

Motivation, Adjustment and Retention of Academic Expatriates: The Case Study of Tishk International University

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Abstract

International organizations represent a dynamic workplace where people from different cultures and work background are working together to achieve a common goal. Whenever an individual is attracted from another country in which (expatriation) or giving an opportunity to someone who is living outside his country to work in his homeland again (repatriation), a set of challenges will rise. Organizations need to guide and control the process by adopting programs specialized in the expatriation and repatriation in which it will be given after the arrival of the employee in different or in-home country.

This research paper explores motivations and the expectations that make the academic expatriates join the international universities in other countries by taking a case study in one of the international private universities in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. From this point of view, literature review will present benefits of joining teaching in the host country universities, also identifying the difficulties that they have faced during performing their duties and their feedbacks and recommendations to the other expats who wants to join such a program. As Tshik International University represents one of the top private universities in Kurdistan and has diverse staff. Data is collected by using method of interview as qualitative approach. The sample of the study international university staff. The results of the study represented by a set of findings which mainly settled on main motivation factors to the academic expatriate to join the international assignment like international experience, research interests, and the interest to discover new cultures.

Keywords: Expatriation, Self-Initiated expatriates, Cross-Cultural Training, Organizational Expatriates, Adjustment, Retention, KRG, Tishk University.

Introduction:

Globalization trends in latest years and rise of human mobility have emanated higher difficulty in assignments related to work in the overseas. Latest definitions and concepts like “third-country expatriates”, ‘inpatriates’, ‘short-term project workers’, and ‘self-initiated expatriates (SIEs)’ have transpired as an outcome of this phenomena. (Collings, Scullion and Morley 2007). The assignment type which is self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) was initially described by researchers Inkson, Arthur, Pringle and Barry (1997).

According to Inkson and Myers 2003; and Lee 2005), SIEs are persons who explore overseas work by their initiation and free will. The research made by (Suutari and Brewster 2000; Peltokorpi and Froese 2009) revealed that SIEs are different from “Organizational Expatriates (OEs)” where they receive assignment by their employer to render their service in the subsidiary of the organization in the overseas and not certainly be expatriates by their choice. Latest research made on differentiation between SIEs and OEs have revealed that excessive percentage of expatriates were SIEs ranging from 30% to 70%.

According to (Beaverstock 1996; Richardson and McKenna 2003), industries related to Informational Technology, education and investment banking are the most acquiescent to self-initiated expatriates due to the transferability of professional skills across nations. The researchers

(Inkson et al. 1997; Peltokorpi and Froese 2009), demanded excessive research on self-initiated expatriates due the limited research made related to this aspect and revealed remarkable contrasts between OEs and SIEs.

Research made by Selmer 2001; Tungli and. Peiperl (2009) revealed that experiences of expatriates are intensely prejudiced by their “countries – of – origin” where the study was aimed to expand present interpretation of this issue by conducting the research by taking diversified sample into consideration. As per Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen & Bolino, (2012), expatriate assignments have raised internationally over the past two decades which ranges the assignments of expatriates from corporate to self-initiation besides novel assignments that consist of global business travel, flex partitas and assignments in the short period.

The current research paper explores the motivations and the expectations that make the academic expatriates to join the international universities in other countries by taking a case study in one of the international private universities in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Researchers framed the research questions by considering the issues related to benefits of joining teaching in the host country universities, identifying the difficulties that they face while performing their duty and provide feedback as well as recommendation to other expatriates who want to become expatriates.

1. What are the motivations and exceptions that the academics had to work abroad?
2. What is the adjustment experience that the expat had during the assignment abroad in terms of (general, work and interaction adjustment)?
3. What’s their opinion about the retention?

Literature Review

Research made on motivation to expatriate could be widely classified into three different areas such as expatriate willingness: expatriate willingness (e.g. Brett and Stroh 1995; Tharenou 2008), motivation factors of OEs (e.g. Stahl and Cerdin 2004; Dickmann, Doherty, Mills and Brewster 2008), and motivation factors of SIEs (e.g. Inkson et al. 1997; Richardson and Mallon 2005).

