**Development of GCC Human Resources:**

**An Evidence-Based Review of Workforce Nationalization**

# Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aimed to contribute to the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) by providing a critical review of existing scholarly research and a thematic analysis of the workforce nationalization domain in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. To strengthen the literature on this topic, it seeks to identify key gaps and areas for further exploration.

**Design:** A two-step systematic research methodology (qualitative and quantitative) and a thematic analysis of empirical and theoretical studies were used in this study. The quantitative review was conducted using a pre-designed coding framework.

**Findings:** The study identified and discussed four perspectives of workforce nationalization in the GCC countries. These were: (1) the conceptualization of workforce nationalization; (2) the role of institutional policies in achieving it; (3) the practices and outcomes of nationalization efforts, and (4) the impact of gender and women in the nationalization process.

**Originality/value:** Workforce nationalization initiatives in the GCC region offer a unique and rich research phenomenon replete with managerial, organizational, economic, and political dilemmas. The investigation of this phenomenon would profoundly enlighten employers, policy makers, and scholars.

**Research limitations:** This study has several limitations, which we have addressed by proposing several future research avenues. For example, the reviewed studies are skewed towards certain countries (e.g., UAE and Saudi Arabia), which limits the generalizability of their findings.

**Practical Implications:** A more comprehensive definition of nationalization, development of qualitative and quantitative measures to enhance HRM practices and outcomes, and the identification of alternative approaches to improve the employment of locals are emphasized as needs. Additionally, revised measures and mechanisms to rectify negative perceptions about entitlement and the revision of policies to integrate females in the national labor force are suggested.

**Keywords:** GCC countries;workforcenationalization; localization; human resource management

# Introduction

Workforce planning is considered essential for both organizations and the workforce itself. One current issue in workforce planning is nationalization. A special form of workforce nationalization has emerged in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries; one which aims to encourage the development and employment of national employees and has become an increasingly important national concern because of the heavy reliance on expatriates in the GCC labor markets (Elbanna, 2022; Elsharnouby et al., 2023; Tee & Li, 2021). Given this, the governments of GCC countries have recognized the need to focus on workforce nationalization in their development and have adapted a set of strategies for developing local employees in order to rely less on skilled expatriates (Al Jawali et al., 2021). Moreover, the GCC countries have adopted future national visions (such as Qatar’s Vision 2030 and the Saudi Vision 2030) and long-term national strategies all emphasizing human development (Budhwar et al., 2019). Inclusive of these strategies is the fostering of a highly skilled and extremely productive local workforce (Al Jawali et al., 2021).In these circumstances, the need to develop and retain highly skilled local employees has become dominant for the implementation of workforce nationalization.

Despite a stream of research on workforce nationalization since the early 1990s, a comprehensive review of the literature that provides a systematic review of workforce nationalization in the GCC region has not so far emerged; for an exception, see Budhwar et al., 2019). This paper highlights key developments in the HRM field in the Middle East in general, focusing in part on the localization initiatives implemented in the region. Hence, it is not specific to workforce nationalization in the countries of the GCC region, which has special features distinguishing it from the remaining countries of the Middle East (e.g., culture, per capita income, political system).

Based on the discussion thus far, we posit a need, for several reasons, of a more integrative understanding of various aspects of workforce nationalization in the GCC region. First, there is a lack of review papers that provide an in-depth analysis of workforce nationalization-related studies implemented in the GCC countries. Therefore, our understanding of the current state in the field remains limited. Second, the GCC context itself is an interesting domain for exploring the workforce nationalization phenomenon. It provides a unique ground for studying a special form of workforce nationalization that exists only in GCC countries, where most of the workforce are expatriates. Third, there is a growing interest in the region in implementing nationalization programs, which constitute an important strategic goal highlighted in the national visions and strategic plans of all the GCC countries. Finally, the lack of success of the localization strategies so far in attaining their goal of developing and employing nationals is evident (Al Jawali et al., 2021). Hence, until an in-depth review is written, it is unclear which antecedents and consequences of workforce nationalization currently feature in GCC countries and their relevance to organizations operating there.

Therefore, this systematic literature review aims to achieve the following objectives: (a) synthesize the literature on workforce nationalization in the GCC countries; (b) critically evaluate the current conceptualization of workforce nationalization; (c) examine the institutional context in which workforce nationalization policies are enacted; (d) provide an overview of the relationship between workforce nationalization and HRM practices; (e) identify the measures used to assess the effectiveness of nationalization programs; (f) analyze the gender perspective in the workforce nationalization literature; and (g) propose future directions for research to advance the understanding of workforce nationalization.

The rest of this paper is organized into four main sections. The first section provides an overview of the review methodology, and the second one offers a comprehensive review of the current literature on workforce nationalization. The third section presents the results of the thematic analysis, while the final section discusses the implications of the review for future research, policy and practice, as well as the methodological implications and limitations.

# Review Methodology

In order to achieve the study objectives, we combined quantitative and qualitative thematic analyses as described in the following two-stage approach (e.g., Elbanna et al., 2020). While quantitative analysis helped in summarizing the current studies using key descriptive factors, a qualitative analysis allowed us to understand the research landscape better, identify gaps and emerging themes, and develop a future research agenda. Thus, a combined approach enabled us to draw more meaningful insights and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the research on workforce nationalization in the GCC countries.

The first stage aimed to review the literature to identify relevant papers on workforce nationalization in the GCC countries. We used different keywords to identify the list of articles for review, including localization, nationalization, workforce localization, workforce nationalization, GCC, Bahrainization, Emiratization, Kuwaitization, Qatarization, Omanization, and Saudization. Using these keywords, we reviewed academic journals in the EBSCO, Emerald, JSTOR Business, ProQuest, and Science Direct databases to gather relevant articles. Considering the limited research on workforce nationalization in GCC countries, the authors did not place restrictions on the time period of their review. Upon applying the above criteria, our systematic literature review process revealed 78 relevant research studies from 35 journals. Only three papers before 2000 were identified.

To ensure the robustness of the review, the first two authors, who conducted the literature review, had to agree that the identified papers were relevant to GCC workforce nationalization. In the few cases where there was initial doubt about the inclusion of a paper, the authors discussed their inclusion until a consensus was reached. Second, in order to discover if any relevant papers had not been captured by the defined keywords, we screened the references from the identified articles. Third, using the identified keywords, we reviewed the identified journals in the first two rounds. It is worth noting that we considered theoretical papers in addition to empirically based ones in order to contribute to the frame of reference needed to achieve the study objectives. Irrelevant areas for the purpose of this study, such as other managerial practices in the GCC region or HRM in other Arab countries, were disregarded.

A quantitative review was conducted in stage one in accordance with a predesigned coding frame. This aided in summarizing the current studies using key descriptive factors. The relevant literature was referred to using dichotomous variables, 0 or 1 (Cropanzano, 2009; Gilson & Goldberg, 2015; Johnson et al., 2007), which helped code these studies on the basis of their research methodology into four categories: theoretical, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods papers. Furthermore, we conducted a review to identify the scope of each study, theory usage, and sample (focus country, size). In addition, other factors such as design method (data collection method, source of data, time horizons, and analysis techniques), author profile (affiliation, nationality), key findings, and abstracts were examined.

A thematic analysis in stage two was conducted to analyze the current research landscape which helped understand the current research dialogues and, in particular, develop a future research agenda and questions on GCC workforce nationalization. Thematic analysis is a suitable qualitative tool with which to understand patterns and trends in the data. It involves reading the identified papers and drawing conclusions in a multistep process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Step 1 involved the use of an inductive approach, and the sampled studies were categorized by topic or issue to identify trends in the data. Step 2 used an analytical approach to categorize the selected studies according to their research questions.

# Overview of Current Literature

Our literature review identified 78 articles. Thirty-two of the papers reviewed (41%) were published in four journals, with twelve of these papers (15.39%) being published in one journal: *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. The other three journals were *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, *Human Resource Development International*, and *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*. In addition to HRM journals, the GCC workforce nationalization also attracts the attention of business journals, such as *Journal of World Business*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Journal of Business Research* (for more details on the sampled journals, please, refer to Appendix 1 online).

