the power relations between social classes. According to Bourdieu (1973), the investment families make in their children's academic career constitutes a strategy of reproduction which generations aim to pass over to other generations. Bourdieu explains how the ruling class exercises monopoly

of elite educational establishments, leads to “segregation” that starts as of secondary education (p. 84).

2.7.5 Habitus and Field

Bourdieu (1977) defines *habitus* as “systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*” (p. 72). He argues that habitus are structures that are both “structured” and “structuring”, which refers to its nature as principles guiding individuals and shaping their practices. Individuals may have their different preferences, for instance, shaped by their families and the school they attend. Bourdieu argues that strategies selected by agents are the result of habitus. Practices can be predicated and are understandable and coherent due to habitus homogeneity (Bourdieu, 1977). For example, in Egypt, working class children tend to play football whereas upper-middle and upper class children may play tennis. Burke et al. (2013) make a distinction between individual and collective habitus which includes familial and institutional habitus. They explain how the habitus of individuals who belong to certain institutions is affected by their institutional habitus. To illustrate, institutions such as schools and universities may shape the habitus of their students the practices their communities do. Burke et al. also argue that the notion of collective habitus-familial and institutional-is significant for its ability to explain the collective practices undergone by individuals within an institution.

Bourdieu’s notion of habitus is intricately interwoven with his notion of *field* where habitus functions. *Field* refers to the social field determined by the relations of power among forms of capital where agents and institutions who possess the highest volume of capital, in particular economic and cultural, are those who dominate in their field (Bourdieu, 1998). The relationship between habitus and field is governed by another notion, namely *doxa*, which refers to the implicit rules or the accepted order (Bourdieu, 1984; 2000). In a particular country as a field, middle class students may participate in HE because their social habitus regards university as an inevitable step in their trajectory whereas their working-class peers, who could be first generation college students, may find this field ‘a far cry’ from what they and their families are accustomed to.

2.7.6 Employing Bourdieu's 'Toolkit'

Bourdieu's conceptual notions have attracted considerable attention in recent years both in Western and non-Western contexts. Researchers worldwide have employed Bourdieu's toolkit to understand HE issues and to guide their methodology and data analysis. In the UK, these researchers have utilised Bourdieu's notions: Abrahams (2017), social capital and habitus; Abrahams and Ingram (2013), habitus and field; Bathmaker et al. (2013), forms of capital; Bathmaker (2015), field; Bradley (2017), capital; Ingram (2017), habitus and field; and Ingram and Allen (2019), "social magic and institutional habitus" (p. 723). While Bathmaker et al. (2013) designed their methodology based on Bourdieu's definition of social class and found his notion of "feel for the game" useful in their analysis, Ingram and Allen (2019) drew on his work to create their theoretical framework to understand graduate recruitment in two organisations (p. 66). Focusing on university graduates, Ingram and Allen (2019) employed Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital and the notion of 'social magic' to investigate recruitment processes in two popular sectors. More precisely, they looked at how employers perceived and selected their ideal candidate; how this perception is reflected in job advertisements; and how these practices promote social exclusion from these sectors. Findings indicate that the seemingly objective criteria stated in job advertisements are converted through "social magic" into "socially structured capitals" that may enhance inequalities (p. 732).

In Egypt, researchers have successfully used Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit. Barsoum (2017) analysed the Egyptian HE field which she described as an "institutionalized classifier" where lower-background graduates choose lower status HEIs and reproduce their status by using the strategies at their disposal (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 387). In a study by Barsoum and Rashad (2016), public and private universities in Egypt were compared in terms of market labour outcomes while referring to Bourdieu's (1990) social and cultural reproduction. In her doctoral thesis, Abou-Setta (2015) utilised Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital, social and cultural reproduction, and structure and agency to understand how inequitable access to HE aggravates social inequality through the analysis of the narratives of Egyptian students of the relationship between structure and agency. In her MA thesis, Galegher (2012) employed Bourdieu's notion of habitus, and

in particular linguistic habitus, and the forms of capital, specifically cultural capital, to understand the impact of the developments in Arabic as the national yet stigmatised language on the behaviour and beliefs of Egyptian students, teachers, and alumni of an elite school and the cultural and social reproduction undergone by the privileged.

2.8 Critiques of Bourdieu

Bourdieu has been criticised by some sociologists, the most prominent of whom are: King (2000); Ortner (2006); and Jenkins (1982; 1992; 1994). Jenkins' (1992) claims that there is contradiction between Bourdieu says and what he does. According to Jenkins, while Bourdieu insists that he is not theorist, the titles of some of his works comprises the word 'theory' such as *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972). Another contradiction, as explained by Jenkins, is related to the objectivism-subjectivism dualism. In an attempt to overcome the dualism between subjectivism and objectivism, Bourdieu introduced the concept of habitus, which Jenkins heavily criticised. According to Bourdieu, as discussed earlier in this chapter, habitus is a system of dispositions that are both 'structuring' and 'structured' where these dispositions result in perceptions and practices that are structured by objective social conditions and subjective experiences. Habitus mediates between the 'structured' and the 'structuring' to give room to agents to act creatively in the social field. Jenkins (1982) criticises Bourdieu's habitus because it is a form of determination, which refutes the very raison d'être Bourdieu proposed the notion in the first place.

In resonance with Jenkins, King (2000) in his article, "Thinking with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of the Habitus", explains: "Although Bourdieu believes that the notion of the habitus resolves the subject-object dualism of social theory, in fact, the habitus relapses against Bourdieu's intentions objectivism which he rejects" (p. 417). This suggests that sociologists regard Bourdieu's concept of habitus as problematic due to the contradiction it may create between the very nature of the concept and his own intentions. For King, Bourdieu's definition of habitus is an act of "surrender to objectivism" (p. 423). To illustrate, King argued that Bourdieu (1977) mentioned that the habitus helps "agents to cope with unforeseen and ever- changing situations" which contradicts with the nature of the habitus that does not allow for arising situations or practice transformations (p.72). King even proposed that Bourdieu

reconsider the notion of habitus, renounce his definition, and revert to his "sense of the game" to allow for 'transformation' in habitus (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). Interestingly, King, later in his article, argued that Bourdieu's concept of the field has helped the habitus to regain the flexibility he intended this concept to have in the first place. This may indicate that King (2000) did not completely reject the concept of habitus, as other sociologists may have. Instead, he managed to look at the concept in relation to other notions in Bourdieu's toolkit which tend to complement one another.

Another critique of Bourdieu's habitus was made by Sherry Ortner (2006) in her work, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*. Ortner explains that according to Bourdieu, the concept of the habitus is a set of structures that shapes the dispositions of the individuals in a way that gives structure the upper hand. According to Ortner, class habitus, as a concept, is "potentially risky" for it is being used the way the word "culture" is treated (p. 79). Therefore, Ortner decided to add to the concept "the little cracks and openings" which may emerge due to the evolving complex nature of practice (p. 79). This suggests that habitus seems to be problematic due to its determinism, a concern which has been raised by the aforementioned sociologists. Ortner also criticised Bourdieu's work for it does not sufficiently theorise the idea of agency despite the elements of agency that appear in the actors. According to Ortner, whether it be intentional or not, this under-theorisation of the concept may render Bourdieu anti-humanistic.

Bourdieu (1993) described habitus as "a power of adaption" which "…constantly performs adaptation to the outside world which only exceptionally takes the form of radical conversion" (p. 88). Bourdieu (1990) further explains that habitus is a concept that draws a picture of an individual by combining their present and past. It could be argued that the concept of habitus does not seem to be completely deterministic if the concepts of agency and capitals are taken in consideration. As previously discussed in this chapter, Bourdieu (1986) devised the forms of capitals and discussed at length the process of accumulation and mobilisation, which properly acknowledges individuals' agency. If agents can select the capitals to accumulate and mobilise, then they have a choice. However, these choices are to be made within the frame of the social field and determined by the structure. Therefore, Bourdieu by devising the notion of habitus was able to resolve the dualism of objectivism and subjectivism and by creating the forms of

capitals, he acknowledges agency and hence his work is not too deterministic, as described by his critics, including Jenkins. To illustrate, Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit resembles a football court where players have the agency to run, kick the ball, and score goals, but all their movements have to be done within the court and under certain rules. By employing, Bourdieu's forms of capital, habitus, and field, in addition to his contributions of the agency-structure dimensions to be the theoretical framework underpinning this study, I have responded to the critiques made by sociologists.

For example, a working-class young woman has the social habitus of her class which has been shaped by conditions like her family and neighbours. If she then moved to another city or underwent upward mobility, her habitus may adapt and change according to the new conditions. Meanwhile her habitus, be it new or old, determines her practices, taste, and preferences. This makes habitus both structured and structuring. If another woman went down the same path while having the same old habitus, would she necessarily acquire the same 'new' habitus, and if she would, would she does the same practices and makes the same choices. One cannot be positive of the answer. If habitus is totally deterministic, how can one account for differential choices and decisions made by agents of the same social or institutional habitus? Can one guarantee that all working-class students join demand absorbing higher education institutes? Can some working class students decide not to participate in HE, allternatively? What habitus may determine is the set of choices but it is an individual's agency that decides which one to choose within the set or even outside the set.

2.9 Research Questions

Therefore, three research questions have been formulated for this investigation:

1. How do graduates of different university types understand employability in Egypt? How do they develop it?
2. How do employers of different company types and sizes understand employability in Egypt? How do they help their staff develop it?
3. How do graduates of different university types and employers of different company types and sizes understand employability in Egypt compare?

2.10 Summary

This chapter has presented briefly the economic and political context of the current study. It has compared the two main HE players in Egypt, public and private universities, while highlighting the challenges this system faces. A detailed discussion of GE conceptualisations worldwide, including the Arab World and MENA region has been demonstrated, moving from the earlier simplistic definitions to the most recent contextual and relational understandings. A comparison has been drawn between the key stakeholders, graduates and employers, in terms of their understanding of GE. Finally, the theoretical underpinnings of this study has been explained and justified. In the next chapter, the adopted methodology, the research paradigm, the epistemological stance will be outlined, the sample will be described, and data collection and analysis will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology adopted for this study, the research paradigm, and the epistemological stance. It also outlines the rationale for the method, issues of rigour and quality, and sample description. Following this, instrument crafting and translation in addition to language choice will be presented. This leads to a discussion of participant recruitment techniques, power dynamics, ethical considerations, researcher positionality, transcription, and data analysis. While describing these issues, references will be made to how data collection and ethics, in particular, operate in a non-Western context, specifically Arab and Egyptian. The study explores the understanding of public and private universities graduates and employers in companies of different types of GE in Egypt.

3.1 Methodology Selected

As an interpretivist, I made an effort to "get into the head of the subjects being studied" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 33). I am particularly interested in understanding the thoughts of the subjects, namely participants (Englander, 2012). The subjects and I 'constructed' reality through interactions while we listened, read, wrote, and recorded data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Wahyuni, 2012). Since interpretivists regard context as vital, I recognise that different backgrounds and experiences have an impact on the construction of reality in my study (Wahyuni, 2012). In this study, reality is complex, comprising several diverse elements which I attempt to explore by looking at how different people understand the world differently. This also entails that I adopt a relativist ontology based on which the studied object has "multiple realities" which can be explored through the interaction between the researcher and participants (Chalmers et al., 2005). In addition, interpretivism, compared to scientific and critical paradigms, aims at understanding, rather than generalizing or emancipating (Scotland, 2012). Therefore, this study does not aim to generalise the findings. Rather, it attempts to understand employability from the perspectives of employers and university graduates in Egypt.

3.1.1 Phenomenology

Based on Constructivism and an interpretivist paradigm, phenomenology seeks to explore the "essence of the participants' experience" within context (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). To illustrate, the phenomenon, rather than the participants, is the "object of investigation" yet individuals are still needed to describe this phenomenon (Englander, 2012, p. 25). Acknowledging the need to understand a particular phenomenon from the perspective of lived experience is the first phase in phenomenological studies (Englander, 2012). Next, phenomenologists select participants based on a main criterion which whether the individual has the experience being studied. This criterion, known as purposive sampling, guides phenomenologists in the participant selection and elimination processes. Purposive sampling is a kind of non-probability non-random sampling in which the researcher chooses the sample which is suitable for the purpose (Etikan et al., 2016). Nevertheless, phenomenologists need to be careful not to arrive at the study with "pre-understandings" of the phenomenon so as to be able to fully understand the experiences of this phenomenon (Englander, 2012, p. 19). To clarify, as a researcher, I may have certain assumptions, consistent with public perception, in terms of public versus private university graduates' understanding of employability. These assumptions, though could not be entirely "suspended" as data may be completely different, can be partially controlled for through acknowledgment of their existence and systematic data collection and analysis. A good example could be Omar, a young HR professional in a large domestic company and a graduate of a private Higher Institute, described as a "demand-absorbing" by Barsoum (2017) whose views and knowledge left me perplexed (p. 107). This is because the public perception is that graduates of these institutes are usually 'low achievers'.

In this study, I attempted to construct an understanding of the phenomenon of GE in Egypt by comparing the realities of two groups of stakeholders-public and private university graduates and employers of different types. The study also intended to explore the differences among graduates in terms of the strategies used to develop their employability and whether there are evident differences in terms of background such as social class, degree subject, and university type. With regards to employers, questions about graduate suitability and suggestions to improve the situation were attempted.

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions conducted in early January 2020 and lasting about an hour in English or Arabic were used with both groups. Findings aim to inform institutional policy making and curriculum development at Egyptian HEIs. Comparing graduates and employers' perceptions of employability will highlight the areas which an institutional employability policy may need to capture such as connection with employers and universities and modules that involve both educators and employers at different stages.

3.1.2 Methods

Reasons for choosing interviews over quantitative research methodologies can be attributed to the research area, which is employability. Most previous employability studies have employed surveys with their restrictive nature (McArthur et al., 2017). McArthur et al. also argue that these studies focused on attributes previously determined by researchers, resulting in "a closed-loop process of knowledge advancement" (p. 83).

Individual in-depth interviews have a number of merits which include: "circumstances of unique applicability", "sampling advantages", and "preferential outcomes" (Robson & Foster, 1989, as cited in Stokes & Bergin, 2006, p. 28). Interviewees provide their own accounts and experiences which are distinctive and are less likely to have been experienced by other individuals. Interviews also give researchers the privilege of selecting participants that meet their eligibility criteria, which results in more in-depth data (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Another advantage to in-depth interviews is the relatively rare occurrence of being listened to in addition to the anonymity of participants, which enhances respondents' empowerment (Berent, 1966, Cited in Stokes & Bergin, 2006). The rapport built between interviewers and interviewees may result in data with higher quality (Webb, 1995, cited in Stokes & Bergin, 2006).

Nevertheless, in-depth interviews have their caveats, the most important of which is the inability of the researcher to reach a large number of respondents and therefore interacting with a particular pool of participants. Disadvantages may also include: cost, speed, and difficulty in interpretation (Zikmund & Babin, 1997; Fern, 2000; Cassell & Symon, 2004). Interviews are "time consuming" given the stages researchers go

through starting with making contact with participants, then conducting and transcribing the interviews, and finally analysing and using the data in the research (Robson, 2002, as cited in Alshenqeeti, 2014, p. 43). Other disadvantages of interviews are related to the outcome, which may be affected by a number of issues (Robson, 2011, as cited in Alsaawi, 2014). First, since transcribing interviews is the researcher's responsibility, there is a possibility that the interviewer may not convey the meaning the interviewee intended to say. In unstructured interviews, the way questions are posed may affect the responses. Therefore, I opted for semi-structured interviews to enhance the credibility and dependability of the data. Leading questions or adjectives or adverbs like 'major', 'less', 'well', and 'great' or verbs that may make value judgement like 'fail' and 'succeed' were avoided so as not to direct interviewees to specific responses. This may increase the credibility of the interview questions. In addition, the researcher's identity may have an impact on the data obtained-a concern that cannot be controlled for. Nevertheless, I argue that the researcher's "fluid" identity may positively influence the flow of the interview (Alsaawi, 2014, p. 155). Using a reflexive eye, I noticed that I would be more encouraging with interviewees who were hesitant and anxious and probably more cautious with those with high self-esteem. To conclude, acknowledging the limitations of interviews is crucial in order to address them.

Other reasons for choosing semi-structured interviews are: they are usually used by researchers when they have an overview of the topic they are looking at (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). Since this study explores graduate employability (GE), a topic which has been extensively researched for over two decades, in particular in the UK and Australia, and since there is abundance of literature on different GE conceptualisations and perspectives, crafting open-ended questions is the most logical choice for this study. In addition, semi-structured interviews provide interviewers with the opportunity to probe and the interviewees to elaborate on their responses, hence achieving depth (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Koskei & Simiyu, 2015). Questions in semi-structured interviews should be piloted in advance because they are open-ended in nature (Dörnyei, 2007). Both interview schedules in both languages were piloted and a few words were replaced and long questions were broken down into shorter ones.

3.1.3 Insider/Outsider Researcher

Initially, I decided to start with recruiting employer participants because I am an outsider researcher in terms of corporate world. On the other hand, I may be considered an insider researcher for employed university graduates as I have been a university educational practitioner in different HEIs and I have developed a network of fellow academics and university graduates.

The insider-outsider dichotomy has been re-conceptualised in the literature. Researcher's identity seems to shift in accordance with the situation and the researcher's response to the context including its social, political, and cultural aspects (Arthur, 2010). According to Milligan (2016), the shift in positionings is also determined by the individual the researcher is interacting with. Milligan argues that researchers are neither complete insiders or complete outsiders. In Milligan's work, "insiderness" and "outsiderness" involve both the positionings the researcher decides to take and the roles other stakeholders in the research project perceive the researcher to be playing (p. 235).

3.2 Study Participants

3.2.1 Sample Description

Participants are divided into two groups: employers in companies of different sizes and different industries in the public and private sectors in Egypt; and university graduates who were students at Egyptian public and private HEIs. Graduates of public and private universities are compared because it is thought that the latter type of universities have been established to "attract rich kids" (Cook & El-Refaee, 2017, p. 298). Therefore, recruiting graduates from different university types should improve the diversity of participants, which is significant to understand how different kinds of people are positioned in relation to GE. The total number of interviews is 41 divided into 21 interviews with 11 male and 10 female employers in 2 public companies and 19 private companies and 20 interviews with 9 male and 11 female university graduates who studied at 8 public and 12 at private HEIs (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). Cairo-based graduate participants outnumbered graduates with rural background because

access to HE in Egypt is described as an "urban phenomenon" (Barsoum, 2017, p.107). All participants were allocated pseudonyms to protect their identity while taking in consideration age and gender. It should be noted the naming system in contemporary Egypt includes both Arabic and foreign names.

Brehends (2007) divides companies based on the number of employees into: micro enterprises (1 to 9), small enterprises (from 10 to 49), medium enterprises (from 50 to 250), and larger enterprises (above 250). In this study, graduates and employers work at enterprises of different sizes. The rationale behind including company size in terms of the number of employees is that HR practices in smaller and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) usually use "informal/internal recruitment methods" compared to large enterprises which rely more on "formal/external recruitment methods" (Darrag et al., 2010, p. 106; Zibarras & Woods, 2010). This could be due to MSEs' adopting a "different logic" (Brehends, 2007, p. 72) and/or reducing the time, effort, and money invested in the recruitment process in addition to utilising their better understanding of their employees and their performance (Darrag et al., 2010). Another major difference between large enterprises and MSEs is the presence or the lack of HR professionals and departments (Brehends, 2007; Darrag et al., 2010). Idson (1990) explains that the bigger the company size, the more formal the recruitment and HR practices. It is noteworthy to mention that the companies where graduates and employers work are also classified in terms of scope: domestic (DEs) and multinational (MNCs). This is because practices may be different in both types. Mohamed et al. (2013) found that MNCs are "much more stringent" in their HR practices, including recruitment, training, and promotions, compared to DEs (p. 2072).

I combined two recruitment techniques which are: maximum variation, a type of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Maximum variation, also known as heterogeneous sampling, refers to the sampling process where a subject is examined from different perspectives in order to achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon (Etikan et al., 2016). According to Seidman (2012), maximum variation achieves fairness to the larger population due to the range from which people are chosen. An equal representation was also achieved in both samples where 11 male and 10 female employers, and 11 male and 9 female university graduates were interviewed.

Snowball sampling can be defined as “a technique for finding research subjects. One subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on” (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Gatekeepers are people who are capable of providing researchers with access to institutions such as a director or administrator (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). Interestingly, I reached graduates of universities all over Egypt including cities in Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt to “expand geographical scope” and thus provide a wider range of perspectives of university graduates in a variety of context and with different cultural backgrounds (Baltar & Brunet, 2011, p. 57). In terms of age, I limited my recruitment to graduates who are ‘recent’-those who graduated in 2019 up to those who have up to 7 years of experience because graduates who have longer work experience could be more aware of the ‘game’ in the labour market and therefore their understanding of employability might be similar to that of employers.

3.2.2 Participant Recruitment

Employing multiple recruitment techniques concurrently and sequentially enabled me to interview 41 participants in total in 6 weeks. Snowball technique and gatekeepers were more effective than purposive sampling through Social Media Sites (SMS) such as Facebook and LinkedIn (See Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2). In the first phase, social circles, fellow teachers, and former students helped me recruit participants for my study. Triandis (1995, cited in Hawamdeh, 2014) and Hofstede (1980) have described the Middle East as a “collectivist culture” where the difference between members of the same community and strangers is more obvious (p. 52). This may provide an interpretation of the relatively higher level of effectiveness of participant recruitment techniques such as snowballing and gatekeeping in this study. To illustrate, gatekeepers put the effort in recruiting participants because they see me as a member of their in-group. Likewise, participants recruited other participants who are members of their in-groups.

In the second phase, I used Facebook in three different ways. First, I posted a recruitment invitation message in three different registers on my Facebook page: one in English (see appendix 16), the second was in Egyptian Arabic using a neutral tone (see appendix 17), and the third was in Egyptian Arabic but in a more humorous tone to

appeal to young people on Facebook (see appendix 18). Second, I posted a standardised recruitment message on Facebook university alumni pages to recruit university graduates. Third, I posted another recruitment message on Facebook HR groups to recruit HR professionals and another message on more generic Facebook pages I am a member of. In the third phase, I used LinkedIn, which turned to be the least effective SMS, in two ways: joining HR groups and sending participation invitation messages to individuals whom I searched for using keywords such as “HR”, “Talent Acquisition”, and other relevant keywords.

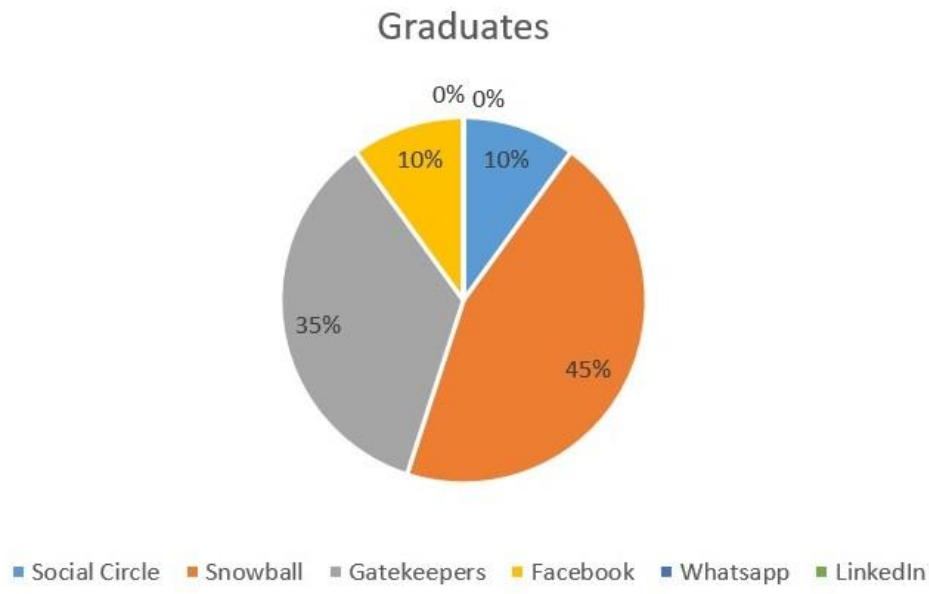

Figure 3.1 Pie chart shows the percentage of graduates recruited using different techniques.

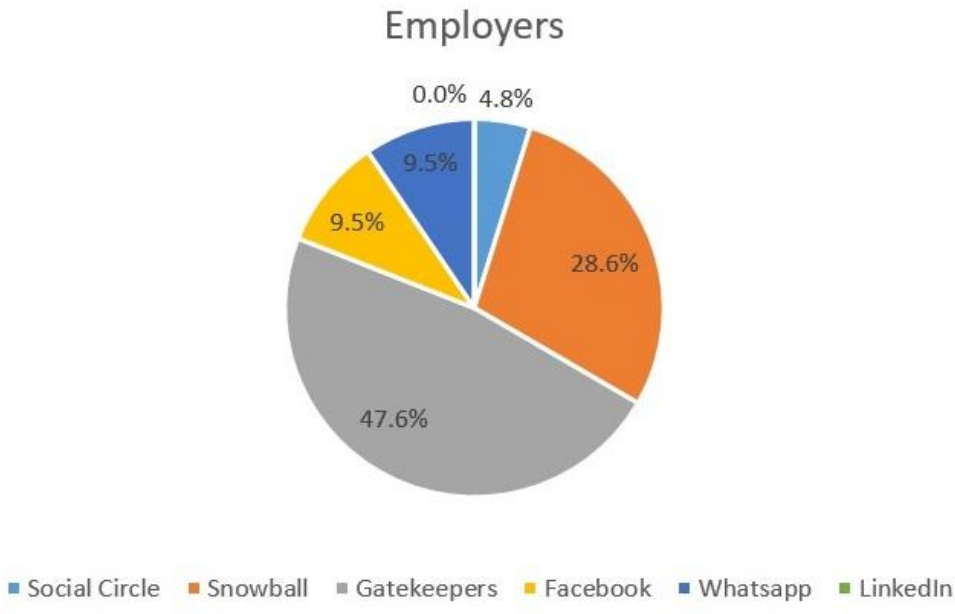

Figure 3.2 Pie chart shows the percentage of employers recruited using different techniques.