Tharenou, (2008) developed a model based on social cognitive theory (Lent, Brown and Hackett 1994). Prevailing theory proposes that willingness towards expatriation normally relies on “personal agency (one’s background and personal interest and family barriers”. Tharenou, (2008). The assessment made by Dickmann et al. (2008) on expatriates’ motivational factors who had accepted really and were on overseas assignment. Researcher in the study observed that these factors deviated to some degree from previous potential findings of other researchers.

“The socio-economic push/pull model” constructed by (Bierbrauer and Pedersen 1996; Massey and Espinosa 1997) may be more suitable to explain the reasons of going expatriates to overseas. This model proposed that different environmental and individual factors push or pull employees work at overseas. The typical push factors as per this model for individuals move in finding work overseas are hardships of individuals and economic recession.

Research made by (Miller and Cheng 1978; Tung 1998; Dickmann et al. 2008) revealed that Multi National Enterprises (MNEs) may use both push as well as pull factors to force their employees in accepting expatriate assignments. MNEs try to push employees by threatening limitations of their career in an indirect way or may adopt pull factors in providing incentives monetarily, learning potential by work enrichment and career progress in an accelerated manner.

Extensive literature exists on expatriates’ cross-cultural adjustment. Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer and Luk 2005 and Takeuchi 2010). Black and Stephens (1989) have recognized three clear aspects that are “cross-cultural adjustment: general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment”. General adjustment involves the process in which expatriates manage with living in abroad. Interaction adjustment concentrates efforts of expatriates in establishing nexus with local people in abroad. Work adjustment involves expatriates’ way of fitting into the workplace. These aspects’ validity has been confirmed and generally adapted by the succeeding studies on expatriate adjustment. According to Ren et al., (2014), retention concept is closely similar to adjustment where expatriates’ intent to stay in their international position. Research made by Schoepp, (2011) revealed that numerous researches on the concept of expatriates’ adjustment have observed adjustment

whereas very few researchers have enlarged their concentration to retention in spite of its significance in International Human Resource Management.

As per Hussain and Deery, (2018) SIEs are inclined to be thoroughly adaptable and ready to work in divergent countries may not show interest to stay in their present position for long period when they discern adverse circumstances related to their job or non-job issues. According to (Gergersen and Black, 1990), the observation made by (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2005) between adjustment and retention where retention necessitates long term frame of reference which is highly capable to job changing and conditions related to non-job-related issues in the host country.

Methodology:

While checking literature on the academic expatriates in the developed countries the most suitable methodological approach to get the data commonly exploratory approach used. This paper utilized the interview as qualitative method with the targeted sample for the study and NVIVO qualitative data analysis software used for analyzing data.

The Context of the study:

For this study Kurdistan region of Iraq universities selected due to the emergency in the investment in higher education, in which it can be clearly seen in the number of universities (16 public and 19 private universities), in all around the region, and most of these universities especially the private one are having an expatriate staff in their faculties, and in order to understand the motivation factor and the adjustments of the academic expatriates in the region.

The sample of the study:

The sample of the study is the international staff (expatriates) in one of the private universities in Erbil /Kurdistan region which named TISHK international university (formerly known as ISHIK university). in which its one of the private universities that established in 2008, the university offers 23 different programs to the students and it currently has much international staff from 16 countries (Turkey, India, USA, UK, etc). Interviews were conducted with these international academic expatriates from different faculties in the university.

Interview and analysis process:

The interview schedule questions have been concluded from related studies with a question that is related to the motivation, general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment that are based on (Danisman, 2017), (Froese F. J., 2012) and (Richardson & wong, H.W., 2018) and for the retention was based on (Ren, et al, 2014) studies.

The interview questions were open-ended questions and semi-structured while the language of the interview in English which is the language used by the lecturers in their teaching activities in the university. The interview was conducted with the assistant professors and professors from India that are teaching in the faculties of university. The interview took place during the month of March 2019, in Tishik international university and it took about 30 minutes with each participant. All the face to face interview were recorded and for analyzing the respondent answers, the data was coded by theoretical concepts related to the study like motivation, , and retention.

