

Reverse Brain Drain: Career Aspirations of Malaysian Repatriates

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the influence of push and pull factors on career aspirations of Malaysian repatriates.

Design/methodology/approach: The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was used as the study's underlying theory. Data were gathered from 129 self-initiated repatriates and analysed using multiple regression analysis.

Findings: The analysis shows that political variables of push factors, as well as personal and family variables of pull factors, predicted repatriates' career aspirations. The independent variables explained 31.2% variance of repatriates' career aspiration model.

Research limitations/implications: The research was limited to repatriates employed in organizations within the Klang Valley region, namely Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Petaling Jaya.

Practical implications: The paper offers practical implications for human resource managers, general managers, and employees by using the links between the predictive factors and career aspirations of repatriates to further strategize human resource development strategies. The findings could help government bodies to narrow their focus on repatriates' needs so that the loss of talents due to brain drain would be repaid upon their return. As a result, repatriates will also be able to contribute their skills, expertise, knowledge and experiences that they have gained abroad to the homeland.

Originality/value: This study is a step forward in understanding the influence of social, personal, family, economic and political factors on the career aspirations of repatriates. The study, the first of its kind in this country, provides an insight to human resource practitioners in dealing with the career aspirations of repatriates.

Keywords: Career aspiration, repatriate, push-pull factor, human resource management, reverse brain drain, Malaysia

Introduction

The number of professional human resources undertaking repatriation assignments are increasing lately (ILO, 2010; Jokinen et al., 2008), a growing number of them come from emerging market economies (Al Ariss, 2010). The World Bank statistics in 2010 (cited in Roudgar and Richards, 2015) showed that approximately 20 million people left their homeland to better developed countries due to the unsatisfactory social conditions prevailing in their home country. In Korea alone, around two-thirds of talents who pursue doctoral studies intended to stay and chose to remain, for the past few decades, in developed countries especially in the US (Song and Song, 2015). This scenario is not alien to Malaysia as only 2500 repatriates returned from 1995 to 2013 – a significantly small amount. The process of global circulation of talents somehow is expected to pay back the ‘investment’ of the talent, also known as repatriates, to the homeland. A repatriate refers to an individual who undergoes a repatriation process, which means returning to his/her homeland after staying abroad for a duration of time due to employment. There is limited understanding on the drivers of repatriation from developing markets, whether from a self-initiated or corporate-initiated move (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010), and from advanced economies heading back to emerging market economies (Chatterjee, 2007; Soltani et al., 2012). This has been described, from the perspective of the emerging market economies, as ‘reverse brain drain’ (RBD) (Saxenian, 2005). This article focuses on the self-initiated repatriation of professionals from abroad (whether from advanced or developing countries) to Malaysia.

There is an extensive body of research on repatriation (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall, 1992; Harvey, 1989; Stroh, Gregersen and Black, 1998), however, the general focus is mainly on causes such as expatriates’ poor cultural adjustment, or their family members’ lack of adjustment the new host nation’s settings, as the key reasons for repatriation (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer and Luk, 2005; Hechanova, Beehr and Christiansen, 2003). The knowledge on the factors that trigger repatriation of professionals in relation to career aspiration decision upon repatriation is limited. There are evidence which suggest that the career aspiration of repatriates is driven by an individual’s pull factors from the home country (Hugo et al., 2003). In this paper of reverse brain drain, we defined the push factors of a particular context in developed country or host country as the factors that push talents to return to their homeland. On the other hand, the pull attractions refer to the factors that attract repatriates. Furthermore, most self-initiated repatriates tend to find employment themselves and/or set up an entrepreneurial venture upon their return (Begley, Collings and Scullion, 2008; Suutari and Brewster, 2000).

More often than not, self-initiated repatriates from developed nations return to their home country, while self-initiated repatriates from developing nations may progress their careers to other developed countries (OECD, 2008; Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). However, at the turn of the twenty-first century, there is an increasing set of government policies from emerging nations that focus on the ‘reverse brain-drain’ (RBD) (Thiruchelvam and Ahmad, 2008; Hassan and Talib, 2012; Tyson, 2011) of highly qualified and experienced repatriating professionals (Saxenian, 2005; Zweig, 2006; Wadhwa, 2009). This is evident, for example, in Taiwan, India, China, and Malaysia, where self-initiated repatriates have returned to their homeland in the first decade of the millennium (Chacko, 2007; Ismail et al., 2014; Wadhwa, 2009). Given the newness of this phenomenon and the rarity of this population, this study attempts to examine

the influence of push and pull factors on the repatriates' career aspirations following the decision to return to Malaysia.