As presented in Table 1, the sampled articles explored 15 different areas of workforce nationalization. The first five areas were addressed in more than 40% of studies. One of the most commonly examined aspects (in 59% of the studies) is the role of institutional policies and their effects on the implementation of nationalization programs. Two aspects which were expected to account for a good proportion of the reviewed articles: Education and national development (52.6% of the studies) and examining how workforce nationalization interrelates with a variety of HRM practices (44.9% of the studies). In addition, studies that focus on gender and the role of women in implementing nationalization programs are notable (43.6% of the studies). Although it is of greater importance, only 32.1% of the studies focused on the outcomes generated from the implementation of workforce nationalization programs in the GCC. The least common emphases of the selected articles are contextual factors, such as the role of the psychological contract (10.3%) and politics (9%), on nationalization programs’ implementation. Another related topic that receives little attention from scholars is the examination of CSR and international business in promoting nationalization programs (5.1%). Table 1 presents additional important information on the methods adopted, countries examined, theoretical foundations of sampled articles and authors’ affiliations while Table 2 provides a summary of each reviewed article.

In the following sections, we address the questions that guided our evidence-based research and suggest areas where additional research is required to complete the current view of workforce nationalization in the GCC region.

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# Analysis of Literature: Thematic Analysis and Research Agenda

The findings from the thematic qualitative analysis revealed that the sampled studies can be divided into four /categories, according to perspective: (1) the conceptualization of workforce nationalization; (2) the role of institutional policies; (3) HRM practices and outcomes; and (4) gender/women workforce nationalization. The four perspectives and the associated topics as revealed from our analysis are discussed in the following sub-sections.

## Conceptualization of Workforce Nationalization

Studies on workforce nationalization have made several attempts to provide definitions of the concept (see Table 3). We observed several common features in our careful examination of the definitions reported in our identified studies. First, consistent with being at an early stage of conceptualization, about 33% of the articles sought to provide a conceptualization of workforce nationalization in the GCC region. In recent years, the number of studies exploring this issue has been increasing (e.g., (Abaker et al., 2019; Goby, 2015; Waxin et al., 2018)). Given its importance and prevalence in GCC human resources management praxis, several scholars have identified the concept highlighting such diverse themes as the HRM activities required to enable the local workforce to enter the labor market, developing the local workforce, the employability of the local workforce, and labor market interventions.

Second, a review of the existing definitions underlined the existence of an assortment of perspectives. For example, a group of definitions emphasized HRM activities, such as recruitment, selection, training and development, to be performed by centralized state institutions (e.g., TANMIA in the UAE, PAAET in Kuwait) or in a decentralized manner that encourages organizations to perform them for the sake of local employees (Rees et al., 2007; Waxin et al., 2018). It has also been observed that several studies conceptualized workforce nationalization as a planned replacement of foreign workers with nationals, largely through employment quota targets e.g., (Abaker et al., 2019; Al-Harbi, 1997; Salih, 2010; Toledo, 2013). Other studies have noted the importance of enhancing the employability of nationals through investment in education and skills development (e.g., Abu-Shawish et al., 2021; Al‐Ali, 2008; Forstenlechner et al., 2012b; Forstenlechner & Mellahi, 2011; Goby, 2015; Rees et al., 2007).

Third, most definitions of workforce nationalization emphasize state intervention more strongly to ensure that the policy will be effectively implemented, either directly or indirectly. Direct market intervention entails quantity nationalization, where organizations are set specific quotas to maintain (e.g., hiring a particular number of locals each year or maintaining a certain percentage of the local workforce; (Forstenlechner et al., 2012a; Rutledge et al., 2011). Indirect intervention emphasizes quality nationalization, where the state endeavors to enable national employees to achieve their career potential by providing them with relevant and high-quality education along with training and development opportunities. This intervention may take a radical format through a reform of the educational system (Forstenlechner et al., 2012b) or capacity-building initiatives to enhance nationals’ skills, knowledge, and competencies (Abu-Shawish et al., 2021; Rutledge et al., 2011). Taking a more comprehensive approach, Forstenlechner et al. (2012b) described workforce nationalization (namely, Emiratization) as a two-fold process, both bottom-up and top-down. In the former, the state plays a critical role in restructuring the educational systems and aligning the skills of graduates with the needs of the market. and in the latter, the state intervenes by setting a range of direct quantitative measures, such as quotas, and reserving certain jobs to be held exclusively by nationals.

Fourth, an important observation is that all the definitions reviewed in this study were at the country level. This seems plausible because workforce nationalization originated as a national policy to tackle governments’ concerns regarding the private sector’s heavy reliance on expatriate labor, coupled with the high unemployment rate among native workers (Alfarhan & Al-Busaidi, 2018; Goby, 2015).

This discussion leads to defining workforce nationalization in the context of GCC countries as a national strategy that has two core tenets. The first tenet aims to enhance the employability of the national workforce by qualifying them with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed for a knowledge-based economy through effective education and the proper implementation of HRM initiatives. The second tenet is intended to provide quantitative and qualitative measures at both the country level and the organizational level to assess the effectiveness of implementing the nationalization strategy*.* This proposed definition stresses the need to invest in boosting the attractiveness of the national workforce to make it beneficial and economically advantageous for organizations to employ nationals in their workforce. It also underscores the need to measure the effectiveness of implementation at both the country and organizational levels by employing quantitative (e.g., the percentage of nationals employed, retention rate, and turnover rate) and qualitative (e.g., employee and supervisor satisfaction, behavioral and attitudinal measures of employees, and fit with the organization) measures.

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## Role of Institutional Policies

The institutional context encompasses norms, rules, and cognitive structures that set the boundaries within which human and economic interactions take place (Scott, 2013). Consequently, the evaluation of the nationalization strategy requires the simultaneous examination of the institutional context in which policies are enacted (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014; Elbanna, 2022; Glaister et al., 2021). In this regard, we next discuss two related topics: public and institutional policies and psychological and social contracts.

### Public and institutional policies

Studies examining the institutional policies designed to enhance the effective implementation of workforce nationalization programs—perhaps not surprisingly—dominate this stream of research (46 articles), and this interest has been stable over the years. An example of this line of inquiry is the study by Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2014) on workforce policy design and institutional environment in the UAE. A careful analysis of these studies reveals several observations.

First, the current state of knowledge about nationalization policies in the GCC region is heavily skewed toward examining the formal regulations and mechanisms in their support, such as the studies of Mellahi (2007) in Saudi Arabia, Berrebi et al. (2009) in Qatar, Jabeen et al. (2018) and Sarker and Rahman (2020) in the UAE, and Glaister et al. (2021) in Oman. The literature establishes that the GCC governments, albeit to a varying degree, are key actors in shaping the nationalization policies and practices through administrative micro interventions to prescribe how businesses organize the national and expatriate workforce. The direct intervention measures are in the form of quota systems that have proved inefficient (see, Berrebi et al., 2009; Jabeen et al., 2018; Marchon & Toledo, 2014; Peck, 2017; Toledo, 2013).

Second, although the rules and regulations created sanctions for deviant organizations that do not employ nationals, they also created defenses and loopholes to escape sanctions. Several studies have captured the evasive mechanisms that organizations have adopted. For example, Sidani and Al Ariss (2014) identified the effect of institutional drivers on the talent management of nationals as a necessary evil. Al Jawali et al. (2021) documents that the practices and policies of talent management in the public sector in Dubai are fragmented and ineffective. Third, due to the ineffective implementation of quota systems, some studies have shifted toward examining the reform initiatives that have led to the recent ineffective implementation of nationalization initiatives that many GCC countries have lately taken in an attempt to resolve some of their challenges (Elbanna, 2022). Moideenkutty et al. (2016), for instance, discussed the Omani government’s attempts to deal with low local employment, such as reserving certain trades and occupations for locals.