3.2.3 Sample Size

Englander (2012) argues that researchers whose studies are qualitative in terms of purpose and research questions look for in-depth knowledge of the experience at hand, and subsequently attempt to explore the meaning of the phenomenon, rather than the number of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. As a phenomenologist, I believe that sample size decision should be made based on criteria relevant to qualitative, not quantitative research. According to Seidman (2012), the size of the sample is determined based on two criteria: sufficiency felt by the researcher and saturation. Instead of a pre-determined size, I thought that 20 graduates and 21 employers were sufficient because almost no new data emerged after interviewing these numbers. Therefore, saturation was reached after 41 interviews.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Interview Structure

According to Robson (2011, cited to Alsaawi), interviews can be divided into five phases: introduction, warm-up, main body, cool-off, and closure. In most interviews, I introduced myself either on the phone or in a WhatsApp message. However, some participants were keen to know about my study and who I am before the actual interview started. Therefore, my interviews mostly started at the warm-up phase where I asked my participants simple questions such as “Who are you?”, and “Tell me about your educational background”. Afterwards, I moved to the main body, which constitutes the questions related to the topic at study. I used one question in the cool-off stage, which is about the information they would like to add to the interview. Moving to the closure, I thanked my participants for their time and their contribution. However, my closure included another component, which is asking my participants to recruit potential participants. Employers interviews lasted from 30 minutes to an hour and 20 minutes while graduates interviews from 20 minutes to an hour. This could be attributed to the gap in the work experience between the employers and the recent graduates.

3.4 Procedures Followed

Since some of the interviewees may prefer to be interviewed in their own language, I added the language choice part in the interview invitation emails (for the graduate version and the employer version, see appendices 13 and 14, respectively) because I was concerned that some participants may decline the invitation for fear of using a language they are not competent in. As well, other participants may choose English yet their proficiency level is rather low, which may cause communication breakdown or problems with the analysis and interpretation of data. Another reason for language choice is developing a rapport with the interviewee, which needs to be built and maintained during the fieldwork (Widodo, 2014). Therefore, participants were urged to use the language they felt they were comfortable expressing themselves in. Both

interview schedules were translated in Arabic. Eight out of 41 participants opted for English with only one participant whose English proficiency level was native-like.

3.4.1 Crafting Interview Schedules

While crafting the interview schedules in English, I made an effort to ensure that the phrasing is clear and I avoided ambiguous words to enhance the translatability of the instruments. For example, I used the word 'internships' instead of 'work placement' because the word 'internships' is widely used in both English and Arabic here. In addition, the Arabic equivalent of 'internships' and 'work placement' is the same, which is *tadreeb*. In order to eliminate difficulties in translating instruments, Yu et al. (2004) urge that meaning should be clearly communicated and implicit meanings expressed through specific grammatical structures should be avoided to reduce the risk of translation errors. Yu et al. also added that active voice should be used because a corresponding passive voice may not exist in the target language. Finally, according to Yu et al., researchers should use "short and concise form" while maintaining context and refraining from the use of pronouns as much as they can (p. 311).

Next, I mapped the interview questions against the research questions the study attempted to answer to ensure that the former provide answers to the latter (For a detailed version of this, see appendix 3). The interviews questions were also informed by employability literature to enhance the credibility and dependability of my instruments (For a detailed version of this, see appendix 4). I then made changes in the phrasing of the interview questions because they sounded more like a verbal questionnaire than an interview. In this study, the research questions are:

1. How do graduates of different university types understand employability in Egypt? How do they develop it?
2. How do employers of different company types and sizes understand employability in Egypt? How do they help their staff develop it?
3. How do graduates of different university types and employers of different company types and sizes understand employability in Egypt compare?

3.4.2 Translation Issues in Cross Cultural Research

One of the challenges researchers may face in cross cultural studies is conceptual equivalence (Osborn, 2004). Osborn argues that concepts that may seem unambiguous could be culturally bound. In this study, the very term "employability" is a culturally specific concept that does not have a counterpart in the Arabic culture. I looked it up in different English-Arabic dictionaries but in vain. Google search provided a literal translation, which is *al-tawaẓufeyyah*, yet this term is not used, at least in Egypt. In a doctorate thesis written by Hassock (2019) in the United Emirates, she used the word *tawzeef*, which is employment, in the title of her thesis and then she used the phrase *qabeleyyah lel tawzeef*, which is more accurate, in the abstract. This may confirm how problematic the concept 'employability' is in Arabic. In order to achieve validity or in more interpretivist terms credibility, I opted for using a phrase, which translates, 'the ability to become employed', to replace the word 'employability' because coining a new term may cause ambiguity, rather than achieve clarity. According to Clark (2006), construct validity is a challenge that some researchers who study the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region may face because participants may not be familiar with the concept at study due its "relative newness and/or rarity" (p. 419). Geisinger (1994) argues for "instrument adaptation", which entails taking in consideration the meaning, structure, and the culture of target language (p. 137).

3.4.3 Expert Committee

Epstein et al. (2015) maintain that Expert Committee, as an instrument translation method, is more effective than back translation. According to Epstein et al., while Expert Committee approach helps clarify ambiguous concepts and reach agreement on amendments through discussion among the members, back translation may lead to one translation overlapping with the other, and hence misrepresenting the original text.

Therefore, I formed a Committee of Experts to translate the two interview schedules individually. Committee members were: An English as a Second Language Teacher who is also a linguist; an Arabic as a Foreign Language Teacher who is also a linguist; and a professional translator and editor. Before embarking on the translation, the members of the Committee and myself agreed on choosing Egyptian Arabic as this is

the language Egyptians use in their everyday conversations. According to Yacoub (2015), the three co-existing language varieties in Egypt are: Classic Arabic, Egyptian Arabic Variety (EAV), and English Variety, with EAV being "the everyday-used-variety in Egypt" (p. 383).

The members of the Committee then reached a consensus with regard to the 'best' translation. Finally, I reviewed the final version to ensure accuracy and clarity. Words with negative connotations were replaced with neutral words. The word "networks", has been translated into an Arabic word with a neutral connotation so as not to offend participants. In addition, words which were translated inaccurately due to the lack of an equivalent in Arabic had to be kept in English such as 'career centre'. All three members of the expert committee misunderstood the meaning of the word 'career centre' as it is a rather novel concept that has been used exclusively in two private universities.

3.4.4 Transcription

Transcription can be defined as the process of re-constructing verbal data that was co-created by the participant and the researcher in an interview (Widodo, 2014). To illustrate, it is the process of converting spoken recorded words into a written text (Halcom & Davidson, 2006). Different approaches have been used to convert interview data into transcripts. Kvale (1996) argues against verbatim transcription because it may result in "incoherent and confused" speech, which may also disadvantage particular individuals or groups of individuals (p. 206). Kvale also maintains that researchers' epistemological stance may determine the purpose and the nature of transcription. As an interpretivist, I believe that understanding meaning cannot be achieved without considering context. Individuals interact and engage in conversation in particular places at certain times (Lapadat, 2000). Participants may be thought of as "co-actors" who have ownership over the realities they narrate and they assist the researcher listen to their "inner voices" (Widodo, 2014, p. 106).

Transcribing entails constructing and interpreting meaning in a manner that is "sensitive to context, reflexive, and constructivist" (Lapadat, 2000, p. 210). In addition, Widodo argues that "communicating talking data" can be implemented in two approaches,

"naturalism" and "denaturalism", depending on how much detail to be included (p. 105). I used features of the two approaches where I left grammatical errors uncorrected yet I removed elements such as pauses, fillers, and stutters. Therefore, I decided against verbatim transcription because it is incongruent with both my epistemological stance and the research design. It is also inconsistent with the theoretical underpinnings of this research. This is in addition to the involved time and cost factors.

I created a post-interview sheet including close-ended and open-ended questions to promote reflection in a timely manner (see appendix 19). According to Moore (2015), automatic speech recognition (ASR) provides researchers with a good tool to make transcription of recordings a less labour-intense process by immensely reducing the required amount of time to finish the task. In this study, most participants used Egyptian Arabic, which was not accurately recognized by the ASR Google offers. Eight participants opted for English, but their accent was not efficiently recognized, either. Moore also states that another challenge was the recording quality which is affected by several factors including noises, poor connectivity, and low quality equipment like earphones and microphones used by participants in online interviews. Therefore, ASR failed to provide me with "reliable text-to-speech" or even "partial transcripts" (Moore, 2015, p. 269).

3.5 Data Analysis

Deductive Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) was employed to analyse the generated interview data. Deductive TA can be also called theoretical thematic analysis because it is driven by "researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area, and is thus more explicitly analyst driven" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 83). I selected Deductive Reflexive TA over other data analysis methods because it allows researchers to code for the research questions they have formulated for their investigations (Braun & Clark, 2006). According to Braun and Clark (2023), one of the merits of Reflexive TA is flexibility which enables researchers to 'tweak' research questions. They have also argued that this method suits a host of research questions, including the ones that deal with beliefs and views.

Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital is the overarching conceptual framework which has guided the crafting of the interview schedules and informed the data analysis. The first data analysis phase occurred with the transcription. The second stage involved repeated reading of the interviews, during which codes emerged. Theory-based codes were clustered to form themes. NVivo 12 software was not used to code and organise the data, as intended, because it does not support right-to-left languages such as Arabic in which the majority of interviews were conducted. Since analysis is primarily based on Bourdieu's work, the main themes in both sets of interviews are: Economic, cultural, social capitals, habitus, and field where each theme is further divided into sub-themes. While in graduates' interviews, cultural capital was divided into: pre-university, university, and post-university, the same capital was divided into 15 sub-themes based on the data in employers' interviews.

3.6 Trustworthiness

3.6.1 Rigour and the Four Quality Criteria

According to Dikko (2016), instruments should be tested for validity and reliability to be considered good methods. However, Guba (1981) states that validating and subsequently achieving rigour in research that is based on an interpretivist paradigm cannot be achieved through the criteria used in positivist research, which are validity and reliability. In agreement, Wahyuni (2012) argues that these notions "do not fit perfectly" in qualitative research (p. 77). Instead, four trustworthiness and authenticity criteria are used in this research, which are: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Guba, 1981). Credibility, which replaces internal validity, refers to the degree to which data as well as data analysis are deemed believable. To clarify, it is related to the extent to which the findings are in alignment with the reality co-constructed by the researcher and the participants (Merriam, 1989, as cited in Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In more general terms, Wahyuni defines credibility as a criterion "concerned with whether the study actually measures or tests what is intended" (p. 77). Instead of reliability, dependability is used to measure the extent to which similar, not same, findings could be observed under similar circumstances given the nature of research located in the interpretivist realm that studies human behaviour which is

context determined and can be subject to multiple interpretations (Guba, 1981). To achieve dependability, Wahyuni suggests that the researcher should provide a detailed description of the research design and process in order for other researchers to guide other researchers who may follow a similar framework. He further recommends that this may include presenting interview schedules. Guba (1981) defines confirmability as the extent to which findings of a particular study are in agreement with those obtained in prior research. He then adds that this criterion aims at reducing biases that may contaminate the results. Replacing external validity, transferability, as Wahyuni puts it, refers to "the level of applicability into other settings or situations" (p.77). He also explains that a qualitative study can be applied in different settings despite the irreproducibility of the data.

Alshenqeeti (2014) suggests a number of techniques to enhance the four criteria, which are: Avoiding leading questions, taking notes while interviewing, conducting pilot interviews, providing interviewee the time they need to elaborate on, clarify, and summarise their ideas. Dikko (2016) explains in detail the importance of conducting a pilot study, which is "a mini version of the study", in promoting the credibility of the instrument (p. 521). I conducted a pilot study using the two interview schedules in both languages. I have also made a few changes on the lexical and sentence levels (for both interview schedules in both languages 'before' and 'after' the pilot, see appendices from 5 to 12, respectively).

3.7 Ethical Concerns

3.7.1 Consent Forms

Though consent forms are the most widely used document to ensure informed consent of participants (Roberts & Indermaur, 2003), obtaining signed consent forms from participants in this study was difficult because some participants were concerned about signing a document they might not have heard about before. Due to the politically unstable context, some participants seemed to be concerned about signing these forms as their signatures might be used against them. Roberts and Indermaur cast doubt on the benefits that incur to participants as a result of signing these forms, which may make participants regard them as another "favour" asked by the researchers and hence they

become reluctant to concur (p. 294). Roberts and Indermaur even argue against the use of consent forms and add that it is the researcher rather than the participants who gain benefit from this "documentary evidence of consent" (p. 294).

Hawamdeh (2014) assumes that signing a contract in the Arab culture, the consent form, may be regarded as an insult since the participant has given the researcher a verbal approval. Similarly, Hassok (2019) faced the same issue with her participants who showed reluctance to sign the consent forms required for the interviews conducted as part of her thesis in the United Arab Emirates. She maintained though participants were requested to sign and return the forms before the interviews, none did and she had to have them sign them at the interview meeting. She decided to politely cancel the interviews if a participant refused to sign the form. It seems that in non-Western contexts, ethical approval, which is "routine in the Western research context", is a "foreign concept" (Nguyen, 2014, p. 37), which different researchers address differently.

Being a PhD student, I thought I should request ethics forms to be signed by participants prior to interviews as per the rules and regulations of the programme I am enroled in. Very few participants, those who conducted research in a Western university or Western-accredited university and one who works in the field of market research, signed the forms immediately and even one of them related to my experience as she herself had to face the same problem. Some were reluctant yet ultimately signed the form and the rest did not. However, all participants provided me with a verbal consent at the beginning of the interview. I also made sure that all participants received the information sheet by email and I answered their questions about the study thoroughly prior to the interviews. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2006), an ethical researcher should take in consideration the cultural aspect of research. Thus, I decided to reach a middle ground between the requirements of my doctorate thesis and the cultural context where my study was conducted.

In conclusion, this chapter presented the methodology I used for this research project, which was conducted in a non-Western context, Egypt. From a Constructivist phenomenological perspective, my interviewees and myself co-constructed the realities of employability in Egypt. We both gained and lost power during the interviews where

my positionality and ‘set of statuses’ may have affected the construction process. First, I presented my epistemological and ontological stance which determined the research design and the method. Second, I discussed the merits and the demerits of interviews. Next, I showed how interview questions were mapped against the research questions and were informed by previous employability literature. Then I argued that interviews involved power dynamics that was determined by factors like gender and age. Following this, I explained the challenges and the decisions I made in relation with language choice, translation, as well as transcription. Throughout this chapter, I argued that the context-Arabic and Egyptian, has played a pivotal role in different methodological aspects, including consent forms.

Chapter 4: Graduates' Understanding of Employability

This investigation attempts to explore the understanding of two stakeholders, employers and graduates, of GE in Egypt. Twenty recent urban and rural private and public universities graduates were interviewed face-to-face, online, and on telephone for half an hour to an hour and a half. For this study, the following question was formulated:

- How do graduates of different university types understand employability in Egypt? How do they develop it?

The chapter compares graduates' understanding of GE and discusses the similarities and/or differences that could be attributed to their different habitus, which includes their educational background, age, work experience, location, company type, field, sector, and size. It concludes with a discussion of how forms of capitals fit and operate in tension with one another.

4.1 Economic Capital

This section starts by discussing how graduates may invest in HE with the aim of 'making money' after graduation and how this goal may guide their choice of degree subject. The discussion then considers how the value of a degree can be immensely affected by the imbalances in supply and demand in the labour market. Finally, the 'financial' responsibility towards the accumulation of further cultural capital is highlighted. Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit, this section discusses the relationship between economic and cultural capitals. Since "economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital", this section is far shorter than the other two sections outlining cultural and social capitals (Bourdieu, p. 24). It appears that economic capital is in a constant state of conversion. Findings of economic capital are presented in the table below.

Sub-themes	Viewpoint	Participants
Degree subject choice	Yes	3
Low salaries	Yes	2
Supply and demand	Yes	2
Low value of degrees	Yes	4
Graduates' conversion economic capital into cultural capital	Yes	4
	No	1
Employers' conversion economic capital into cultural capital	Yes	4

Table 4.1 Overview of economic capital findings in graduates' interviews.

4.1.1 Pre-university Accumulation of Capital: Return on Investment

Private universities graduates with affluent backgrounds seem to have the financial means to join this type of universities which charge higher tuition fees compared to their public counterparts. For example, Amir mentioned that money did not constitute a barrier for his family to help him join his private university after he was not admitted to a public one. Selim stated that one of the reasons for going to university was "making money" after graduation. Aiming at the return on investments also determined their choice of the degree subjects that are perceived to be 'lucrative'. For example, Amir's parents would have liked their child to enrol in Petroleum Engineering because of the potential income in "dollars". In addition, Hana preferred dentistry to other related fields because "dentists, are unlike other doctors, are visited by all people. In comparison, look at orthopaedists. How many people may live their entire life without fractures? But no one lives their life without getting pain in their teeth".

Graduates who chose a degree subject that does not enable them to accumulate 'sufficient' economic capital made strategic career shifts. Peter, a mechanical engineer, shifted career to IT because the salaries of engineers are very low. It could be argued that private university graduates perceive HE as an investment on which financial returns are expected, bearing in consideration that this investment is feasible and may not 'hurt' their families' bank accounts. They appear to have 'picked up the baton' from

their parents in generating money out of their degrees. This indicates a class habitus which includes perception, disposition, and behaviour of converting economic capital into ‘profitable’ cultural capital that can be easily converted back into economic capital. This habitus has guided the selection of the field and type of instituitionalised cultural capital and ruled out the options that do not seem to guarantee a successful conversion process. Despite the differential HE landscape and hierarchy, Bathmaker et al. (2013) argued that since students pay tuition fees, they expect to convert this cost into future job opportunities. While Bathmaker et al. refer to HE in the UK where universities are at fees, in my study the reference is to private universities which charge much higher fees compared to public ones, as previously mentioned. This is consistent with the results by Krafft et al., (2019) that the return on education investment in Egypt is lower than that in Tunisia and Jordan and lower among younger generation and in the private sector compared to the public one. Krafft et al. argued that the factors include the over education of individuals relative to job requirements, the quality of education, and the massification of education and overpopulation.

4.1.2 Post-University Accumulation

The majority of graduates perceived their degrees as being ‘not enough’ with four Engineering graduates clearly stating that. This can be attributed to the imbalances in supply and demand in the labour market, manifested in the high supply of Engineers and leading Engineers to be “cheap” in the labour market, as Nelly mentioned. The high supply caused the value of their degree to decline and therefore, earnings to decrease. Having “the feel for the game”, Peter decided to shift career to IT, a field with higher earnings, and to continue “buying certificates with good return-on-investment” and Nelly strategically chose to pursue a degree at a “reputed institution” while creating networks with the aim of obtaining better employment that the ones she was offered as a graduate of a public regional university (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). To remain ‘fit’ for the competition, graduates decided to fund their own post-graduation learning. While Amir is taking the courses that his employer will not sponsor, and Hana pays the costs of the visits of senior dentists and professors to mentor her work in order to master new techniques.

Bourdieu (1986) explained how the "the material and symbolic profits" brought by a degree depends on "its scarcity", which refers to discrepancy between its actual profitability and the expected profitability when the agent embarked on the accumulation of this capital (p. 21). According to Bourdieu (1990), habitus can be individual or collective such as class habitus and institutional habitus where both types of habitus are interrelated. Reay et al. (2001) argue that the curriculum offered by different universities, and hence their reputation, is considered a significant aspect of their institutional habituses. It seems that the Engineering curricula offered by both university types in Egypt do not prepare them for the labour market, which urges them to seek further education and practice in other institutions the institutional habitus of which appear to have a better status. This is similar to the findings by Nauffal and Skulte-Ouaiss (2018) in Lebanon where the number of engineers and doctors Lebanese HEIs produce exceeds the number the labour market can absorb.

4.1.3 Who should Pay for it?

Most graduates stated that employers invest in them by providing them with training and/or funding courses and certificates they take. However, as Peter explained how employers do not undergo this investment "for the love of God and the nation" and that they "won't invest in you [graduates] unless they are certain of the return". Instead, he added, they would even require graduates to sign documents that would require them to work like "slaves for 10 years" or pay for the cost with interest. Amir seems to complete the picture Peter painted by arguing that employers are careful to sponsor the courses and degrees to qualify graduates to do the assigned tasks in their current positions, and not those that they may make them overqualified for fear of head hunting or graduates requesting higher offers. Mahmoud stated that employers select "ambitious" graduates for this kind of investment. This suggests that the conversion of economic capital conversion into cultural capital that can be eventually converted into economic capital is a process that can be undergone by two categories of agents, graduates and employers. This conversion seems to be "a tacit process" and an integral part of "employers' practices" which characterises the institutional habitus of these companies (Ingram & Allen, 2019).

These findings are consistent with previous research. In Papua New Guinea, a developing country, Bhanugopan and Fish (2009) have found that employers provide their employees with development courses and training that help them train in the skills they were not able to demonstrate when they were first hired. Along the same lines, Husain et al. (2010), in Malaysia, explained how the competition among companies in the labour market requires "a competitive employee", which makes employers heavily invest in the development of the skills of their employees. In the UK, Williams et al. (2019) state that employers tend to be interested in developing their employees' skills while they work at their institutions and this interest is not extended to their careers after they leave their organisations.

4.2 Cultural Capital

This section will consider the two main types of cultural capital-embodied, referring to mannerisms, taste, and preferences, and institutionalised, namely educational qualifications obtained through formal education- that emerged in graduates' interviews. Following this, the process of accumulation of this capital will be divided into three stages: Pre-university, university, and post-university. This leads into a discussion of pre-university stage where school choice made by parents affects graduates' admission to university and their employment. Below is table 4.2 which outlines cultural capital findings.

Sub-themes	Viewpoint	Participants
Pre-university accumulation	Yes	1
	No	4
Human Capital Theory	Yes	9
University choice "embedded	Yes	10
University status	Yes	6
	No	8
Degree subject choice	Employment	11
	Passion	7
University degree value	High	2
	Low	5
Post-university cultural capital	Courses	9
	Self-learning	3
	Degrees and diplomas	9
	On-the-job learning	10

ECAs and volunteering	Yes	11
	No	3
Career centres and employment fairs	Yes	5
	No	12
Internships	Yes	5
	No	4
Self-perceived employability	Work experience	7
	Skills	8
	Passion	4
Responsibility towards GE	Yes	16
	No	4
Employers' role	Yes	18
	No	2

Table 4.2 Overview of cultural capital findings in graduates' interviews.

4.2.1 Pre-University Accumulation of Capital

Accumulation of cultural capital started at the pre-university phase with school choice decision made by graduates' parents. One of the themes that was discerned in the data is the impact of the school type, the field in which institutionalised cultural capital is generated, on GE. It should be noted that there are different types of schools in Egypt offering national and international education. Private schools with quality language provision seems to offer better admission to university and employment prospects compared to public schools with lower quality language provision. Five graduates gave an account of their pre-university accumulation of institutionalised cultural capital and how it affected either positively or negatively their accumulation of both further institutionalised cultural capital, namely university admission, and their economic capital, represented by future employment. For example, Marwan stated that learning German at school helped him with university choice, which is a private German university in Egypt. On the other hand, Omar, a public school leaver explains: "… I went to the AUC for the first time, they told me this issue with the waiting list because you are not an IG or American Diploma student".

It can be concluded that institutionalised cultural capital at pre-university phase may either facilitate or act as a barrier in the process of generating other forms of capitals. In addition, it is likely that the institutional habitus of elite private universities to favour

private universities leavers because of their cultural capital, which is their English language proficiency. Therefore, the institutional habitus of universities may impact the choice making processes of university undergone by school leavers and their families. This is consistent with the findings by Galegher (2012) where both students and their parents were fully aware of the privileges of earning a degree from an elite school would bring, including earning a multilingual degree, which increases their chances of being accepted at prestigious universities.

4.2.1.1 Embedded Choosers

Interestingly, half of the graduates in this study seem to be what Ball et al. (2002) called "embedded choosers" (p. 336). When asked about the reasons for participating in HE, they were surprised and some inquired if I meant by the question their university choice. For example, Hana stated that it is the "normal trajectory". Peter confirms: "Not going to university is not an option. After all it is essential. We live in Egypt, you know, so I don't think there is an option".

Graduates' reaction and responses indicate how the habitus, defined by Bourdieu (1977) as the "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" of the middle-class students has shaped their practices, which is in this case, going to university (p. 72). Their familial habitus may have dictated 'the inevitability' of HE participation. Graduates seem to have never thought of HE participation as a debatable issue because habitus renders their education experiences "intelligible and foreseeable" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 80). Looking at the background of the 'embedded choosers' in the graduates sample, they came from both types of universities, have differential years of experience, and obtained different degree subjects. However, the interaction among these dimensions may have resulted in a homogeneous habitus, represented by the perspective and practice of participation in HE.

