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## Self-Initiated Academics Work Adjustment: A Systematic Literature Review

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### Abstract

Expatriation abroad for work and leisure is becoming the norm these days. This necessitates individuals to adjust to life in their new destination and work environment. This paper focuses on presenting a systematic literature review of how the phenomena of Self-Initiated Academics (SIEs) adjust to their work environment. Method: A systematic literature search was conducted by examining articles published in the field of SIE academics. No restrictions were placed on the date of publication because of the nascent nature of the subject of study. The following electronic databases were searched, where language was restricted to only English: Business Source Complete, Academic Search Ultimate, Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO. Result: The result shows that SIEs face challenges that could affect their adjustment to life in a new country, culture, and work. Among these factors are family, local language proficiency, interaction with local hosts and expatriates, prior international work experience, and trainings that are provided at the workplaces. The differentiated treatment of expatriates based on their looks and the passport they hold by the HCNs (host country nationals) is a significant issue that was identified as well.

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**Keywords:** Work adjustment, self-initiated academics, expatriation, working abroad

## Introduction

The phenomenon of academics crossing international boundaries to work abroad is not new (Richardson & Wong, 2018). Higher education institutions in different countries recruit SIE academics for various reasons. For example, Saudi Arabia does not have adequately qualified indigenous personnel, thus recruiting academics from abroad is a necessity (Alshammari, 2012). However, for some countries, employing qualified individuals from foreign countries is a way to improve their international competitiveness (Trembath, 2016; Scurry et al., 2013). To provide clarity, Trembath (2016) identifies expatriate academics as people who work in higher education (HE) sector and have relocated abroad to teach and/or do research in a university with requisite legal requirements. Also, their duration of stay there is time-bound (Table 1)

**Table 1.** Trembath’s (2016, p.116) criteria for someone to be considered as an expatriate academic

All of the following criteria must be upheld	None of the following criteria are included
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have moved away from dominant place of residence (i.e., a long-term move)</li> <li>• Have moved across national borders</li> <li>• Employment is legal</li> <li>• Employment is time-bound (i.e., no intention to emigrate permanently)</li> <li>• Employment is related to teaching and/or research</li> <li>• Employment is based in a university</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travelers (i.e., they have not moved away from their dominant place of residence). For example, conference attendees, academics on sabbatical or fieldwork</li> <li>• Managers or administrators employed in universities whose employment does not include teaching, or researchers not employed in this role at a university</li> </ul>

The seminal study of Richardson and McKenna (2002) on academics’ self-expatriation highlights the motivation of SIEs. In their paper, they categorise expatriate academics as “mercenaries”, “explorers”, “refugees” or “architects”. Academics who are mercenaries are motivated by only money. This means that they relocate to destinations where they think they can develop themselves economically (Austin et al., 2014). Academics who go abroad as explorers are interested in learning new cultures and are not concerned about economic gains (Richardson & Wong, 2018). The architect academics expatriate from their home countries to develop and strengthen their careers. Academics who are classified as refugees are those who escape from boring routines or even from a toxic relationship (Richardson & McKenna, 2002). However, Wilkins and Neri (2019) are of the opinion that this categorisation cannot be rigidly placed because of the fluid nature of reasons that surround going abroad. An SIE can be an explorer and mercenary

at the time, or vice versa. Scurry et al. (2013) contend that expatriates can change their motivation, depending on their personal circumstances and the environment they are in. This implies that the architect SIEs can change to mercenaries if they find opportunities to develop themselves financially. However, these groupings may not be so clearly defined as people may be influenced by different things at the same time (Selmer & Lauring, 2015). For example, SIEs may decide to improve their economic positions, meet people from other cultures, and develop their careers, while fleeing from hard conditions in their countries (Kuzhabekova & Lee, 2018).

Selmer and Lauring (2013) conducted a research on 600 SIE academics from 60 countries, including those working in 35 Northern European countries. Accordingly, they assert that refugee reason for expatriation has a negative effect on work adjustment. This study tried to validate the qualitative study of Richardson and Mckenna (2002), and the result indicates that those escaping difficulties back in their home countries faced adjustment challenges. Selmer and Lauring (2013) speculate that the other reasons for moving abroad are pull factors. Nevertheless, they do not have as much effect on adjustment compared to refugee reason which is a push factor. Certainly, from the psychological decision making literature, emotion-oriented decisions are likely to have negative consequences because they are not thought through properly (Pham & Avnet, 2009). The study of Selmer and Lauring (2013) indicates the possibility of a negative connection between 'refugee' reason of academic expatriation and work outcome. This may be the reason why SIE academics from developing countries experience problems adjusting to their work environment. In reality, these SIEs move abroad because they do not have an alternative.

