

PROFILE AND CAREER ASPIRATION OF MALAYSIAN RETURNEES

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Abstract. *This study examined profiles and predictors of career aspiration of Malaysian returnees from European and non-European countries. This study, involving 226 returnees, was carried out in the industrialized areas of the Klang Valley, Johore Bharu and Penang, and the state of Sabah. Based on the Social Cognitive Career Theory and the Chaos Theory of Careers the study derived personal and environmental factors within the major groups of push-pull factors that served as the predictors. Most returnees from Europe came back from the United Kingdom while Australia, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Korea and the United States were the host countries outside Europe. A regression analysis showed the explanatory power of career aspiration for returnees from European countries was higher (33.9%) than that of returnees from non-European countries (29.1%). Push political and pull social factors were significant for the former, whereas push social, pull personal and pull family factors were stronger for the latter ones. The implications of these findings for human resource practices and suggestions for future research are discussed.*

Key words: *career aspiration, professional returnees, reverse brain drain, push-pull factors.*

1. Introduction

Malaysia launched the country's New Economic Model (NEM) in 2010 with the main goal to attain a status of high-income economy by 2020. The policy model has detailed out eight Strategic Reform Initiatives (SRIs) one of which is to develop, attract, retain, and increase the highly-skilled workforce in the various sectors of employment so as they are at par with the first-world talent base. Achievement of this target, which

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would move the nation towards doubling of the per capita income from USD7,000 in 2011 to USD15,000 - 20,000 per year in 2020 is dependent on the availability of high-skilled human capital. With a population of 30.3 million in 2014, which is expected to rise to 32.5 million by 2020 (Malaysia, 2014), the country has undergone tremendous developments at the turn of the century. Concurrently, Malaysia aims to be a major hub in higher education, commerce, and knowledge innovation in the Asian region through the setting-up of public and private universities, R&D centers, industrial zones, technology and science parks (Ismail & Osman-Gani, 2011). Nevertheless, there are formidable hurdles to overcome before this goal can be reached. At present, highly-skilled labour in Malaysia (25%) lags behind that in Taiwan (33%), Korea (35%) and Singapore (49%) (NEAC, 2010). To redress this problem, a potential source of highly-skilled labour has been identified in the Malaysian diaspora estimated at about 300,000 or 10% of the country's tertiary-educated workforce in the last decade (2003-2013). The country needs the diaspora to return to complement the existing pool of skilled workforce. From 1995 to 2013, a total of 2500 Malaysian professionals returned to Malaysia, and many more are expected to do so in the near future (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22610210>).

The subject of this study is a group of professional returnees who came back to Malaysia after working for at least one year abroad. This is essentially a 'reverse brain drain (RBD)' – another term of 'return migration' or 'repatriation'. The term 'professional' is based on Iredale's (2001) characteristics of professional migrants as individuals holding at least a college degree. Specifically, this study aims to compare i) the professional profiles of the returnees, *viz.*, those who came back from European countries and those returning from non-European countries, and ii) the predictors of career aspiration of the two groups. The next section of this paper continues with the research problem, followed by theories underlying career aspiration of returnees and a literature review. The methodological procedures undertaken are explained next, followed by findings. The paper ends with a conclusion, practical implications for global human resource development and management, and suggestions for future research.

The Research Problem

Three sets of circumstances are considered in the research problem: First, many studies of migration of professionals focus on seeking reasons for the out-migration such as for higher education and career opportunities (Danaj, 2006; Lee & Kim, 2009). However, few studies have been undertaken on the return migration of talented or skilled professionals, specifically studies that relate to career aspiration. Second, the available studies on career aspiration have been mainly conducted on groups of professionals who were employed in a single sector such as engineering (Bigliardi et al., 2005), medicine (She et al., 2008; Seetharaman & Logaraj, 2008), R&D (Petroni, 2000; Ismail & Ramly, 2010) and academia (Arokiasamy et al., 2011). Career aspiration from the perspective of transnational mobility of returnees from developed to less developed countries is

still under-explored. As the world is becoming interconnected and globalized, a rise in return mobility involving professionals of various backgrounds seems inevitable. Third, career aspiration is about desired goals in one's career. Hence, research on career aspiration of returnees investigating geographical movement from a country abroad to the home country in pursuit of specific career expectations is necessary. The need of such a study is to respond to a call such as by Doherty (2011) who is of the opinion that a better understanding of factors associated with expatriation and repatriation and the associated outcomes is vital to enhance knowledge in careers.

It is postulated that every migration flow produces a counter flow (Lee, 1966), and that every brain drain is a potential brain gain (Hunger, 2002). King's (2000) analysis stresses the push-pull model in its approach to explain RBD mechanisms in both individual and contextual or environmental situations. Push factors are repelling factors in the host country whereas pull factors are attraction factors associated with the destination (Schmidthals, 2010). This means that if an individual's needs are not satisfied in his present location, a move elsewhere would be considered (Dustmann & Weiss, 2007). Therefore, this study focuses on the influence of these push and pull factors on one of career outcomes, i.e. career aspiration. As such the research questions of this study are as follows: How do pull factors influence professional returnees' career aspirations? How do push factors influence professional returnees' career aspirations? How do individual factors influence professional returnees' career aspirations?