This resonates with the findings by Ball et al. (2002). Despite the differential national contexts and participants, Ball et al. who examined the university choices of ethnic students classify students in terms of their university choice process into: "contingent" and "embedded" (p. 337). The first category refers to students who use "cold knowledge" drawn from university prospectus and other sources of information in the

absence of parents' role to make university choice whereas the second group refers to students whose parents represent "strong framers" whose financial resources make the process much easier compared to their counterparts (Ball et al., 2002, p. 337).

Another interesting finding may explain how graduates' class habitus was formed. Fairouz, with whom Ammar concurs, argues that "in Egypt, to be a school leaver with a thanawya ama certificate is something that is looked at differently. This person did not complete their education. There must be something missing in them. They also have no opportunities even in life even marriage". This suggests that the class habitus, which has been mainly shaped by their families, dictates the avoidance of the 'school leavers' status. This finding is in agreement with Abou-Setta's (2014) findings which showed that a university degree may give a graduate immunity against "ill-treatment from the government", which may refer to police brutality, which involves physical and verbal violence that trigger feelings of humiliation and heighten anxiety among citizens (Abou-Setta, p. 240; Ismail, 2012). While Nour stated that going to university is related to "social prestige", Peter believes that the social class system in Egypt does not make HE participation "an option" and if that system was not powerful, he would have pursued a career as a "folk singer", making much money. This is consistent with the findings by Barsoum (2017) that credentials are crucial for marriage and that without a university degree, a man could struggle with having his marriage proposal accepted.

For the other half of participants, HE participation is motivated by obtaining employment- a finding that can be explained in the light of Human Capital Theory (HTC) which considers educational achievement as an investment that leads to future employment (Tomlinson, 2017). Rwan says: "I am not sure if there is a company that will accept someone with a university degree so it is not like an option for me". According to Assaad at al. (2019), data of the Egyptian labour market indicates that HE provides graduates with advantages that their non-graduates do not have. To illustrate, around one third of graduates transition into stable employment whereas less than 10% of non-graduates were capable of achieving this target, which suggests that entering HE can still be considered an investment, partially supporting the HTC.

4.2.1.2 Are all Graduates Equally Choosers?

Despite the "embedded" choice element in graduates' trajectories, not all graduates were capable of selecting the university type and location. Clearly, public universities graduates in this sample do not seem to have 'real choices' whereas their private universities peers were able to have strategically chosen their universities. In addition to thanawya ama exam scores, location plays a role in the university choice made for school leavers by the University Admissions Coordination Office affiliated to the Ministry of HE. Nelly who lives in Fayoum City and had Fayoum University chosen for her though expressed her frustration: "Uni is too small and too close to home... I wanted to go far away to explore the world. I could not write Ain Shams University before Fayoum University in the application. It is the geographical distribution".

Unlike public university graduates, their private university peers, with their parents' economic capital, were able to choose university strategically. While Radwa rejected the possibility of joining a public university since they are not as reputed as they used to be, Mahy denounced this university type and chose a private one because "it is not something nice at all to go to a public university. It is not easy", referring to the difficulty of 'mingling with' students of different social backgrounds. This could refer to the "expressive order" described by Reay et al. (2010), which includes manners, conduct, and character. This is an example of social and cultural reproduction as termed in the works by Bourdieu (1990) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). To illustrate, graduates with affluent backgrounds were capable of entering reputable private HEIs thanks to their family financial support, and are hence more likely to obtain high paying jobs and remain in the same socioeconomic class unlike their working class and middle class peers. Class habitus seems to have also played a role in selecting private over public universities where agents of a particular social class made the decision not to enter a field where agents possess a differential class habitus. Institutional habitus, which comprises university repetition, is another factor that determines university choice processes. In other words, public universities in Egypt could be known to be attended by working-class and lower-middle class students whose social habitus differs from that of their upper-middle and upper class peers. However, this finding does not support previous research (e.g. Abou-Setta, 2014) as public university students

perceived the "richer social experience they are having as compared to the closed environments of a limited social class at private universities" (p. 237). The contrasting result could be attributed to students/graduates' differential backgrounds as GE20 is a private university graduate whereas participants in Abou-Setta's study are public university students.

4.2.1.3 University Status

Six out of twenty graduates stated that their university choice depends on its status in the labour market. To illustrate, they believe that university status affects their GE whereas the rest of graduates disagree. Omar says: "you won't take an accounting exam because they know very well you are from the BUE… the company knows very well that these students acknowledge so it is very important". Selim explains how graduates of his German university have the reputation of being "as hardworking as horses" thanks to the university system they got accustomed to. In Bourdieusian terms, university reputation, which is a component of its institutional habitus, for these graduates, has shaped their embodied cultural capital which is highly prized by employers. This perception is similar to the finding by Donald et al. (2018), despite the differential HE landscape, where students thought that their university reputation and university degrees made their CVs more attractive to employers and therefore enhancing their future employment prospects. The literature (e.g. Espinoza et al., 2019) already suggested that employers tend to differentiate between two candidates based on the prestige of their universities when information about their skills is lacking.

On the other hand, twelve graduates believed that university status does not affect their GE. Interestingly, when asked whether university status affects her GE, Rwan replied: "I think yes if this is the only thing you have done that you have gone to a university and you have not done anything that is additional to it". She went further to explain how her father who "is in the industry told [her] … [it is about] who you are and what you have done throughout university years more than where you come from". Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts, cultural capital seems to overpower institutional habitus in the eyes of employers from graduates' perspectives. This finding mirrors that of a previous study by Merrill et al. (2019) that "small differences", referring to professional networks and other 'extra' GE-related capitals, are helpful in a competitive labour

market. Other participants perceived that university status might slightly matter for a number of considerations such as the job level mentioned by Nour, or during particular stages such as candidate selection as stated Amir, or degree subject such as Engineering as argued by Mahmoud.

4.2.1.4 University Type and Location

Two dichotomies, public versus private universities and Cairo versus regional universities, emerged in the interviews as a sub-theme related to university status. Generally, graduates valued private universities for different reasons: how they are perceived by employers; the quality of education they offer; and the soft skills they develop. Mahy observed that Managers and HR professionals at her workplace are AUC graduates, which may support the argument that university status impacts GE. This dichotomy appears to be extended across disciplines. For example, Hana explains: "We [graduates of her university] have equipment and facilities. Dentistry is based on equipment more than the human factor. We use very advanced machines where others use very old ones".

University location seems to be related to university status where graduates of universities located in Cairo are thought to better positioned compared to their peers who went to regional universities. Mohamed, a graduate of a regional university, argued that the public perception is against regional universities where people describe his university as the "university of peasants". This indicates that the value of institutionalised cultural capital is highly affected by the amount of economic capital graduates' families can mobilise. The more economic capital mobilised, the better the field, namely, private, not public, and Cairo, not regional universities, the better employment prospects with higher economic capital, which again refers to cultural and social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This also suggests that the low institutional habitus of regional university may negatively impact the GE of their graduates. This public perception may be rooted in the national context where youth policies reflect the Egyptian government's bias toward educated youth in urban areas despite the government rhetoric that states otherwise (Sika, 2016).

4.2.2 During University

4.2.2.1 Accumulation of Academic Cultural Capital Subject Choice and Value

Selection of degree subjects appears to be a combination of preferences rather than a single factor. To illustrate, graduates may follow their passion such as Amir and Nelly, seek high future employment prospects such as Rwan and Radwa, be subject to their family pressure, and take in consideration the status of the labour market. Amir says: "I chose Mechanical Engineering because I love … fixing things around our house since I was a child. I was responsible for maintaining anything at home". However, how do graduates and employers, from the perspective of graduates, value this cultural capital? Some graduates believe that they have not benefited from the knowledge they have gained at university either due its little relevance to the workplace or because the workplace requires limited range of knowledge and therefore they do not appreciate the vast amount they have learned at university. For instance, Peter thinks "if I were to estimate the ratio [sic] I benefitted from my university education over 5 years, I would say around 3 to 5%", while Mohamed was very explicit about his frustration: "From the gate of the factory till the products come out, the whole process is based on one chemical equation". This is similar to the finding by Abou-Setta (2014) where students in Cairo university perceive "the irrelevance of HE" as one of the most critical problems Egyptian youth face in the labour market (p. 241).

Meanwhile, employers, as perceived by graduates, do not seem to have particular preference in terms of degree subjects. Interestingly, Mohamed, Chemistry graduate, Mariam, Theatrical Arts graduate, and Manar, Translation and Mass Communication graduate, reported that employers do not look at degree subjects and they may choose graduates with any BA or BSc. Other factors that may aggravate the decrease in degree subjects value are: the status of the labour market and the nature of degree. Mahmoud explained how the value of his degree, Chemical Engineering, declined due to the closure of numerous factories in the aftermath of the 2011 Uprising: "It [field of study] is both Chemical and Nuclear Engineering. There is a high demand on our field and limited supply because it is offered by public universities only and there are only three

departments". Nour says that she learned the "basics" of Computer Science in the first two years and the rest were "a waste of time" because the nature of the field renders knowledge obsolete rapidly. This suggests that the value of cultural capital, educational credentials, accumulated by agents, is affected by the perception of other agents, time, and the structure. In dissonance, in Donald's et al. (2018) study, undergraduates perceived Arts graduates to be less employable than their Engineering peers.

4.2.2.2 Non-Academic Cultural Capital

During university, students may participate in extra-curricular activities (ECAs), do volunteer work and internships, attend employment fairs, and visit career centres. Only four graduates mentioned that they benefited immensely from the ECAs they did. "Soft credentials", as called by Tomlinson (2008), like language, negotiation, leadership, time management, presentation, marketing, and communication were among the cultural capital that the graduates in his study reported to have accumulated to gain employment. AbdelRahman explains: "I used to take part in student activities such as IEEE… I was an active member there so I used to get exposed to projects and get in touch with university professors …and then start to plan accordingly".

In Bourdieusian terms, non-academic capital may be converted into two forms of capital: cultural capital, which are skills, and economic capital, represented by employment and salaries. In Taiwan, an emerging economy, Lau et al. (2014) found that students who were core members in ECAs reported the development of their leadership, creativity, and communication skills. This finding also agrees with the results by Clark et al. (2015) that alumni who also recruit staff reported that they use ECAs as an employment selection criterion. This is also consistent with the finding by Ingram and Allen (2019) in the UK that graduates "who have the most impressive portfolio of ECAs on their CV both qualitatively and quantitatively are best positioned" (p. 732).

Nevertheless, the rest of the graduates did not participate in ECAs for different reasons. Four graduates believed that little or no participation in ECA negatively affected their employability. While some graduates were not aware of the importance of this capital such as Noha and Manar, graduates of regional universities such as Fairouz and Nelly felt disadvantaged because no ECAs were held at their institutions and that "it is the

university's fault". Noha explains: "I spent college time studying … There were clubs but I did not put much effort in them because I did not know that they may affect me getting a job in the future". She adds: "But when I compare myself to my brother.... Since he was in first year till he graduated he was always busy in these activities. They helped him a lot get employed very easily immediately after he graduated". This indicates that barriers to the accumulation of one beneficial cultural capital, ECA, could be the lack of another, which is awareness, yet the absence of this beneficial capital can be compensated for by other types of cultural capital. This is similar to the finding by Bathmaker's et al. (2013) who argue that the non-engagement of working-class students in their study in ECAs deprived them from the opportunities of generating and mobilising capitals for future employment.

Other forms of non-academic cultural capital involve volunteer work and employment fairs. Six graduates stated that volunteering in non-profit organisations (NGOs) enhanced their personalities and helped them create networks. Fairouz, a pharmacist, believes that she got accepted in her first job thanks to the communication and leadership skills she developed while volunteering in a charity organisation as an HR Manager and a Project Manager, rather than her technical skills. This may indicate that the accumulation of one form of embodied cultural capital which is volunteering may lead to the accumulation of another, which is skills, that can be mobilised to the labour market and be converted into economic capital, represented by employment and subsequent payment. This concurs with the findings by Barton et al. (2019) and Bourner and Millican (2011) in the UK that volunteering enhances employment and GE.

Employment fairs is one of the services that are offered by few universities in Egypt, the majority of which are private. While six graduates who participated in employment fairs found the experience unbeneficial, only two benefited from these events. For example, AbdelRahman found it a good networking opportunity with university professors and attending workshops by professionals in different industries and Mahy were successful at landing a job she learned about at the event. However, others mentioned that companies participate in these fairs to promote their products and services, rather than actually being interested in selecting students for future employment. Other reasons for the inadequacy of these events are: the selection criteria

companies adopt, field coverage, and the inefficient job application process. Nevertheless, graduates of regional public universities do not seem to have the choice of going to employment fairs due to their remote location away from Cairo where employment fairs are held in public and private universities. Sara says: "… I, for instance, attended 2 of them out of my university. One was in Beni Seuf and the other was in Cairo in Cairo University or Ain Shams University. I attended 3 fairs throughout the 5 years at university but I am the one who put the effort to get to know about these fairs". Interestingly, Mahy chose not to attend the events at her institution in Alexandria because jobs she might find there would be in her city which she decided to leave. This is consistent with Bradley's et al. (2013) finding in the UK that students complained about employment fairs due to the inadequate coverage of industries, which were inclined towards fields such as a finance, engineering, and law.

Other employability-related services provided by universities is career advising. Graduates argued that only two fully-fledged career centres are available at the two "elite" private universities, the AUC and the German University in Cairo (GUC). Two graduates stated that they found these centres beneficial in terms of their services and networking opportunities with industry. Public universities graduates expressed their wish to have this service at their universities as Sara puts it: "It would be a good thing to have a career centre". This wish was fulfilled few years later when Ain Shams University established an employability and career centre that offers a variety of services including career guidance, resume and cover letter critique, and mock interviews ("ASU Career Center"). The absence of a field where students can accumulate cultural and social capitals, which is career centres, in public universities aggravates the discrepancy between the capitals graduates of both university types can accumulate, leading to differential economic capital and increasing social inequalities. The findings resonate with a number of studies, despite differential context, (i.e. Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017 in Australia; Barlett & Uvalic, 2019 in Western Balkans; Okolie et al., 2007 in Bangladesh; Tomlinson, 2017 in the UK) where career counseling serves several functions including a compensation for the lack of work experience and internships; the absence of social capital; and promoting equity among different equity groups of students.

In this study, two conflicting views emerged in the interviews with regards to internships. The majority of graduates stated that they were required to do internships in order to graduate from university. Five graduates benefited from this experience for an array of reasons. Marwan explains: “The internship I did in Orange helped know the subjects that could benefit me at work if I continue in the field so I focused on them”. Rwan says: “It gave me credibility like I have done a lot of things like I am knowledgeable. Something like Etisalat, it is hard to have an internship in Etisalat … so I am someone who is hardworker”. Peter states: “the only benefit I got from the internships I did is that I realised that I don’t want to work in these fields”. Multiple domestic and overseas internships enabled Amir, a Mechanical Engineer to be the “youngest inspector in the company branch in Egypt”. Therefore, it can be concluded that one cultural capital, internships, can help with the accumulation of another cultural capital, which is experience and skills, with the aim of converting both types into another form which is economic capital, in the form of employment and payment. This is similar to the finding by Nauffal and Skulte-Ouaiss (2018) that quality education which embeds soft skills and provides internships enhances GE, in particular securing first employment. These findings resonate with the results by El-Temtamy et al. (2016) in the UAE where students who took part in an internship programme were 6.7 times more likely to obtain employment upon graduation than their peers who did not participate in it. In Vietnam, Bilsland et al. (2019) mentioned that alumni perceived that internships as “transformational learning journeys” and “pathways to post-graduate jobs” (p. 359)

On the other hand, three graduates did not benefit from internships because they used to go to sign in and out, have coffee, read and photocopy documents just to get a proof to present to their universities that they did internships. Other agents may generate cultural capital required by the field, yet it may not lead to further accumulation of cultural capital, namely skills, knowledge, and experience but can still be converted into economic capital. In agreement with these findings, students studying Tourism in 9 public universities in Egypt in a study by Gad et al. (2020) believed that the experience was unbeneficial for several reasons including the low development of personal skills, knowledge skills, and enterprise skills.

In Bourdieusian terms, different universities have different institutional habitus where some offer GE development opportunities where others do not. Institutional habitus may also involve the market awareness career educators and university professors may spread among students because in the data, some students attended universities the institutional habitus of which provides GE development services but does not explain to their students how significant these services are to their GE and future careers.

4.2.3 Post-Graduation Accumulation of Cultural Capital

Eighteen out of twenty graduates plan to accumulate more cultural capital in different forms. Whilst nine graduates believe that taking work-related courses and diplomas may enhance their careers, three chose academic degrees such as Master's in Media and in Business Administration. Three graduates decided to take Arabic, English, and Italian courses because they will be beneficial for their current jobs and their careers. Ten graduates think that 'learning on the job' which entails learning from colleagues, supervisors, and managers at the workplace enhances career development whereas three graduates believe that self-learning enhances their GE. For instance, while Mohamed says: "At work, I try to learn a new thing every now and then… My normal work is being in charge of the workers and implement plans. Bit by bit, I have learned to operate and maintain machines". Mahy argues: "I feel I'd rather invest my time in doing more projects rather learning theoretical stuff. Others may disagree with me". It appears that the importance of English language proficiency, in particular, to GE has been discussed in the literature in non-English countries such as in Morocco by Kesbi (2017), China by Kiong et al. (2019), and in Malaysia by Zainuddin et al. (2019).

4.2.3.1 Responsibility toward GE

A vital aspect of graduates' understanding of employability is their view of the role employers may play to enhance it. Six graduates believe that they are completely responsible for their own employability. For example, Rwan says: "We all have different skills and different knowledge. Everyone has to work hard for their own path. I don't think I can rely on someone to make me better or make me have a better job next time". It could be argued that graduates' perception of their role towards GE may determine the extent to which they own the process of developing their GE. In

Bourdieusian terms, graduates' habitus dictates the role they have to play as agents in the process of accumulation of cultural capital in pre-university stage. Graduates who believe that their responsibility towards their GE is 50% or below are individuals who see themselves as agents with limited agency and who expect other agents, namely employers, to equally develop their own GE and who also believe that structure, represented by the labour market, the economy, and society to either facilitate or hinder the process of accumulation and mobilisation of capitals. This is partially consistent with the findings by Abou-Setta (2014) in Egypt where students had different views of the responsibility towards GE: one stakeholder's responsibility such as students or university, or a shared responsibility among various stakeholders such as graduates, university, employers, and the state.

Thirteen out of 20 graduates think that providing courses to graduates is how employers can help their employees develop their employability. Younger graduates, like Rwan, seem to appreciate "insights" and "directions" because "[she is] still a fresh grad and a bit short-sighted" and Marwan appreciates "one-to-one" with his manager more than courses and Sara expects her employer to be "a leader and a role model". It could be argued that employers are agents who are expected to provide other agents, namely, graduates with the opportunities to accumulate and mobilise further cultural capital. The majority of graduates seem to describe the institutional habitus of the companies they work/dream to work at where providing training to staff is an integral component of the institutional habitus. This is similar to the finding by Devins and Hogarth (2005) in the UK that input from employers is of paramount importance at the phase of transition to the labour market with the aim of reducing turnover.

4.3 Social Capital and the 'Curious' Case of *Wasta*

This section continues on from the themes which were explored in the previous sections, but focuses on social capital, including wasta, networking, and referrals. Cummingham et al. (1994) described wasta as a form of "mediation" in the Middle East that involves an agent acting on the behalf of another agent in order to gain an advantage for that other agent (p. 29). Al-Ramahi (2008) defines wasta as "both the well-connected, personal intermediary-intervener and the process of intermediation-intervention" (p. 35). This "advantage" could be an employment, an official document,

or even admission to a reputed university. Mohamed and Mohamad (2011) further explain how wasta operates; different people may use wasta but the one with the most powerful wasta will get the job, creating inequalities in the labour market. Cummingham et al. (1994) mentioned that wasta creates feelings of anger and resentment among qualified candidates without wasta who were not able to obtain the job and dependency among the less qualified candidate who obtained the job thanks to wasta. Mohamed and Hamdy (2008) differentiate between wasta and nepotism where the former involves family and strangers and the latter refers to family only.

The second form of social capital is networking which refers to creating and maintaining personal or professional links with others with the hope of gathering contacts, information, and support (Batistic & Tymon, 2017). Abrahams (2017) distinguishes between two types of social capital: one that is passed from one generation to the other and another which is created by the agents themselves. In this study, wasta, including nepotism, is regarded as a social capital that is reproduced by passing connections among generations whereas networks involve agents' willingness and investment to produce this social capital. Below is a table that presents social capital in graduates' interviews.

Sub-themes	**Viewpoint**	**Participants**
Family networks	Yes	3
Teaching staff networks	Yes	1
Wasta power	Yes	3
Wasta across time	Yes	2
Wasta and company types	Yes	1
University graduates' towards wasta	Yes	2
	No	8

Table 4.3 Overview of social capital findings in graduates' interviews.

4.3.1 Wasta

4.3.1.1 What can Wasta do?

The overriding belief amongst graduates is that social capital, in particular wasta, plays a vital role in graduates' employability. This role could start as early as the pre-university phase which is admission to university. For example, Mariam says: "My brother-in-law is the one who helped me join the Institute and he is the one who helped land the training in my life". In addition, most graduates reported that they were capable of 'landing' internships during their university years through their connections and family members. Rwan who appeared to "have a feel for the game" says: "Etisalat takes people through referrals like if you applied, you wouldn't get picked. You just have to have someone there so I had a friend of the family there and he referred me and I was accepted" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). The same applies to Selim who obtained three internships through wasta. Interestingly, Amir clearly says: "In Egypt, you have to have wasta and other stuff but abroad like the internships I did in Porsche and Mercedes they just asked for a proof of residence in that country and some university documents and that's it". Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit, it appears that the institutional habitus of some companies in Egypt involves wasta as a criterion for selecting graduates for internships.

To be able to make the first step in the career path, some graduates resorted to wasta. Two graduates were of the view that pulling strings were inevitable "to secure a foot in the door" (Abrahams, 2017, p. 625), yet they believe that wasta, though crucial at this point, does not seem to be needed in the next steps in their trajectories. Mahy says: "I needed that push because there were so many graduates the year I graduated so that what makes a difference". This suggests that participants mobilised cultural and social capital and converted them into economic capital in the form of employment, which can be an example of what Bradley et al. (2017) described as "hyper-mobilization of capitals" (p. 6). Some graduates seem to be familiar with the institutional habitus of companies and the status of the field and hence to mobilise an effective capital which is the social capital, wasta, to ensure a smoother transition to the field. It could be also argued that their individual habitus and companies' institutional habitus are in state of

harmony, unlike their peers who declined ‘the wasta card’ due to the tension between the two types of habituses.

This also resonates with Lackner’s (2016) argument about the Middle East labour market where job opportunities are limited due to several reasons including rapid population growth and neoliberal policies, which has made first employment for youth with no record of good work experience based on skills and qualifications quite rare. In resonance, Abou-Setta (2014) found that Cairo university students believed that corruption and social networks prevailing in the labour market, rather than competence, leads to employment. This suggests that there could be a link between wasta and access to prestigious jobs on the one hand and the social class on the other. Assaad et al. (2019) found that the socioeconomic status has a great impact on access to good jobs in both Egypt and Tunisia.

4.3.1.2 To use or not to use Wasta?

Based on their accounts of wasta, graduates can be classified into: possessor mobilisers, possessor non-mobilisers, and non-possessors. While the first group used wasta to enter the labour market, the second group made the choice not to use it for different reasons. For example, while Peter expressed a strong belief in his abilities and skills and described himself as “a self-made man” who even acted as wasta for other graduates to get employment, Omar says “I didn’t resort to family or friends to get employed and I am very proud of myself. This is not narcissism. I made myself. I don’t owe anyone anything”. Drawing on Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, the possession of social capital does not necessarily entail the mobilisation of this capital because this decision is determined by agents’ habitus. This view is similar to those voiced by three participants in Abrahams’ (2017) study who rejected nepotism, relied on their own skills, and were proud to achieve their career goals without the help of others.

Meanwhile, Mohamed declined wasta to avoid the stress it may cause because “people would look down at [him]”. Drawing on Bourdieu’s work, wasta as a social capital may have negative consequences affecting agents’ cultural capital, represented by work experience and self-perception. This resonates with the findings by Mohamed and Hamdy (2008) in Egypt that wasta ruins the reputation of its beneficiaries. Another

study in Egypt by Mohamed and Mohamad (2011) concluded that wasta negatively impacts its users by the stigma it leaves on their image. In their study, participants perceived employees using wasta to obtain employment as less competent compared to their counterparts who did not, thus negatively affecting their perceived competence. They also found that subjects perceived graduates using wasta as "less moral" compared to their counterparts who did not. The researchers concluded that the 'price tag' that wasta carries is quite high which makes it inadvisable to use it. A third reason for refraining from wasta is the employment offer it may bring. For example, Mahmoud refused to use his wasta because "the package was not suitable".

