Qatar and UAE: The Strategic Region for Malaysian Diaspora Economic Development

Siti Rugayah Hj Tibek, Jawiah Dakir, Maznah Ibrahim, Wan Kamal Mujani, Fariza Md Sham, Safar Hasim, Kamaruzaman Yusoff, Kaseh Abu Bakar, Zamri Ariffin, Badlihisham Mohd Nasir, Tamat Sarmadi, Nor Hafizah Abu Samah & Mohamad Zulfazdlee Abul Hassan

Institute of West Asian Studies, Institute of Islam Hadhari, Department of Theology and Philosophy, Center for General Studies, Department of Dakwah and Leadership, The National University of Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the views of Malaysians who reside in UAE and Qatar on the factors motivating them to work in these two countries. Various factors have motivated a number of Malaysians to migrate in search of a better livelihood in these two countries. Their views were obtained in interviews conducted. Respondents are divided into a few categories, company employees, embassy staff/officers and club members. This research finds that the dominant motivation factor is economic, that is, the high income, and other factors such as seeking experience in other countries, better education for children and seeking new challenges.

Key words:

Introduction

The West Asian Region is the focus area of Malaysians who reside and work overseas especially UAE and Qatar. This is due to the strategic attraction of the West Asian region in commerce, job opportunities and the fact that all the countries there are Muslim countries and registered with the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). The rapid economic development has attracted the interest of various nationalities to work there. Malaysians also choose to serve and reside in UAE and Qatar. In addition, there are Malaysian countries who cooperate with companies there to establish branches in these three countries being researched. This cooperation provides opportunities for Malaysians as well a locals and other nationalities to work there. In addition, relations between Malaysia and these two countries are also based on economic interest and cooperation among Muslim countries.

Materials and Methods

A qualitative research is one that is inclined to methods of data collection through observation or document content analysis. Among the general characteristics of this research are: involving field research, which is more focused on process rather than the results, inductive in reasoning leading to abstractions, concepts, theories and hypothesis, as well as being more focused on humans whether in terms of life, experiences and so on. There are three forms of qualitative analysis: content analysis, case studies and ethnography (Ahmad 2011). In this research, however, the method used is case studies. This research is based on social data for the purpose of examining social reality. It studies selected units assumed as representative of the whole bigger community. The selected unit can comprise of individuals, families, a social group, social institution or community. Two steps need to be taken in carrying out this form of research: the writer is required to have a deep background or theory of a matter or case being studied, and to avoid bias in data collection and analysis. On completion of questionnaire design, the researcher arranges a meeting with respondent to obtain information by interview.

Research Sample:

This research selects 15 Malaysians who work in UAE and Qatar. They are divided into a few categories: first, 3 individuals who work for Malaysian companies operating there, such as in construction, hotels, airline.
companies and so on; second, 7 individuals who work with Malaysian government agencies there such as the offices of the Malaysian embassy; and third, 5 individuals who are members of clubs formed at their workplace, comprising of workers and their spouses.

**Interview Method:**

Interview is defined as a two-way conversation to gain research information. It is a face to face interaction between the interviewer and the respondent. According to Denzin (2001) quoted in Chua (2006), an interview should be more than just a means of gathering information, it should be reflective of life as well as the reality of a certain phenomenon. The interview method is one whereby the subject and researcher are present in a process of obtaining information. It is used to obtain information, concerning facts, beliefs, feelings, desires and so on, required to achieve a research objective (Mohd Majid Konting, 2005).

Interview is the main method in survey study whereby it is done orally (conversation) and the answers are recorded by a researcher in writing or through cassette, video or other electronic recording. There are four main stages in an interview: preparation, creating a rapport, obtaining information and recording it. In order to facilitate the process, a researcher should identify the research objectives, determine the subjects, design the details of questions and train the interviewer. After each interview, the interviewer should write up a full transcript of the recorded interview. Then the researcher should re-play the recording to obtain suitable and significant matters in the interview as well as write it down using whole sentences in the interview log.

