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**SIGNIFICATIONS OF FAMILY SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND
FRIENDSHIP RELATIONSHIPS IN AFFECTING EXPATRIATE
EXPERIENCE: FROM THE LENS OF MALAYSIA PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY**

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Abstract:

This paper provides an understanding of the social structure, which is seen as a phenomenology that refers to one's thinking about the interpretation and meaning of life experience based on the presence of individuals in economic position, political scenario, statehood, and education system in a country that is not his country of origin. Thus, the interpretation among these independent expatriates is debated by taking into account the role of social structures such as family institutions and the environment of friendship in relation to the significance of expatriate experiences in the host country. In other words, the discussion presented in this paper is to achieve the objective of the study in unravelling the expatriate's interpretation of the expatriate decision, whether it is closely related to the experience of his family members during the expatriate service in the host country. The research was conducted by utilising qualitative methods of in-depth interviews with 30 expatriate academics selected from four Malaysian public universities. The appropriate respondent criteria include the following characteristics, namely (a) has resided for at least a year in Malaysia using a valid employee visa, (b) has been offered a position as academic staff and has renewed his service contract, (c) is an expatriate with his own initiative in expatriating and (d) works full time and is not classified as an exchange staff between universities or those on sabbatical leave. The study results show that the interpretation of family members on the meaning of expatriation experience gives justification for expatriate to remain in the host country. While moral support from friendship provides a positive indication of expatriate's performance in the context of work throughout performing

international duties. Further supporting social networks relationship with the local community is also one of the determinants of expatriate success in adapting to the host country environment.

Keywords:

Family Institution, Friendship, Social Structure, Academic Expatriate, Malaysian Public Universities

Introduction

This paper focuses on family influence and friendship issues among expatriates' decision-making to experience expatriate life abroad. In the context of expatriation decisions, the individuals cannot escape from involving the personal relationship with others, especially spouses, children, family, and even friends (Othman, Mohd Suki & Yusoff, 2012; Yusoff, Othman, Razak & Mohd Suki, 2016; Razak, Othman, Mohd Suki, Awang, Jupiter & Yusoff, 2017; Yusoff, Mohd Kamal, Othman & Abdul Hamid, 2018; Othman, 2019; 2020; 2021; Mohd Shah, Mokhtar, Othman, Yusoff, Esa, Ationg & Ramlie, 2021). Each individual's commitments to family relationships play a role in providing differentiated decision-making justification to migrate out of the origin country and to select the host country, which will be the new home for the expatriate and their family who accompanies them. From that perspective, the interpretation of relationships and social interactions carries the meaning of how expatriate motives are understood not only by the expatriate himself but also taking into account each member of his family involved in the decision-making.

Therefore, in general, the interpretation and the meaning of expatriation experience are closely related to the family's experiences throughout the expatriate's service in the host country. Accordingly, the interpretation of these independent expatriates is debated by taking into account the role of the social structure such as the family and friendship in relation to the expatriate experience in the host country (Othman, 2019). Social structure is understood as a phenomenology that refers to one's thinking about the interpretation and meaning of life experience based on the presence of individuals in the economic position, political scenario, statehood, and education system in a foreign country (Yusoff *et al.*, 2018). In other words, the discussion presented in this paper suggests expatriate interpretations of expatriate decisions and life experience has continuity with the social context in which the expatriate is present during the process.

Expatriate is defined as an individual residing outside of their home country in a certain period of time to obtain employment and further develop their career on their own desires and efforts (Othman, 2021). A study conducted by Mayrhofer, Pernkopf & Reiss, (2020), examines the impact on the retention of an expatriate by comparing citizenship status given by the host country to the independent expatriate as a permanent residence individual compared to executive expatriate as an international standard employee. Such comparisons affect in increasing loyalty, especially for expatriate with families. Further, the study also found a decline in the turnover rate of international employees in an organisation. The service contract also has a comfortable period of two to three years, depending on the expatriate's annual performance in the current valuation year.

Meanwhile, Shaikh & Ahmad, (2018) categorised executive expatriate as employees sent to conduct operation abroad on the organisation's instruction for a set of time. Therefore, the executive expatriate is also known as the organisation's employee who operates in their home country but is placed to work, serve and live abroad for a short time (temporary residing). Some organisations prefer to call these employees "International Assignees" (Rocke, 2017). At the same time, there is a category of local staff who are local and work in the country where the company conducts its business operations. Employees of this category are appointed and given the training to understand the background of the origin country. Employees of origin country are also known as third-country nationals (Saba, Dilek & Gamze, 2018).

From the perspective of the above scholars, executive expatriate is recognised as employees in an organisation assigned abroad in a short period of time, where the work orientation is not much different from the organisation in the origin country. Significant differences only involve culture, work style, attitudes and way of life. In contrast, independent expatriate is an individual who apply for positions abroad and subsequently perform expatriates when job offers are submitted by new employers. The period of time in the host country is enshrined in their service contract (Trembath, 2016). Scholars such as Atif, Palwasha & Syed Muzaffar, (2017) define expatriates with their own initiative as citizens from the country of origin and reside in other countries.