Finally, graduates with no wasta may not obtain employment. Hana clearly put it, "They don't get a job. I have friends who have been looking for a job for three years since graduation". Peter concurs: "The first way is to have a wasta and the second one is to have been an intern there and you are looking for a job, they have a vacancy and there are no wasta-backed people applying for it". He adds: "This is how things work. Forget about those who tell you we have a process and 5 screening exams and all this stuff. All this doesn't matter". Wasta appears to also challenge Bourdieu's argument about "volume" and "size" of capital. To illustrate, Bourdieu argues that there is a relationship between the volume of the social capital and the size of social networks wherein the more the networks, the higher the volume of social capital. However, wasta as a social capital is powerful enough to provide the required volume without the need for other types of social capital. This typology resonates with the classification of individuals in terms of benefitting from wasta proposed by Oukil (2016): those who possess qualifications and skills yet are unable to reach their goals; those who do not have the right qualifications and skills and are therefore unaccepted by the system; and those who do not have the right qualifications and skills yet still achieve their goals at the expense of other people.

4.3.1.3 Can Wasta be the Answer?

Nevertheless, wasta is not a 'cure-it-all' medicine to career issues because though it helps with the 'opening doors' phase, it is the graduate's hard work that counts afterwards. Interestingly, Selim explains: "It just helps you to set your foot in the workplace or the field. What you do there is your own call. You have to prove yourself

there. You may be fired any time. You are known in the workplace that you have been hired because of wasta so you are being closely monitored…" Nevertheless, being a fresh graduate and a new hire at the company does not qualify him to be a wasta for his friend graduates. The best he could be is a 'referral'. This may shed light on the characteristics of a wasta in the narratives of Selim and other graduates. In his case, the wasta was the Chairman at the company with whom his father, a well-connected figure in the field of Engineering, pulled strings.

Borrowing Bourdieu's conceptual framework, it appears that the mobilisation of both forms of capitals, cultural and social, better position agents in the labour market and that low cultural capital does not act as a barrier whereas high cultural capital in the absence of valuable social capital may not lead to employment. Literature on wasta in MENA region, and in particular Egypt (e.g. Mohamed & Mohamad, 2011) has not discussed how wasta does not render graduates 'bullet proof'. Much of this literature (e.g. Mohamed & Hamdy, 2008) portrays wasta as a 'potion' with the 'stigma' aspect as the only downside.

4.3.1.4 Wasta and Company Type/Size

Wasta seems to behave differently in companies of different types/sizes. AbdelRahman provided an interesting typology of companies in terms of wasta effectiveness. According to AbdelRahman, both Multinational companies (MNCs) and family businesses or domestic companies require wasta yet of different nature and at a different level of effectiveness. Wasta such as upper management in a domestic company is needed to obtain employment there. In MNCs, however, referrals, who could be friends of graduates working in the company that graduates target is the wasta who is powerful enough to help them through different hiring phases. AbdelRahman attributes this tacit policy to: "the mindset of the management who are Egyptians". He adds: "When you decide to move to a multinational, they don't accept you because you have worked in a family business or a domestic company…They believe that you are accustomed to their mindset and they want a fresh person they can invest in and they can shape and mould into their own culture". Therefore, this may indicate that wasta and referrals as two types of social capital are required in different fields, without which agents with valuable institutionalised and objectified cultural

capital, namely university degree and CV, may not be accepted. It also appears that companies of different sizes and types tend to have different institutional habituses that dictate different attitudes and practices toward wasta, as a social capital. To aggravate employment inequalities, the habitus agents acquired at one field could hinder access to the other field. According to Leat and El-Kot (2007), the practices and approaches used by companies in Egypt are a combination of cultural and non-cultural effects.

4.3.1.5 Is Wasta Fair?

A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense amongst interviewees that wasta is an unfair system. Interestingly, wasta is thought to be a legal practice by some graduates. Nelly commented about a friend whose father was able to get her hired at the public university where he works as something "legal in the public sector". Egyptian mainstream media shows the illegality of wasta in the public sector. The former director of Central Agency for Organization and Administration stated that 'Children of Employees' employment is not a law (فيتو, 2019; فيتو, 2015). According to the Minister of Planning and Economic Development, family members of the first and the second ranks cannot be hired in the same public institution in order to reduce corruption ("الخدمة المدنية").

Nevertheless, evidence from the data shows that this law may not be enforced. In the public sector, wasta seems to more prevalent and is widely accepted and practiced. For example, Amir says: "I did all the things that can help me join EgyptAir but EgyptAir is for children of employees and wasta-backed people". In a regional public hospital, Sara, a pharmacist, explained how graduates with low GPA could be assigned to a near city while those with outstanding academic achievement are assigned to far places or even in other cities. She says: "there is a pharmacist whose supervisors at the hospital don't like to assign her any tasks… It is because she is a troublemaker and has a relative at the Prosecution Authority so they don't give her work to do to avoid troubles". This suggests that in particular fields, the public sector, social capital such as wasta overpowers valuable cultural capital. It could be also argued that the institutional habitus of public sector companies dictate practices that highly valorise wasta, compared to other forms of capital. Though research on wasta has described it as a form

of corruption and illegal, widening inequalities (Cummingham et al., 1994; Hutchings & Weir, 2006; Lackner, 2016; Mohamed & Mohamad, 2011; Oukil, 2016; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011), no previous research has compared wasta practices in the public and private sectors.

Surprisingly, it appears that a similar trend could be prevalent in some fields in the private sector. When asked about the effectiveness of connections in finding employment, Hana says: "In the majority of clinics that have been open, everyone hires their nephews and nieces even if you are more qualified than they are". Accounting is no difference as Selim mentioned that wasta works miracles regardless of "how clever you are or if you have a very low GPA". Due to wasta, unqualified graduates can be hired while qualified ones may remain unemployed. In the field of media, Mariam says: "As long as you know someone in a high position, you will be hired even if you were as thick as a post". In addition, wasta can provide a "fast track" in career. Noha explains: "We all know she [a fellow graduate] was not much of a genius and a week after graduation she got hired at the biggest pharmaceutical company in Egypt. Few months later, she was promoted to a much higher position…We all know she has a VIP relative". She adds: "When companies decided to downsize, they let go of those who don't have a wasta". This may indicate that there is no distinction between fields in the private sector because wasta seems to equally operate in dentistry, pharmacy, accounting, and media.

Therefore, regardless of the field, public and private sectors, wasta as a social capital still outperforms cultural capital. To illustrate, there is a match between the institutional habituses of both public and private sectors where both accept wasta and may also allow this social capital to overpower cultural capital. Mobilising this social capital, in the absence of valuable cultural capital, leads to employment but mobilising valuable cultural capital without wasta leads to: no employment; or less desirable employment; or desirable employment with excessive effort and time. This is similar to the argument by Hutchings and Weir (2006) that in the Arab World, individuals who do not use wasta receive consequences and that the public perceptions in these societies is that to accomplish a goal, they have to have a powerful person in their networks.

4.3.1.6 Agency, Structure, and Wasta

Wasta could even adversely impact graduates who do not possess this social capital. In addition to inequalities in employment opportunities, those graduates may be harmed by their wasta-backed peers. Noha explains:

> [Redacted Redacted].

Drawing on Bourdieu, wasta as a social capital can be a 'weapon' used by those who possess it against those who do not. This could also reflect the institutional habitus of some companies where employers' practices support wasta-backed graduates in their 'war' against their wasta-less co-workers. This resonates with the arguments made by Oukil (2016) where wasta providers in the MENA region and the Arab world usually belong to the fields of administration, [Redacted], and business. In dissonance, Tomlinson (2007) in the UK found that students focused more on individual-related factors such as agency, motivation, and dispositions that determine labour market outcomes, while disregarding structure-related factors such as class, gender, and ethnicity. This contrast could be attributed to the differential stakeholders and context.

4.3.2 Networking

4.3.2.1 Why and how to Network?

Some graduates have developed a firm sense of the importance of networking. They believe that networks could help them with employment opportunities as well as mobility. However, how these networks are created may differ from one graduate to another. Mariam says: "It is about me knowing you so I hang out with you and you are with your friends and you introduce me to them". Fairouz is keen on attending conferences to create networks that will help her find a job despite the discouragement

she receives from her colleagues who think these conferences are "outings to capture pictures in posh venues where lunch is served". She clearly says "One job won't lead to another unless I find a way through it or meet someone who can help me, which happens outside work. This happens through work-related networks". Networks appear to 'fit' in Bourdieu's account of social capital where the more the networks, the higher the volume of social capital. This is in line with previous literature in the UK (e.g. Batistic & Tymon, 2017; Forsythe, 2017) where networking may increase internal and external perceptions of employability. In the UK, Okay-Somerville and Scholarios (2017) found that networking enhances the chances of obtaining employment.

4.3.3 Referrals

Graduates create networks with the aim of meeting influential individuals that can help them 'enter' a workplace. Those 'influential' individuals are referrals who acquire their status thanks to being an 'insider' at a particular company who can provide graduates with information about employment opportunities, get their CVs noticed, and 'put a word' for them with the hiring decision makers. For example, Nour explains: "Internal referrals definitely help if you were able to prove yourself and you just need an internal referral to enter the company so the internal referral will work the capable candidate that doesn't have an internal referral". AbdelRahman explains MNCs' rationale: "It is because they deal with a particular mindset and they have created a family like environment so they need a trusted person to join them … so they resort to people in the company to recommend people from outside". This suggests that different types of social capital are effective in different fields due to the differential institutional habitus. Based on the data, while wasta seems to be more effective in the public sector and in domestic private companies, referrals tend to be effective in local branches of MNCs and some domestic private companies as well. This is line with the finding by Karolak (2016) in Bahrain where wasta is more prevailing in the public sector compared to the private one due to the profit-orientedness of the latter.

4.4 Self-perceived Employability

In this study, graduates accumulated and mobilised different forms of capital based on their perception of their value. They may have generated capitals that when 'put to the

test' in the labour market did not seem to have the expected value. As previously discussed, some graduates realised the low value of their degree, for instance, when they embarked on the search for employment opportunities. The crucial questions to pose here are: How do they perceive their own employability? What differentiates them from other candidates applying for the same job? Interestingly, work experience, communication skills, and passion were the most common aspects in graduates' narratives, followed by technical skills, knowledge, team working, and connections. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts, graduates believed that institutional habitus in companies value cultural capital over social capital, which may indicate harmony between this habitus and their individual habituses that regard wasta as an unfair practice. This is consistent with the finding by Abou-Setta (2014) in Egypt where Cairo University students perceived soft skills and communication skills as two valuable HE outcomes and work experience and "field-related courses" as employability elements by employers.

4.5 Habitus

The habitus of graduates should be analysed considering the one that is the most useful to GE. Graduates' habitus includes their social class, gender, personality attributes, location, field of study, and university type. In this study, social class has been established based on the university type graduates attended. This dichotomy has been drawn from the findings by Abou-Setta's (2014) in her doctoral thesis where participants linked social class to university types and classified graduates into two classes: those who attend public universities and others who went to private HEIs. Looking at social habitus, graduates with upper-middle class background appear to have the most useful habitus because they are supported by their parents who view education as an investment. Their perception, attitude, and disposition enabled them to choose the right universities and degree subjects, do ECAs, and take the right courses, degrees, and diplomas after their graduation. They tend to select the degree with the highest return on investment. It should be noted that this habitus would not have been useful in the absence of their parents' economic capital. To illustrate, their parents' knowledge, experience, and awareness and their financial resources helped them make strategic decisions with regard to their education and career.

Based on the data, the 'ideal' habitus is that of a male private urban university graduate with an upper-middle/upper class background who has this "extra little sparkle" such as ECAs, volunteering, and work experience (Barton et al., 2019). Graduates who lack one or more of these aspects of the habitus may be less positioned in the labour market. This is consistent with Assaad's (2010) dichotomy of individuals in Egypt: the "most privileged" and the "most deprived" where the former refers to those with wealthy backgrounds and live in the urban areas whose both parents attended university and the latter refer to those with poorer backgrounds and live in rural Upper Egypt and whose parents are illiterate.

Nevertheless, habitus does not work in vacuum as it determines which capitals to be accumulated and mobilised. Despite capitals being tied together through the most dominant aspect of habitus which is 'class habitus', capitals seem to be in a state of tension. Based on the data, social capital represented by the controversial wasta overpowers cultural capital, namely degrees and skills, creating tension resulting in different attitudes and a myriad of negative feelings among graduates. To illustrate, unqualified graduates with wasta gain 'good' employment or even employment whereas their peers with valuable cultural capital, namely degrees and skills, may not. Networks and referrals seem to create less tension because qualified graduates who possess this social capital get a good job whereas other qualified graduates who lack it may still get employed but not at the same company type, for example. Tension can be also observed between economic and cultural capital where the absence of the former compromises the quality of the latter. To clarify, graduates with middle class background do not have their parents' resources to enter an elite private university where the quality of education is generally higher and employability skills are developed, which may decrease their chances to get a 'good job' at an MNC, for instance. Harmony and tension have been observed between individual habitus and collective habitus such as institutional habituses of schools, universities, and companies. It seems that individual habitus, which involves perceptions and beliefs, guide individuals in their different decision-making processes at different phases where the "continuity"/gap between individual and collective habituses result in either a state of harmony/tension, respectively (Xie & Reay, 2020).

4.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed graduates' understanding of GE through the analysis of the different forms of capitals emerging in their interviews. They strategically accumulated capitals in three phases: pre-, during, and post university. However, their habitus, acquired mainly through families, has shaped the processes of accumulation, mobilisation, and demobilisation. In terms of cultural capital, graduates attended schools, chosen by their families, which either facilitated or hindered admission to university. They also made a number of choices, including university and degree subject, which were either valuable for their GE, or were found invaluable after they entered the labour market, and therefore, they decided to accumulate further cultural capital that enabled them to partially or completely shift their careers. Cultural capital seems to be intertwined with economic capital. To be able to accumulate valuable cultural capital in different phases, economic capital is needed, which could be either mobilised by graduates or employers. Social capital includes: wasta, networking, and referrals. Though graduates have the same perception toward wasta, their attitudes and behaviours around it differed. Few graduates were aware of how important networking is and how they can create networks. It can be concluded that though capitals are convertible and reproducible, graduates' habitus determines the process in the light of structure, which appears to have the upper hand at least in this field, which is the Egyptian labour market.

Chapter 5: Employers' Understanding of Employability

This study aims to explore the understanding of employers and graduates of GE in Egypt. The sample includes 21 employers in companies of different sectors, types, sizes, and fields. Semi-structured face-to-face, telephone, and online interviews were conducted "to explore the notion of employability through the eyes of employers". (Wilton, 2014). The following research question was framed for this investigation:

- How do employers of different company types and sizes understand employability in Egypt? How do they help their staff develop it?

Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit, the forms of capital and the habitus, and the field collected data from both sets of interviews were coded into social, cultural, and economic capitals. Sub-themes also emerged from the data and patterns were identified. In the previous chapter, graduates' data were analysed to answer the first research question and were discussed in the light of previous literature. This chapter ties together the second research question, the data generated in the interviews with employers, and the previous literature. It is mainly concerned with exploring the understanding of employers of GE and their contribution to the development of the employability of graduates at university and the workplace.

5.1 Economic Capital

This section discusses the processes of conversion of economic capital into cultural capital and vice versa in the data drawn from employers' interviews. Since according to Bourdieu (1986) economic capital is the origin of all types of capital, this section is far less short than the other two sections. Processes of multiple conversions, conditions of conversion, the interaction between structure and agency will also be highlighted. In addition, this section deals with the relationship between two forms of capital, economic and cultural, and how when one of them increases, the other increases and vice versa. Below is table 5.1 which provides an overview of the findings.

Sub-themes	Viewpoint	Participants
Selection criteria for graduates	Yes	2
Relationship between economic and cultural capitals	Yes	4
Mobilisation of economic capital by employers	Yes	4
Interaction between structure and agency	Yes	2

Table 5.1 Overview of economic capital findings in employers' interviews.

5.1.1 Capital-capital Interaction

Based on interview data, work experience, salaries, and profits seem to be closely related. Another prominent sub-theme is the direct relationship between cultural capital and economic capital. The lower the cultural capital is, the lower the economic capital is. Moataz explained how hiring decisions are based on assessing business needs, which if not properly evaluated "discretionary expenses" will incur, which leads to loss of economic capital by employers. He argues: "…if the candidate is inexperienced, I will have to put the effort in training them but they save me money because they will stay at my company for 2 to 3 years as they want to learn and everything goes fine…their salaries are low".

Therefore, fresh graduates who possess low cultural capital are capable of converting this capital into low economic capital. The opposite applies to experienced graduates. The relationship between these two forms of capital is governed by the field, which is the company size and field. To illustrate, an SME may not offer a salary that is high as that is offered by a large enterprise. It could be argued that the institutional habitus of companies is linked to their sizes. For example, the institutional habitus of SMEs prefer recent graduates due to the low economic capital that employers need to mobilise, yet employers are aware that they may need to mobilise economic capital to help their inexperienced staff to accumulate the needed cultural capital. This institutional habitus allows for 'a win-win situation' or a mutual benefit opportunity where employers mobilise less economic capital, in the form of their inexperienced staff's low economic capital, and recent graduates accumulate cultural capital, in the form of work

experience. This is consistent with the finding by Norwood and Henneberry (2006) that work experience is one of the key attributes that determine the salaries of recent graduates.

Evidence also indicates a relationship between graduates' personality attributes and profits. Sherine describes Millennial graduates as: "They are not disciplined or committed. And they actually believe in the easy wins. Sometimes for example you offer him a stable job but then he is offered some sort of an internship that will pay him off more than the monthly salary you are paying him he will leave you and go there…". Embodied cultural capital, namely personal attributes, is also proportionately related to economic capital. It seems that the institutional habitus of some companies do not prefer graduates of a particular age groups for the embodied cultural capital they display. This partially concurs with the finding by Bradley et al. (2017) where Millennial graduates were found less interested in "a job for life" (p. 11). Hosny seems to share a similar view as lack of conscientiousness, passion, accuracy, and hard work causes money loss because "the slightest mistake is very expensive" such as a wrong number written on a container of Chemicals exported abroad. This is consistent with Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) finding that technical organisations value the attention to detail and accuracy.

5.1.2 Do Employers Mobilise Economic Capital?

Previous literature has focused on the mobilisation of economic capital by students and their families. Much less research (e.g. Ingram & Allen, 2019) has explored employers' practices in terms of the institutional habitus of their companies. In this study, employers gave an account of how they mobilise economic capital, which is training budget, to help their staff, accumulate cultural capital to improve performance and hence generate more profits. Employers also mobilise particular forms of capitals for their benefit and the benefits of graduates. However, this multiple conversion process is governed by certain rules which constitute the doxa of the field. Nevertheless, the decision of performing this conversion is made by employers based on a number of conditions: business needs, cost, and loyalty. These conditions constitute aspects of the institutional habitus where training is a predictable practice. Ali explains: "When you invest in an employee, there is something called ROI... So today when I invest in

training, in a course, for instance which costs 5000 pounds, on Sales, then we expect this employee to bring a million pounds in revenue in a year".

Another condition is business needs. Waleed says: "Let's say an employee needs to take an MBA to be a manager in Saudi Arabia. Sorry. I won't invest in the MBA because I don't need it. I don't offer training or development based on personal needs. It is determined by business needs". Salma clearly states the third condition: "I am going to invest in you and I need to make sure you are going to stay with me and you are going to work with me to reach this goal because of the concept of attrition". In other words, graduates are expected to work at her institution after completing a course she funds for a particular number of years. This suggests that for employers to strategically make the decision of increasing of mobilising their economic capital to help their staff accumulate cultural capital, certain conditions should be fulfilled, including expected economic capital, staff's personality attributes, and the significant of the absent cultural capital to the performance at the field, which is the company. This resonates with the findings by Choi and Yoon (2015) in Korea, a collective culture, that training and development opportunities are considered "rewards and fringe benefits" for staff that signal loyalty (p. 2099).

Whilst start-ups and SMEs employers, such as Hosny, offer small salaries and training to fresh graduates, MNCs and large domestic corporations employers, Khaled and Ibrahim, offer higher salaries and no training for fresh graduates. However, Hosny believed it is unfair to do the training and then have his trained employees moving to bigger enterprises that offer higher payment after he had invested in their training. In Bourdieusian terms, some employers may refuse to hire fresh graduates to avoid participating in the first phase of conversion of economic capital into cultural capital. They seem to 'wait' for employers at start-ups and SMEs to perform this conversion then convert the cultural capital graduates accumulate at former workplaces to convert into economic capital at their own workplaces. Nevertheless, this seemingly orchestrated performance of employers results in economic capital loss for start-ups and SMEs employers, as Hosny explained it. This can be regarded as example of the differential institutional habitus which is aligned with the size, type, and sector of a company. This is consistent with the

finding by Dûsek et al. (2021) in Czech Republic that one of the disadvantages of hiring recent graduates is the long time needed to provide them with training.

5.1.3 Structure and Agency

The condition of the labour market may determine the failure of the conversion of economic capital into other forms of capital. Despite the institutional habitus that support staff GE, employers may decide not to follow “the norm”, which could be an example of how structure may contribute to disruption of practices in institutions (Ingram & Allen, 2019). Sanaa explains how “the current situation and the many ups-and-downs in the economy” made it difficult for employers in domestic companies, despite their willingness, to invest in training graduates. Notwithstanding the agency of graduates and employers, structure plays a significant role in the success or failure of conversion processes. [Redacted Redacted]. This bears relation to what Tomlinson (2007) calls “the dynamic interplay between structure and agency” where agents make strategic decisions in relation to the social and economic levels.

5.2 Cultural Capital

This section provides an overview of the cultural capital sub-themes and patterns drawn from employers’ interviews (see table 5.2). It discusses graduates’ readiness to the labour market and highlights the criteria employers utilise to select graduates. The roles of key stakeholders- universities, employers, and graduates- in enhancing GE will be also presented.

Sub-theme		Viewpoint	Participant
Readiness		Yes	0
		No	8
Employer's role		Yes	15
		No	6
University's role		Yes	7
Graduates' role		Yes	6
Selection criteria	University status	Yes	12
		No	5
	Personality traits and attitude	Yes	13
	Educational achievement and	Yes	4
	Technical and non-technical aspects	Yes	3
	Social background	Yes	12
		No	9

Table 5.2 Overview of cultural capital findings in employers' interviews.

5.2.1 Readiness

To explore employers' understanding of GE, they were asked about their views of graduates' readiness. Surprisingly, none of the 21 employers thought that graduates in Egypt are completely ready for the labour market. Six employers thought that graduates do not show any sign of readiness. GM1 says: "… with the level of education in Egypt, I don't think they are ready because most of the graduates in the college in Egypt, they are just passing an exam and they don't have the talents to just working".

In Bourdieusian terms, employers as key agents in the labour market field devalued the insititutionalised cultural capital graduates have accumulated at university, which impacts both groups: while employers find difficulty hiring skilful graduates, unskilled graduates struggle with gaining employment. In addition, employers tend to criticise the institutional habitus of universities in Egypt because it does not support students' employability due to the quality of education they provide and the absence of GE development services. These findings resonate with Schomaker's (2015) account of the status of the Egyptian labour market. She explains that a substantial percentage of graduates lack both the needed skills and experience and the extent to which private sector employers struggle to select qualified graduates due to the low education quality

and failing HEIs training systems. This also resonates with the results by the World Bank (2013) that a quarter of employers in Egypt believed that graduates possess the required soft and technical skills. In another report by the World Bank (2014), Egypt is urged to reduce the huge gap between skills developed at university and those needed in the labour market.

While Ibrahim describes HE in Egypt as "somewhat decent", Fatma gave an account of the failed attempts of hiring fresh graduates due to the lack of skills that enable them to "satisfy payment in exchange of work". Khaled explains: "Unfortunately, they need a lot of extensive courses before being ready. That is why we, companies and organizations, spend a lot of time and a lot of money on training in order to make them ready…. We spend a lot of money to make these students ready". Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts, employers are concerned about graduates' lack of cultural capital, which leads to loss of employers' economic capital. This bears relation to Al-Mahrooqi and Tuzlukova (2014) finding about the exhortation coming from employers in Oman who complained about the level of skills graduates have developed at university. On a larger scale, Ramadi et al. (2016) found that MENA employers of Engineering are dissatisfied with the level of their communication skills and personal accountability, including time management and integrity.

5.2.1.1 Factors Affecting Readiness

The rest of employers think that readiness depends on other factors such as personality, ECAs, internships, and university type. Eight employers think that readiness is linked to university type and degree subject. Specifically, four employers think that the curriculum at private universities, rather than public universities, develop students' skills and provide quality education. Hoda and Mostafa believe that private universities enhance students' business skills or personal skills such as communication skills, which make them more self-confident "round" [sic]graduates, or "rounded" (Jackson, 2019). This is similar to numerous studies in different contexts (e.g. Adebakin et al., 2015); Clokie & Fouri, 2016; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Lowden et al., 2011; Rasul et al., 2012; Ting et al., 2017; and Wilton, 2014) in which employers have placed great importance on strong communication skills. However, Salma explains:

> There are candidates who are very much focused on their education studies… are extremely theoretical and they might know the knowledge about different topics and then we see the other candidates who go into internships, student activities, and extracurricular activities and these candidates are very much different because they are actually engaged with the workforce.

This is similar to the findings by Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) that employers in interviews look for instances of student engagement through ECAs, volunteering, and work experience because it indicates that students have stepped out of their comfort zone and interacted with others in non-academic domains. In the same vein, Wilton (2014) found that employers consider graduates' engagement an indication of the presence of valued personality traits such as "personal, ambition and motivation" (p. 248).