**Method of Data Analysis:**

The interview is transcripted verbatim and processed using the software Nvivo 8.0 (Lyn Richards 2008; 1999; Patricia et al 2000; http://www.lynrichards.org) to encode the themes and discussion topics. Analysis is done using descriptive and thematic approaches. The use of this software is to facilitate and expedite the process of managing, analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. In a qualitative research, the researcher usually faces the problem of abundant (dumping) data from various sources. Thus, this software helps to update data and obtain an overall analysis. The final part is report writing, which includes interpreting, reviewing and dissemination of research outcome based on the data obtained. The outcome and findings of the interview with the respondents are presented according to the structured topics. Research findings encompass factors of high income, employment opportunities and exploring new opportunities. In addition, factors such as children’s education also attracts respondents to work overseas. Among other factors are the physical and health facilities, national stability, no income tax, influence of friends, as well as the appreciation shown for Malaysians’ talent and professionalism by the nationals of UAE and Qatar. However, there are also respondents who work overseas because of feeling bored with working in Malaysia.

**Migration Theory:**

This article explains the factors which motivate respondents to work and reside in Gulf countries such as UAE, Qatar and Arab Saudi. The researcher divides the factors based on 2 migration theories related to the writings of Everett S. Lee (1987) and Todaro (1998).

According to Lee (1987) a decision to migrate frequently depends on the wishes of a person to improve one of the aspects of his life by seeking a better opportunity at the same time improving his standard of living (http://www.students.uni-mainz.de/kjissel/skripte/Lee.pdf). According to Lee there are 4 factors which require attention in a study of population migration:

i) Factors of place of origin
ii) Factors found in place of destination
iii) Obstacles
iv) Personal factors

The first and second factors show matters which limit the action of those who wish to migrate. Consideration is given to push and pull factors which exist in the place of origin and place of destination. As a rule, migration is influenced by pull factors which exist in the place of destination, such as industrial development, commerce, education, housing and transportation. This attracts the interest of people from other places to come with the hope that their wishes will be fulfilled.

The third factor, obstacles, refers to barriers or constraints to making a decision whether to migrate or not. The fourth factor very much determines a decision to migrate, depending on individual considerations in assessing the positive and negative factors of migrating.
According to Todaro (1998), migration is a process which very much influences each individual in terms of economy, social, education and demography. In addition there are a few non-economic factors which influence the desire of a person to migrate, such as the following:

i) Social factors such as desire to escape from the constraints of place of origin;

ii) Physical factors including the influence of climate and natural disasters such as floods and droughts;

iii) Demographic factors which include the decline of mortality that later accelerates population growth;

iv) Cultural factors which include building up sustainable relationships with kindred in the place of destination; and

v) Communication factors including quality of infrastructure, education system which is inclined to city life orientation and effects of modernisation caused by mass media or electronic media.

Results and Discussion

This part reports on the views of the reasons for migration to UAE and Qatar according to certain categories:

a. Company employees:

Those working in Malaysian companies operating in the said countries, have various factors which motivate them to do so. Most of them are motivated economically by the better remuneration package compared to home, the opportunity of an international education for their children, professional teachers and the boredom of working in their own country. This is asserted by respondent 1:

"In my view, the main factor is the job. Some choose to work, for example, as a pilot for Emirates Airlines. Other factors are looking for new opportunities, financial factor, opportunity for children to go to an international school, feeling bored with working in Malaysia, and so on".

The same factors are given by respondent 2 who states:

"Generally, I feel there are two factors. First, the financial factor. Most of the Gulf countries lack skilled workers, the fastest way is to get foreigners at the price they have to pay to get experienced workers. Moreover, in Gulf countries there is no income tax. Second, the education factor, International School education is provided by the company. It is a factor to give new experience to children, in the past we did not have a similar opportunity, but not forgetting Malaysia, that he originates from Malaysia, that he is Malaysian and religious experience too".

Respondent 3 who works with a tourism company operating in this country finds different and great challenges in working overseas as a motivating factor. She states:

"The motivating factor is the challenge and opportunity of working overseas. The big contribution of my job in travel and tourism, is in bringing Arabs from this region to visit Malaysia. Other than Arabs, we also have customers from other countries as the workers here are not only locals in UAE and Middle East. The other factor is the fairly lucrative salary".

b. Embassy Staff / Officers

Almost the same factors were given by the embassy staff in these countries. However, respondent 1 stressed on the aspect of offer and returns, in his statement:

"In my view, the motivating factor for Malaysians to live in Qatar is the job offer and the returns, financial as well as other benefits in terms of children’s education, for example. My view of these 2 human resource factors, offer and returns. Returns is in financial terms as well as self and family necessities. Some Malaysians working here are given benefits such as sponsorship of children’s education, housing allowance, car provision and so on. In addition, it is the Malaysian’s desire to look for better livelihood overseas”.

