

The Commonalities in Expatriates' Performance: Empirical Evidence from Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The common exchange of products, ideas, worldviews, and other cultural elements is what drives the process of international integration. There are numerous facets to this, and foreigners are vital to this evolving process in a number of ways. This change is influenced by several important factors. A few factors that affect foreign workers' performance in Pakistan are looked at in this study. To investigate the theoretical foundation for the study, the body of existing literature has been examined. Additionally, the theoretical scope was developed based on earlier research. 109 expatriates from four distinct sectors education, construction, telecommunication, and press and media were surveyed to gather their opinions in order to analyze the determinants. The analysis of multiple regression was used. The empirical data showed that a variety of factors, including personality traits, cross-cultural training, language proficiency, family-related concerns, and expatriate motivations, account for 67.3% of the variation in performance. In contrast to the others, personality traits play a very important role. The empirical data validated the hypothesis, which was supported by the correlation and regression analysis results. The study is subject to certain limitations, including a relatively small sample size and a restricted number of international organizations within Pakistan's sectors. The study, despite certain limitations, possesses numerous advantages associated with expatriate research. A significant feature of this research is its status as one of the pioneering investigations into expatriation within Pakistan. The practical implications of this research are substantial for international organizations, as it offers a comprehensive understanding of how various factors influence employee behavior and, consequently, organizational performance. This insight will assist organizations in considering these determinants when making informed decisions regarding expatriation in Pakistan. While there is a wealth of research on expatriation, contextual studies specific to Pakistan remain in their early stages. Such investigations, whether original or replicative, will greatly contribute to the promotion of effective human resource practices and stimulate further research in this domain.

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Introduction

Expatriation is a concept with a long-standing history, yet its theoretical framework has evolved significantly over the past thirty years, as noted by Mendenhall (1999). The phenomenon of globalization, coupled with a remarkable rise in the number of organizations pursuing international operations at the close of the 20th century (Hutchings, 2005, p. 557), has created a pressing need for individuals to adapt to foreign cultures. The necessity for expatriation arises primarily because international organizations often find it challenging to recruit local employees who possess the requisite managerial experience and technical expertise. Furthermore, conducting business in foreign markets presents not only complexities but also substantial costs (Toh&Denisi, 2003). The life of an expatriate is undoubtedly demanding, requiring individuals to be well-prepared to confront various challenges (Russell, 2006, p. 24). Achieving success in this context hinges on effective intercultural training. For organizations aiming to excel in their expatriation initiatives, it

is essential that their international human resources professionals support the adjustment of expatriates (Cieri, Dowling, & Keith, 1991).

Expatriation is defined as the process of relocating to a new international location and adapting to a different work environment. This transition affects not only the individual but also their spouse and family. Consequently, a significant number of expatriates encounter difficulties during overseas assignments, leading to failure (Toh&DeNisi, 2005). The repercussions of expatriate failure are substantial for both the organization and the expatriates themselves, resulting in direct financial losses, adverse effects on other employees, and strained relationships with customers, suppliers, and host government officials. For instance, research indicates that American companies experience annual losses of approximately US\$ 2 billion due to failures in international assignments (Pihl, Qi, Fjelkner, & Lange, 2005). Additionally,

expatriates and their families often endure psychological and social challenges as a result of these failures.

The inquiry into the reasons behind expatriate failure presents a significant challenge for international organizations. Scholars have identified various factors contributing to this issue, including a lack of cultural awareness (Harris & Moran, 1987), an overemphasis on technical skills (Tung, 1987), reluctance to engage in formal training (Glanz, 2003), and the pressures of adapting to a new and demanding environment (Brewster & Pickard, 1994). Other contributing factors include inadequate cross-cultural training (Selmer, 2006), insufficient organizational support (Rushing & Kleiner, 2003; Russell, 2006; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999), limited access to current information about local business practices, brief training durations, and a lack of assistance in addressing family-related issues (Forster, 1994). Role conflicts have also been noted as a significant concern (Mendenhall, Kuhlmann, Stahl, & Osland, 2002). Despite extensive research on this topic, a deeper understanding of expatriate failure can be gained by considering the perspectives of the expatriates themselves.

The aforementioned references highlight the extensive body of literature surrounding the topic and the significance of associated issues. Nevertheless, the majority of these studies focus on expatriates in the USA, Europe, or, to a lesser degree, ASEAN countries. There exists a notable deficiency in similar research pertaining to Pakistan. This study aims to address that gap and to encourage researchers to explore this overlooked area.

