Article

Challenges in Effective Implementation of Saudization Policy in the Restaurant Sector

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Abstract: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is one of the countries that heavily rely on expatriates, especially in the private sector, which includes restaurants. However, to overcome the increasing rate of unemployment, the government has adopted new quota up to 50% Saudi Arabian people in restaurants. Notwithstanding, Saudization has been more successful in public sectors than it has been in the private sector. The current study undertook a sequential mixed method approach, starting with a questionnaire for newly joined local workers in restaurants and supplemented with in-depth interviews with managers. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to understand how new local workers perceive their new jobs/careers in restaurants, while the managers' interviews explored the challenges encountered in the effective implementation of the new quota in restaurants. The results of questionnaire showed that local workers had negative perceptions about their new jobs/careers. They perceived it as a "bad" and "disrespected" job and reported overall dissatisfaction with their new job. Newly joined local workers consider restaurant positions as a "transit job", with no intention to continue it as a career or even recommend it to their friends and family members. Managers, on the other hand, identified six main challenges that are associated with this, albeit they are linked to the absence of a clear strategic framework and executive plan by the government for the effective implementation of the new quota. The plan has to clearly focus on the employability and mitigate the wrong assumption about working in restaurants due to cultural and social impacts. The plan should consider the needs of both employers and employees to promote sustainable career among local workers, which ultimately influences the sustainable development of restaurants in the KSA.

Keywords: Saudization; expatriates; localization policy; unemployment; restaurants; sustainable career

1. Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is one of the countries that heavily rely on foreign workers, particularly those in jobs that are not of interest to local people, such as restaurant jobs [1]. Nonetheless, the last three decades have witnessed high rates of unemployment among locals of about 12% and 27% among educated males and 33% among educated females [2]. Hence, the government has adopted a localization policy, i.e., replacing expatriates or foreign workers with local workers [3]. The first step undertaken by the government in 1970 was to adopt a localization policy called "Saudization". It is worth noting that the policy was successfully implemented in the public sector, albeit it was not implemented successfully in the private sector [4], as the proportion of Saudi Arabian people in the private sector did not exceed 19% in 2018 [2].

The Saudi Development Plan in 1970–1975 aimed for 75% of workers in all sectors to be Saudi Arabian people [5]. However, this aim was not successfully fulfilled because Saudi Arabian people were more keen to join the public sector than they were the private sector. This target was impossible to fulfill at that time due to almost all workers in private sectors being foreigners [5].

There were several other attempts by the government to enforce a localization policy by suggesting new quota of 30% Saudization in the private sector in the Saudi Development Plan in 2006–2010; nevertheless, the quota was not fulfilled, as the Saudi Arabian people's contribution to the private sector did not exceed 10.5% until 2015 [4]. Hence, the government developed a new mechanism called "Nitaqat" in 2011. This Nitaqat approach classified private businesses into four categories: platinum, green, yellow and red based on the localization of their labor force or "Saudization" [4]. The red category means the business failed to act in accordance with Saudization; it was "non-compliant", whereas platinum means that the business fits well with the policy and has exceptional practices [6]. Yellow business are semi-compliant with the Nitaqat program. Businesses categorized as red and yellow are penalized for their non-compliance with Saudization. For instance, businesses in the red category cannot renew the visas of their foreign workers or recruit new other foreign staff, whereas yellow-labeled businesses cannot extend the visas of their foreign workers over six years [6]. This Nitaqat approach was criticized due to its focus mainly on quantitative aspects in terms of number of Saudi Arabian people employed rather than the nature of their jobs or whether they are qualified to undertake the job or not [1,7].

Previous research on Saudization (e.g., [1–7]) showed that Saudi Arabian people favored the public sector over the private sector because it offers them job opportunities with a better social status. Social status is one of vital factors for selecting a job among Saudi Arabian people. Saudi Arabian people prefer to join a career at a managerial job level after graduation [8]; hence, they would like to take any management position directly after graduation from university [9,10]. They are less interested in physically demanding jobs with a low reputation such as those in restaurants [1,2]. Hence, this is reflected the unsuccessful implementation of Saudization in the private sector, such as in hotels [5]. However, recently, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (HRSD) [11] in the KSA enforced restaurants (outside shopping malls) to localize at least 20% of their labor, which has taken place since October 2021. Additionally, for restaurants inside shopping malls/centers, they have to have at least 40% Saudi Arabian people. Furthermore, cafes outside shopping malls/centers must have a workforce with 30% Saudi Arabian people, whereas cafes inside shopping malls/centers must have a workforce with 50% Saudi Arabian people [10]. This includes all jobs except cleaners and loading and unloading workers because these jobs are not accepted by Saudi workers. The Ministry has made some incentives to encourage restaurants to implement the new quota: (1) a wage subsidy of up to 50% for a certain period, (2) training provision for job seekers, (3) transportation expenses to workplace, (4) transportation expenses to other cities/areas (for work), and (5) childcare allowance to encourage mothers to work. Restaurants and cafes are all enforced to implement these decisions; otherwise, it could lead to several penalties [11].