The study results found that the majority of overseas assignments for the executive expatriate group did not allow expatriates to bring with them spouses and family members to accompany them abroad. This may be due to a short period, and the cost is entirely borne by the employer (Shaikh & Ahmad, 2018). The task is considered temporary and relocating the expatriate family is taught to slow down the transfer process and create an implication of more complex problems (Mayrhofer, Pernkopf & Reiss, 2020). In contrast, with the self-initiative expatriate group who brought their family along to migrate abroad, the decision taken to work results from their family members' consent.

More than a decade ago saw the significant transformation of the Malaysian economy as one of the fastest-growing countries in the Asian region (Fei, & Lim, 2020). The mainstream globalisation brings Malaysia to be part of the capitalist world with the country's economic growth at a comfortable level (Fei, & Lim, 2020). Results from the government's introduction of the utilisation of the economy transformational programme as an intensive effort to encourage Malaysian to venture into International businesses has proven to impact the national higher education sector. The proactive action taken is in line with the country's higher education internationalisation policy to offer international staff employment into the public universities to mobilise academic scholars' expertise in realising the national agenda of making Malaysia a hub of world higher education excellence.

The increase of academic expatriate attendance at public Institution of Higher Learning in Malaysia has rapidly developed after the Ministry of Higher Education started to push Malaysia as the centre of educational excellence in the South East Asian region in the past decade from the year 2010 to 2019 (MOE, 2021). This push has encouraged public universities to spread the wing to market various study programme to attract international students to further their studies in the host country (Chelliah, Khan, Krishnan, Kamarulzaman & Goh, 2019). This scenario has given a direct indication in which Malaysia has been made as the country of choice for many academic expats to further their career as an academician in higher learning

institutions abroad. Based on the statistic in Table 1, by the Ministry of Higher Institution Malaysia, it shows that the number of academic expatriates in Malaysia was 1472 people in 2019. A total of 1150 academic expatriates were Males, and 322 academic expatriates were females. Compared to 2013, there were 2712 academic expatriates with 2014 males, and 698 females pursuing their careers in 20 higher learning institutions in Malaysia (MOE, 2019).

Table 1: Total Number of Academic Expatriate Staff in 20 Public Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia for the Last 10 Years According to Gender

Year	Male Academic Expatriate	Female Academic Expatriate	Total
2010	1305	376	1681
2011	1372	393	1765
2012	1577	574	2151
2013	2014	698	2712
2014	1822	608	2430
2015	1626	573	2199
2016	1328	391	1719
2017	1180	360	1540
2018	1130	322	1452
2019	1150	322	1472

Source: http://www.mohe.gov.my/web_statistik/ (From 2007 until 2019)

Literature Review

In the context of the discussion in this paper, an academic expatriate is an international teaching staff who has been accepted to work by the university in a specific area of specialisation depending on their expertise (Othman, 2021). From that perspective, academic expatriates are said to be valuable assets from various fields of expertise. They are believed to play a vital role in an organisation's success because their recruitment aims to meet the goals of internalisation policy of higher learning institution (Wilkins & Neri, 2019).

Family Relationship

Family is defined as a group of individuals who have a familial bond through marriage or descendant who live together to lead a life and is led by the head of the family and consist of a life partner, children, and immediate family (Razak *et al.*, 2017). Based on research done by Othman, (2019), family issues are thought as the dominant factor to influence the expatriate task abroad. This results from the moral support from a strong family system that influences the expatriate's success in facing connection problems with the operational aspect while being in a different and strange culture from the origin country (Erogul & Rahman, 2017; Uddin & Bhuiyan, 2019; Canhilal, Canboy & Bakici, 2020). The implication of continuous support from their partner or other family members has enabled the expatriate to gain positive values and increase their self-confidence from the process of cultural assimilation of cultural adaptation (Yusoff *et al.*, 2018; Buettner-Wobst, Dorner, Dos Santos Dörholt, Hüttchen & Sahakiants, 2020; Goede, 2020). Thus, the family's role gives weight to expatriates' retention in the host country, which ultimately provides an advantage for expatriates who bring the family together compared to single expatriates or expatriates who are married but choose to leave their families in the country of origin.

The study conducted by Segaran & Yahya, (2018) and Goede, (2020) revealed that their spouses' point of view influenced the decision to be an expatriate among married expatriates from the destination country's choice and even the period of time that is felt appropriate for the well-being of their family. Family influence plays a major role in expatriates success or failure while working in the host country (Erogul, & Rahman, 2017; Shockley, Shen & Johnson, 2018; Othman, 2021). The majority of expatriates who do premature repatriation stems from family members' failure to adapt to the state in a new environment (Kim, 2015; Trompetter, Bussin & Nienaber, 2016; Filipic Sterle, Fontaine, De Mol & Verhofstadt, 2018; Mayrhofer, Pernkopf & Reiss, 2020). On the other hand, expatriates who show excellence in their careers also stems from the reliable support given by family members who can deal with foreign cross-cultural (Yusoff *et al.*, 2016; Nunes, Felix & Prates, 2017; Bayraktar, 2019; Fei, & Lim, 2020; McNulty & Brewster, 2020). This proves that the family's role can influence expatriate work's performance and in line with valuable experience in the context of personal life and work faced by expatriates and families.