In initiating this research, the following background perspectives on the return of Malaysians from European and non-European countries were considered as an important facet of the profile which provides the basis for comparing the returnees from the two major groups: i) Among the European countries, the UK has been the traditional destination of Malaysians for higher education because of the historical ties between the two countries, Malaysia being a former British colony. Many Malaysian scholars chose to continue working in the UK after completing their studies while the UK has frequently been a destination for employment even for those who obtain their education locally. Other career destinations in Europe for Malaysians are Germany, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and Denmark; ii) The division between European and non-European host countries in this study was thought appropriate as the cultural and physical backgrounds of the European countries tend to be more homogenous while acknowledging the fact that countries outside Europe are culturally diverse and widely spread over vast regions such as Asia-Pacific including Australia and New Zealand, Africa and the continents of North and South America; iii) The transnational mobility for Malaysians to other countries outside Europe is relatively recent, after the government widened its economic and socio-cultural ties with a large cross section of countries that included the United States, the East Asian countries of Japan, China and Korea through the 'Look East Policy' (NEAC, 2010) and other countries in the Gulf region. Therefore, based on the above brief history of international relations between Malaysia and other countries it is appropriate to divide the returnees based on the two

groups of host countries when they were abroad. This is an important profile of returnees and understanding their profile would help Malaysia in formulating policies in sending future professionals who aspire to work abroad and in accepting them to return.

The choice of returnees from European and non-European countries was supported based on perspectives of comparative methodology in the social sciences. Comparative studies involving countries lie on a continuum (one country, few countries and many countries involved) (Lor, 201, p. 8) and therefore the major differences at the two ends of the continuum depend on the number of countries covered and the degree of details of analysis. Landman (2008 cited in Lor, 2011, p. 8) further indicates that the continuum can also be looked at from another angle: the level of abstraction. The more countries are included in the study, the higher the level of abstraction (or the less detailed it becomes). Generally, a study of a single country can be very intensive and conducted in considerable detail, but the more countries there are, the less intensively each one will be studied. The present study is precisely a comparison made among the returnees in a single country (Malaysia); however, the comparison was based on the background of the host country: European and non-European. The choice of this comparison is further supported using Sartori's (1991 cited in Lor, 2011, p. 15) assertion that entities to be compared should have both shared/similar and non-shared/non-similar attributes. The history of Malaysia with many countries abroad creates the division between traditional versus non-traditional bilateral relations in economy, education, and politics, or European (shared attributes) and non-European countries (non-shared attributes). Furthermore, the choice of comparison made is compensated by the strength that the respondents of the research come from one country and the diverse nature of European and non-European countries, which are the host countries of the returnees, further adds strength to the study.

2. Literature Review

Career Aspiration Defined

Career aspiration is about an individual's interest and hope of what he or she sees as promising prospects for future career. Career aspiration is an aspect of the internal dimension of career that determines the success of a career (Ismail & Ramly, 2010), which dwells well with the concept of self-initiated action. Features of the internal careers are important as they will explain employees' satisfaction, devotion, orientation, and involvement within an organization (Bigliardi et al., 2005; Ituma, 2006). Career aspirations in this study were conceptualized based on Schein's (1996) career anchors, namely technical/functional competence; managerial competence; job security, geographical security; sense of service; pure challenge; lifestyle integration; and entrepreneurial creativity. This conceptualization of career aspiration was chosen because it forms a strong self-concept which holds features of internal career together even as in-

dividuals experience unexpected changes in their external career. Hence, career aspirations are significant in one's career development because they influence career choices, affect decisions on career mobility, shape an individual's career path, determine views of the career future, influence the selection of specific occupations and work settings, and influence individuals' reactions to their work experiences (Schein, 1996).

We argued that career aspirations may be triggered externally and possibly intensified as a result of events occurring in the home country (pull factors) such as economic crisis. Examples of pull factors are the Malaysian government's economic stimulus packages and career opportunities provided under various schemes for returnees. It is thus crucial to know the returnees' career aspirations before opportunities are available for their career development. A study by Bigliardi et al. (2005) shows that RSETs, particularly engineers, have diverse career aspirations and have a strong need for growth and personal development.

Theories

This study adopted two theories as its underlying theoretical foundation. They are the advanced version of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent & Brown, 2006) and the Chaos Theory of Careers (CTC) (Bright & Pryor, 2011). Justifications for choosing these theories are based on the functional meaning and the strengths of the theories in relation to the phenomenon of career aspiration and the subjects of the research, the professional returnees. The SCCT postulates that the development of positive career development depends on an individual's experiences resulting from interactions between environmental (e.g., push and pull factors and their influence on outcome expectations) and personal factors (e.g., individual characteristics such as age, duration with the job, the location of the job based on countries) (Rogers et al., 2009). Therefore, the SCCT is chosen because career aspiration becomes the core problem investigated in the study and the theory succinctly explains that career aspiration is one of the ultimate outcome expectations resulting from the influences of environmental factors that include push and pull factors in the host and home countries.

The second theory of CTC (Bright & Pryor, 2011) emphasizes four constructs, *viz.*, complexity, change, chance, and construction as fundamental bases in career development. Complexity emerges when there is a multiplicity of influences in career decision that range from parental influence to traditions, politics, climate, and health. In addition, cultural changes due to economic progress may affect the career decisions of an individual, which may come in terms of chance or luck, which is out of one's control. Hence, one would actively construct his career instead of relying on the linear nature of cause and effect (Bright & Pryor, 2011). As such, the CTC advocates the acceptance of uncertainties and unplanned events, whether in the host country or in one's homeland, which are termed as push and pull factors, as among the ways a returnee's career aspiration might be affected. As such push-pull factors were suitable based on CTC. The basic idea is that RBD is initiated in the host country because of push factors, specifically the

economic instability, political disturbances, and environmental disadvantages. The pull factors, on the other hand, include job opportunities, better medical care, personal and family ties in the homeland (Kirkwood, 2009; Parkins, 2010). Those who are pushed into re-migration are simultaneously pulled by the aspiration of finding a better career elsewhere, particularly the homeland.