The challenges SIEs face may not be necessarily linked to motivating factors prior to expatriation. Some of these factors may manifest themselves while in the host country. For instance, some SIEs from less developed nations may face difficulties at work because they are treated differently due to their origin, language, and even the way they dress (Al Ariss & O'zbilgin, 2010). Thirlwall et al. (2021) argue that adjustment challenges which SIEs experience is context specific. In their study of SIEs in the UAE, they found that the main issue that hindered adjustment was language. This means being able to communicate in the language of the host country could solve some of the difficulties SIEs face in their work adjustment. However, in certain regions, such as the Gulf, the temporary nature of the residency permits given to expatriates make it hard for SIEs to fully learn the culture and language of the host countries (Alsharif, 2022). According to Singh et al. (2021), SIEs have a better chance of adjusting to their work when the employers clearly clarify the roles or task undertaken by each individual employee. This is particularly important in the Gulf countries because of the job indigenisation policies,

where home country nationals (HCNs) who may not have the requisite skills are employed to fulfil quotas set by governments. In doing these, organisations may be forced to not clearly allocate roles performed by different employees in order to accommodate the HNCs's inabilities to perform their duties. The lack of role clarity may generate anxiety and uncertainty for expatriates, which may be detrimental to their work adjustment. Austin et al. (2014) and Richardson and McKenna (2016) highlight the contextual nature of adjustment. Whilst SIEs in Europe may experience work adjustment problems due to their backgrounds, those in the Gulf have to overcome language and role clarity issues to be able to adjust. Dickmann et al. (2008, p.755) further argues that "context is an essential variable in understanding research outcomes".

There is a general low retention rate of SIE academics in the Gulf countries because organisations focus less on professional and academic development in this region (Tahir, 2022). The exploratory study of Tahir (2022) asserts that collegiality is a major factor that contributes to expatriate retention and adjustment among academics that work in universities in the UAE. The short-term nature of contracts given to SIE academics seems to undermine this fundamental factor and leads to academic flight. As confirmed by Kalmey (2022), SIE academics tend to seek help from people of the same background. Collegiality seems to exist among individuals who come from the same culture. For example, SIEs from Western Europe tend to associate with each other. Kalmey (2022) further adds that there is interaction between SIE academics and local academics. This negatively contributes to lack of adjustment and may inevitably lead to academics seeking work elsewhere.

As underlined by Agha-Alikhani (2018), due to the mobile nature of today's personnel, it is imperative to understand the subjective experiences of the diverse groups of people who work in different occupations abroad. Furthermore, the adjustment challenges these individuals confront is not general but contextual (Danisman, 2017; Fu et al., 2017). With this backdrop, this study will review factors that affect the work adjustment of SIE academics. Since this area of SIE research is relatively nascent and under-researched, this review will consider both qualitative and quantitative studies.

## **1. Literature Search Strategy**

The following electronic databases were searched, where language was restricted to only English: Business Source Complete, Academic Search Ultimate, Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO. There was no restriction placed on dates of publication to ensure all published research was retrieved. The following combinations of search terms were used to retrieve all possible relevant articles. First, the general key words "expatriate", "self-initiated", "academic", and "work adjustment" were used. Subsequently, additional

keyword combinations were integrated into the search to account for close synonyms. For example, “expatriate” or “expat”, “international worker” or “foreign worker”, “self-initiated” or “self-assigned”, “academic” or “professor”, “teacher”, “lecturer” or “researcher”, “work adjustment”, “work engagement”, or “work performance”, and “job performance” or “job engagement”. The application of the above search criteria resulted in the retrieval of 202 articles. This was supplemented by a secondary search for articles listed in reference lists but not identified in the original search, which led to further searches of specific researchers who are active in the field of SIEs academics expatriation.

