

Effects of Primary Stakeholders' Support on Expatriate Adjustment and Performance in Malaysia

(Kesan Sokongan Pemegang Taruh Utama ke atas Penyesuaian dan Prestasi Ekspatriat di Malaysia)

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation encourages international companies to show interest in the growth of job mobility and relocations among employees. To meet global workforce demands, these companies are highly reliant on expatriates to manage their business operation abroad. This study examined the role of primary stakeholders' support such as organisations, host country nationals (HCNs) and spouses on expatriate adjustment and performance. Questionnaire survey data were collected from 112 expatriates in Malaysia and analysed using multiple hierarchical regression analysis. The results substantiated that perceived organisational support (POS) and HCN support were significant components in expatriate adjustment. The findings also revealed a positive relationship between expatriate adjustment and performance. Thus, multinational companies (MNCs) and human resource managers should provide expatriate relevant training and support to ensure a successful international assignment when he or she is sent abroad. Local employees could also be assigned to help expatriates mingle around in the host country.

Keywords: Expatriate adjustment; support; stakeholders; expatriate performance; Malaysia

ABSTRAK

Globalisasi menggalakkan syarikat antarabangsa untuk menunjukkan minat terhadap pertumbuhan mobiliti pekerjaan dan relokasi dalam kalangan pekerja. Untuk memenuhi permintaan tenaga kerja global, syarikat antarabangsa sangat bergantung kepada ekspatriat untuk menguruskan operasi perniagaan mereka di luar negara. Kajian ini mengkaji peranan sokongan pemegang taruh utama seperti organisasi, warga tuan rumah dan pasangan terhadap penyesuaian dan prestasi ekspatriat. Data soal selidik yang dikumpulkan dari 112 ekspatriat di Malaysia dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis regresi pelbagai hirarkikal. Hasil kajian membuktikan bahawa tanggapan sokongan organisasi dan sokongan warga tuan rumah adalah komponen penting dalam penyesuaian ekspatriat. Hasil kajian ini juga menunjukkan hubungan positif antara penyesuaian ekspatriat dan prestasi. Oleh itu, syarikat multinasional dan pengurus sumber manusia harus menyediakan latihan dan sokongan yang berkaitan untuk ekspatriat untuk memastikan suatu tugas antarabangsa yang berjaya apabila mereka dihantar ke luar negara. Pekerja tempatan juga boleh ditugaskan untuk membantu ekspatriat bergaul di negara tuan rumah.

Kata kunci: Penyesuaian ekspatriat; sokongan; pemegang taruh; prestasi ekspatriat; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The opportunity to accept an international assignment is exclusively enriching. However, poor cross-cultural adjustment can lead to a daunting expatriate experience. In general, expatriate adjustment is the adaptation process with respect to living and working among expatriates in the host country (Black & Gregersen 1991). The adjustment process requires them to understand the host cultural behaviours, cognitions and emotions. Undoubtedly, adjustment is important for both expatriates and organisations (Lee & Kartika 2014). According to Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2016), 18% of the expatriates, who were assigned by their companies indicated that cultural adjustment as one of the main reasons for assignment failure. Other contributing factors include family concerns, new job opportunities, security concerns and work environment issues (Dowling, Festing & Engle 2017). The overall cost of an overseas assignment is relatively high, about two to four times the expatriate's base salary, depending on the assignment's locations (Alsop 2014). That is, when an expatriate fails to deliver an assignment, the organisation is expected to bear the cost of approximately \$1million for each failure (Mohn 2011). Therefore, the identification of factors influencing expatriate success is the main focus of international business journal.

Despite attempts in unravelling factors related to expatriate success include individual, job, organisational and non-work factors (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005; Kim & Slocum 2008; Awais Bhatti et al. 2014; Lee & Kartika 2014), Van Erp et al. (2014) pointed out that the literature mainly focuses on expatriates themselves. In fact, studies that include stakeholders' support have been sparse. Earlier researches have stressed that organisations and supervisors are influential in helping expatriates feel adjusted (Kraimer, Wayne & Jaworski 2001; Kraimer & Wayne 2004). Specifically, Takeuchi (2010) highlighted that host country nationals (HCNs) and accompanying spouses are primary stakeholders that should not be neglected because they can impact an expatriate's assignment goals. Recent studies have started to recalibrate their attention to the role of HCNs (Abdul Malek, Budhwar & Reiche 2015; Gorp et al. 2017; Kang & Shen 2018) and spouses (Davies, Kraeh & Froese 2015; Sambasivan, Sadoughi & Esmailzadeh 2017). Gupta, Banerjee and Gaur (2012) justified stakeholders can be integrated in one study to exhibit the underlying support given to expatriates. To address this limitation, a framework including three stakeholders' support (organisations, HCNs and spouses) is introduced to explain expatriate adjustment and performance.