Despite there being a plethora research on Saudization in general (see for example, [4,5]) and challenges to its effective implementation in the private sector in particular (see for instance, [5,6]), including the tourism and hospitality sector (e.g., [1,3]), a limited number of studies, if any, have examined these challenges in the restaurant sector [12]. A recent study on the restaurant sector in the KSA [12] showed that Saudi Arabian people who newly joined restaurants after the new quota was determined negatively perceive restaurant jobs as a "servile" job and view those who take them as "salves" who cook and serve food for others. Additionally, restaurants have many other challenges such as poor working conditions, limited career progression, and advancement opportunities [12]. This makes the effective implementation of the new quota of Saudization in restaurants more challenging for businesses than it is for those in other private sectors. However, these challenges were not examined properly after the new quota was implemented [12], presenting a research gap on the challenges of Saudization in restaurants and the solution for effective implementation. This study addresses this research gap and answers the following questions: First, what are the challenges that face restaurant owners/managers for the effective implementation of the Saudization policy in restaurants? What are the percep-

tions of new local workers of their careers in restaurants? How can restaurant businesses achieve the effective execution of the new localization policy in restaurants? The purpose of current study is to explore the responses of local workers and their managers to the new Saudization quota in restaurants. The research explores the perceptions of new entrants "Saudis" about their careers in restaurants using the pre-tested scale of career choice [13]. The positive perceptions and attitudes of workers are important to ensure their sustainable career [14], i.e., continuous employability in their career [15], which ultimately affects their performance, and the restaurant's overall performance [13]. The study identifies challenges that face restaurant managers for the effective implementation of the new Saudization quota and provides some implications for proper implementation.

The following sections of the paper start with reviewing the literature in relation to the localization policy and the challenges of its execution in the KSA's private sector (Section 2). Section 3 adopts a sequential mixed method research approach, starting with a questionnaire survey to understand local workers' perceptions of their careers in restaurant. It then describes the qualitative method of in-depth interviews, which were conducted with restaurant managers. Sections 4 and 5 present the findings of both questionnaire survey and interviews, respectively. Section 6 discusses these findings and links them with a previous literature review. Section 7 provides the implications of the study for scholars and practitioners in relation to sustainable careers for Saudi Arabian people in restaurants and the sustainable development of the restaurant sector, and hence, the tourism industry, which is critical to the Saudi Vision 2030.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Localization Policy as a Solution for Unemployment

The states of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) are among the top countries worldwide that largely employ expatriates, especially in the private sector [16]. However, the increasing rate of unemployment among locals, especially in the last few decades, has pushed the governments of these countries to consider localization as one of the main solutions for unemployment [10]. Localization is defined as "*a process which reserves the trend of globalization by discriminating in favor of the local*" ([17], p. 4). More specifically, in the context of workforce, localization refers to the replacement of expatriates with local workers. It is acknowledged that the KSA has the longest history of adopting localization policies among the GCC countries [18], which started in 1970 by adopting a localization policy called "Saudization". The rate of unemployment in the KSA is higher among educated people than it is among less educated people [2]. Females who graduated from higher education are the top unemployed category (33%), followed by higher-education-gradate males (27%). The high unemployment rates among educated people exist for two main reasons: First, the mismatch of their qualifications and the available jobs, as they found the job insufficient to meet the skills they gained during their degree studies. Second, Saudi Arabian people's requirement of a suitable job with tenure and a good salary [2]. This confirms that unemployment persists in the KSA due to the fact that the offered jobs do not meet the expectations of Saudi Arabian people.

Localizing the job market is not limited to the KSA nor to the other GCC countries; however, it was adopted by many countries worldwide to minimize immigration to these countries [19]. Examples of this policy include the action undertaken by the Conservative government in the United Kingdom (UK) and the Trump government in the United States of America (USA) to reduce the proportion of expatriates in these countries and give more chances to locals [20,21]. Other countries, such as Singapore, also adopted localization to deal with the increase rates of immigration and anti-immigrant sentiments [22].

2.2. Challenges of Implementing Saudization in the KSA Private Sector

Saudization has been more successful in the public sector than it has been in the private sector in the KSA [1]. Several challenges were identified for executing the localization policy in the KSA private sector. There were also a variation among the sub-sectors of the

KSA private sector. For example, the situation in some private sub-sectors, e.g., restaurants, is even worse than it is in other sub-private sectors [1,3,19]. First, Saudi Arabian people prefer to join the public sector rather than the private one because it gives them regular promotion opportunities to management positions with limited physical efforts compared to those in the private sector [10]. Saudi Arabian people prefer to join any management level directly after graduation from university [1]. Second, social status is one of the main issues that makes Saudi Arabian people interested in the public sector [9]. Their job titles in the public sectors are more acceptable by society than those in the private sector are, including restaurants. Third, jobs in some sub-sectors of the private sector, such as restaurants, are perceived as a "servile job", whereby the person serves people, and not as a part of the "service industry". Hence, there is a perception of "servility" among many Saudi Arabian people who work in restaurants [23]. Fourth, the negative image by many Saudi Arabian people is supplemented by the image of restaurants as poor employers. This includes low levels of payment, limited career progression, limited training and development opportunities, stress due to long working hours, anti-social hours, and difficult customers, as well as a perception that it is a woman's job [1,3,13,24–26].

Despite the above-mentioned challenges, restaurants in the KSA are enforced to adopt new Saudization quota to avoid any penalties from the government. However, this has had negative consequences on expatriates' psychological states, e.g., anxiety and job insecurity, which have negative consequences on their wellbeing, job attitudes, and behavior [14]. To adapt with the policy, some organizations in the private sector employed Saudi Arabian people and paid them, but they did not really work, and these people are called "Ghost workers" [10]. This, indeed, has negative consequences on other employees' attitudes and behavior, which ultimately affects their performance [19].

Saudization policy was criticized in the private sector for three main reasons [5]. First, Fakeeh ([5], p. IV) argued that: "*Saudization as a policy is targeting the symptoms (unemployment) instead of focusing on the problem (employability)*. This argument was supported by other researchers (e.g., [1–3]), who also argued that Saudization focuses on quantitative aspects, e.g., the number of new Saudi Arabian people employed. Second, the policy did not consider the needs of employers nor new employees, e.g., the employee–job fit [5]. Third, the policy did not consider the variation within different sub-sectors in the private sector [5].

