

The Parent Factor: Establishing Trust and Partnerships with the Most Influential Voice in the Middle East

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Panelists



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Today's Roadmap

🌟 **Why Parents Matter**

The pivotal role of parents in influencing student decision-making and long-term success

🚧 **Key Barriers to Parent Engagement**

Why parents remain an untapped resource in recruitment

❤️ **What Parents Care About**

Safety, quality & supportive environment

🤝 **Humanized Strategies (with Ethics)**

Trust-building through empathy, transparency, and respecting parental roles

📖 **Success Stories & Case Studies**

Examples of initiatives that boosted conversion, satisfaction, or retention through parent outreach

⚠️ **Avoiding Commodification**

Recognizing parents as partners—not customers—and avoiding purely transactional messaging

? **Q&A**

Open floor for discussion, questions, and shared insights



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An invitation and an opportunity to reflect on our responsibility in the industry

Our responsibility goes beyond generating leads and getting enrolments



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Context – The Role of Parents in MENA

- Parents are primary decision-makers, not just influencers
- Safety, trust, reputation and community matter more than rankings
- Quote from counsellor: “Parents make the final call. The student’s dream depends on their approval.”



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Why Parents Matter?

Parents = decision-makers, suggesting what kids should study, where (university, destination), or allowing them to study abroad

Influence every step: from vision → offer → enrolment → graduation

Students may guide what (program, university, country) → but parents often decide the whether and when

Heavy parental influence remains a key determinant in international enrolment decisions—especially in the Middle East → financial factor is crucial



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Real Scenarios:

How would you navigate this situation?

Scenario 1: At a fair in Dubai, a Pakistani father and his son approach your table. The father drives the conversation inquiring about engineering. The boy doesn't say a word.



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The Challenge: A Chance to Make a Positive Impact

Parents leading career and program conversations (Parents who show up without their kids at fairs opportunity or challenge?)

Parents prefer professional careers: Medicine, engineering, law

Educating parents is key (program diversity, career outcomes, early engagement → lower grades → institution's KSPs)

- Ask the student questions and try to give them the opportunity to talk, the chance to say what they really want



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Real Scenarios:

How would you navigate this situation?

Scenario 2: At a school visit in Jordan, a female student approaches your table. She expresses that her dream is to study in Canada, but her parents wouldn't allow her to go alone