For this study, Malaysia was chosen as it is one of the best developing countries in Asia rated by expatriates in terms of social integration and social life (HSBC Bank 2018). The balanced economic growth of Malaysia has been the backbone of the country that allows expatriates to seek better career opportunities. Interestingly, the cultural differences in Malaysia have also provided expatriates with opportunities to learn from a variety of cultural and professional values (The Star Online 2015). However, Malaysia remains a challenging country with its unpredictability which causes baffling situations for expatriates because not all local practices are easily understood by them (Tahir & Ismail 2007). Some cultural factors such as languages and cultural differences are difficult for expatriates to overcome. In addition, the personal and business norms may vary for expatriates performing their assignments in developing countries like Malaysia, where the culture places a high priority on age, hierarchy and seniority (Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2013). In response to these issues, expatriates in Malaysia might need support from multiple parties to ease their assignments.

In this research, the influence of primary stakeholders' support on expatriate adjustment and performance is proposed. According to Hobfoll's conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll 1989), highly valuable resources (e.g., support) allow employees to accomplish organisational goals. In fact, resource loss is closely related to a lack of social support which consumes expatriates' exhaustive effort to meet demands of an international assignment

(Halbesleben et al. 2014). From a resource perspective, social support is an external resource (receive support). Simultaneously, it can become an internal resource when one internalises the new cultural knowledge shared by various groups (Stroppa & Spieß 2011). On the other hand, international assignment can be onerous and challenging as it may threaten an expatriate's coping resources (Van Erp et al. 2014). Since support could be used as coping resources (Hobfoll 1989), this study included perceived organisational support (POS), HCN support and spousal support as the main proxies to predict expatriate adjustment, and in turn expatriate performance. The basic premise of COR theory is that when individuals face diminishing resources due to occupational stress (Hobfoll 1989), they will struggle to keep the resources they own, which is detrimental to assignment success. Hence, this study applies COR theory and discerns how stakeholders' support can function as a coping resource for expatriates to facilitate assignment success in Malaysia.

The contribution of this study is to develop a research framework that analyses the relationship between support and expatriate adjustment and job performance. Based on the theoretical foundation of COR theory, it helps identify underlying mechanism that leads to expatriate performance. Prior studies look at expatriate adjustment as a channel in facilitating job performance (Abdul Malek & Budhwar 2013; Lee & Kartika 2014; Abdul Malek et al. 2015; Sambasivan et al. 2017). Therefore, the aim of this research is to investigate the effect of support from three salient stakeholders (organisations, HCNs and spouses) on expatriates' adjustment, which is likely to influence their performance in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES THEORY

The central tenet of COR theory is that individuals are motivated to obtain, retain, foster and protect resources they highly value (Hobfoll 1989). COR theory develops four types of resources: objects, conditions, personal characteristics and energies (Hobfoll 1989). Object resources are valued because of their physical nature or secondary value based on their expense and rarity, for instance, a house. Conditions are resources valued and sought after in which social support is an example. Personal characteristics are resources that help dealing with stress, for example, conscientiousness. Energies are the last resources valued for their aid in acquiring other resources including time, money and knowledge with no intrinsic value.

COR theory suggests that a person with excessive demands relies on one of the resources (objects, conditions, personal characteristics and energies) to minimise the demands or loss of resources (Hobfoll 1989). In other words, when people have resources, they are more productive in coping with the demands and receiving more resources. Conversely, when people have few resources, they are more prone to ineffective strategy in coping with the demands and receiving fewer resources. This theory emphasises an individual's ability to retain resources that drive success by improving his or her adaptation and coping skills (Avey et al. 2010).

Hobfoll's COR theory has been applied to understand how resources or losses of resources can affect employee outcomes. Remarkably, this theory is also applicable to expatriate studies. It is argued that expatriate work behaviours and performance are not static and can change over time in the host environment. Existing studies which utilised COR theory have reported that expatriates are driven to acquire new resources as they are inundated with excessive demands in the host country. According to Cao, Hirschi and Deller (2012), COR theory suggested that career capital (protean career attitude, total career network size and cultural intelligence) in the host country would improve expatriate adjustment. Van Erp et al. (2014) considered intercultural traits as coping resources that can help expatriates increase cultural adjustment. Besides, Andresen (2015) stated that expatriates who lost resources might experience strain.

Those strongly embedded expatriates within the organisation were able to build connections with co-workers and obtain resources from them to facilitate organisational citizenship behaviours. Bader (2017) also proposed HCN support from top management team, supervisors, colleagues, subordinates and friends can reduce resources loss of expatriates to heighten their adjustment level during assignments. The review suggests that resources such as career capital, intercultural traits, embeddedness and HCN support can influence various expatriate outcomes. In this study, Hobfoll's COR theory is used to explain the effects of primary stakeholders' support on expatriate adjustment and performance. This kind of support can be classified as condition resources (Halbesleben et al. 2014) to stabilise expatriate adjustment in order to avoid resources loss due to culture shock in the host country.

PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

POS measures employees' global beliefs concerning whether their organisations value their contributions and prioritises their welfare (Eisenberger et al. 1986). Employees with high POS are committed to fulfilling their duties as they have a strong sense of belonging to their organisations through greater incorporation and higher role status (Eisenberger et al. 1986). A stronger POS encourages employees to make positive work-related outcomes in terms of organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour, job satisfaction, job performance, lessened withdrawal behaviour and job involvement (Rhoades & Eisenberger 2002). As such, social exchange theory explains that when organisations support the employees, employees reciprocate by striving at work (Wayne, Shore & Liden 1997).

Organisational support is significant to expatriate adjustment (Caligiuri, Joshi & Lazarova 1999; Salgado & Bastida 2017). Specifically, POS is one of the sources of support to predict expatriate success (Kraimer & Wayne 2004; Bashir 2012; Lee, Veasna & Wu 2013; Salgado & Bastida 2017). In COR theory, POS is a condition resource. POS can minimise the cost of retaining expatriates and reducing expatriate failure (Abdul Malek et al. 2015). Therefore, most companies provide tangible support (host language classes, cross-cultural training) for expatriates to ensure assignment completion (Cole & Nesbeth 2014). However, the lacking of POS in terms of personal attention and emotion has brought adverse effects to expatriates. When an organisation fails to value and care about its expatriates' contributions, it is unlikely for them to commit and prosper (Cole & Nesbeth 2014; Paul & Bikos 2015). This is because employees who are assigned to work overseas sacrifice their social networking with friends and family in home country, making organisational support even more prominent to help them adjust to their new environment. From a social exchange standpoint, an organisation can provide expatriates with tangible support to ensure that their psychological well-being and personal lives are maintained (Shaffer et al. 2001; Paul & Bikos 2015).

To illustrate, Kraimer et al. (2001) examined POS as a predictor of expatriate adjustment based on a sample of 213 expatriate-supervisor dyads from three American-based companies. The result denoted POS had a positive relationship with general adjustment. Bashir (2012) contended that POS was a powerful predictor of expatriate adjustment. When organisations were proud of what expatriates achieved, their general and work adjustment improved. In addition, expatriates' interaction adjustment improved when organisations cared about their work satisfaction and carried out regular cross-cultural training for them to ease their communication with HCNs. Lee et al. (2013) proved that POS had a positive relationship with work and interaction adjustment among 165 expatriates working for Taiwanese multinational companies (MNCs) in China. This implied that expatriates who received support from companies were highly motivated to adapt to different cultures. As a result, POS is predicted to have a positive relationship with expatriate adjustment.

H₁ There is a positive relationship between POS and expatriate adjustment.

HOST COUNTRY NATIONAL SUPPORT

HCNs are individuals or local employees working within the host unit who can help expatriates understand the scope of their jobs and the host's organisations (Toh & Denisi 2007). Many scholars have contended that HCN support can enhance the likelihood of expatriate success (Caligiuri & Lazarona 2002; Toh & Denisi 2007; Mahajan & De Silva 2012). In the basis of COR theory, HCN support is a crucial resource (Bader 2017). Expatriates who receive HCN support have a feeling of acceptance, thus strengthening the connection with the host country (Mahajan & De Silva 2012). Toh and Denisi (2007) highlighted the two major socialising behaviours by HCNs which refer to providing role information and offering social support. The establishment of a partnership with HCNs can assist expatriates in overcoming culture shock and eliminating cultural challenges. In other words, the state of being connected with the host community allows expatriates to feel psychologically safe (Caligiuri & Lazarona 2002). As a result, HCN support would enable expatriates to connect with the local society to facilitate expatriate adjustment. However, the reliability and consistency of HCNs in providing support for expatriates is uncertain (Wang & Fang 2014). The assistance provided by HCNs is rather optional and not compulsory. These behaviours originate from personal initiative and motivation in nature (Wang & Fang 2014; Kang & Shen 2018).

Several studies have discovered a significant relationship between HCN support and expatriate adjustment (Black 1990; Lee & Vorst 2010; Mahajan & De Silva 2012; Gorp et al. 2017; Bader 2017). For instance, Black (1990) studied a sample of 220 American expatriates working in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The results showed that expatriates who had received HCN emotional support showed greater general and interaction adjustment. In fact, HCN support facilitated expatriates to learn the effective ways of interacting with HCNs. Conversely, Abdul Malek et al. (2015) did not find any evidence to substantiate the role of HCNs in mitigating adjustment challenges, especially in Malaysia with high power distance and collectivism. They did not find proof for HCN support and expatriate adjustment due to their respondents were mainly from top management level who did not rely much on local employees. Particularly, this study looks at expatriates of both non-managerial and managerial levels, it is expected that HCN support plays a role in their adjustment. Hence, HCN support is predicted to have a positive relationship with expatriate adjustment.

H₂ There is a positive relationship between HCN support and expatriate adjustment

SPOUSAL SUPPORT

Spousal support refers to direct and indirect encouragement from a spouse or significant others (Patel et al. 2008). Primarily, married couples sustain each other by offering help, advice, understanding, and affirmation (Aycan & Eskin 2005). Spousal support bolsters the individual's feelings of self-efficacy at home and at work simultaneously. It alleviates the burden of family demands and allows spouses to spend more time on work (Aycan & Eskin 2005). However, Janning (2006) argued that the definition of spousal support was limited to the dual-career married couples who shared a paid work. She highlighted that spouses can receive different support from each other in various aspects of their life, for example, leisure, childcare, paid work and community engagement.