2.3. Saudi Arabian People's Perceptions of Career in Tourism and Hospitality Sector

A career choice is refers to an individual's motivation to join a certain job and/or an industry [27]. It is important that potential workers understand the real condition of the job before they join the job to express positive attitudes and behavior in their job. The choice of a certain career is affected by several factors: personal factors (e.g., individual characteristics, self-interest, and outcome expectation) [28] and contextual factors (e.g., the nature of the industry, social status, and the localization policy) [29]. El-Dief and El-Dief [30] examined factors affecting undergraduate students' commitment to careers in the hospitality sector among students enrolled in Tourism and Hospitality Management Programs at Saudi Universities. The results showed that Saudization is not a significant predicator of career choice in hospitality; however, the nature of the working environment, the nature of the working day, self-interest, industry experience, outcomes expectations, and the number of years of study are key determinants of commitment to a career in hospitality. Ali et al. [14] confirmed that career competencies (reflective, communicative, and behavioral) among Saudi Arabian people in the tourism and hospitality sector are associated positively with job involvement and organizational commitment and negatively associated with turnover intention.

Azhar et al. [1] have highlighted the factors that enhance Saudi Arabian people' choices of career in hotels: raising the awareness of Saudi Arabian people about hotel work, enhancing women's participation in hotel workforce, skills development through education and training, parity between holidays and working hours, and salaries equal to

those offered in the public sector. A recent study [12] conducted on restaurant workers after the new quota was enforced has compared the perceptions, attitudes, and commitment of people towards careers in restaurants. They found that local workers showed more negative perception and perceptions, attitudes, and commitment towards career in restaurants in comparison to those of foreign workers. Local workers perceived the nature of restaurant work as poor, with a poor social image and status. They found that they had poor working conditions and limited career progression opportunities.

3. Methodology

3.1. The Choice of Mixed Methods Approach

This research adopted a mixed method approach [31] to achieve the aim of the research. Following the suggestions of Creswell and Clark [31], the data collection process in this research had two phases. Phase 1 was concerned with local workers', who are often newly joined restaurant workers, perceptions of their new careers in restaurants. The results from phase 1, the new workers' questionnaire, informed phase 2 of the study. Phase 2 was related to managers' responses to Saudization and the challenges they encountered. The reason for undertaking a sequential mixed method approach was to gain a deeper understanding of Saudization from the perspectives of both workers and employers. This was undertaken by understanding the workers' perceptions of their new careers in restaurants as a response to Saudization (phase 1) and managers' responses to challenges encountered while adopting the new quota to fulfil the Saudization policy. The current study integrates the two perspectives of workers and managers to gain a deeper understating of the effective implementation of Saudization. The following paragraph discusses these phases in more details.

3.2. Phase 1: The Questionnaire of New Local Workers in Restaurants

3.2.1. Population and Sample

This phase of the study included the distribution of a questionnaire survey to a sample of new local workers in different regions in the KSA in order to explore their perceptions of new restaurant jobs and their new careers in restaurants. The most recent published statistics by the General Authority for Statistics (2021) showed that the total number of workers with food and beverage jobs is 451,999 workers. There are no recent published statistics on the proportion of local workers in restaurants; however, it was confirmed that the proportion of Saudi Arabian people in the private sector, such as in restaurants, did not exceed 19% [2]. Nonetheless, the recent decision by HRSD in the KSA is to aim for up to 50% Saudization (especially in restaurants and cafes inside shopping malls). If 50% of the total workers are considered, then the maximum number of local workers expected to be 225,999 workers. The sample size for this population is 384 participants according to the proposition of Krejcie and Morgan [32], which was adopted in the current study. The total number of collected forms was 512. Of these forms, 22 forms were excluded because there were some missing answers. Only completed forms were analyzed, which left 490 forms. The participants were from 50 restaurants and 24 cafes. It is worth mentioning that the majority of restaurants/cafes that participated in the current study were small, i.e., have number of workers was less than 10. The sample size was satisfactory based on Krejcie and Morgan's [32] suggestion.

3.2.2. The Research Instrument

The questionnaire had four sections. Section 1 was concerned with the respondents' profile, especially their age, gender, education, job position, monthly income, and experience in restaurant jobs. Section 2 asked local workers to assess their jobs and careers using a pre-tested Likert scale of 20 factors developed by Richardson [13]. One item was added to these 20 items to ask respondents about their overall satisfaction with their job. Section 3 asked local workers about their turnover intention using a Likert scale of 3 items [33]. We also asked the respondents whether they consider their job as their career and whether

they would recommend it to their friends and family members. Sections 2 and 3 adopted a Likert scale of 5 items, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The last part, Section 4, asked the respondents to add any further comment about their experience of their current job.

The questionnaire was piloted with 10 restaurant workers and 10 scholars in Business Administration for face and content validity. There was a slight change in the wording of one item in the 20 items of Richardson [13]. The item was reworded from "the opportunity to travel abroad" to "the opportunity to meet new people" since the original scale was about tourism management.

3.2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from restaurants, with support from an organization that specializes in research data collection. Research was conducted by the researcher. The role of the company was to facilitate the communication process with restaurants. The purpose of the research was explained for randomly selected restaurant managers to access their staff for participation in the study. Following the consensus of managers, the purpose of the research was explained to the staff, and they were invited to voluntarily participate in the study. They were all assured of us respecting their privacy and confidentiality. Data were collected on November 2022, i.e., one year after the new quota was introduced by HRSD.