The contributions of this study are: first, to add to the limited research on self-initiated repatriation of professionals from the context of a developing country, namely Malaysia. Second, to provide insights into the use of the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) focusing on contextual push-pull factors affecting repatriates' career aspirations. Third is on the grounds of methodology. Although most prior studies adopted a descriptive approach in analyzing the reasons for intention to return or why self-initiated repatriation occurs in relation to career development (Frank and Be'lair, 1999; Hugo et al., 2003; Mak, 1997), this paper provides substantive evidence using multiple regression analysis as the methodology. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: first, the study's guiding theoretical framework is presented. Then, past literature on career aspirations of professional repatriates and their predictors were examined. Following that, an overview of the methodological approach was provided. This continues with a discussion and a conclusion with implications for theory and practice as well as future research.

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

The use of SCCT (Lent, Brown and Hackett, 2000; Lent and Brown, 2006) to explain the push-pull factors that affect career aspirations of Malaysian repatriating knowledge workers is relevant as career aspirations is the core problem investigated in the context of this study. Furthermore, the SCCT theory allows for a framework to analyzing career outcomes influenced by environmental factors.

The SCCT focuses on the means by which individuals exercise personal agency in their career development (Rogers, Creed and Searle, 2009). Personal agency refers to power and influence which allows individuals to affect changes in their lives, work and career, as permitted and legitimized by their position in webs of social and workplace relations (Al Ariss, Vassilopoulou, Özbilgin, and Game, 2013, p.1236). The SCCT therefore postulates that positive career development depends on an individual's experiences which result from the magnitude of interactions between environmental factors (e.g. push and pull factors and their influence on outcome expectations) and personal factors (e.g. age and duration abroad).

Anchored in Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory, the SCCT focuses on several cognitive-person variables (e.g., outcome expectations and goals) and how these variables interact with other aspects of individuals with their contextual environment (e.g., the push and pull factors from the host and home countries) to help shape their career aspirations. Thus, this study refers to push factors as parts of constructs that consist of background contextual affordances such as the quality of educational experiences, working experience in the host country, interaction with people and the perceived response to economic and political issues. These factors are interdependent on the person's background such as age, family structure, duration abroad and work experience. The theory further states that contextual affordances and the person's background will influence choice behavior such as career desire and intention and career aspiration, which exists prior to career goal and action. In fact, the SCCT has been perceived as a versatile theory that can be adapted to many types of organizations and employment contexts (Rasheed Ali and McWhirter, 2006) including career aspiration of self-initiated repatriates. The pull-push factors in this study equally refer to personal, family, social, economic and political factors in which push means the factors from the host country, while pull refers to factors that come from the homeland. The pull-push factors were selected because they fit into the core components of the SCCT, namely, the contexts and the variables that are highly relevant to the career outcomes of self-initiated repatriates.

The SCCT further posits that individuals who view the environmental conditions (push-pull factors) positively tend to have a stronger hold on their interest, goals and actions than those who perceive many barriers (Lent et al., 2000). The dynamism in the work environment encourages repatriates to change the nature of their career aspirations (Allen and Katz, 1986). Working experience in the host country adds to the individual learning process through knowledge sharing, knowledge transfer, social interaction with co-workers and training provided by the employers there among others, which in turn influences the returnees' understanding on the roles and expectation towards future career prospects in the organization. Positive behaviours such as being innovative, optimistic, seeking for feedback about performance, and looking forward play a significant role in enhancing repatriate professionals' career aspirations (Jorgensen et al., 2006).

Repatriates' Career Aspirations

Based on the earlier discussion of self-initiated repatriation, we focus on professional repatriates as they are important to the home country (Hunger, 2002). Talents who went to developed countries for job opportunities and gaining knowledge are considered as an investment to the home country because it is believed that every brain drain is a potential brain gain (Hunger, 2002). However, it is also believed that this phenomenon of brain drain may give negative effects if the skilled repatriates are not properly paid and treated in the homeland (Lu and Zhang, 2015). Optimistically, the skilled repatriates could be considered as a talent pool to the homeland in which they can bring benefits such as in technology transfer and foreign direct investment through international projects that the repatriates may contribute to in the homeland. Brain drain will turn to gain only when its positive outcomes outweigh the negative ones (Lu and Zhang, 2015).

King's (2000) analysis of 'history of return migration' provides useful insights to the push-pull factors. King (2000) explains the return mechanisms reasonably in both individual and contextual situations and argues that return migration takes place in the host country because of push factors, such as economic instability, political disturbances, and environmental disadvantages and due to pull factors, such as economic opportunities and political preferences in the homeland that create encouraging conditions for them to return and pursue a better career. Hence, push factors are repelling factors in the area of origin (host country) whereas pull factors are associated with the destination or homeland (Lee, 1966; Schmidhals, 2010). This means that if an individual's needs (such as career aspirations) are not satisfied by his or her present location, a move elsewhere will be considered. The push and pull factors for each repatriate's return to the homeland are diverse. Ismail et al., (2015) indicated that family ties are the main reason of Malaysian repatriates' decision to return.