Meanwhile, in his research, Yusoff *et al.* (2018) and Buettner-Wobst, *et al.* (2020). also emphasise family support relationship whether from the spouse, children or even parents in ensuring the sustainability of the expatriate career in the host country. Among the emphasis are emotional and moral support from the family when facing challenges at the workplace (Uddin & Bhuiyan 2019; Goede, 2020). Moral values such as enthusiasm, motivation, and positive opinions increase expatriates' confidence while dealing with issues at work. Another study focusing on the same issue by Razak, Othman, Yusoff & Mohd Suki, (2016) found that expatriate spouses' compatibility with the new environment is influenced by elements such as economic stability generated from expatriate's income as international employees. It also includes non-financial benefits such as family insurance, children's education, and employment opportunities for expatriate couples.

Apart from having an open-minded partner towards a new life in the host country, the employer's initiative to help expatriate and their family face the country's life challenges could make them appreciate the working opportunity there (Rashid Aziz, 2014; Bakel & Salzbrenner, 2019). Annual events, such as family days involving expatriate family members to some extent, indicate that the expatriate's presence receives attention and concern from employers and local employees (Canhilal *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, the comfort of the work community relation network could guarantee remuneration and reciprocity from expatriates in the form of service excellence. The implications of this can be to reduce the turnover rate and reduce cases of premature repatriation among expatriates in an organisation (Cho, Hutchings & Marchant, 2013; Abdien, 2019; Goede, 2020; Mayrhofer, Pernkopf & Reiss, 2020).

Theories on family role and influence in guiding the expatriate decision to migrate abroad have been made by Van Hear, Bakewell & Long, (2017) The result from the study proved that the significant party who influence the final decision of expatriate for independent expatriates are the spouse, children and parents. Apart from that, influence also comes from close relatives, especially among older family members. In the interviews conducted, it was revealed that the expatriate often associated his family lineage and family history with the action taken to become an independent expatriate. Among the clarification given were that family members wanted the expatriate to make life changes that could guarantee the family's economy and happiness. The real motive for the encouragement and support is seen as the catalyst for the independent expatriate in making the final decision to be an expatriate.

Issue related to the assimilation problem faced by the expatriate children has been discussed by De Sivatte, Bullinger, Cañamero & Gomez, (2019) with reference to the children's age level when the expatriation ensues. Children who were in the pre-schooler group tend to adapt easier and quicker. Whereas, expatriate adolescent children face difficulties adjusting to the new environment besides having severe cultural shock worse than the minors. The nature of exploring new things has added to the problems that arise, especially in dilemmas and self-identity conflicts. However, the diverse backgrounds and early education factors applied in children also have different implications for cross-cultural responses. Thus, the significant social structure encompasses not only the family but also the friendship which influences the friendship bond.

Friendship

Friendship is the essence of the discussion by Othman, (2019) who puts the importance of having good social networking with the local employees in generating a conducive workplace environment. In this context, expatriates are individuals who have high dependence to ensure harmony in the workplace is able to give an advantage to their acceptance in the host country (Rocke, 2017; Shaikh, & Ahmad, 2018; Stoermer, Luring & Selmer, 2020). Extensive elements of friendly relations can also put expatriates in a comfortable position to compete competitively and produce quality work (Abdien, 2019). Increased job satisfaction can be utilised with the close cooperation of various parties, which in turn encourages expatriates to shoulder their responsibilities efficiently and with dedication (Rocke, 2017).

Research conducted by Paul, Marloes & Marc, (2016), also supports the element of friendship as one critical aspect to avoid expatriate alienation and marginalisation in the local working community. Even social interaction, regardless of citizenship, is considered the main driver for an organisation to achieve close personnel relations in generating unity at the workplace (Bayraktar, 2019). Expatriate retention in an organisation refers to the comfort of the expatriate performing work routines in a conducive environment (Rocke, 2017; Shaikh, & Ahmad, 2018; Abdien, 2019; Stoermer, Luring & Selmer, 2020). The spirit of cooperation and tolerance can be enhanced by holding events such as family days, staff dinners, and extracurricular activities in the form of team cooperation. Support from colleagues and healthy competition are believed to be motivators that contribute to outstanding performance and declining premature repatriation among expatriate (Cho, Hutchings & Marchant, 2013; Abdien, 2019; Goede, 2020; Mayrhofer, Pernkopf & Reiss, 2020).

Comments on the issue of friendships are explored in depth by Rocke, (2017) in his paper, which suggested that support from local workers to international staff is an essential element that creates a conducive atmosphere in the workplace. Cooperation between two groups of workers from different countries can be utilised by understanding and respecting each other's cultures. Social support indicates that international staff is accepted as part of the human resources moving towards the same organisation's mission. Dependence on each other creates a support network system that is "Supportive Network," which contributes towards not only the adaptation of expatriates abroad but also provides a meaningful experience. Reciprocity from close relationships among employees will continue until expatriates migrate to other countries or return to their home countries.