Fourth, another important issue synthesized from the current state of knowledge is the fact that institutional policies have put more pressure on some sectors more than others to localize their workforce (Ali et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2011). For example, it has been argued that the banking and financial sector was more highly regulated in terms of achieving workforce nationalization than other sectors were and that consequently they have been the most successful sector in complying with the goals of nationalization (Forstenlechner & Mellahi, 2011; Tee & Li, 2021). Based on this discussion, we conclude that academic research is required to examine institutional policies from which to discover what could be reasonably expected of the government in attaining nationalization targets, integrating nationals into the labor and reducing the dependence on foreign employees.

### Psychological and social contracts

The standpoint of neo-institutionalism argues that the institutional context can be conceptualized not only as formal norms, regulations, and procedures, but can also include informal values, cultures, and conventions (March & Olsen, 2009). An emerging dialogue in the nationalization literature examines the relationship between the informal institutional mechanisms, such as the values and norms in society and the nationalization strategies (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014; Bosbait & Wilson, 2005; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014; Williams et al., 2011). A careful study of the sampled studies reveals several significant considerations.

First, our review suggests two important and interrelated factors that are closely linked to the successful implementation of workforce nationalization. These are the social and psychological contracts which describe the relationship between employer and employees. Of the reviewed papers, about 30.8% (24 out of 78 articles) discussed social/psychological contracts and how they are related to workforce nationalization. However, most of them describe rather than thoroughly investigate social/psychological contracts and the way in which they relate to workforce nationalization initiatives. Moreover, few studies went further by empirically examining the impact of social and/or psychological contracts and their links with the effectiveness of workforce nationalization (Forstenlechner & Mellahi, 2011; Forstenlechner et al., 2014), indicating the need for more research on this topic.

Second, the reviewed papers suggest that GCC countries are characterized by a special form of social contract that embodies a set of attitudes and beliefs about work (Glaister et al., 2021; Swailes et al., 2012). Under the current social contract, the public sector has to guarantee employment to home nationals and provide high remuneration to them in exchange for the work that they do (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010). This has led to a strong preference among nationals for jobs in the public sector (Al Jawali et al., 2021; Forstenlechner, 2008). Looking at it from the psychological contract theory, national employees in the GCC region have built certain beliefs that form around the expectations that future employers (most likely from the public sector) will provide secure and well-paid work that is not particularly challenging (Rutledge & Madi, 2017; Swailes et al., 2012). Thus, not only does the inaccurate perception of social contract appear to be impeding the uptake of workforce nationalization, but there are also concerns that the public sector has reached saturation point and the employment of nationals in the public sector can no longer be guaranteed (Forstenlechner et al., 2012a).

Third, we note that this stream of research advocates the importance of normative behavior by organizations and signifies the need to revise and update the social contract in addressing nationalization strategies by enhancing education systems and addressing biases and nationals’ perceptions about vocational education and blue-collar jobs (Bosbait & Wilson, 2005; Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Griffin et al., 2021; Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2020). These studies acknowledge that the GCC governments provide their nationals with well-remunerated undemanding public sector jobs as part of the social contract to distribute wealth (Bank, 2016). A careful examination of the studies in this domain establishes the need to revise the principal transmission mechanisms of this social contract between the state and the nationals and to capture several weaknesses in relation to policy regulations, implementation tools, and inadequate cultural norms, such as the tendency to reject blue-collar jobs and nationals’ negative views of entry-level career-progression prospects. The analysis also reveals too little research that provides an explicit description or explanation of ways to foster an informal institutional context that complements formal mechanisms.

Fourth, our review further reflects the spread of unrealistic psychological expectations that are context-specific and relate to the national culture, systems, and institutions (Hui et al., 2004; Westwood et al., 2001), creating huge problems for nationalization. For example, potential national employees do not see a need to develop their knowledge and skills, since they can secure jobs that require low competence. Few studies have tackled this issue.

## HRM Practices, and Outcomes

### Workforce nationalization and HRM practices

44.9% of the reviewed studies (35 articles) addressed the link between workforce nationalization programs and a set of HRM practices (e.g., Madhi & Barrientos, 2003; Rees et al., 2007). This interrelationship is expected and is deemed necessary when investigating local employment practices for both local and foreign organizations that operate in the GCC region. MNEs, for example, choose to apply either the ethnocentric (hiring from the parent country) or the polycentric (hiring locals) approach of hiring (Mayrhofer & Brewster, 1996). In both approaches, implications for HRM practices can be found, particularly for MNEs that operate in the GCC region. These organizations are often forced to follow the polycentric approach to meet quota requirements. This important issue is neglected in the current literature and, therefore, is a promising and fertile area for research.

Among the HRM practices usually adopted in companies, recruitment and selection practices, both training and development and career planning are the most often investigated practices in the articles reviewed for this study (Al-Dosary, 2004; Rutledge et al., 2011). Madhi and Barrientos (2003), for example, explored the nature of employment and career development in Saudi Arabia. Tlaiss and Al Waqfi (2020) investigated the strategic role that HRM managers play in developing careers for Saudi women. Their study provided empirical evidence of the need to improve hiring, training, and career-planning practices to advance the career of women in Saudi Arabia. Glaister et al. (2021) investigated how the workforce nationalization implemented in Oman persuades managers to rationalize talent management practices; while Al Jawali et al. (2021) examined talent management practices in the public sector in Dubai.

With its importance for the implementation of nationalization initiatives, the HRM field is gaining an increased emphasis in the reviewed papers (Al Dosary 2004; Al Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014). The first stream of research explored HRM as one of the challenges that negatively affect the proper implementation of nationalization. The second stream of research have placed HRM improvement as a priority in order to enhance nationalization practices. The study by Al Jawali et al. (2021) found that, although talent development programs are implemented in Dubai`s public sector organizations, the significant weakness is the lack of control to ensure the proper implementation of career development. Williams et al. (2011), for their part, pointed out the importance of effective training and development programs and career planning that would constantly monitor and guide to nationals as vital if Qatarization is to be achieved. HRM practices are equally important for all the MNEs that operate in the region to successfully localize their workforce, through their ability to identify local job candidates, hire locals following the recommendations of government agencies that endorse localization, and invest in training and development for local employees (Darwish, et al. 2022). Overall, while calls and recommendations to improve HRM for effective nationalization are obvious in the current literature, a deeper understanding of the mechanisms for improving the current HRM programs is not apparent.

Another aspect examined in the reviewed articles is the fact that the implementation of a nationalization policy has created two different HRM systems in organizations: one for locals and another for expatriates. Specific practices such as staffing, training and development, and career planning are differentiated in these systems. Waxin et al. (2018), for example, found that organizations in the UAE have specific recruitment methods to attract local employees; they have also modified their selection process (i.e., screening, selection standards, selection steps) to facilitate workforce nationalization. Similarly, Moideenkutty et al. (2016) investigated nationalization HRM practices setting out to attract, motivate, and retain local employees in Omani organizations and differentiated them from HRM practices for managing expatriate employees. Although a large percentage of the reviewed studies described the link between nationalization and HRM practices, only a few of them have received the deserved attention.

### Outcomes and measures of workforce nationalization

The effectiveness of nationalization programs can be examined through quantitative and qualitative measures. Quantitative measures rely on the number (or percentage) of nationals employed. Other measures are related to recruitment and employment for nationals, enrollments in training programs for nationals, and the retention rate and/or turnover rate for both nationals and non-nationals (Waxin et al., 2018). Qualitative measures complement then by using satisfaction surveys of localization programs, behavioral and attitudinal measures of employees, and fit with the organizational culture (Rees et al., 2007). 25 studies (out of 78) discussed and examined the outcomes of nationalization, and most of them reported quantitative approaches (mainly a quota system) for measuring the progressofworkforce nationalization (e.g., (Forstenlechner & Mellahi, 2011; Waxin et al., 2018)). In particular, the increased number of local employees was used for measuring a workforce’s success in nationalization. Other studies have reported the drop in foreigners’ recruitment as a major indicator of nationalization success (Al-Dosary & Rahman, 2005) while others argued for the need to combine qualitative measures (such as an attitudes survey) with quantitative measures (Rees et al., 2007).