Nevertheless, in a different scenario, despite being satisfied with the present situation, compelling information about greater opportunities elsewhere and strong personal and kinship ties with individuals at home may persuade an individual to move to develop one's career. Canibano and Wooley (2015) stressed that the failure of brain drain is due to uneven scientific and socio-economic development, which leads to the failure of policy making in harnessing talents. Kainth (2009) asserted that push-pull factors are closely interrelated; those who are pushed into migration are simultaneously pulled by the aspiration of finding better career elsewhere, particularly in the homeland. Hence, this study adopted the push and pull factors as predictors to Malaysian self-initiated repatriates' career aspiration.

Schein's (1996) Career Anchors

Career aspirations of self-initiated repatriates for this study are conceptualized using Schein's (1996) eight career anchors: technical/functional competence, managerial competence, autonomy, security (job and geographical stability), sense of service, pure challenge, lifestyle integration, and entrepreneurial creativity. These career anchors may influence career choices, affect decisions to move, determine an individual's view of the future, and sway employees' reactions to work experiences, which are all relevant to career aspirations. Measuring an individual's career anchors makes explicit the career aspirations of the individual employee (Bigliardi, 2005).

However, in the case of self-initiated repatriates, it is important to understand them beyond their profile and constitution of current needs, particularly in terms of their career aspirations as many of them are still in their mid-career age. Career aspiration is an internal dimension of career that determines the success of a career (Ismail et al., 2008) which dwells well with the concept of self-initiated behavior and action. Career development is the total integration of psychological, educational, physical, socio-economic and chance factors that combine to shape the careers of individuals (Schultze and Miller, 2003). It is thus crucial to know the repatriates' career aspirations before opportunities are available for their career development. Bigliardi et al.'s (2005) study shows that engineers have diverse career aspirations and have a strong need for growth and personal development. Organizational socialization (an element in environment) was found to significantly influence their career aspiration (Bigliardi et al., 2005). Organizational socialization is indeed one of the work-related factors (push factors) that may have influenced repatriates' aspiration in their careers.

Although many studies have investigated factors affecting career aspiration (Mayrhofer et al., 2000; Ismail et al., 2008), a number of studies lack focus on self-initiated repatriates. Ismail et al.'s (2008) research on career aspirations of R&D professionals in Malaysian organizations found that career aspirations were affected by self-efficacy, organizational socialization and the desire for continuous improvement. Mayrhofer et al.'s (2000) work was based on career orientations that consist of the company world, free-floating professionalism, self-employment, and chronic flexibility. Coetzee and Schreuder (2009) are of the opinion that career orientations are closely related to the notion of career anchor and career aspiration as career orientations activate and guide one's intention towards achieving what an individual consequently wants to be in the future. Based on the above reviews, it is argued that career aspiration could be influenced by many environmental factors such as location of work and organizational experiences, as well as personal characteristics such as age and family factors. Hence, in this study, various pull and push factors are taken into account, such as social, personal, economic, family and political factors of the host country and the homeland, and their influence on repatriates' career aspirations.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of this study which consists of personal and environmental factors as well as individual factors as the independent variables, and career aspirations of self-initiated repatriates as the dependent variable. Personal and environmental factors refer to five push and pull factors for both host country and the homeland, namely social, economic, family, personal and political. Individual characteristics of age and years of duration abroad are two additional independent individual variables.

