



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gulf nations are described as blessed twice, firstly by the discovery of hydrocarbon resources and secondly by convenient access to the expatriate pipeline coming from nearby countries (Arnold & Shah, 1986). Throughout recent history, dependency on temporary foreign workers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has steadily increased.

In the education sector, Arab expatriate teachers account for a significant percentage of the teacher workforce, therefore playing a critical role in determining the quality of the national education systems. This policy paper presents results from a study exploring the perceptions of Arab expatriate teachers in the UAE and Qatar regarding the push and pull factors drawing them to work in the two countries and the implications of this phenomenon for education systems and these countries overall.

# Expatriate Teachers and Education Quality in the Gulf Cooperation Council

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## Introduction

The mid-twentieth century's discovery of oil in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) fueled rapid economic development across the region (Ridge, 2014). Key to this development agenda was the use of expatriate labor to build infrastructure and fill middle management and administrative roles in both the public and private sectors. Over time, as national populations have become more educated, the majority of public sector positions have been filled by nationals. However, some sectors, including the education sector, have been unable to attract nationals in sufficient numbers and so have continued to depend on expatriate labor. With the exception of Oman, the education sectors of most GCC countries continue to use significant numbers of Arab expatriates as teachers in government schools (Ridge, 2014). In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 90% of teachers in boys' government schools and 20% of teachers in girls' government schools were expatriate Arabs as of the 2010/2011 academic year (UAE MOE, 2014). In Qatar, expatriate Arabs comprised approximately 87% of teachers in all government schools in 2013 (Social and Economic Survey Research Institute [SESRI], personal communication, 2014).

Despite their contribution to national development, Arab expatriate teachers are not well-studied as a unique expatriate population. The lack of research on this segment of the population gives rise to larger questions about the factors that attract them to the Gulf region, what keeps them there, and the implications for the national education systems that are heavily dependent upon them. National policies related to the recruitment and use of expatriate teachers, therefore, need to account for these factors in order to improve not only access to, but also the quality of, national education systems.

This policy paper, which is based on a larger study (currently pending publication as a book chapter), examines the case of Arab expatriate teachers working in the UAE and Qatar through both an educational and institutional lens. First, it introduces the background of global expatriate teachers as well as those working specifically in the GCC. Next, it discusses the current challenges faced by and those resulting from the dependency on Arab expatriate teachers

in the UAE and Qatar, followed by a presentation of the findings from an exploratory study conducted on the topic in both countries. The paper concludes by offering policy recommendations related to the current working environment of Arab expatriate teachers and its effects on GCC schools and students as well as on the wider development of GCC countries.

## Patterns and Trends in Global Teacher Migration

Teacher migration is not a phenomenon unique to the GCC. Global studies on teacher migration find that the primary factors that contribute to teachers' decisions to leave their home countries and pursue opportunities abroad are economic, including better pay and career opportunities (Ravenstein, 1885).

Teacher migration studies from developing country contexts suggest that, in addition to economic motivations, a combination of non-economic push and pull factors exist that encourage teachers to make international moves. In Fiji, the most significant factors contributing to the migration decision include political instability, discrimination, and land rights issues (Voigt-Graf, 2003). In South Africa, teachers are both pushed out of their country due to a dissatisfaction with national education systems and pulled into other countries to pursue what they perceive to be better career opportunities (or "greener pastures") (Manik, 2005). Similarly, teachers in India are pulled into other countries to further their professional development and to expose themselves to international careers. They are also pushed out of the subcontinent as a result of corruption and social issues, among other factors (Sharma, 2012).

While there have been a number of studies examining teacher migration in other parts of the world, the phenomenon of teacher migration to the Gulf and its impact on local education systems in particular is unexplored. This paper, therefore, seeks to ameliorate this and examines the cases of the UAE and Qatar.

## Teacher Migration to the UAE and Qatar

Both the UAE and Qatar have made advances in terms of access to and quality of education, from minimal access in the 1950s to comprehensive coverage by the mid-1970s (Ridge, 2014). With rapidly expanding education sectors, demand for teachers in the two countries has continually exceeded domestic supply throughout the past 40 years (Engman, 2009).