Predictors of Career Aspirations

The experience with migrants in the UK indicates that a significant number of them eventually return to their home countries. As an example, more of Australians in the UK now are moving back to Australia on the realization that their home country is actually part of Asia where economic growth is vibrant and career opportunities are bright. Young Aussies are exploring Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan and China, rather than the UK or other European countries, for expanding business and trading partnership (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine>). Similarly, New Zealand migrants both in the UK and elsewhere found strong pull factors that led to a predisposition for them to return home (Lidgard & Gilson, 2002; Chabana et al., 2011).

Moreover, many migrants of East Asian origin, Chinese, Koreans and Japanese, return to their homelands after residing abroad for several years because of a yearning for a working environment with a cultural familiarity (Chen, 2003; Saxenian, 2007). For Malaysians, family ties are the main reason for their return. The fast growing Asian economies such as the Philippines, Taiwan, and Malaysia are actively enticing their professionals abroad to contribute to the homeland (Hydrogen, 2013).

The Human Capital Theory (HCT) (Schultz, 1971) contends that individuals and society derive economic benefits from investments in people skill. Human capital is also known as the personal qualities that accumulate stocks of productive knowledge and technical skills (Dobbs, Yun & Roberts, 2008; Krzeslo, 2009) resulting from level of education and adaptive capability to a different country environment. Human capital of the returnees was accumulated through formal and informal learning, social interactions and hands-on experience in the host country (Bijwaard & Wang, 2013), which takes a certain duration of time to see its impact on the returnees. Hence it is logically deduced that human capital accumulation has some bearing on returnees' duration of staying abroad and, consequently, to their career aspiration.

Based on the theories discussed above and the related literature review, a research framework (Fig. 1) was developed for this study. Personal and environmental factors (of push and pull factor groups) as well as an individual characteristic (duration of staying abroad) served as the independent variables, with career aspiration of returnees as the dependent variable.

The hypotheses developed for this study are:

- H1: Push factors significantly influence professional returnees' career aspirations.
- H2: Pull factors significantly influence professional returnees' career aspirations.
- H3: Duration of staying abroad has significant relationship with professional returnees' career aspirations.

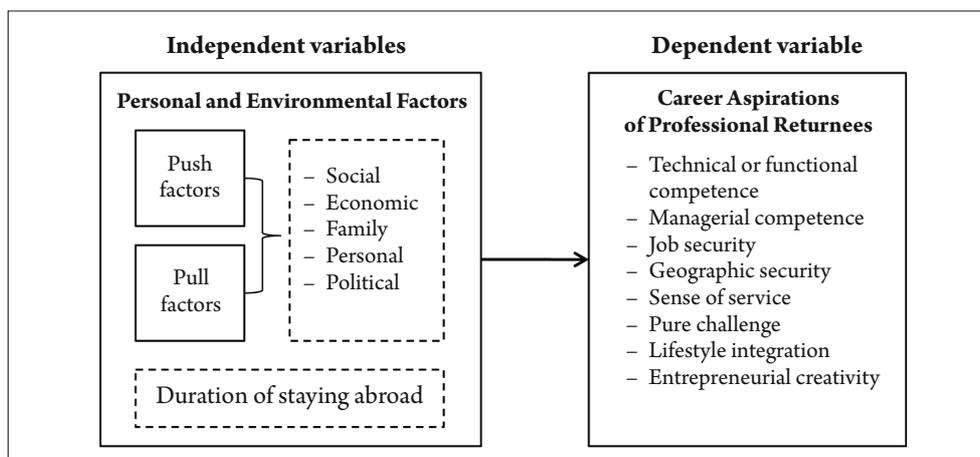


FIGURE 1. Conceptual framework showing the independent and dependent variables

3. Methodology

European countries in this study refer to countries that are members of the European Union (http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index_en.htm), together with Russia, Switzerland and Turkey. Non-European countries refer to countries in North and South America, and those in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Japan, Taiwan, China, Australia and New Zealand, various countries in the African continent, the Arab Gulf states such as the United Arab Emirates, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The study drew upon a population of 2,500 returning Malaysian professionals from 1995 to 2013 when the country launched brain gain programs such as the Return Expert Program (REP). Respondents were identified based on a randomized cluster sampling of institutions comprising ministries, R&D institutions, government-linked companies, hospitals, universities, business firms, science parks and MNCs located in the industrialized areas of the Klang Valley, Johore Bharu and Penang in Peninsular Malaysia, and in Sabah. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire through group administered and email questionnaire surveys.

The study sample size was determined using Raosoft and G*Power softwares. The Raosoft software (http://www.raosoft.com/sample_size.htm) yielded a sample size of 334 while G*Power (Faul & Erdfelder, 1992) method suggested 178 respondents. Therefore, the sample size required was in the range of 178 to 334, and we decided to take the middle point of $(178 + 334)/2 = 256$. This was the total of questionnaires distributed; and the total completed and usable was 226 giving a response rate of $226/256 \times 100 = 88.3\%$. This is considered reasonably high in a survey research (Babbie, 2001).

The study used descriptive analysis to portray the profile of the respondents, level of their responses on the push-pull factors and career aspiration. The inferential statistics

of Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the correlation among the variables, and multiple linear regression (MLR) was also used to examine the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable of career aspiration. The MLR was chosen instead of other techniques of inferential statistics due to the following reasons: i) MLR is the basic tool to measure prediction of the influence of predictor variables on a criterion variable; ii) the study used established measurements to measure push-pull factors and career aspiration, however, the instruments have been used mainly in the western countries but to a very limited extent in Malaysia; and iii) the study was not intended to examine the effect of an intervening variable such as moderator or mediator in the prediction analysis; hence it did not require an advanced regression technique.