Readiness can be linked to degree subject. Mazen thinks that STEM graduates are more ready compared to their non-STEM peers due to the practical aspects of their studies. Mostafa thinks that different universities produce graduates of differential level of readiness. He explains:

> … Ain Shams Engineering graduates are stronger than those from the AUC but the former lack some of the critical elements that AUCians have which are mainly the soft skills ... But Ain Shams graduates are more willing to take risks and work hard and put effort... But you can hire good Economics AUC graduates and GUC Engineering graduates are strong.

This suggests that cultural capital accumulated at university are of differential value in the labour market, which also indicates the differential institutional habitus of different universities. This is similar to the finding by Ramadi et al. (2016) that employers were satisfied with the level of application of knowledge and the use of modern communication technology of MENA Engineering graduates.

5.2.2 Selection Criteria

5.2.2.1 Embodied or Institutionalised Cultural Capital?

To understand how employers perceived employable graduates, they were asked about the selection criteria upon which they make their hiring decisions. In this study, employers can be classified into three categories based on their criteria: Personality traits and attitude; personality traits, education, and knowledge; and technical skills, experience and attitude. Below is a table that summarises the three categories:

Category	Selection Criteria	Participants
1	Personality traits and attitude	13
2	Education and knowledge	4
3	Technical skills, experience, and attitude	3

Table 5.3 Overview of the three categories of employers based on their selection criteria of graduates.

The first category involves 13 employers who believed that personality traits such as self-confidence, commitment, flexibility, desire for growth and development, cooperation, and cultural fitness, as well as a positive attitude constitute their criteria of selection, with no mention of technical skills or experience. Hashem explains: "The second thing you look for is a person's attitude… It is because you also look at the personality. Here, an employee makes 15 thousands per month, for instance. You want to make sure that they have a good personality because they keep counting millions all day long".

Nearly half the employers look for embodied cultural capital. These findings resonate with previous literature that explores employers' selection criteria (e.g. Penkauskiene et al., 2019; Nilsson, 2010; Thomas et al., 2016; Wilton, 2014; and Zainuddin et al., 2019 on self-confidence; Anderson & Tomlinson, 2020, on flexibility and adaptability; Anderson & Tomlinson, 2020; Hora, 2020; Wilton, 2014, on person-organisation fit; Devins & Hogarth, 2005, on personality attributes).

The second category believes that educational achievement and qualifications are the most crucial elements in selected graduates. Waleed poses these questions: "Does the graduate match my criteria? Do they have my requirements? In terms of work experience, education, certificate, and skills. To what extent do they match these things?" This shows that some employers still value the cultural capital graduates accumulate at university. In dissonance with this finding, Courtois (2019), in Ireland, mentioned that employers regard academic capital "outdated" and "counterproductive" (p. 202). The third category strikes a balance between technical and non-technical aspects of a graduate where the absence of attitude makes technical skills of no benefit. Khaled explains:

> … being decent means like to know how to deal with your customers, how to deal with colleagues, how not to create toxic work environment, how not to poison the water between people, how to be collaborative, how to deliver excellence, to have passion in whatever you are doing, how to have a high level of integrity as well.

This echoes the result by Ramadi et al. (2016) where employers of MENA Engineering graduates tended to appreciate professional skills such as time management more than technical skills. In a UK context, Lowden et al. (2011) found that employers in companies in different sectors, fields, and sizes expect graduates to possess technical skills and to develop soft skills and attributes.

An interesting finding is the recurrence of attitude among two out of the three aforementioned categories of employers. Seven out of 21 employers placed a great value on a positive attitude with Lina stressing that HR professionals "hire for attitude. Train for skills". In Bourdieusian terms, the institutional habitus in different companies may attract graduates of different capitals. It could be argued that there are two distinct sets of habitus that are interrelated: Individual habitus of employers that could have been shaped by collective habitus such as familial, institutional habitus of their previous workplaces, in addition of the institutional habitus of their current companies. The interaction of both sets of habitus has guided their beliefs, and hence their practices. Therefore, based on the aforementioned data, there are three types of institutional habituses where the 'norms' in the first prefers attitude, the second prefers

institutionalised cultural capital, and the third strikes a balance between the two types of cultural capital

This is similar to the findings by Chhinzer and Russo (2018) and Zainuddin et al. (2019) where employers put a great emphasis on a positive attitude in graduates. An observation can be made about the four categories is that more than half the employers value personality traits more than technical skills and that the majority have chosen non-technical aspects alongside technical skills. Ibrahim says: "…you should be decent because it is still like all other jobs you are dealing with machines and humans as well so you have to satisfy both". Borrowing Bourdieu's conceptual lens, embodied, rather than institutionalised cultural capital, is central to employers' understanding of GE.

5.2.2.2 University Status

Based on the data, employers can be classified into four groups according to their perceptions of the university status (see table 5.4 below). When employers were asked about the importance of university status as a selection criterion, they all brought up the dichotomy of public and private universities with the exception of Fatma who classified universities into 'old' and 'new'. This bears relation to Chisty et al. (2007) in Bangladesh who found that the reputation of university does not positively impact GE, where 46% of the sampled employers think university reputation is not that important.

Category	University Status	Participants
1	Preference of one university type over the	6
2	Matters to some extent	6
3	Does not matter	5
4	Depends on degree subject	3

Table 5.4 Overview of employer perceptions of university status.

The first category preferred private universities because they enhance GE and develop personal competence through internships, ECAs, and career centres and develop personal competences. Mazen says: "In faculties like Accounting, cohorts are large. Professors don't get the opportunity to explain and to care for their students". In

Bourdieusian terms, graduates with affluent backgrounds can convert their families' economic capital into valuable cultural capital, represented by desired skills, whereas their less privileged peers cannot undergo the same conversion process, which creates social inequalities in the field. This concurs with the finding by Espinoza et. Al (2019) that employers who do not have access to sufficient information about the skills of two candidates who attended two different universities tend to select the one from the more prestigious university because their university indicates better productivity.

The second category thinks that university status is not the only criterion of selection and that competence, personality traits, and language skills contribute to the hiring decision. For example, Moataz explains: "University status definitely matters at the interviewing phase…you have selected 2 or 3 applicants and they are all almost of the same level of competence and good personal traits…, I will choose the private university graduate... Private universities graduates are better at foreign languages and are more refined". According to these employers, the valuable cultural capital accumulated at private universities do not overpower embodied cultural capital. This is similar to a number of studies in non-English speaking countries (e.g. Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014, in Oman; Kesbi, 2017, Morocco; Kiong et al., 2019, in China; Ting et al.,2017, in Indonesia; Thomas et al., 2016, in Bahrain; and Zainuddin et al., 2019, in Malaysia) which have placed value on English language as an important employability skill.

The third category denounced the concept of status because personality traits and qualifications are much more important. Three employers linked university status to degree subject. This relationship again challenges the public-private dichotomy. Interestingly, they agreed that the best Engineering calibers graduate from Ain Shams University-an old public university- while Marketing, Political Science, HR and Economics from the AUC. The perception of Ain Shams Engineering graduates came up in the interviews few times with Lina justifying her preference:

> They can communicate with all people. Mind you in Civil Engineering you go to construction sites. How would you ask an AUC or MIU graduate to go to site and deal with guards, plumbers, concrete casting guys?

To illustrate, the AUC and MIU graduates may use a particular accent in addition to English which indicate their affluent background and the quality of education they received. Their 'posh' appearance may add to the image which contradicts that of workers on site. This may hinder communication between both parties. Interestingly, the embodied cultural capital of these graduates, their mannerisms, accent, and appearance, work against another kind of cultural capital, which is their degrees and the status of their universities. In Bourdieusian terms, university status, which is an integral part of its institutional habitus, seems to be significant to GE because the majority of interviewed employers use it in their hiring process.

5.2.3 Employer's Role

An interesting theme is employer's perception of their role towards GE. This section will discuss how significant different forms of university enterprise collaboration as well as employers' visit to HEIs.

5.2.3.1 During University

Fifteen out of 21 employers believe in their role in enhancing GE while six think that "it isn't [our] responsibility". This is an interesting finding which indicates either a high sense of responsibility that could be considered 'a survival mechanism' to rectify the low level of readiness of graduates or a recognition that graduates' readiness is a shared responsibility among several stakeholders, on the top of which are HEIs and employers. This role starts at the university phase when employers arrange internships at their premises and goes further when graduates become part of their workforce. Despite the importance four employers placed on internships because of the "real life experience" they offer to graduates as Mostafa puts it, internships do not seem to enhance GE as desired by all stakeholders because employers sometimes assign menial tasks for undergraduates to do such as photocopying. Both Khaled and Mostafa argued that this should change, yet Khaled says:

> We do complain that we cannot find the calibre in the market… internships in most companies…candidates coming from universities end up photocopying documents or shredding paper or doing some filing. As a company, … I cannot

share with them confidential data because they are not my employees and I cannot disclose to them sensitive information or let them do day-to-day operations.

A contradiction could be observed between employers' perception of internships as a selection criterion in some cases and their reluctance to offer 'real internships'.

However, there are two exceptions: Oil and Gas MNCs and large domestic corporations which have created full-fledged carefully designed training programmes for students, graduates, and even senior employees. In Bourdieusian terms, agents may value a particular cultural capital which they should offer to other agents yet they are unwilling to provide a proper form of this capital. This is consistent with the practical implications proposed by El-Fekey and Mohamad (2018) based on the results of their study that GE stakeholders should be made aware of the significance of aligning university curricula with industry needs to decrease the "employability gap" (p. 158). Similar practical implications have been offered by Okolie et al. (2019) in Nigeria and Shivoro et al. (2018) in Namibia who argued that HEIs strengthen ties with industries to ensure that curricula are designed in collaboration with employers.

5.2.3.1.1 Employers' Visit

Mixed views were observed in the data in terms of employers' visits to university. Whilst Lina stressed the importance of these visits, Waleed believed that employers do not have the time and are unwilling to pay the cost to go speak at universities yet he complained at how university academics who lack market knowledge and experience are the ones who hold conferences and seminars, rather employers. This is another paradox that indicates employers' need for skilled graduates without playing any role in developing their GE. Sanaa appreciated the efforts made by public universities Student Unions who "knock the doors" of companies to invite employers to speak at their universities. She said: "I went to Ain Shams University 3 times. The students themselves made a programme and invited companies to give sessions to teach students soft skills after university days".

Drawing on Bourdieu's toolkit, agents, namely employers, are reluctant to provide a valuable cultural capital, which is market awareness, due to time constraints, yet point fingers at another group of agents, university professors, for being incapable of providing this capital. Reluctance or willing could be considered as part of the institutional habitus of the companies employers work for. In other words, visiting universities could be a norm in one company and an unpredictable practice in another. This is similar to the findings by Matlay and Rae (2008) and Sarkar et al. (2016) that presentations made by employers as guest speakers at HEIs may enhance students in making well-informed career decisions.

5.2.3.1.2 University Enterprise Collaboration (UEC)

In undergraduate years, employers may collaborate with university personnel to help develop students' employability. According to O'Leary (2013), UEC includes guest speakers, internships, and projects which are part of university programmes. In this study, the trend of collaboration between both stakeholders, employers and university was discernible. Employers may offer internships to undergraduates in exchange for opportunities provided by universities. For example, Waleed says: "We did something good when I was in BMW with the FUE. We told them we are training your graduates and you let us participate in the employment fair. It was a win-win. It is practice and a kind of UCE". Another example of UEC is employment fairs which, as Laila puts it, help students meet with employers and hence understand the needs of employers. However, Waleed and Omar cast doubt on these fairs which is used by employers as "a marketing tool", rather than a 'real' opportunity for students/graduates to apply for jobs. As Omar puts it: "Over the past two years, there were no fairs that we didn't go to. Why? Because Giza Systems is a gigantic company that work with almost 90% of Engineering-related industries. Two years ago, Giza Systems were not known among students".

However, employers, such as Sanaa, may also offer other employability-related services to undergraduates giving "learning and development sessions" to introduce students in private universities to industries and the required skills. Omar says: "We used to manage the training department in universities... Each of these universities have a career centre. We used to partner with these centres through providing vocational training to

help students link the theoretical stuff they learn to real-life experience in the company". Drawing on Bourdieu's theoretical framework, employers as agents appear to be willing to take part in the process of accumulation of cultural capital undergone by graduates at the 'during university' phase, yet in return of services offered by universities that would enhance operations at their companies and hence generate profits. Employability-related services are also considered part of the institutional habitus of companies where some support GE 'during university' whereas others do not. The aforementioned findings are consistent with the results by El-Fekey and Mohamad (2018) in Egypt who believe that ties between university and industry can "bridge the employability gap". Osmani et al. (2015) also argued that closer links with the labour market help students identify the skills and personal attributes valued by employers. According to Al-Roubaie (2018), university enterprise collaboration is rare in the Arab World due to the decreased manufacturing outcomes in this region, which adds limited if any value to the local economy.

5.2.3.1.3 MNCs versus SMEs

Data reveals that UEC varies according to company type and size. Two UEC examples were provided by Ghada and Sherine. Ghada, a young HR professional in a small company, stated that university professors and their teaching assistants work on part-basis in her company as "consultants" and they "teach" her Engineers "whatever they are struggling to understand". In contrast, a sophisticated well-planned alignment takes place between private universities and Oil and Gas MNCs through HR professionals such as Sherine who explains: "…we ask to have the curriculum that the students went through a specific academic year to tailor the training program to be compatible to what they study and actually part of their academic year grade like 5% or 10% is depending on the summer training they have in our premises."

From a Bourdieusian lens, two groups of key stakeholders, university educators and employers, collaborate to create a valuable cultural capital that enhance that better position a third group of stakeholders, graduates, in the field. This collaboration reflects the institutional habituses of both parties. According to ERASMUS (2017), collaboration between HEIs and employers in Egypt is not supervised by official entities despite its importance. While some universities offer internships as an

integral part of their curricula, a lesser number of universities have managed to collaborate with state authorities on providing internships for undergraduates to experience work in the public sector administrative bodies (ERASMUS, 2017).

5.2.3.2 Post University

5.2.3.2.1 Support and Guidance

In this study, employers discussed the employability-related practices they have at their companies. Four employers stated that they offer 'induction' to new hires to introduce them to the workplace. Interestingly, two employers described themselves as "the father" and the "shrink" of employees who build a close rapport with their staff to guide recent graduates and help resolve staff's problems which may affect operations at the workplace. From a Bourdieusian perspective, agents offer another group of agents the cultural capital they need to function in the new field, namely the workplace. This 'unique' role described by the two employers may indicate their individual and/or their institutional habitus. It is difficult to say whether their practices have shaped by their familial habitus or the institutional habitus of the company they have worked at unless they state that other employers at their companies perform the same practices. This echoes the finding by Devins and Hogarth (2005) that employers are more likely to provide their staff with induction and development on regular basis in response to a tight labour market.

5.2.3.2.2 Training and Other Opportunities

Thirteen out of 21 employers mentioned that they offer hired graduates training courses held by internal or external trainers. Ibrahim explains:

> We do our best just to keep their technical skills up to date … we have Research and Development Department. They know like what is the new trend in our markets so we propose a new technology to them and we let them know guys this is the new technology and we are ready to sponsor it so we just encourage you but we cannot force you to do it ...

Using a Bourdieusian lens, employers seem to regard accumulation of cultural capital through training as the most successful conversion of their economic capital, namely training budget, into cultural capital. This contradicts with the finding by Burke and El-Kot (2014) that on-the-job learning, including observation and discussion with more experienced staff, as the most effective support technique provided by employers.

Small enterprises do not seem to have a training plan and may resort to the line-manager to train new hires. This is the case of Hosny who owns a small Chemical company. On the other hand, MNCs and large domestic enterprises design more elaborate training plans. Sherine says: "… there are induction sessions. There are clear objectives. Clear KPIs and of course training if required. And everything is measured against the competencies. They can even visualize their progress". In addition to training courses, two employers said they offer graduates "a rotation programme" which entails working at different departments at their companies to explore their passion and talents and decide which one suits them. Three employers explained that a significant role they play is offering graduates a career path where they are informed of the required courses and certificates they need to obtain to be promoted at their companies or even apply internally for other positions. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts, employers, as agents, help their staff, who represent another group of agents, to accumulate cultural capital, in the form of knowledge and skills, and economic capital, represented by higher salaries and promotions. Similar to recruitment processes, training plans are part of the institutional habitus of company which vary according to the company type and size. It is worth mentioning that training practices, performance evaluation, and career path are issues that GE research has not looked into and have been extensively explored in HRM research.

5.2.3.2.3 Employable or not Employable?

In contrast, five employers believed that they have no role to play in enhancing GE. When asked about his role as an employer, Khaled exclaimed, "Why would I hire someone who is not employable?" He also mentioned that there is no place for fresh graduates at his international diplomatic institutions and that fresh graduates are advised

to work at small enterprises first to be eligible to apply at his organisation. Laila says "there is no such thing as employer's role in enhancing GE in Egypt" yet she then explained how she would give her staff technical training if required by large corporations they partner with. Interestingly, Waleed started the interview with 'painting an image' of exceptional HR practices such as having a "Happiness Department", "caring for the human element" and being "a world class standard" company, yet feeling more comfortable towards the end of the interview, he stated that "I am business driven. I am not a charity". He confirms: "My role as an HR professional is to achieve the company's goals through the people in this company who are its resources".

In resonance, two employers declared that they look for "a graduate who is ready to work" because employers do not have the time to develop basic skills. In Bourdieusian terms, a few employers, as agents, seemed reluctant to partially convert their economic capital into cultural capital accumulated by their staff. Instead, they are looking for agents with the desired cultural capital to save time. Employers' attitude and practices towards the employability of candidates are part of the institutional habitus of the companies they have worked at. This resonates with the results by Husain et al. (2010) that employers compete with each other to survive in the market and to fulfill this goal, they invest in the development of the development of the skills of their staff. According to Hussain et al., since the investment cost is increasing, employers expect HEIs to enhance the skills desired in the market with no training provided by industries.

5.2.4 University's Role

5.2.4.1 Gap between Curriculum and Industry

Some employers 'pointed fingers' at universities in Egypt, especially public ones, for their limited contribution to GE. Three employers mentioned that the curriculum is highly theoretical with no value in the workplace. Despite the differential context, Courtois (2019) mentioned that employers criticised HE education as being "too abstract, rigid, and generally unfit for purpose" (p. 195). Whilst Zakaria stated that university learning is based on "passing exams", Hosny mentioned that the skills required at his workplace are not developed at university. Khaled, an HR professional

and HR instructor, says: “They [undergraduates] get much more very theoretical old-fashioned experience in most of the cases… they [professors] still teach the same syllabus and the same methods maybe these things since 1800… They are trying to reproduce it in a modern way like adding the same syllabus but using any technological tools…”

This is consistent with the findings by Osman (2011) that curricula are slightly annually updated with no focus on soft skills. She added that these outdated curricula do not help students cope with current challenges because they are based on memorisation, rather than problem solving and critical thinking. Fatma, another HR professional and HR instructor, described the reaction of her MBA students who expressed surprise at the HR concepts and practices she introduced at her classes which they had never encountered in their undergraduate courses. In Bourdieusian terms, curriculum and knowledge as two types of cultural capital are devalued by employers who blame universities for the low value of the cultural capital accumulated by graduates. This could be also considered an instance of tension between two sets of institutional habitus: universities and companies where the curriculum provided by universities as part of their institutional habitus result in discontinuity between the two sets. This accords with Holmes’ (2008) implications and recommendations in her study of HE in Egypt where she called for curriculum reform and the abolishment of rote-memorisation which characterises HE in Egypt.

5.2.4.2 Imbalance in Supply and Demand

Another serious problem with HE in Egypt is the lack of “market awareness” or “market knowledge” as Omar puts it. This disconnection between universities and industry results in “obsolete” curriculum. He explains:

> I made a huge number of interviews over the past 3 months and I cannot find anyone because all the graduates don’t have hands-on experience. I need someone to work on something specific in the robot... So far I have found only one and he is not the best …We …screened more than 500 or 600 CVs.

He added that the response to the demands of the labour market by HE is very slow where a public university recently established an Actuarial Accounting Department due to the high demand in the market, yet cohorts are still too small. Drawing on Bourdieu, the cultural capital offered by HEIs appears to be irrelevant and outdated and therefore, it does not help agents, namely graduates, to better position themselves in the field. This bears relation with the recommendation made by Chisty et al. (2007) in Bangladesh, an emerging economy like Egypt, to urge students to study Business and IT in order to join flourishing sectors in their country

Both Omar and Salma pointed at another major problem which is the imbalance in supply and demand in the labour market. E19 says: "This is extremely sad that such big careers and we have big need in the market for it, we don't find qualified graduates to come work in them… people they graduated from Commerce thinking that the opportunity is Finance and Accounting and this is it and this is the only thing they understand". This suggests that cultural capital may lose its value in the labour market due to the high number of the agents who possess it. Meanwhile, the need for this capital is diminishing. The mismatch between the degree subjects needed in the labour market and the ones offered by universities could be considered another instance of discontinuity between the institutional habituses of universities and companies. This concurs with the findings by Kenawy (2006) who mentioned that cohorts that are larger than the labour market needs are the real problem in HE in Egypt. He explained how the expansion in degrees which are not required in the market among other factors have led to this problem. Schomaker (2015) drew a bleaker picture when he mentioned that lack of jobs is the real problem, not high supply. Universities have also been accused of providing unbeneficial hands-on experience. Khaled explained that even the most expensive university, the AUC, let alone public universities, do not possess the funds to purchase expensive simulation programmes needed to provide students with hands-on experience.

In Bourdieusian terms, for cultural capital to reach its optimum value, more economic capital should be mobilised by key stakeholders, HEIs. This resonates with Kenawy (2006) finding that universities in Egypt suffer from limited resources and inadequate performance of teaching staff due to lack of training. The status of HE provision in Egypt, in particular public universities, may have urged graduates to take courses and

obtain certificates and degrees after graduation to ease the transition from university to the labour market, as Ali explained. This refers to the low value of some degrees offered by public HEIs. This concurs with the finding by Schomaker (2015) who maintained that employability skills in Egypt are "in average not sustainably offered" by HEIs (p. 153.) Omar gave an example of his brother, a Production Engineer with a high GPA, who could not obtain employment for three years after graduation which made him shift to Embedded Engineering. Graduates may also have to face long "waithood" before they obtain their first employment or realise that they have to shift career (Assaad & Krafft, 2019).

5.2.5 Graduate's Role

All employers believed that graduates, not employers, are responsible for their employability. Hashem draws this analogy: "Let's assume you can't drive a car. If I were Michael Schumacher and I was trying to teach how to drive, I wouldn't be able to do it if you didn't have the will to learn driving". Using a Bourdieusian lens, employers as agents, whose actions are determined by the doxa of the field, namely neoliberalism, regard employability as a process which involves the conversion of a number of capitals as the responsibility of graduates as another group of agents. This resonates with Brown's et al. (2010) argument about neoliberalism which has made "knowledge workers" responsible for developing their own employability through obtaining degrees and career advancement (p. 23). However, looking at how neoliberalism has been described in the literature as "a modern version of liberalism …" involving four main tenets: "the self-interested individual", "free market economics", a commitment to laissez-faire", and "a commitment to free trade", it seems that it does not fully apply to the Egyptian context (Olssen & Peters; 2005; Tight, 2019). To illustrate, while the neoliberal trend has led to the growing number of private universities, these HEIs are monitored and closely supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education. This close supervision includes admission, curriculum, and facilities (Barsoum, 2017). The impact of neoliberal tide on Egyptian HE system tends to be different from other countries, in particular in the Global North such as the UK, in that it does not emphasise employability as one of the major responsibilities of universities. The scarce amount of GE literature contributed by MENA region and Arab countries, including Egypt, may

indicate how universities are 'free' from the pressures their counterpart institutions in the global North may experience from their governments and societies vis-à-vis employability (Brown & Tannock, 2009).

In a semi-neoliberal economy in Egypt, employers gave this role a percent between 80 and 100 because as Waleed says: "It's all about me [the graduate]. I am the one who creates opportunities, tries hard, learns, looks everywhere, gets job opportunities out of the current one." Hadeel confirms: "Number one is the university. Number two is the person. If you have opportunities, do you grab them to develop yourself? Number three is the employer who are the people who give the chances to these students to explore themselves and transfer knowledge to them." Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual 'toolkit', GE is determined by embodied, rather than institutionalised, cultural capital. This is consistent with the finding by Matlay and Rae (2008) that though many university courses enhance GE, some students are not ready because they did not seize the available opportunities.

Whilst five employers maintained that taking courses, funding their education, and keeping their knowledge updated are parts of graduates' role in enhancing their employability, Hadeel and Salma stressed the importance of internships and ECAs which distinguish graduates and make them more employable. Hadeel says: "…I may find graduates of Cairo University or any of these ordinary universities I mean public universities who have engaged themselves into student activities and internships and are more ready".

For employers, cultural capital, namely knowledge, experience, and skills, accumulated in the 'during university' phase constitute significant selection criteria. This is similar to the findings by Anderson and Tomlinson (2020) in the UK where employers value non-academic activities such as internships, work experience, and entrepreneurial experience. This finding also resonates with that of Bartlett and Uvalić (2019) in the Western Balkans that half the sampled employers mentioned that work experience is a significant selection criterion. Both Omar and Fatma mentioned that graduates are responsible for their own career path. Omar explains:

> You have to be always thinking where your next step will be. Is it within or outside the company? If outside, how can develop myself to qualify? They [most people] find a job and stick to it and this is my job and this is my company. They always have this fear to be out and explore different options.