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, version 25. The profiles of respondents were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. Descriptive statistics were adopted to analyze the scale items. Person correlation and linear regression were undertaken to test the relationship between career items and turnover intention of the new workers after the implementation of the new Saudization quota. The normality of data was confirmed before undertaking data analysis. The reliability of items was assured since the Cronbach alpha was above 0.7 for all items [34].

3.3. Phase 2: Interviews with Restaurant Managers

The results of the first phase (questionnaire survey) informed the second phase of the study, which involved in-depth interviews with a sample of restaurant managers. The purpose of the interview is to explore how managers in restaurants deal with the pressure from the government to implement the new Saudization quota. A total of 27 interviews were conducted with various managers. The number of interviews was decided after data saturation was achieved [35]. The interviews with managers covered six themes: government support given to restaurants, local workers' perceptions of restaurant jobs as temporary, social image and cultural impacts, skills' gap and shortage among local workers, working environment and conditions, and the segregation of women and their participation in restaurant jobs.

All interviewees were males. No female managers participated in this study. All interviewees held a bachelor's degree or higher. The vast majority of them were not Saudi Arabian. There were 23 non-Saudi Arabian managers or acting managers and 4 Saudi Arabian managers. All of them had at least five years of experience in a managerial position. Many of non-Saudi Arabian people were found to have post-graduate degrees and other international qualifications related to food and beverage operation and management. Written messages were sent to managers of restaurants to ask them to participate in the study. Contact details of the researcher were attached to the letter. Managers who responded agreed were interviewed. The interviews were voice recorded with the managers' approval and transcribed straight after the interviews to ensure the completeness of collected information. Data were analyzed manually via quantitative content analysis.

4. The Results of Questionnaire

This section provides the profile of respondents, their assessment of current jobs, and their intention to leave, as well as their comments on their new experiences in restaurants.

4.1. The Profile of Respondents

More than 90% respondents were male. More exactly 92% of the respondents were male, and only 8% were female (See Table 1). Similarly, almost 90% of respondents were less than 30 years old, and about 10.8% of the respondents were between 31 and 40 years old. There were no respondents above 40 years, confirming that the respondents were young. A small number of respondents held a bachelor's or university degree (5%), where 38.6% of the respondents held a secondary school certificate or an equivalent, followed by those who underwent two years of study after secondary school (32.7%), and finally, 23.7% had below secondary school education (i.e., they could read and write, had a primary school certificate, or they had an intermediate school certificate). Respondents were found to have jobs that fit with their social status, such as a cashier (37.8%) or frontline worker, i.e., counter or customer welcoming customers/order taker (36%) and supervisor (18.4). A few respondents worked in kitchens (5%), and 2.9% held other positions such as purchasing.

With regard to the monthly income of respondents, the majority (42.9) earned between SAR 4000 and 6000, followed by those who earned between SAR 6000 and 10,000. It was found that 18.4% of the respondents earned below SAR 4000, which is against the new minimum wage approved by the government for business in Nitaqat program. Nearly half of the respondents (49.2%) had worked in a restaurant job for less than 6 months, whereas another 36.7% or respondents had done so for less than 12 month. This means that these workers are all employed after the new Saudization quota by the government, which started was implemented on October 2021.

Table 1. The profile of respondents.

Question	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
What is your gender?	Male	451	92
	Female	39	8
What is your age category?	From 18 to 25 years	280	57.1
	From 26 to 30 years	157	32.1
	From 31 to 40 years	53	10.8
What is your educational level?	Less than secondary school	116	23.7
	Secondary school or equivalent	189	38.6
	Diploma	160	32.7
	Bachelor/university degree	25	5
Please select your job position	Frontline (counter or welcoming)	177	36
	Kitchen (food preparation)	24	5
	Cashier	185	37.8
	Supervisor	90	18.3
	Other jobs	14	2.9
What is your monthly income?	Between SAR 3000 and SAR 4000	90	18.4
	Between SAR 4000 and SAR 6000	210	42.9
	Between SAR 6000 and SAR 10,000	154	31.4
	Over SAR 10,000	36	7.3
How long have you been in restaurant jobs?	Less than 6 months	241	49.2
	From 6 to 12 months	180	36.7
	From 12 to 24 months	55	11.2
	Over 24 months	14	2.9

4.2. Local Workers' Assessment of Their New Job/Career in Restaurants

Respondents were asked to state how they perceive their current job on a Likert scale of five items (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). The results in Table 2 showed that they did not find their job enjoyable (M = 1.51, SD = 0.79) and they did not have colleagues that they can get along with (M = 1.51, SD = 0.78). Additionally, they disagreed that they have a secure job (M = 1.49, SD = 0.77), a career that provides intellectual challenges (M = 1.29, SD = 0.47), good promotion prospects (M = 1.38, SD = 0.67), a job that gives them responsibility (M = 1.38, SD = 0.67), a job where they gain transferable skills (M = 1.48, SD = 0.75), a respected job (M = 1.28, SD = 0.45), a reasonable workload (M = 1.48, SD = 0.75), a job with high quality resources and equipment (M = 1.48, SD = 0.75), a job with opportunities to meet different people (M = 1.48, SD = 0.75), a job that can easily be combined with parenthood (M = 1.48, SD = 0.75), a good starting salary (M = 1.28, SD = 0.45), and a job that offers opportunities for further training (M = 1.28, SD = 0.45). However, they almost agreed that their working environment is pleasant (M = 3.73, SD = 1.20), they have high earnings over the duration of their career (M = 3.73, SD = 1.20), their job contributes to society (M = 3.87, SD = 1.12), they can use their degree in the current job (M = 3.73, SD = 1.20), it is easy to get this job anywhere (M = 3.84, SD = 1.12), and it is a job where they can care for others (M = 3.84, SD = 1.12). Overall, the respondents were not satisfied with their jobs (M = 1.48, SD = 0.76).