### 1.1 Studies Screening Process

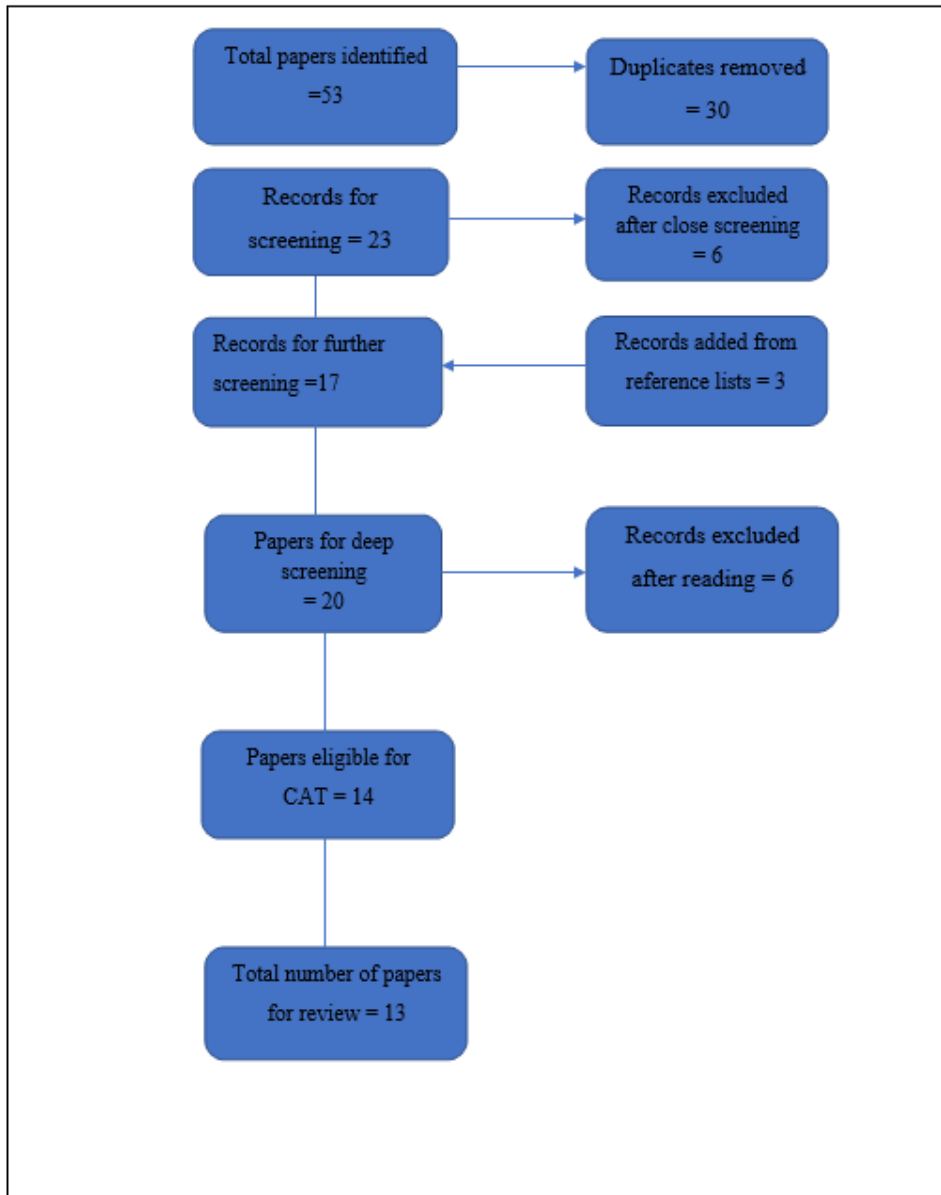
The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) (Moher et al., 2009) process was utilized to screen the retrieved documents (Figure 1). The inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1 and Table 2 respectively) were adhered to as well.

**Table 2.** Inclusion criteria

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SIEs academics</li><li>• Peer-reviewed materials</li><li>• English-language text</li><li>• Containing the search terms in title, abstract, and/or article</li><li>• Empirical studies</li><li>• Study addresses SIE academics work adjustment experiences</li></ul>
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**Table 3.** Exclusion criteria

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conference papers and study reviews</li><li>• Non-English studies</li><li>• Repatriates, refugees, students, sojourners, immigrants, expatriate spouses, assigned expatriates</li><li>• Book chapters</li><li>• Opinion, editorials, and news items</li><li>• Reviews of other studies that have been included</li></ul>
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**Figure 1.** PRISMA process for literature search and retrieval

## 2. Quality Assessment Process

The quality of selected papers was assessed using the critical appraisal tool (CAT), which was developed by Hawker et al. (2002). This assessment tool was chosen because it is useful with research that has varied data and different subject areas. This review has varied studies that utilised qualitative and quantitative methods.

The current research acknowledges that there are other quality appraisal tools that could have been suitable. A good example is the traditional levels of evidence (Canadian Task Force, 1979), which places more emphasis on randomised controlled trials. Another example is Downs and Black scale (Sousa et al., 2017), which uses a 27-item measuring scale. Since the current study focuses on studies that have heterogeneity, the use of hierarchies of scales classify studies that are not methodologically quantitative, are deficient, and without expert opinions.

The Hawker CAT uses nine evaluation principles across a research paper, where a score of 1 (very poor) to 4 (good) is allocated to different sections (Hawker et al., 2002). Therefore, a research article can have a general lower quality score of between 9 (very poor) to a higher score of 36 points (very good). The papers selected for this review were all evaluated using these criteria and the ones that had a score of twenty and above were added to the review (Firm et al., 2016). After using the Hawker’s CAT quality assessment tool, thirteen papers scored between 21 and 34 and were included in the final review for analysis.