The same factor is given by respondent 2 who explains:

"The first factor is the job factor, there are many job opportunities here, but salary is the main factor because salaries here are more lucrative compared to in Malaysia".
Other than economic attraction of lucrative income, a comfortable standard of living also motivates the professional class to come and work here. This is stated by respondent 3 who works in Dubai as follows:

"According to statistics, there are 6,500 Malaysians here, probably half of them in Abu Dhabi and the other half in Dubai, but the statistics vary. Within the near future, I can see that the drawing factor is economic. I find the standard of living here quite comfortable but I'm not saying it is better, and the attraction factor is the salary, on the average the Malaysian community here are professionals compared to other foreign communities".

For respondent 4, the no income tax factor and housing provision in the contract are fringe benefits other than the factors already mentioned. He asserts:

"I feel that the main factor is the high and lucrative income, no income tax payable, housing provided as per the contract, all are on the company expenses, not on them. In terms of education, Malaysia is better. Some companies pay for school tuition fees and there are those who pay for their own, depending on the company. We in the embassy are given assistance up to only 1/3rd, not fully supported".

The same factor becomes a bigger motivation for respondent 5, besides the cheaper cost of necessities, lower crime rate compared to Malaysia, provision of housing and means of transportation, and guaranteed worker security. He explains at length:

"The main factor is economic, the more lucrative salary. Besides the salary scale, there is no income tax payable, so when the salary is high with no tax payable, the motivation is greater. There are many lecturers here such as in Human College, School of Economics and Abu Dhabi University, application is online, whether to government university or private. Most of the necessities are cheap, crime rate is low, when compared to Malaysia which has scary daily news, over here the enforcement agencies such as the police and authorities are firm and strict, as for example, there are many foreign labourers and students who are responsible for the crime in Malaysia, the foreign labour here is placed in labour camps, they go to the city to work and in the evening are transported by the company for return to the labour camp, they do not go out, except on holidays, but the enforcement is strict, if a labourer makes a pass at a woman, she can complain or if security sees them, he can question their relationship, why the foreigner tries to talk to her, the foreigner can be arrested. When enforcement is very strict, there is less crime and the situation is under control, many say crime is unreported but if enforcement is that deterring to the extent that we ourselves are afraid to talk, no one dares. Here you go directly to jail first, then try to prove innocence, there are many cases of lock-up and waiting and looking for a lawyer. In social terms, the low crime rate is a factor".

The manifold remuneration package together with the accommodation provided is an attraction to respondent 6, as expressed:

"The first which attracts is the money, second in terms of the offer is the great package not available in our country and they follow the UAE policy in encouraging the professional class to develop this country, half to develop UAE, as a business here in the construction, business and services sectors. The most obvious example is, the first people who come to UAE are the professional experienced pilots, and hundreds who come to UAE such as stewardesses because of the better and high salaries based on experience. Our QS come from Malaysia, architects who show their achievements such as in building Kuala Lumpur Convention Center (KLCC), Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), Petronas, are introduced here. When Malaysians who come here show their diligence, the pilots’ friends then pull other friends here opening opportunities to them. Lately, when a Malaysian company gets a business here, ignore the factor for coming, the company which gets a project here will bring in professionals and workers from Malaysia they will also appoint contractors from Malaysia such as for a project in building a horse race-course, the influx of Malaysians who come here get better salaries, a counter operator gets RM12,000 (Malaysian Ringgit) with accommodation, compared to RM1000 or RM2000 in Malaysia. That is the main attraction, the financial factor".

