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Leadership Impact on Lecturer Retention at University Preparation Programs in Malaysia

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Abstract

Many higher education institutions (HEIs) offer pre-university/foundation programs that help students transition from secondary school to universities, in Malaysia, or around the world. To be globally competitive and meet the needs of students looking to enter world class universities, HEIs in Malaysia often need to employ expatriate lecturers (ELs) (Trembath, 2016). Many ELs choose to depart their institution at the end of their first contract. This can have a negative impact on programs and adds additional recruitment costs to program budgets (Theron et al., 2014). This study's purpose was to understand the importance of leadership and organizational climate on ELs' decision to either renew their contract or depart. The objective was to provide the leaders of such programs with insights to help them mitigate the challenges expatriates face and develop a supportive environment that encourages longer-term commitment of lecturers beyond an initial contract.

A convergent, parallel mixed methods research design was used for this study in which 63 participants completed an online questionnaire. In addition, 31 participants also completed a semi-structured interview. The research population for this study included current and former ELs who have worked at university preparation programs at Malaysian HEIs.

Five themes that affect EL retention surfaced from the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data: (a) professional growth and fulfilment, (b) the direct influence of the leader, (c) institutional factors, (d) cultural adjustment factors (Froese, 2012), and (e) country-specific factors. These key factors have influenced the decision making around contract renewal for ELs at Malaysian HEIs.

Based on the results of this study, The Leadership Model for Expatriate Lecturer Satisfaction and Fulfillment was developed in order to guide program directors in developing a system to foster the conditions that encourage EL retention.

Keywords: Leadership, work adjustment, cultural adjustment, expatriates, higher education institutions, retention.

Introduction

The internationalization of the higher education sector has created the need to recruit foreign academics to become part of the critical inputs in providing world-class education to university students (Ramalu et al., 2018). Despite common challenges such as lack of job security and opportunities for development and advancement, expatriate academics increasingly believe it is possible to have an attractive career in transnational education (Wilkins & Annabi, 2021). This chapter examines the significance of program leadership, relative to other factors such as host-country and pay, in expatriate lecturers' (EL) decision-making surrounding their contract renewal at university preparation programs at higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia, and identified leadership approaches that were effective at promoting faculty retention. An important factor that determined an expatriate's effectiveness in their role was how well they adjusted themselves to the host culture (Sambasivan et al., 2017). This chapter provides program leaders with insights regarding how to mitigate the challenges expatriates face, and how to develop a supportive environment that encourages longer-term commitment of lecturers to the program beyond an initial contract.

Background

The international activities of universities have dramatically expanded in volume, scope, and complexity over the past few decades (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Malaysian universities are seeking to enhance their curricula with international content to improve their international competitiveness, while well-known Western universities such as Nottingham (U.K.), Heriot Watt (U.K.), and Monash (Australia) have set up branch campuses in Malaysia to expand student enrolment outside of their home countries. Quality program offerings and academic reputation are two of the key factors affecting students' choices to enrol in a higher education institution in Malaysia (Migin, et al., 2015).

To a large extent, Malaysia depends on expatriates to develop its economy (Den et al., 2018). To meet the demands of students and offer top-quality programs taught by highly qualified staff, HEIs often need to employ expatriate academic staff (Tahir & Ismail, 2007). For a variety of reasons, many ELs choose to depart their institution at the end of their first contract. This can have a negative impact on the teaching and learning environment and program culture and adds additional recruitment costs to program budgets.

By understanding the causes of EL turnover in Malaysian university preparation programs, leaders can employ strategies to mitigate constraints and create a sense of community that is long-lasting and fosters conditions for academic excellence and ongoing program viability, stability, and sustainability.

Literature Review

Employing skilled expatriate academics is a competitive advantage in this era of internationalisation of higher education institutions (Henha, 2019). International relocation in the academic world is not easy and studies have indicated that foreign faculty are often less satisfied than when working in their home countries and sometimes feel discriminated against in higher education institutions (Selmer et al., 2017). This has led to a higher turnover propensity amongst expatriate academics (Henha, 2019). This literature review investigates topics that are central to faculty retention in international higher education, such as the impact of faculty retention and turnover on higher education institutions, challenges faced by expatriate academics when adjusting to working and living in different countries, and leadership approaches to facilitate cross-cultural work adjustment.

Impact of Faculty Retention and Turnover

The quality of its faculty determines the quality of an HEI, and the hallmark of a successful institution is its ability to retain high-achieving faculty (Schoepp, 2011). Keeping faculty satisfied with their job can have a noteworthy impact on an HEI's ability to meet its objectives, both in financial and operational terms (Trivellas & Santouridis, 2014). Job satisfaction is an essential factor that contributes to the effectiveness and efficiency of organizations (Hee et al., 2019). The most serious consequence of a high academic staff turnover is that it diminishes teaching quality and student achievement (Ibrahim et al., 2017). The specific benefits of retaining veteran expatriate faculty are numerous. Long-serving faculty are experienced in the work environment, which gives them a better understanding of the students and the organisational culture (Schoepp, 2011). Figueroa (2015) classified the departure of veteran faculty as a skill drain. This not only costs the organization in terms of loss of intellectual capital, but competitors tend to gain through the employment of these expert personnel (Musah & Nkuah, 2013).

Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments

Naeem, Nadeem, and Khan (2015) noted that stress is a major part of expatriate assignments in the initial months when the employee is experiencing what is known as culture shock (Oberg, 1960), which arises when an expatriate learns how to deal with a new culture. Culture shock can lead to stress in a working environment which can decrease work motivation and quality of performance (Yektiningsih et al., 2021). Both Halicioglu (2015) and Roskell (2013) considered the ideas of cultural adjustment and work adjustment as being intertwined and recommend that leaders not only recognize the impact of culture shock on expatriate lecturers, but also actively assist them in overcoming it. It is primarily the expatriate's ability to adapt to the cultural norms of her/his new workplace that impacts their decision to stay at their institution or depart. The phenomenon of culture shock is highly relevant for leaders at Malaysian HEIs to be aware of and able to accommodate for. However, more essential is to understand how cultural differences and the process of culture shock may impact ELs' successful work adjustment.

Theory of Work Adjustment and Expatriate Academics

Work adjustment is a continuous and dynamic process by which individuals seek to achieve and maintain correspondence with their work environment (Dawis et al., 1968). After the initial match is made between individual and occupation, the remainder of one's tenure in that occupation is spent adjusting to changing work circumstances (Eggerth, 2008). In a cross-cultural environment, there is a positive relationship between the successful work adjustment of an expatriate academic and their job performance and overall satisfaction (Na-Nan et al., 2018)

Froese (2012) identified three distinct facets of expatriate cross-cultural adjustment: (a) general adjustment, which involves coping with living in a foreign country; (b) interaction adjustment, which involves establishing relationships with locals; and (c) work adjustment, which involves the way expatriates fit into the workplace. Roskell (2013) stated that work adjustment rather than host culture adjustment is more likely to dominate teachers' decisions as to whether to continue with their employment and suggests that educators can encounter double culture shock because of having to adjust simultaneously to an unfamiliar host culture and an unfamiliar work culture.

Adjustment and Role-Related Stressors

Expatriates must adjust to a new work role, and that adjustment is fundamental to a successful outcome in their overseas role (Selmer & Luring, 2011). However, individuals frequently face issues with adjustment to the new country, to work differences, and to interacting with others (Wilkins & Neri, 2019). Facilitating the successful adjustment of expatriate academic staff needs to be given careful consideration, as there are additional considerations and supports needed to accommodate expatriate faculty over and above what might be necessary in a domestic setting. Chan et al., (2019) found that to successfully adjust to a new culture and work environment, expatriates need to perceive that they are receiving support from their organization. The authors also found that there was a positive relationship between an expatriate's adjustment and their performance.

Leaders need to think about the complexities of life both in and outside the institution to support expatriate academic staff and foster the conditions in which they can thrive, not only in their new role, but also host country. Richardson (2000) found that expatriates' ability to adjust had a major influence on their professional and personal experiences during their overseas appointment. An inability to adjust both professionally and personally was found to have a detrimental effect on expatriate academics' performance at work, which also had a detrimental effect on their home life.

Cultural Impact on Teaching and Collegiality

Expatriation has been found to have a large impact on both the job of teaching as well as the work environment for academic faculty. It is slowly being recognised that offshore teaching is a complex issue, which involves multiple people, cultures, roles, settings, programs, and modes of delivery. While expatriate instructors are hired for their expertise in the curriculum they are to teach, they often find themselves trying to "serve two masters" when trying to adapt the content, pedagogy, and assessment of a foreign curriculum to a local context (Dobos, 2011, p. 32). Faculty members are often not sufficiently prepared by their institutions to meet these challenges. It is difficult for instructors to strike a balance between adapting a curriculum to the local context and maintaining the distinct characteristics of the qualification being offered. In addition, instructors often find that local students have very different learning styles and cultural references and trying to force local students to conform to foreign curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment leads to a

damaging degree of homogenization (Healey, 2015b). It is possible that as a trainer abroad, teachers must adopt methods, which at home they have learned to consider as outmoded or unpopular (Hofstede, 1986). Antonia et al., (2020) found that to improve the teaching and learning environment in transnational education programs, both the curriculum provider and host organization need to invest significantly in face-to-face professional development that addresses the challenges expatriate academics experience.

Leadership Approaches

Effectiveness within a given culture, and judged according to the values of that culture, asks for management skills adapted to the local culture (Hofstede, 1984). Leaders who can effectively integrate various leadership styles can help HEIs achieve their internationalization goals (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014) by creating a supportive work environment that positively impacts expatriate work performance (Kraimer et al., 2001). Effective leadership in higher education is fundamental for institutional development and sustainability in today's rapidly changing world, yet there is a lack of formalized leadership preparation for this important role (Gonaim, 2016).

The literature on leading expatriate academics suggested that specific leadership approaches can have a significant influence on their job satisfaction. Rather than individuals learning through trial and error, and teachers independently altering their pedagogy, expatriate academics appreciate leaders who place more emphasis on the development of effective academic practice in transnational education provide them with opportunities to discuss and share issues with colleagues (Antonia et al., 2020). The first step is to adequately prepare staff and provide proper induction to their new host country and workplace to facilitate a smooth transition to living and working in a host country. Leaders must also ensure that faculty are provided with ongoing professional development to help them adapt their pedagogical skills to the cultural demands of the host country, such as adapting to teaching subject content to second language learners. Further, leaders must take care to manage the work environment to maintain a collegial atmosphere for all workers regardless of nationality.

