

A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE FLUENCY OF HOST COUNTRY AND CROSS CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF INDIAN EXPATRIATES

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the relationship between language fluency of host country and the international adjustment of professional Indian expatriates. With the help of a self-administered online questionnaire relationship of various individual variables with adjustment and its different dimensions (general living, work related and interaction adjustment) was analysed. A total of 369 Indian expatriates from 13 different countries were surveyed using judgement and snowball sampling techniques. The results of the analysis indicate that Indian expatriates were found to be adjusted well in foreign countries. The level of adjustment was more towards general living and work environment as compared to interaction adjustment. No significant correlations were found between host country language fluency and adjustment and its dimensions. Various practical suggestions were also given based on the present research study.

Key words: Expatriate, Cross cultural adjustment, general living adjustment, work adjustment, interaction adjustment, host country language fluency

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of globalization has significantly altered the world. Previously, the thought to move abroad was considered to be the sphere of prosperous persons and big corporate houses. According to Punnet (1997) global mobility has become a reality and a necessity today. More and more people are moving to other countries to live and work. When the employees are sent by the organisations from home nations to various international locations they are termed as organizational expatriates. On the other hand when the individuals decide by their own to shift overseas to live and work they are known as self-initiated expatriates.

The issue of management of expatriates has got a significant attention in the literature related to International Human Resources Management. An important aspect which differentiates expatriate jobs from other jobs is the additional complication of the intercultural environment that makes adjustment challenging for expatriates and their families.

When enterprises expand internationally, they realize the urgency to utilize expatriates on global assignments for strategic reasons. So as to stay competitive in current global environment, organizations recognize that shifting proficient workforce not only add-on vital skill and acquaintance to their outcome and performance

and making them more competent to compete worldwide markets, but also this type of work force is crucial for accomplishing global projects. Expatriates help in implementing global business strategies and managing subsidiaries in different countries.

The expatriates depart from their own country with the intent of an ultimate come back. They get into entirely different environment which may be very unknown and unpredictable. They take on work roles in a different framework; cope up the cultural shock and go through intense change. The frustration and confusion that result from being bombarded by uninterrupted cues makes the expatriate job different from other jobs and is again and again proved as the prime reason of a failed or ineffective expatriate assignment (Oberg 1960).

Many researchers like Black(1988); Gertson (1990); Parker &Evoy (1993) recommended that expatriates who don't adjust satisfactorily with respect to global assignments are not able to perform well, take out psychologically, and mostly come back before term. There may be many different factors responsible for this occurrence that may involve problem of adapting to various physical or cultural surroundings, family connected complexities, personality related aspects, job connected technical aptitude, and absence of inspiration to do job abroad .For expatriates and their families, adaptation to live abroad may be considered as a major hurdle .The more the level of adjustment of expatriates, the more is the probability of completing their international assignments (Kramer Wayne and Jaworski 2001). For that reason, well-adjusted expatriates are more proficient and dedicated for their new assignments as they undergo low degree of stress and frustration. The successful adaptation of expatriates in the foreign environment is proved time and again as the foremost influential factor of his work performance. Because of this basis it is vital to figure out the unexplored determinants like language fluency of host country that facilitate adjustment of expatriates to the foreign cultural environment.

2.THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

2.1. Expatriate

Conventionally, the term “expatriate” refers to those employees that are dispatched to posts outside of their home nation for a period of months or years. Currently, the term has begun started to include those persons that are not transferred overseas but who decide by their own to live and work in foreign locations (Suutari&Brewster, 2000).They are known as self-initiating expatriates. Because of deficit of skills in different nations and growing demand of culturally empathetic and competent work force self-initiated expatriates are significant human resource for global organizations and an increasing number of persons are hired by multinational corporations (Deloitte, 2010).

For the purpose of present study an expatriate is defined as someone who has chosen to live in a country other than the one of which he or she is a citizen. So all the people who are Indian citizens and are residing and working in other countries are Indian Expatriates.

2.2 Professional

According to Macmillan Dictionary, a professional is someone who has special skills or qualifications which are certified formally by a professional body. Now the scope of the term has widened. Basically the individuals who are involved in mental or administrative work are included in the definition of professional contrary to those who are engaged in physical work.

2.3 International Adjustment

Basically, adjustment is the degree to which an individual feel comfortable with different aspects of environment (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991). This definition can be extended by Brett's (1980) contention that one of the principal processes of adjustment is that of decreasing uncertainty.

2.4 Dimensions of Adjustment

Earlier researchers (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960) regarded adjustment as a one-dimensional concept. But Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991 have given a three dimensional view of international adjustment.