**Table 4.** Review papers about SIE academics

Author	Date	CAT	Country	Method	Scope
1. Agha-Akhilani, B.	2018	33	Denmark	Qualitative	The study explores the adjustment experiences of 12 academics.
2. Alshammari, H.	2012	21	Saudi Arabia	Quantitative	The study evaluates whether previous and marital status affects SIEs working in a university. There were 207 academics from 2 universities.
3. Asif et al.	2020	24	Saudi Arabia	Qualitative	Describes the experiences of 13 non-western academics working in a university.
4. Austin et al.	2014	26	UAE	Qualitative	The study describes the motivation, satisfaction, and commitment of 33 academics working in 13 universities.
5. Danisman, S.	2017	28	Turkey	Qualitative	The study explores the attitudes of 18 participants from 13 different countries towards the culture of host country.
6. Froese, F.	2012	32	South Korea	Qualitative	The study explores the motivation and adjustment of 30 SIE academics from 30 different countries.

Author	Date	CAT	Country	Method	Scope
7. Fu et al.	2017	34	Hong Kong	Quantitative	The purpose of the study is to investigate organizational socialization aspects of 207 teachers from 4 English speaking countries.
8. Halim et al.	2018	22	Malaysia	Quantitative	The study investigates the adjustment of 101 SIE academics working in a university.
9. Isakovic and Whitman	2013	34	UAE	Quantitative	The study investigates the adjustment experiences of 207 academics working in 10 universities.
10. Richardson and Wong	2018	29	Malaysia	Qualitative	The study Explores the motivation and adjustment of 17 expatriates working in 4 universities.
11. Romanowski and Nasser	2014	28	Qatar	Qualitative	The study presents the experiences and conflicts of 20 professors.
12. Selmer and Lauring	2015	30	Nordic countries and the Netherlands	Quantitative	The paper examines the cognitive and affective reasons of 428 academics.
13. Selmer and Lauring	2011	31	Nordic countries and the Netherlands	Quantitative	The study investigates the marital status and work outcomes of 428 academics working in 34 universities.

### 3. Study Designs of Papers Identified

The current review identified 13 articles (Table 4) for final analysis. The papers were published between 2011 and 2020. This shows the nascent nature of SIE academics' research. In terms of the research methodologies that were used in the identified records, it seems studies that used qualitative methodology are slightly higher than those that adapted quantitative. While 60% are qualitative (Agha-Akhilani, 2018; Asif et al., 2020; Austin et al., 2014; Danisman, 2017; Froese, 2012; Richardson & Wong, 2018; Romanowski & Nasser, 2014), the other 40% are quantitative (Alshammari, 2012; Fu et al., 2017; Halim et al., 2018; Isakovic & Whitman, 2013; Selmer & Lauring, 2011; Selmer & Lauring, 2013). Interestingly, the selected research papers originated mainly from Europe (Northern Europe and Holland), the Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE), Turkey, and East Asia (Hong Kong, Malaysia and South Korea). The concentration of studies in these



countries means that universities employ many SIE academics. This may be an indication of the emerging nature of higher education in these countries and not having enough local talents to fill vacancies.

The sample sizes of the studies in the review vary, ranging from  $n=10$  to  $n=428$  (Agha-Akhilani, 2018). This is seen for a qualitative study (Selmer & Luring, 2015) that uses quantitative methodology. However, the research of Agha-Akhilani (2018) is a qualitative longitudinal study (first a sample size of 12 and then 10). Typically, in a qualitative research, the sample sizes are smaller (Asif et al., 2020). The larger population samples come from the non-qualitative articles (Isakovic & Whitman, 2013; Selmer & Luring, 2011). This is expected as qualitative research focuses more on details or deeper understanding of a phenomenon. On the other hand, quantitative research assesses a larger population for generalisation.

In relation to the objectives of the selected papers, the ones that utilised qualitative methods are exploratory (Agha-Akhilani, 2018; Froese, 2012), while others assessed the everyday feelings of participants (Austine et al, 2014; Romanowski & Nasser, 2014). The quantitative articles are cross sectional and assess different facets of adjustment among SIEs. For example, Selmer and Luring (2011) investigated the effect of marital status on adjustment, i.e., whether having a family around helps the adjustment process. In addition, Selmer and Luring (2015) further assessed the relationship between cognition and affectivity on work adjustment. Halim et al. (2018) and Isakovic and Whitman (2013) also investigated the experiences of expatriate academics in Malaysia and the UAE respectively.

