

Measuring Multicultural Effectiveness among Self-Initiated Academic Expatriates in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Being an academic entity, universities offer a distinct environment with different missions and work tasks as compared to business organizations. Thus far only a minimal amount of investigation has embarked on self-initiated expatriates in the academic field. Therefore, the main aim of the research is to investigate the adjustment of this group of expatriates by focusing on the relationships between multicultural personality skills and the academic expatriates' personal, professional and social adjustment by utilizing the multicultural personality scale (MPQ). The MPQ consists of five dimensions - cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability and flexibility. Besides MPQ constructs, the study also examines the relationship between language ability and the expatriates' personal, social and professional adjustment. One-hundred and one questionnaires were distributed to self-initiated academic expatriates (N=101) attached to various academic departments in UUM. Results revealed that open-mindedness and flexibility are significantly related to the expatriates' personal adjustment, while cultural empathy, emotional stability and flexibility are significantly related to social adjustment. Flexibility is the only dimension of MPQ that predicts academic expatriates' professional adjustment. Language skills on the other hand, do not show any significant relationship with all three types of adjustments. Apart from the results, the discussions and limitations of the study are also presented in the paper.

Keywords: *Cross-cultural adjustment, expatriate adjustment, organizational expatriates, self-initiated academic expatriates, multicultural personality questionnaire.*

INTRODUCTION

The open door policy imposed by many countries towards academic expatriates has allowed for more academics to travel and work abroad, and the numbers are increasing exponentially (Altbach, 2004). For instance, in Malaysia, the government policy requires the local universities to engage foreign academics to expose local students to various cultural aspects such as language, values and international issues. The policy has empowered Malaysian universities to advertise and offer appealing contracts to suitable and qualified foreign academics. The inclination to utilize the service of these expatriates is also due to the competition and desire to attract more students, either local or abroad. The interest shown by these foreign universities has contributed towards the growing number of academics traveling and working across national boundaries. This group of expatriates usually initiates their travel to foreign countries (Richardson & McKenna, 2002).

As an academic entity, universities offer a distinct environment with different missions and work tasks as compared to business organizations (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer & Luk, 2005). Universities represent an entirely different working environment with diverse tasks and administrative obligations. Academics have to perform various tasks such as conducting lectures, as well as embark on research and publications, presenting papers, performing course administration, engaging in consultation work, as well as acquiring research grants (Barry, Berg & Chandler, 2003). Hence, it is more likely that the nature of work, the work environment, as well as the socio- and psycho-cultural situations are different for expatriate academics as compared to business expatriates. As their numbers continue to increase, the management of universities also becomes more complex and challenging (Richardson & McKenna, 2000). This has led to issues are being raised on supports available, whether at work or outside work, so that these expatriates can effectively adjust to the new environment and perform their tasks successfully.

The vast amount of literature on business expatriates has allowed researchers and scholars to comprehend knowledge and understanding of their adjustment expatriates as well as the business environment. While studies of expatriation and cross-cultural adjustment are inherent, research on the adjustment of self-initiated expatriates, especially academics is still limited. Apropos that, only a minimal amount of investigations has embarked on SIEs in the academic field (Richardson, 2006; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Richardson & McKenna; 2002; Selmer & Luring, 2011). Hence, this research aims towards addressing this lacuna by further examining the adjustment of academic expatriates along with uncovering the differences between the two groups of expatriates. This is in line with the suggestion made by Van Oudenhoven, Mol and Van der Zee (2003), there has been lack of specific measures which is capable of measuring individual differences in multicultural attitudes and success. Specifically, this research will look further into the adjustment of academic expatriates by utilizing the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) scale to identify the relationships that exist between MPQ dimensions and expatriates' personal (i.e. satisfaction with life), social adjustment and professional adjustment (i.e. job satisfaction).