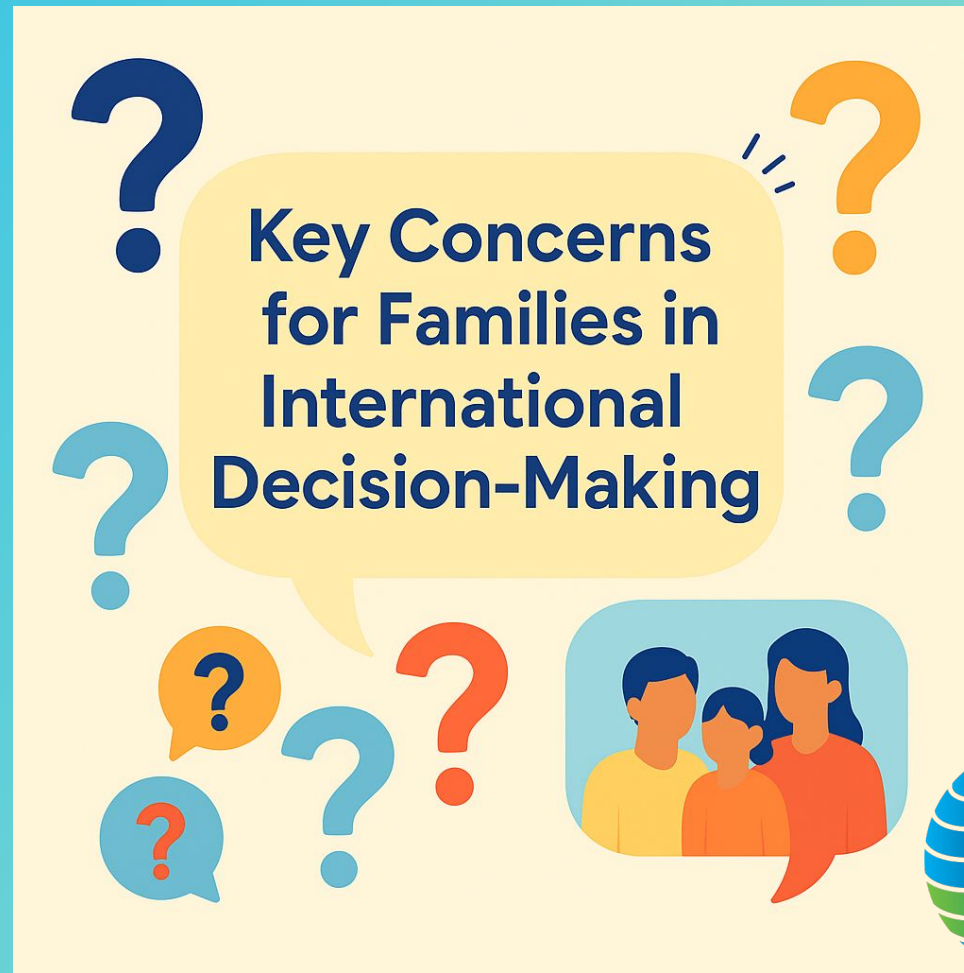


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Key Concerns for Families: Frame of Reference Theory



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Visa Processing & Family Support

"We don't understand the visa process—will the university help guide us?"



Religious & Cultural Inclusion

Will my child have access to prayer spaces?
Will Ramadan be respected?



Return on Investment (ROI)

Is this degree worth the cost? What are the job prospects after graduation?



Return on Investment (ROI)

3-year Post Graduation Work Permit



Mental Health & Wellbeing

What support is available if my child feels overwhelmed or homesick



Xenophobia & Discrimination

Will my child feel welcome and treated equally as a Middle Eastern student?



Country & Campus Safety

Is the city safe?
Will my child be protected on and off campus?



Career Outcomes & Alumni Success

Where are your graduates working now?
What internships or co-ops are available?

Barriers to Effective Engagement

Hard to reach parents directly → Communication gaps

Difficulty collecting parent leads → CRMs often capture only student data, leaving parents invisible

Language limitations (literal vs real understanding of universities abroad)

- Students filtering information (parents only hear part of the story)



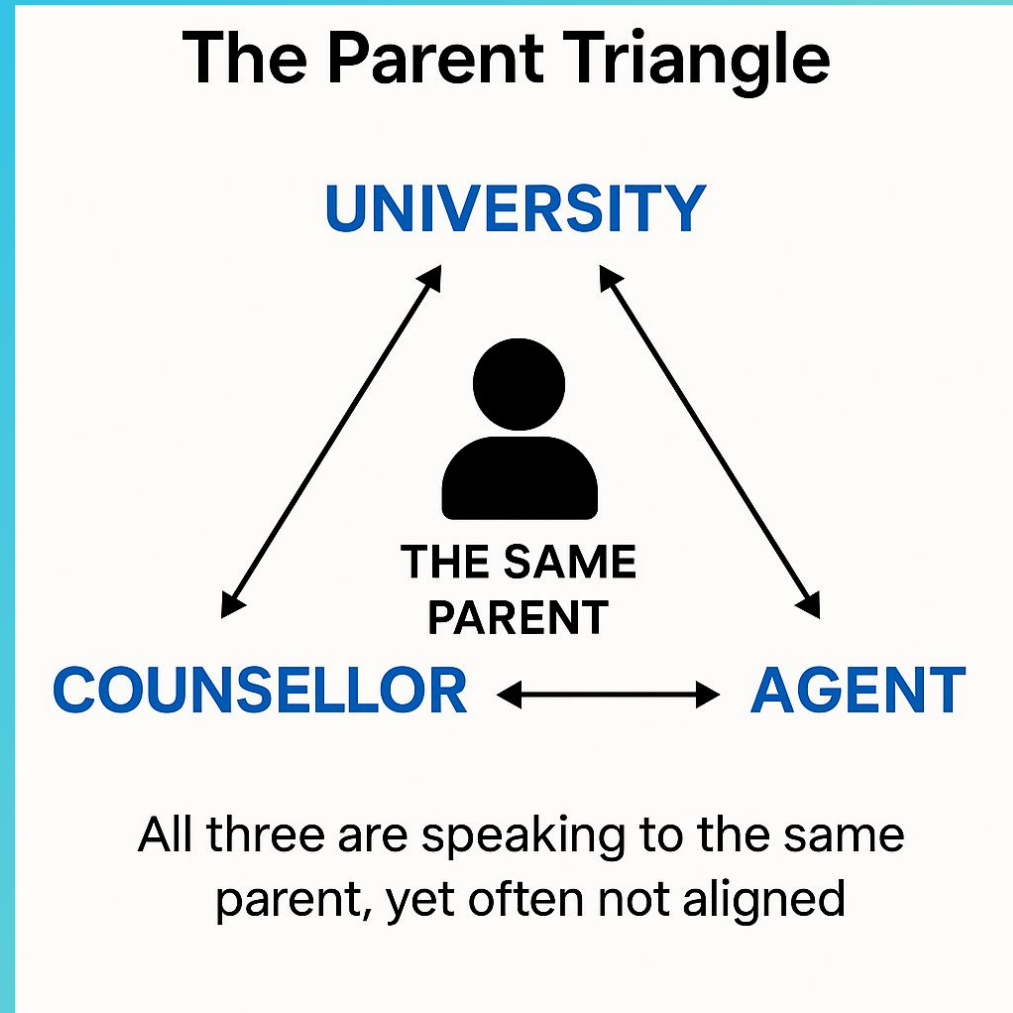
Institutions unsure how to communicate without overstepping or duplicating efforts (parental involvement norms vary; fear of disrupting agent/counsellor relationships or violating student autonomy)