- General living adjustment
- Interaction adjustment
- Work adjustment

1. General adjustment is level of comfort an expatriate feels with respect to various dimensions of foreign country environment, such as climate, food, housing, health care, shopping and transport facilities.
2. Interaction adjustment refers to the level of psychological comfort with respect to different styles used by the expatriate for communicating with foreign nation nationals.
3. Work adjustment is the degree of comfort with respect to various job standards, requirements and work values at the workplace in the foreign country.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the present study is to explore the relation of host country language fluency with the different dimensions of adjustment of Indian expatriates who are living and working in different countries.

4. HYPOTHESES

Based on literature review the study was advanced on the following hypotheses:

H1: Host country language fluency has no relation with international adjustment of working professional Indian expatriates.

H1(a): Host country language fluency has no relation with general living adjustment of working professional Indian expatriates.

H1(b): Host country language fluency has no relation with work adjustment of working professional Indian expatriates.

H1(c) : Host country language fluency has no relation with interaction adjustment of working professional Indian expatriates

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Scope of the Study

The study included only those Indian expatriates who are working professionals. Unskilled labour i.e. people engaged in manual jobs and those have become entrepreneurs were not a part of the study. However the study covered both types of expatriates i.e. OEs (Organizational expatriates) and SIEs (Self initiating expatriates).

5.2 Population of the Study

The universe for the present research consists of all professional Indian expatriates working and living in various countries of the world. There are 10037761 non-resident Indians living in 205 countries of the world (data available on the official website of ministry of Indian overseas affairs in the form of country wise list of population of non-resident Indians updated latest on May12, 2012).

5.3 Sample and Sample Design

Sampling for the study was done at two stages. At first stage, 15 countries out of the top thirty countries where there is high concentration of Indians (data available on the official website of ministry of Indian overseas affairs in the form of country wise list of population of non-resident Indians updated latest on May12, 2012) were selected by simple random sampling technique.

At the second stage non-probability techniques i.e. judgmental and snowball sampling techniques were applied. Judgemental sampling means a technique where the researcher selects those subjects which he thinks appropriate for the research subject. The other technique used to obtain respondents was snowball sampling also known as reference sampling. The planned sample size was 400. One thousand forms were sent to the potential

respondents of these randomly chosen countries. These respondents were further requested to forward the questionnaire to their friends and known and identify further members of the population.

A total of 383 questionnaires were received from respondents of 13 countries. There were no responses from two countries. Out of 383, 16 were incomplete responses which could not be used so final sample was of 367 expatriates. Of these 239 were SIEs (self initiated expatriates) and 128 were OEs (organisational expatriates).

5.4 Collection of Data

Data was collected with the help of both primary as well as secondary sources. The primary data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire using online and mail survey technique. The questionnaire was drafted in a MS word format and it was also put on the Google docs web link. Online surveys generally suffer from low response rate and involve more time and money. Taking this into consideration, online survey was conducted that made the procedure less time consuming and more suitable for the participants, therefore, motivating them to respond. Secondary sources comprised of books, journals, government, non-government agencies, newspapers and earlier studies, papers presented in seminars and conferences; internet etc.

5.5 Tools Used

5.5.1 Adjustment scale

A standard scale consisting of 14 statements proposed by Black and Stephens (1989) was used for measuring adjustment level including its three dimensions. It is a five dimensional scale whose scores range between 1 to 5, 1 being very unadjusted and 5 being very adjusted. Out of total fourteen statements 7 statements are for measuring general living adjustment like food, housing, shopping etc., 3 statements are for measuring work related adjustment like various job and performance obligations and finally 4 statement for measuring interaction adjustment like socializing and making networks with people in the host country. Validity and reliability of this scale have been established again and again in subsequent studies across different cultures.

6. ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data was analysed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 21.0 in this study. Descriptive statistics namely “mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis” were computed to study nature of distribution of scores of language fluency and adjustment & its dimensions..

Pearson product moment correlations between adjustment, its dimensions and social support were calculated to ascertain the extent of relationship between these variables.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Adjustment and its dimensions

Statistics	Adjustment and its dimensions			
	General Adjustment (N=367)	Interaction Adjustment (N=367)	Work Adjustment (N=367)	Adjustment(Total) (N=367)
Mean	4.0686	3.7829	4.0052	3.9548
Std.Deviation	.41588	.55672	.59070	.36482
Minimum	2.71	2.00	2.33	2.56
Maximum	5.00	4.75	5.00	4.65
Skewness	-1.002	-.710	-.339	-.955
Kurtosis	1.369	1.186	-.099	2.149