Research Methodology

This research applies the in-depth interview method with reference to the phenomenology of family ties and friendships and expatriate experiences in the host country. The case study selection as the study design is to pioneer in-depth research on the occurrence of an event associated with environmental interaction of a social unit consisting of individuals, certain groups, organisations, or local communities (Yin, 2009). The research was conducted by utilising qualitative methods of in-depth interviews with 30 academic expatriates selected from four Malaysia public universities.

The case study design is an option to ensure that all issues raised in in-depth interviews with respondents can be utilised comprehensively where the details of the information are able to be understood more clearly (Thomas, 2011). Based on the researchers' perspective who feel the appropriateness of choosing an intrinsic type case study is due to the need to intensively explore the migration phenomenon of academic expatriates from all over the world to the destination of the host country which is their priority. Based on the type of case study design, the selected sample size is small to provide space for the study respondents' views on the issues raised (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016).

The sampling technique was used by taking into account the respondents' characteristics, which could fulfil the aim of the study set by the previous researcher (Cresswell, 2014). Sampling in this case study aimed to refer to a group of the self-initiative expatriate population employed as academic staff in Malaysia public universities. Four public educational institutions have been identified and labelled in numbers: University 1, University 2, and University 3. While the respondents' criteria include the following characteristics, which are (a) resided at least a year in Malaysia with valid working visa, (b) has been offered a position as academic staff and has renewed the service contract. (c) an expatriate who takes the initiative in expatriating and (d) works full time and is not classified as an exchange staff between the university or those on sabbatical leave.

The application of the semi-structured interview method in the context of this study gave the researcher an advantage to obtain richer findings with the indications of facial expression, tone of voice, gestures and body language presented by the respondents. The question and answer session with the respondents are more open to get their honest opinions without restricting their freedom to voice their views. The priority of this semi-structured interview selection is the advantage in favour of the researcher to interview the respondents in-depth and the opportunity to get specific feedback on the issues raised by the respondents.

Most of the respondents are expatriates who have extensive experience in expatriation, which allows the exploration of selected issues that are expected to provide valuable data for this study (Flick, 2014). Next, the compilation of raw data stored in audio form goes through a transcription process to convert it into text form. The categorisation of themes was done carefully and repeatedly until all the transcripts of the respondents involved in this study were completed. This step is an important process in analysing qualitative data. Finally, dominant and subsidiary themes are formed to further clarify the study (Silverman, 2013).

Table 2 lists the demographic profiles of study informants containing variables of gender, age, marital status, and educational level. This study involved a total of 30 respondents, of which

21 were male, and the remaining 9 were female study informants. The majority of the study informants involved range between 40 to 49 years; 12 participants or 40.0 percent. Eight participants or equivalent to 26.7 percent were of the aged 50 to 59 years. There were five participants who were at the aged of 60 years and above, which is 16.7 percent. About 13.3 percent or four participants were between the age of 30 to 39 years. While, the rest is between 20 to 29 years old and is equivalent to 3.3 percent. The majority of study informants consisted of those who were married, as many as 18 participants, which accounted for 60.0 percent of the total study participants. Whereas, the remaining 40.0 percent or 12 participants are still single. All study informants involved in this study have the highest education level, namely Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.).

Table 2: Study Informant Demography Profile

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	21	70.0
Female	9	30.0
<i>Age (Year)</i>		
20-29	1	3.3
30-39	4	13.3
40-49	12	40.0
50-59	8	26.7
>60	5	16.7
<i>Status</i>		
Single	12	40.0
Married	18	60.0
<i>Education Level</i>		
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	30	100.0

Result of Study

Family influence on the host country's environment adaption is related to 18 out of 30 married respondents. All respondents agreed that the influence element from family includes the spouse, children, and immediate family as an important justification in knowing the local community's culture to facilitate the process of adaptation of their cultural environment in the host country.

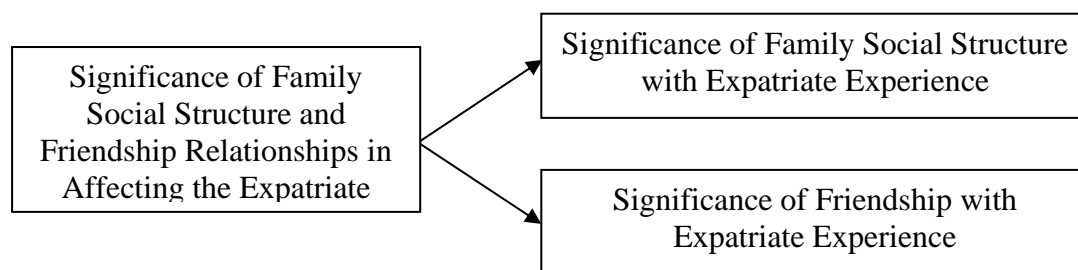


Diagram 1: Signification of Family Social Structure and Friendship in Influencing the Expatriate Experience of Malaysia Public University Academic Expatriate

Table 3 shows that several respondents agreed that the decision to expatriate involved personal family social structure relationships such as the spouse, children, family, and friend.