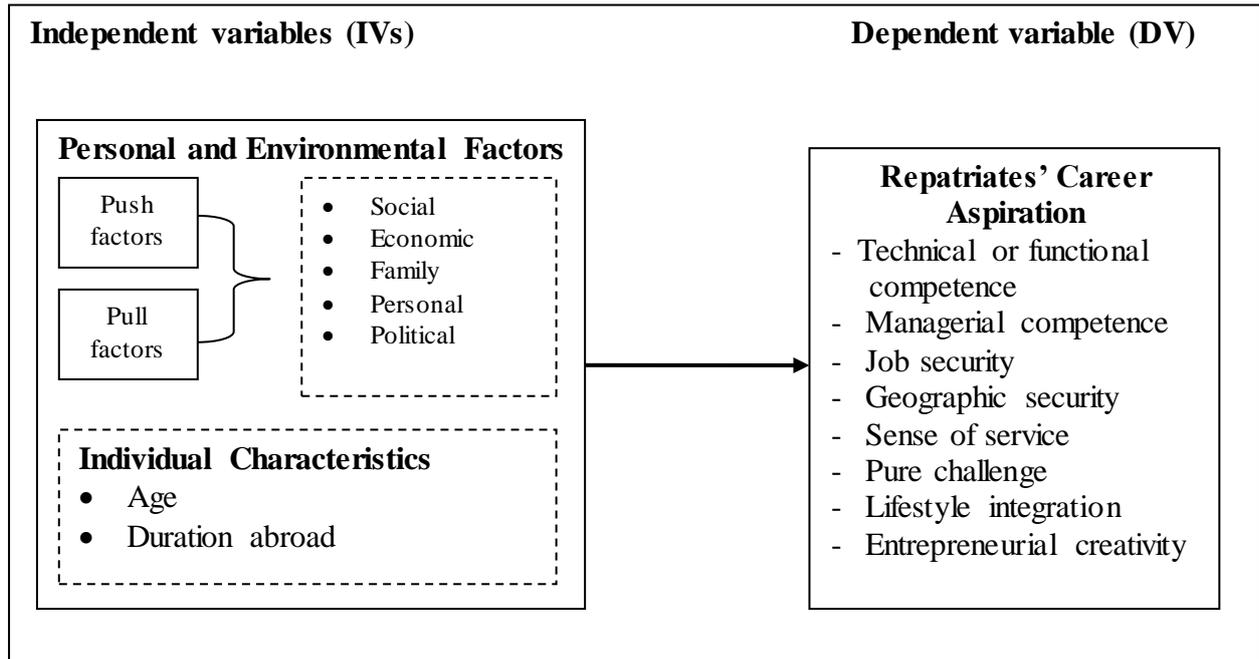


Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing the independent and dependent variables

The hypotheses of the study are as follows:

H1: Pull factors significantly influence repatriates' career aspiration.

H2: Push factors significantly influence repatriates' career aspiration.

H3: Individual factors [age (H3a) and years of duration abroad (H3b)] each significantly influences repatriates' career aspiration.

The SCCT proposes that the more the environment is perceived by the individuals to provide opportunities and support, the less it causes barriers to particular careers; hence, the more the individuals will develop an interest in those careers. As such, career aspirations may also be triggered externally and possibly intensified as a result of events occurring in the host country such as the economic crisis. Examples of pull factors are the Malaysian government's economic stimulus packages and career opportunities provided under various schemes for repatriates. Other family and social factors are also included in the group of pull factors.

Method

The population of the study were 2411 Malaysian self-initiated repatriates who returned to Malaysia from abroad from 1995 to 2013 when the Malaysian Brain Gain program was launched in 1995. They were attached to various institutions all over Malaysia. A cluster of samples were derived from institutions such as ministries, R&D institutions, Government-linked Companies (GLCs), hospitals, universities, architect firms, and MNCs located in the industrialized Klang Valley that includes Kuala Lumpur, Cyberjaya and Putrajaya.

The study used Bartlett, Kotrlik and Higgins's (2001) procedures to identify sample size through which it gave a minimum value of 112. Data from the participants were collected via questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in selected organizations through various means such as setting appointment dates with their Human Resource managers of the respective organizations, and professional contacts. The questionnaires were also sent to respondents through emails and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter as well as personal visits. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the research was attached to each

questionnaire and the letter provided an assurance of confidentiality. The total number of usable questionnaires was 129.

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

Validity and Reliability

Reliability test of push and pull factor scales

Table 1 shows results of the reliability test for items on career aspirations, push and pull factors of the instrument for both pilot and actual studies. The composite values of Cronbach's Alpha exceeding 0.7 shows that the items used are measured at 0.5 to 0.7, which is moderately reliable.

Table 1: Cronbach's alpha for pilot test and actual test

Scale	Pilot test (n=13)		Actual study (n=129)	
	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Career Aspirations	16	0.820	16	0.818
Push Factors	22	0.899	20	0.892
1. Social factor	6	0.835	5	0.845
2. Personal factor	4	0.686	3	0.584
3. Economic factor	4	0.492	4	0.746
4. Family factor	4	0.788	4	0.528
5. Political factor	4	0.902	4	0.670
Pull Factors	21	0.854	20	0.887
1. Social factor	4	0.603	4	0.803
2. Personal factor	4	0.531	3	0.678
3. Economic factor	5	0.411	5	0.697
4. Family factor	5	0.878	5	0.655
5. Political factor	3	0.633	3	0.791

Validity test

Content validity was ensured by experts in this field of career development from an established Malaysian university for clarity, adequacy, and readability of the items. Additionally, career aspiration and push-pull factors were tested using factor analysis procedures. Overall, 40 items for push and pull factors were analyzed using principal component analysis factoring and varimax rotation to examine the factor structures of the scales and items with factor loading (Kainth 2009) as it maximizes the sum of the variances of the squared loadings within each loading matrix. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .760 for the push factors scale, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant $\chi^2(df 190, n = 129) = 1352.063, p < .001$. The pull factors KMO was .803 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant $\chi^2(df 190, n = 129) = 1186.447, p < .001$. The KMO values accepted a minimum of

0.5 for a satisfactory factor analysis; 0.7-0.8 was acceptable and values above 0.9 was excellent (Thonggrattana, 2012). Thus, both values of push and pull factors were considered acceptable for adequate sample sizes (Thonggrattana, 2012). Barlett’s test should be less than 0.05 to show the strength of the relationship among variables.