Findings :

-Academic expatriate motivation:

The main motivating factor to accept the expatriate assignment among the respondent was simply the of the universities after they have finished their PhD. According to the responses, two of the respondents their main motivation factor to join the expatriate assignment is research , the availability of the research sources in the host country meet the need of their research interests, for example, the "the sufficient facilities in terms of living and work area, easy internet accessibility and the offer the lectures a chance to join international conferences in all around the world . Another reason to join as expatriate in Tishik international university in Erbil was that according to three respondent that their

research interests meet the cultural as (Froese F. J., 2012) mentioned in his study in Korea that some of the academic expatriate are inspired by the Korean research interest , so the situation here in Kurdistan is inspiring for some of the respondent who are specialized in the international relation and diplomacy so being here in the region consider a good source for them for research as a result of the conflict and the political issues here while one of the respondent his specialization is psychology and his new research interest is trying to understand the criminal psychology here in different countries so in the upcoming days he will visit the criminals in the jails and he will try to understand their psychology .

Some of the respondent they were interested in discovering new cultures or the desire to gain the international experience /exposure by get the chance to learn the traditions , norms and the values of the host country and even learning their local language which some of them has already started learning the language and practicing with the local people in order to improve their pronunciation . And this was also mentioned in the study that conducted by (Danisman, 2017) in which he found out that the academic expatriate in turkey, one of their motivating factor is to learn the Turkish language, norms, and Islamic culture. Some of the respondent they main motivation to apply in university in Kurdistan region is their Muslim background, so that they practice their religion freely and without facing any difficulties and problems that they might face in other countries. in respect to that, some respondent that they really feel comfortable here since they are able to visit the mosque take some religious lesson and even have a discussion with people about the religion issues so in this way they can improve their religion beliefs.

Adjustment:

-General adjustment:

Although of the high living cost in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, the majority of the respondent is feeling comfortable and safe living in the region. One common theme that we noticed in particular between all the respondent is that in general the life here is considered simple, no problems in daily life, while the local people are helpful and open, minded accepting the other people from other nationalities.

The accommodation in the region compared to home countries is highly priced but it has high standards. In their view, they are living in high standards of living comparing to their living conditions in their home country. Not like (Danisman, 2017) Study in turkey and (Froese F. J., 2012) in Korea, the some Indian respondent in Kurdistan region are not facing any language problems here that hinder them to communicate with the local people in their daily activities, even some of the respondents mentioned that they have already started learning the Kurdish language. For research and teaching in the university, the teaching language of the university is in English and they can communicate with the local work colleagues and students in English, so they are not facing any language problems.

Finally, some of the respondent they have children and because of the availability of the international schools in the city, they could ensure that their children are getting high quality of education and even when the international assignment concluded, they continue their education in the other expatriate work destination without any problems.

Work Adjustment:

The Academic expatriate were in general satisfied with the work adjustment in the university , they mentioned that they are really enjoying the teaching here and even they are improving their teaching skills by getting the experience of working in private international universities , but some of them they mentioned that some of the students in the university they are not much interested in knowledge and learning and even studying and they think that reason behind this is that either they have their own family business other situation is not demanding much here, while the others mentioned that some of the students since the teaching language in the university is English , the students are having

English problems in terms of vocabulary and scientific terms. one of the respondents, he is specialized in psychology he mentioned that since he has taught in India before he came here and he can notice that there is a huge difference between the students psychology here and in India in terms of interests and the eagerness to learn and to acquire knowledge.

As a part of their work requirement and self-improvement in terms of research, many of the respondent has mentioned that their main motivation to join the university is to do research. Since one of the benefits that the university is providing for the researchers is the incentives for publishing papers, and the other benefits is the opportunity to join international conferences abroad, while for some of them being here in the region consider a good source of research sources especially for the lecturers who are specialized in International relation and diplomacy .

Interaction adjustment:

Generally, some the respondent they have been here only for six months since they started their work in the university, but in general though they don't have much time for the social life or have friendship with the local people outside the university due to their busy work schedule. But they are happy with the social life here and the Kurdish culture even some of them they have mentioned that there are many similarities between the Indian culture and the Kurdish culture. Some of the respondent mentioned that during their free time, they are trying to communicate with local people outside the university either during the religious activities or shopping with neighbors in market. they have mentioned that although difference in language, people here are very understanding, supportive and helpful as a result of that the language differences is not a reason the hinder the social communication between the expat and the local people.