Furthermore, spousal support is essential for expatriates to adjust in the host country (Davies et al. 2015; Sambasivan et al. 2017). First of all, Caligiuri et al. (1999) explored the influence of spousal support on expatriate adjustment among 38 female American expatriates in Europe, Australia and Asia through a phone interview. Interestingly, all married female

expatriates acknowledged that the support they received from their spouses strengthened their adjustment level significantly. In addition, Lauring and Selmer (2010) postulated that married expatriates are more successful than singles in securing high chances of assignment success. A previous research by Shi and Franklin (2013) presented that if the spouse adjusts favourably, it will assist expatriates in focusing on their job. Spouses can search for information about a general environment in the host country to improve expatriates' general adjustment (Kraimer et al. 2001). With regards to work adjustment, spouses can provide logistical assistance for the expatriates during the relocation, thus expatriates would be able to pay more attention to their job. Further, Lee and Kartika (2014) claimed that family support, especially from a spouse, was positively related to expatriate adjustment. Overall, a spouse can demonstrate his or her love and admiration to heighten expatriates' life satisfaction and adjustment in the host country. Hence, this study hypothesises that spousal support can improve expatriate adjustment.

H₃ There is a positive relationship between spousal support and expatriate adjustment.

EXPATRIATE ADJUSTMENT AND EXPATRIATE PERFORMANCE

Lee and Donohue (2012) stressed that expatriate performance could be defined as the degree an expatriate is achieving expected outcomes or the effectiveness of work outcomes. Shi and Franklin (2013) contended that the relationship between expatriate adjustment and job performance is vague and often complicated as a high level of cultural adjustment does not guarantee job performance. For example, Sambasivan et al. (2017) argued that expatriate adjustment did not directly influence job performance, while some of the researchers (e.g., Shay & Baack 2006; Abdul Malek & Budhwar 2013; Lee et al. 2013; Lee & Kartika 2014) reported a positive relationship between expatriate adjustment and performance.

The main objective of sending an expatriate for international assignment is to ensure that the assigned tasks are accomplished to maintain the continuity of the operations of headquarters and subsidiaries (Black & Gregersen 1991). Indeed, expatriate effectiveness can be determined by expatriate performance to what extent the expatriates can achieve organisational goals. This is supported by Shaffer et al. (2001) who found well-adjusted expatriates possess resources (time, effort and emotional attachment) to enhance job performance. Harrison and Shaffer (2005) suggested that expatriate performance was measured based on the contribution of effort, time and energy. Basically, the core facets of expatriate performance included fulfilling task requirements (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005).

According to Lee and Kartika (2014), theory of work adjustment reassures effective adjustment is achievable when individuals and environments predetermine certain requirements on successful work relations. They feel less exhausted and are willing to devote available personal resources such as time, effort and emotional attachment to complete their tasks (Harrison & Shaffer 2005). Besides, effective adjustment can induce a sense of psychological comfort amongst expatriates to stabilise their emotions and enhance their job performance (Wang & Tran 2012). Hechanova, Beehr and Christiansen (2003) confirmed that expatriates with better adjustment are able to reduce their stresses and strains for improving job performance. This finding was reinforced by Shay and Baack (2006) who discovered significant relationships between each facet of adjustment and expatriate performance. In this study, it is predicted to have a positive relationship between expatriate adjustment and expatriate performance.

H₄ There is a positive relationship between expatriate adjustment and expatriate performance.

Figure 1 illustrates the research framework for this study, which was developed based on the literature. The framework links POS, HCN support, spousal support, expatriate adjustment and expatriate performance.