Moreover, a few empirical studies have provided inconsistent results for the economic outcomes of nationalization programs. Moideenkutty et al. (2016), for example, presented evidence that nationalization programs, regardless of their cost, can produce financial outcomes. Unlike them, Marchon and Toledo (2014) found that the quota system implemented in the UAE has led to increased labor and production costs. Toledo (2013) found that, in the short run, nationalization policies tend to achieve some level of success. At the individual level, Ali et al. (2020) found that job insecurity resulting from workforce nationalization has a significant effect on reducing the engagement of immigrant employees and has led to increased employee burnout and intention to quit their job.

Clearly, there appears to be a major gap in the literature regarding the way in which nationalization outcomes are measured. Moreover, no single set of measures of nationalization, whether quantitative or qualitative, has been sufficiently examined. In addition, measuring the success of nationalization should be looked at through a comprehensive model of nationalization implementation. In this regard, Wong and Law (1999) proposed a three-stage model explaining the process leading to effective nationalization in transnational corporations, namely, planning, localizing, and consolidating. This model, or similar ones, could be used to better measure the success of nationalization programs implemented in the GCC countries.

## Gender/Women Workforce Nationalization

Although the literature recommends female education and employment as part of a successful nationalization strategy (Al-Waqfi & Abdalla Al-faki, 2015; Albejaidi & Nair, 2019; Rutledge et al., 2011), our review reflects the need to augment the current studies by identifying mechanisms that effectively integrate women into nationalization initiatives. The main streams/themes investigate the role of cultural factors in inhibiting female employment (Elbanna et al., 2020; Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Ghouse et al. 2021; Griffin et al., 2021; Rutledge & Madi, 2017), talent management and integration in the national workforce (Al Jawali et al., 2021; Rutledge et al., 2011), cultural stereotypes (Belwal & Belwal, 2017; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014), and the limitations of the current education systems in empowering women’s employment, particularly in private sector organizations (Albejaidi & Nair, 2019; Belwal et al., 2019; Patterson et al., 2021; Salih, 2010). A dominant research stream examines the effect of quota practices on improving women’s representation in the national workforce. However, the results indicated that quota systems remain generally ineffective (Forstenlechner et al., 2012a), due to the lack of upward feedback in the creation of regulations with regard to women’s need for a work/life balance and stereotyping when it comes to the nomination and awarding of senior management posts (Belwal & Belwal, 2017; Mellahi, 2007). Consequently, scholars have called for the examination of the current social, economic, and political issues in GCC societies to identify alternative market interventions to address the national psychological contract and expectations about women’s guaranteed employment and progression above the glass ceiling (Forstenlechner & Baruch, 2013).

Although the current state of knowledge identifies the significance of elevating the education and skill levels of females and establishes the importance of addressing societies’ and individuals’ perceptions about the need for women to join the national workforce (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014; Aljanahi, 2017), there seems to be dissatisfaction with existing policies (Belwal et al., 2019). Furthermore, limited studies have examined how to align perceptions about the values of the family, the patriarchal Islamic society, and the established gender roles defined in the teaching of the Islamic religion (Belwal et al., 2019). Although this perspective requires empirical validation, our review returns limited qualitative or/and qualitative findings in this regard, as evidenced by recent calls by Jabeen et al. (2018).

# Discussion

Revisiting the literature with a critical eye not only provides insights into the past, but also discloses evolving conceptual perspectives and visions for the future. Given this, our study offers a critical review of existing scholarly research on workforce nationalization in the GCC countries and paves the way for progressive research agendas that enhance the effectiveness of workforce nationalization. Out of the 78 articles reviewed, most looked into the role of institutional policies and their impact on the implementation of the nationalization programs followed by HRM, and education. Important research areas such as CSR and international business have received minimal attention. Our review indicates that the focus of nationalization has been shifting over the years, where psychological, social and allied factors have been observed to play a major role in nationalization practices.

The current review identified and discussed four perspectives of workforce nationalization: (1) its conceptualization; (2) the role of institutional policies; (3) its practices and outcomes; and (4) gender/women. The study recommends a revised conceptualization that focuses on the GCC context to define workforce nationalization as a national strategy with two core tenets. The first one focuses on enhancing the employability of the local workforce while the second one aims to provide quantitative and qualitative measures at both the country level and the organizational level to assess the effectiveness of nationalization strategy implementation.

Further, the review probes the fundamentals of the institutional context in which policies are enacted and discusses the public and institutional policies as well as the psychological and social contracts. Our examination also highlights workforce nationalization practices and outcomes in the HRM field. In this stream, we conclude that there appears to be a critical gap in regard to the measures of success of workforce nationalization. The review could not identify a single measure of nationalization, whether qualitative or qualitative. Our examination of the gender/women workforce nationalization stream establishes the scholars’ call to integrate females into the total workforce and the need to elevate their education, talent management and career progression considering cultural and societal values in the GCC context.

## Future Research Directions

Based on our in-depth review of the literature, we have identified ten possible areas for future research, which are outlined below. First, future research needs to investigate how institutional forces could be modified in the next few years to make nationalization policies more consensual and less coercive. Hence, scholars should compare the implementation across different sectors and investigate the phenomenon from the employer's perspective. This could help find better ways to develop more contextualized and institutionalized government nationalization policies that could benefit both parties: employer and employees.

Second, the role of institutional policies has shaped the relationship between the state and its nationals, employers, and employees. Our review indicates that nationalization policies in the GCC have focused on reducing reliance on expatriates by replacing them with nationals; however, they have yet to achieve their goals as employment rates for nationals in the private sector remain below the targeted level (Alfarhan & Al-Busaidi, 2018; Barnett et al., 2015; Elbanna et al., 2020). Although this is evident in the existing literature about government policies and their role in achieving nationalization targets, future avenues for research are still needed. For example, it is evident that partnerships between key stakeholders (e.g., the state, the community, employers, and employees) within the nationalization initiatives are essential for the forming of integrated nationalization policies and their effective implementation. Accordingly, future research could investigate the level of coordination among all the involved stakeholders in the nationalization process.

Third, although the quota system directly affects the national workforce representation, it comes with further issues for both employers and employees. For example, institutional policies have been pressurizing the private sector to hire more nationals and exhausting the public sector with phantom employment. In addition, the core of the workforce nationalization conundrum is that lower-income foreign workers are exploited by the private sector, while the law nonetheless tolerates this practice. Furthermore, the private sector is not ready to pay the high remuneration expected by the national workforce. Foreign employees have found themselves engaged in implementing a nationalization policy by training and mentoring national employees and, at the same time, dealing with the high work demand caused by hiring more national employees and fewer foreign ones. At the same time, local employees have found themselves dealing with work-related tasks that require competencies that are beyond them (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014). Thus, researchers may investigate the challenges faced by MNEs and SMEs because such developments can help develop institutionalized government policies on nationalization in order to benefit both employers and employees.

Fourth, our review of articles that linked social and psychological contracts with nationalization implementation showed that the state under the social contract is tied to the equal distribution of wealth (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010), whereas the psychological contracts between employees and employers are adversely affected by state policies that have given employees the upper hand in having their expectations met. In this situation, social and psychological contracts are highly important in developing the mindset of the local workforce and need further investigation. Understanding psychological contracts will benefit countries that wish to develop a more robust market structure to facilitate the implementation of nationalization (Abdalla et al., 2010). Future research could further empirically examine the effect of the special psychological/social contracts shaped by the national culture in the GCC region when implementing a workforce nationalization policy.

Fifth, although HRM has been a key strategic practice that enables organizations to train, develop, and manage their employees, research on HRM and its impact on nationalization has received limited attention. Therefore, the review highlights the fact that the HRM practices implemented in the GCC region are context specific. This may contradict the convergence argument of HRM and confirm the view that, although several common patterns in HRM have emerged across countries and regions, cross-national variation can be found in various HRM practices, which is more consistent with the divergence argument (Rowley & Benson, 2002). Accordingly, there is a genuine need to raise the level of our understanding of the HRM practices that are implemented in this region (Waxin et al., 2018). A related research avenue is to investigate how the implemented HRM practices of locals and expatriates differ, especially regarding the MNEs that operate in the GCC region. Organizations implement two different systems of HRM (one for expatriates and another for locals). However, it is still unclear in what ways these systems differ and whether this special classification of HRM practices can have an effect on the ability of organizations to attain their strategic goals. Further empirical studies on the HRM practices and systems used in the region could advance this line of inquiry.