Table 2. Respondents' perceptions of their job in restaurants.

Job Characteristics	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
1. A job that I will find enjoyable	1.00	5.00	1.508	0.786
2. Colleagues that I can get along with	1.00	5.00	1.508	0.778
3. Pleasant working environment	1.00	5.00	3.734	1.201
4. A secure job	1.00	5.00	1.495	0.773
5. A career that provides intellectual challenge	1.00	4.00	1.293	0.473
6. Good promotion prospects	1.00	5.00	1.381	0.667
7. A job, which gives me responsibility	1.00	4.00	1.293	0.473
8. High earnings over length of career	1.00	5.00	3.871	1.115
9. A job where I will contribute to society	1.00	5.00	3.871	1.115
10. A job where I can use my degree	1.00	5.00	3.967	0.992
11. A job where you gain transferable skills	1.00	4.00	1.475	0.748
12. A job that is respected	1.00	2.00	1.283	0.451
13. Reasonable workload	1.00	4.00	1.475	0.748
14. A job with high quality resources and equipment	1.00	4.00	1.475	0.748
15. The opportunity to meet new people	1.00	4.00	1.475	0.748
16. Job mobility—easy to get a job anywhere	2.00	5.00	3.836	1.121
17. A job that can easily be combined with parenthood	1.00	4.00	1.475	0.748
18. Good starting salary	1.00	2.00	1.283	0.451
19. A job where I can care for others	2.00	5.00	3.836	1.121
20. A job that offers opportunities for further training	1.00	2.00	1.283	0.451
21. I am overall satisfied with my current job	1.00	4.00	1.487	0.765

Note: 1.00–1.80 (Strongly disagree); 1.81–2.60 (Disagree); 2.61–3.40 (Neutral); 3.41–4.20 (Agree); 4.21–5.00 (Strongly Agree); SD = standard deviation.

4.3. Local Workers' Perceptions of Their Job as a Career, Recommendations to Others, and Turnover Intentions

The results showed that that 90% of the respondents do not consider working in a restaurant as a sustainable career. They intend to work in this job temporarily until they move to long-life career job. Additionally, 88% of the respondents would not recommend the job to their friends or others (see Table 3), which reflects their negative perceptions of the restaurant job/career.

Table 3. Perceptions of career and recommendation of the job to others.

Question	Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Do you consider restaurant as your career?	Yes	48	9.8
	No	442	90.2
Would you recommend the job to your friends and family members?	Yes	59	12.1
	No	431	87.9

Respondents were also asked about their turnover intention using three items (Table 4). The mean score for the three items was above 4.2, confirming an agreement among the respondents for their turnover intention.

Table 4. Intention to leave the job.

Items	Mini	Max	Mean	SD
I often think about leaving that job	1.00	5.00	4.231	0.922
It would not take much to make me leave this job	1.00	5.00	4.331	0.978
I will probably be looking for another job soon	1.00	5.00	4.241	0.951

Pearson correlation was undertaken to examine the relationship between workers' perceptions of their new job/career in restaurants and their intention to leave. The results showed a positive correlation ($r = 0.588$, $p < 0.001$). The results of liner regression showed that the current workers' perceptions of their job/career in restaurants significantly predict their turnover intention ($\beta = -0.217$, $p = 0.52$) (full results of regression analysis are presented in Appendix A). This means that the negative perception of job/career among new workers in restaurants is a determinant of turnover intention.

5. The Results of Interviews

As highlighted earlier in the Section 3, we conducted interviews with managers covered five themes or challenges that face managers with regard to the new quota: government support to restaurants, local workers' perceptions and attitudes toward restaurant jobs, skills shortage among local workers, working environment and conditions, and the segregation of women and their participation in restaurants.

5.1. Government Support

There was consensus among the managers that the support given by the government did not meet their expectations. They were expecting that the government would help them to prepare Saudi Arabian people for this new career and set expectations of Saudi Arabian people about their new career. However, the support given to restaurants to implement the new quota was not sufficient. Among the interviewees, comments that reflect this issue include:

> *"The Ministry is forcing us to make the quota happens, but what support is given for us to move forwards. Honestly, we did not receive support for this."* (RM12)

"The Saudi we employ now have no idea about the job. Where is the Nitaqat program team? What are they doing for us? They just want us to move a green-banded business." (RM07)

The interviewees also commented on the compensation given to Saudi Arabian people compared to that given to expatriates. They argued that the Ministry has enforced them to give a minimum wage of SAR 4000 to Saudi Arabian people. However, they argued that expatriates could receive half this salary with a better performance. They have to pay almost double the salary to Saudi Arabian people, and they were expecting to receive financial support for this from the government. In conclusion, managers were expecting to receive financial support to shift towards Saudization. They also were expecting to have intensive development programs to prepare new local workers for their business and set their expectations, which they assumed would be arranged by the government.