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The Parent Triangle



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Aligning the Support System: Empowering agents and counsellors

 **Responsibility lies with the university** to proactively equip counsellors and agents to support families effectively. Without clear, consistent updates, families receive fragmented or incomplete information

Recommended Practices:

- Send **counsellor and agent newsletters** with a dedicated section for parent FAQs
- Host **virtual training sessions** and **parent-focused briefings** for agents and counsellors
- Share **translated materials** and **regionalized content** for greater impact (places of worship, eateries, cultural clubs)
- Provide **talking points or toolkits** on sensitive topics like housing, safety, and visa support

Bottom Line:

If parents are a key decision-maker in your region, they must be a strategic focus—**not an afterthought**



It Starts with Us: Empowering Parents Through Education

Context Matters

Many parents in the Middle East and beyond did not study in the host country (e.g., Canada, UK, USA, Europe), and may be unfamiliar with the academic, cultural, and visa landscapes their children are entering

First-Generation Families

For students who are the first in their family to attend university abroad, parental support is crucial—but often parents lack the information or confidence to navigate the process



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It Starts with Us: Empowering Parents Through Education (2)



Our Role as Institutions

We must bridge the knowledge gap by educating families



Why It Matters

When parents understand the system, they become empowered allies—not anxious barriers

Clear, proactive education builds trust, improves student confidence, and enhances yield and retention



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The Parent Engagement Gap

Many institutions are hesitant to launch parent-focused initiatives because **engaging parents often requires significant time, patience, and cultural nuance**

- Explaining unfamiliar systems (e.g., academic structure, application processes, immigration steps) to parents who didn't study in the host country can be **labour-intensive**
- **Institutional resources are often stretched**, and staff may not feel equipped to handle complex questions from parents across different languages or educational backgrounds
- There's a fear of “**opening the floodgates**”—once communication starts, how do you manage ongoing expectations and inquiries?

But Here's the Opportunity:

When done intentionally, even **small, scalable steps** can go a long way in **building trust** and **reducing repeated questions** down the line



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Building Trust: A Family-Oriented Approach

Trust is built over time

Family-first language: “Your child’s future matters. So does your voice because when families are informed, students thrive.”