Sixth, this study identified that workforce nationalization in the GCC region fundamentally works in two streams: less reliance on expatriate workers and development of the national workforce with the required education and training. It has been observed that the success of nationalization is prevailingly measured by direct quantitative measures, such as a quota system, implemented in both the public and private sectors. Thus, it is not surprising to find that most definitions of workforce nationalization reviewed in this study place more emphasis on quantitative measures. Although the quota system has been a major factor in boosting national representation in organizations (Parcero & Ryan, 2017), it has been challenging for organizations because it comes at the cost of training GCC locals on the required skill sets (Barnett et al., 2015; Elbanna, 2022; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014). On the contrary, incorporating nationals in the workforce and building human capital capacity have been seen as an important qualitative aspect of measuring the effectiveness of nationalization. Hence, we emphasize the need to include a multifaceted measure that incorporates qualitative indicators, transcending numbers and statistics, and considers critical issues for employers and employees, such as satisfaction, behavioral and attitudinal measures, credence, qualifications of employees, and fit with organization.

Seventh, our review has produced mixed results on whether nationalization initiatives have attained their goals. The existing literature has not reached a unified approach for measuring the effectiveness of nationalization policies. Accordingly, we recommend conducting empirical comparative studies that examine and compare the outcomes achieved from implementing nationalization initiatives and policies in all GCC countries.

Eighth, prior research has demonstrated that workforce nationalization often falls short of its intended outcomes due to a pervasive tendency among organizations to approach nationalization in a one-size-fits-all manner. This assumption shows the critical importance of assessing an organization's unique characteristics in order to effectively implement its nationalization strategies: i.e., its sectoral context, internal processes and systems, and required competencies and capabilities. Accordingly, a promising avenue for future research lies in identifying and unpacking the key factors that drive successful workforce efforts to nationalize across various sectors and organizational contexts.

Ninth, future studies can identify the most predominant type of conflict informing the work/life balance of women in the GCC contexts on the basis of religious considerations and societal norms and can propose alternative mechanisms to effectively deal with such conflict to enhance women’s participation in the national workforce. Such research should also compare the policies as enacted in private and public sector organizations with respect to national female employment. Future research could also examine alternative mechanisms to achieve the synergy between religious and social factors and in this way to overcome resistance to female integration in the national workforce.

Finally, a limitation of this study is that, while we used a wide range of keywords to identify relevant articles for our review, there is still a possibility that some works related to the field of workforce nationalization may have been excluded due to our choice of keywords. We recognize this as a potential limitation of our research and recommend future researchers to consider broadening the range of keywords used to ensure a more comprehensive review.

**Policy and Practical Implications**

The present review reveals several implications for policy makers and managers for each of the four identified themes. First, workforce nationalization can be widely defined in terms of numbers or HRM activities such as recruitment and replacement. We call for a more comprehensive conceptualization to encompass strategic elements such as enhancing the employability of the local workforce and the need to measure the effectiveness of implementing policies at both national and organizational levels. Second, the major gap in the literature regarding the method of measuring nationalization outcomes is substantive; hence, policy makers and senior managers should urgently develop qualitative and quantitative measures to complement HRM practices and the outcomes of workforce nationalization strategies. Initiatives to encourage the development of such measures should be prioritized on policy agendas at both national and regional levels. In addition, policy makers need to identify different approaches, other than the quota system, to improve the employment of locals. This may include, as suggested by Elbanna and Fatima (2022), aligning the education system with market needs, adopting a more diversified economy from hydrocarbons, and developing a knowledge-based economy. Third, the dominance of the unwritten social contract between the national workforce and governments is empirically substantiated. Therefore, we call on policymakers and HRM managers to revise their measures and mechanisms so that they rectify negative perceptions about the guaranteed sense of entitlement. The revised mechanisms will enhance national workforce motivation and progression in the labor market. Fourth, dissatisfaction with the current policies to integrate females in the national labor force is established in the literature. We call on major revisions of enacted policies to incorporate elements of Islamic identity and conservative societal values in new labor rules and regulations.

## Methodological Implications

Our review proposes six methodological implications that scholars should consider for advancing future research related to workforce nationalization. First, given that the current definitions of workforce nationalization underscore the role of the state in ensuring and monitoring policy implementation, future studies examining this concept could provide operational definitions at the organizational level. In addition, the new definitions should go beyond the current predominant emphasis on quantitative measures, such as quotas, and reflect more comprehensive ways of measuring the effectiveness of implementation at the organizational level. In this regard, our proposed definition tries to provide policy makers and organizations with some guidance on the core tenets of the concept of workforce nationalization. Second, an important limitation of most current empirical research is that analyses were conducted post hoc, and the data were cross-sectional; only four of the 78 reviewed studies adopted a longitudinal design. Hence, a better comprehension of workforce nationalization requires the use of longitudinal research designs that can help scholars understand causality across nationalization variables (e.g., the causal relationship between organizational performance and level of nationalization) and examine how relationships evolve over time.

Third, insights into how the variables associated with workforce nationalization interact holistically to shape the efficiency and effectiveness of nationalization initiatives require case-based investigations. This can help highlight the best practices associated with workforce nationalization in leading organizations and inform policy makers and employers about them. Fourth, researchers can focus on using quantitative research methods, on a wider scale, to understand the general trends in planning and implementing workforce nationalization initiatives as opposed to attaining quality information at a smaller scale.

Fifth, most reviewed studies used a country or an individual level of analysis whereas few focused on the organizational level. The assumption that different organizations similarly act on workforce nationalization is problematic since the nationalization context usually varies from one organization to another, even in the same country. Sixth, although GCC countries share many commonalities, they still have different national contexts. Hence, we need to be cautious when applying results derived from one GCC country to others, and a significant sampling limitation arises given that the reviewed studies are skewed towards representing the UAE and Saudi Arabia, while fewer studies have used regional samples or been conducted in the remaining four countries. Thus, researchers should sample GCC countries more broadly in their future research.

**Table 1**

**Articles count by methodological characteristics**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Characteristics** | **Classifications** | **Count (%)** |
| **Areas**[[1]](#footnote-1) | Public policies, laws and institutional changes | 46 (59%) |
| Education and national development | 41 (52.6%) |
| HRM practices | 35 (44.9%) |
| Challenges of nationalization | 36 (46.2%) |
| Gender and the role of women | 34 (43.6%) |
| Quota system | 28 (35.9%) |
| Sociology | 27 (34.6%) |
| Demographics | 24 (30.8%) |
| Outcomes of nationalization | 25 (32.1%) |
| Social contract | 16 (20.5%) |
| Psychology | 12 (15.4%) |
| Economics | 10 (12.8%) |
| Psychological contract | 8 (10.3%) |
| Politics | 7 (9%) |
| CSR and international business (2 studies each) | 4 (5.1%) |
| **Methods**[[2]](#footnote-2) | Quantitative | 30 (38.5%) |
| Qualitative | 19 (24.4%) |
| Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative methods) | 7 (9%) |
| Theoretical/literature based | 15 (19.2%) |
| **Time scope** | Cross sectional | 51 (65.4%) |
| Longitudinal | 4 (5.1%) |
| Not applicable (Theoretical/literature-based papers) | 15 (19.2%) |
| **Data collection methods** | Secondary data | 28 (35.9%) |
| Interview | 24 (30.8%) |
| Survey | 17 (21.8%) |
| Others | 17 (21.8%) |
| **Unit of analysis** | Country | 26 (33.3%) |
| Firm | 17 (21.8%) |
| Individual | 24 (30.8%) |
| **Country**[[3]](#footnote-3) | UAE | 37 (47.4%) |
| Saudi Arabia | 28 (35.9%) |
| Qatar | 13 (16.7%) |
| Oman | 13 (16.7%) |
| Bahrain | 9 (11.5%) |
| Kuwait | 9 (11.5%) |
| Region | 8 (10.3%) |