There have been some attempts to increase national participation in the teaching workforces, but these have been met with limited success, particularly among male nationals, who have many opportunities in other, higher-paying sectors (Ridge, 2014). In the UAE, Emiratis make up over 80% of female but only about 10% of male teachers in public schools (Ridge, 2010). In Qatar, however, the dependence on Arab expatriate teachers is even more pronounced due to a shortage of both male and female Qatari teachers. Although a larger percentage of Arab expatriate teachers work in private schools, they have been stated to make up over 70% of independent (public) school teachers (Toumi, 2011; SEC, 2011) in 2011 and 87% of public school teachers in 2013 (SESRI, 2013).

According to existing literature, the overriding factor pulling Arab expatriate teachers to the UAE and Qatar is the promise of higher salaries (Engman, 2009). As expatriate Arab teachers in the UAE and Qatar are frequently male, and typically the sole wage earners for their families (Ridge, 2010), the perceived ability to earn higher salaries than they could in their home countries and thus be able to send sizable remittances to those at home is a key attraction. There are also, however, a number of important push factors that encourage Arab teachers to leave their home countries. These include lack of employment prospects and political instability, which has often led to violent conflict (Zohry, 2013).

Despite the more lucrative salaries found in the UAE and Qatar compared to salaries in the teachers' home countries, Arab expatriate teachers experience numerous challenges working in these contexts. In the UAE, Arab expatriate teachers earn approximately half the salary of their Emirati counterparts and have fewer professional development opportunities. Besides also having fewer training opportunities, in Qatar, Arab expatriate teachers are placed on one-year contracts, are expected to transfer to teach in other schools with limited advanced notice, and are sometimes made to teach large classes of 40 to 50 students (Brewer et al., 2006). Some studies have also found that, due to uncertain work environments, a prolonged state of apprehension may exist among many Arab expatriate teachers (Brewer & Goldman, 2013). Khalaf and Alkobaisi (1999) have referred to this as the "insecurity syndrome" (p. 296). This perception of job insecurity among the majority of Arab expatriate teachers in both countries may mean that these teachers fail to fully engage with the system out of fear of losing their jobs, thereby impacting the quality of the education received by the students (Jones, 2013).

Arab expatriate teachers also bring with them a culture of private tutoring as one way of generating additional income (Engman, 2009; Sabry, 2012). Although teachers in the UAE and Qatar are officially prohibited from getting paid for private lessons, the rule is infrequently enforced, primarily due to the difficulty of identifying teachers who are engaging in private tutoring (Farah, 2011). Therefore, since parents of national students seek private tutoring to supplement regular classes, teachers can easily find opportunities to teach outside of school, sometimes tutoring students from their own classrooms (Sabry, 2012). Indicative of their job insecurity, teachers' feelings of impermanence can cause them to be focused on the present, pushing them to maximize their earnings through tutoring instead of considering the long-term repercussions of private tutoring for themselves and their students. These consequences include lower teaching and learning quality, and, in the worst cases, can result in corruption in the education system (Farah, 2011).

The quality of Arab expatriate teachers is also called into question by the fact that they originate from countries that do not have consistent teacher-training standards and in which teaching is often viewed as a profession of last resort (Ridge, 2014). Arab expatriate teachers have generally received less pedagogical training relative to their local counterparts in the UAE and Qatar (Ridge, 2014). For instance, pre-practicum or a supervised practicum during teacher training is not mandated for teacher education programs in Egypt, Syria, or Jordan, unlike it is in the UAE (Ridge, 2010).

Overall, the current research on teacher migration internationally and in the GCC region specifically provides a broad understanding of the background and socioeconomic conditions for teachers working in those contexts. The next section presents the findings from the study examining Arab expatriate teachers in the UAE and Qatar.

## Perceptions of Arab Expatriate Teachers in the UAE and Qatar

The purpose of the study upon which this paper is based was to gain a deeper understanding of the following three aspects:

1. The characteristics of Arab expatriate teachers in the UAE and Qatar,
2. The push and pull factors that bring and keep these teachers there, and

3. The implications of the current situation on the national education systems of the two countries.

To address these questions, this study employed a mixed-methods comparative approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative components. It surveyed 48 and 43 teachers from the UAE and Qatar respectively, followed by in-depth interviews with a group of seven teachers regarding the themes that emerged in the study. Significant findings are discussed below.