Literature Review

Expatriate selection

The process of selecting the appropriate individuals for specific roles, in adequate numbers, at the right time, and for the intended purpose has become a fundamental principle in human resource management. Research indicates that inadequate selection practices are associated with expatriate failures, which may manifest as premature returns or notable underperformance during assignments (Morley & Flynn, 2003, p. 43). There tends to be an excessive focus on technical competencies, often at the expense of cross-cultural abilities and the expatriate's family circumstances (Anderson, 2001; Mendenhall et al., 2002). It is essential to consider the expatriate's family in this selection process (Edkins, 1995). Hutchings (2002) suggests that organizations often approach selection in an 'ad hoc' manner; Anderson (2005) describes it as 'an irrational process' within organizations, while Ferraro (2002) argues that it is conducted 'hastily.' Consequently, a comprehensive selection process is necessary, one that takes into account factors such as extroversion and personal competencies, including stress management skills, empathy, language proficiency, and cross-cultural capabilities for both the expatriate and their family (Morley & Flynn, 2003).

Forster (2000) posits that the ability to adapt to new cultures is a critical element for the success of international assignments. The primary objective of training programs is to familiarize employees with the importance of cultural awareness and to help them adjust to cultural differences. Additionally, these programs aim to raise awareness of the inevitable psychological stresses that accompany the transition to living and working in unfamiliar environments (p. 65). Without such preparation, individuals may rely on their pre-existing behavioral patterns from their home country, which could lead to misinterpretations of their new surroundings and

result in significant challenges (McDonald, 2000, p. 20). Cross-cultural training encompasses various areas, including technical training, cultural sensitivity, regional studies, intercultural communication skills, practical knowledge, interpersonal awareness, language proficiency, tax regulations, governmental structures, assignment duration, and levels of engagement with local communities (Andreason, 2003; Gómez-Mejía, Balkin, & Cardy, 2007; Zakaria, 2000).

There is a scarcity of literature that evaluates the prevalence of established and recognized practices in this field. Nonetheless, some studies from approximately twenty years ago provide insight. For instance, Black and Mendenhall (1990) found that merely 30 percent of expatriates assigned to international roles received cross-cultural training before their relocation. This statistic suggests that the implementation of cross-cultural training is currently insufficient. Consequently, researchers (Ashamalla & Crocitto, 1997; Forster, 1994; Hutchings, 2003; McDonald, 2000) identify the lack of adequate cross-cultural training as a significant factor contributing to expatriate failure.

Performance

The remarkable expansion of international business has underscored the significance of the effectiveness of foreign managers (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001). Expatriate performance is characterized by the level of success expatriates achieve in their overseas roles, with high performance being associated with their ability to adapt well to both their job and the surrounding environment. It is anticipated that expatriates who are effectively acclimated to their work settings will execute their responsibilities abroad with greater efficiency (Kraimer et al., 2001). Scholars (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Mendenhall et al., 2002; Shim & Paprock, 2002) concur that cross-cultural training fosters an appreciation of various cultures, thereby enhancing expatriates' adaptability to foreign cultural contexts and improving overall operational effectiveness. Four categories of factors serve as indicators of foreign activity: technical skills related to work, personality traits or interpersonal skills, environmental influences, and family dynamics, including the adaptability of spouses and other family members (Pucik & Saba, 1998). A deficiency in any of these areas can significantly affect an expatriate's performance. Russell (2006) posits that positive experiences while abroad can lead to improved performance outcomes.

Success

Success for expatriates is defined as their ability to perform effectively and achieve objectives in foreign locations, which has emerged as a critical concern for organizations seeking to enhance expatriate success rates (Toh & Denisi, 2003). The success of expatriates is of paramount importance (Varma, Toh, & Budhwar, 2006). Key factors influencing this success include family circumstances, job-related expertise and motivation, interpersonal skills, adaptability, and cultural openness (Guthrie, Ash, & Stevens, 2003), as well as improved selection processes, preparation, training, and support during assignments (Cieri et al., 1991). Consequently, effective international management practices, such as ensuring appropriate reasons for expatriation, selecting suitable expatriates, and managing assignments properly, are essential (Black & Gregersen, 1999) (Ashamalla, 1998).