Besides multicultural personality traits, we also hope to examine whether local language ability affects academic expatriates' adjustment. Research has shown that knowledge of local language helps people to move around as it enables people to communicate and interact with host nationals, thus, ease adjustment (see for example, Bjorkman & Gertsen, 1992; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). Since academic expatriates initiate their own travel to another country, it is anticipated that their pattern of adjustment would differ from the organizational expatriates. The findings from our research will provide some theoretical insights and knowledge on pragmatic applications that would certainly benefit scholars and practitioners involved with the management of expatriates and cross-cultural communication, especially on cross-cultural adjustment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Expatriates (OEs) VS Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs)

Research relating to the adjustment of OEs has attained its climax by which the phenomenon is now becoming well-comprehended (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Myers & Pringle, 2005) given that a substantial amount of literature on expatriates seem to accord emphasis on OEs

(Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Selmer & Luring, 2011). Since the pioneering work by Torrington 1994, researchers have garnered their interest and attention on individuals who instigate their own travel in search of work in a foreign country, known as SIEs. This group of expatriates has been traveling around the globe for years to find job opportunities, experiences and challenges, and their numbers have increased over time.

Nevertheless, although SIEs establish a wider and even more potent division of the labor market (Myers & Pringle, 2005, p.1) only a marginal of information is known about them. Inkson, Pringle, Arthur and Barry (1997) have pioneered the research on SIEs in 1997 but it was only in recent years that the number of studies has started to multiply. Apart from obtaining their own personal agenda, this group of expatriates identifies international work experience as a form of self-development. In contrast, the professional developments of SIEs deviate from the more organized path of OEs. Myers and Pringle (2005) have labeled SIEs as a form of self-managed international career, which should be distinguished from OEs and be perceived as a part of an individual's career enhancement (Inkson et al., 1997; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Pursuant to Myers and Pringle (2005), this career path is predominantly assumed by the younger generations who are more inclined to discover the world and experience new cultures.

An increasing amount of information in relation to the variances in the adjustment between OEs and SIEs is now available considering the rise in attention that scholars have now placed on SIEs. As discussed in various literatures, most expatriates, either OEs or SIEs are attached to industries such as manufacturing and engineering (see for example Inkson et al., 1997; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). An illustration depicting the differences in the adjustment of OEs and SIEs is provided by a specific research conducted by Peltokorpi and Froese (2009). The foregoing variances are credited to the difference in motivation and regularity of cross-cultural interaction with the host and also taking into consideration the description of SIEs themselves. As earlier defined, SIEs are international employees who initiate their own mobility, and often motivated by the offers made by foreign organizations. As OEs are posted by their parent companies, they may have minimal knowledge of the country of assignment and are less adjusted than SIEs although more assistance may be provided by their parent company (such as training, housing or area of residence).

Since SIEs initiate their own travel, they are more motivated to learn about the new culture at a faster pace. The learning process of SIEs is also anticipated to be much easier which allows a better adjustment as explained in the Social Learning Theory (SLT). The theory advocates that in ensuring a successful expatriation, expatriates need the enthusiasm to learn and initiate positive behaviors (Bandura, 1977). It is therefore, crucial for SIEs to communicate and interact effectively with the people of the host country during the course of learning and acquiring local knowledge as the response from the locals can provide support to acquire the information on what is appropriate or otherwise.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment

As described by Black et al. (1991) cross-cultural adjustment is the degree of psychological comfort and familiarity of expatriates with the contrasting facets of a foreign culture. The process of adjustment involves the decrease of uncertainties and changes through which

expatriates begin to feel more comfortable with the new culture thus adapting to the new surroundings and environment itself. In this regard, how the new cultural environment affects adjustment, attitudes and behaviors of expatriates have been validated through the studies on expatriation (see for example Halim, Bakar & Mustaffa, 2016; Selmer, 2001; Yavas & Bodur, 1999). Through an early research by Church (1982), it was proposed that culturally adjusted expatriates are more receptive to the new cultural environment, are able to adjust their behavior and norms accordingly, and accumulate the new behaviors and norms to the grounds provided by home cultures.