On the dimension of General Adjustment the scores of Indian expatriates ranged between 2.71 and 5. The mean of the score was found to be 4.06 and the standard deviation was .415. The Indian expatriates scored between 2 and 4.75 on the dimension of interaction adjustment. The mean of the group was 3.78 and standard deviation was .558. The scores of Indian expatriates ranged between 2.33 and 5 on the dimension of work adjustment. The mean value calculated as 4 and the standard deviation computed as .590. The scores of Indian expatriates on total adjustment ranged between 2.56 and 4.65. The mean of the score was found to be 3.95 and the standard deviation was .364. The results indicate that the mean adjustment degree of Indian expatriates was well over the

mid-point mark. So the Indian expatriates are well adjusted on total adjustment as well as on its different dimensions. The level of adjustment is more on the dimension of general adjustment and work adjustment as compared to interaction adjustment. These results are as per the findings of the earlier work done by Black et al (1988) ,Napier(1995) and Taylor (2002). Interaction adjustment is considered to be the most challenging as it is concerned with speaking and adapting to socialising with people of the foreign country. As an individual deals with nationals of a different nation so there may be conflict because the perception of the expatriate may not match with the values and beliefs of people in the host nation. It may cause frustration, depression and anxiety, which can negatively influence the process of adjustment (Chang, 1996)

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

Statistics	
Mean	3.5518
Std.Deviation	.66456
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	5.00
Skewness	-.761
Kurtosis	1.612

The scores on social network with home country nationals ranged between 1 and 5. The mean was found to be 3.55 and the scores on skewness(-.761) and kurtosis(1.612) were found to be within limits.

7. LANGUAGE FLUENCY AND INTERNATIONAL ADJUSTMENT

The relationship between language fluency and adjustment and its dimensions and difference among different categories of language fluency of professional Indian expatriates with respect to adjustment and its dimensions are discussed below.

(a) Correlation between language fluency and International Adjustment and its dimensions

As evident from Table 4.16 no significant correlation was found between language fluency of Indian expatriates and the overall adjustment. Further, the correlation between language fluency and the dimensions of adjustment, namely, general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment was found to be insignificant.

Table 3 Correlation between language fluency and adjustment & its dimensions

Adjustment	Correlation with language fluency
General Adjustment	.095
Interaction Adjustment	.005
Work Adjustment	.037
Adjustment(Total)	.061

*Significant at the 0.05 level.

** Significant at the 0.01 level.

(b) Significance of difference in mean scores of adjustment among different categories of Indian expatriates with respect to their language fluency.

The results of significance of differences entered in table 4.17, show that there were no significant differences between the different categories of language fluency and professional Indian expatriates on the dimension of general adjustment, interaction adjustment, work adjustment and total adjustment.

Table 4: Significance of difference in mean scores of adjustment among different categories of Indian expatriates with respect to their language fluency

Adjustment	Language Fluency	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P
General Adjustment	Very Bad	20	3.9643	.41163	2.382	.051
	Bad	45	4.0762	.29780		
	Intermediate	17	3.8571	.48708		
	Good	179	4.0447	.43448		
	Very Good	106	4.1388	.38974		
	Total	367	4.0627	.41178		
Interaction Adjustment	Very Bad	20	3.7875	.61385	.487	.745
	Bad	45	3.9111	.45276		
	Intermediate	17	3.8382	.57920		
	Good	179	3.8128	.58770		
	Very Good	106	3.8797	.47713		
	Total	367	3.8440	.54197		
Work Adjustment	Very Bad	20	4.1500	.33289	1.694	.151
	Bad	45	3.8741	.55181		
	Intermediate	17	3.8824	.67640		
	Good	179	3.9441	.54106		

	Very Good	106	4.0535	.56930		
	Total	367	3.9755	.55071		
Total Adjustment	Very Bad	20	3.9672	.25778	1.546	.188
	Bad	45	3.9533	.29021		
	Intermediate	17	3.8592	.45196		
	Good	179	3.9337	.39148		
	Very Good	106	4.0268	.30372		
	Total	367	3.9614	.35442		

The results thus imply that language proficiency and adjustment are not related. This finding is very surprising as earlier studies claim that those expatriates who actually speak the same language as the host country may actually have an easier time adjusting in the acculturation process. The significance of language skills for cross-cultural adjustment, has been confirmed in many studies (Ramalu et al., 2010, Andreason, 2008, p. 387; Caligiuri, 2000a, p. 66; Kraimer et al., 2001, p. 90; Tanake, et al., 2002, p. 15).

It is perhaps due to the fact that as Indians are known for their proficiency in English language which is widely used in many countries so they may not be very keen for host country language.

Hence, Hypothesis 8 that there is no significant correlation between the language proficiency and adjustment (including its dimensions) of professional Indian expatriates is accepted.

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