Failure

Failure in this context refers to any expatriate returning to their home country prior to the completion of their international assignment or being unable to perform their

duties effectively (Ashamalla, 1998). Anderson (2001) notes that the global literature on human resource management emphasizes the necessity of effectively managing the responsibilities of expatriates, as these roles demand both human and economic resources (p. 33). Despite this understanding, Varma et al. (2006) argue that numerous organizations struggle to manage their expatriation programs successfully. Mitigating expatriate failure is crucial, as expatriates represent a significant financial investment for companies, and their failure can lead to challenges not only for the individuals involved but also for the organizations themselves. Nevertheless, a universal solution to this issue remains elusive. International organizations must adopt best practices in their overseas assignments. For instance, Tung (1987) recommends that managers at the outset of their assignments be exempt from managerial responsibilities, which can help prevent errors stemming from misunderstandings of cultural differences. It is noteworthy that the failure rates of expatriates in developing countries (70%) are considerably higher than those in developed countries (25% to 40%) (Varner & Palmer, 2005).

Culture shock

International business inherently involves the collaboration of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, necessitating daily cross-cultural interactions (Varner & Palmer, 2005). Research conducted by Jun, Gentry, and Hyun (2001) indicates that many expatriates face challenges when transitioning between cultures. Culture shock is defined as an "expatriate's reaction to a new, consequently different environment" (Zakaria, 2000, p. 496). This phenomenon arises from the misinterpretation of various cultural signals in foreign settings, which can lead to inappropriate behaviors; the larger the disparity between the expatriate's home culture and the host culture, the more pronounced the anxiety (Black and Mendenhall, 1990). Mendenhall et al. (2002) further assert that merely residing and working in a foreign culture can induce significant stress, stemming from uncertainty, information overload, and a perceived loss of control (p. 139). Nearly all expatriates encounter some level of culture shock, and the intensity of this experience correlates with the individual's need to adjust to a new environment. This adjustment can pose a substantial barrier to success in international assignments, necessitating effective strategies for overcoming it (Russell, 2006, p. 45). Forster (1994) emphasizes that cross-cultural training and skill enhancement are crucial in equipping expatriates to manage culture shock effectively.

Sims and Schraeder (2004) identify five key factors that influence the culture shock experienced by expatriates. These factors include the training received by expatriates, their demographic characteristics, their personal and dispositional traits, the extent of organizational support available, and their technical competencies. Culture shock can occur in any country, and Pakistan is no exception.

Family factors

The significance of family is emphasized in expatriate literature, as "an expatriate's family and spouse also undergo the adjustment process" (Russell, 2006, p. 78). Family constitutes a critical element that affects expatriates' job performance; therefore, "the selection plan should also include the expatriate family" (Ashamalla, 1998, p. 56). Research indicates that the intercultural adjustment of spouses and family members can have a beneficial impact on the overall

intercultural adaptation of expatriates, as well as on the decisions and actions of their partners (Andreason, 2008). It has been reported that approximately 60 percent of unsuccessful assignments can be attributed to challenges in family adjustment (Sims & Schraeder, 2004). Consequently, international organizations must provide comprehensive training for their overseas personnel to prepare them for the challenges of their new environments. Such training should focus on socio-cultural and psychological readiness to enhance their success in international assignments (Zakaria, 2000).

Personality characteristics

The personal attributes of an expatriate play a crucial role in determining their effectiveness in international assignments. While identifying specific personality traits can be challenging, international organizations frequently assess the cross-cultural compatibility of candidates when selecting individuals for overseas business trips (Pihl et al., 2005). Key personality traits that are often considered include cultural sensitivity, empathy towards others, a readiness to embrace the challenges associated with multicultural environments, and, perhaps most significantly, a willingness to undertake international assignments (Lee, 2007). It can be concluded that personal characteristics are positively correlated with the performance of expatriates. An expatriate who is adaptable, culturally aware, empathetic, and prepared for overseas missions is likely to excel in their roles abroad, thereby enhancing the overall adjustment process for foreign nationals.