5.2. Perceptions of Restaurants as Job Temporary

The managers agreed that Saudi Arabian people perceive restaurant work as a "temporary job" and not a career. Managers mentioned the concept of "Transit Workers", who consider a restaurant job as a stop-gap until they find another job. They expect to stay in restaurant job until another "good job" appears for them. This is because Saudi Arabian people prefer public jobs or "office job" with a job tile that is less physical demanding and has better working conditions. The following statements are among the managers' comments:

"They enforce me to employ Saudis. Okay, where are they? I am pleading to find one even with double salary. If you know one interested, please let me know." (RM02)

"I have to employ someone with no qualification. He is costing me a lost for training and high salary to cope with Nitaqat and at the end he leaves the job." (RM22)

One of the interesting points raised by some managers that they had to employ local workers who do not really work, but receive payment for their "Saudi" name from the organization to cope with the new quota. However, one of the expatriates completed the actual job instead of the local worker. This could increase the workload on the workers, especially expatriates, which could have a negative impact on their job outcomes, especially in the long term. This brings up the concept of "Ghost Worker" again [9], which could have a serious impact on the business' performance.

5.3. Social Image and Cultural Norms

Managers argued that jobs in restaurants do not provide a good social image for Saudi Arabian people. Some managers argued that many Saudi Arabian people do not want to introduce themselves to others by saying they are working as a "cook", "waiter", or "food server". These jobs are perceived by society as "bad" and "low-image" jobs. Mangers confirmed that there are wrong culture or social assumptions that link food preparation and service jobs with "servility". Saudi Arabian culture promotes the "servile" aspect in restaurants, especially in food preparation and service, as many "community groups" in Saudi Arabia still hold these assumption about restaurants' jobs and accept that their group members work in these jobs. This statement was among the managers' comments:

"Many Saudis believe that restaurant jobs is not for them. It is for expatriates. Many do not accept preparing or serving food. It is a minimal job for Saudi. I think many of them would prefer unemployed than working in a restaurant or cafe." (RM11)

The social image of Saudi Arabian people is important in their life. Hence, a good job title is preferable to them. This includes access to managerial positions. Managers agreed that restaurants cannot meet these requirements of Saudi Arabian people due to limited career progression since most of restaurants are small or medium sized with limited administrative roles such as those that Saudi Arabian people prefer. Another challenge is related poor salary and benefits compared to those in other sectors. The managers argued that it is difficult for restaurants to give salaries and benefits similar to those in the public

sector or other organization in the private sector because most restaurants are small and cannot afford these salaries or benefits.

5.4. Skills' Gap and Shortage

There was a consensus among the interviewed managers that there is a skill gap among their newly employed local workers. Additionally, there is skill shortage among Saudi Arabian people in general in relation to restaurant jobs. Both newly employed workers and potential workers lack the skills required for restaurants. These include technical skills such as food preparation and food service. They also include human skills such as interpersonal communication and team working. Furthermore, they lack conceptual skills when they are employed for senior positions, such as manager or assistant manager positions. Managers argued that Saudi Arabian people are almost new entrants into restaurants. Hence, they lack experience in this sector. Additionally, they often do not have qualifications related to work in restaurants, such as restaurant operation and management or hospitality management ones.

Managers agreed that there is a wide gap between the qualifications and skills of expatriates and those of local workers. Local workers often have poor qualifications compared to the jobs they seek to take in restaurant. For instance, one of the managers commented:

> *"I have one of new applicants, who would like to join us at the business in managerial position despite he has secondary school certificate. This is not the issue; the issue is he has zero experience in such a job."* (RM26)

The issue of the shortage and gap in skills is associated with the government support, as most of restaurants are small and lack the resources to invest in new workers and develop their skills. This highlights the crucial role of the government in developing the skills of potential workers through development programs, as well as formal education programs at academic institutions.

5.5. Working Environment and Condition

Managers argued that one of the main challenges that made it too difficult for them to meet the new quota was the working environment and conditions in the restaurants compared to those in other organizations in the private sector or the public sector. There was consensus among managers that recruiting local workers to join a restaurant team is a difficult job, mainly because of the working conditions compared to those in other jobs. Restaurants have a poor perception among Saudi Arabian people, requiring long and anti-social working hours and having limited career progress, low salaries, and poor benefits. Comments by two of the managers can clearly reflect this:

> *"Saudis compare jobs in restaurants or cafes with other jobs in public or other private sectors. They find nothing attractive in restaurants' jobs. Other jobs have better salaries and working conditions job."* (RM16)

> *"Restaurants are bad jobs for many Saudis. Why they work in restaurants if they can find other jobs with better compensation and less working hours."* (RM07)

Another challenge related to the working conditions in restaurants is the anti-social working hours, as many restaurants are open 24/7. Managers argued that having a good social life is very important for Saudi Arabian people; however, working in restaurants makes it difficult for them to have a good social life because they have to work during holidays and have different shifts, including night shifts. These unsocial working hours make it difficult for Saudi Arabian people to socialize with their families and friends, especially during public holidays.

5.6. The Segregation of Women

Another challenge raised by managers for meeting the new quota was the employment of women. Managers agreed that Saudi Arabian people believe that working in a restaurant is not a suitable job for women since they deal directly with men, which is not accepted by

most of society. Managers argued that many community members believe that working in a restaurant is not a respectful job for women because it support gender mixing, which is in conflict the Saudi Arabian culture, which does not accept gender mixing and encourage gender segregation. Managers argued that it is very difficult for them to find a woman to take a job in restaurants. However, with the current transformation in the KSA, they expect to see more women taking restaurant jobs. Managers confirmed that women encompass a large proportion of the society, and their participation in restaurants would definitely help them to meet the new quota. These statement are among the comments made by the managers:

> "*I barely find a woman to work with us. We work 24/7 but it is unacceptable to have women in night shift or even after noon shift.*" (RM04)

> "*I have a woman work with us now for 5 month. She is good and working hard. I think if there is more participation from women, it will help us meet the quota in a proficient way.*" (RM18)

6. Discussion

The current study is a response to the recent decisions made by the KSA government regarding the new Saudization quota in restaurants and cafes, which varies between 20% and 50% based on the location of restaurants (whether inside or outside shopping malls). The study bridges a research gap in relation to the challenges in the effective implementation of Saudization in restaurants, which has implications for the creation of sustainable careers for new workers joining restaurants. The study adopted a sequential mixed research methods, starting with an examination of the local workers' perceptions regarding their new jobs/careers in restaurants. The study also explored the perceptions of managers regarding the challenges encountered during the implementation of the new quota in their restaurants.