The instruments consisted of five sections: (i) background of returnees, (ii) history of leaving Malaysia, (iii) push and pull factors comprising 40-items scored on a 5-point Likert scale based on Gmelch's (1983) model of push and pull factors, and on factors associated with return migration by Baba and Sanchez (2012); Roman and Goschin (2012); and Minta (2007), (iv) career aspiration measured by the Career Anchor Inventory developed by Schein (1975), adapted from Igarria et al. (1991), and (v) socio-demographic profiles. Push factors were measured using eight items, and examples of items are "Economic turbulence in host country", and "Limited nurturance of own culture". Pull factors were measured using 11 items, and examples of items are "Growth in development hubs (e.g., Iskandar Region in the southern Johore)", and "Opportunities in policy making". A total of 15 items were used to measure career aspiration. Examples of items to measure career aspiration are "I have always wanted to start and build up a business of my own" and "A career is worthwhile only if it enables me to lead my life in my own way".

Validity and Reliability

Content validity of career aspiration instrument was determined through feedback of 13 respondents in a pilot test. The validity of the push and pull factors constructs was tested by factor analysis. Twenty items of the push factors scale and 20 items of pull factors scale were analyzed using principal component analysis factoring and varimax rotation to examine the factor structures of the scales and items with factor loading (Kainth, 2009) as it maximizes the sum of the variances of the squared loadings within each loading matrix. Exploratory factor analysis was performed to examine the factor structures of the push and pull factors scales, and to select the items with high factor loadings. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .822 for the push factors scale, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant $\chi^2_{(df\ 190, n = 226)} = 2330.598, p < .001$. The KMO was .787 for the pull factors scale and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant $\chi^2_{(df\ 190, n = 226)} = 1933.564, p < .001$. KMO values between 0.5 and 1.0 indicate that the

factor analysis technique is appropriately used. These results indicated that both the push and pull factors correlation matrices were suitable for factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Five factors' eigenvalues were found greater than one for the push factors scale. The items loaded on five separate factors (social, personal, economic, family, political) explained 66.03 % of total variance. The results also indicated that five factors' eigenvalues were greater than one in the pull factor scale. The items loaded on five separate factors (social, personal, economic, family, political) explained 63.10% of total variance, showing that the scales were valid. The Cronbach's Alpha values of the questionnaire are shown in Table 5.

4. Results and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents

The 226 respondents were divided into two groups depending on whether they had returned from European or Non-European countries with the sample sizes of 115 and 111, respectively. Table 1 indicates most returnees were aged between 24 and 39 years, with the average age of returnees from European and non-European countries being 38.5 and 35.8, respectively. This implies that respondents for both regions were mainly young and middle-aged professionals. Based on the generation theory (Srinivasan, 2012) these average ages are the beginning of Generation X, a generation cohort characterized by values such as realistic, self-reliant, entrepreneurial, independent, market-savvy, and techno-literate, who seek a balance between work and leisure. Male respondents constituted more than half of the samples from Europe (63.85%) and non-European (55.9%) countries, a common profile of repatriation based on gender (Doherty, 2013). Among returnees from Europe, 53.9% were graduates with Bachelor's degrees, 17.4% had Master's degrees, and 8.7% held PhD degrees. Similarly for returnees from non-European countries, 49.5% had Bachelor degrees, 20.7% Master's degrees and 9.9% PhDs. There were others who held professional qualifications in areas such as accounting, medicine and engineering.

Table 2 shows accounting and finance topped the list (20.9%) in terms of employment sector, followed by medicine (13%) among professional returnees from Europe. Other returnees were lawyers, retailers, hoteliers, computer programmers, and graphic and fashion designers. The large number of returnees in finance was due to their having been enrolled as students in prestigious business schools, especially in the UK, such as the London School of Economics, or their having worked at international financial firms like PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst and Young in the UK or KPMG in the Netherlands (Talent Corp Malaysia, 2011). Their related experiences in banking and financial services of the returnees are being capitalized on by the Malaysian financial sector.

The majority of professionals returning from the non-European countries were in the medical (18.9%) and services sectors (12.6%). The professionals were nurses, doctors, consultants, pharmacists, and therapists. The largest group was those returning from Australia and Saudi Arabia (Fig. 3B). Saudi Arabia ranked 26th and Australia 32th of the world ranking for medical sector (Rafei, 2007) based on technological advancement. Malaysians returning from Japan included those who had worked in the automobile industry and others were in the oil and gas industry.

The increasing demands for IT specialists from the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries such as Canada, Australia and US had also attracted professionals to migrate in the first instance (Nawab & Shafi, 2011). The US and Australia are countries that are popular with migrants who have expertise in oil and gas, finance, life science, law and technology (Hydrogen, 2013). At the same time, the Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and United Arab Emirates are important destinations for Malaysian professionals in the burgeoning gas sector.