Theoretical Framework

According to the literature review, the following factors have been identified as independent variables influencing expatriate performance: (1) selection of expatriates, (2) training prior to departure, (3) training after arrival, (4) language proficiency, (5) personality traits, (6) family-related considerations, and (7) motivation (see Figure 1)

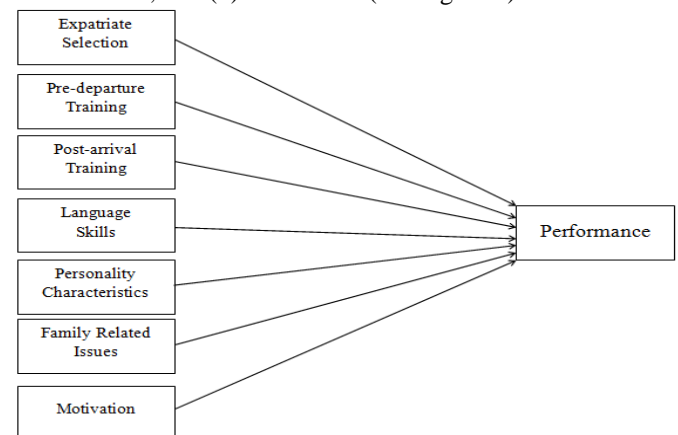


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the study

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- I. What is the necessity of cross-cultural training for organizations?
- II. Which factors influence expatriate performance and contribute to their success or failure?

The framework outlined aims to empirically examine the interdependencies within international business organizations in Pakistan. The hypothesis proposed is as follows:

Hypothesis: The performance of an expatriate is affected by factors such as expatriate selection, cross-cultural training, language proficiency, personality traits, family dynamics, and motivation.

Methodology

Procedures

A questionnaire was created for the study, grounded in a theoretical framework developed through an extensive literature review. The formulation of individual questions was informed by the work of other scholars (Russell, 2006; Selmer, 2006; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000, 2001). The questions were tailored to align with the specific objectives of the current research. Data collection took place across various international organizations located in cities such as Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, and Peshawar in Pakistan. The questionnaire, accompanied by a cover letter outlining its purpose, was administered in person. Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed to expatriates, resulting in the return of 113 completed questionnaires, of which 109 were deemed fully suitable for analysis. This resulted in a response rate of 55%.

Measures

Selection Criteria: This section comprises seven items. The questions address aspects such as 'specific knowledge and skills necessary for the position', 'level of motivation', 'individual traits', 'proficiency in language', and 'awareness of cultural differences'. Participants are invited to respond using a 5-point scale, where 1 indicates 'never' and 5 signifies 'mostly'.

Pre-departure Training: This section consists of six items, which include: 'language instruction', 'environmental orientation', 'cultural sensitivity', 'interpersonal skills', 'technical proficiency', and 'development of cross-cultural competencies'. Participants can respond on a 5-point scale, with 1 representing 'least important' and 5 denoting 'most important'.

Post-arrival Training: This section includes four items, namely: 'cross-cultural training related to the environment', 'adaptation to the workplace', 'engagement with the host community', and 'adjustment to the non-work environment'. Respondents are asked to provide their answers on a 5-point scale, where 1 means 'strongly disagree' and 5 means 'strongly agree'.

Language Skills: This section features five items, which encompass: 'comprehension of the host country's language', 'language proficiency and performance', 'enhancing communication', 'aiding in the understanding of the host culture', and 'learning social etiquette'. Participants are requested to respond using a 5-point scale, with 1 indicating 'least important' and 5 indicating 'most important'.

Family-Related Issues: This section comprises four elements: 'support from family or spouse', 'family adaptation', 'spouse's willingness to relocate abroad', and 'training for family adaptation'. Participants were asked to rate the importance of each item on a 5-point scale, where 1 indicates least important and 5 signifies most important.

Personality Characteristics: This section consists of six elements: 'ability to handle uncertainty and stress', 'flexibility', 'social skills', 'openness to local recommendations', and 'emotional maturity'. Participants rated the significance of each characteristic on a 5-point scale, with 1 representing least important and 5 denoting most important.

Expatriate Motivation: This section includes five elements: 'desire to relocate abroad', 'support from local staff', 'satisfaction with salary', 'job security', and 'overall willingness to continue'. Respondents rated their agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale, where 1 indicates strong disagreement and 5 indicates strong agreement.

Expatriate Performance: This section encompasses seven elements: 'motivation', 'adjustment', 'cultural awareness', 'interpersonal sensitivity', 'technical skills', 'productivity', and 'completion of assigned tasks'. Participants rated the importance of each item on a 5-point scale, with 1 signifying least important and 5 indicating most important.