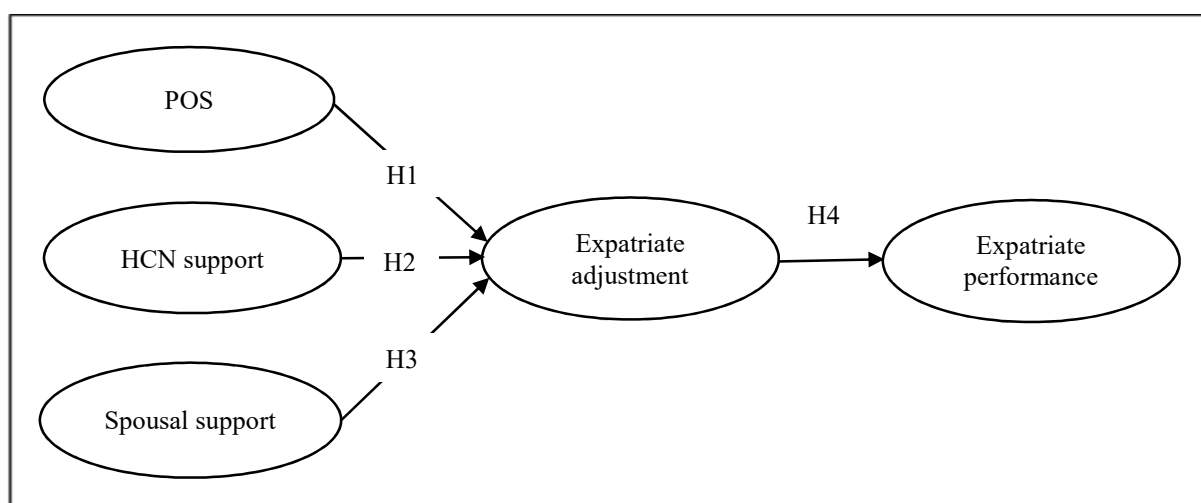


FIGURE 1. Research framework

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

In this study, samples were collected from expatriates working in non-managerial to top management positions of various industries in Malaysia with a few selection criteria imposed on respondents. Eligible expatriates must be based in an organisation located in Malaysia for more than six months and they must be married in order for POS and spousal support to be measured. Based on the U-Curve of adjustment by Black and Mendenhall (1991), expatriates might feel insecure when residing in another country. As a result, the need for adjustment is gradually increasing within a span of sixth months to a year. When the novelty slowly disappears, the real life in the host country begins to surface. Consequently, the occurrence of homesickness and downswing are often expected. This process is called ‘culture shock’ (Dowling et al. 2017). This period is actually a critical time for the expatriates to cope with psychological adjustment, which is characterised as ‘adjustment’ (Dowling et al. 2017). Once this point of time is over, the expatriates will begin to adapt to the new culture and learn how to behave suitably. In this context, this transition is described as ‘mastery’ (Black & Mendenhall 1991). Therefore, the arguments emphasised on the importance of selecting expatriates who have been in Malaysia for a minimum of six months in order to capture the actual adjustment process.

The sampling frame for this study was generated from Malaysia’s Multimedia Super Corridor Companies Directory, British-Malaysian Chamber of Commerce, Malaysian-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Malaysian Dutch Business Council and Malaysia-Canada Business Council. These are the best available sources as most reputable organisations are registered as a member in at least one of the chambers. Other Malaysian researchers (Ramalu et al. 2010; Abdul Malek et al. 2015) also used some of these sources to obtain company information. The membership list provided by the directories comprised of MNCs, international organisations and local companies. Once the list was combined after removing redundancy and overlapping of details, a total of 189 companies were compiled. However, there were 44 companies removed from the list due to inaccessible phone numbers, incorrect

address and permanent company closure. At the end, 145 companies were finalised for questionnaire distribution.

Out of 145 companies approached, only 36 companies agreed to participate and facilitate the questionnaire distribution. The majority declined the participation due to the disapproval of management or legal team as there were sensitive items in the survey which requires full disclosure of an expatriate's personal view towards the organisation. Depending on the number of expatriates working in the companies, each of these companies was given a variation of five to 20 questionnaires to be distributed to expatriates through either drop-off or electronic questionnaire method. Then, a total of 432 questionnaires were successfully distributed to the expatriates, only 123 questionnaires were returned, of which 112 were deemed to be valid. However, 11 questionnaires were eliminated as there were excessive missing values or the respondents failed to fulfil the criteria. Thus, this questionnaire had a response rate of 25.9%.

SAMPLE PROFILES

Table 1 depicts that the majority of the 112 respondents were males. Most expatriates were within the age of 31 to 40 (47.3%). The table shows that more than half of the expatriates held managerial position, 14.3% of the respondents were in the top management position, while 37.5% were in the middle management position. Interestingly, a large number of expatriates represented the Asian region (73.3%) with 16.1% of them from the Philippines, 15.2% from India, 10.7% from Indonesia, 9.8% from China and 8.9% from Thailand. Other Asian expatriates were from Japan (4.5%), Singapore (2.7%), Iran (1.8%), Bangladesh (0.9%), Pakistan (0.9%), Sri Lanka (0.9%) and Vietnam (0.9%). In addition, almost 23.2% of the expatriates have worked in Malaysia for up to five years. This study revealed that 54.5% of the expatriates had previous international working experience and about half (50.9%) of the expatriates were unable to converse in the Malay language.