Proper Induction and Ongoing Professional Development

Expatriates who perceive strong organizational support have been found to feel more subjective well-being, which results in higher retention (Tu, Chen, & Lam, 2019). Gopal (2011)

argued that the need to effectively prepare faculty to teach in a cross-cultural environment has become imperative in the context of globalizing higher education. Many faculty members do not receive sufficient preparation to teach students from diverse populations in international programs, let alone formal intercultural competency training. Pre-departure training is a crucial to conduct before sending expatriates for international assignment to help facilitate their adjustment process, improve their work performance, and prevent problems that could lead to their failures (Sartika et al., 2021). Faculty members are unaware of culturally competent pedagogical strategies that would enable them to respond in culturally sensitive ways, and thus, they lack the ability to successfully communicate and work with learners from other cultures. Professional development as well as pre-departure and ongoing training opportunities are needed to support transnational faculty in international environments. According to Halicioglu (2015), the induction period (as well as the interview that precedes it) is a critical opportunity to influence newly arrived teachers' anticipatory adjustments. A well-designed induction "will do much to reassure members and (improve) their motivation and attitudes to their work" (Roskell, 2013, p. 168). If the induction is ineffective or misleading, then it can precipitate feelings of distrust, disillusionment, and demotivation, which often culminate in terminated contracts and a rapid turnover.

Fostering a Collegial Community

Fostering a collegial culture is beneficial to both individual employees and organizations as a whole because collegial relations influence intentions influence whether or not an expatriate will remain at an institution or depart (Ngo-Henha & Khumalo, 2022). Managing a work environment with a mix of locally hired and expatriate faculty presents its own unique set of challenges. Chalmers (2011) suggested offering workshops and training to address culture shock and dealing with significant change during the start-up period to help alleviate the impact of the new environment on employee productivity in the workplace. In addition, HEIs may offer a forum that allows employees to share their thoughts, frustrations, and concerns regarding problems they experience during the adjustment phase of expatriation. This may be an excellent way for leaders to better understand the cultural elements that impact the work environment.

Research Methodology

Convergent, Parallel Mixed Methods Design

A convergent, parallel mixed methods design was used. Both quantitative and qualitative

data were collected concurrently using a web-based questionnaire and one-to-one, semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2014a). The data collection timeframe was from February to July, 2018.

Sampling Frame

The research population of this study included current and former ELs at university preparation programs in Malaysia. All participants in this study held a bachelor's degree in their teaching area. Most had additional qualifications, including teaching certification or graduate degrees in their speciality. Males and females between 26 and 65 years old participated.

Approximately 10 Malaysian HEIs employ a sizable number of ELs. Approximately 150 potential participants were contacted, of which 63 completed the online questionnaire and a total of 31 interviews were conducted during the data collection period.

Participant Recruitment

Administrators from university preparation programs were contacted and asked to send an email to their current and former ELs. Another method used to recruit participants was searching publicly profiles of lecturers at Malaysian HEIs. If the biographical details of a lecturer suggested that they were expatriate lecturers, they were emailed an invitation to participate.

Data Analysis

Data for both the questionnaire and interviews were collected and prepared independently, with mixing of results occurring during the interpretation phase of the analysis. The questionnaire used to administer the surveys automatically captured the data once participants submitted their responses. The interview data were captured using a digital voice recorder.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from participants in the web-based questionnaire were used in this study to establish that participants were representative of the entire population to improve the generalizability of the findings (Cohen et al., 2013). Frequencies were used to measure responses to multiple choice and Likert-scale questions and rank them according to importance. Numeric scores were also used to understand aggregate scores for quantitative responses to questions. Frequencies counts were undertaken to quantitize the qualitative data and allow for the researcher to make informed choices around priorities and importance or to emphasize themes (Onwuegbuzie

& Johnson, 2006).

Qualitative Data Analysis

Verbatim transcriptions were made from the digital voice recordings of the interviews using Microsoft Word. The open-ended responses from the questionnaires were automatically collected in a spreadsheet document through the Google Form. Following this, codes were developed based on themes that emerged. Relevant quantitative data were mixed into the results of the thematic analysis to support the primary themes. The results were written only after mixing and interpreting the qualitative and quantitative data.

Results

Themes

The results are comprised of five primary themes that emerged from the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data obtained for this study and are ordered based on the overall frequency of coding in the study data. The five primary themes include: (a) professional growth and fulfillment, (b) the direct influence of the leader, (c) institutional factors, (d) cultural adjustment factors, and (e) country-specific factors.

Professional Growth and Fulfillment

The most important factor influencing an EL's decision to remain at an institution or depart is the professional growth and fulfillment they experience while working in Malaysia. This was found to be highly dependent on their leader providing them with new opportunities and ensuring that the lecturers enjoyed their day-to-day job and work environment. Regardless of the age or experience of the participants, they generally viewed their time in Malaysia as an opportunity to advance their career by gaining experience in the class or by assuming additional leadership duties. Many perceived Malaysia as a place that offered them more opportunities than they could experience in their home country.