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Being Human: Building Trust with Parents in a Transactional World



Why It Matters

In the age of mass emails, chatbot replies, and automated systems, families—especially in the Middle East—crave something more: authenticity. Human warmth, genuine respect, and personal attention often matter more than flashy brochures



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Being Human: Building Trust with Parents in a Transactional World (2)

🌟 Tone Matters

Use warm, humble, and affirming language in all communications. Avoid rigid or overly formal templates. Show families that they're speaking with real people who care

👂 Active Listening

Create space for parent questions

👤 Visibility & Familiarity

Feature staff, alumni parents, or current student-parent duos. Let families see who they are entrusting their child to. Use visuals—faces build comfort

🤝 Vulnerability & Empathy

Acknowledge their fears (e.g., visa stress, safety). Don't overpromise. Meet them with empathy. A simple "we understand this is overwhelming" can shift the tone entirely



Remote Tactics for Parent Engagement



Lead Generation Forms

Include a parent contact field on your university landing webpage to build early connections



Translated Offer Letters & Multilingual Materials

Build trust by delivering decision communications in the family's native language



Post-Offer Parent Welcome Letters

Personalized messages from deans or recruiters acknowledging the parent's role



WhatsApp “Parent Circles”

Create opt-in, university-managed groups for admitted families by region or language



Local Language Welcome Videos

Feature current students or staff greeting families and walking them through next steps



“What to Expect” Campus Guides

Outline logistics, housing, safety, and student life in family-friendly formats



Virtual Parent Sessions

Host Q&As or themed webinars to answer region-specific concerns



Alumni-Parent Stories

Highlight shared journeys to reassure and inspire trust



Localized Webpage for Parents

Central hub for translated content, FAQs, and how-to guides



Parent Newsletters

Regular updates on deadlines, tips, and transition resources tailored to families



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Meaningful Parent Engagement on the Ground

Admitted Student Receptions

Invite families to connect with faculty, students, and support staff in-person or virtually

Pre-Departure Sessions

Prepare families and students for life abroad—covering housing, travel, healthcare, academics, and safety

Religious & Cultural Moments

Acknowledge key moments respectfully—if hosting events during periods like **Ramadan**, be mindful of timing and tone.

Simple, inclusive gestures like **Eid or Diwali greetings** go a long way. Keep sessions broad and welcoming to families of **all faiths**

Alumni & Parent Panels

Feature graduates and their parents to build trust through lived experience. Especially powerful for parents of first-gen students

Career Futures Nights

Address the question on every parent's mind: *“What job will my child get?”* Highlight internships, co-ops, alumni outcomes, and employer connections

Translated & Tailored Materials

Distribute **“What Parents Ask Most”** flyers, FAQs, or brochures in Arabic, Hindi, and other regional languages. Tailor the message to family concerns



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Parent Outreach in Lower Grades

Challenge

Many students from the Middle East follow a narrow path (e.g., Medicine, Engineering, Business) because parents are unaware of broader academic options—or skeptical of their value

🧩 **Start Early: Engaging Parents to Diversify the Pipeline**

Opportunity: Early Parent Engagement

When parents are brought into the conversation early (Grades 9–11), institutions can:

- **Broaden perspectives** around programs like Environmental Studies, Arts, Humanities, Social Work, or Emerging Tech
- **Plant the seed** for future decisions—especially in younger siblings
- **Position the university as a long-term partner** in their child's journey
- Design pipeline events where families can meet **faculty, students, and alumni**



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The Silver Lining

Already making an impact

Our work is paving the path for generations to come. They will have access to these opportunities

Step by step. It's not an easy or short journey. Requires collective effort

Let's have a look at a couple of positive examples...



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Rahma from Saudi
Arabia, Forensic
Psychology
Global Leadership
Award winner
\$120,000 CAD
scholarship
**Do universities also
need to open more
doors?**

Father from Lebanon, asked to
convince her daughter to study
Computer Science in Canada.

**It boils down to trust and the
strong values parents have with
their kids**



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Beyond the map - power of showing up in forgotten cities

School in Al Ain:

- First-time visit by group of Canadian institutions
- School had no prior international exposure

Counsellor: *“Rocking the boat is part of our mission.”*

Takeaway: Go beyond Tier 1 cities — these families have means, but lack access



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We might not always be successful but it's the start of an important conversation

At least we try, and this is the essence of what we do

Let's share some practices and things we are currently doing in the market



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Discussion Questions:

What's one thing your team does well with parents?



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Discussion Questions:

Where do you see an opportunity for change?