Table 3: Significance of Family Social Structure with Expatriate Experience

University 1	University 2	University3
Academic Expatriate 2	Academic Expatriate 11	Academic Expatriate 22
Academic Expatriate 5	Academic Expatriate 13	Academic Expatriate 23
Academic Expatriate 6	Academic Expatriate 15	Academic Expatriate 25
Academic Expatriate 7	Academic Expatriate 17	Academic Expatriate 28
Academic Expatriate 8	Academic Expatriate 16	Academic Expatriate 29
	Academic Expatriate 18	Academic Expatriate 30
	Academic Expatriate 20	

Narrative selection resulting from in-depth interviews presented, aims to unravel thoroughly the commonly understood expatriate family's role as a complex process involving a group of individuals striving to meet common goals. Some of the feedback shows the level of assimilation among expatriate families, such as stress and hardship and the sharing of meaning that brings a new interpretation to each family member's positive attitude to succeed in international expatriate tasks in the host country.

“Yes, my husband is Malaysian. That helps me in adapting to this country. I am quick to learn my husband's culture because of his positive attitude, which constantly helps me learn, speak, and hold out to the hot weather. Even though my husband had resided abroad for quite some time, however, the situation is different. He was in a community that speaks English, where the language is a universal language learned in school. On the other hand, I had to learn the local language, which is a bit awkward to learn at this age. I am not very good at learning a new language. Moral support from my husband helps, and I really appreciate it.” (Academic Expatriate 2)

Based on Academic Expatriate 2, full support from family is the primary influence in the process of the expatriation (Razak *et al.*, 2017; Yusoff *et al.*, 2018; Bayraktar, 2019; Mayrhofer, Pernkopf & Reiss, 2020). Academic Expatriate 2's husband coincidentally is a local where she is assigned. Thus, the assimilation process did not pose any problem for her. If there were a problem, all the hurdles and the challenges of being in a new culture different from her origin country would not be anything new as she has the husband's support. The impact of continuous support from her life partner makes her successful in adding positives values in herself. Every action gets weighted by her husband to make the best decision. This scenario is a bonus that is unlikely to be earned by everyone who is an expatriate.

“My wife is a local from Sabah. I have never heard of Sabah until I met her. Yes, correct. My wife's role is significant because as an outsider coming to a new country, almost all issues and problems can be overcome the best that I could with my partner beside me. From my point of view, the support system helps in all aspects. For example, opening a bank account in Malaysia is easier when you are married to a local. In fact, to subscribe to Astro is different if you are a citizen or an expatriate. For an expatriate like me, this is among the challenge that I successfully face easily due to my partner's constant support. I have been thinking of residing here long term because that would definitely be my wife's main choice.” (Academic Expatriate 8)

The view puts forward by Academic Expatriate 8 is that the decision to expatriate for a married expatriate is usually influenced by their life partner (Yusoff *et al.*, 2018; Richardson & Wong, 2018; Othman, 2020; 2021 Mohd Shah *et al.*, 2021). This is evident when Academic Expatriate 8 puts the decision not only in terms of the destination of the country of choice but also the period of time deemed appropriate for the well-being of their family. In this context, the wife's influence manages to play a vital role in the success or failure of expatriate while working in the host country (Paul, Marloes & Marc, 2016; Goede, 2020). Most of the independent expatriates make a premature repatriation decision where the expatriate terminates the service contract by returning to the country of origin earlier than the expiration date due to the failure of family members, especially spouses who are unable to assimilate themselves with the new culture (Cho, Hutchings & Marchant, 2013; Abdien, 2019; Goede, 2020; Mayrhofer, Pernkopf & Reiss, 2020). But for Academic Expatriate 8, the opposite happens because the partner is a local.

“A local spouse is beneficial. I think most of my officemates are closer to my husband compared to me. This makes me feel a bit left out. However, the benefit is I was not always questioning if I want to know about things or culture. My husband is always the informer and my walking dictionary. What I can say here is that my husband is the key to my process of learning Malaysian culture. As the saying goes, ‘Tak kenal maka tak Cinta’. But in my case, the saying is full proofed not only in my personal life but also in going through the expatriate experience with the person that we love.” (Academic Expatriate 11)

Academic Expatriate 11's views are similar with Academic Expatriate 15, where the emphasis on family support, especially from the husband, guaranteed expatriate career sustainability in the host country. Among the emphasis highlighted were emotional and moral support from the husband when facing challenges at the workplace (Van Hear, Bakewell & Long, 2017; Yusoff *et al.*, 2018). Moral values were given to me to fire up my spirit, boost my motivation, the sharing of positive views indirectly increase my self-confidence in work and with the local community.