TABLE 1. Sample profiles

Demographic Variable	Sub-Variable	Percentage(%)
Gender	Male	70.5
	Female	29.5
Age	21 years-30 years	25.0
	31 years-40 years	47.3
	41 years-50 years	16.1
	51 years-60 years	9.8
	Above 60 years	1.8
Level of assignment	Top management	14.3
	Middle management	37.5
	Non-managerial	34.8
Country of origin	Others	13.4
	Philippines	16.1
	India	15.2
	Indonesia	10.7
	China	9.8
	Thailand	8.9
	United Kingdom	6.3
	Japan	4.5
	Australia	3.6
	United States	3.6
	Singapore	2.7
	Iran	1.8
	Bangladesh	0.9
Pakistan	0.9	
Sri Lanka	0.9	
Vietnam	0.9	

Time in the host country (Malaysia)	6 months to 1 year	17.0
	Up to 2 years	15.2
	Up to 3 years	18.8
	Up to 4 years	8.9
	Up to 5 years	15.2
	Above 5 years	23.2
Previous international experience	Missing	1.8
	Yes	44.6
	No	54.5
Host language fluency	Missing	0.9
	Yes, fluently	9.8
	Yes, partly	37.5
	No	50.9
	Missing	1.8

MEASUREMENTS

For the purpose of this study, the variables were acknowledged as constructs that can be deduced and operationalised from their respective dimensions. Firstly, expatriate adjustment was measured using 15 items from Black and Stephens (1989), which was revised by Abdul Malek et al. (2015). Expatriates indicated their level of adjustability on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly unadjusted, 5=strongly adjusted). They were instructed to respond to general, work and interaction adjustment. Sample items of general adjustment included 'housing' and 'food'. For work adjustment, a sample item included 'supervisory responsibilities. For interaction adjustment, on the other hand, a sample item included 'socialising with HCNs outside of work'. The Cronbach's alpha of the construct was reported a reading of 0.92. Secondly, expatriate performance was tested using the combination of scales from Caligiuri (1997) and Kraimer and Wayne (2004). There were 10 items available to measure expatriate performance on a five-point Likert scale (1=very poor, 5=very good). A sample item included 'Meeting job objectives'. This construct revealed a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.93.

Thirdly, the 16-item scale of POS by Eisenberger et al. (1986) was administered to allow expatriates to make evaluative judgement with regards to their organisations. The questions were designed on a five-point Likert scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. A sample item was 'My organisation considers my goals and values.' Nevertheless, there were seven reverse-scored items. One of them was 'My organisation fails to appreciate any extra effort from me.' This construct achieved the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.89. Fourthly, HCN support was measured using the 16-item scale adapted from Abdul Malek et al. (2015). The responses were made on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. A sample item was 'My co-workers/friends in the host country provided me information about activities'. The Cronbach's alpha value for this construct was 0.94. Fifthly, in respect of spousal support, items were tailored according to Vinokur and Van Ryn's (1993) study, which were filled in by married expatriates accompanied by their spouses in Malaysia. This construct contained eight items and incorporated a five-point Likert from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. A sample item was 'He/She provides me with encouragement'. This construct exhibited a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.94.

Finally, three demographic variables such as time in the host country, previous international experience and fluency of the host language were used to control the effects of factors on the hypotheses. Prior literature found that these variables can influence expatriate adjustment and performance significantly (Hechanova et al. 2003; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005; Kim & Slocum 2008). Thus, they were deemed suitable for inclusion in this study.

COMMON METHOD VARIANCE

Since the present study adopted a self-reported questionnaire, the common method variance (CMV) may be a concern. The application of self-reported constructs was unavoidable due to the nature of the variables (POS, HCN support, spousal support and expatriate adjustment) which required personal assessment. However, the use of self-rated expatriate performance might contribute to CMV. Podsakoff et al. (2003) proposed that employing Harman’s single-factor test to discover CMV. By including all items of the variables, Harman’s single-factor test was performed through maximum likelihood for the extraction method without rotation (Podsakoff & Organ 1986). The test noted that the first factor accounted for 30.95% of the total variance. As the value was less than the recommended maximum value of 50% (Podsakoff et al. 2003), it was concluded that the effect of CMV was minimal.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE AND CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to understand the general tendency of respondents on main concepts presented in this study. To reiterate, all variables were studied at construct level in order to obtain the findings that could be made generalisable to the theory. Table 2 shows the descriptive results and correlation values of the main variables.

TABLE 2. Descriptive analysis and correlation of the main variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Expatriate adjustment	3.78	2.39	1.00				
2. POS	3.59	2.41	0.61**	1.00			
3. HCN support	3.67	2.53	0.37**	0.42**	1.00		
4. Spousal support	4.20	2.01	0.43**	0.44**	0.25**	1.00	
5. Expatriate performance	4.04	1.77	0.37**	0.29**	0.36**	0.57**	1.00

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (Two-tailed)

On a five-point Likert scale, Table 2 depicts the mean value of expatriate adjustment was 3.78, suggesting most respondents were able to adjust in Malaysia. The mean score for spousal support was 4.20, indicating high spousal support as a whole. In addition, the mean value for HCN support was 3.67, while the mean value for POS was 3.59, indicating moderate support. For expatriate performance, the respondents rated themselves as above average, with a mean value of 4.04. As the standard deviation for most variables in this study was above 2.0, this indicates a good variation of responses on the constructs. Nonetheless, the standard deviation for expatriate performance was 1.77, recording a relatively lower variation on respondents’ view of their own performance.

MULTIPLE HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Multiple hierarchical regression analysis was applied to test the four hypotheses. As highlighted by Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2012), the steps and measures of model fit in the analysis are well-established and more appealing to other researchers. As can be seen in Table 3, Model 2 reflects the research framework met model fit criterion ($F=6.28, p<0.001$).