Results

Profile of the Respondents

Table 2 and 3 show the demographic and professional profiles of the respondents, respectively. The respondents were employed in 33 organizations, of which 28 were private institutions. Repatriates from the United Kingdom formed the largest group in this study (26.4%), followed by those from Australia (10.9%) and Saudi Arabia (7.0%) (Figure 2). The average age of the respondents was 37.6; their ages ranged from 24 to 56 years. This implies that the distribution of respondents was inclined towards middle-aged professionals or the younger end of the Generation X employees. The data also show 63.6% of the respondents were Malays, reflecting that this ethnic group responded the most compared to other ethnic groups. Sixty three percent of the respondents were male and 37% were female, giving a 2:1 ratio.

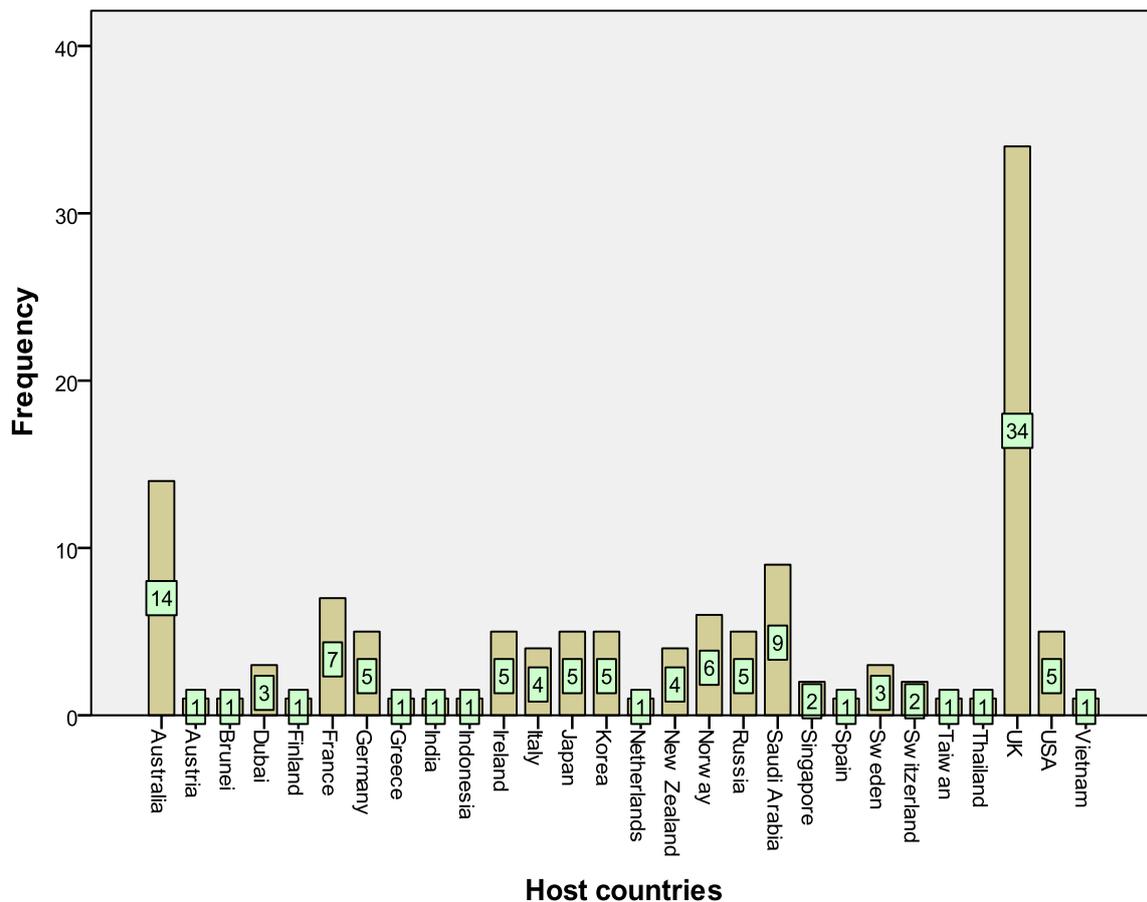


Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by host countries (n=129)

The respondents held various levels of tertiary education; 54.3% of them were graduates with a Bachelor’s degree, 19.4% has Master’s degree, and 7.0% has a PhD. This educational criterion

indicates that most respondents attained tertiary academic qualification, which is one of the characteristics of a professional employee. They were from diverse sectors, namely medicine (20.2%), banking (14.7%), services (11.6%), engineering (7.8%), education (7.0%) and production (5.4%). Other sectors include design, web programming, graphics, hospitality, aviation, retailing, and counseling, which made up 17.1%.