“Correct and it is undeniable that family is essential. In fact, having a life partner makes our life comfortable, especially when we are going through expatriation abroad. The issues that our life partner cannot adapt to the new environment is very trivial. When our partners agreed to migrate to other countries to find work and help the family, this means that they were willing to go through the ups and down together with their partners. The sacrifice of an expatriate is to work in the host country with a lot of work challenges. Therefore, the sacrifice from the partner and family are in giving the moral support to adapt the best they could in another country.” (Academic Expatriate 15)

Academic Expatriate 18, on the contrary, finds that expatriate's family compatibility with the environmental atmosphere is influenced by the element of economic stability that is the expatriate income such as non-monetary benefits like international education standard, the opportunity for the partner to secure a job, family insurance, and tickets to go back for a holiday (Yusoff *et al.*, 2016; 2018; Atif, Palwasha & Syed Muzaffar, 2017; Abdien, 2019; Othman, 2020). When the family is open to the new life and with the organisation's proactive attitude in ensuring the expatriate and the family can successfully overcome the cross-culture hurdles, they will appreciate the concern given by increasing their loyalty to the organisation (Yusoff

et al., 2016; Nunes, Felix & Prates, 2017; Bayraktar, 2019; Fei, & Lim, 2020; McNulty & Brewster, 2020).

“In my opinion, the family issue is universal. Each one of us has a family, whether we are expatriate or not. For expatriates like us, the most significant challenges are bringing our family in the development of our career. For example, most of the expatriates will bring their wives and children with them abroad. In that context, an expatriate state can be seen as something that is made more comfortable with the family's presence or the other way around. Usually, the family will give full support because the family's view must be considered first before deciding to expatriate. However, it is not impossible that one family member fails due to unavoidable factors that they cannot accept, such as surrounding and culture.” (Academic Expatriate 18)

Academic Expatriate 22 expressed appreciative feedback as he was happy when the employer took into account the participation of the expatriate family in the organisation's annual events such as tele-match, retreat ad outbound, family day and others. Family's participation indicated that the presences of expatriate and their family receive attention from the organisation and co-workers. The implication of this tight bonding resulted in excellent services performed by the expatriate. The impact could lessen the premature repatriation cases among expatriate in an organisation (Cho, Hutchings & Marchant, 2013; Abdien, 2019; Goede, 2020; Mayrhofer, Pernkopf & Reiss, 2020).

“One of the things that attracted my attention after arriving in Malaysia is when the university authorities where I work held an orientation gathering not only for the international staff but also for the families too. This bonding through such a gathering is a good initiative to ensure that the family do not feel as if they are alienated. Having many acquaintances among their partner's office mates helps them understand theirpartner's career and work. One of the benefits is that the expatriate family meets another expatriate family, and a community of expatriates with matching similarities and aspirations is established.” (Academic Expatriate 22)

Academic Expatriate 29 thinks that apart from the family's solid support system, which made the assimilation process more manageable, the compatibility with the surrounding and the host country culture need to be emphasised (Nunes, Felix & Prates, 2017; Fei, & Lim, 2020). When the welfare of the children is taken care in terms of education and healthy culture acceptance, it makes them feel comfortable living in the host country (Mohd Suki, Othman, Yusoff & Mohd Suki, 2014; Trompetter, Bussin & Nienaber, 2016; De Sivatte *et al.*, 2019). In a statement by Academic Expatriate 29, “ the benevolence of the employer to provide free international schooling to expatriate's children is a bonus that we are hoping for” he envisages his gratitude for himself for the opportunity to provide quality education to the children through his work as an academic in the country. Academic Expatriate 29 also refers to the conducive environment as the main reason for not making premature repatriation as most of them are satisfied with the hospitality given by their employer (Othman, 2020; Mayrhofer, Pernkopf & Reiss, 2020).

“Children are an important factor in maintaining my relevance in the working world as an academic. The numeration received here is higher than in the home country. With that income, I am able to give the best education to my children. In fact, the employer's benevolence in providing free international standards education to expatriate's children is a bonus that we

were hoping for. Sending the children to an international school means exposing them to a conducive and quality international situation for them to learn. No problem of feeling alienated from the culture or influenced by unhealthy phenomena due to its monitoring is under university management. Thus, the benefit is gained not only from the education quality but also from the association of different races.” (Academic Expatriate 29)

Friendship Relations Influence with The Host Country towards Expatriate Adjustment and Adaptation

Friendship relations is the essence of the study respondent's discussion, which focuses on the priority of good social connection with the co-workers and the local community. Based on the in-depth interview with academic expatriates in three chosen Malaysia public universities, 13 out of 30 respondents voice out a similar view on the significance of friendship relations in influencing the expatriate experiences. Table 4 below relates the expatriate view to the broad element of friendly relations is capable of placing the expatriate in a comfortable position to be in a conducive environment either at work or in personal life.