Other than the salary factor, another attraction is the appreciation for talent and professionalism, as respondent 7 states:

“In my opinion, most Malaysians work overseas for two pull factors, their salary, because the lifestyle here, people appreciate the talent and professionalism, Malaysian branding is very good especially for Middle East. People know about Malaysia as a Muslim country, Malaysian people very polite and very professional, most of
them are qualified from American universities, Commonwealth Universities and from Malaysian universities but they consider our professionalism and our talent. Furthermore we are Asians, we bring a long Muslim culture, we can deal very well with local people in terms of perfection, act and the way of doing business”.

c. Club members

For Malaysian club members, the factor given is synonymous with that given by staff of embassy and companies as above, reported as follows. Respondent 1, for example, states:

"Added value in term of monetary value because over here they can offer up to 6 or 7 times better than in Malaysia. The other thing is education for the children is the best, I personally feel is the best for every holding factor, part of monetary value, facilities also, first class medical and education facilities. I found the education for my children compared to Malaysian education, they go through a lot of changes as a person, thinking wise, everything to be plugged in, more exposed to their personal credibility because of school education, personal development is very good. This country is very peaceful and the people, they hold on to religious values, because they are the majority, we have nice culture, actually they respect Malaysia, they look up to Malaysia, this is my first time posted outside the country, I can see Malaysia more than words, I can see inside. We say many things about Malaysia which we say is political, but outside, we are very proud to be Malaysian especially the car, we are much respected, if you mention Malaysia, they say Mahathir, Mahathir factor. I realize what Mahathir has done to the country especially Mega project, KLIA also, I see the impact of KLIA, there is the window for the others to know Malaysia, once people come there, all my clique would say Malaysia is heaven why do you come here whether those who come back from a course or holiday in Malaysia. This is the second picture they see of Malaysia, one of the things I see as gateway to Malaysia is KLIA, it is very famous and it reflects our country which has a modern technology, we should be proud of it, KLIA is the first impression of Malaysia. The first reason why we are accepted is human resource, if we’re not good we cannot go out there, after going out we know our value, the value we have, in fact is high”.

Respondent 2 is of the opinion that the job market and high income are the main factors, aside from the factor of work location which is situated between east and west. He asserts that:

"In my view the first factor is economic, whereby the overall market for jobs and high income at this time is in the Gulf. Second, Dubai is well-known as a stop-over and tourist spot and transit point, because Dubai advertises itself widely to the world, its popularity attracts foreigners to invest and open businesses and offices in the Middle-East, called MENA (Middle East North Africa) particularly as a place of business. This is one of the factors. I work in Trafalgar Technician Service, a Scottish company, now managing the Dubai airport project, if I’m not mistaken a new airport, to be the world’s biggest airport, is being built. I got the experience when KLIA airport was being built, thus the expertise and labour is needed here”.

Respondent 3 added that more profitability for business is a big attraction factor, besides searching for experience and fine and healthy competition. He says the said factor is:

"First is the opportunity, when Dubai linked up with Abu Dhabi, capital of UAE, many opportunities arise as an attraction. Second, business is more profitable, salary is more than double, this is what attracts. Looking for work experience is also important, even though an Arabic country, it is very modern, we compete globally, when I was in Abu Dhabi University, I was only Malaysian Assistant Professor while there were many American professors employed, and even the Arabs recruited were American qualified. They want to impact the knowledge faster for their new generation, competition is there, although their method is different from ours. We have to adapt to the culture, but still feel proud because we are at the high level, we bring our name with us”.

The remuneration package includes better pay and allowances which is attractive to respondent 4, he says:

"The job opportunity and high income. That is the job opportunity package here. Usually it’s the salary. For the majority it’s the pay packet. Package usually means the salary if the person doesn’t know anyone. But for the person who has friends here, he is interested in the life and the time here. Package pays for time in school. Includes allowances. All packages for coming here are more attractive compared to staying in Malaysia”.

Other than the factor above which is shared by respondent 5, the factor of work-hours/ no overtime, less work load becomes an attraction. He explains:
"The main factor is the money because they offer a good package. Pay and package are all fine. On top of that, I think the first is really money. Most people come here to survive, no? It’s really the money. Once they are here I think the decision to stay longer is more for security and safety. Here crime is almost unheard of. Maybe the government’s not publishing in papers. But if you look, you never hear of it. If you walk around, all these people in Qatar just leave their car engines and just go in and go out again and the cars are still there. It doesn’t happen in Malaysia. That is the factor to stay here because of safety and security. In Malaysia, before you leave the house, you have to think of locking the house, locking the car if you are inside the house, and think whether the house is locked or not. So exactly, this is less here.