Retention:

According to the new employed responses regarding their willingness to stay in their current position, many of them they said that they are very interested to continue their work in the university as long as the university has the will to keep them too. while one of the respondents has mentioned that he is already submitted his resignation letter because he found a better opportunity that will help him to achieve his goal.

In general, the academic expatriate in the university they know that they can't stay in the host country for Avery long period due to visa issues and other issues but some of them they have mentioned that if the decision was up to them they have the will to stay and live here till they die.

In terms of what the university is offering them it stay in their positions, some of the previously employed employees (more than six months) has mentioned that the university is lacking in terms of offering an expatriate or employee a motivation or an offer that encourage them to stay, that why along to the university history we can see that there are many people who worked in the university for one month or for 10 years and he/ she is still working the same place, while the newly employed respondent mentioned that as long as the university is willing to keep us we will stay and perform our duties and even they mentioned that so far they are satisfied with the university services provided for them in terms of their accommodation for them and their families, transportation and even the food provided for the university staff during the working days .

Conclusion :

There are many of the important implications and insight that concluded from this exploratory study on the academic expatriate in private universities. In this research papers, we tried to identify the motivation factors that encourage the Self-initiated academic expatriate from different nationalities to join be an expat in other countries especially developing countries, as we conclude from that is both push /pull factor are the motivations for them to work in Kurdistan region.

For the pull factors, the international experience, Research interest, availability of research resources, exploring a new culture and even the religious background could have an effect to choose the place (the host country) for the expatriate assignment has been concluded that are the main motivational factors. While family and the differences in the labor market in the host country are the push factors. The findings of this research paper make us understand the motivation factors of the Academic expatriate that has been mentioned in the previous researches coincides according to the findings; the desire to get the international experience and the interest to live in a different culture, get a chance to know the traditions and the try to involve in the social activities of the specific region or country are important.

While adjustment satisfaction level of the expatriate him/her self and their family since 50% of the respondent are married are their family are joining with them in the host country. In terms of the cross-cultural adjustment, interaction adjustment and the work adjustment after they arrived in the host country and started the expatriate assignment has affected their performance because as we concluded from the responses is that the cross-cultural in the region is very satisfying in terms of the living conditions, ability to cope with the local people here and even the social and culture factor which is as they responded is very supportive and the local people in the region are very helpful and understanding and they are willing to accept the people from other nationalities.

Working Conditions are also considered a motivation factor for the respondents in this study. Satisfaction level of the working conditions and the ability to achieve the goals that they were not able to reach in their home country or this working opportunity for them is a step to achieve a future goal are the motivational factors in terms of the work adjustment. As some of the respondents mentioned that working and teaching in international universities is will give them an idea about the psychology of the students in the other countries and it will give them an idea to improve their management skills.

Although this is working in progress paper, we could conclude that the family has huge effect on the expatriate decision, some of the respondent stated that due to the family circumstances they were not able to join any expatriate assignment before due to the children age, and some of them mentioned their families were very supportive to the idea and they encouraged them to visit new places and get experience.

Other important conclusion of the paper is regarding retention, which the respondent has mentioned that unfortunately, the university is lacking in terms of retention programs some of the previously employed employees has mentioned that the university is lacking in terms of offering an expatriate or employee a motivation or an offer that encourage them to stay, that why along to the university history we can see that there are many people who worked in the university for one month or for 10 years and he/ she is still working the same place, while the newly employed respondent mentioned that as long as the university is willing to keep us we will stay and perform our duties and even they mentioned that so far they are satisfied with the university services provided for them in terms of their accommodation for them and their families, transportation and even the food provided for the university staff during the working days.

This study has been conducted in one of private university in Erbil city, limited sample size is one of limitation of the study. Furthermore, the was some imbalances between the selected sample in terms of the age, gender and even the period of the expatriate in the host country.

Since this is working in progress paper, future of study will meet limitations, and will include more universities and more diverse expatriates from different countries and demographic backgrounds.

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