Whilst Salma brought up "learning ownership", which refers to graduates' belief and desire to learn, Hadeel stressed the importance of "market awareness" which may reduce graduates' waithood by identifying discipline in demand in the market. To better position themselves in the labour market, graduates should possess the process of conversion of capitals and make their strategic decisions to accumulate, mobilise, and demobilise capitals throughout their entire membership in the field, namely the labour market. This concurs with the findings by Bourner et al. (2011), Chhinzer and Russo (2018), and Wilton (2014) that employers look for graduates who have learning agility because the cost of learning, represented by time and effort, for them is less than others.

5.2.6 Graduates' Social Background

Interestingly, more than half of the employers said that the social background of graduates is a crucial selection criterion. The table below provides an overview of this section:

	Viewpoint		**Participant**
Social Background	Yes	Greatly impacts selection (rejection)	3
		Determines positions in company	8
		Matches clientele's social background	3
		Matches existing staff's social background	1

Table 5.5 Overview of employer perceptions of graduate social background.

The two most striking comments are of those made by Hosny and Fatma who stated that social background greatly impacts the selection process because those of low social class background tend to cause problems at the workplace compared to their middle class peers. Hosny justifies his view by the unmet needs of the candidate which may motivate them to ask for a raise or a promotion more frequently than their middle class counterparts. Fatma explains:

> For me, … I never appoint somebody without knowing their social background. And for the Bank …, when I used to work there and this is what I have learned. I spent with them 14 years. They have taught me that the most important thing [sic] 'bring chicken' and we were laughing at the word 'chicken'. This mean [sic] raw material and the most important [sic] that you should ensure that those chickens are well-fed. They ask Human Resources the partner to investigate about the sources of the family background. Crucial.

Similarly, Sherine, who has worked mostly at prestigious Oil and Gas MNCs, gave another analogy about employees arriving at the company with a newspaper and fava beans sandwiches, which are typical working class objectified cultural capital.

The rest of employers who placed value on graduates' social background provided different justifications and mentioned a variety of HR practices towards this capital. For example, four employers explained how social class is closely related to graduates' mannerisms, accents, and appearance, namely embodied cultural capital. This differential social habitus which have been acquired from other agents of the field, namely working class, acts as a criterion for selection and positioning in the labour market. This bears relation to the finding by Ingram and Allen (2019) in the UK that recruiting graduates involves screening based on cultural and social capital that resemble those of existing staff and clients. These employers believed that such graduates can be hired in particular positions which do not require a direct contact with clients and which may even require contact with other agents of the field (e.g. Production Manager, and workers; Procurement Manager and merchants). Drawing on Bourdieu's notions, there is a link between graduates' embodied cultural capital and their position in the labour market, and hence their employment, where those whose mannerisms and accent reflect elite working class tend to obtain 'good' employment.

This bears relation to the findings by Assaad et al. (2019) where men with better socioeconomic status (SES) obtain jobs easier than their counterparts with lower SES. Results of this study also show that in both Egypt and Tunisia SES is a crucial determinant of access of good employment.

Interestingly, Ghada classified graduates she hires at her small sister companies into: middle class, and working class with rural background graduates where she hires the first category in Engineering Consulting and the second in Contracting. In the field of Sales, three employers seem to agree that the social class, reflected in mannerisms, appearance, and accent, of graduates should match that of the targeted clientele. They explained that Real Estate Sales professionals, for example, who sell residential units to A+ clients need to belong to the same field, which is upper or upper middle class. However, this process includes matching the socioeconomic class of candidates with that of existing staff. Salma gives an account of the wealthy candidate with a Rolex watch and a BMW car: "…we were sitting in an interview with the CEO on the panel and he told us the director of this unit doesn't own what this guy was wearing it will not work. He will not fit in with the people. He will have different needs, different topics to talk about". The mismatch between the objectified cultural capital and social habitus of the graduate and those of prospective Manager and colleagues constitutes barriers to employment. It is interesting to observe that employers act as gatekeepers to the field who pass 'social class' judgements based on the doxa that determines whether the agent, namely the candidate, can enter that field, which is the company.

In contrast, less than half the employers perceived social background as an unimportant aspect of graduate's profile. Zakaria and Khaled, who have worked in MNCs, regard social class as discrimination which is prohibited by international standards. Khaled explains: "I need a hardworker and I need technical skills. I don't want someone who is a member in X club or he lives in X City... So if someone is performing well, this is what I need in my organisation, regardless where you are from, what is your background and this is international standards".

Four employers do not seek to know graduates' social background but they look for a presentable candidate who is able to communicate with others and fit in the culture of the organisation. Lina says, "Why would I deprive someone from an opportunity just

because their family is poor or rich?" Drawing on Bourdieu's notions, using graduates' embodied cultural capital as an employment selection criterion is an unfair practice. This bears relation to Holmes' (2013) argument about the link between access to educational credentials and skills desired by employers and graduate's social background. This also resonates with Ingram and Allen (2019) in the UK who argued that employers should play a role in enhancing GE by carefully watching out for their practices which may prefer elite universities that are not usually attended by students of lower social class.

Nevertheless, three employers rejected social background as a criterion for selecting graduates. Interestingly, Ibrahim explains the link between social class and foreign language:

> …no one will tell you yes it makes a difference except if are working for customer service or whatever where they are meeting up with front people. However, in a way or another it does impact the selection process because we need someone who is really fluent in English.

This suggests that the presence of one embodied cultural capital which is a language proficiency compensates for other embodied cultural capital which is mannerism and taste which is part of social habitus. To illustrate, the accumulation of this capital by working-class agents, which is rather unusual, is sufficient to obtain employment in some MNCs such as the one Ibrahim works for. This bears relation to Bathmaker et al.'s (2013) study in the UK of the strategies middle class families adopt to better position their children in a competitive labour market.

5.3 Social Capital

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on the key themes of social capital (de)valued by employers (see table 5.6). Distinction will be made between different types of social capital including *wasta*, networks, referrals, and connection. The section concludes with a brief discussion of the relationships between agents of the field, namely, employers and employees and how these relationships are built and maintained or strained.

Sub-theme	Viewpoint	Participant
Nepotism	Yes	6
	No	3
Wasta	Yes	0
	No	12
Networks	Yes	8
	No	1
Referrals	Yes	7
Connections	Yes	4
	No	3

Table 5.6 Overview of social capital findings in employers' interviews.

5.3.1 Wasta

As discussed in Chapter 2, wasta, as a social capital, involves a mediator called wasta intervening to help a beneficiary obtain an advantage (Cummingham et al, 1994). However, how is wasta different from other forms of social capital that emerged in the data? Nepotism refers to family and friends whereas wasta could be extended to strangers (Mohamed & Hamdy, 2008). Networking refers to creating and maintaining links, whether personal or professional, with different people with the aim of accumulating resources such as contacts, support, and information (Batistic & Tymon, 2017).

5.3.1.1 Wasta: Benefits and Caveats

Wasta, the controversial social capital, is described as "widespread in Egypt" by Moataz. This is consistent with Mohamed and Mohamad (2011) who maintained that "wasta plays a critical role in hiring and promotion decisions in many Arab organizations" (p. 412). Based on the two data sets, what makes wasta distinct from other forms of social capital is that the mediator is a powerful person whose request is usually difficult to be declined by employers. Another feature of wasta is the skills of the wasta beneficiary who is usually unqualified. Hashem explains: "If you know

someone who is a Division Director even if you are incompetent, you will still get the job. And sometimes someone with much better capabilities may not get the job because of that".

Using a Bourdieusian lens, wasta as a social capital may operate with the presence of low cultural capital, unlike other types of social capital. This resonates with Mohamed and Mohamad's (2011) argument that a candidate who is poorly qualified yet has a strong wasta will be chosen over a highly qualified one without a wasta. Moataz explains: "It depends on the power of their relative. If this relative is a Production Manager or Factory General Manager or a CEO, this makes a difference. But if he is a colleague or a Production Engineer…he won't be prioritised because there is someone who is more powerful. But if he is relative is in Upper Management, it is done!" He even adds, "In Egypt, it is all about who you are and who your family is". Interestingly, wasta seems to work according to a tacit hierarchy, which constitutes part of the doxa of the field. This resonates with the findings by Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) that 87% of the respondents believed that "who you know" is more important than "what you know". According to Tlaiss and Kauser, 93% reported that in order to obtain good employment you need to have family members occupying important positions and 92% perceived wasta as overriding qualifications and work experience.

Despite the benefits that wasta may bring to graduates, wasta does not seem to be always the 'winning card' because a graduate's wasta, as Sanaa explained, could be an "unpopular" person, which reduces their employment prospects. Employers' perception of wasta beneficiaries is another negative aspect of this social capital. Sanaa explains: "… I would be uncomfortable dealing with them [wasta-backed employees] because I wouldn't be able to be fair with them. I would feel threatened. They would be VIPs and I wouldn't be able to issue a warning letter against them". It is worth mentioning that there is no literature on employers' perceptions of wasta in relation to their staff performance and reputation. It could be concluded that despite the wide range of HR practices towards wasta, in this study, employer perception of wasta as an unfair system, promoting social inequalities, is unanimous.

5.3.1.2 Wasta and Company Type/Size

Nevertheless, it appears that wasta is not entirely ineffective outside the 'realm' of MNCs. Four HR professionals stated that they would hire a graduate with a wasta if the company owner insisted because "it is their money at the end of the day" whereas another would only "give them the chance of an interview". Whilst two employers stated clearly that wasta is unacceptable, one stated that she may accept it if the candidate is "talented and meet company needs" because "[they] are in a tough business environment". Interestingly, Mostafa, an experienced HR professional, seems to decline wasta in a less confrontational fashion: "We have a test and a candidate either passes or fails. This test is held in another institution, the AUC…Put them through the process. If they failed, then it is none of my business. There was an exam and they failed it. Go spank them (laughingly)!"

Interestingly, two other employers remarked that some companies may even seek to hire graduates with wasta with the aim of exchanging favours with the wasta who possesses sufficient power to facilitate their business operations. However, it could be argued that company type and field are not the sole determinants of practices. Rodayna commented that the response towards wasta entirely depends on the company's vision and policies. Another dichotomy of companies in terms of wasta-related practices can be observed in the data. Omar argues:

> In service companies, …the percentage of wasta there is higher than other companies because the client could be a company manager and is the decision maker there. How much does this client bring to the service company as profit? Millions! …FMCGs are different…They have so many job openings that need to be filled really fast so they use networking to hire someone.

In Bourdieusian terms, a capital may be effective in one field, and not another. The way wasta operates can be thought as part of the institutional habitus of a company which guide the collective beliefs and practices of employers and staff. This resonates with the finding by Karolak (2016) in Bahrain that wasta is practiced in both public and private companies yet it is more prevalent in the public sector and in domestic more than international private companies.

5.3.1.3 Different HR Practices

A range of HR practices dealing with wasta can be observed in the data. It appears that these practices differ based on the company type- a finding which could be further examined in future research. Processes in SMEs seem to conform to local traditions that encompass wasta whereas MNCs appear to operate within a more globalised set of norms which could have been influenced by the West. This suggests that the doxa of the field determines the attitudes and practices of agents in terms of the accumulated capitals. According to Hutchings and Weir (2006), managerial styles in both the Arab World and China are neither Western nor Eastern but they are rather a combination of local cultures and Western business values. In Egypt, Leat and El-Kot (2014) found that HR practices in companies in Egypt are a combination of "cultural bound and cultural free influences" (p. 147).

Evidence from the data shows that HR practices in MNCs sound more complex compared to domestic enterprises. For example, Sherine explained how HR presents a business case to the Regional Compliance Department who review the documents to make a written decision to be included in the file, needed for auditing purposes. Ibrahim explains: "It [selection process] is really fair so like I am hiring here then you know like there are 3 stages or 4 stages of interview so even if I compliment you, the next interview will not compliment you because the next interview could be seated in Kenya".

The dichotomy of MNC and domestic companies appeared again in Waleed's narrative who stated that unlike domestic companies, in MNCs he could refuse to hire a graduate with a wasta. In Bourdieu's terms, wasta as a social capital causes tension between agents, namely HR professionals, wasta-backed candidate, and the powerful individual acting as wasta where the first group of agents discretely disobey the doxa of the field, which is the social and business norms in the Egyptian culture. Different employers' attitude towards wasta is another clear example of the institutional habitus of their companies. Previous wasta literature has not explored how employers deal with wasta in the workplace.

5.3.2 Nepotism

As discussed earlier, nepotism involves relatives, not friends, and is therefore based on kinship (Afiouni & Nakhle, 2016). Similar to wasta, nepotism is detrimental to meritocracy and fairness (Namazie & Pahlavnejad, 2016). [Redacted Redacted]. This predominance can be attributed to: scarcity of 'good' jobs as argued by Mohamed and Hamdy and to the Egyptian culture being friendship and family-oriented (Parnell & Hatem, 1999).

This section discusses how employers perceived nepotism differently. Their attitude towards nepotism varies from acceptance, encouragement, and rejection. Six employers regarded nepotism as an acceptable social capital yet under either one of two conditions: working in different departments and good performance. Hadeel explained why nepotism is even encouraged in start-ups and SMEs where a CEO may hire his wife as an executive assistant because they need to keep their economic capital 'in good hands'. She remarked to an employer who reluctantly introduced his nephew who worked for him as an accountant: "Don't be embarrassed. This is your money". This could be regarded as a transaction cost reduction strategy in the face of embezzlement. Ghada gave a detailed account of the benefits of nepotism: "All my staff are family members…They get along really fast and they don't need long orientation. So no one would sit alone because others would say: Are you X's nephew? Yes. Come and grab a bite, mate".

Another benefit is the ease of operations where an employee can easily reach his son if they are late to work. She also explained that induction of new hires is done informally. Therefore, this "family" environment facilitates the task in the absence of incentives to internal trainers. Drawing on Bourdieu's notions, social capital may enhance the relationships between agents, which enhances operations in the field, and therefore, this capital is deemed beneficial for all agents. This resonates with the arguments by Sidani and Thornberry (2013) that nepotism is accepted by some stakeholders because it promotes communication and results in good workplace relations.

In contrast, employers who work in MNCs or large domestic enterprises perceived nepotism as unacceptable and have devised a 'nepotism act' that prohibits the appointment of relatives in the organisation. This suggests that agents' perception and attitude towards this capital is determined by the doxa of the field which could be influenced by the doxa of other fields. Employers' perceptions and practices in relation to nepotism may reflect the institutional habitus of the companies they work at. This echoes with Sidani and Thornberry's warning (2013) against nepotism, in particular in large companies, because when business grows, this social capital becomes more challenging. According to Afiouni, and Nakhle (2016), nepotism leads to a negative work environment due to its "discriminatory" effect on competent employees with non-family connections (p. 191).

5.3.3 Connections and Networks

Unlike nepotism and wasta, connections, networks, and referrals may require more time and effort to accumulate and mobilise to gain employment. The perception of employers of these forms of capital is what makes them profitable or not. Ghada states: "Graduates need to set a foot in the door through wasta if they could find one and then they can develop themselves the way they want like taking courses… But to look for a job without wasta, that would be really difficult". This suggests that social capital may overpower other forms of capital, in particular cultural capital. Sanaa believed that hiring graduates in the networks of existing employees may help maintain a stable work environment. Hadeel says:

> I need to hire someone I can trust in a society where you cannot verify things. There are no guarantees. You may hire someone and the next day you find out they are a thief. How would you know? Criminal records certificate? No…Who would protect me? …There is no government or someone who would protect me.

This is similar to Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) who stressed the importance of trust and integrity without which employment is useless, and therefore, graduates should signal to employers how trustworthy and committed they are. In the same vein, Wilton (2014) found that employers highly value strong work ethics.

Connections could be even counterproductive in some cases. Sherine explains: "Sometimes we have people whose family is involved in some political aspects that the company is not accepting so we have to… get a state security approval". This case of social capital has neither been accumulated or mobilised by the graduate yet has tremendously affected their employability. To illustrate, the status of the labour market in Egypt appears to be highly impacted by its political status. These graduates as agents entered university and may have accumulated other forms of cultural capital such as internships and experience, yet their social capital constitutes a barrier in their career in a particular structure, which is the Egyptian labour market. This could be a clear example of how structure and agency interact where at certain times structure seems to have the upper hand. This interaction is mediated by the institutional habitus of companies that dictate harmony with the structure. It should be noted that there is no previous literature on the detrimental impact of connections on graduates' careers.

5.3.3.1 What is Networking?

Graduates may seek to create professional networks to obtain employment, move between companies, and gain important work-related information. Khaled considers networks important for both graduates and employers as job openings are advertised on company websites but knowing about them at the right time could be through networks. He added that employers, on the other hand, receive "an adequate pool of candidates" which enables them to carry on with the process of selection. This is a 'win-win' case of mobilisation of social capital. Omar clearly stated that it is crucial to create networks "around the one who does the hiring" because they would rather make contact with one graduate to make an offer and set an interview rather than to filter a thousand CVs.

5.3.3.2 Who Needs Networks?

Graduates' networks could constitute a criterion of selection in some positions like Sales professionals. Waleed provided an example of an Automotive Sales professional: "There was this Sales Manager who on the second day at work … made 6 million cash in revenue... It is because this guy has been in the field of Sales for 10 years and he knows all merchants in Egypt and has a good relationship with them". Sanaa and Lina share the same view but in the field of Real Estate Sales. Lina commented: "In Sales,

they look for the list of clientele so the question is: who are your clients? Join us and bring them to buy our residential units". Hashem concurs with this view of graduates' networks but in banking where wide networks are highly valued to "achieve the target" and the lack thereof, due to working abroad for a while, could be a reason for rejecting a candidate applying for a job at the bank.

However, not only graduates but also employers need to accumulate this social capital for their organisations to operate successfully and profitably. Whilst Sanaa explained how the constant need for information requires networks through which employers keep themselves 'updated' with the market, Fatma is keen on maintaining "a good relationship" with Faculty of Pharmacy in Cairo University staff because "they will give you a good pool" through their employment fairs where she headhunts graduates for her HR consultancy and recruitment agency. In Bourdieusian terms, networks are social capital that should be accumulated by both groups of agents, graduates and employers, to obtain employment and for effective operations, respectively. Employers' perceptions of networks could be part of the institutional habitus of their companies. This finding corroborates the argument by Erickson (2001) that employees' social capital which may include ties with clients and suppliers can lead into important information. According to Erickson, candidates' networks may also constitute a job requirement in that employers may inquire about the potential clients these candidates can "bring to the firm" (p. 154).

5.3.4 Referrals

Another 'win-win' mobilisation of social capital is the use of referrals. Employers value referring of graduates because it is a 'time saver'. Hadeel clarifies: "I get so many CVs and I don't read them all but I may get a recommendation email so I would hire that person who has been recommended or meet them". Salma values referrals as "one of the top sources of recruitment" that employers could also use to "reference check". Interestingly, in Ibrahim's IT company, "Bring your Buddy" policy financially rewards employees who refer a friend who then successfully completes the probation period. He claims that it is a widespread policy with a differential monetary reward. On the other hand, three employers said that they accept referring graduates if they perceive the referral as a 'good employee'. In Bourdieusian terms, graduates act as 'gatekeepers' to

the field who have the agency to allow other graduates to enter the field, which is the company they work at. Accepting referrals reflects a state of harmony between the institutional habitus of companies and the individual habitus of graduates. This resonates with the finding by Darrag et al. (2010) in Egypt that employee referral is the 'top' recruitment technique utilised in the participating MNCs.

5.4 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an analysis of the data generated from employers' interviews through a Bourdieusian lens. It set off with a thorough discussion of the economic capital both graduates and employers successfully accumulate and mobilise and the unique relationship between economic and cultural capitals. The second section has presented cultural capital, including sub-themes like readiness, university status, selection criteria, and the roles of stakeholders. The third section has provided an analysis of how employers understand social capital in its different forms, nepotism, wasta, connections, networks, and referrals, in relation to GE, which forms they value, and how they themselves mobilise social capital for better operation of their enterprises. The chapter has also shown the significant role that habitus plays in shaping employers' beliefs and behaviour towards GE, using evidence from the data to show clear patterns in terms of company size, field, and type. The next chapter will combine and compare key themes from both data sets to identify matches and mismatches in the understanding of employers and graduates of GE in Egypt.

Chapter 6: Dissonance and Congruence between the Understanding of Graduates and Employers

This study explores and compares the perspectives of public and private university graduates and employers of different company types of GE in Egypt. The study also explores the differences among graduates in terms of the strategies used to develop their employability and whether there are evident differences in terms of background such as social class, degree subject, and university type. With regards to employers, questions about their graduates' readiness to the labour market, employers' role in GE, and their selection criteria were attempted. Semi-structured interviews in English or Arabic were used with both groups. Three research questions were formulated for this investigation:

1. How do graduates of different university types understand employability in Egypt? How do they develop it?
2. How do employers of different company types and sizes understand employability in Egypt? How do they help their staff develop it?
3. How do graduates of different university types and employers of different company types and sizes understand employability in Egypt compare?

In the previous two chapters, the understanding, perceptions, and beliefs of graduates and employers of GE were discussed. Chapter six is a combination of the findings and discussion from the two previous empirical chapters. The chapter is structured to bring together the answers of the first two research questions. Following the structure of the previous two chapters, this chapter is structured around the three major themes drawn from Bourdieu's (1986) work on forms of capital.

6.1 Economic Capital

This section examines the similarity and the disparity between employers and graduates in term of the accumulation, mobilisation, and conversion of economic capital into other forms of capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), economic capital is the "root of all the other types of capital" which can be converted into either cultural or/and social capital through effort (pp.15-16). In this section, perceptions of both stakeholders of the process of accumulation and mobilisation of economic capital with the aim of developing GE will be compared and matches/mismatches will be identified. Below is a

table that compares the perceptions of both groups of stakeholders in terms of economic capital.

Phase	Sub-theme	Comparison
Post-university	Relationship between Economic and Cultural Capitals	No
	Conditions for Capital Mobilisation	Yes

Table 6.1 Comparison between graduates and employers in terms of economic capital.

**Yes* refers to 'congruence' and *No* to 'dissonance'.

6.1.1 Relationship between Economic and Cultural Capitals

Clearly, both groups are concerned with investing their money and generating profit. On the one hand, employers are looking for graduates with desired personality traits and attitude that would enhance business operations, and hence generate profits. Sherine says: "If I am hiring a treasury manager or a treasury staff, he has to be honest. Otherwise, you will be stolen. The personality traits are very important." To illustrate, graduates' cultural capital such as desired personality like commitment, accuracy, dedication and non-technical skills such as communication can be converted into economic capital, represented by revenues for employers, and their absence leads to loss of economic capital, namely financial loss.

However, graduates do not seem to be fully aware of this conversion process. None of the graduates stated any of the aforementioned personality attributes when asked about their 'unique selling point'. Instead, private university graduates strategically selected degree subjects and universities that would increase their employment prospects. However, their public university peers, though chose the degree subject they were passionate about, had their universities selected for them based on geographical distribution. Lacking this cultural capital, which is awareness or "the feel for the game", public university graduates thought that gaining employment is a long term goal they should not be worried about then (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66).

A mismatch can be observed between the perceptions of employers who are looking for particular personality attributes and soft skills on the one hand and private universities graduates who are constantly taking courses and degrees. Nevertheless, the mismatch is even larger between the perceptions of employers and public regional universities graduates, leaving them steps behind in the race. It could be argued that the source of this cultural capital on the part of the private university graduates is their upper-middle and upper class parents, the real 'investors'. Amir explains: "I didn't think about jobs when I chose Engineering. I just wanted to know more about it… My family were considering Petroleum Engineering ... For them, Petroleum Engineering means income in dollars."

Using a Bourdieusian lens, both groups seem to share similar views and understandings on the relationship between economic and cultural capitals. However, it appears that employers tend to focus more on the link between embodied cultural capital and economic capital, which is part of the institutional capital of their companies, whereas private university graduates appear to value the relationship between institutionalised cultural capital and economic capital as part of their familial habitus. This conversion process is mediated by agents, namely upper-middle and upper class parents, who used both their cultural and economic capitals to help their children accumulate valuable cultural capital that can be converted into economic capital. However, other agents, their public university peers, started the process after graduation due to the lack of cultural capital and limited economic capital, which made them struggle to convert their less valuable institutionalised cultural capital into profitable economic capital, represented by good salaries, which leave them rather behind in the competition. In the UK, Williams et al. (2019) found that employers perceive commitment as a construct in GE that reflects loyalty which saves the cost that would be spent again on advertisement, recruitment, and training of new employees.

6.1.2 Conditions for Capital Mobilisation

Interestingly, both groups are aware of the conditions under which employers decide to make such investment such as business needs and graduates' attitude, including loyalty. However, both groups voiced their differential fears. While employers seemed worried that their investment may not yield the desired outcomes, which is better staff

performance, either due to graduates' unserious attitude and disengagement with the training or leaving their company, graduates, on the other hand, seem rather concerned about the conditions, including signing documents. Interestingly, graduates seem to be aware of the 'game' and are more focused on their career path. Amir says: "They won't let you learn more than your current position requires that I can learn… Unfortunately, I have learned it without them knowing about it. This means I would be headhunted. Or they would have to give me a constantly higher offer so I stay." Meanwhile, Hosny expresses his frustration: "Of course, I train them … so a huge burden lies on employers' shoulders because they have to train new staff. An employee who you have trained may just tell you 'bye bye! I am going to a better company".