Research on work-related outcomes, especially on job satisfaction and job performance have found that well-adjusted expatriates are more likely to perform better in their work (see for example Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Naumann, 1993). Job satisfaction is “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experience” (Locke, 1976, p.1300). It is suggested that satisfied expatriates are more inclined to be intrinsically motivated to perform well thus continue to stay abroad. Hence, in most studies, researchers are either more likely to propose job satisfaction as one of the anticipated consequences of adjustment (Black et al., 1991) or utilize the variable to measure professional adjustment (van Oudenhoven et al., 2003).

In contrast, expatriates who experience difficulty adjusting themselves to the new environment will experience apprehension that can lead to several negative experiences, such as low performance and job satisfaction (Naumann, 1992), as well as too early departure to the home country (Harzing, 1995). Negative experiences encountered in the new environment can also lead expatriates to perceive the new culture as inferior to their own, which would consequently inhibit their adjustment.

Expatriate Adjustment

Various definitions of expatriate adjustment have been proposed by scholars and researchers. However, in the context of the present research, expatriate adjustment is explained as the degree at which an expatriate feels comfortable towards the new environment, and subsequently leads him/her to perform effectually in such environment. Literatures suggest that there are three main areas of adjustment, namely the psychological/personal and sociocultural adjustment (see for example Searle & Ward, 1990; and work (professional) adjustment by Aycan & Berry, 1996; Hawes & Kealey, 1981).

The psychological/personal adjustment is connected with the psychological well-being, physical health and gratification with the diverse aspects of life in the new environment, and emphasis is placed on the approach of expatriates. Oppositely, sociocultural adjustment is more concentrated on the social skills that motivate the attitudinal influences, and facilitate social interactions with the people of the host country. Sociocultural adjustment can be categorized into two areas which are the professional area that centers on the extent of satisfaction with the new work environment and the social area, which concentrates on the expatriates’ satisfaction with the social relationships that they form with the people of the host country. In gist, it is the expatriate’s ability to conform to the new cultural setting (Searle & Ward, 1990) and concerns the way he or she attends to difficulties, and how such expatriate strives to function effectively and interact meaningfully with the locals (Aycan, 1997). Lastly, work or professional adjustment indicates expatriates’ tasks accomplishment and approach towards

work (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), which is apparent through effective execution and positive attitude towards the new role. In sum, the three areas of adjustment serve as a beneficial structure in pursuing research on expatriate adjustment.

The MPQ

The MPQ was developed by Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000, 2001) of which the instrument contains the evaluation of personality and was established to define the personality proportions or behaviors that motivate multicultural effectiveness. The MPQ is implemented to foresee how individuals adapt to the new cultural environment based on five dimensions: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability and flexibility.

Cultural empathy designates the compassion towards the new cultural environment (Hawes & Kealey, 1981), and is often deliberated as an essential dimension of multicultural effectiveness (Arthur & Bennet, 1995). The dimension represents one's ability to empathize with the emotional state, opinions and behaviors of members of diverse cultural groups. The second dimension, open mindedness, is a harmonious and impartial attitude towards members of the out-group, with dissimilar cultural norms and values (Arthur & Bennet, 1995; Ronen, 1989). Sequentially, social initiative is defined as the proclivity to approach social circumstances and to take initiatives of learning and mingling with the people of the host culture. Researchers have stressed and suggested that it is imperative for expatriates to form and maintain contacts and create networks with those from the host country (see for example Hawes & Kealy, 1981; Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Kets de Vries & Mead, 1991). The dimension of emotional stability describes the propensity to remain composed in stressful situations contrasted with a penchant to display intense emotional responses under stressful circumstances (Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Caligiuri, 2000; Church, 1982; Tung, 1981). The final dimension, flexibility, has been brought to light by a number of researchers (i.e. Arthur & Bennet, 1995; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Torbiorn, 1982). It is seen as the most vital dimension in successful adjustment due to the expatriates' capability to alter behaviors and strategies to another when one is in a new environment. This ability is critical as the common ways of handling incidents will not necessarily work in a new cultural environment.