The results of the questionnaire with a sample of new workers who joined restaurants after the new quota was introduced showed that they were dominated by male respondents, who are young, have a below university degree, and have less than a year of experience in restaurants. Overall, local workers were not satisfied with their current job. The assessment of their restaurant job indicated that they have negative perceptions of the job. For example, they agreed that a restaurant job is not a respected job, has a high workload with poor starting salary, and has fewer training opportunities. These results support the findings of previous studies [1,3] on local workers in the KSA hospitality and tourism sector, which state that they have a negative perceptions of their current job. They are also in line with the work of Sobaih and Abu Elnasr [12], who found that new local workers hold negative perceptions, attitudes, and a low level of commitment to a career in restaurants. The results also showed that this negative perceptions of restaurant jobs positively influence their turnover intention. This becomes a threat to the creation of sustainable careers among Saudi Arabian people in restaurants [14,15].

On the other side, local workers agreed that they could use their degree to work restaurant jobs and contribute to the society. Additionally, despite the fact that new workers agreed that there is no good starting salary, they expect to have high earnings over duration of their career. This positive view of the job gave some indication that local workers can continue working in restaurants if other challenges, such as improving the working environment and enhancing the social status, are resolved. The current working environment and image of restaurants means that local workers do not consider restaurant jobs as a career and would not recommend it to their friends. Hence, they become less satisfied about their jobs and have a high turnover. These results support the works of Sadi and Henderson [3] and Sobaih and Abu Elnasr [12], which state that that local workers have a poor perception of restaurants as a career and do not intend to stay at this job for long time. Notwithstanding, turnover intention has a negative impact on workers, attitudes and behavior, and ultimately, on their performance [19].

The results of interviews with managers of restaurants showed six major challenges in the effective implementation of the new quota. The first challenge relates to government

support, which was perceived by managers as limited for either developing new workers or giving higher salaries to local workers who replaced foreign workers with low salaries. This finding supports the work Azhar et al. [1], who also confirmed that there has been limited support from the government for the effective implementation of the localization policy of the "Nitaqat program". This limited support by the government has made it difficult for restaurants to find qualified and skilled local workers to work in restaurants [7]. Moreover, most of the restaurants are small and do not have access to resources for developing new workers' skills or paying high salaries that are equal to those in the public sector. This reflects the critical role of governmental support in the effective implementation of the new Saudization quota in restaurants.

The second and third major challenges that managers encountered during their implementation of the new quota were related to social and cultural impacts, which promoted a "stigma" about restaurant jobs, which are perceived by many Saudi Arabian people are bad. Managers confirmed that if Saudi Arabian people accepted work in restaurants, they would perceive it as a "transit" and "temporary" job and not their sustainable or life-long career because they feel that it presents a poor social image and they are stigmatized when they talk about jobs such as "cook", "server", and "waiter". Job titles are important to Saudi Arabian people as a part of their social image; however, they were found to be unhappy about job titles in restaurants. This poor image of restaurant jobs enhanced the higher intention to leave among local workers. This supports the work of Wildes [36], who found that when employees perceive work to have stigma attached, they are less likely to continue working in those jobs. However, managers argued they had to hire locals who do not really work to cope with the new quota. Interestingly, this practice is not new and has been identified by Al-Asfour and Khan [10] as employing "Ghost Workers". This practice means that one of the foreign workers is going to take care of this responsibility, which adds a larger workload on them. This could negatively affect their performance, and ultimately, on their overall performance [37].

The fourth challenge was related the gap in and shortage of skills. Managers could not find qualified workers to take on job, which confirmed the skills shortage. This supply–demand skills mismatch is a great threat to the sustainability of the Saudization policy [5]. Managers confirmed that the newly employed local workers lack technical and human skills, and it is difficult to find workers in their restaurants. Managers were hiring workers who did not have the competencies needed for the job to cope with the new quota, contributing to the skills gap among local workers. This finings is supported by Azhar et al. [1], who stated that there was skills shortage among local workers in the KSA hotels. Sobaih and Abu Elnasr [12] confirmed this skills gap among local workers and found that foreign workers are more qualified and suitable for the job.

The fifth challenge was related to the context of restaurants, i.e., the working environment and conditions, as Saudi Arabian people often compare restaurant jobs with other jobs in the private sector or the public sector. This includes working unsocial hours during weekends and on public holidays. However, having a good social life and gathering during holidays and at the weekend is a part of Saudi Arabian culture. Hence, locals do not like jobs that affect their social life. In addition, the limited career progression opportunities, low salaries, and poor benefits provided by restaurants compared to those in other sectors make the working environment less attractive to Saudi Arabian people. These issues support the finding of Azhar et al. [1], who found the same results in the hotel industry. Another challenge in restaurant work is it is a physically demanding job, as workers have to keep working while standing (in either kitchen or service) for long hours (over 8 h). However, Saudi Arabian people keep comparing this job with jobs in offices in the public sector, which are less physically demanding and have a better salary, and thus, they become more dissatisfied about their restaurant job.