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) conceptual notions, it could be argued that while graduates are 'busy' converting their cultural capital that they accumulated at university into economic capital, which they then partially use to accumulate further cultural capital, in the hope of generating more economic capital either in the same workplace or in future employment, employers use their economic capital to provide graduates with opportunities to accumulate more cultural capital which helps graduates perform more efficiently-a situation which should generate economic capital for employers. Therefore, capitals here are used as a currency they keep on using in exchange of more capital in a seemingly non-stop processes of conversion. However, both groups of agents have fears around processes of capital conversion: while employers are concerned they might lose both forms of capitals to other employers if graduates leave their companies, graduates do not feel comfortable about the doxa employers follow to select the graduates and the type of cultural capital they select for graduates to accumulate. This also suggests that both groups of agents share a similar institutional habitus which they could have either gained in their previous or current companies.

This finding is inconsistent with the results of previous research. Quoting a voice from Human Resources Management (HRM) research, Rodrigues et al. (2020) define *employability paradox* as the dilemma employers may have while investing in staff at their companies: while career development processes (CDPs) are essential to enhance performance, they lead to increased external employability, resulting in employees leaving the company before the company receives the desired return on its investment. However, evidence from Akkermans et al. (2019) in the Netherlands and Rodrigues et

al. (2020) in the UK cast doubt on the concept. The findings by Akkermans et al. indicate reciprocity: when employers invest in developing graduates' employability, their knowledge increases yet their commitment to the workplace is also enhanced. In resonance, findings by Rodrigues et al. show that there is no association between career development and decreased workplace commitment or increased intention to leave. Their findings also suggest that employees reciprocate company investment with commitment and retention though they may receive more employment opportunities.

6.2 Cultural Capital

This section discusses the congruence and dissonance in the perceptions of employers and graduates of pre-university, during university and post-university accumulation of cultural capital and theories of both graduates and employers in enhancing GE. Below is a table (table 6.2) that provides a comparison between both stakeholders' understanding of cultural capital.

Phase	Sub-theme	Comparison
Pre-university	Impact of school type	Yes
	University Status	Yes
During university	ECAs, Internships, and Volunteering	Yes
	Employment Fairs and Career Centres	Yes
Post-university	Selection Criteria	No
	Conditions for Conversion	Yes

Table 6.2 Comparison between graduates and employers in terms of cultural capital.

**Yes* refers to 'congruence' and *No* to 'dissonance'.

Both graduates and employers think that pre-university cultural capital may impact GE, either positively or negatively. To illustrate, based on data of both interview sets, graduates who went to public schools are perceived to possess inadequate language skills and may not be admitted to highly selective English-medium private universities. For example, Omar says: “I went to the AUC for the first time. They told me this issue with the waiting list because you are not an IG or American Diploma student”. Employers perceive graduates of private schools as candidates with desirable personality traits. For example, Lina says: “It is well known that schools run by nuns and monks produce very firm and hardworking graduates. Both men and women”. Sanaa believes that “German school graduates are known everywhere for being disciplined. They have a certain personality. Not because of the education they have received is different”. School choice is made by parents of upper-middle and upper class backgrounds who possess both the knowledge and experience in addition to the financial resources that enable them to enrol their children at elite schools. As Lina puts it: “People have started to think right because they have family and friends who tell them how to think”.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s concepts, the accumulation of cultural capital at the school level is entirely determined by parents whose social background together with their economic and cultural capitals which affect their choice of their children’s school. It could be argued that parents’ beliefs and practices constitute their children’s familial habitus which results in continuity/discontinuity with other institutional habituses such as that of university and of the workplace. Familial habitus involves crucial decision making processes such as university and degree subject selection. Therefore, pre-university accumulation of cultural capital is directly linked to admission to university and employment prospects mediated by employers’ perception of graduates’ possession of language skills and personality attributes. This resonates with the finding by Galegher (2012) about parents and students in one of the elite private schools in Egypt where they both realise the benefits of enrolling in such schools, including earning a multilingual degree which facilitates admission to prestigious universities. Previous literature in non-English speaking countries (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Kiong et al., 2019; Ting et al. 2017; Zainuddin et al., 2019), has established the positive impact of English language proficiency on GE.

6.2.1 University Status

University status is another congruence between employers and graduates. Half the employers think that university status matters in graduates' readiness, referring to private universities which offer curriculum that develop students' skills, encourage students to do internships, and provide them with ECAs. Lina explains: "I see the graduates of these universities [private]. MIU graduates are stronger than BUE graduates…The AUC graduates are crème de la crème of the society because of the money they pay… Of course, university name differs for me."

Similarly, half the graduates believe that university status is crucial in enhancing GE because recruiters are thought to be aware of the quality of education different universities provide. Marwan says: "… private companies or multinationals prefer private university graduates so much… If you are clever and have graduated from any university, you will eventually be employed but if you are a private university graduate, you would be one step ahead of others because your university has a good reputation." Like employers, these graduates think that development of soft skills embedded in the curriculum and engaging students in non-academic events have enhanced their GE. It is noteworthy to mention that both employers and graduates refer to 'top' private universities as the ones that are highly perceived by employers for the aforementioned reasons.

Despite the lack of empirical evidence on the relationship between university type and quality of education (Barsoum, 2017), the perception of private universities offering better quality education seems powerful in the labour market based on the data. This perception could be supported by multiple arguments, including incentivisation, tuition fees, pedagogy, and curriculum. According to Assad et al. (2016), private HE institutions tend to be have more accountability and incentives to provide better education. While public universities charge "nominal fees" (Barsoum & Rashad, 2016, p.126), private universities are incentivized to improve quality of education based on the higher fees students and families pay. Another important issue to consider in relation to incentives is the fact that private institutions depend on students' tuition fees for income and therefore, they need to attract students. This may explain why these HEIs ensure that their faculties and courses are designed to meet market needs

(ERASMUS, 2017). Assaad et al. (2016) also argue that private institutions utilise much better pedagogy compared to public ones. On the other hand, public HE has neither significantly changed nor improved despite the changes in employment structure and the move from state-oriented to market-led economy, partially due to the lack of incentives (Assad et al., 2016). This match in perception may indicate that the accumulation and mobilisation of institutionalised cultural capital undergone by graduates is profitable because employers, representing the demand side of the labour market, approve the conversion of this capital into economic capital, represented by employment and subsequent salaries. Both groups of agent seem to agree that university status which is part of its institutional capital is important to GE. This resonates with the findings by Espinoza et al. (2019) in Chile where both graduates and employers believe that graduates of more selective universities obtain employment faster and get higher payment than their peers from less selective universities because they think that these graduates would show more productivity than their peers.

6.2.2 ECAs, Internships, and Volunteering

Both employers and graduates believed in the significance of ECAs and internships. However, it should be noted that graduates' perception has changed over time. To illustrate, some graduates were not aware of the importance of ECAs and internships when they were students. This 'moment of enlightenment' occurred after graduation. For example, Noha who studied Biotechnology in a private university realised the importance of this capital after she entered the labour market. Regional public universities graduates had an even 'bleaker' experience. In the aftermath of the Uprising in 2011, their universities did not allow ECAs on their campuses. Nelly says: "They also refuse to let TEDx speakers in…it sounded so much fun…Very weird things that make you hate the place." Overall, few graduates benefitted from ECAs because their universities provided them with such opportunities and they 'were told' that they are important for their employability. Graduates also believed that volunteering in NGOs was a beneficial experience that compensated for the ECAs that did not do. Sara says: "I think this [volunteering] is one of the things that has made a difference in my employment prospects, the fact that I used to work for a charitable organisation… Volunteering opens so many doors and shows your personality."

Meanwhile, employers maintained that they look for graduates who did ECAs. Sherine explains: “I care about the people who probed the practical life having some sort of internship going through postgraduate whatever attending workshops... unless they are having some sort of a flavour or a glimpse about it they will not be able to cope.”

This suggests that graduates deprived of this valuable cultural capital, ECAs, either because the structure, which is the aftermath of the Uprising, and the doxa in their fields, which is public universities, did not permit the accumulation of this capital, and/or they lacked the cultural capital, namely, knowledge about the importance of ECAs for GE. While the institutional habitus of private universities seem to provide the practices undergraduates may appreciate, their public university peers appear to be deprived of these practices and even had to face other negative practices, where the former is a case of harmony and the latter tension between university institutional habitus and individual habitus. This is similar to the findings by Clark et al. (2015) in the UK that recruiters utilise ECAs as a criterion for selecting graduates and Kinash et al. (2016) in Australia that 78% of surveyed employers chose the set of work experience, internships, and placements as important while making hiring decisions. This also resonates with Clark et al. (2015) findings that graduates believe that participation in ECAs increased their self-confidence.

Employers regard internships crucial for GE yet they are reluctant to provide graduates with real opportunities. Graduates are either capable of obtaining good internship opportunities in Multinational companies (MNCs) and large domestic enterprises thanks to wasta and referrals or ‘fake’ internships where they just showed up to receive a document to submit at their universities and add it to their CVs. Interestingly, Khaled is aware of the paradox and clearly stated that employers “partially responsible” for the status of internships, yet still unwilling to do his part and ‘passed the buck’ to universities. On the one hand, he is a strong advocate of ‘real’ internships, and on the other he refused to assign tasks other than “shredding paper”, filling, and making coping to interns because he could not trust them with “sensitive data”.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1986) concepts, agents, namely employers, value internships as a cultural capital, yet they either offer useless ones or valuable ones that require social capital for graduates to be able to accumulate. To illustrate, graduates cannot

accumulate such a valuable cultural capital, internships, because employers do not perceive themselves as agents who are responsible for offering these opportunities for graduates to accumulate these capitals. Ironically, employers constitute the real barriers in the conversion of this cultural capital into economic capital, yet put the blame on graduates for not enhancing their employability and thus not being ready for the labour market. If both employers and graduates believe that 'the degree is not enough', then graduates need to be made aware by career professionals once they are admitted to university and to have internship opportunities that are more than 'documents' or menial work. Both employers and graduates think that ECAs and internships have a positive impact on GE. Whilst most graduates are not capable of accumulating these capitals for the aforementioned reasons, neither employers nor universities seem to be willing to help. To illustrate, despite the match in perception, mismatch occurred in reality.

6.2.3 Employment Fairs and Career Centres

Employment fairs is another congruence between both groups. Employers and graduates mentioned that companies are keen on participating in these events to promote their products and services, rarely offering 'real' job opportunities. Therefore, employment fairs do not serve the purpose they are made for in the first place, which is meeting students with employers who can introduce them to the labour market and offer them employment opportunities. Another paradox is employers' belief, such as Waleed, in the importance of bridging the gap between universities and industry through events organised by career centres, yet they believed they do not have the time to make such visits to university. Graduates, on the other hand, expressed their desire to have such guidance opportunities, given the fact that only two private universities have full-fledged career centres.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, employment fairs and career centres can be thought of as other sources of cultural capital that employers are reluctant to mobilise for graduates, yet again blaming them for lack of cultural capital, which is 'market awareness'. The process of accumulation of capitals expected to be undergone at university-led services is aborted because either the service is not offered as in the case of career centres or not adequately provided as in the case of employment fairs. Both

services can be considered components of the institutional habitus of universities where practices do not properly support GE. This is similar to the finding by Donald et al. (2018) in the UK that students thought career centres were useful in terms of applying for jobs and communicating with employers. In Egypt, ERASMUS mentioned that career centres at private universities are key for their future as these institutions are market-oriented. Gardiner and Goedhuys (2020) argued that career counseling in Egypt can be an effective tool for communicating available employment opportunities to youth, raising aspirations among them, and steering unrealistic aspirations to more realistic ones. Several researchers worldwide have considered the importance of career counseling, as a source of social capital, in enhancing GE, by educating students about how to interact with employers and to choose the career paths relevant to their studies and substituting for internships, in case of absence of adequate opportunities (e.g. Chisty et al., 2007; Okolie et al., 2019; Tomlinson, 2017).

6.2.4 Selection Criteria

One of the major differences between employers and graduates is the selection criteria employers utilise to choose graduates. Whilst employers seek graduates with personality attributes such as commitment, flexibility, and a positive attitude, graduates think that what differentiate them from other candidates is work experience, knowledge, technical skills, and passion. An interesting example is attitude which employers place great value on yet it did not appear in graduates' narratives. Ali says:

> There are two things I evaluate an employee on: attitude and performance. If performance is zero and attitude is 100% or above 70%, I can invest in training but if performance is above 70-80% and attitude is below 70 or 50%, do not invest in them. Instead, fire them. Attitude is always difficult to change.

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital, graduates appear not to be accumulating the capitals that employers value, which may turn the process of conversion from cultural capital into economic capital unsuccessful. Since graduates seem not to be aware of the desired capitals, they may keep on accumulating unneeded capitals, which they may not be able to convert into economic capital. For example, graduates may take courses after graduation which they themselves fund in an attempt

to convert economic capital into cultural capital in the hope of transforming it into economic capital. They make undergo this process while they do not possess embodied cultural capital such as a positive attitude, which may make them wonder in frustration why they have not been selected for their 'dream job'. This mismatch in habituses, individual, familial, and institutional, suggests that graduates lack the cultural capital, namely market awareness, that enables them to accumulate the desired cultural capital, personality attributes and a positive attitude that can be then converted into economic capital.

Previous research on GE worldwide (Bhanugopan & Fish, 2009; Ferns, 2012; Oliver et al.; 2011; Sarkar et al., 2016; Saunders & Zuzel, 2010) reported that employers and graduates valued generic skills and personal attributes over knowledge and technical skills. Interestingly, in three of the aforementioned studies (Ferns, 2012; Sarkar et al., 2016; Saunders & Zuzel, 2010), stakeholders were graduates and employers in the field of science whereas the rest are business. This may indicate that regardless of the field, both stakeholders valued soft skills over technical skills, which is contrary to public perception that stakeholders in the field of science would value technical skills over soft skills. In dissonance, findings by Andrews and Higson (2008) indicate that both graduates and employers in four European countries considered technical business skills a significant aspect of graduates' portfolios. Another body of literature (Succi & Canovi, 2019; Tran et al., 2015) has reported disagreement between students and graduates who value technical skills and professional knowledge on one hand and employers who place huge importance on soft skills and work experience on the other. This disagreement could be attributed to the quality of HE in Egypt which both employers and graduates in this study find low and curricula which they regard as outdated and irrelevant.

For example, Ali explains:

> There is always a loose link between work and education… In [name of the company], … Civil Engineers work on designs using programmes ... They didn't learn anything about them at university so these Engineers must take courses to learn to use these programmes ... People at universities don't know about labour market needs and job requirements. So they don't work on preparing students to

enter the labour market fast. Instead, students have to take courses and training to be able to enter the labour market.

Drawing on Bourdieu's toolkit, the cultural capital accumulated seemed to be insufficient and are valued by one group of agents who are employers which makes another group of agents, namely graduates, mobilise economic capital to convert into valuable cultural capital. According to Daoud (2012), curricula in HEIs in Egypt are rarely updated and disconnected from the skills in the labour market. A number of studies stated that these curricula also promote rote memorisation (Abou-Setta, 2014; Assaad et al., 2016; Assaad & Krafft, 2014; Cook, El-Refaee & Kirdar, 2017; Holmes; 2008; Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2017; Richards, 1992).

6.2.5 Conditions for Conversion

Interestingly, employers and graduates appear to agree on the extent to which each group is responsible for GE. Whilst employers believe that graduates are fully responsible for their employability, graduates themselves think that their responsibility ranges from 70 to 100%. Graduates believe that the most prominent role employers should play is providing them with courses and training. The youngest graduates added directions, guidance, and employers being "a role model", which is unsurprising given the little amount of work experience they have. For example, Rwan says: "Definitely they can give more insight into the field especially that I am still a fresh grad and a bit short-sighted… To let me know if there is something wrong with my attitude if I am doing something wrong if I am approaching something the wrong way." Both employers and graduates regard training courses as the most significant contribution employers can make. Using a Bourdieusian lens, both groups of agents agree on the same doxa, GE being graduates' responsibility, for the field, the labour market, which 'takes the burden of mobilising capitals off employers' shoulders'.

However, mismatches occur over two aspects of employers' role. First, graduates did not see internships as partially, if not totally the responsibility of employers, though they either experienced 'fake' internships or could not obtain one without wasta. Second, graduates are not aware that employers are responsible for evaluating their performance and providing them with feedback. This role also includes explaining their

career trajectory in the company. Only 6 employers stated the relationship between evaluation, feedback, competencies, training plan, and career path, which suggests that employers may not put much effort in developing GE even when these graduates are their own staff. For example, Sanaa says:

> So what is graduates' role when they apply for jobs? It is not just about getting hired. They should ask questions like: What are the development programmes you offer? … I know these companies are not many and everyone is desperate to get a job but if graduates have developed themselves enough, are strong and self-confident, then these companies will hunt them.

In Bourdieusian terms, employers are only active in the post-university phase of graduates' trajectories. They seem to be reluctant to support graduates in their accumulation of capitals at the university phase perhaps because they are not capable of envisioning the long-term profit of the conversion process. The perceptions of both groups with regard to responsibility toward GE are aspects of their individual and institutional habituses. In agreement, the finding by Nilsson (2010) in Sweden show that engineers with a Master's degree believed that graduates are responsible for managing and developing their own employability where through examining the needs of the organisation, the line of business, and career and work on meeting them. This also resonates with Tomlinson's (2007) findings, in the UK, that students think they should be flexible and proactive when managing their own employability.

6.3 Social Capital

This section looks at the social capital graduates accumulate and mobilise to gain employment and how employers evaluate and respond to this process of conversion. The table below shows the congruence and the dissonance in employers' and graduates' perception of social capital.

Phase	Sub-theme	Comparison
Post-university	Wasta impact	Yes
	Wasta perceptions	Yes
	Nepotism	No
	Networking	Yes
	Social Capital, Agency, and Structure	Yes

Table 6.3 Comparison between graduates and employers in terms of social capital.

**Yes* refers to 'congruence' and *No* to 'dissonance'.

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, social capital in this study is classified into: wasta, networking, and referrals. According to Al-Ramahi (2008), wasta refers to "both the well-connected, personal intermediary-intervener and the process of intermediation-intervention" (p. 35). Networking, another form of social capital, refers to "building and nurturing personal and professional links with a variety of people to create a bank of resources, including contacts, information and support" (Batistic & Tymon, 2017). These networks include professionals who can act as referrals in what is known in HRM research as *employee referral hiring* which refers to "an organization's use of current employees' social networks (referrers) to fill job openings with new hires (referred workers)" (Schlachter & Pieper, 2019, p. 1325). Abrahams (2017) classifies social capital into: capital that is passed from one generation to the other and another which is produced by individuals through their networking activities. Drawing on this typology, wasta and nepotism can be regarded as examples of the first category while networking is a social capital that is produced, rather than transmitted.

6.3.1 Wasta

6.3.1.1 What can Wasta do?

Overall, employers and graduates seem to agree that wasta is prevailing in Egypt. To illustrate, they both believe that it is crucial "to secure a foot in the door" in a congested labour market (Abrahams, 2017, p. 625). While graduates believe that wasta may

guarantee employment in both public and private sectors, employers in the private sector, such as Waleed says:

> The policy is against hiring family members… This is the opposite of the public sector where employees' children are prioritised. So a son is his father's manager or the father is his son's manager and in the evening they meet at the dinner table!... In a local company, … he does whatever he wants. He can appoint all his loved ones and I will have to accept because it is his own company. In a multinational, I can argue that this candidate is unqualified.

Both groups believe that social capital, including wasta, functions differently in companies of different types, sizes, and fields. To illustrate, more experienced graduates think that recruiters in MNCs and domestic large enterprises (LEs) utilise referrals to save time and maintain their organisational culture whereas hiring professionals in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) resort to wasta, and in particular nepotism, to reduce transaction cost. On the other hand, employers classified companies in terms of wasta into: Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) and service companies where wasta does not work in the former and prevails in the latter.

Though both groups of agents believe that wasta, as a unique social capital, is widespread in the field, the Egyptian labour market, they tend to disagree on the conversion of this capital into economic capital-a process which employers, as agents, may resist and abort. Consistent with prior research (e.g. Mohamed & Mohamad, 2011), wasta is highly effective in hiring and promoting decisions in Arab enterprises. The finding about the relationship between effectiveness of wasta and company type is consistent with the literature on HR practices in Egypt (e.g. Darrag et al., 2010) which provides evidence for the dominance of employee referral hiring in MNCs and the prevalence of internal informal hiring in SMEs and external formal hiring in LEs for middle and upper management positions.

6.3.1.2 Wasta Perceptions

The most noticeable congruence between employers and graduates is the perception of wasta as an unfair system. All graduates ostensibly condemned wasta with the

exception of those who have used it themselves yet their accounts, such as Selim, indicate a sense of guilt. Graduates thought that wasta brings stigma to its receiver because it entails that wasta-backed graduates are unqualified and may even have their employers' excessive scrutiny of their performance. Graduates may also avoid wasta, though they possess it. Omar elaborates: "But until now I didn't use this card. Because at the end of the day I think it is better for me to use my skills and knowledge and to use my effort in order to get a job and that is what happened." This may reflect the discourse of meritocracy which could be attributed to age and experience, rather than working-class background as the finding by Abrahams (2017) in the UK.

However, wasta does not seem to only hurt its users, it may even cause more damage to the career of those who do not possess it. Sara gave an example of "a war in the Syndicate of Pharmacists" over powerful people who successfully withdrew hiring documents of a 'wasta-less' graduate in order to make room for a wasta-backed candidate. Employers felt equally unhappy with wasta as it brings about unjustified burden at the workplace which they address differently. [Redacted Redacted].

Borrowing Bourdieu's (1986) conceptual kit, wasta seems to be a social capital that neither employers nor graduates value. However, graduates in the private sector who choose to mobilise this capital are keen on demonstrating their cultural capital in an attempt to change the doxa of the field that dictates the incompetence of its users. Other graduates choose not to mobilise this capital either for the clash between their habitus and this form of capital or for the anticipated clash between this agent and other agents of the field. Therefore, graduates who possess this capital are aware of the 'price tag' that comes with this controversial capital which if used should be 'handled' carefully. In the public sector, despite the resentment graduates show towards wasta, it seems that the doxa of the field is more accepting, which eases the burden off the backs of graduates who are not expected to prove themselves. Based on the institutional habitus of the differential fields, public sector employers appear to deny the presence of wasta, though it is still prevailing according to graduates' accounts, whereas employers in the

private sectors seemed to have developed ‘avoidance techniques’ to alleviate the power and subsequent negative impact on business operations and environment. This echoes the finding by Mohamed and Hamdy (2008) in Egypt that wasta is regarded as a stigma to its users though it widely exists in Arab companies and the result by Mohamed and Mohamad (2011) that wasta negatively affects the perceptions of graduates’ competence and morality at the workplace in Egypt.

6.3.2 Nepotism

There is disparity in the views of employers and graduates of nepotism, which is a form of wasta that refers to the hiring of family. Both employers and graduates seem to agree on nepotism being prevalent in start-ups and SMEs. However, their perception differs because while nepotism is beneficial for employers, it is harmful for graduates. On the one hand, graduates believe that hiring family members has increased the ‘waithood’ for graduates that do not possess this capital. On the other hand, employers explained the reasons why they resort to nepotism, which include facilitating operations, creating a friendly environment in the workplace, and combating embezzlement.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1986) work, nepotism is a social capital that employers aim to mobilise for their benefits despite the belief that it may overpower cultural capital in some cases if an unqualified graduate is hired only for this social capital. Meanwhile, it discounts the value of the cultural capital graduates, with no influential family members, have accumulated and aimed to mobilise to obtain employment, which can be considered an instance of discontinuity between companies’ institutional habitus and graduates’ individual habitus. This striking finding extends the literature on social capital and HR practices for it shows the differential perceptions and attitudes of employers and graduates towards nepotism whereas previous literature (e.g. Abrahams, 2017; Mohamed & Hamdy, 2008; Mohamed & Mohamad, 2011) has looked into wasta while making the distinction between both types of social capital on the definition level only.

6.3.3 Networking

In regard with networking, employers and graduates feel that networking is crucial to GE. According to employers, graduates should create their networks in their field to be able to gain employment. They believe that networks help graduates to know about the job opportunities before other graduates and networks 'around' hiring people in companies may lead to 'headhunting', which makes it easier for graduates to move from one enterprise to another and for employers to hire a graduate in minimal time and effort, as Omar explained. Few graduates, on the other hand, seem to be aware of how significant networks are and how they are created. This lack of awareness could be attributed to the absence of career guidance at universities in Egypt, with a few exceptions, and could be aggravated by the lack of parents' awareness of the labour market. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) concepts, networking is a valuable social capital for both graduates and employers. However, graduates may not be able to 'reap' its benefits due to lack of cultural capital, represented by university and/or parents' guidance. Familial and university institutional habituses failed to shape graduations' perceptions of networking in a way that helps them accumulate and mobilise this valuable capital. This finding bears similarity with previous literature, albeit differential contexts, such as Batistic and Tymon (2017) where networking is found to be positively related to perceived employability among university students. In resonance, in the UK Abrahams (2017) mentioned that careers professionals strongly recommend that students build their networks through events organised by their universities.

6.3.4 Social Capital, Agency, and Structure

A congruence between employers and graduates is their awareness of the interaction between their agency and structure, represented by the labour market, economy, and the political situation in Egypt. Employers, as agents, cannot 'challenge the status quo' by hiring graduates who have "politically active" family members because they may "get in dispute" with the regime, as Sherine puts. [Redacted Redacted

Redacted Redacted].