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Global Case Study 1

Case Study: York University (Canada)

Dubai Admitted Students Family Reception

- **WhatsApp Messages in local language (Urdu/Hindi, and Arabic)**
- Red carpet, cupcakes, alumni speeches
- Parents + students celebrated together

Outcomes:

- 83/86 families attended
- 26 confirmed offers
- Parents left with trust + excitement about York



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The Ethics – Don't Commodify Culture

Ramadan and Eid are not PR moments

- Performative inclusion = Ramadan posts/events but time of event not adjusted
- Respecting diversity - not everyone is Muslim!

Authentic engagement = student success support + year-round inclusion

- Flexible deadlines
- Dietary accommodations
- Religious observance policies



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A Human-Centered Litmus Test

Don't reduce culture to hashtags

Posting #RamadanMubarak or sending tokenized gifts without real engagement risks performative allyship

True inclusion isn't seasonal or selective

It's not about visibility—it's about consistency, care, and cultural humility

Ask Yourself:

Would we do this if no one saw it?

If the gesture or initiative would still matter without public recognition, it's likely rooted in genuine care—not commodification



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A Human-Centered Litmus Test (2)



What This Means:

- Don't just post— **thoughtful engagement is crucial**. If it's Ramadan, are you acknowledging the moment **just on LinkedIn or during in-country events?**
- **Inclusion ≠ exclusivity**. Not all families celebrate the same holidays—**avoid centering everything around one group**
- Offer **quiet dignity**: Support families in ways that are meaningful to them, even if they don't photograph well



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Humanized Lead Collection

Opt-In Forms at Events or on Website

Collect parent contact info through paper forms, QR codes, or online landing pages

Always Include:

- Clear consent language and how their data will be used
- A respectful tone—avoid scraping or aggressive follow-up

Don't Miss This:

- **Monitor general inquiry inboxes**—many parents write in with questions that signal strong interest
- The real challenge? Timely follow-up
- Respond promptly and **redirect them to official lead forms** to bring them into your conversion pipeline



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Global Case Study 2

Case Study: University of Manchester (UK)

Initiative: Parent Webinars for offer-holders in the Middle East

- Hosted live webinars specifically for parents of offer-holders from the Middle East
- Included real-time Arabic translation to ensure accessibility and cultural relevance

Impact: Significantly higher parent attendance compared to previous English-only sessions

- Improved family trust, engagement, and support for student enrollment decisions
- Seen as an effective yield strategy in competitive markets like UAE and Saudi Arabia



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Global Case Study 3

Case Study: New York University (USA)

Initiative: Global Parents Network

- Monthly newsletters & webinars
- Topics: safety, career outcomes, academic support, student wellbeing

Impact: Helped parents feel seen and supported from afar

- Positive correlation with student retention and parent advocacy
- Strengthened retention + family trust