Studies on multicultural personality also suggest that the five personality dimensions designated above are indeed foretelling of successful adjustment among sojourners. As an illustration, the MPQ envisages a stronger preference for integration-oriented acculturation strategies among Finnish immigrants in the United States, Australia and Canada (Bakker, Van der Zee, & van Oudenhoven, 2006). Correspondingly, it also predicts more positive personal, social and professional adjustment among western business executives working in Taiwan (van Oudenhoven et al., 2003).

In light of the foregoing considerations, researchers are guided to believe that self-initiated academic expatriates also differ in their adjustment. In this regard, the notion that expatriates with high levels of MPQ elements would be more superior at their personal, social and professional adjustment and serves to be the main prediction of this research. Therefore, the following hypothesis are conveyed to assess on whether there are substantial dissimilarities in the pattern of adjustment of this group of expatriates and if there are, in which area of adjustment (personal, social or professional).

Hypothesis 1: There are significant relationships between MPQ and expatriates' personal, social and professional adjustment.

Language Ability

Language and culture are embedded into each other. They are interconnected and undividable. The ability to communicate enables a culture to develop through contact and interaction with other people. Linguistic relativity proposes that people of different cultural background and who speak different languages view other cultures contrarily. This is related to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (in Hussein, 2012), which describes how language plays its role in determining our thoughts and behavior. The hypothesis also accentuate how language and culture are intertwined, and how our values and beliefs shape our ways of thinking and communicating. This relates to Selmer's (2006a) study which suggests that language fluency does not determine effective intercultural communication and adjustment. Learning and knowing the values and rules of the new culture do not necessarily mean that one can utilize the information and transform it into practice. In the case of expatriation, an expatriate's belief and values may affect his or her communication with the people of the host nation.

To date, theoretical evidence especially in expatriation management and cross-cultural adjustment literature which describes the impact of language on adjustment is numerous. For example, Selmer (2006a) and Peltokorpi (2008) have suggested that expatriates who move to countries or cultures extremely different from their own, like China and Japan, where spoken and written language differ from the home country are more likely to face difficulty adjusting to the new environment. Peltokorpi has argued that effective communication is contingent upon a common language, and this seldom exists in Japan since the Japanese lack sufficient English skills. Additionally, a close relationship with the locals can help in bridging the gap between expatriates and host nationals and this in turn, enables the expatriates to recognize the value of culture differences and ease their adjustment (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). These arguments are also consistent with the SLT which explains how communication and interaction with people of the host nation is critical as it helps expatriates to obtain information on what is appropriate and not appropriate. Through the gained information, they are able to adjust their own behavior to conform to the new environment.

In relation to this, Bahasa Malaysia proficiency is predicted to help the academic expatriates acquire appropriate values and norms through their interactions with Malaysians, and in turn enables them to perform or act accordingly to the Malaysian culture. This is crucial especially for expatriates moving from low-context cultures to a high-context culture such as Malaysia (Hall, 1977). For example, at workplaces, Malaysians hesitancy to express contrasting opinions can be misconstrued by expatriates from western cultures. Consequently, the natural tendency of people to communicate in their native language would lead the expatriates to be excluded from the communication networks, either intentionality or unintentionality. In relation to this, the expatriates' inability to speak the native language may isolate them from the host and lead to lower-quality relationships, which is linked with adjustment and low job satisfaction (Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999).