'Source: Created by authors

**Table 2**

**Summary of articles reviewed**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Study** | **Description** | **Methods** | **Key findings** |
| 1. Nakhleh (1977) | Observations on labor markets and citizenship | Secondary data, Bahrain and Qatar | Both countries must rely on foreign labor in their development processes-more so in Qatar than in Bahrain. Politics play a determining role, often negative, in policy planning |
| 1. Looney (1991) | Patterns and challenges of HR development | Secondary data, Saudi Arabia | Two proposed scenarios concerning migration to the Gulf region are suggested |
| 1. Al-Harbi (1997) | A description of employment environment of engineering companies | the Markov Chain analysis, interviews, Saudi Arabia | There is a need to improve the retention level of Saudi engineers, especially in the first two years of employment |
| 1. Mellahi and Al-Hinai (2000) | Perceptions of private sector managers about problems and solutions of localization | 114 surveys from private Omani and Saudi Arabian firms; 5 interviews | Reporting key differences between local and expatriate workers and the qualities that local workers should possess to make them employable in the private sector |
| 1. Madhi and Barrientos (2003) | Exploring main factors shaping employment and career development | Conceptual, Saudi Arabia | A significant difference exists in career opportunities, mobility, conditions of work, and pay across Saudis and foreign employees |
| 1. Al-Dosary (2004) | Outlining problems associated with developing human resources locally | Conceptual, Saudi Arabia | Different approaches suggested that could work together as a solution for improving nationalization efforts |
| 1. Al-Dosary and Rahman (2005) | A critical review of Saudization | A review, Saudi Arabia | Saudization should place importance on skill development and be implemented through market forces and incentives |
| 1. Bosbait and Wilson (2005) | The national education policy and labor market | Survey, 411 young Saudi respondents | Identified Saudization challenges associated with education, culture and blue-collar jobs |
| 1. Al-Dosary et al. (2006) | Causes of graduate unemployment and consequences | Secondary data, Saudi Arabia | Proposes a combination  of a rational planning model and communicative rationality to solve the problems of graduate unemployment |
| 1. Harry (2007) | Crucial issues of employment creation and localization and the factors underlying them | A literature review, GCC countries | The private sector maximizes short-term gain while creates long-term problems. Governments needs to create a productive indigenous workforce and worthwhile jobs for citizens |
| 1. Mellahi (2007) | The implications of the new legal framework for HRM in the private sector | Semi-structured interviews, secondary data, Saudi Arabia | Private sector is reconfiguring their HRM practices to meet the new legal requirements (including Saudization) |
| 1. Rees et al. (2007) | Identify issues related to the implementation and evaluation of Emiratization programs | Case study, UAE, 12 senior managers, secondary data and interviews | Emiratization is considered as a key success factor. Commitment towards implementation is questioned. Only quantitative methods of evaluating the program are used. Resistance to change by non-nationals is a major challenge |
| 1. Forstenlechner (2008) | The conditions under which Emiratization can enable organizations to capitalize on local human capital | 18 interviews with UAE and expatriate managers | Successful Emiratization is based on the serious commitment to the integration of UAE nationals into the workforce rather than producing statistics for securing government goodwill |
| 1. Gallant and Pounder (2008) | Opportunities and barriers of female nationals’ employment | A literature-based study, UAE | Cultural factors are largely responsible for inhibiting the level of employment of Emirati females |
| 1. Achoui (2009) | Identifying challenges of HRM development | Conceptual analysis, Saudi Arabia | Challenges identified include the high dependence on expatriates and the ineffectiveness of HRM development programs for the localization process |
| 1. Berrebi et al. (2009) | An assessment of Qatar’s labor markets | Qatar 2004 Census | A list of challenges facing Qatar’s labor markets and the response from the Qatari government |
| 1. Pech (2009) | Contemporary methods of educating young Emiratis as alternatives to the present punitive methods of training | Interviews, 70 recruits, UAE | To better meet UAE Emiratization goals, an education system in the Emirates or for Emiratis should be integrated with the industry |
| 1. Abdalla et al. (2010) | Determinants of employment and the wage gap between the public and private sectors | 1099 workers, UAE, survey | The labor market is segmented based on sectors (public versus private) and types of workers (nationals versus non-nationals) |
| 1. Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2010) | To explore stereotyping of citizens | 310 Surveys, UAE | Emiratis are negatively stereotyped by expatriates in terms of skills and attitudes towards work |
| 1. Forstenlechner (2010) | HRM recommendations for workforce localization | 25 Interviews with HR managers, UAE | A list of proposed adaptations needed by key HRM processes to foster localization |
| 1. Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2010) | The role of updating "social contract" in resolving unemployment problem | Secondary database, GCC | Three types of policy responses: enhancing  educational attainment, diversifying the  economy and intervening directly in the  labor market |
| 1. Salih (2010) | Explore the slow growth of local employees despite localization | 10 interviews and 9 respondents for a questionnaire, Kuwait | Many challenges were identified for implementing localization program in the private sector |
| 1. Forstenlechner and Mellahi (2011) | How do MNEs obtain external legitimacy through the employment of locals? What are the drivers and cost/benefits? | 48 semi-structured interviews with MNEs managers,  Qualitative, UAE | The motives for obtaining external legitimacy through hiring locals varied from social legitimacy logic and a sense of appropriateness to economic efficiency and business case logic. MNEs that are not being seen to be supporting localization are put at disadvantage relative to others |
| 1. Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2011) | The perceptions, realities and policy options of demographic imbalance | Secondary data, GCC | A brief overview of the GCC's national/non-national demographic evolution and the demographic composition as it currently stands |
| 1. Raven (2011) | Issues related to implementation of Emiratization in the education sector | Conceptual, UAE | Several challenges to Emiratize the UAE education sector are identified and discussed |
| 1. Rutledge et al. (2011) | The impact of nationalization policies on female labor force participation | Expert semi-structured 18 interviews, Saudi Arabia and UAE | Nationalization policies marginally increases female participation in the labor force. Still, policies are not gender focused. Gendered-nationalization approach needs to be adopted |
| 1. Williams et al. (2011) | The importance, challenges and impact of localization practices | Review paper, Qatar | There are many barriers to localization like inefficient quota system, strict cultural practices and ineffective education system |
| 1. Al‐Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2012) | The factors determining career choice behavior in the private sector | Semi-structured interviews with 60 young Emiratis, UAE | A list of potential causes of very low private sector employment levels and a two-approaches strategy to deal with them |
| 1. Forstenlechner et al. (2012a) | Analysis of the multi-level dynamics of the quota system and their impact | Longitudinal case study, UAE | The success and failure of a quota system is contingent upon a web of multi-level inﬂuences, transcending the tendency of current debates to polarize the value and weaknesses of quotas in absolute measure |
| 1. Forstenlechner et al. (2012b) | Factors that reduce employers` willingness to recruit national candidates | 247 questionnaires, HRM personnel, UAE | Four factors made UAE employers less willing to recruit nationals, namely, social, motivational, cultural and regulatory factors |
| 1. Lim (2012) | Work preferences for Generation Y Emiratis for better recruitment | Interviews & questionnaires, 155 respondents, UAE | Generation Y Emiratis seeks jobs that offer training opportunities to develop skills to participate in the private sector job market |
| 1. Swailes et al. (2012) | Attitudes toward Omanization and barriers toward its effective implementation | 25 interviews, Oman | Localization policies are progressing steadily as labor markets change. A mismatch exists between graduates’ employability and the skills needed by employers |
| 1. Forstenlechner and Baruch (2013) | Explain the UAE labor market using existing career theories and concepts | Conceptual analysis approach, UAE | Government approach to localization through legal pressures have low impact on localization success |
| 1. Toledo (2013) | The conditions under which an Emiratization quota could increase employment opportunities for native workers in the private sector | Ramsey Rule application, modelling, UAE | Emiratization quota achieves some level of success in the short run, if implemented in firms that are operating in imperfectly competitive markets. In the medium run, a higher level of labor mobility for migrant workers could increase employment opportunities for native workers |
| 1. Yaghi and Yaghi (2013) | How employees perceive practices of HR diversity in their organizations? | Survey, 795 responses, private and public sectors, UAE | Employees with different backgrounds perceive diversity differently. Successful diversity practices include reforming Emiratization programs to eliminate perceived inequality |
| 1. Al-Asfour and Khan (2014) | Key initiatives and challenges of Saudization | A review, Saudi Arabia | A holistic Saudization policy is needed to bridge the gap of talent and skills required after the removal of the expatriate workers |
| 1. Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2014) | Assessment of Emiratization policy and its major challenges | 32 managers and HR practitioners, interviews, UAE | Several weaknesses of the Emiratization program are related to policy regulations and implementation tools adopted. Barriers to effective Emiratization were identified |
| 1. Forstenlechner et al. (2014) | Career attitudes of nationals and its effects on willingness to work in the private sector | Online survey, 2267 responses, UAE | Social contract and expectations toward state employment have strong implications for willingness to work in the private sector |
| 1. Karam and Afiouni (2014) | The localized experiences of women at work in higher education | A two-part research method, namely, a critical review and empirical examination, all GCC countries | A description of the representation of women across ranks and introduction of a multilevel model along with directions for future research on gender, human resource management and regional development |
| 1. Marchon and Toledo (2014) | The impact of the employment quota on native employment | Secondary database, UAE | The binding quota increases the cost of labor, cost of production, output price, and decreases the industry’s production |
| 1. Sidani and Al Ariss (2014) | How institutional and cultural drivers pose new sets of challenges to talent management? | In-depth 48 interviews, template analysis, GCC countries | Localization in the GCC poses major impediments in the talent management process. Companies perceive localization as a burden, a necessary evil |
| 1. Al-Waqfi and Abdalla Al-faki (2015) | Gender-based differences in employment conditions for local and expatriate workers | The 2007 cross-section Dubai Labor Market Survey, UAE | There are gender-based differences and inequity in employment in the UAE labor market. |
| 1. Barnett et al. (2015) | The economic impact of mandated employment quotas for citizen workers | A policy study, UAE | Labor quotas create inefficiencies such as productive inefficiency and higher prices. An alternative policy was proposed to ameliorate these inefficiencies |