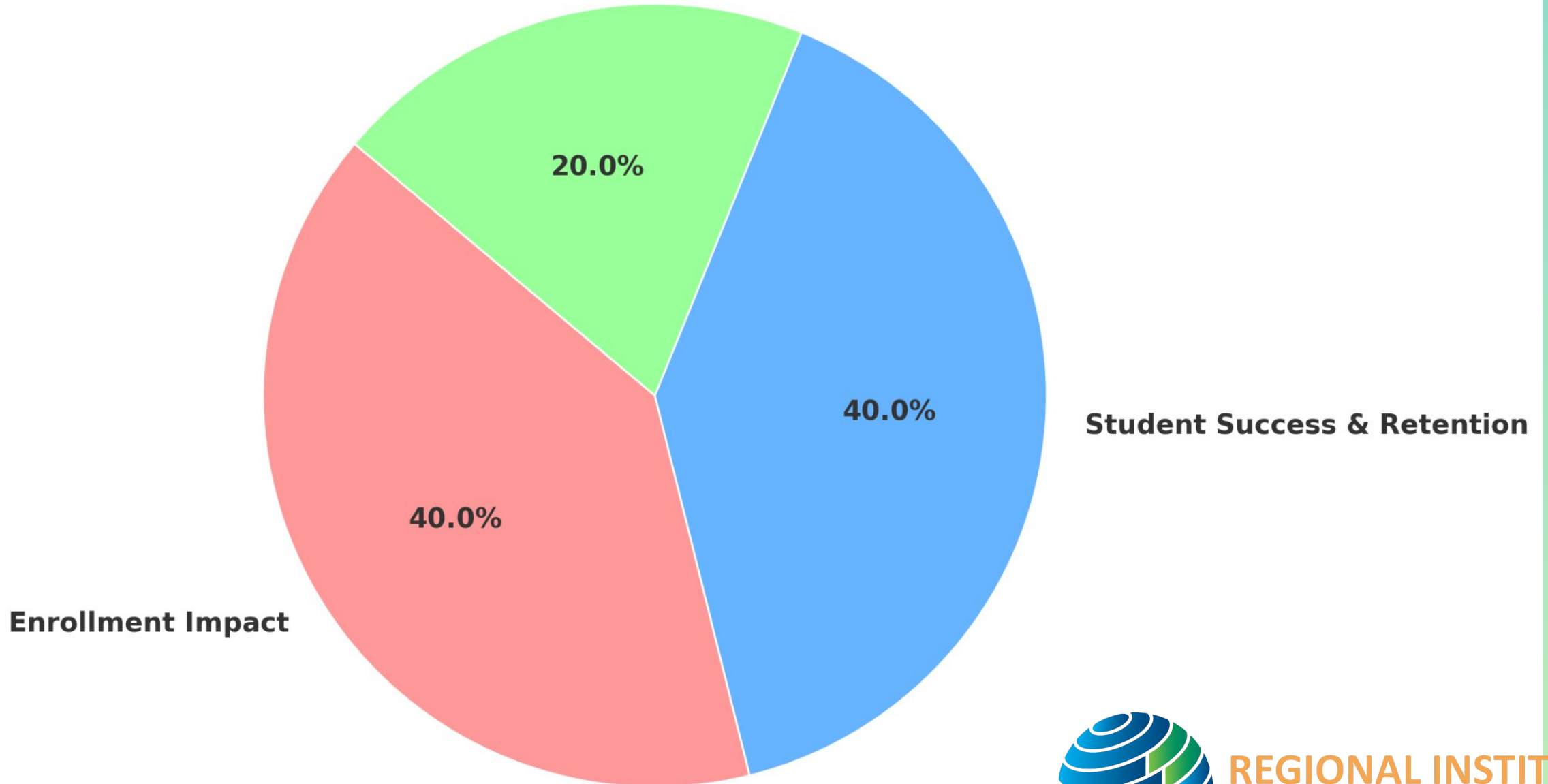


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Impact Areas of Parent Engagement

Fundraising Potential



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Impact of Engaged Parents

Enrollment: Institutions that actively engage parents see increased application and yield rates

Retention: Parents continue to play a role after enrolment: emotionally, financially, and logistically. **They become our allies.**

- **An engaged parent can be a silent success coach—helping students persist and thrive**

Alumni: Parent engagement builds long-term affinity and trust—key ingredients for future giving or advocacy



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Your Most Powerful, Untapped Recruitment Ally

When you win over a parent, you gain an advocate for life.

- Start small: one translated email, one parent Zoom, one new WhatsApp message
- Align with ethics
- Respect their voice in the process



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Final Takeaways

✓ Parents = Powerful Influencers

In MENA and beyond, parents are not peripheral—they are the most decisive voice in a student’s journey abroad

✓ Our Responsibility Extends Beyond Enrolment

Universities must move past a transactional mindset. Supporting families is part of student success, retention, and long-term advocacy

🚧 Key Barriers

- Communication gaps
- Inconsistent lead collection
- Underprepared counsellors and agents

✨ Actionable Solutions

- Leverage **cultural moments** and **multilingual outreach**
- Host **family-focused events** and **virtual touchpoints**
- Equip **counsellors and agents** to engage parents at scale

↺ Reframe the Approach

- Test messaging with a “**parent-first**” lens
- Prioritize **human, inclusive, and authentic** engagement
- Think of trust as the **new ROI**

🌐 Global Best Practices Show Impact

Programs that centre parent engagement report improved yield, satisfaction, and institutional reputation

💬 Navigating Interactions Thoughtfully

Build trust with warmth, transparency, and patience. Treat every parent as a potential long-term ambassador—not just a gatekeeper