Participants indicated that adapting to their job was more important than adapting to other aspects of life in Malaysia, and they felt this is the area where their leader had the most significant influence. Participants discussed how their leader could provide a sense of support that allowed them to apply their expertise in a new context. Although most participants expressed great satisfaction with their experiences, it was made clear that their leader was crucial in providing

mentorship and guidance while they adapted to a new job in a foreign country.

Classroom teaching is the primary duty of ELs in Malaysia, and the consensus among participants was that their time spent in the classroom was enjoyable and a primary motivator for staying at an institution. Lecturers appreciated leadership approaches that involved teaching and learning, where they were being encouraged to use technology to support student-centred pedagogy in the classroom. They also enjoyed being given autonomy to plan and implement curriculum, with the leader playing more of a supportive role rather than an authoritarian one.

The level of professional growth they experienced also had a strong influence. Many participants mentioned opportunities for career advancement through gaining new experiences as the primary motivator to work in Malaysia. Lecturers were content as long as their job was satisfying, and they sensed that there was potential for career advancement at their institution. However, some lecturers noted that after a few years with their HEI, they sensed their opportunities for growth had diminished and it was time to explore new opportunities.

The leader plays a significant role in ensuring that lecturers are experiencing job satisfaction while working in Malaysia. Lecturers perceived that many of the factors impacting their professional growth and fulfillment are highly influenced by their leader. Leaders at Malaysian HEIs have a significant impact on the contract renewal decisions of ELs and can positively influence this by creating a satisfying work environment, supporting lecturers as they transition to Malaysia, providing continuous support for their classroom teaching, and providing opportunities for career growth.

Influence of the Leader

This study found that the relationship between an EL and her/his leader was highly important to the lecturer's decision to remain at an institution or depart. In some cases, this relationship was the deciding factor and caused some to stay at their institution long term and others to depart relatively quickly. Some participants stated that they felt the benefits offered at other institutions within Malaysia were relatively similar, so their relationship with their leader was the factor that caused them to remain. Others stated that having a good leader could compensate for other aspects, such as perceived lower pay or longer working hours, than they would receive at other institutions.

The theme of influence of the leader has a strong relationship with job satisfaction and the overall happiness of lecturers in Malaysia. The relationship with a leader was seen as having a high influence on creating job satisfaction and being happy with their work was identified by participants as one of the most important factors affecting the quality of their life while in Malaysia.

Having a trusting and supportive leader was deemed most important to most participants with regards to leadership approaches. Lecturers wanted to feel like they were trusted enough to manage their jobs without micromanagement, while at the same time enjoying a sense that if the need arose, their leader would support them when they were faced with challenges.

Institutional Factors

A positive organizational climate was found to have a highly influential impact on lecturers' job satisfaction, which in turn encouraged many to remain at their HEI. The climate of the organization was determined to be among the primary factors that affect the retention of ELs. In some cases, participants identified either a positive or negative organizational climate as their motivation for remaining at or departing. Participants believed leaders have a strong influence on creating a positive organizational climate and appreciative workplaces and that the leader sets the tone by creating a workplace that is supportive and trusting. Lecturers who thought their workplace had a positive organizational climate expressed a strong commitment to their HEI.

The bonds that ELs established with their colleagues, both in and out of the office, were found to be among the most important factors in creating job satisfaction and positively impacted their overall quality of life while in Malaysia. Lecturers often developed relationships with their colleagues who arrived in Malaysia at around the same time. The shared experience of transitioning to a new country was a common way lecturers made friends. These relationships often impacted lecturer retention, as one lecturer's decision to remain or depart would inevitably affect the decisions of the lecturers they had developed close relationships with. Strong relationships were also created when senior lecturers served as workplace mentors to new lecturers. Many participants expressed satisfaction with the supportive nature of their mentors and noted that it helped with their transition to the country and overall enjoyment with life in Malaysia. Some participants recognized that their leader had a positive impact on their transition by assigning suitable mentors to help with their transition in the workplace, while others felt that the leader had

a more “hands-off” role and believed this happened organically.

The findings of this study related to job satisfaction were that lecturers found that their happiness at work had a major influence on their overall happiness in Malaysia. The findings related to organizational climate and professional and personal relationships extend this idea, in that the relationships built at work have a positive influence both at the workplace and in the lecturer’s personal life. Participants who had positive stories about their workplace and social life with colleagues often had high levels of commitment to their organization, which was a positive influence on their decision of whether to remain at their HEI.

Cultural Adjustment

Many participants’ initial feelings about Malaysia were that it was an easy country to adjust to. However, as the interviews progressed, most participants shared some experiences of difficulties they faced adapting to life in Malaysia. This study found that lecturers who were successfully able to adjust to living in Malaysia and develop meaningful relationships in the country were often likely to remain in Malaysia past their initial contract.

There is an undoubted need for lecturers to be provided support during the initial stages of their expatriation. Different lecturers had vastly different experiences upon arrival in the country. Some felt that all their needs had been planned for and taken care of with pre-arrival support, airport greeting, having their accommodations arranged for, and help in acquiring necessities such as a local sim card or setting up a bank account. Some spoke of situations where limited support was provided, and they were left to adjust almost independently. Most agreed that there should be a system in place to support the expatriation process for newly arrived lecturers. However, many did not believe it was specifically the role of their academic leader to provide these supports. While being greeted and made to feel welcomed by their leader was appreciated, most felt the system of expatriate induction and orientation should be a priority of the institution and the responsibility of senior leadership to implement and oversee.