## Profile of Arab Expatriate Teachers

Based on the survey results, the average age of expatriate Arab teachers in both countries was approximately 46 years old, with males forming the majority (78%) of teachers surveyed. In terms of nationality, most came from Egypt (39%), followed by Jordan (22%), Syria (18%), and others.

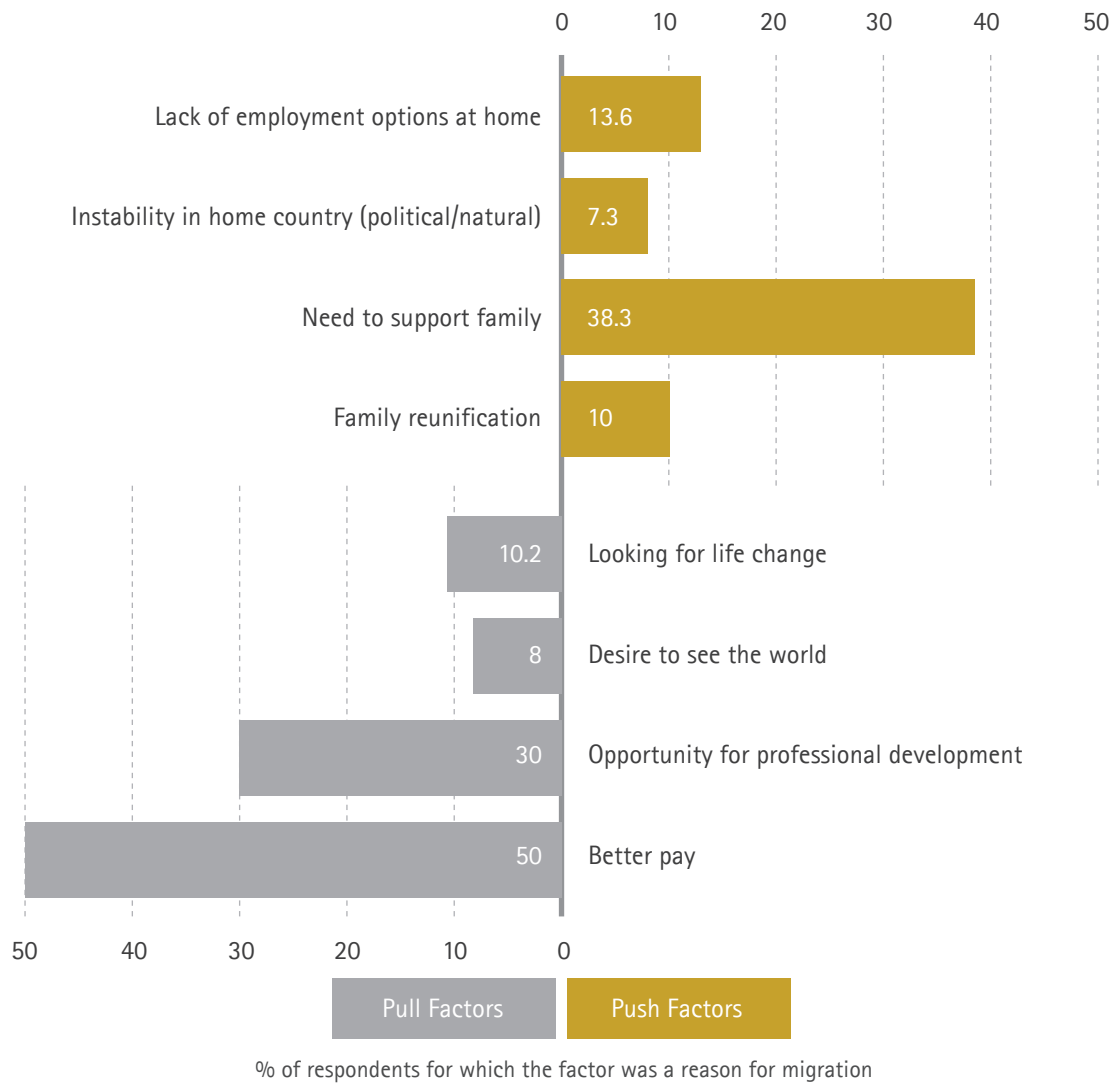
With respect to teachers' professional characteristics, 60% of Arab teacher respondents reported having a subject-specific bachelor's or master's degree while only 33% reported having a degree in education or teaching. Overall, male respondents reported higher levels of education than their female counterparts, with 82% of males and 63% of females having attained bachelor's degrees. An overwhelming majority of all teachers, 89%, had teaching experience prior to moving to their current positions, with males being more experienced than females on average. In addition, around 76% and 54% of the teachers in the UAE and Qatar respectively stated that they had taught outside of their home countries for 10 years.