#### **4. Factors that Affect SIE Academics Work Adjustment**

Getting used to life in a new country, culture, and work can be difficult (Richardson & Wong, 2018). Leaving home, family, friends, and familiar surroundings to move to a new country surrounded by new people comes with many challenges, including the inability of not speaking the language of the host country (Kalmey, 2022), dealing with unfamiliar bureaucracy in the host country (Singh et al., 2021), accompanying family members feeling unhappy (Froese, 2012), and work policies being different from home country (Thirlwall et al., 2021). These situations may eventually hasten the expatriates to return to their home countries earlier than planned. The next sections of the paper outline the issues that were highlighted previously in relation to the work adjustment processes of SIE academics.

##### **4.1 Competence of the Local Language**

Being able to comprehend the host country's language has been mentioned in the wider scholarship as being important in adjusting to work and a new country (Asif et al., 2020; Alsharif, 2022). This is because language

plays a major role in the way people make sense of their living environment. Getting exposed to the language of the host country may not only be a means of understanding its culture, but it also enables expatriates grasp crucial information. Some of this information can be critical in communicating with HCNs at work and interacting with the locals in the community outside of work. Danisman (2017) points to the positive relationship between understanding the language of the host country and adjusting to work. The author argues that language does not only help in interacting with the HCNs, but could have a positive influence on success at the workplace. The implication of the host country's language has also been raised by Richardson and Wong (2018). While commenting on the outcome of their research on expatriate academics in Malaysia, they argue that speaking or at least having some comprehension of the host country's language may aid both work and general adjustment. Froese (2012) established that SIEs with good Korean language ability are able to interact with HNCs, which may improve productivity at work. Certainly, mastering the host country's language has been described as an essential means of getting used to the immediate surroundings at work and outside work (Danisman, 2017). Halim et al. (2018), however, found that being able to understand the local language had no effect in how SIEs adjusted to life in Malaysia. This is because locals in Malaysia speak English. Isakovic and Whitman (2013) came to the same conclusion about the importance of Arabic language proficiency for expatriates in the UAE. They suggest that UAE is a country with many expatriates and English has become the lingua franca.

In relation to Saudi Arabia, Asif et al. (2020) affirm that Arabic language knowledge is extremely important. This is because as opposed to other Gulf countries, Saudis are conservative and homogeneous. Therefore, it is recommended that expatriates gain some understanding of Arabic language in order to interact with the locals and learn their culture (Richardson & Wong, 2018). Conversely, Alshammari (2012) mentions that there may not be a connection between being able to comprehend the host country's language and getting used to a new workplace. This may be partly explained by the fact that the participants in his research came from countries that speak Arabic. Froese (2012) further argues that the host country's language proficiency may not necessarily be a priority for certain category of SIEs. In other words, demographics, the individual's age, and length of stay may dictate the willingness to learn a new language. Thus, learning the host country's language may not be of priority for expatriates who are young because in most cases their duration of stay tends to be shorter. Furthermore, the literature indicates that knowing the language of the host country may not be of value in countries with large number of SIEs such as the UAE or in Malaysia where English is the primary means of communication (Danisman, 2017). However,

Tahir (2022) argues that comprehension of the host country's language is crucial in certain destination, including those countries with a large expatriate population. One of these countries is Saudi Arabia. Despite its sizeable SIE population, the use of Arabic language seems to be a main concern for many SIEs. The fact that the host country's language knowledge may be a precursor to adjustment depends on the environment where the expatriates live and work, thus pointing to the subjective nature of adjustment (Haslberger et al., 2014). Agha-Alikhani (2018) utilised the P-E fit model to demonstrate that the host country's language proficiency may not be a requirement to work adjustment because this depends on the person and their environment.

#### **4.2 Importance of Family**

The significance of family in relation to expatriate adjustment abroad is emphasised in the expatriation literature (Danisman, 2017; Selmer & Lauring, 2015). Danisman (2017) confirms that when the family is happily settled in the new country, adjustment becomes easier. She found that SIE academics who were accompanied by their family members felt more content with situations in the host country. Froese (2012) concurs with Danisman (2017) that the comfortability of the family helps expatriates adjust to their work abroad. His research in South Korea established that expatriates who had family members with them were more comfortable than those who did not have their families with them. The impact of family to adjustment is also established by Selmer and Lauring (2011). Their study found that faculty members who were accompanied by their families experienced better work outcomes and performances. The fact that SIEs relocate abroad on their own volition means they collaboratively plan decisions to relocate to a certain destination abroad with their family members, and this may be the reason why adjustment is easier (Haslberger et al., 2014). Froese (2012) adds that the spousal adjustment depends on specific factors of the host country. For example, in the Arab culture, it is normal for women to cover their heads and their bodies when outside their homes. However, getting used to this custom, which might seem peculiar to many SIEs, can be crucial. The study of Jackson and Manderscheid (2016) supports the argument that expatriate women who adapt to these Saudi customs tend to adjust better to life there, which could concomitantly assist the working spouse's adjustment.