Many of the long-term ELs developed strong relationships outside of work. Happiness with the friendships they developed inside and outside of work in Malaysia was a strong reason why they continued to stay in the country and work at their HEI. Many participants spoke of an “expat bubble” that is easy to stay within. The ones who developed relationships outside their expatriate network tended to do so by taking their own initiative or through special events organized by their

institution. Company trips, annual dinners, and team-building activities were all mentioned as ways ELs developed strong, long-lasting bonds with their local colleagues, which improved their overall satisfaction in Malaysia. The successful adjustment to living in Malaysia and developing meaningful relationships have played an important role in the satisfaction and retention of ELs and should be part of the consideration of leaders at HEIs in Malaysia.

Expatriate Life in Malaysia

The quality-of-life expatriates experienced while in Malaysia and the challenges they sometimes faced while living abroad were found to be an important consideration in the participants' decisions to remain at an institution or depart at their end of their contract. However, in most cases, these could be considered "secondary" factors that supported their decisions, as they were not seen to be as important as job satisfaction, their relationship with their leader, or professional development and career advancement opportunities.

The low cost of living in Malaysia was seen as a highly attractive aspect of working in Malaysia. Most participants commented that the lifestyles they led in Malaysia would have been unaffordable to them in their home country if they were working in a similar role. Many were also very fond of the travel opportunities they had, as Malaysia is known as a travel hub for Southeast Asia, and many lecturers enjoyed long holiday breaks during their employment term. Malaysia itself was viewed by many as a prime destination to live and work because of its warm climate, multiculturalism, and reputation as a food and shopping haven.

Although most participants found life in Malaysia to be a positive influence on their overall satisfaction and happiness, some factors presented challenges, some of which had a negative influence on their quality of life. Living a long distance from family and friends created a sense of "homesickness", which created a strong desire within some to return to their home country. Also, lecturers who were raising young children often found Malaysia to be less affordable than participants from most other demographics. Finally, the phenomenon of "culture shock" did have an impact on many of the participants, but it did not often have a serious enough impact in and of itself to cause lecturers to want to depart. The quality of life or challenges face by expatriate lecturers served as reinforcement to their decision as to whether to remain or depart rather than being the primary motivation.

Discussion

There were five major findings that linked to the results in this study: (a) cultural adjustment for expatriates in Malaysia, (b) determinants of job satisfaction among ELs, (c) theory of work adjustment and ELs, (d) prioritizing factors affecting EL retention, and (e) leadership approaches.

Cultural Adjustment for Expatriates in Malaysia

As Tu, Chen, and Lam (2019) pointed out, successful cross-cultural adjustment positively affects work outcomes and expatriate retention. A top reason expatriates fail at their jobs is an inability to adjust to a different cultural environment (Kraimer, Bolino, & Mead, 2016). Many participants stated that Malaysia was a desirable location for them to live and work, and they felt it was a relatively easy country to adjust to. However, some cultural differences impacted the lecturers' satisfaction with both working and living in Malaysia, and these differences had an influence on their interactions with colleagues, students, and institutional leaders. To address the cultural differences existing between ELs and the culture of their host country, colleagues, students, and leaders, program leaders needed to help ELs bridge these differences. In practice, this means providing initial support to help them overcome culture shock. Additionally, program leaders must provide ongoing support to address fundamental cultural barriers that exist and help the lecturers adapt for their own satisfaction and the benefit of the students in their classes.

Determinants of Job satisfaction Among Academic Faculty

Jonasson, Luring, Selmer, and Trembath (2017) found teacher-student relations were positively associated with expatriate academics' job satisfaction and adjustment. ELs appreciated when leaders offered them new opportunities, facilitated professional development to help their career growth, and challenged experienced faculty to assume increased responsibilities. These things contributed towards retaining lecturers at a Malaysian HEI. However, it is important for leaders to continuously find ways for expatriate lecturers to grow professionally. Participants overwhelmingly believed their leader had a large impact on their professional growth and fulfilment, which, in turn, had a significant influence on the retention of expatriate lecturers.

The Expatriate Lecturer and Work Adjustment

Ren et al., (2015) argued that expatriates who thrived in their job were more likely to stay

on in their assignments and suggested organizations could influence expatriate retention by creating an environment where thriving was possible. Similarly, Pinto et al. (2017) noted expatriates who found their jobs challenging were more likely to remain with their organizations. This study found that work adjustment, rather than interaction or general adjustment, is the most important aspect of ELs' lives, and work adjustment had to be successful for expatriate lecturers to enjoy their time in Malaysia. The role of the leader was important in facilitating the successful work adjustment of ELs, as ELs faced work related challenges they would not ordinarily face in their home country.

Many lecturers interviewed believed their leader had a high impact on their cross-cultural work adjustment. Although they found their jobs enjoyable, many participants identified numerous complexities, such as cultural differences between them and their students and between them and their colleagues, which needed to be managed in order to ensure their successful transition to the role of EL in Malaysia. While confident in their abilities to teach, lecturers appreciated being supported when challenges arose due to cultural differences in the workplace, and they appreciated a leader who was experienced and knowledgeable about delivering their home country's curriculum in the Malaysian context.