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Conclusions

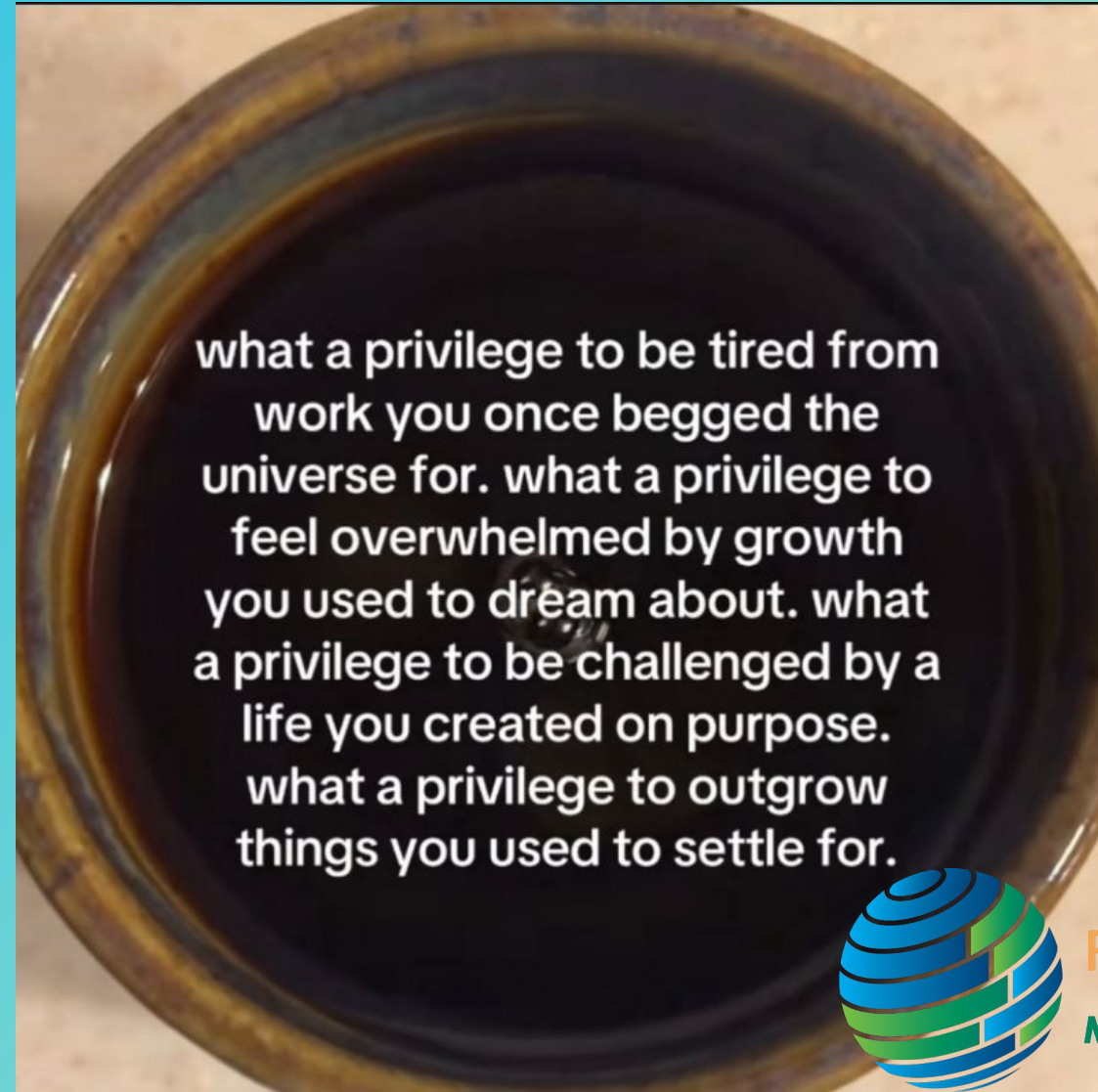
- If we change the parents' mindsets ultimately that will also be reflected in application and enrolment numbers
- Educating parents balances the need and demand for talent in different career fields, whilst we are making a positive impact and staying true to our mission
- Parents can be our advocates and allies when we nurture the relationship and build trust. **Parents trust each other (Word of mouth)**
- It's gonna take time but the impact goes beyond lead collection, application numbers and enrolments. **This is what we are here for.**



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Thank You



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Questions and Answers



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