The majority of repatriates from European countries were in the banking sector; this was probably due to their enrolment at prestigious business schools especially in the UK, such as London School of Economics and those who had worked at international financial and accountancy firms like the UK's PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst and Young, and the Netherlands KPMG. Since returning, their related experiences in banking and financial services were capitalized by the Malaysian banking sector. This implies that there is a high demand for knowledge workers in the financial sector, which plays a vital role in the expanding economy. Many repatriates were also in the 'other' sectors which consist of emerging sub-sectors such as design, graphics and web programming, which are essential in architecture and digital design industries of furniture and appliances, media, digital phones, advertising, and film production.

Table 2: Demographic profile of repatriates (n=129)

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years, $M=37.6$, $SD=7.7$)		
24-31	32	24.8
32-39	55	42.6
40-48	28	21.7
49-56	14	10.9
Gender		
Male	81	62.8
Female	48	37.2
Marital Status		
Single	35	27.1
Married	82	63.6
Widowed	5	3.9
Divorced	6	4.7
Separated	1	0.8
Ethnicity		
Malay	82	63.6
Chinese	30	23.3
Indian	14	10.9
Others	3	2.3
Highest level of education		
Post-secondary education	5	3.8
Bachelor's degree	70	54.3
Master's degree	25	19.4
PhD	9	7.0
Other professional qualifications	20	15.5

Table 3: Professional profile of repatriates in terms of employment sector and occupational position (n=129)

Professional profile	Frequency	Percentage
Employment Sector		
Banking	19	14.7
Production	7	5.4
Service	15	11.6
Medicine	26	20.2
Own business	5	3.9
Construction	5	3.9
Education	9	7.0
Social Science-based	2	1.6
Engineering	10	7.8
Science-based	4	3.1
Architecture	5	3.9
Others	22	17.1
Occupational Position		
CEO/Director	7	5.4
Manager	10	7.8
Accountant	3	2.3
Medical professional	22	17.1
Academician	11	8.5
Architect	4	3.1
IT Professional	11	8.5
Researcher	3	2.3
Engineer	22	17.1
Fresh Graduate-Bachelor/Master/PhD	5	3.9
Others	31	24.0

Table 4: Mobility profile of the repatriates (n=129)

Mobility profile	Frequency	Percentage
Year of Self-initiated expatriation		
1985-1991	1	0.8
1992- 1998	12	9.3
1999- 2005	55	42.6
2006- 2012	61	47.3
Year of Repatriation		
1995- 1998	3	2.3
1999- 2003	11	8.5
2004- 2008	39	30.2
2009- 2013	76	58.9
Duration abroad (year, $M=2.14$, $SD=0.65$)		
≤1.99	14	10.9
2.00- 5.99	88	68.2
6.00- 9.99	22	17.1
≥10	5	3.9
Reasons for leaving Malaysia (frequency and percentages are not additive)		
Higher salary abroad	98	76.0
Better job opportunities	48	37.2
Better career development	42	32.6
Higher quality of life abroad	68	52.7
Accompany family members	16	12.4
Lack of suitable employment in Malaysia	24	18.6
Political reasons	13	10.1
Lack of continuing education opportunities	24	18.6
To gain international experience	102	79.1
Social injustice in Malaysia	1	0.8
Others	19	14.7

Table 4 shows that 47.3% of the respondents went abroad between 2006 and 2012. The main reason cited was to gain international experience (79.1%). Between 2009 and 2013, 58.9% of the respondents returned home. This shows that the repatriates were keen to take advantage of the opportunities resulting from Malaysia's robust growth and to enjoy the perks offered to them. The economy had expanded considerably as a result of the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) and it continues to grow under the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015) and beyond. The duration of residing abroad for the majority of respondents was between 2 to 6 years (68.2%), with an average of 2.1 years.