TABLE 3. Multiple hierarchical regression results on expatriate adjustment

	Model 1	Model 2
Control variables		
<i>Time in the host country</i>	.09	.13
<i>Previous international experience</i>	.13	.14
<i>Host language fluency</i>	-.06	.00
POS		.23*
HCN support		.32**
Spousal support		.00
R ²	.04	.27
Adjusted R ²		.23
F	1.26	6.28***

Note: Beta values are standardised coefficients.

* p<.05, ** p<.01, ***p<.001 (Two-tailed)

Table 3 presents the regression analysis of expatriate adjustment. Model 1 was entered with the three control variables. Then, Model 2 included POS, HCN support and spousal support (H₁, H₂ and H₃). The R² for this model accounted for 27% of the variance in expatriate adjustment with a significant increase in R² value (.23, p<.001) from Model 1. The results showed that both POS ($\beta=.23$, p<.05) and HCN support ($\beta=.32$, p<.01) had a positive relationship with expatriate adjustment. In other words, expatriate adjustment would increase by 0.23 and 0.32 for every increment in POS and HCN support, respectively. The findings supported Hypotheses 1 and 2. In fact, HCN support made a greater contribution to expatriate adjustment, indicating that social support is substantial. On the contrary, spousal support ($\beta=.00$, p=.97) did not have a significant relationship with expatriate adjustment, H₃ was rejected.

TABLE 4. Multiple hierarchical regression results on expatriate performance

	Model 1	Model 2
Control variables		
<i>Time in the host country</i>	.22*	.17
<i>Previous international experience</i>	.11	.04
<i>Host language fluency</i>	-.10	-.07
Expatriate adjustment		.54***
R ²	.09	.37
Adjusted R ²		.28
F	3.49*	15.18***

Note: Beta values are standardised coefficients.

* p<.05, ***p<.001. (Two-tailed)

Table 4 demonstrates the regression analysis of expatriate performance. Model 1 was entered with the three control variables. The results showed that time in the host country had a positive relationship with expatriate performance ($\beta=.22$, p<.05). This suggests that expatriates who stay longer in Malaysia perform better in their assignments. By adding expatriate adjustment in Model 2 (H₄), it increased the amount of explained variance from 9% to 37%, indicating a substantial explanatory power provided by this variable. The model was significant (F=15.18, p<.001). The analysis confirmed a positive relationship between expatriate adjustment and performance ($\beta=.49$, p<.05), which supported H₄. In Model 2, however, time in the host country showed a marginal relationship with expatriate performance ($\beta=.17$, p=.051), suggesting that expatriate adjustment is relatively a better predictor for performance. As time spent in the host country increases, adjustment improves gradually.

DISCUSSION

Based on earlier predictions, the results showed consistency with regards to the notion that organisation support eases expatriate adjustment in the host country. Since organisation is the highly trusted source for expatriates, they reciprocate POS with effective adjustment and psychological well-being (Paul & Bikos 2015). COR theory underlined that POS became a potential resource to ease expatriates' adjustment throughout their assignments. This can be explained from the social exchange perspective which implies that individuals who are satisfied with the 'give and take' exchange will be motivated to maintain the relationship with their employers. In return, organisations would expect high job involvement from them (Knippenberg, Dick & Tavares 2007).

Similarly, the results indicated that HCN support was significant to expatriate adjustment despite Abdul Malek et al. (2015) reported an insignificant relationship between HCN support and expatriate adjustment in Malaysia. This could be due to the fact that most respondents in their study originated from the top management category. This level of expatriates was of prestigious background and received exclusive treatment from organisations, such as having a chauffeur and secretary who would settle personal issues if needed (Olsen & Martins 2009). In the present study, only 14.3% of the respondents were from top management category while the remaining were managers and executives. These expatriates had a closer relationship with HCNs and required HCN assistance. Another reason was 72.4% of the respondents in Abdul Malek et al.'s work were non-Asians and most likely to be individualists. In this study, over 70% of the respondents were Asians and collectivist in nature. Specifically, a collectivist society integrates people into the strong cohesive group since birth and their loyalty to the group will seldom be questioned (Hofstede 1994), where these expatriates appreciate blending in the social group in the host country. There is also a strong possibility that these Asian expatriates were identified by the HCNs as in-group members and showed favouritism towards them by giving support in adjustment.

Apart from that, the results showed an insignificant relationship between spousal support and expatriate adjustment. The accompanying spouses are of those unemployed in the host country. They have to spend time alone with children while their expatriate partners are working (Punnett 1997). This can be explained by the patriarchal family of the male Asian expatriates and traditional roles of their spouses. In general, the patriarchal society is a society in which the husbands are highly involved in decision-making and planning in the family, whereas the wife is usually limited to domestic tasks (Yang et al. 2006). In Asia, the patriarchal family appoints the senior man as a person with authority to control the state of the family (Kandiyoti 1988). According to Table 1, 70.5% of the expatriates were males. Out of these male expatriates, nearly half of them (49.1%) were Asians. This figure reflects their spouses might be given a secondary and submissive position in the family (Rana et al. 1998). In the patriarchal family, the role of the female spouses is often passive (Rana et al. 1998). For instance, they are only responsible for managing family matters when the expatriates are off to work. Due to the traditional gender hierarchies, spousal support was not influential in expatriate adjustment.