## Causes of Migration: Push and Pull Factors

When asked about their decisions to migrate from their home countries (push and pull factors), about half of the Arab expatriate teachers perceived higher salaries in the UAE and Qatar to be the most important determining factor, followed by opportunities for professional development (see Figure 1 below). The primary factor pushing teachers to leave their home countries was the "need" to support family in light of challenging living conditions in their home countries.

The process of migration differs slightly for teachers in both countries. While Arab expatriate teachers working in the UAE primarily found their jobs by applying directly to a job advertisement (64%), those living in Qatar most commonly found their positions through friends/relatives (49%).

**Figure 1: Migration Push and Pull Factors**



### Professional and Personal Experience in the UAE and Qatar

Out of the 89 surveyed teachers, 74% taught at government schools while others worked at private Arabic or English medium schools,<sup>1</sup> with teachers working in private schools faring worse than their counterparts in public schools. In addition to receiving worse compensation and benefits packages, earlier reports find that the quality of Arabic medium private schools is on average significantly lower than that of government schools (Ridge, 2014; Nazzal, 2014).

Interestingly, the basic monthly salary that respondents expected, on average, was lower than what they actually received. However, 55% indicated that their salaries were either lower or much lower than the

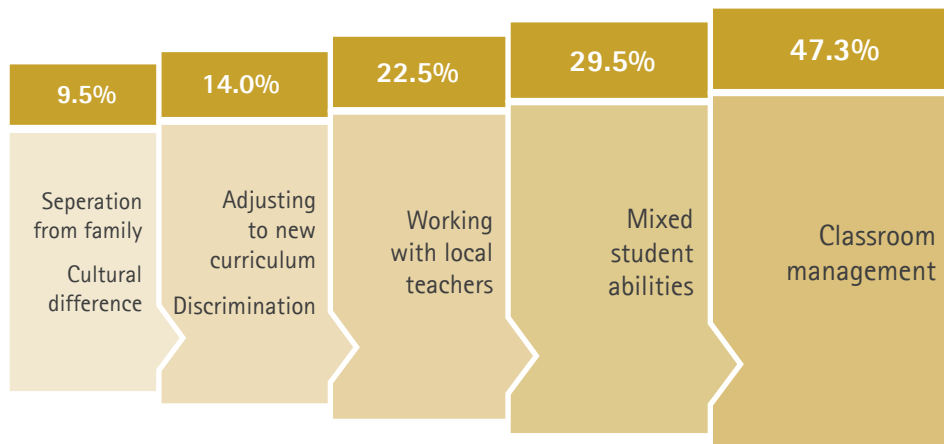
salaries of their Emirati or Qatari counterparts, when holding education credentials and levels of experience constant. Females were especially disadvantaged relative to their male counterparts. Some teachers also noted promotional, regulatory, and classroom difficulties, as illustrated in Figure 2 below. More than half also reported alienation, housing, and job stability as challenges to settling in. Nevertheless, the teachers reported many positive experiences and few difficulties integrating into the local societies in the UAE or Qatar, with approximately 84% of teachers stating that they fit in very well in the UAE or Qatar.

### Reflections and Future Plans

Reflecting on their experiences, teachers in Qatar reported higher levels of satisfaction than their UAE

<sup>1</sup> In Qatar, most government schools are now called independent schools, funded by the government and monitored by the Supreme Education Council (SEC). There are also cases of public-private partnership schools that use the term "semi-independent." In the UAE, government schools also include *Madares Al Ghad* (Schools of Tomorrow) and model schools. The K-12 *Madares Al Ghad* were started in 2007 in the UAE by the Ministry of Education as government schools with an emphasis on the English language. UAE model schools are supervised by regional education zones and emphasize the use of technology in the classroom.

**Figure 2: Challenges to Teaching Experiences in the UAE and Qatar**



counterparts. However, teachers from both countries shared that the primary factors that would encourage them to stay in and commit to the UAE or Qatar were wage increases and more secure positions.