#### **4.3 Previous Work Experience Overseas**

Prior work experience abroad is considered an important pillar that contributes to the adjustment of expatriates (Isakovic & Whitman, 2013). Halim et al. (2018) argue that SIEs who had prior foreign work experience tend to adjust easily to life in a different culture than those with no foreign exposure. Data from their research on SIE academics who came from various

countries to work in Malaysia indicates that academics who worked in other countries reported fewer adjustment problems. Living and working with HCNs and people from other cultures is what gives SIEs the confidence and means to cope with cultural situations both at work and outside (Halim et al., 2018). Surprisingly, Alshammari (2012) argues that there may be no relationship between previous foreign experience and adjusting to work. He attributes such an outcome to the complex and fluid nature of international cross-cultural adjustment. However, 81% of those who participated in his research spoke Arabic. Thus, it is evident that the mastery of the host country's language can have a positive impact on adjustment (Froese, 2012). However, Isakovic and Whitman (2013) add another dimension about the significance of the host country's language to work adjustment. According to them, it is not the length of exposure to a people's language but the quality of the experience. In other words, experience overseas has to be suitable and appropriate to what is needed by the SIEs. The importance of cultural experience over duration is also supported by Halim et al. (2018). They claim that SIE academics who worked in Indonesia (a country that is geographically and culturally close to Malaysia) before, adjusted to life in Malaysia. This may be due to the cultural similarities of the two countries.

Froese (2012) asserts that SIEs who had been exposed to Korean culture through individual interest and family connections reported better general and work adjustment outcomes. This is congruent with the research of Danisman (2017), which affirms that SIEs who marry from the host country are more likely to adjust than those who do not. In addition, Danisman (2017) contends that when the culture of the host and home country are similar, the adjustment process may be easier. Conversely, Selmer and Luring (2011) are of the view that cultural similarities between the host and home country may in certain situations be a detriment to SIEs. This is because SIEs may assume some cultural practices in the host country to be the same as their home country and as a result may not pay enough attention to some nuanced cultural situations in the new context. Invariably, these SIEs may not be able to fully adjust. According to Stoermer et al. (2019) and Haslberger et al. (2014), cultural exposure is particularly crucial in countries with homogenous culture, such as Korea and Japan. This supports the argument that context can be a major factor in adjustment. In other words, adjustment can be influenced by the environment and the individual's personality (Haslberger et al., 2014).

#### **4.4 Other Expatriates**

According to Black et al. (1991), interacting with the HCNs is a fundamental aspect to their adjustment model. However, Stoermer et al. (2019) and Agha-Akhilani (2018) opine that this may not be applicable in all contexts because adjustment is not only subjective but multifaceted too. For

instance, meeting other expatriates, for some people, can be as important as interacting with the locals (Bozionelos, 2009). Fu et al. (2017) support the significance other expatriates can have in adjustment and emphasise how crucial networking with other expatriates is, especially in terms of socialisation and emotional support. Furthermore, interacting with other SIEs can be an opportunity to share information about the host country's culture (Asif et al., 2020). Accessing local information pertaining to legal issues about the host country from other expatriates might be particularly useful for SIEs who generally do not get support from their employers. McKenna and Richardson (2016) recommend that employers should institute mentorship programmes at the workplace because SIEs feel more comfortable with other expatriates. This may not only help them navigate the work policy and procedures, but may be another route of getting information about the wider culture of the host community. While studying SIEs in Korea, Froese (2012) found that SIEs prefer to seek social support from people of similar backgrounds. Besides fellow SIEs, Asif et al. (2020) adds that students can be a good source of support and the teacher student relationship can be significant as well. SIE academics who not only immersed themselves in their students' work, but also engaged with them, reported better adjustment.

#### **4.5 Training at the Workplace**

Career-oriented HRM practices for new entrants to the workforce have been stated in the literature to have positive impact on the adjustment of SIEs (Fu et al., 2017). These practices introduce ways for the employers to show their appreciation to their new SIE workers, which fosters positive attitudes and work outcomes (Isakovic & Whitman, 2013). One of these practices is the provision of training. Certainly, training has been mentioned as a way of developing employees' skills and capabilities at the workplace and outside. Based on evidence from their research, Fu et al. (2017) assert that SIE academics who were given training by their employers in Hong Kong showed better adjustment capabilities. Therefore, they recommend that organisations who employ SIEs should provide thorough and clear trainings about what the new SIEs are expected to do. In addition, organizations should also encourage informal support system through the establishment of social networks. Froese (2012) attests that SIE academics employed by larger universities in Korea adjusted better than those from smaller universities. This could be because they provided longer and more complex cultural training. Also, bigger institutes of higher learning employ more SIEs, which create a community support bubble.