In addition to the work adjustment, non-work related adjustment can also be impeded by language problems. As contended by Dolainski (1997), language problems affect non-work related adjustment of expatriates in Japan. Dolainski also has argued that knowing and

understanding the host native language would enable expatriates to create and foster daily interactions with the Japanese. This in turn would help them to understand the culture. It is suggested that as the level of proficiency increases, the easier it is for expatriates to obtain information about the new culture, at least to order food or ask for directions (Peltokorpi, 2008). Early research by Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) has suggested that an expatriate's ability to communicate and interact using the host language can greatly affect their adjustment. This is also reflected in the SLT discussed earlier. These expatriates do not have to be fluent in the language but their confidence and willingness to communicate using the host language will certainly ease their adjustment. Knowing some words of the local language would already help the expatriates to gain "a sense of safety and self-assurance", as this shows that at the very least it reveals that efforts are made to learn the local language (Copeland & Griggs, 1985, p.113). The discussions presented above are explored in the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: There are significant relationships between language ability and expatriates' personal, professional and social adjustments.

METHOD

Respondents

The present study considers the self-initiated academic expatriates working in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) as participants of the study, since they function outside the "traditional" structure of OEs' assignment model (Richardson, 2006). The list of expatriates, which contained office location and nationality of academic expatriates currently attached to various academic departments in UUM was obtained from the Center of International Affairs and Cooperation (CIAC). Based on the list, there are currently 101 academic expatriates working in UUM. Since their number is small, all of them are considered as participants in this study.

Instrumentation

We utilized the self-administered questionnaire as the primary element of data collection. The questionnaire is comprised of six sections. While Section A measured the five dimensions of the MPQ, Sections B to D contains the items that measured the three facets of adjustment. The next, Section E entails five items that measured the expatriates' language ability, and the final section asked for respondents to provide information about themselves such as gender, education, country of origin, experience and the number of years being in UUM. For sections A to E respondents were required to rate their feelings on a 5-point Likert Scale, which measured their perceived feelings toward the statements provided for each dependent and independent variables. The questionnaires were then distributed to the academic expatriates via a drop and collect method. After two weeks the questionnaires were collected. Out of 101 questionnaires distributed, 94 questionnaires were returned, yielded a 93% returned rate.

Measurement

The table presented below (Table 1) summarizes the measurement of each variable being studied as well as the alpha values of each variable. The measurements are used to measure the dependent and independent variables shows high reliability coefficient.

As for language ability, the variable is measured based on respondents' report of their ability to speak the host's native language on a 5-item scale with alpha value of .83. The variable is assessed on a 5-point scale ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree". The principal component factor analysis has loaded all items on the same factor, indicating the scale is unidimensional.

Table 1: Measures.

Variables	Measures	Total Items	Alpha Values
MPQ			
Cultural empathy	Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven (2000,	18 items	.79
Open-mindedness	2001); Multicultural Personality	18 items	.78
Social initiative	Questionnaire (5 = completely	17 items	.81
Emotional stability	applicable; 1 = totally not applicable)	20 items	.80
Flexibility		18 items	.77
Personal adjustment	Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin	5 items	.81
	(1985); Satisfaction with Life Scale (5 =		
	strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree)		
Social adjustment	Van Sonderen (1993); Social Support List	23 items	.84
	Interaction (5 = very often; 1 = never)		
Professional adjustment	Spector (1997); Job Satisfaction Survey	36 items	.86
	(5 = totally agree; 1 = totally disagree)		

RESULTS

By utilizing descriptive statistics, it was discovered that 58 respondents (61.7%) aged between 41 to 45 years old, 10 of them are female (10.6%) and all of them had a PhD degree, with a majority are hired as senior lecturers (68.1%). From these expatriates, 81 of them are married (86.1%) and 73 of them of them (77.6%) have their family with them in Malaysia. Regarding the country of origin, Indonesia conquered the majority of the expatriates' group, where eighteen respondents (19%) informed that they are from Indonesia. Fifteen (15.9%) expatriates are from India, 12 (12.8%) from Nigeria, seven (7.4%) from United States, Pakistan and Yemen. Further to this, only a minimal group represents the expatriates from other countries. More than 50% of these expatriates have been in Malaysia more than 2 years. Forty-nine of them (52.1%) have experience working in other countries before. When queried about their capability to speak the native language of the host country, 77.6% (73 respondents) have conveyed that their knowledge is limited to very short and simple phrases only.