Inferential Statistical Results

Levels of Push and Pull Factors, and Career Aspirations

More than half (54.3%) of the respondents reported a moderate level of push factors. On the other hand, 69.8% of the respondents reported a moderate level and 21.7% a high level of pull factors. This implies that pull factors had a potential association with repatriates' decision to return and to aspire in certain careers. Thus, attractions or pull factors of the home country have more influence on the repatriates than factors inherent in the host countries. A total of 52.7% of the respondents had a moderate level of career aspiration while 46.5% professed to a high level of career aspiration. This indicates that most respondents had moderate and high levels of career aspiration, thus influencing their decision to return to pursue their careers to greater heights in Malaysia. A t-test was conducted to see the difference between career aspiration and gender, while analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to see the difference in career aspiration between marital status, age group, duration abroad, employment sector and level of education. However, the results indicated that there is no significant difference in career aspirations in the groups of repatriates based on the above individual factors.

Correlation Matrix of Predictors and Career Aspirations

Table 5 shows that two push factor variables (personal and political) were correlated significantly with career aspiration, and all variables in the pull factors were correlated significantly with career aspirations. The significant relationships of the variables with career aspiration imply that the former has predictive potential to the latter.

Table 5: Correlation matrix of predictors and career aspirations (n=129)

Variables	Mean	SD	Y	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄	X ₅	X ₆	X ₇	X ₈	X ₉	X ₁₀	X ₁₁	X ₁₂
Y CA	3.625	.608	-												
Push Factor															
X ₁ Social	2.151	.810	.087	-											
X ₂ Personal	2.785	.893	.181*	.646**	-										
X ₃ Economic	2.728	.889	.113	.658**	.666**	-									
X ₄ Family	2.284	.898	.043	.333**	.206**	.146	-								
X ₅ Political	2.248	.765	-.163*	.626**	.480**	.637**	.434**	-							
Pull Factor															
X ₆ Social	3.655	.789	.446**	.436**	.600**	.527**	.245**	.276**	-						
X ₇ Personal	3.715	.766	.401**	.322**	.553**	.385**	.206*	.164	.688**	-					
X ₈ Economic	3.254	.825	.282**	.260**	.358**	.489**	.131	.304**	.546**	.442**	-				
X ₉ Family	2.787	.898	.407**	.215**	.259**	.177*	.199*	.069	.365*	.259**	.395**	-			
X ₁₀ Political	2.839	.991	.333**	.432**	.436**	.416**	.254**	.229**	.639**	.633**	.557**	.452**	-		
X ₁₁ Individual Characteristic Duration Abroad	3.635	2.311	-.053	-.238**	-.165	-.235**	-.025	-.111	-.119	-.063	.057	-.016	-.128	-	-
X ₁₂ Age	37.59	7.669	.015	-.002	.039	.108	.067	.120	.143	.138	.189*	-.041	-.070	.307**	-

Notes: CA – Career Aspirations; * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Predictors of Repatriates' Career Aspirations

To identify the predictors of career aspirations among repatriates, a 12-predictor multiple linear regression (MLR) model was used. The predictor variables included those of push factors, viz. social (X_1), personal (X_2), economic (X_3), family (X_4) and political (X_5); the pull factor variables were social (X_6), personal (X_7), economic (X_8), family (X_9) and political (X_{10}); duration abroad (X_{11}); and lastly age (X_{12}). The equation of the MLR model is as follows:

$$Y = b_0 + b_1(X_1) + b_2(X_2) + b_3(X_3) + b_4(X_4) + b_5(X_5) + b_6(X_6) + b_7(X_7) + b_8(X_8) + b_9(X_9) + b_{10}(X_{10}) + b_{11}(X_{11}) + b_{12}(X_{12}) + e$$

The results showed that only three variables were found to be significant in influencing career aspirations of the repatriates. The variables were political push factor (X_5), social pull factor (X_6) and family pull factor (X_9).

Table 6 shows that the estimates of the model coefficients for b_0 is 2.260, b_5 is -.347, b_6 is .323 and b_9 is .280. Hence, the estimated model is as follows:

$$Y = 2.260 + (-.347)(X_5) + .323(X_6) + .280(X_9) + e$$

The regression results show that the model is found statistically significant [$F(12,129) = 5.845$, $p < .000$]. This means that the model explains as much as 31.2% of the variance in the career aspirations of the expatriates.

The MLR results further show that the social and family pull factors are significant and predictors of career aspirations (social pull factor $\beta = .323$, $p = .009$; family pull factor $\beta = .280$, $p = .002$). The results therefore partially support H1 which states that pull factors influence repatriates' career aspirations. Next, the finding on push factors and career aspirations showed that political push factor ($\beta = -.347$, $p = .004$) is significantly correlated. The results too partially support H2 which states that push factors influence repatriates' career aspirations. H3 was not supported because age and duration abroad showed no significant influence on repatriates' career aspirations.