Lastly, the results indicated a positive relationship between expatriate adjustment and expatriate performance. This finding agreed with previous studies (Abdul Malek & Budhwar 2013; Lee et al. 2013; Abdul Malek et al. 2015), which contended that expatriates who acquire local cultural knowledge are unlikely to experience serious concerns in a new environment, thereby fostering adjustment which improves job performance.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study contributed to the existing frameworks of expatriate adjustment by integrating three types of support from salient stakeholders (organisations, HCNs and spouses). While empirical studies do not consider their support in a comprehensive study (Lee & Vorst 2010; Bashir 2012; Sambasivan et al. 2017), the main objective of this study is to address the gaps identified by scholars (Gupta et al. 2012; Mahajan & De Silva 2012; Abdul Malek et al. 2015) who stressed on the central role of these stakeholders to uncover the underlying issues of expatriates. This study also shed light on the phenomenon of expatriate adjustment. As social support is considered a condition resource under COR theory which fosters expatriates' cultural adjustment (Bader 2017), they can rely on POS and HCN support as coping mechanisms to intensify assignment success in Malaysia.

The second contribution of this study was to extend the literature to Asian expatriate samples. Selmer and Luring (2009) discovered that HCNs' selective perception can pose a challenge to expatriates from similar cultures as they can be treated impatiently by HCNs. In contrast, this study discerns the cultural similarity among Asian expatriates and HCNs, which can strengthen the relationship between these two groups to benefit expatriates in Malaysia. Evidently, Malaysia is home to a combination of cultures and languages, making expatriates liveable in the country (The Star Online 2015). The demographic characteristics of Malaysia are similar to the majority of expatriates from Asian countries (e.g., Philippines, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam) who are categorised by HCNs as in-group members. Hence, this similarity allows HCNs to provide expatriates with suitable support in order to facilitate their adjustment during their assignments in Malaysia.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

To ensure expatriates have an enjoyable life, organisations should provide suitable support mechanism such as cross-cultural training to prepare expatriates to take up the international assignments in Malaysia. This kind of training should cover general information on living and working in Malaysia, and information about Malaysian cultures. Malaysia is a multiracial country with the three main races (Malay, Chinese and Indian). It is essential for organisations to impart cultural knowledge to the expatriates in order to understand how different races live and work in the society. Besides, organisations should prioritise emotional support to improve expatriates' well-being, especially during critical situations, since POS is the first source expatriates can approach from the beginning of the assignments. Such norm of reciprocity may invigorate the employer-employee relationship to improve the notion that the organisations value the expatriates' contributions.

Given that HCNs support was highly significant to expatriate adjustment, organisations have a crucial role to play in bridging the gap between HCNs and expatriates through buddy or mentoring programmes. These programmes might be useful to expatriates who feel anxious working in Malaysia. For instance, organisations can pair expatriates up with a HCN who is more willing to spend time assisting them to get adjusted in living, work, and interaction. It is recommended that expatriates take the initiative to build their networking with HCNs, because building a close relationship with HCNs is the key to effective adjustment as they can provide useful support and relevant information for expatriates.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Notwithstanding the implications above, this study experienced two limitations. First and foremost, the relatively small sample size was a result of the disapproval of questionnaire by numerous organisations due to confidentiality issue about POS and expatriate performance. This setback is identified by Brewster et al. (2014) who claimed that the challenge of getting expatriate data has been increasing. For future studies, a longitudinal study can be adopted to enrich the understanding regarding the extent of support and its effect on expatriate adjustment and performance in a longer term. Furthermore, a qualitative approach in the forms of in-depth interview, focus group discussion and case study will be more interesting to gain insight with respect to the research scenario.

The next limitation was the lack of data comprehensiveness because the sources of support were limited to organisations, HCNs and spouses. Though expatriates working in various industries were involved, the nature of the job may differ from one industry to another. Thus, future studies should include measures relating to the cultural differences between Malaysia subsidiaries and headquarter as the main factor influencing expatriate success. In addition, support from significant others such as children, relatives and home friends should also be taken into account.

CONCLUSION

International assignments are increasingly challenging in this globalised world and have become an important area for both academics and international human resource practitioners alike. This study extended Hobfoll's COR theory by including stakeholders' support (organisations, HCNs and spouses) as valuable resource to enhance expatriate adjustment, and subsequently expatriate performance. The findings indicated a positive relationship between POS and expatriate adjustment, and HCN support and expatriate adjustment. The findings also indicated a positive relationship between expatriate adjustment and performance. Furthermore, the practical implications can be used as a reference by practitioners and policymakers of MNCs and expatriate-hiring firms in developing countries like Malaysia.

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