Using the full respondents, the means, standard deviations (SDs) and correlations of all variables were also calculated. Table 2 reports the mean distributions, SDs and correlations of all variables. Professional adjustment scores the highest mean value (\bar{x} =4.05) and flexibility scores the lowest (\bar{x} =3.26) among all variables being studied. The table also reveals that all dimensions of MPQ, cultural empathy do not show significant relationships with emotional stability and flexibility. It also does not have any significant relationship with the psychological and social adjustment of the expatriates. Open-mindedness and social initiative also do not correlate with social adjustment. For adjustment variables, social adjustment does not correlate with professional adjustment. Additionally, language skills also do not indicate any relationship with all three types of adjustment.

Table 2: Means, SDs and correlations of all variables.

Variables	M	SDs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Cultural Empathy	3.46	.39									
Open-Mindedness	3.58	.36	.67**								
Social Initiative	3.51	.36	.31**	.58**							
Emotional Stability	3.44	.34	.19	.40**	.49**						
Flexibility	3.26	.32	.18	.41**	.42**	.47**					
Language	3.42	.35	.23	.34	.29	.18	.21				
Personal Adjust.	3.83	.54	.13	.12	.16	.21*	.23*	.19			
Social Adjust.	3.70	.69	.06	.12	.19***	.23*	.28**	.25	.38**		
Professional Adjust.	4.05	.44	.32**	.34**	.34**	.39**	.39**	.07	.15	.04	-

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The results of the relationship between MPQ dimensions and expatriate adjustment are presented based on the hierarchical regression analyses performed on the variables, where personal, social and professional adjustments are regressed against the five dimensions of MPQ - cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability and flexibility. Of the MPQ variables, open-mindedness ($\beta = .28$, $t = 2.13$, $p = .05$) and flexibility ($\beta = .21$, $t = 1.98$, $p = .05$) are found to be correlated to the expatriates' personal adjustment. Meanwhile, cultural empathy ($\beta = .28$, $t = 2.64$, $p = .05$), emotional stability ($\beta = .34$, $t = 2.87$, $p = .05$) and flexibility ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2.03$, $p = .05$) show significant relationships with the expatriates' social adjustment. The MPQ dimensions explained for 26 per cent of variance towards the expatriates' social adjustment. Finally, for professional adjustment, the MPQ dimensions accounted for 12 per cent of the expatriates' professional adjustment. Of the MPQ dimensions, only flexibility is found to be correlated with professional adjustment ($\beta = .24$, $t = 2.07$, $p = .05$). Of all dimensions, social initiative is not correlated to any types of adjustment. We also conducted a regression test of adjustment on local language fluency. It appeared that language ability is not a predictor to all three types of adjustment - personal ($\beta = .19$, $t = 1.27$, $p > .05$), social ($\beta = .25$, $t = 1.65$, $p > .05$) and professional ($\beta = .07$, $t = 1.04$, $p > .05$). In the overall, the MPQ dimensions accounted for 39 per cent of variance in expatriates' personal, social and psychological adjustment.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

As previously mentioned, the primary objective of our study is to determine the relationships between MPQ dimensions and the expatriates' adjustment in terms of personal, social and professional. Additionally, we also investigate whether there is an effect of language ability on academic expatriates' personal, social and professional adjustment. An insightful inquiry is offered through our research on how MPQ influences personal adjustment (i.e. satisfaction with life), social adjustment (i.e. support by peers) and professional adjustment (i.e. job satisfaction). Hypothesis 1 predicts that there are significant relationships between MPQ and expatriates' personal, social and professional adjustments. While it was discovered through the analyses that open-mindedness and flexibility is correlated to the expatriates' personal adjustment, cultural empathy, emotional stability and flexibility posed important positive

relationships with the expatriates' social adjustment. As the new environment presents great challenges to sojourners, it requires the newcomers to be open and flexible to face these challenges and adjust themselves to the new environment. It is crucial that expatriates enter the new situation positively, without any judgment about the new culture, and take initiatives to mix around and communicate with the locals. Interestingly, flexibility is associated with all three facets of adjustment. This is consistent with past studies which have concluded the same impact of flexibility on adjustment (see for example Black, 1990; Parker & McEvoy, 1993; Shaffer, Gregersen, Harrison, Black & Ferzandi, 2006; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2003). By being flexible, expatriates can easily maneuver themselves in the new environment, and this assists them in knowing the people and the culture better, consequently leading to successful adjustment.