#### **4.6 Treating People Differently**

In their critique of adjustment as “being a point to be reached”, (Wilkins & Neri, 2019), in terms of a psychological comfort level, Hasleberger et al. (2014) suggest that adjustment experiences that people go through in a new country is underpinned by contexts because each individual’s interpretation of situations can be different. The complexity and context specificity of adjustment has also been supported by Austin et al. (2014). According to them, people from non-European backgrounds are treated differently in the Gulf countries, and this may affect the adjustment of these individuals. Another study from the same region had the same conclusion in the way non-Caucasian academics are treated (Romanowski & Nasser, 2014). Hence, this study argues that as opposed to their European colleagues, SIE academics of colour may be judged in a different manner because of their identity and the type of passports they hold. As a result of policies of this nature, it is not a surprise that academics from Asia and Africa may feel less valued. This stratified classification sometimes forces some academics who hold dual nationalities to use their adopted countries’ passports, for example, UK, USA, Canada, Australia, etc., to try to be at parity with their white colleagues in terms of equality and remuneration (Romanowski & Nasser, 2014). The study of Romanowski and Nasser (2014) further highlighted that some non-white participants narrated how they often identify themselves as nationals of Western countries so that the locals can accept and respect them. “Some faculty members may choose an identity that might not be the true core of their being but rather an identity that is sociably acceptable” (Romanowski & Nasser, 2014, p.662). From this quote, it is apparent that there may be positive discrimination towards certain ethnicities such as Europeans.

In relation to SIE academics in Saudi Arabia, the research of Asif et al. (2020) is in line with that of Austin et al. (2014) and Romanowski and Nasser (2014), which also identifies discrimination against academics of colour in Gulf countries. They argue that the participants of their research, who were all non-western academics, were nervous about their job security. These participants claim that HR policies in their institution are skewed in favour of those with Western citizenship. As a result of this perceived stratification of people based on the type of passports they hold, there is a general fear for their jobs. Thus, they are forced to work harder and be nicer to their managers. These academics feel such discriminatory policies negatively contribute to their ability to adjust. Interestingly, three studies from different Gulf countries (UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia) show that adjustment is not one size fit all, but can be influenced by context. Thus, stratified remuneration based on one’s nationality affects adjustment and may be specific to these regions and other Asian countries. Stoermer et al. (2019) found that discrimination against

expatriates is prevalent in countries with closed and homogenous cultures, such as Japan and South Korea.

#### **4.7 Personal Level Characteristics that Help in Work Adjustment**

Personal level features may be critical in the work adjustment process of SIEs (Agha-Akhilani, 2018). A good example includes the SIEs with personal drive to pursue careers abroad. Halim et al. (2018) assert that certain attributes, such as being open-minded can have an effect on work adjustment. Furthermore, personality traits, such as the ability to accept change and having positive outlook towards the new country and its people may provide a means to getting used to the new work environment. Froese (2012) found that SIEs with interest in certain countries and culture have capabilities to adjust than those driven by other things, such as finance and travel. Those who took part in the research of Froese (2012) stated that their previous interests in Korean way of life were the reason they were able to settle into their new country. Richardson and Wong (2018) came to the same conclusion about expatriate academics in Malaysia. Subsequently, those with pre-migration interest and those that had relocated from countries with geographical proximity to Malaysia reported better adjustment process than those who did not have these plans.

In relations to overcoming adjustment difficulties, SIEs tend to possess personal motivational drivers (Agha-Akhilani, 2018), which encourages them to not only look for employment overseas, but to persevere difficult situations. Froese (2012) suggests that there could be pre-disposing circumstances that makes people endure several conditions abroad. A good example is lack of employment and undesirable work conditions in the home countries of SIEs, which may necessitate SIEs to withstand harsh and discriminatory HR policies in host destinations. Through interaction with HCNs (Fu et al., 2017), SIEs tend to overcome adjustment difficulties. Danisman (2017) claims that in Turkey, SIEs academics who portrayed a willingness to meet and learn from the HCNs were able to overcome adjustment problems. In the context of Gulf, however, organizational HR policies sometimes curtail the interactions between expatriates and HCNs. Since expatriates are housed in protected compounds, the possibility of associating with the local population is almost impossible (Romanowski & Nasser, 2014).

### **5. Discussion**

There are a number of fundamental issues highlighted about the papers that were reviewed. As far as the study setting is concerned, it is evident that most of the studies were conducted in countries in Asia. However, 12 of the 15 papers emanated from countries in Asia. This might be due to the recent expansion of higher education institutions in these destinations (Asif et al.,

2020; Austin et al., 2014; Richardson & Wong, 2018). Also, the limited supply of qualified instructors in the host countries to teach in institutes of higher learning may have resulted in the high numbers of SIE academics working in these countries (Haslberger et al., 2014). Certainly, there has been a huge increase in the number of SIE academics wanting to work in universities in the Gulf to fill vacancies that could not be covered by the locals.

