

Investing in National Talent: Evidence-Based Pathways for Faculty Recruitment and Retention in Gulf Higher Education

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Abstract

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The underrepresentation of nationals among faculty at international universities raises pressing questions about how a developing higher education system can cultivate and retain national academic talent. This qualitative study examines the systemic barriers shaping national faculty recruitment and retention at an international branch-campus university to generate actionable insight for university administrators and national policymakers. Using a qualitative design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve participants purposively sampled across two dimensions: disciplinary field (natural sciences, engineering, social sciences, and humanities) and career stage (early-career and senior faculty). Interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes, explored career trajectories and institutional hiring practices, and were analyzed thematically through iterative coding. Findings indicate that obstacles are structural rather than discipline-bound. Five interrelated themes emerged: fragmented career pipelines with a missing postdoctoral stage; misaligned recruitment channels, as the institution advertises through Western academic platforms while national candidates rely on government portals; structural financial disincentives, including fixed-term contracts that constrain long-term bank loans and pension-portability fees approaching one million in local currency when transferring between regions or sectors; cultural prestige hierarchies positioning academia below government and corporate roles; and evaluation frameworks dependent on bibliometric indicators that may undervalue local-language scholarship and community-engaged work. The implications point to concrete policy levers, including portable benefits, targeted recruitment channels, and reconceptualized evaluation rubrics, that are actionable without waiting for system-wide reform while contributing to comparative scholarship on faculty nationalization in emerging higher education systems.

Keywords: Academic Career Pathways; Bibliometric Evaluation; Faculty Nationalization; Higher Education Policy; International Branch Campuses