Our results however, revealed that while open-mindedness is correlated to expatriates' personal adjustment, it is not significantly related to their social and professional adjustments. Cultural empathy is not correlated to personal and professional adjustment, and social initiative is not related to any facet of adjustment. These findings do not corroborate an earlier research by Van Oudenhoven et al. (2003) as anticipated. Their study found that the MPQ scales are significantly related to all three facets of adjustment. This could be explained in a number of ways. First, it could be attributed to the country of origin, where most of them came from high context cultures such as Indonesia and India, which have some similarities to the present culture. Similarities in terms of food, values and practices make it easier for them to adapt and adjust to the local culture. Additionally, as these expatriates initiated their own travel to work abroad, and more than 50 per cent of them had experience working in other countries, they could have anticipated what a new culture is like and this has helped ease their adjustment. This is also consistent with the claim that expatriates who are able to adjust to a new cultural environment are found to be more open to the new culture, are able to adjust their behavior, norms and rules effectively in the new environment (see for example Church, 1982; Halim, 2013; Selmer, 2001; & Yavas & Bodur, 1999). As described in the SLT (Bandura, 1977), people learn through observations and imitate behaviors of others, which are influenced by the intrinsic or extrinsic reinforcements such as self-esteem, contentment and achievement. In the case of expatriates being studied, the experience they had could have contributed towards their anticipations and has aided in their learning of the Malaysian culture. Additionally, Malaysian culture in general, where it consists of different races with its unique offerings could have played important roles in facilitating the expatriates' adjustment.

The self-initiated academic expatriates that we studied corresponds with the recent trend in expatriation whereby studies have shown that globalization has encouraged more people to take charge of their own career paths without hoping for a direct support from an organization (Carr, Kerr & Thorn, 2005). The increase in the number of SIEs coming to teach in UUM also supports Myers and Pringle (2005) claim that this group of expatriates has now become an important global workforce. As our study revealed, most of the academic expatriates in UUM have been in Malaysia for more than two years, and more than half of them had experience working in other countries before settling in UUM. They are able to speak foreign languages, especially English, fluently, and are also able to speak Bahasa Malaysia, although with limited ability (short and simple phrases). The respondents also claimed that they did not have problems adjusting to the Malaysian culture, as in general, it took less than six

months to adjust to the culture. Interestingly, this contradicts some research findings which suggest the importance of training, especially cross-cultural, in expatriate adjustment (Causin, Ayoun & Moreo, 2011; Mohd. Tahir & Ismail, 2007; Selmer, 2006b; Selmer, Chiu & Shenkar, 2007; Warneke & Schneider, 2011).

It can be argued that training, in this case, is not the matter as most of the expatriates have had experience working and being in other countries prior to pursuing their career in UUM. As discussed in the SLT, past experience helps expatriates to anticipate and learn about life in a foreign country. This in turn, helps them to adjust to the present culture. Alongside experience, the ability to speak Bahasa Malaysia, even though with limited vocabulary, could have also contributed to their adjustment. The ability could help them communicate with the people of the host country, and this determines the amount of information regarding the new environment and the culture which they can obtain. The more they are involved in communication, the better they understand the people and the culture of the host country, and this will help facilitate their adjustment.