Another observation from the current review indicates that getting used to life in a new country may not only be subjective, but also quite complex and multifaceted. As argued by Agha-Alikhani (2018) and Stoermer et al. (2018), adjustment is not one dimensional as traditionally suggested (Black et al, 1991). This is because it can be influenced by the context where the expatriates live and work. Thus, what affects adjustment in one country may not apply in a different country (McKenna & Richardson, 2016). In addition, getting used to a new culture is varied and continuous (Farndale et al., 2019). Adjusting to life in a foreign country also depends on the individual expatriate as there are people who are inherently able to adjust, while others do not (Thirlwall et al., 2021). This portrays the subjective nature of adjustment as suggested by Haslberger et al. (2014). Therefore, there must be a fit between the persons and their surroundings. The confluence of the host country's culture, the individual's ability, policies at the workplace and other factors brings the claim of McKenna and Richardson (2007) to mind. According to them, adjustment is a "fluid" phenomenon which may never be realised. In other words, SIEs develop ways to cope with their situations.

## **6. Practical Implications**

The objective of this review was to investigate the factors that affect the work adjustment of SIE academics. The current review has identified the significance of comprehending the language of the host country (Alshahrani, 2022). Thus, it is imperative for employing institutions of higher learning to help academics develop some basic understanding of the host country's language. As suggested by Showail et al. (2013), comprehension of the host language may even be more critical in destinations whose culture is conservative and is closed to outsiders, such as Saudi Arabia and Korea. When a foreigner speaks the language of the host country, evidence points to the fact that HCNs go out of their way to welcome them and make them feel settled (Danisman, 2017). Family support has also been identified as a key pillar that positively contributes to work adjustment (Thirlwall et al., 2021). Employing organisation should help their SIE employees and families learn the language of the host country because this may stabilise the adjustment process and thus make the SIE stay longer.

According to the current review, possessing the right know-how and skills should not be used as a prerequisite for employment. Institutions in host



countries should consider employing SIE academics with prior foreign experience that is similar to that of the new country (Isakovic & Whitman, 2013). Having a foreign experience may be useful in expatriation, but when the gained experience is similar to that of the host country, it becomes more beneficial. Certainly, being familiar with the culture of the host country may give the SIE the repertoire to confront and adapt to situations that might otherwise have been challenging. Employing academics with experience similar to the host country may also help organizations save money in the long run that would otherwise have been used for cultural training. Related to having some experience of the host country's culture is the issue of discrimination based on ethnicity, colour, and place of origin. This review has found a compartmentalization policy that may be engrained in HR policies of Asian countries. The policy of remunerating SIEs based on their origins and the type of passport they hold can be demotivating, disheartening, and demoralising to many SIEs (Asif et al., 2020; Austin et al., 2014; Romanowski & Nasser, 2014). Inevitably, this may affect the productivity of these SIEs. Therefore, SIE academics that wish to self-expatriate to these countries should be made aware of this practice as it can be a shock upon arrival. Employing institutions should try to be upfront and candid with academics about this cultural practice so that people can know what they are getting into.

## **7. Limitation**

This study has several limitations. First, the nascent nature of SIE academics research may have limited the number of review articles. Future research could expand the search criteria and include more articles, books, and book chapters. Furthermore, most of the articles included are qualitative and the inclusion of more quantitative articles may have generated a different outcome. Second, the review was undertaken by only one researcher. This may have affected its depth and scope as most reviews are conducted by a group of researchers.

## **Conclusion**

Evidence from this review suggest that adjusting to life in a new country may be subjective and multidimensional (Hasslberger et al., 2014). Furthermore, adjustment is contingent on the context and the individual expatriate. Notwithstanding, the current review identified the need to find a fit between the SIEs and the environment where they live and work (Agha-Alikhani, 2018). Despite these realities, if individuals decide to self-expatriate at their volition, they may face various impediments, which is specific to a destination country. However, within the context of this review, having the ability to comprehend the language of the host country may be essential. This outcome is congruent with the findings of other studies (Asif et al., 2020;

Thirlwall et al., 2021). In agreement with Jackson and Manderschied (2016), the accompanying family of the expatriate is another important factor, especially for countries where the family unit is central to the culture, such as Saudi Arabia. In line with the study of Isakovic and Whitman (2013), this review emphasises the importance of having a previous work experience abroad that is similar to that of the host country. In addition, expatriates have to be realistic about the destination they are relocating to as there may be certain cultural norms that are difficult to deal with, such as remunerations that are based on ethnicity and the passport an individual holds.

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