TABLE 1: Profile of Returnees from European and non-European Countries

Profile	From European Countries (n=115)		From Non-European Countries (n=111)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Age group				
24-31	23	20.0	35	31.5
32-39	50	43.5	48	43.2
40-48	28	24.3	19	17.1
49-56	14	12.2	9	8.1
Mean	38.5		35.8	
SD	7.8		6.9	
Gender				
Male	73	63.5	62	55.9
Female	42	36.5	49	44.1
Marital status				
Bachelor	30	26.1	38	34.2
Married	73	63.5	68	61.3
Widowed	5	4.3	3	2.7
Divorced/Separated	7	6.1	2	1.8
Highest level of education				
Post-secondary education	6	5.2	2	1.8
Bachelor's degree	62	53.9	55	49.5
Master's degree	20	17.4	23	20.7
PhD degree	10	8.7	11	9.9
Other professional qualifications	17	14.8	20	18.0

TABLE 2: Profile of Returnees by Employment Sector and Occupational Group

Employment Sector and Occupational Group	From European Countries (n=115)		From Non-European Countries (n=111)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Employment sector				
Accounting and Finance	24	20.9	11	9.9
Production	4	3.5	7	6.3
Services	12	10.4	14	12.6
Medicine	15	13.0	21	18.9
Own a business	7	6.1	7	6.3
Construction	8	7.0	5	4.5
Education	10	8.7	12	10.8
Social Science-based	3	2.6	3	2.7
Engineering	8	7.0	6	5.4
Science-based	1	0.9	5	4.5
Architecture	5	4.3	-	-
Others	18	15.7	20	18.0
Occupational group				
CEO/Director	9	7.8	10	9.0
Manager	7	6.1	7	6.3
Accountant	4	3.5	3	2.7
Medical professional	15	13.0	15	13.5
Academician	12	10.4	17	15.3
Architect	5	4.3	1	0.9
IT professional	7	6.1	9	8.1
Researcher	1	0.9	7	6.3
Engineer	15	13.0	15	13.5
Fresh Graduate- Bachelor/Master/PhD	2	1.7	6	5.4
Others	38	33.0	21	18.9

Mobility Profile of the Returnees

Table 3 shows more than 40% returnees leaving for European countries between 2006 and 2012. The reasons cited were to gain international experience (75.7%), higher salaries abroad (64.3%) and higher quality of life (52.2%). For emigrants to the non-European countries, a majority of respondents left between 2006 and 2012. Malaysian professionals migrated earlier to European countries compared with those who left for non-European countries.

The increasing number of returnees in recent years (52.2% and 65.8%, respectively) could be due to provisions in the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) that provided for incentives to return. The Talent Corporation acted to attract diaspora talent by offering tax incentives, job opportunities and permanent residence to the spouses of the returnees. In addition, the establishment of Technology Parks in several Malaysian

states persuaded many technology-savvy professionals to contribute their accumulated knowledge, experience and skills. Strong family ties were another reason returnees decided to return after staying abroad. Emigrants to non-European countries tended to stay in the host country for a shorter period as compared with those from the European countries owing to visa and security issues (Saxenian, 2007).

TABLE 3: Mobility Profile of the Returnees

Mobility Profile	From European Countries (n=115)		From Non-European Countries (n=111)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Year of migration				
1985-1991	1	0.9	-	-
1992- 1998	13	11.3	3	2.7
1999- 2005	52	45.2	46	41.4
2006- 2012	49	42.6	62	55.9
Year of return				
1995- 1998	4	3.5	-	-
1999- 2003	10	8.7	6	5.4
2004- 2008	41	35.7	32	28.8
2009- 2013	60	52.2	73	65.8
Duration of staying abroad (years)				
≤1.99	4	3.5	17	15.3
2.00- 5.99	89	77.4	79	71.2
6.00- 9.99	18	15.7	13	11.7
≥10	4	3.5	2	1.8
Mean	3.8		3.2	
SD	2.2		2.0	
Reasons for leaving Malaysia (Frequencies and percentages are not additive)				
Higher salary abroad	74	64.3	91	82.0
Better job opportunities	42	36.5	42	37.8
Better in career development	31	27.0	46	41.4
Higher quality of life abroad	60	52.2	59	53.2
Accompany family members	15	13.0	14	12.6
Lack of suitable employment in Malaysia	18	15.7	26	23.4
Political reasons	15	13.0	10	9.0
Lack of continuing education opportunities	32	27.8	15	13.5
To gain international experience	87	75.7	84	75.7
Social injustice in Malaysia	24	20.9	17	15.3
Others	16	13.9	20	18.0

Figures 2a and 2b show the distribution of respondents by 15 European countries and 19 non-European countries. The UK was host to the largest number of returnees. This was due to the fact that the country emerged as a leading European technology hub following the launching of the Silicon Roundabout. Australia followed by Saudi Arabia,

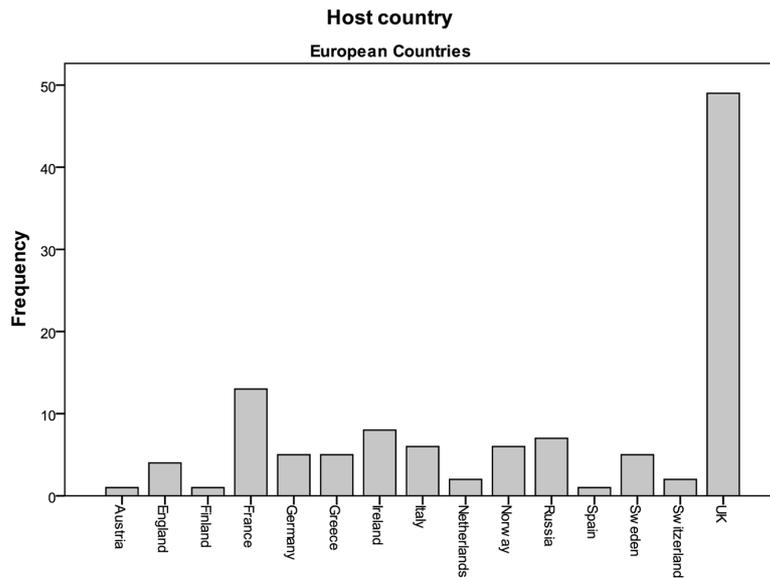


FIGURE 2a: Distribution of Respondents in European Host Countries (n=115)