The second hypothesis predicts that there are significant relationships between language ability and expatriates' adjustment. It is found however that language is also not significant to all three facets of expatriate adjustment. This is consistent with Halim's (2013) study which found that language ability does not have any effect on expatriate adjustment in Malaysia as most Malaysians, especially the working ones, are able to communicate and interact in English, regardless of race and ethnic. This is especially true as a study by Lim (2001) has proved that Malaysians, especially those involved in the business factor, are fluent in English. The finding by Takeuchi, Yun and Russel (2002) which suggest that English skills (usually referred to as language of business) seem to be relevant in the context of adjustment of academic expatriates in UUM, especially the work-related adjustment where English is being used in daily interaction especially at work.

Additionally, Malaysian culture is also regarded as "friendly" especially with regard to food, entertainment and health care facilities as food from different regions of the world are almost available everywhere, including UUM and entertainment and medical care are easily accessible. Culture distance also does not seem to be so much of a problem as most of them are from the Asian countries and have been in foreign countries before. The exposures they had could have helped them to anticipate what would be in the new culture. Certainly, this could contribute toward their learning to a new cultural environment. Besides, our findings could also help the public, especially the university's management and those who work with academic expatriates to be more aware that it is not only these expatriates who have to put efforts to adjust to the new cultural environment, but those who work and deal with them are equally responsible in facilitating their adjustment (i.e. help ease work life, cooperative, approachable, reliable and ready to listen). The perception they create towards the acceptance and the amount of support they receive from friends and peers at the new workplace will subsequently help them to adjust and perform effectively.

Implications

While it is acknowledged that research on cross-cultural adjustment and expatriation management is abundant, the results of our research findings from the present research offer a new perspective on the pattern of adjustment of self-initiated academic expatriates and how personality factor such as flexibility, plays a crucial role in successful adjustment. Considering that the academic expatriates' personality traits and contextual factors are related to professional, social and personal adjustment in Malaysia, the present work offers a number of contributions towards cross-cultural and expatriation management literatures. First, the study adds towards the limited literature on SIEs and academic expatriates. Although academic expatriates have previously been investigated by Richardson and McKenna (2000, 2002), more research on self-initiated academic expatriates is needed to further understand the challenges in their adjustment. Second, the focus of our study on how MPQ affects academic expatriates is also far-reaching as past studies have been mainly observing at how MPQ influence the adjustment of OEs. The effects of expatriate personality traits on adjustment were examined using the (MPQ) instead of the general personality scales which is normally utilized in studying adjustment (i.e. the Big-Five personality factors) that might not effectively describe cross-cultural adjustment (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). The instrument that we utilized is also designed to cover the detail aspects of traits, and is relevant to describe the elements that contribute towards successful adjustment (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2003). Finally, this study also contributes toward the literature on the adjustment of academic expatriates in Malaysia as to date, research in this area is still very limited.

Limitations

Regardless of its offerings, we also recognize the limitations present in this research. The reply rates within groups are extraordinarily vital for all multivariate analyses. The small sample size employed by the current research could have led to problems during the calculation of the regression weights related to hypotheses testing. However, as the number of academic expatriates working in UUM is rather small, the size is considered satisfactory. Given the foregoing considerations, future studies in the same area should consider a bigger number of academic expatriates residing in Malaysia. A wider sample size and representation of academic expatriates from diverse cultural backgrounds could yield towards the generalization of research findings.

In conclusion, it is recognized that it is usually the academic expatriates' own resolve to travel and work overseas. These expatriates perceive their experience abroad as a means of self-development, self-satisfaction or in achieving other personal goal. Undoubtedly, they are not traveling to accomplish specific company goals but rather to discover new cultures and looking for new opportunities. The incentive would have empowered them to naturally venture into the new environment. The communication and creation of social relationships with Malaysians, especially the UUM community, could have permitted these academic expatriates to obtain insights into cultural norms, values and behaviors, thus, enabling further interaction with the hosts. With the self-motivation and disposition to discover a new life overseas, they would also face a smaller amount of adjustment difficulties while in UUM, and these subsequently aids them in leading a meaningful personal, social and professional life.

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