Table 4: Significance of Friendship Relation with Expatriate Experience

University 1	University 2	University3
Academic Expatriate 1	Academic Expatriate 12	Academic Expatriate 24
Academic Expatriate 3	Academic Expatriate 13	Academic Expatriate 25
Academic Expatriate 5	Academic Expatriate 14	Academic Expatriate 26
Academic Expatriate 9	Academic Expatriate 18	Academic Expatriate 27
Academic Expatriate 10		

Referring to selected interviews, statements supporting the relationship between having a friendly relationship at work and social networking with the local community as one of the determinants for expatriate success in adapting to the host country environment are presented (Kim, 2015; Othman, 2019). The following is a narrative excerpt from the respondents' interview regarding the significance of friendly relations and the adjustment of expatriate adaptation

“It is common for us to gain a friendship that would last for a long time. In my opinion, friendship is an essential element to make your life comfortable in the host country. Imagine if you are someplace new where everything is different. Further you do not have any friends or neighbours that you can socialise with. Life would be lonely. It will be different if we develop a relationship with the local community until we are considered as part of them. This privilege will make your relationship with the local community closer and provide you with positive values that generate our harmony. Thus, in my opinion, a good relationship with the host country can influence the process of our family's adaption.” (Academic Expatriate 1)

Academic Expatriate 1 places friendship as a long-term social network. From his perspective, expatriates have a high reliance on harmony in treading a career in a foreign country, and their career depends on their acceptance in the host country (Rashid Aziz, 2014; Bayraktar, 2019). Academic Expatriate 1 also emphasises the special element of friendship with the local community as a criterion that should be achieved by the expatriate to give them the advantage to be in a comfortable position and able to compete competitively and produce quality work (Kim, 2015; Canhilal, Canboy & Bakici, 2020; Othman, 2021).

“It doesn’t feel like I have been here for ten years. With a conducive life at work and in the office has made me feel comfortable with people and this place. At the beginning of my arrival here, I felt I was a tough individual to adapt to a new environment and culture. But the thought went completely wrong. The One Malaysia concept introduced by the government, makes the community here have an open attitude in accepting expatriates like us. The background of Malaysia as a multi-ethnic country is also convenient. Such diversity has made the element of harmony as not awkward to be practised in this country. I am very grateful for choosing Malaysia as my second country.” (Academic Expatriate 5)

Academic Expatriate 5 also agrees that the friendship element is a needed value in a multi-racial community in Malaysia. Expatriate is often classified as a fragile community group with a foreign environment. Thus, the alienation element can be eliminated with the presence of expatriates in a multi-racial society that practice harmony regardless of background and skin colour. Malaysia is a country which has a high tolerance level. This also contributes to the retention of an expatriate in this country.

“Of course, I have help from my local friends to adapt here. But one thing that I learned was the process of adaptation starts from within our self. When we work hard to learn something, then the results of our effort is fruitful. Anybody would help those who want to change for the better. For me, it is a lifelong learning. They are more willing to help than we expected. Another thing about the Malaysian community is that they are very friendly and helpful. They are also a nation that loves recognition for their culture and custom from outsiders because that is what they are proud of.” (Academic Expatriate 10)

Academic Expatriate 10 commented on the issue of friendly relations by suggesting support from local workers to international staff comes from the seriousness of expatriates to work together to learn the culture and have a friendly and tolerant nature (Shaikh, & Ahmad, 2018; Abdien, 2019; Othman, 2019). These characteristics ensure a friendly relationship that can create a conducive atmosphere in the workplace and their daily lives. Unity between the two continents can be utilised for the well-being of expatriate life during the period of residency abroad. Such moral support gives more meaning and lasting friendship until expatriates return to their homeland.

“For me, working as a lecturer is the most suitable platform to test your endurance in changing from being in the old notch, especially in terms of our mind. Each day we teach something new to the university’s students. The attitude of receiving new knowledge should be applied to educators like us because that is the basis of an educator’s nature. Many of my expatriate friends asked me the tips for to be an expatriate who is liked by other lecturers. My father is my lifelong teacher. Besides having a good personality, I was taught that an open mind to accept something new is the key to success and retention abroad.” (Academic Expatriate 12)

“My mother has reminded me always to be humble and caring. That advice is handy when you are an expatriate. You would easily get friends and will not be shy of help from people around you when you needed them. One more thing that I learned was the more you give, the more you will gain. As an expatriate, what I give to my students is my vast experience in my speciality, which I acquired as a lecturer in various countries. With my colleagues, the local lecturer, I am able to share my knowledge to develop their career. My involvement in the university’s

management is seen as an advantage in implanting the university's policy and procedures." (Academic Expatriate 14)

In general, Academic Expatriate 12 and 14 interpret and define the expatriation encountered as having a close relationship with the traces of educational stems, and personal experience practised throughout the expatriate service in the host country. For example, the statement from Academic Expatriate 12, "My father is my lifelong teacher" and from Academic Expatriate 14, "My mother has reminded me always to be humble and caring." Once again it depicted that the interpretation took into account the social structure role such as family and friendship are related to the significance of expatriate experience in the host country,

"Since young, the concept of friendship is an important component in shaping oneself. I think someone with a lot of friends is someone with a lot of wealth. It is not because wealth can make someone happy, but friends can make us feel appreciated, needed and secured. Friendship makes our social relationships more meaningful. In the workplace context, a lecturer who can accept friends with various characters usually will hold the management position because they have the talent to manage human resources, and it is seen as an advantage. Friends also contribute to the assimilation process faster among expatriate. An expatriate who manages to pass through the language, culture and environment hurdles is usually helped by friends who are in the same process of assimilation." (Academic Expatriate 24)

Next, Academic Expatriate 24 focuses on issues related to family influence and friendship relationship of an independent expatriate in deciding to go through expatriation abroad. In the context of expatriating, an individual cannot run from involving personal relationships with other people, especially life partner, children, family and friends (Razak *et al.*, 2017; Yusoff *et al.*, 2018; De Sivatte *et al.*, 2019; Othman, 2019; Buettner-Wobst *et al.*, 2020; Mayrhofer, Pernkopf & Reiss, 2020). Each individual's commitment to family relationships indirectly plays a role in providing differentiated decision-making justifications to migrate out of the country of origin, let alone selecting the destination country where the expatriate and family that accompanies them will be living. From this perspective, the definition of relation and social interaction means understanding of the expatriate's motive and at the same time, taking into account each family member involves in the decision-making.