The sixth challenge highlighted by managers was related to the segregation of women and their participation in restaurant jobs. The segregation of women is the norm in Saudi Arabian culture, which does not accept mixing genders [38]. Hence, there is a cultural

barrier to women taking restaurant jobs. This cultural and social barrier contributed to the limited proportion of women in restaurants despite women, especially educated ones, being at the top the unemployed population in the KSA. Tourism and hospitality, in general, is dominated by women; however, their participation in the KSA tourism and hospitality sector is limited [26]. This is because most of the community members do not accept women working in a gender-mixed environment, such as restaurants [38], and family members do not accept this [9]. However, the Saudi Vision 2030 has empowered women, and they are expected to be seen in new jobs such as those in restaurants [39]. This participation of women can support restaurants in meeting the new Saudization quota.

7. Implications of the Study

The results have implications for the effective implementation of the localization policy, "Saudization", and the creation of sustainable careers for local workers in restaurants. The poor assessment of the job by local workers has contributed to low levels of satisfaction with this job. It also positively predicted their turnover intention. However, employees' attitudes and behaviors are key determinants of customer satisfaction and loyalty in the service industry, such as in restaurants [40]. It was confirmed that employee satisfaction is a predicator of customer satisfaction [41]. Employees' attitudes and behaviors can create a competitive advantage [42] and have an impact on the overall performance [37].

The results have implications for policy makers in relation to the effective implementation of Saudization. Policy makers should not look at the implementation of Saudization quantitatively by enforcing restaurants to employ a certain quota to meet unemployment goals. However, they need to develop an executive plan that considers the needs of employees and new employees. This plan should include giving adequate support to restaurant managers, particularly small ones, to implement the new quota effectively. This could be achieved by supporting them to develop the skills of new entrants in restaurant jobs through various training programs, as well as new programs in collaboration with academic institutions that provide tourism and hospitality education. Financial support to meet the wage gap between the public sector and other private sectors is also important for small restaurants. Additionally, the plan should also include a media campaign to raise the awareness among Saudi Arabian people about the contribution of the private sector to society. The media campaign should eliminate the poor social image of working in a restaurant among Saudi Arabian people by stressing the principle of Islam (since Saudi Arabian people are categorized as Muslim) that no one should not feel negatively about any job that contributes to society. In this plan, policy makers should also encourage the participation of women in restaurants through several incentives given to them and the business. There is no doubt that woman participating in restaurants contributes to the effective implementation of Saudization.

Employers and managers of restaurants in the KSA should recognize this transition in policy towards localization and develop a plan with alternatives to effectively implement this new Saudization quota. For example, it is important that employers and managers recognize the working days and shifts of Saudi Arabian people. A flexible working schedule should be considered, especially during weekends and public holidays. It is important the working schedule consider the limited participation of Saudi Arabian people during weekend and public holidays. Employee induction in the job is important at the beginning of the job to introduce the worker to his/her new career. On-job-training, using "shadow" or "buddy" approaches, can be an effective tool for transmitting skills to new workers, while maintaining the low cost of training. A better understanding of workers' perceptions and attitudes toward their new job is crucial for understating their commitment to careers in restaurants.

8. Conclusions

This study is an attempt to bridge a gap in knowledge and practice in relation to the effective implementation of the new Saudization quota of there being between 20% and 50% Saudi Arabian workers in restaurants/cafes. The results showed six main chal-

lenges that hinder restaurant managers from effectively implementing the new Saudization quota. The six challenges are associated with and linked to the absence of a clear strategic framework for the Saudization policy in restaurants, which was found to focus only on quantitative measures in relation to the number of new workers employed after the new quota was implemented. The Saudization policy did not take into consideration the needs of both restaurant employers (such as support of small business or improve working condition) and employees (such as bridging the wage gap and setting expectation for their new career). The policy did not consider how to mitigate the work stigma and negative assumption about restaurants work as "servile", "bad", "unrespectable", and as an unacceptable job among many of community members due to social and cultural impacts. The role of the government is critical for ensuring the effective implementation of the policy by focusing on the "employability" of new workers and preparing them for a sustainable career. This practice will enhance the perceptions of the new workers about their new job and set clear expectations for the new worker about their career. This is expected to positively affect employees' attitude and commitment to career and promotes a sustainable career in restaurants/cafés among Saudi Arabian people.

This study examined the perceptions of new workers of their job/career in restaurants after the new Saudization quota was introduced using a self-reporting research tool, which limit the results of the research to wider context, without the need for further testing. The research also explored the perceptions of managers in relation to effective implementation, but did not integrate the perspective of government officials. Hence, future research could explore the perceptions of government officials regarding the effective implementation of the new Saudization quota in restaurants. Factors that affect the creation of sustainable careers among new workers are important. This could be achieved by examining the job–characteristics model to create positive outcomes and enhance sustainable career opportunities.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the deanship of the scientific research ethical committee, King Faisal University (project number: GRANT3360, date of approval: 1 November 2022).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data are available upon request from researchers who meet the eligibility criteria. Kindly contact the author privately via e-mail.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. The Results of Regression Analysis

Table A1. Model summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.588 [a]	0.345	0.344	2.28516

[a] Predictors: (constant), career perceptions.

Table A2. The results of ANOVA [a].

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	1343.684	1	1343.684	257.314	0.000 [b]
1	Residual	2548.316	488	5.222		
	Total	3892.000	489			

[a] Dependent variable: turnover intention; [b] predictors: (constant), career perceptions.

Table A3. The results of coefficients [a].

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.337	0.611		3.823	0.000
	career	0.214	0.013	0.588	16.041	0.000

[a] Dependent variable: turnover intention.

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