Although participants considered Malaysia to be generally easy to adapt to, cultural differences had to be recognized and addressed by leaders to facilitate the successful work adjustment and ongoing satisfaction of ELs in Malaysia. Adjustment problems experienced by expatriates may have fundamental consequences for an organization (Selmer & Luring, 2009). Facilitating the successful adjustment of expatriate academic staff, therefore, needs to be given careful consideration, as there are additional considerations and supports needed to accommodate expatriate faculty over and above what might be necessary in a domestic setting.

Prioritizing Factors Affecting Expatriate Lecturer Retention

The two most cited reasons for accepting an overseas position were (a) the personal growth of the cross-cultural experience and (b) the perception that overseas work would be more challenging, interesting, and rewarding in terms of career progress (Kraimer et al., 2016). Ren et al. (2015) stated expatriates valued learning and the excitement of working in a new environment. This study found that professional growth and fulfilment comprised the most important factor to the majority of ELs in their decision to work abroad. Both financial gain and cultural immersion

were important and should be satisfactory, but often these were secondary considerations in ELs' contract renewal decisions. Professional satisfaction in their role was found to outweigh other factors such as pay and other benefits in lecturers' minds when deciding to continue working at their HEI or seek other opportunities.

The work environment and relationships lecturers forged with their colleagues were found to be significant factors in contract renewal decisions. Trust and support from leaders were identified as being critical for building not only a positive work environment, but also an overall positive and fulfilling personal and professional experience working in Malaysia. Participants identified both job satisfaction and a positive organizational climate, where they developed strong personal and professional relationships with their colleagues, as being highly important to their decision to renew a contract or depart. Participants believed their leader was clearly linked to shaping the most important factors in EL retention.

Leadership Approaches

Hofstede and Dooley's (2017) research on international leadership identified universally appreciated leadership elements that were not culture-bound. The central and most universal trait was that a leader should have a trustworthy and confident personality. A positive relationship with their leader was a primary factor in the contract renewal decisions of many ELs, and ELs appreciated a leader they felt comfortable approaching for advice and support. Additionally, barring a significant pay differential, lecturers preferred to stay at their HEI if they had a positive relationship with their leader, and a positive relationship between a leader and lecturer increased the likelihood of retention, even if lecturers were unhappy with other important aspects of their employment such as pay, benefits, or workload.

The two most important leadership approaches were "Providing a Supportive Environment for Instructors" and "Trust in Leader". Many participants recognized that although they enjoyed being trusted as highly skilled professionals and being given autonomy when delivering the curriculum, living, and working in a foreign country often required additional support from leaders. The appreciation of trust and support from a leader was important both at the workplace and living in the community for ELs in Malaysia, as ELs faced challenges they did not face in their home country.

Not all participants experienced well-planned pre-departure preparation, a thorough

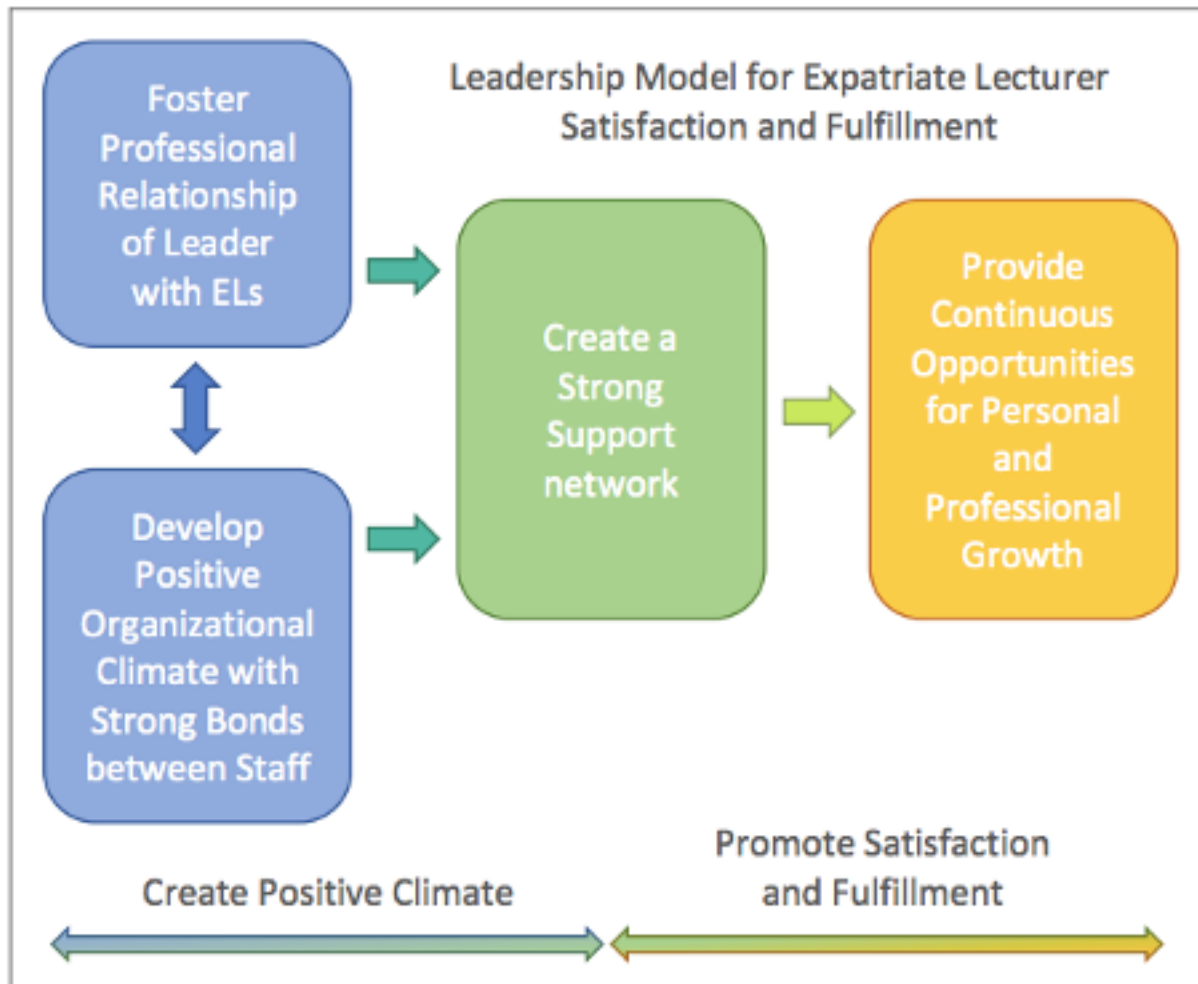
induction and orientation, or continuous support throughout their contract. These leadership approaches were among those most frequently mentioned as important for facilitating the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate lecturers at HEIs in Malaysia. This confirmed Tu et al.'s (2019) findings that expatriates who perceived their organization had provided more supports and facilitated better cross-cultural adjustment tended to be satisfied and remained with their employers beyond their initial contract period.