Other than that, the job has less work load. Here, it’s more focus. In Malaysia in one of my companies before, we become supermen, we do everything but here there is more focus, if you doing one area so focus on one area. So basically less work load, go home on time, no overtime, seldom hear of overtime. In Malaysia, to share my experience, if you go home at 5 pm, tomorrow you see the boss, he says you worked half day yesterday. They accept to stay 6, 7 o’clock. Over here no, at 3.30 pm people go home, stop thinking about work, tomorrow is another day. One thing you value, is time with family. In Malaysia you reach home at sampai rumah 7, 8 pm, no time for children, at least to tuck them in bed, the following morning they go off to school, we leave for work. Most companies provide schooling, give education assistance, give education support provide international school for our children, we can choose either British or American school”.

Research outcome from 15 respondents comprising of company employees, embassy staff and club members, find that the attraction factors for Malaysians to work in UAE and Qatar are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation Factor</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucrative Salary</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Factor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring new opportunities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and Health Facilities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Stability</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Income tax</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talent and professionalism appreciated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of friends</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bored with working in Malaysia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ten motivation factors for Malaysians’ migration to UAE and Qatar are as follows:

1. **Lucrative Salary:**
   - All of the respondents are of the opinion that the high salary offered as compared to Malaysia attracts them to serve in UAE and Qatar.
   - As example, an operator is able to earn income up to RM12,000 monthly as compared to only RM1,000 to RM2,000 a month in Malaysia.

2. **Job:**
   - Most of Malaysians working in UAE and Qatar comprise of professionals.
   - Implementation of UAE policy in encouraging professionals to develop their countries, including operating businesses, services, construction and commerce.
   - Experts from Malaysia are recruited because we have proven to the world that Malaysia also can produce infrastructure of international standard such as construction of Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).
   - UAE and Qatar still lack expertise. Thus, they are willing to pay a high price to hire skilled workers to mobilize national development.
   - Flexible working hours up to 3.30 pm daily compared to Malaysia, allows workers to have more quality time with family.
   - More job focus, less work load.

3. **Exploring new opportunities:**
   - There are also respondents who work overseas because they like challenges and exploring new opportunities. Indirectly widening their networking and gaining a more lucrative income compared to being in their home country.
   - The experience of working overseas is considered important because of competitiveness and also helps respondent to know himself and his country better.

4. **Education Factor:**
   - Children get to enrol in international schools. Indirectly, respondents take this chance to ensure they get better education. Compared to Malaysia, the education system in UAE and Qatar is more open, students are exposed to exploring new things and discovering their talents.
   - Respondents have a choice to enrol their children in British or American schools.
   - However, there are also respondents who feel that education in Malaysia is better and more suitable than in Arab countries.

5. **Physical and health facilities:**
   - The company pays for accommodation, vehicles and health services.
   - First class health services is given to workers.
   - Cost of necessities is cheap.

6. **National stability:**
The standard of living in UAE and Qatar is very comfortable.
The crime rate is low because of strict control by the authorities.
Thorough surveillance of foreign workers deters them from committing crime for fear of immediate imprisonment based on assumption of guilt until proven innocent.

7. No income tax:

- The high income offered with no income tax leads Malaysians to choose UAE and Qatar in search of a better livelihood.
- When there is no tax, cost of necessities becomes cheap.

8. Influence of Friends:

- Malaysians who have served there influence their friends to join them in UAE and Qatar for the promise of job opportunities and a more comfortable life.
- Malaysian workers open job opportunities to other Malaysians who have the expertise, particularly in the construction sector.

9. Appreciation of talent and professionalism:

- People in UAE and Qatar appreciate very much the skills / expertise of Malaysian workers / professionals.
- In addition, they look up to the progress that Malaysia has achieved in building KLIA and production of the national car.

10. Bored with working in Malaysia:

- There are also respondents who migrate to UAE and Qatar because of feeling bored working in Malaysia.

Conclusion:

Various factors attract the Malaysian diaspora in UAE and Qatar. The economic package factor is dominant. Various opportunities and economic attractions in these countries cause Malaysians and Malaysian companies to migrate there. The economic boom which continues to develop in the relevant countries makes it more convenient for them to rush and reside there. In addition, factors such as education, security, facilities and working conditions attract the diaspora even more. Even though the Malaysian economy is improving and rapidly developing, it is not sufficient to attract them to return to their homeland because the income there is more attractive and many times more than can be earned in their own country, Malaysia.

References

Lyn Richards, 2008. Teach-yourself NVivo 8: The introductory tutorials. tpt