In the interviews, the teachers elaborated on their commitment to the UAE and Qatar, motivation for migration, and desire for recognition and permanency. All of the participants felt at home in the UAE and Qatar, with most having lived there for over eighteen years. In fact, many of them reported that they were attracted by the safety and relative comfort offered by these countries relative to their own.

"... I have lived here longer than I've lived in my home country. I don't know much about Egypt. I started my career in this country, and I hope to continue it here."

UAE respondent

When asked about their compensation, all respondents acknowledged that, while they received what they initially thought were decent salaries, they quickly became aware that their salaries were not always enough to account for the costs of living in the UAE and Qatar. The survey and interview findings suggest that, in addition to meeting the demands of families back home, this may be one reason that many teachers have resorted to other income-generating avenues like private tutoring, teaching at adult education centers, and starting small businesses.

"I spend around three hours a day on external activities . . . Being a private teacher is not an easy or respectable thing . . . If the [teaching] salary [were] better, no one would [engage in] private tutoring because everyone would like to lead comfortable lives."

UAE respondent

However, other respondents shared contradictory perspectives, indicating that they would not stop engaging in private tutoring, regardless of the salaries they made teaching. This corroborates earlier reports of Arab expatriate teachers' stating that even if their salaries were 100,000 AED (27,700 USD) a month, they would continue to tutor (Farah, 2011; Hajras, 2011). Finally, respondents working in private schools and receiving lower compensation suggested that they would like to seek higher paying teaching positions in the public sector despite being satisfied in all other aspects of work.

"I don't want to stay in my private school, although I am comfortable at the school, because the salary is very low. I would prefer to work in the public sector where [the salaries] are higher."

UAE respondent

## The Educational Implications of the Status of Arab Expatriate Teachers

Finally, when considering the implications of the current financial and work conditions of expatriate Arab teachers on the Emirati and Qatari education systems, interviewees in the UAE noted that the lack of job security and unrealistic expectations could lead to a negative impact on their quality of teaching. In addition to limited time spent on lesson planning, interviewees also highlighted the negative implications of job insecurity that result from their lack of permanent residency. One respondent gave an account of how teachers can be pushed into raising student grades by anywhere from 10-30% for fear of losing their jobs. Another teacher commented that her visa status has meant that she has been transferred to two schools within the span of a few months because a national teacher was promised her position.

Interviewees in Qatar had conflicting and vague responses with respect to the implications of their work statuses on the education sector. One acknowledged the fear of losing his job, but both denied that it had an impact on education quality.

“Having a yearly contract is worrying because you don't know if you're going to stay for the next year or get laid off. Having a five-year contract would bring teachers peace of mind because they would know that they aren't going anywhere. This fear would impact the person emotionally, but probably not their teaching.”

Qatar respondent

In conclusion, although most of the findings from the study were largely consistent with existing research on expatriate teacher populations, Arab expatriate teacher populations in both countries expressed concerns surrounding the professional integration of expatriate teachers, particularly with regards to their lack of permanency and job security. The study suggests that it is important to take into account the long-term implications of this unique context on the quality and culture of schools in the UAE and Qatar and on their education systems overall.

## Policy Recommendations

The results of this study are consistent with literature on the economic motivation behind migration (Sharma, 2012; Khalaf & Alkobaisi, 1999; Eurostat, 2000). Expatriate Arab teachers come to the Gulf in order to make money. This, in turn, allows them to provide a better lifestyle for their immediate and extended families, particularly in light of the political instability in most of their home countries. However, Arab expatriates in the Gulf form a unique and, in many ways, an indispensable part of the population due to their shared language, culture, and, in most cases, religion. They, therefore, play an integral role in educating the citizens and future leaders of these countries.

Nevertheless, current employment practices and policies relating to Arab expatriate teachers are failing to achieve the kind of student outcomes that governments in both the UAE and Qatar desire. In order to improve both teacher engagement and student achievement, education authorities in the UAE and Qatar should consider the following policy recommendations:

1. Investing in more research to examine the impact of current employment policies on Arab expatriate teachers' effectiveness in terms of student achievement,
2. Offering better working conditions for Arab expatriate teachers, including longer contracts and more opportunities for professional development, and
3. Improving the status of all teachers (both national and expatriate) within schools in GCC societies to create recognition for their contributions to the national education systems, allowing them to feel invested both in the countries in which they work and in the well-being of their students.

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