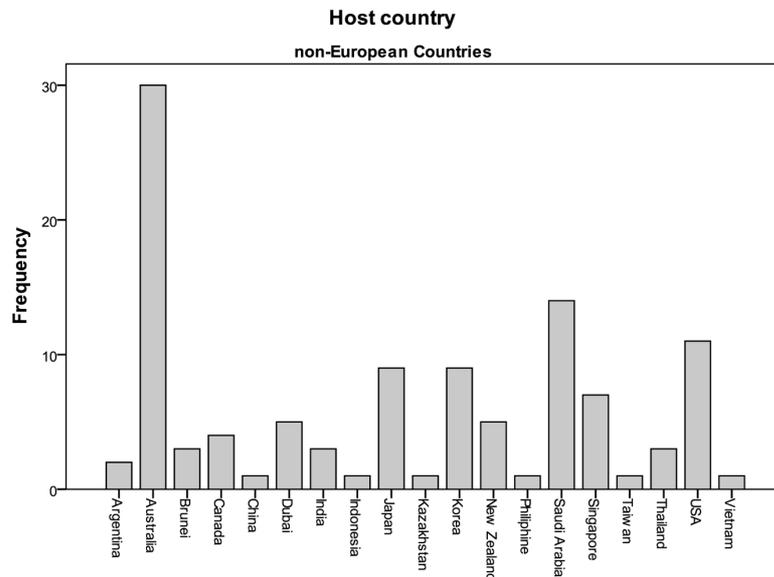


FIGURE 2b: Distribution of Respondents in non-European Host Countries (n=111)

the United States, Japan and Korea were countries outside Europe with high numbers of returnees. Professionals chose to work outside Europe owing to their specialization in oil and gas in the Gulf countries, and in the life sciences in some of the other countries (Hydrogen, 2013).

Levels of Push and Pull Factors, and Career Aspirations

Table 4 indicates that more than half of the respondents reported a moderate level of push factors for their return from European and non-European countries (53.6% and 50.5%, respectively). In addition, returnees from European and non-European countries responded to a moderate level of pull factors (69.6% and 65.8%, respectively). This implies that government programs like the Returning Expert Program and the Brain Gain Program have the potential to entice expatriate Malaysians to return regardless where they are.

About 61.7% of the respondents who had returned from European countries indicated career aspiration as a moderate influencing factor in their decision to return, while 50.5% returnees from non-European countries were highly motivated by career aspiration. For instance, returnees from European countries looked forward to merely moderate job security and a moderate lifestyle. A t-test and an analysis of variance (ANOVA), however, found no significant difference in career aspiration between re-

TABLE 4: Levels of Push and Pull Factors, and Career Aspiration

Variable		Returnees from European Countries (n=115)		Returnees from Non-European Countries (n=111)	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
		Min= 1.00 Max= 3.85	M= 2.39 SD= .70	Min= 1.15 Max= 3.80	M= 2.33 SD= .61
Push Factors	Low (1.0-2.33)	50	43.5	52	47.7
	Mod(2.34-3.66)	61	53.6	55	50.5
	High (3.67-5.0)	4	3.5	2	1.8
		Min= 1.30 Max= 4.70	M= 3.12 SD= .68	Min= 1.80 Max= 4.70	M= 3.28 SD= .60
Pull Factors	Low (1.0-2.33)	13	11.3	7	6.3
	Mod (2.34-3.66)	80	69.6	73	65.8
	High (3.67-5.0)	22	19.1	31	27.9
		Min= 2.25 Max= 5.0	M= 3.56 SD= .62	Min= 2.25 Max= 5.0	M= 3.66 SD= .60
Career Aspiration	Low(1.0-2.33)	1	0.9	1	0.9
	Mod(2.34-3.66)	72	61.7	54	48.6
	High (3.67-5.0)	43	37.4	56	50.5

Note: Mod=moderate

TABLE 5: Correlation Matrix of Independent Variables and Career Aspiration (n=226)

Variables	Mean	SD	Y	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄	X ₅	X ₆	X ₇	X ₈	X ₉	X ₁₀	
Y CA	3.56 3.67	.62 .60		-										
X ₁ Push actor Social	2.08 2.12	.85 .79		.015 .233*	.850									
X ₂ Personal	2.88 2.74	.90 .93		.209* .168	.660** .566**	.639								
X ₃ Economic	2.72 2.52	.99 .86		.062 .090	.797** .558**	.692** .576**	.744							
X ₄ Family	2.19 2.27	.90 .83		.007 .083	.358** .253**	.439** .147	.307** .138	.462						
X ₅ Political	2.27 2.15	.75 .80		-.314** -.030	.689** .557**	.474** .406**	.714** .588**	.418** .382**	.710					
X ₆ Pull Factor Social	3.50 3.55	.92 .66		.422** .391**	.547** .432**	.661** .528**	.620** .378**	.414** .227**	.354** .303**	.669				
X ₇ Personal	3.70 3.75	.80 .70		.387** .425**	.302** .286**	.458** .541**	.407** .246*	.300** .180	.156 .237**	.629** .725**	.597			
X ₈ Economic	3.25 3.32	.84 .75		.232** .201*	.373** .155	.369** .320**	.498** .303**	.176 .006	.239* .305**	.477** .497**	.503** .344**	.694		
X ₉ Family	2.62 2.91	.90 .88		.273** .450**	.246** .264**	.339** .295**	.233* .139	.195* .204*	.059 .131	.369** .420**	.222* .394**	.437** .349**	.649	
X ₁₀ Political	2.67 3.01	1.0 .90		.356** .362**	.437** .421**	.447** .441**	.439** .278**	.277** .155	.167 .351**	.683** .694**	.667** .607**	.587** .537**	.376** .550**	.785
X ₁₁ Duration abroad	3.75 3.15	2.16 1.98		-.030 -.001	-.243** -.154	-.332** .014	-.289** -.069*	.061 -.051	-.138 .031	-.163 .087	-.028 -.007	.169 -.004	.032 -.118	.004 -.118