Table 6: Results of the regression analysis

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig. p
	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)		
(Constant)	2.260	.324		6.970	.000
Push Factor					
Social (X_1)	.068	.090	.090	.753	.453
Personal (X_2)	-.081	.083	-.119	-.979	.329
Economic (X_3)	.041	.090	.061	.458	.648
Family (X_4)	.015	.060	.022	.242	.809
Political (X_5)	-.276	.093	-.347	-2.962	.004
Pull Factor					
Social (X_6)	.249	.094	.323	2.640	.009
Personal (X_7)	.176	.093	.221	1.894	.061
Economic (X_8)	.046	.078	.062	.591	.556
Family (X_9)	.190	.059	.280	3.219	.002
Political (X_{10})	-.073	.074	-.118	-.983	.327
Individual Characteristic					
Duration Abroad (X_{11})	-.008	.022	-.030	-.271	.719
Age (X_{12})	-.002	.007	-.023	-.361	.787

Notes: $R = 0.614$; $R^2 = 0.377$; $Adj. R^2 = .312$; $F = 5.845$, $p = 0.000$

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Using the SCCT (Lent and Brown 2006) in the context of a developing country, this study presents first-hand empirical data on the influence of push and pull factors on Malaysian repatriates' career aspirations. Knowledge of career aspirations of this group of elite human resources will help repatriates maximize their skills and potential as they plan and develop their careers in the home country.

Social support of the home country (pull factor) was found to influence career aspirations of the repatriates. The strong appeal of social factors such as affordability and easily available social support, such as childcare facilities and domestic helpers heightened repatriates' career aspirations when such concerns are being taken care of. Most repatriates' aspirations were also based on their feeling of loyalty and allegiance as Malaysia is their homeland and they felt obliged to have high career aspirations to contribute to the nation's advancement (Talent Corp Malaysia, 2011). As such, HRD practitioners of the organizations that employ repatriates should develop various effective social support mechanisms such as setting up childcare facilities at the workplace, and provide group counseling and work life balance programs. The recent call by government for private corporations to adopt family-friendly policies (NEAC, 2010) is thus very timely.

Family factors seem to be very significant in influencing career aspirations of the repatriates. According to Tharenou (2002), employees often refuse to accept the task as expatriates because of family reasons. A survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers' reported that 80% of employees admitted they did not stay longer abroad because of family reasons and strong family ties (TalentCorp Malaysia, 2012).

Political factors in the host country (a push factor) are also significant in influencing repatriates' career aspiration, which is in line with repatriates in India and China (Chacko, 2007; Saxenian, 2005; Zweig, 2006). This implies that conditions such as feeling unsafe because of riots, political instability affecting job opportunities, skeptical policies on migrants, and visa issues led to lower career aspirations while still being abroad, but aspirations were higher when envisioning oneself in the home country. Hence, the influence of these political factors should be considered by repatriates in their planning and negotiation with prospective employers for careers in the home country such as to increase their self-confidence, utilize their innovative minds, and be flexible to venture into multiple careers when opportunities arise. Repatriates should capitalize on the knowledge and experience they have gained from abroad as part of their adaptation process according to current work environment at home, hence achieving what they aspired for in a career (Wang et al. 2011; Reiche, Kraimer, and Harzing; 2011).

Some implications to human resource practices are worth noting here. Continuous learning such as training and re-training as well as attending conferences should be encouraged to materialize career aspiration in the homeland. Engagement in various human resource initiatives might also help in the transfer of repatriates' accumulated knowledge and experiences that they gained abroad, which is in line with their career aspiration at home. Senior repatriates could be recruited as mentors to junior employees in their respective organizations and vice versa. In the same line, as this study found that 79.1% of respondents left Malaysia with the main aim to gain international experience, this warrants implications in relation to international learning. To use Zhang and Di Fan's (2014) concept of 'internationalization as learning', this implies that the repatriates should continue the momentum of their learning curve in the new loop of 'brain exchange' or 'brain circulation' (Straubhaar, 2000), which involves knowledge development and sharing (Wang and Noe, 2010) through global businesses. This should enhance their career aspiration upon returning

home. Human resource practitioners should also create a systematic database to store profiles of such valuable human resources, including their possible future careers. Such data are important for recruitment, placement, career progression, and work engagement initiatives for these mobile human resources.

Based on the study limitations we recommend for future research as follows: First, as this study was limited to career aspirations, the role of Malaysian repatriates in the development of local entrepreneurs with international aspirations is worthy of exploration. Second, this study did not consider any moderating factors, therefore, the role of social network as a moderator of pull and push factors and career aspiration is much needed in future studies because social network links expatriates with others such as their colleagues in their former host countries, as well as the employers and other professional associations that they were affiliated with. Finally, investigation on the differences in career aspirations based on gender is critical as there is an increasing number of highly educated Malaysian women undertaking such assignments, thus making them potential subjects for future research as repatriates.

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