| 1. Goby (2015) | The influence of corporate financing on Emiratization program success | Conceptual, private sector, UAE | The limited success of Emiratization program is due to corporate strategy of selecting the workforce based on rights and financial criteria (cheaper and more compliant labor) |
| 1. Goby et al. (2015) | The rudiments of an organizational communication framework and how it can enhance the  integration of locals into the expatriate-dominated workforce of UAE | 458 Emirati respondents’ narratives of positive and negative workplace communication experiences. | The communication preferences identified could inform the implementation of an organizational communication model centered around indigenous communication preferences, including the communication strategies that would be most effective for organizational leadership to use. |
| 1. Aldossari and Robertson (2016) | The influence of Wasta on how psychological contracts of repatriates’ form and change | 48 semi-structured interviews from two large Saudi organizations | Prior to international assignment, Wasta was taken for granted and once repatriated, it was foregrounded and perceived as highly problematic for career advancement |
| 1. Moideenkutty et al. (2016) | The link between localization practices and financial performance | Survey, secondary data, 73 firms, Oman | HRM practices of localization are positively related to financial performance (after controlling for size, firm type, average price earnings ratio, and Omanization levels) |
| 1. Parakandi and Behery (2016) | The status of work–life balance policies and initiatives in various business organizations | Multiple case study, 14 companies, 38 senior managers, UAE | A proposed comprehensive research model for future research on work–life balance |
| 1. Ryan (2016) | Applying equity theory as a framework to evaluate Emiratization challenges and initiatives | Conceptual, UAE | Offers an equity theory perspective on the perceptions of inequity that can exist in the comparison of UAE nationals in the private and public sectors. An inequality exist that hinders Emiratization initiatives |
| 1. Parcero and Ryan (2017) | The effect of labor market condition on the four pillars of knowledge–based economy | 19 countries  benchmarking methodology, UAE, Qatar | UAE ranks slightly better than the median rank of the 19 compared countries while Qatar ranks somewhat below. Results also indicate that both countries lag considerably behind knowledge economy leaders |
| 1. Rutledge and Madi (2017) | Parental career-related behavior (PCB) in relation to the vocational intentions of female nationals | Survey data from face-to-face encounters (n=335), UAE | Parental support was found to significantly reduce the perceived sociocultural barriers to workforce participation. Parental interference amplified these barriers and also increased public sector preferences. |
| 1. Aljanahi (2017) | The current challenges/barriers to Emiratization process in the private sector | Content analysis, 88 articles in business-focused newspapers, UAE | A combination of low skills standards, higher salary and benefit requirements, and longer working hours impede the hiring of UAE nationals in the private sector |
| 1. Belwal and Belwal (2017) | Employers’ perceptions of women workers and the challenges they face | 28 interviews, Oman | Employers are impressed by women workers. A number of challenges women face are identified such as attitude at work, post-marital challenges, and socio-cultural barriers |
| 1. Peck (2017) | The effect of quota-based labor regulations (i.e., Natiqat program) on employment and firms | 116,873 private firms,  Secondary database, Saudi Arabia | Natiqat program increased the number of Saudis employed in the private sector, but at significant cost. It also increased firms exit rate |
| 1. Alfarhan and Al-Busaidi (2018) | Prevalent earnings differentials in the private sectors between skilled local and migrant labor | Primary data set, 7,262 full-time skilled workers, All GCC countries | The real earnings differential between locals and Asians decreases at higher earnings, while that between locals and non-GCC Arabs are relatively stable. Both are characterized by overpayment of locals |
| 1. Jabeen et al. (2018) | The role of localization policies, job attributes, and education in achieving professional goals | 207 questionnaires, Emirati postgraduate students, interpretive structural modelling (ISM), UAE | Localization is perceived to be effective in promoting employment opportunities for UAE nationals. Education plays a crucial role in their professional success. Salary is ranked as an important job attribute |
| 1. Waxin et al. (2018) | Recruitment and selection challenges and practices related to Emiratization | 14 interviews with HR managers in 11 private and public organizations, UAE | Six common challenges related to the recruitment and selection such as high compensation expectations of locals. Some differences between public and private organizations were also reported |
| 1. Yamada (2018) | Political economy of human capital development | A review, Saudi Arabia | Rentier characteristics of Saudi economy is responsible for the mismatch between education and employment, thus hampering the ability of building a skilled workforce |
| 1. Abaker et al. (2019) | The impact of organizational policies and practices on diversity management | 74 questionnaires from 11 private organizations, Saudi Arabia | Saudization policies and practices affect the recruitment of diverse employees. It negatively influences foreign employees in terms of cutting wages, jobs and benefits |
| 1. Albejaidi and Nair (2019) | An overview of health workforce in achieving health system goals | Conceptual, literature review, Saudi Arabia | Saudi health workforce displays various attributes like gender composition, geographic, and public-private distribution |
| 1. Al-Mutairi et al. (2019) | Factors discouraging nationals from working in the private sector | Questionnaire, 304 potential job seekers, Kuwait | Discouraging factors include low expectations of employers toward Kuwaiti nationals, lack of job security, and fewer benefits |
| 1. Belwal et al. (2019) | The work–life balance challenges facing working Omani women | 46 interviews, private sector, Oman | The majority of women are neither fully aware nor satisfied of the labor laws and family-friendly policies |
| 1. Ali et al. (2020) | The role of corporate reputation and employee-company identification on the work-related outcomes of job insecurity resulting from workforce localization | Survey, 135 Expat employees, Saudi Arabia | Job insecurity reduces the engagement of immigrant employees and leads to increased employee burnout and intentions to quit jobs. Favorable corporate reputation and level of identification with company may reduce the negative impact of job insecurity on employee's burnout and intentions to quit |
| 1. Tlaiss and Al Waqfi (2020) | HR managers strategic role in advancing women’s careers | Semi-structured interviews, 43 HR managers, Saudi Arabia | Commitment of HR managers to increasing Saudi women’s participation stemmed from different motivations including meeting Saudization program |
| 1. Sarker and Rahman (2020) | Analyze the rationale for using social engineering as a tool to impact nationalization of workforce in the UAE | Secondary data, UAE | UAE Government initiated multiple policies and programs to enhance participation of Emiratis, yet significant gap exist between private and public sector. |
| 1. Patterson et al., (2021) | A meta-analysis of existing research on gender discrimination/gender gap and women in the UAE | A meta-analysis of 72 articles using the  Wildcard operator search method and the Boolean operator, UAE | A decreasing trend in gender discrimination, but the issue persists, requiring efforts from policy-makers, society and government to ensure gender equality. |
| 1. Ghouse et al., (2021) | Examines how gender and previous work exposure are related to entrepreneurial attitudes of Omani university students. T | 144 surveys from Omani students, Oman. | Omani students display positive entrepreneurial attitudes. Female Omani students had similar  entrepreneurial attitudes with their male counterparts. This indicates an environment that encourages and supports women entrepreneurs in Oman. |
| 1. Elbanna (2022) | Explores current nationalization literature in the GCC countries to propose policy and practical implications | A review, GCC countries | Ten implications that addressed workforce nationalization in the GCC are proposed |
| 1. (Glaister et al., 2021) | How managers make sense of localization policies through the use of talent management? | 26 interviews with managers in the Banking and Petroleum  Sectors, thematic analysis, Oman | Punitive state logics encourage organizations to focus on the societal wellbeing of their talent management measures and inspires a sense of corporate social responsibility |
| 1. Al Jawali et al. (2021) | Explores practices and policies of talent management in the public sector of Dubai, UAE | 34 in-depth interviews  with senior human resource managers, field visits and extensive document reviews | Talent management in the public sector in Dubai is ineffective and fragmented |
| 1. Griffin et al. (2021) | Investigates the tourism career perceptions of female Emirati undergraduate  students | 247 surveys across 19 classes are collected from female Emirati students who could have chosen tourism as a major, but elected not to. | Perception of the tourism field is influenced by career incentives, career deterrents, and cultural blocks and the latter are the most prominent  factor. |
| 1. Tee and Li (2021) | Studies the impact of Emiratization on innovation motivation of Emirati employees. | 200 surveys and bank annual reports from 13 commercial banks in the UAE. | Positive effect of Emiratization on firm innovation. |
| 1. Al Muqarshi (2022) | Investigates the reasons of group instability resulting from faculty’s  national diversity and its impact on establishing a group’s social identity and intellectual capital in Oman. | A single case study design using triangulated sources of data which include 16 interviews, 8 meeting  observations, document analysis, field notes and indirect observations. | The absence of social identity in higher education hinders establishing an intellectual capital that represents a cornerstone for establishing a knowledge-based economy that fuels the realization of the Oman vision 2040. |
| 1. El-Said and Aziz (2022) | Determine the causes of the low number of Omanis employed  in the hotel industry  . | Mixed methods design  using focus-groups and a structured questionnaire among Omani employees of four- and five-star hotels in Muscat. | There is strong dissatisfaction with financial compensation and the limited  growth opportunities. |
| 1. Darwish et al., (2022) | To advance our understanding of the effects of localization policies on multinational enterprises (MNEs). | Surveys from 157 MNEs, Saudi Arabia. | HRM functions are closely correlated with the level of workforce localization. |
| 1. Durand-Lasserve (2022) | Investigates how quotas of foreign workers and subsidies on national labor can increase the private sector  employment of nationals. | Secondary data, two alternative partial equilibrium models for analysis, Saudi Arabia. | Results showed that when the quotas of foreign workers are binding, they reduce the impact of labor subsidies on the employment of nationals. In addition, the matching model subsidies on national labor have a larger effect on employment compared with market-clearing wage model. |
| 1. Elbanna & Fatima (2022). | Examines the integrative scholarly research on the quota system in implementing the nationalization strategy. | Secondary data, integrative literature review, GCC. | Developed a framework for discerning the role of the quota system in implementing the  nationalization strategy. |
| 1. Elsharnouby et al., (2023) | Explores local Qatari job seekers’ and employees’ perceptions of the workforce  nationalization strategy | Qualitative, interviews with 28 local job seekers, Qatar. | Local job seekers perceive Qatarization as a means to replace expatriate employees  with nationals, particularly in the public sector and leadership positions. |