Notes: CA – Career Aspiration

*Significant at p < 0.05 (2-tailed), **Significant at p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

Returnees from European countries (n=115, values in bold), from Non-European countries (n=111)

Figures in diagonal show reliability of the variables in the instrument

turnees from European and non-European countries based on demographic and professional factors.

Correlation Matrix of Independent Variables and Career Aspirations

Table 5 shows the correlation matrix of variables in which seven factors of returnees from European countries (push personal, push political as well as all the five pull factors) correlated significantly with career aspiration. For returnees from non-European countries, only push social and all the five pull factors correlated significantly with career aspiration. The significant relationships of the variables imply that they have predictive potential for career aspiration.

The Predictors of Returnees' Career Aspiration

The predictors of career aspiration are 11 factors, *viz.*, social (X_1), personal (X_2), economic (X_3), family (X_4) and political (X_5) of push factors, social (X_6), personal (X_7), economic (X_8), family (X_9) and political (X_{10}) of pull factors, and duration abroad (X_{11}). The equation of the proposed multiple linear regression (MLR) model is as follows:

$$Y = b_0 + b_1(X_1) + b_2(X_2) + b_3(X_3) + b_4(X_4) + b_5(X_5) + b_6(X_6) + b_7(X_7) + b_8(X_8) + b_9(X_9) + b_{10}(X_{10}) + b_{11}(X_{11}) + e$$

Table 6 shows only two predictor variables to be significant in explaining career aspiration of the returnees for the European country returnees (Y_1). These were push political (X_5), and pull social (X_6). For the career aspiration of non-European country returnees (Y_2), the significant predictors were push social (X_1), push personal (X_2), push political (X_5), pull personal (X_7), and pull family (X_9).

The models that adopt only the significant predictor variables are as follows:

For returnees from European countries ($n=115$):

$$Y_1 = 2.819 - .601(X_5) + 0.444(X_6) + e$$

For returnees from non-European countries ($n=111$):

$$Y_2 = 1.804 + .311(X_1) - .255(X_2) - .319(X_5) + .375(X_7) + .304(X_9) + e$$

Returnees from European Countries

The regression results (Table 6) were statistically significant ($F_{10,115}=7.834$, $p<.000$), which explains as much as 33.9% in the variance of the career aspiration of the returnees from European countries. The push political and pull social factors show significant influence on career aspiration (push political $\beta=-.601$, $p=0.000$; $\beta=.444$, $p=.001$). Therefore, data from returnees of the European countries partially supported H1 and H2 and did not support H3. The negative influence of push political factor, according to Nawab and Shafi (2011) and Heitor et al. (2013), is that migration is often associated with the political environment and this is followed in importance by economic dispari-

ties in the world. Conditions such as feeling unsafe because of riots, political instability affecting job opportunities as well as questionable policies on migrants, especially on visa issues, would tend to lower their career aspirations.

The strong influence of social factors from the pull factor group shows that affordable and easily available social support, i.e., childcare facilities and availability of domestic helpers heightened returnees' aspirations with other important concerns. Most returnees' aspirations were also influenced by their feeling of allegiance to Malaysia as their homeland and willingness to contribute to the nation's development.

TABLE 6: Results of Regression Analysis

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t
	B	Std. Error	β	
(Constant)	2.819 1.804	.292 .349		9.656 5.176
Push Factor				
Social (X_1)	.035 .238	.100 .094	.048 .311	.349 2.537
Personal (X_2)	.033 -.165	.086 .079	.047 -.255	.378 -2.097
Economic (X_3)	.070 .066	.104 .084	.111 .095	.674 .794
Family (X_4)	-.032 .018	.064 .068	-.046 .025	-.500 .265
Political (X_5)	-.499 -.240	.102 .092	-.601 -.319	-4.874 -2.612
Pull Factor				
Social (X_6)	.302 .001	.087 .138	.444 .001	3.462 .004
Personal (X_7)	.123 .324	.085 .113	.158 .375	1.447 2.879
Economic (X_8)	-.004 .050	.081 .085	-.005 .062	-.048 .587
Family (X_9)	.062 .207	.060 .068	.089 .304	1.031 3.040
Political (X_{10})	-.037 .006	.076 .091	-.060 .009	-.492 .062
Duration Abroad (X_{11})	.007 .033	.025 .027	.024 .110	.273 1.251

Notes: R= 0.675; R² = 0.456; Adj. R² = .339; F =7.834, p =0.000

R= 0.601; R² = 0.362; Adj. R² = .291; F =5.100, p =0.000

*Significant at p<.05

(Values in **bold** represent data for returnees from European countries)

Returnees from non-European Countries

The regression results (Table 6) were statistically significant ($F_{10,111}=5.100$, $p<.000$) and the model explained as much as 29.1% of the variance in career aspiration of returnees from the non-European countries. There were three positive factors that significantly influenced career aspiration, namely push social ($\beta=.311$, $p=.013$), pull personal ($\beta=.375$, $p=.005$) and pull family ($\beta=.304$, $p=.003$). Therefore, data from returnees of the non-European countries partially supported H1 and H2, and did not support H3. The two pull factors contributed to the returnees' decision by invoking patriotic feelings to the country and promising the returnees comfortable living with people of their own background and culture. Affordable healthcare and the available social support were other attractions. Highly qualified professionals brought home their knowledge and experience, and contributed positively to the robust growth of the Malaysian Technology Park (Mat Lazim & Yusof, 2012).

The survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers reported that 80% of expatriate employees did not wish to stay longer abroad because of family reasons (www.matt.org; Tharenou, 2002). The data of this study also showed that there were significant negative results of push personal factors ($\beta=-.255$, $p=.039$) and push political factors ($\beta=-.319$, $p=.010$) that influenced career aspiration of the returnees from non-European countries. This indicated that some personal feeling and political conditions affected negatively on their career aspiration.

5. Conclusion, Implications for Human Resource Practices, and Future Research

Among the European host countries, the UK, which has strong historical ties with Malaysia, was the dominant host country from which Malaysian professionals returned. On the other hand, the spread of the returnees from non-UK region was wider, with Saudi Arabia, the US, Japan and Korea occupying the top four positions. Emigration to Japan and Korea were partly the result of the Malaysian government's Look East Policy that started in the early eighties (NEAC, 2010). The reasons for leaving Malaysia were similar for both regions, *viz.*, to gain international experience and to obtain higher salary abroad. These cited reasons were different from those of blue-collar worker returnees (Saxenian, 2007). The duration abroad was longer among returnees from Europe than those from non-Europe.

The explanatory power of the selected variables on career aspiration for returnees from European countries was higher than that of non-European countries. This study has been able to explore returnees coming from a wider geographical diversity in comparison with other studies that were limited in the host countries covered (Chen, 2003; Saxenian, 2007; Dustmann & Weiss, 2007). Hence, this study is able to complement the knowledge on the full cycle of out-migration and return, the second stage of migration involving a subset of career development dimension of the highly educated returnees. The strong influence of 'pull factors' in the analysis reflects largely the positive pre-

disposition for them to return. Hence, the Malaysian government should put in place positive policies to welcome returnees and to ensure that they do not make a U-turn a second time.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the enhancement of the SCCT and CTC. Specifically to SCCT, this study provides empirical evidence that it advocates on the reciprocal person-environment interactions in the sense that a person is the “Malaysian returnee”, and “environment” covers the social-cognitive push-pull factors that the returnee experienced abroad and in the home country. It is within this environment that the returnees attached meaning and values to their work, and ultimately career aspiration.

The contribution to CTC is that the study supports the evidence that the reciprocal person-environment interactions are complex. This complex system is represented by the multiple push-pull social, economic, family, personal and political which are experienced by the returnees used in this study. CTC asserts that these factors characterize change, chance, and construction as fundamental bases in one’s career aspiration and development.

Several practical recommendations arising from the results of this study are as follows: Comprehensive periodic databases on Malaysian diaspora abroad that provide information on professionals according to their career aspiration, fields of expertise, job positions, affiliated institutions, age, work experience and other demographic characteristics should be readily accessible. These databases could be used for future policy development for the returnees. China has been successful in reaping the substantial benefits from their returnees by having such sophisticated databases (Chen, 2003).

Malaysia should blend human resource development initiatives in their 10th Development Plan (2010-2015) and future plans by concurrently emphasizing education, training, and R&D right from the primary school up to the tertiary level. More agencies in Malaysia, besides the Talent Corporation (TC) should be given the task to attract, retain and develop global talent. This human resource policy should be understood by all policy makers including economists, educationists, politicians, and public administrators. Such a practice has been successfully implemented in Korea (PISA, 2011).

Malaysia should continuously develop many more RBD projects that enhance human talent inflow to the country. The various programs that are already in place such as The Returning Expert Program, Scholarship Talent and Retention (STAR), and Talent Acceleration in Public Service (TAPS) (NEAC, 2010), should be further infused with innovative ideas to make the programs more attractive and sustainable. The best practices in China, such as the Spring Light Project, the Incubator Projects, and Green Channel (Zweig et al., 2008) should be emulated by Malaysia. Returnees should be allowed to exercise brain mobility between Malaysia and the former host country as has been successfully exercised in Taiwan (Saxenian, 2007).

Several future research lines are suggested based on the limitations of the study. First, as the focus of the study was limited on career aspiration of the professionals upon their return to Malaysia, it is necessary to investigate the roles of Malaysian re-

turnees in brain circulation or the new loop of 'brain exchange' (Straubhaar, 2000), a stage that goes beyond their remigration to the country involving knowledge development and sharing through global businesses. This also relates to another type of career aspiration involving resource mobility that allows for a win-win global HRD among established technology centers and MNCs in various countries. Second, the role of Malaysian returnees in the development of local entrepreneurs with international vision and mission is worthy of exploration, a suggestion that arises to expand the scope of the research beyond the limited focus on career aspiration. Third, this study was silent about the role of returnees in knowledge transfer. As the returnees might have much accumulated experience, there is a need to study their role in knowledge sharing and development through initiatives such as coaching and mentoring, leadership, and training and development. Finally, this research did not consider gender as an important issue. Therefore, future research on career development based on gender perspective is suggested, considering the increased visibility of highly educated Malaysian women in senior assignments (Ismail, 2009), thus making them potential candidates for global migration, return migration, and brain circulation.

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