While confident in their abilities to teach, ELs appreciated being supported when challenges arose due to cultural differences in the workplace and having a leader who was experienced and knowledgeable about delivering their home country's curriculum in the Malaysian context. Having a mentor was positively related to an expatriate's organizational knowledge, job performance, and promotability. It was also positively related to expatriates' perceptions of organizational knowledge sharing and team cohesiveness (Kraimer et al., 2016). Strong bonds with peers, supervisors, and mentors played a strong role in the successful adjustment and overall performance of expatriates (van der Laken et al., 2019). Many expatriate lecturers stated that in addition to strong support and guidance from their program leader, they received additional mentorship, both formally and informally, from their colleagues and supervisors, which they found helpful in their adjustment to their new roles in Malaysia.

Leadership Model for Expatriate Lecturer Satisfaction and Fulfillment

As a result of this study a leadership model has been proposed. The purpose of this model is to visualize the process program directors could follow to develop the satisfaction and fulfillment ELs derive from their experience working at their HEI and increase EL retention rates at their HEI. The model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Leadership Model for Expatriate Lecturer Satisfaction and Fulfillment



Description of Model for Program Directors

This study found that the satisfaction and fulfillment an EL experienced both at work and in the community were highly important to the decision of lecturers to renew their contracts. A positive organizational climate was also a very important factor in retaining ELs in Malaysia. This model is a visualization of the key components of the important factors leading to EL satisfaction and fulfillment. The subthemes discussed in this section include (a) factors relating to fostering positive organizational climate and (b) focusing on support and providing opportunities for professional growth.

Factors Relating to Fostering Positive Organizational Climate

Two factors were identified for fostering a positive organizational climate. These include (a) strong relationships between leader and ELs, and (b) a positive organizational climate.

Strong relationship between leader and ELs. The role of program director is highly important to EL retention. The direct relationship between the program director and ELs has a high impact on EL retention. ELs relied on leadership to ensure their successful cross-cultural work adjustment, provide support when challenges arise, help them to develop their career, and create a positive work environment that allows them to enjoy their work and life in Malaysia. As such, the relationship between program director and each lecturer should be a priority for leaders at HEIs. Yearly employee satisfaction surveys are only one tool to gauge the satisfaction of ELs. Honest discussions about job satisfaction and the quality of life of lecturers can help leaders identify any challenges they can assist ELs with. As trust and support were identified as the key leadership approaches that ELs appreciate, a strong relationship between EL and leader can establish trust between ELs and their leader and allow for the leader to be aware of when and how they can provide support for their lecturers.

Positive organizational climate. Program directors need to recognize that the early arrival phase of expatriation is critical, as it can be a time of great excitement and challenges. Work adjustment was found to be the most important aspect of adapting to life in Malaysia for ELs. As a result, program directors need to ensure that the orientation and induction of new staff is seen as a priority with a well-planned system in place to help ELs adjust to life in Malaysia and at their new workplace. However, managing the adjustment of ELs cannot be thought of as a “one-time” program; rather, it should be an ongoing endeavour, as ELs will inevitably face challenges related to living and working in Malaysia. Successful work adjustment and satisfaction with their job are critical elements of ELs retention. Most ELs identified their general happiness in Malaysia as being highly dependent on their satisfaction with their job. Leaders need to work to ensure the work environment for ELs is enjoyable and they develop strong personal and professional relationships. Within this study, many participants recalled enjoyable work experiences and the strong friendships they developed with colleagues as key reasons for them to remain at their HEI. Fostering a positive organizational climate, monitoring staff morale, and creating opportunities for staff bonding are important considerations for program directors to retain ELs.