'Source: Created by authors

**Table 3**

**Workforce nationalization definitions in the context of the GCC countries**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Study** | **Concept (country)** | **Definition** | **Key themes** | **Emphasis/level** |
| Waxin et al. (2018, p. 100) | Workforce localization (UAE) | “the recruitment and development of  citizens to increase their employability, thus reducing a country’s dependency on expatriate labor” | - Activities such as recruitment, training and development for enhancing local employees’ capabilities.  - Creating employment opportunities for national citizens. | Direct intervention (quantity)  Country-level |
| Al-Harbi (1997, p. 87). | Workforce localization (KSA) | “the replacement of the expatriate labor force with a trained and qualified local labor force in a planned manner that will ensure the continuity of work” | -Planned replacement of the expatriate workforce with a local workforce.  -Local workforce development. | Direct intervention (quantity)  Country-level |
| Salih (2010, p. 169) | Workforce localization (Kuwait) | “the process of replacing expatriates with nationals in several economic roles… [it] take[s] various shapes, from  developing human capital through education and training programs to mandating specific quotas of national workforce on the private sector” | - Replacing expatriates with nationals.  - Planned replacement in specific sectors. | Direct intervention (quantity)  & indirect intervention (quality)  Country-level |
| Forstenlechner & Mellahi (2011, p. 456) | Workforce localization (UAE) | “Investing in and supporting nationals to build their skills to enhance their chances in the job market”. | - Investing in education and development of local workforce.  - Enhancing employability for local workforce. | Indirect intervention (quality)  Country-level |
| Rutledge et al. (2011, p. 183) | Labor  Nationalization (GCC) | It includes “direct labor market intervention,  such as reserving certain job categories for nationals, and indirect intervention  by way of human resource development” | - Direct market intervention.  - Indirect market intervention. | Direct intervention (quantity) and indirect intervention (quality)  Country-level |
| Goby (2015, p. 417) | Emiratization (UAE) | “attaining full employment within the national labor force, reducing the reliance on foreign labor and developing market-oriented skills among locals”. | - Creating employment opportunities for locals.  - Reducing the reliance on foreign labor.  - Enhancing employability for local workforce. | Direct intervention (quantity) & indirect intervention (quality)  Country-level |
| Al Ali (2008, p. 368) | Emiratization (UAE) | “a focused social capital program, seeks to overcome structural barriers to Emirati employment in organizations, and address social issues rising from citizens’ entry into the labor market” | - Adapting workplace for nationals.  - Investing in education and development of local workforce.  - Addressing social issues related to locals’ entry into the labor market (e.g., trust, gender issues and Wasta). | Indirect intervention (quality)  Country-level |
| Forstenlechner et al. (2012, p. 409) | Emiratization (UAE) | a process to “overhaul educational systems and more closely aligning the skills taught with the needs of the market… [and to] implement a range of direct labor market intervention measures such as setting quotas and the allocation of certain roles to be staffed solely by nationals” | - Reform educational systems.  - Alignment between education and skills needed in the market.  - Labor market intervention to implement the localization. | Indirect intervention (quality & direct intervention (quantity) |
| Toledo (2013, p. 40) | Emiratization (UAE) | “a government policy designed to increase the participation of native workers in the production of goods and services in the private sector”. | - Planned replacement in specific sectors. | Direct intervention (quantity)  Country-level |
| Abaker, Al-Titi, & Al-Nasr (2019, p. 458) | Saudization (KSA) | A policy that includes “restrictions to recruiting expatriates in the public sector as well as private companies in order to reduce foreign employees and rely more on locals”. | - Limit the reliance on expatriates’ workforce.  - Planned replacement in specific sectors, mainly in the private sector. | Direct intervention (quantity)  Country-level |

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1. The total adds up to more than 78 articles and 100% since it was allowed to code a study under more than one area. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The definition is based on the work of Johnson et al. (2007); Gilson and Goldberg (2015); and Cropanzano (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The total is more 100% since many studies used multi-country samples. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)