Similarly, graduates appear to be equally aware of the relationship between their agency and structure. [Redacted Redacted].

In Bourdieusian terms, there seems to be constant tension between agency and structure in the field where structure appears to have the 'final say' about which capitals agents can or should not accumulate. Structure and individual habitus also determine how agents can protect themselves from the repercussions of 'messing with' other agents who may possess 'ultimate' social capital while institutional habitus determines the course of action that agents can take. This resonates with Tomlinson's (2010) re-conceptualisation of GE as "an active social process, and that this process is mediated significantly by the way graduates position themselves, and are positioned, within a continually shifting labour market context" (p.73). This suggests that in order for graduates to survive in the labour market, they need to undergo a constant process of evaluation and adaptation to the labour market based on their position whether they have chosen and the one that have been chosen for them. [Redacted Redacted].

6.4 Summary

This chapter has provided a comparison between the perceptions of employers and graduates of different elements of GE. Matches and mismatches have been identified and discussed. With regards to social capital, wasta appears to be the least accepted type which both groups refrain from using and dealing with due its negative impact on business operations and career path. However, graduates in this study seem to exaggerate the effectiveness of wasta because they all, except for one, gained employment without it, which could be attributed to the deeply-rooted perception and long history of this social capital in Egypt and MENA region. It could also be that, if anyone did really use it, they would not be entirely honest because they know it is socially unacceptable and undermines the view of their cultural capital. Both groups seem to be aware of their agency in relation to the structure, including the labour market status and the nature of the political system. Some forms of cultural capital such as the importance of university status, employment fairs, and career advising constitute points of agreement. However, there is disparity in perceptions with regard to the importance of personality attributes, attitude, and soft skills, in comparison to technical skills.

While it is not possible to generalise from the comparison between the findings of both stakeholders, they nonetheless show that there are mismatches between the perceptions of graduates and employers of GE in crucial areas such as selection criteria. To illustrate, there is a gap between what graduates think and what employers are looking for. This indicates that graduates in general, and public university with middle-class backgrounds in particular, are completely unaware of the demands of the Egyptian labour market, and therefore, might be accumulating capitals that are not valued by employers. More precisely, they are accused of being 'not ready' by employers who, ironically, are unwilling to 'offer a hand' to make the transition to the labour market less 'messy'. Meanwhile, graduates, based on their socioeconomic background, attended two types of universities which offer services of tremendously different quality. In the absence of career services, 'real' employment fairs, 'real' internships, and updated relevant –to-the-labour-market curricula, how would graduates in general, of public universities in particular, let alone regional ones, be expected to be ready for the labour market? It seems that survival in the precarious Egyptian labour market is typically for the upper-middle

and upper class graduates with useful connections, and a degree from a reputed, mainly elite private university. The rest are left for the seemingly endless ‘trial and error’ process of positioning themselves in a field that ostensibly does not favour their capitals.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Structured around the three research questions, this chapter draws conclusions from the research. Next, it reflects on the theoretical and conceptual contributions of this study to knowledge. Then it discusses research limitations and recommend areas for future research.

1. How do graduates of different university types understand employability in Egypt? How do they develop it?
2. How do employers of different company types and sizes understand employability in Egypt? How do they help their staff develop it?
3. How do graduates of different university types and employers of different company types and sizes in Egypt compare?

7.1 The Context

The Egyptian labour market comprises of two main players: the public and the Egyptian private sector. In 1962, the government decided to guarantee employment to all university graduates, yet this policy was cancelled in the 1990s. Despite that, the public sector has remained as youth preferred employer because of the unmatched benefits it provides including stability and security (Barsoum, 2016). Though the private sector does not offer these benefits, it provides much higher salaries which may compensate for the absence of other 'perks'. Absence of social security contributions and other benefits in the private sector leads to a phenomenon known as "job informality" which 91.1% of youth between the age of 15 and 29 suffer from (Barsoum et al., 2014). Job informality refers to being employed at an unregistered company or being a paid employee at registered companies without benefits (Barsoum, 2016). With a 7.9% unemployment rate and 34% unemployment rate among university graduates and the discontinuation of guarantee employment to university graduates in the public sector, university graduates resort to job informal jobs or else they will suffer from long waithood (Assaad et al., 2019; Pettit, 2018; The European Training Foundation, 2021).

The Egyptian HE system, which is considered the largest in the Arab World, comprises two main university types: public and private. This system, particularly public HEIs,

face several challenges, including large cohorts, low budgets, strained facilities, poor pedagogy, rote learning, teaching academics low salaries, centralisation, and lack of academic freedom (Abou-Setta, 2014; Assaad et al., 2016; Assaad & Krafft, 2014; Cook, El-Refaee & Kirdar, 2017; Holmes; 2008; Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2017; Richards, 1992).

7.2 Previous Graduate Employability Literature

Employability has been the concern of researchers in different parts of the world, in particular the UK, the US, and Australia, yet it has not received much attention in the Arab world and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Much of this literature worldwide has been based on the skills agenda, which has been heavily criticised for several reasons, including discounting other crucial elements of employability. In the Arab World, employability research is rather scarce and does not follow a particular agenda. However, two discernible trends in this research are the impact of foreign language skills and employability (e.g. Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Kesbi, 2017), and the effect of wasta on the workplace (e.g. Al-Yahyaei et al., 2022; Karolak, 2016). Little is known about employability understanding through the eyes of different stakeholders despite the urgent need for this research in a region that is characterised by precarious labour markets.

7.3 Summary of the Main Research Findings

7.3.1 Graduates' Understanding of Employability

In this study, graduates have accumulated different forms of capital in three phases: pre, during, and post university. Graduate data reveals that accumulation of cultural capital may start as early as selection of school which may impact university admission and employment. Participation in HE appears to be inevitable for the majority of graduates. However, private university graduates, thanks to their families' financial resources and market awareness, seem to be better positioned than their public university peers. Inequality tends to compound due to the differential university status which again favours private and metropolitan public university graduates. The public-private university dimension affects other GE elements. While elite private university graduates

are offered various GE services such as career advising and employment fairs, their public university peers, and in particular regional ones, lack either the awareness and/or access to these services.

There is a consensus among graduates of both types of universities with regards to post-university accumulation of cultural capital. However, private university graduates seem to be better equipped for this process using their market awareness and financial resources. The differential starting point, which is university type, keeps private university graduates ahead in the 'race'. For all graduates, post-university accumulation of cultural capital ranges from asking for guidance from their managers to taking courses at reputed institutions.

All graduates believed that wasta is widespread in Egypt. They are also aware that it works differently in different companies and at different times. Its power ranges from securing an interview to securing employment, depending on the power of the wasta and the company type. They seem to be also aware of other types of social capital such as referrals and networks, yet they are not equally aware of how important they are and how they are formed and used.

7.3.2 Employers' Understanding of Employability

Differences in GE understanding have been identified between employers based on company size, type, and sector. Nevertheless, one sweeping consensus among all interviewed employers is their perception of graduates' lack of readiness. A few employers believed that private university graduates are more ready than their public perception peers because of the soft skills, ECAs, and internships offered at private universities. Another similarity among employers of different backgrounds is the great value they placed on personality traits and attitude.

The dimension of public-private universities was obvious in employers' narratives. The majority preferred private university graduates over their public university peers due to the large cohorts and inadequate pedagogy which characterise public HEIs. Congruence in terms perceptions of employer's responsibility toward GE could be noticed. The majority of employers believed that they have a crucial role to play toward GE in the

post-university phase through support, guidance, and training, which vary based on company type. Nevertheless, they did not perceive their role in the university phase as equally important.

Overall, the employers put the blame on universities for not providing "oven-ready" graduates (Boden & Nevada, 2010, p. 46). This 'blame' is divided into two main areas: outdated irrelevant curriculum without application opportunities and with great emphasis on passing exams; and imbalance in supply and demand in terms of specialisations. Rare University Enterprise Collaboration (UEC), manifested in curriculum alignment to industry needs, is another concern for employers that they blamed HE, in particular public universities, for. The employers also believed that graduates are fully responsible for their employability. Based on the analysis of employers' interviews, graduates' social background constitutes an important part of GE. More than half of the employers thought that graduates' mannerisms, accent, and appearance are important selection criteria for two reasons.

Interestingly, dissonance was observed between employers of different company size in terms of hiring decisions. While employers at SMEs hire fresh graduates and provide them with training and low salaries, their counterparts at large enterprises regard appointment of fresh graduates a waste of time and they seem willing to hire more experienced candidates at higher salaries. Nevertheless, employers of different backgrounds are fully aware of the field they are operating in, which is the Egyptian market and they would never use their agency to challenge the structure, which is the militarised regime, for smooth operations.

A striking disparity between employers of different backgrounds can be noticed in social capital which includes wasta, nepotism, and referrals. SMEs employers mentioned that wasta existed in their organisations, whereas HR practices at large domestic enterprises and MNCs are against this social capital. While nepotism seemed to be preferred by SMEs employers, MNCs set their 'nepotism act' against this type of social capital. Referrals are the 'top' social capital at MNCs whereas it is the least preferred among employers of SMEs.

7.3.3 Graduates' and Employers' Understanding Compared

Matches and mismatches were found between the understanding of graduates and employers of GE. Both groups of stakeholders believed that GE is graduates' responsibility and that the role employers could play in enhancing GE is providing guidance, feedback, and training. Both employers and graduates mentioned that employers provide training under certain conditions: graduates' attitude, business needs, and anticipated return on investment resulting from improved staff performance. While employers voiced concerns regarding staff's engagement with training courses, graduates felt uncomfortable about signing documents that force them to stay at their organisations. Nevertheless, both groups differ in their perception between economic capital and cultural capital. To illustrate, while employers believe that the possessions of certain personality traits enhance staff performance and therefore yield profits, private university graduates thought that taking more courses and degrees will make them more employable. The disparity between the views of employers and public university graduates is even greater as the latter have mainly selected their degree subjects they are passionate about, which indicates that public university graduates lack "the feel for the game" which their private university peers possess (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66).

Both groups of stakeholders share similarities with regards to their perceptions of wasta as a social capital. Employers and graduates believed that it is widespread in Egypt yet operates differently, depending on company size and type. Wasta is more powerful in the public sector and in domestic enterprises, rather than MNCs. However, dissonance was observed in the effect of wasta over time: while graduates believed that it is still as effective as it used to be in the past, employers stated that its impact has diminished. Both groups believed that wasta is an unfair corrupt system that leaves its users with a tarnished reputation and causes an unstable work environment. Both employers and graduates stated that creating professional networks is important for enhancing GE yet a few graduates seemed to be aware of how crucial this type of social capital is and how these networks can be created. Nevertheless, nepotism is a point of mismatch between the two groups: while employers viewed hiring family members in their businesses 'a

life saver', graduates denounced it as a social capital that may increase their "waithood".

The importance of pre-university education to GE is another congruence between the two groups. They both believed that attending private language schools increases the prospects of admission to elite private universities and future good employment. In addition to the desired language skills, employers believed that graduates of schools managed by nuns and monks possess desirable personality attributes such as diligence and commitment. Both groups tended to prefer private universities for the quality of education, ECAs, and internships they provide and the soft skills they develop. They also both believed that employment fairs are ineffective. While employers selected candidates based on their personality traits and attitude, graduates believed that work experience, knowledge, and technical skills are their 'unique selling points'.

7.4 Empirical and Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are Bourdieu's work (1984; 1986; 1990): *the forms of capital*, *the habitus*, and *the field*. A few empirical and theoretical contributions emerged from this study:

- Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit has been extensively used to explore the perceptions and the strategies used by students and less extensively to explore those of graduates (e.g. Abrahams, 2017; Bathmaker et al., 2013). This study has employed Bourdieu's notions to explore and compare the understanding of two key stakeholders, graduates and employers, who are two groups that have not been represented in Egypt. The capitals graduates accumulated and mobilised in pre-university, university, and post-university phases have been compared against the capitals that employers valorise to identify matches and mismatches. Graduates were chosen over students because graduates provide a broader image of GE: their experience as former students and as graduates who have entered the labour market. This echoes Yorke's (2006) conceptualisation of employability as characteristic that "needs to be continuously refreshed throughout a person's working life" (p. 3). Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of habitus, comparison was drawn between graduates of different habitus, which is university type and

comparison was also drawn between employers of different habitus, which is company size and type.

- An empirical contribution of this research is related to the scarcity of GE research in the MENA region and the Arab World. As discussed in Chapter 2, little research has been conducted to explore GE in this region, where research has mainly tackled the skills valued employers in particular language skills in addition to the subliterature focusing on wasta. While previous GE research in the region has exclusively focused on either public or private university graduates, this study, with its focus on the perspectives of both groups of graduates across disciplines and university location, and employers in the public and private sectors, across industry, has expanded knowledge about the perspectives of two key stakeholders of GE.
- A closer investigation of graduates' demographic information shows that all private university graduates work in the private sector, in particular large domestic enterprises and MNCs, and the majority of public university graduates have joined the public sector. In addition, the majority of private sector employers tend to prefer private university graduates. This might indicate a "two-tier" labour market, similar to Richards' (1992) "two-tier education" in Egypt. Since the labour market is a 'field', it might be a *de facto* 'cleft field', borrowing Abrahams and Ingram's (2013) term of "cleft habitus" (p. 213).
- In Bourdieu's theory, agents accumulate and mobilise capitals including its social form. To convert one form of capital to another, time and effort are required. In his theory, agents seem to have the choice whether to accumulate or mobilise a particular form. Nevertheless, in the Egyptian labour market, agents may not choose to accumulate a social capital, yet have it mobilised for them to damage their career. [Redacted Redacted]. Wasta, as a social capital, is

exceptionally powerful compared to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital. It may challenge Bourdieu's argument about 'the scarcer a degree is, the higher its value' because in the Egyptian labour market, while an agent who may possess a low-value degree can still find an employment as in the case of wasta in the public sector, an agent with a valuable degree may not obtain an employment.

- Bourdieu (1989) argues that in a social field, agents with the highest volume of cultural and economic capital occupy dominant position. However, in the Egyptian labour market as a field, agents with the highest volume of social and cultural capital which has been converted from economic capital (i.e. wasta and a degree from a private university which charge high tuition fees paid by families) occupy the dominant positions in the field.

7.4.1 Reflections on Limitations

In this study, one challenge I faced was methodological. In Egypt, people are more familiar with quantitative methods which made almost all participants asking for the link to the survey. The idea of being interviewed was novel to the majority of interviewees, triggering a combination of confusion and excitement. I had to be very patient explaining what the whole study is about and the role they are expected to play. The most intriguing part was the ethics and the consent form. Overall, many people were eager to help to the extent of almost breaching ethics. For example, one supervisor at a Communications company wanted to help by putting me in contact with all his supervisees at work to be interviewed. I had to explain why that was not ethically valid and to decline politely. Another challenge was the consent forms which many interviewees refused to sign for fear their signature could be used against them later.

One of the limitations of this study is the language used in interviews. All participants were given the opportunities to use either Egyptian Arabic, which is their first language, or English, which is the most commonly used foreign language in Egypt. This is to enhance the quality of the data, resulting in interviews which were difficult to transcribe because of the code mixing between the two languages. Another language-related challenge is Arabic being a right-to-left language which is not supported by data-management software such as NVivo and therefore, all data had to be coded manually.

Translation from Egyptian Arabic to English was rather challenging. Relying on my undergraduate studies of Translation and with the help of my supervisor, I was able to find 'informal' British English equivalents for Egyptian Arabic terminology to avoid having differential 'register' between original and translated texts.

7.5 New Lines of Inquiry

Several new lines of inquiry have sprung from this study. Below are examples of possible new research, derived from both the methodology and the interviews:

- It is worth exploring the understanding of other GE key stakeholders in Egypt such as students, teaching academics, career advisors (though they exist in a handful of private universities), and HE policymakers (despite the challenges of interviewing officials in Egypt). To obtain an even broader picture, exploring the perceptions of parents could be helpful since they fund their children's HE in Egypt.
- A closer inspection of other elements of background such as social class and gender could be of benefit to exploring the impact of these dimensions on GE understanding and strategies. Elements of gender in both sets of interviews have emerged which indicates that this element may affect GE understanding of both graduates and employers. Social class is another crucial constituent of background, and therefore, self-reported social class could be used to classify graduates and employers into sub-categories: working-class, lower-middle, upper-middle, upper classes.
- Wasta is a fascinating area which has been immensely investigated in Jordan, but little has been done in this area in other Arab countries, including Egypt. Derived from employers' interviews, researchers may wish to explore the perceptions of employers in Egypt of wasta and the HR practices they use to handle this controversial social capital.
- Language choice in interviewing bilingual or multilingual participants is another interesting research area. In post-colonial contexts such as Egypt, choosing either languages may stir negative feelings due to the status of both languages in society. Selecting English as the language of interviews with less proficient speakers may negatively impact the quality of data. How do researcher(s) decide

on the language of interviews? To what extent does the language of choice impact the quality of data? To what extent does choosing a particular language affect interviewees' decision of participation and their level of comfort?

7.6 The PhD Journey

- Before embarking on this project, I have experienced wasta. However, I was surprised by how powerful wasta-backed candidates can be. I had never thought that wasta-backed employees may receive their salaries without even having to show up at work. Meanwhile, the attitude of private sector HR professionals has surprised me as I have always thought that they may hire wasta-backed candidates without much 'reluctance'. The distinction between the attitude of HR professionals in the public and private sector is a dimension that has been clear to me before.
- The notions of habitus, field, cultural, and social reproduction have their impact on my understanding of my society and community. I now understand that the practices we as a family have had can be quite different from those of other families. Similarly, the attempts made by my parents are quite similar to those I now make with my children, which could be explained by my social habitus and social and cultural reproduction. I used to think that social class is determined by financial resources which has made it difficult for me to account for the practices I share with individuals with different financial resources. Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social class, which is the interaction of different dimensions of individuals' backgrounds, has explained why two individuals of seemingly differential social class may share many practices and family's reproduction of capital.

Chapter 8: Appendix One

Pseudonym	Age	Interview Type	Education Background	Position in Company	Work Experience/ years	Co. Type	Co. Field	Co. Size/number of employees
Zakaria	66	Telephone	PhD in Agriculture	Chairman	45	Private	Seed hybrids	150
Hashem	38	Face-to-face	BSc. in Commerce	Branch Manager	15	Private	Banking	20

Moataz	35	Online	BA. in Law	Senior Personnel Officer and Government Liaison	13	Private	Construction	100
Hosny	68	Online	BSc. in Military Sciences	General Manager	14	Private	Chemicals	8
Khaled	38	Online& Telephone	MBA	HR Manager and HR Instructor	3	Private and public	Diplomacy	501-1000

Laila	30	Online	BSc. in Management Technology; MBA (Marketing)	Marketing Manager	8	Private	Digital Marketing	750
Ghada	23	Online	BA. in Archeology	Head of Department	2	Private	Contracting	150
Sherine	42	Online	DBA, professional doctorate	Chief People's Officer, Freelance Consultant,	20	Private	Retail and Distribution	100+

				and HR Instructor				
Sanaa	57	Online	BSc. in Engineering; MA in HR	Chief HR Director	20	Private	Investment Construction & Development	3800
Lina	45	Face-to-face	BA. in French Literature; MBA	Chief HR Officer	18	Private	Development	1500
Ali	33	Online	BA. in Psychology	Senior HR	10	Private	Electrical Substations	120

				Generalist				
Hoda	52	Online	BSc. in Accounting	HR General Manager	10	Public	Oil and Gas	3000
Hadeel	28	Online	BSc. in Finance and Innovation	Managing Director and HR Business Partner	5	Private	HR Consultancy (Start-ups& MSEs)	20
Waleed	32	Online	BSc. in Administrative Studies	Principal Organisation and HR Consultant	11	Private	Knowledge Industry	2

Ibrahim	30	Online	BA. in Law; MA in International Business and Global Management	Engineering Hiring Lead	6	Private	Information Technology	1400
Rodayna	35	Telephone	BSc. in Commerce MBA	HR Manager	13	Private	Leasing	100
Omar	27	Face-to-face	BSc. in Information Systems	Talent Acquisition Specialist	4	Private	Engineering	10,000+

Mazen	30	Online	BSc. in Accounting	HR Generalist	6	Private	Paper Manufacturing& Contracting	400
Salma	29	Online	BA. in Psychology	Talent Management Manager	5	Private	Investment	11,000
Fatma	59	Online	BSc. in Commerce; PhD in HR Philosophy	Co-founder of Management Consultancy Firm and HR Instructor	30+	Private	HR Consultancy	10

Mostafa	60	Online	BSc. in Mechanical Engineering	Head of HR	20	Private/ public	Banking	1,800

The table shows the background information of employer participants.

*Co. stands for company.

Chapter 9: Appendix Two

Pseudonym	Age	Interview Type	Grad. Year	University Name	University Type	Degree Subject	Position in Company	Work Experience in Months/ Years	Co. Type	Co. Field	Co. Size/ Number of Employees
Rwan	23	Online	2019	Ain Shams University	Public	Engineering	Technical Support Engineer	Less than a year	Private	Information Technology	1500
Marwan	24	Online	2018	German University	Private	Mechanical Engineering	Technical Support Engineer	1.5	Private	Information Technology	1500

				in Cairo (GUC)							
Peter	27	Online	2014	British University in Egypt (BUE)	Private	Mechanical Engineering	Senior Supply Chain Consultant	6	Private	Information Technology Consulting	100
Mohamed	30	Telephone	2012	Zaqaziq University	Public	Chemistry	Production Chemist	5	Private	Car Battery Manufacturing	500
Radwa	23	Online	2018	BUE	Private	Mass	Content Creator	1+	Private	Health&	20

						Communi-cation				Education	
Mariam	25	Online	2017	Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts	Public	Theatrical Arts	Assistant Director	6	Private	Film directing	NA
Selim	23	Online	2019	GUC	Private	Finance	Accountant	4 months	Private	Water-treatment technology	501-1000
Sara	26	Online	2016	Beni Seuf University	Public	Pharmacy	Pharmacist	3.5	Public	Hospital	500+

Amir	28	Online	2014	BUE	Private	Mechanical Engineering	Senior Inspector	5	Private	Forensic Investigation	20
Omar	22	Online	2019	BUE	Private	Finance	AR Accountant, Accounts Residual	2 months	Private	Residential& Commercial	42000
Hana	25	Online	2017	Future University in Egypt (FUE)	Private	Dentistry	General Practitioner Dentist	3	Private& Public	Health	4
AbdelRahman	27	Online	2014	BUE	Private	Mechanical Engineering	Production Team Lead	6	Private	FMCG	1680

Mahmoud	31	Online	2012	Menya University	Public	Chemical Engineering	Operation Engineer	3	Public	Fertilizers	Confidential
Noha	26	Online	2016	GUC	Private	Bio-technology	Project Manager	3-4	Public	Market Research	400
Fairouz	26	Online	2017	Helwan University	Public	Pharmacy	Clinical Pharmacist	2.5	Private &Public	Health	200
Nelly	26	Online	2018	Fayoum University	Public	Electric Power Engineering	Sales Engineer	2 months	Private	Factory Machinery	50

Ammar	30	Online	2011	Ain Shams University	Public	Commerce	Customer Service and Accountant	7	Public	Banking	20000+
Manar	25	Online	2017	Arab Academy for Science, Technology, Maritime Transport (AASTMT)	Private	Translation & Mass Communi-cation	Sales Administrative	2	Private	Real Estate	10+

Nour	24	Online	2018	BUE	Private	Computer Science	Software Engineer	1.5	Private	Software Development	700
Mahy	24	Online	2018	AASTMT	Private	Marketing Management	Account Executive	1.5	Private	Marketing Activation	100

The table shows the background information of graduate participants.

*Co. stands for company.

Chapter 10: Appendix Three

Economic Capital	Graduates' salaries	
	Degree subject choice	
	Career choice	
	Funding learning	
Cultural Capital	Pre-university	Embedded choosers
		University admission
		School type
		University type
		University reputation
		University status
		University choice

		Degree subject choice
	University	ECAs
		Internships
		Career advising
		Employment fairs
		Volunteering
		University location
		Quality of education
		GPA
	Post-University	Courses and degrees
		Employers' role

		Gap between university and industry
		Responsibility toward GE
Social Capital	Referrals	
	Networking	
	Wasta	
	Nepotism	
Habitus	Age	
	Gender	
	Social class	
	Work experience	
	Company size	

	Company field	
	Company sector	
Field	Labour market	
	Economy…Supply and demand	
	[Redacted]	

The table outlines the themes and sub-themes for graduates' interviews.

Chapter 11: Appendix Four

<table>
<tr><td>Economic Capital</td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="10">Cultural Capital</td><td colspan="2">Readiness</td><td rowspan="10"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">University type</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">University status</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Degree subject</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Quality of education</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Skills</td><td>Soft</td></tr>
<tr><td>Technical</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Internships</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">GPA</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">University’s role</td></tr>
</table>

	Employer's role	
	Employer's responsibility toward GE	
	Personality traits	
	Selection criteria	
	Social class	
	Gap between university and industry	
	Enterprise University Collaboration	
Social Capital	Wasta	
	Nepotism	
	Referrals	

	Networking	
Habitus	Age	
	Gender	
	Social class	
	Work experience	
	Company size	
	Company field	
	Company sector	

Field	Labour market	
	Economy	
	Supply and demand	
	[Redacted]	

The table outlines the themes and the sub-themes of employers' interviews.

Chapter 12: References

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