"It is true that we understand the culture and blend in the culture through the surrounding people. It is not logical if we learn a culture only by reading or watching on television. Everything that involves culture would involve people or the community that upholds it. We see, we understand, and we follow. That is cultural assimilation. Culture is very subjective, but it is also very accepting, that is why culture can change with civilisation. Some cultures remained a culture. But there is the culture that remains with those who practice it. For me, culture is something that we should be proud of because it represents our identity. In discussing the culture of a country, it relates to the acceptance from outsiders. The expatriate community is often associated with the cultural acceptance by foreign communities towards host country that reflects the sustainability of the whole." (Academic Expatriate 27)

In regards to positive friendship relationship, the last statement by Academic Expatriate 27, highlights that this includes respecting cultural differences and being friendly with the local community (Kim, 2015; Atif, Palwasha & Syed Muzaffar, 2017; Richardson & Wong, 2018). In his view, being humble and open minded indirectly portrays the expatriate's flexibility with

the social relationship in the local community. In fact, Academic Expatriate 27 feels that by showing interest in reading and social media only does not increase the desire to learn about a culture. Thus, he suggested that in order to understand the local culture and its way of thinking, one has to be part of the community.

Conclusion

This paper argues for an understanding of social structure issues such as family and friends in influencing their expatriate experiences while in the host country. Results of the study proposed that influence, support and family commitment are the most dominant factors influencing the decision to migrate abroad and subsequently continued up to the level of adaptation in foreign culture and new environment. Family's interpretation to the meaning of expatriate justify the expatriate decision to remain in the host country. Moreover, moral support from friendship provide positive indication on the performance shown by expatriate at work context throughout the execution of international assignments.

Continuing from that, the results of the study also reported that solid support from the family is a determining factor that leads to the adaptation of expatriates into new cultures in the host country. There are a handful of families who love the challenges of a new life that have positive implications in expatriate experiences for expatriates and families. The desire to try new things, excitement to venture and having high tolerance attitude to a new environment has catalyzed the cross-culture assimilation. When cultural shocks are dealt with together as a family unit then the perceived barriers will be light and provide a meaningful experience for each family member. The effect of that is not only the shared pleasure but also the experience that is worth adding to the bond between them. Moral support from the aspect of family encouragement can change behaviour and affect the emotional stability of expatriates, especially in the process of adapting to a new work environment.

The study successfully explores the level of assimilation of expatriate families further by presenting ideas such as stress and hardship as well as sharing meaning that refers to the approach taken by expatriate family members during the expatriation period in foreign countries. Continuing of the same context, the study successfully explores the expatriate family's level of assimilation by presenting ideas such as stress and hardship, as well as sharing meaning which refers to the approach taken by expatriate family throughout their expatriate period abroad. The results of the study brought forward a new interpretation to the role of the expatriate family as a complex process where it involves only a group of individual who work to achieve the same goals. In that context, family background combined with a positive and pro-active attitude of each family member produces a commitment to a successful international expatriate duty in the host country.

Finally, the results of the study found that the ability to assimilate and a strong support system from family are the keys to success in carrying out the task abroad. Issues related to expatriate among man came from elements such as stress from their spouse, the pressure to go back to their home country as they refuse to live among the local community. Request from the family in their home country and even the issue of incompatibility of children schooling is said to be the cause of failure while working abroad. The empirical evidence resulting from this research further strengthens the allegations of family difficulties in adapting to different cultural environments being a major cause of premature repatriation resulting in losses on the part of employers.

The findings of the study conducted on expatriate academics in this study lead to the conclusion that family structure and friendship are two undeniably important elements. The narrative approach utilised in giving a true picture of the process of adjustment and adaptation shows the importance to these two components. While the limitations of this study are it does not focus on the citizenship of the informant where the findings may differ between informants from the same country. Apart from that, a family's influence could have a significant effect on expatriate's decision in choosing a career path especially the destination of the life partner and the children. Therefore, we see different results between the married expatriate to the single expatriate. Similarly, the short period of time in the host country, as well as the cultural gap between the country of origin and the host country can be an indicator of the results for different experiences. Finally, the contribution of knowledge in this paper is expected to be useful knowledge for the international staff community that places cultural elements of the host country as a catalyst for destination selection decisions and career retention abroad. From this point forward, the results of the study discussed can also be used as a guide for human resource management in improving the career offers of an academic expatriate in Malaysia public universities.

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