Focusing on Support and Providing Opportunities for Professional Growth

Regardless of how long ELs had spent teaching abroad or which stage of their career they were at, they appreciated a leader who supports them and nurtures their career growth. Two subthemes were discovered in support of this need for support and opportunities for professional growth. These include (a) support system for ELs and (b) career development for ELs, which are discussed in this section.

Support system for expatriate lecturers. ELs were found to appreciate leaders whom they could rely on for support. Program directors must be able to provide support for ELs as they adapt to teaching a foreign curriculum in Malaysia. They must also have the cultural intelligence to identify challenges that ELs are dealing with that are culturally related and help them navigate them in a manner that respects the culture of Malaysia and the home country culture of the EL. Program directors need to ensure that ELs feel supported when they assume additional responsibilities within the organization, which is beneficial for the EL's professional growth and the success of the program.

It is suggested that a system of mentorship be in place, where the program director, department heads, and senior lecturers provide direct support for ELs, regardless of the length of time the mentor has been within the organization. This can occur both through the formal goal setting and performance appraisal process as well as a more informal mentor-mentee system. This would help reinforce the relationship between leaders and lecturers as well as provide support for a positive organizational climate.

The process of supporting ELs begins prior to their initial arrival and continues until they depart the HEI. There are four key stages program directors could consider when designing support systems for ELs: (a) pre-departure, (c) initial arrival, (d) work and general adjustment phase, and (e) departure stage.

The first stage of supports offered for ELs would begin at the hiring stage and continue until arrival. This is known as the pre-departure stage. At this stage, the ELs should be supplied with all relevant information they will need to adjust to their new workplace and community. Flight tickets, visa applications, and arranging for accommodation upon arrival are common tasks to be supported by or taken care of by the organization. Put newly hired ELs in contact with current ELs, who could offer advice and answer questions for them.

The next important stage of support is during the initial arrival phase. When new ELs arrive, the program director or senior staff could greet them. The new ELs would then be brought to their new accommodation and be given time to settle in. Provide adequate time between the arrival of new staff and the first day of work in order to ensure they have successfully settled in and are not concerned with taking care of essential tasks that are not directly related to work. It is suggested that program directors design a thorough orientation to the organization, program, and country. This orientation would not only be informational but would also serve to develop the relationship between new ELs and the program director and others within the program. During this phase, ensure a monitor is available to provide guidance for new ELs with their work and adjusting to life in Malaysia.

The third stage is the process of adjusting to working and living in Malaysia and continues past the initial orientation phase; this can last for a year or more. ELs need continuous support with the challenges they may face. It is important to provide training and support for ELs regarding curriculum and teaching in the Malaysian HEI context. Provide counselling and mentorship to help ELs navigate their feelings related to culture shock. Program directors need to be aware of and provide support wherever possible for issues that affect the quality of life of ELs, such as personal safety, childcare, and so forth.

Finally, the process of departing Malaysia at the end of a contract can be challenging and stressful. Should ELs decide they want to depart their HEI, there should be supports in place to help guide them through essential common tasks, such as attaining tax clearance, visa cancellation, employee clearance, and retirement fund withdrawal. On top of this, the program director must recognize that the departing ELs are likely looking to secure their next job. Therefore, program directors will need to provide any reasonable support they can in this regard, such as ensuring references are provided in a timely manner or allowing temporary personal leave for circumstances where they must travel to recruitment fairs in a different country.

Career development for expatriate lecturers. Regardless of the career stage of ELs, they want to use their time in Malaysia as a career building opportunity. Providing ELs with support and a positive work environment are important for retaining them. However, the most important factors for ELs are their satisfaction with their job and the fulfilment they get while working in Malaysia. Therefore, program directors need to place an emphasis on providing career

development opportunities for ELs at all career stages, regardless of the amount of time they have spent with the organization.

For relatively new lecturers, leaders need to ensure the ELs' work adjustment is smooth and that they are not overburdened with large classes. Also, provide ELS with opportunities to expand the range of courses they teach. Program directors can also encourage them to explore ways to make additional contributions to their program by running clubs or joining committees.

After some time with an organization, more experienced ELs will want additional challenges; therefore, encourage them to assume specialized roles such as technology lead or counsellor. At this time, if they are capable, consider ELS for promotion into leadership roles within the program.

Finally, highly experienced ELs want to feel that their career will not be limited at their HEI by the fact that they are not local staff. Some participants mentioned senior roles at their organization were reserved exclusively for Malaysians. To address this issue, program leaders could create leadership development programs to allow ELs into program leadership positions or a senior leadership position within the institution. Senior lecturers can also have graduate study or additional training paid for by the HEI. This would help put them in a position to improve their career prospects and give them a sense that their career is continuing to evolve. If they are not eventually offered a promotion within the HEI, they will be able to take their skills to other organizations.

Conclusion

This study found that the satisfaction and fulfilment an EL experienced both at work and in the community were highly important to the decision of lecturers to renew their contracts. A positive organizational climate was also a very important factor in retaining ELs in Malaysia. The Leadership Model for Expatriate Lecturer Satisfaction and Fulfillment was developed based on the conclusions and subsequent recommendations of this study. The purpose of this model is to visualize the process that program directors can follow to develop the satisfaction and fulfilment ELs derive from their experience working at their HEI and increase EL retention rates at their HEI.

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