Demographic information collected included: 'age', 'education', 'nationality', 'field of expatriate work', 'gender', 'marital status', and 'occupation'.

Results

Profile of respondents

SPSS 18 was utilized for the analysis of descriptive statistics. Nearly half of the participants (47 percent) were aged between 30 and 45 years, while 28 percent were under 30, and 23 percent were over 45. Approximately 90 percent of the respondents had completed at least 16 years of education. The largest demographic group was from China, comprising 35 percent, followed by Turkey at 28 percent, with the remaining 37 percent from various other countries. These included Iran, Afghanistan, Georgia, France, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Argentina, Japan, and Azerbaijan. In terms of professional background, the majority of respondents were employed in the education sector (37 percent), followed by telecommunications (24 percent), media (16 percent), and other fields (23 percent). Concerning gender distribution, a significant majority were male, accounting for 84 individuals or 71 percent. In terms of marital status, most respondents identified as single (45 percent), followed by those who were married with children (32 percent) and married without children (23 percent). Regarding occupations, the largest group consisted of educators (32 percent), followed by managers (25 percent), engineers (19 percent), consultants (14 percent), and others (10 percent).

Reliability analysis was conducted to assess the dependability of the scales employed for each measurement, aiming to determine the generalizability of the scales in a different context. All scales exhibited substantial reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha exceeding 0.8.

Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted utilizing Pearson correlation to examine the relationships among the variables. The findings are summarized in Table 1. This table indicates a moderate correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variables. Notably, personality traits exhibit higher values on the scale, underscoring their significance. Conversely, language skills reflect lower values on the scales. The observed low correlation between the dependent and independent variables may be attributed to the fact that the majority of expatriates are proficient in English, which is the primary language used in all offices, and is also commonly spoken by the local population in these cities.

Multiple regression analysis

Given the presence of six independent variables that impact the dependent variable, we have conducted a multiple regression analysis. The R^2 value obtained is 0.673, indicating that 67.3% of the variation in performance can be attributed to the seven independent variables. Notably, personality characteristics exert a positive and significant influence on expatriate performance, with a beta coefficient of 0.395. This is succeeded by expatriate motivation, which has a beta value of 0.242. Other factors include family issues, language skills, post-arrival training, expatriate selection, and pre-departure training, with respective beta values of 0.218, 0.182, 0.145,

0.076, and 0.042. The findings from both the correlation and regression analyses lend empirical support to the hypothesis.

Discussions

The existing body of literature regarding expatriate performance has identified several influencing factors. This study examined a selection of these factors and provided empirical evidence based on a limited sample size. The findings indicated that elements such as the selection process for expatriates, their cross-cultural training at various stages, language proficiency, family dynamics, personal traits, and motivation significantly affect expatriate performance. A thorough country-wise analysis revealed that expatriates from China and Turkey exhibit greater adaptability in Pakistan, feeling more at home than their counterparts in the sample. This adaptability may be attributed to the strong relationships these countries maintain, devoid of significant geopolitical tensions. The historical, strategic, and commercial ties between these nations suggest that cultural, social, political, and religious factors play a crucial role in expatriate adjustment. Notably, Chinese expatriates often display unique characteristics, such as not relocating with their families or having fewer children, which may further facilitate their adjustment. These observations align with the findings of previous researchers (Andreason, 2008; Russell, 2006; Sims & Schraeder, 2004).

Expatriates entering a new geographical environment frequently encounter culture shock, which can stem from various factors. A critical consideration is the degree to which an expatriate can manage this experience. Personal attributes such as resilience to stress and uncertainty, sociability, emotional sensitivity, and interpersonal skills are vital in this context. Individuals who score highly in these areas tend to experience fewer difficulties in adjusting, which in turn positively influences their performance. According to Guthrie et al. (2003), these characteristics are significant contributors to successful expatriation.

The current study further emphasizes the significance of cross-cultural training (CCT). When asked about the importance of such training, approximately 75% of respondents indicated that CCT is highly relevant and

significantly impacts expatriate adjustment. These findings align with the conclusions of several researchers (Ashamalla, 1998; Braud & Anderson, 1998; Hutchings, 2003; McDonald, 2000), who argue that organizations aiming to prevent expatriate failure must acknowledge the critical role of cross-cultural training.

The fundamental component of any human resources initiative is the human element itself, with motivation being a critical aspect of this element. Without the motivation of expatriates, achieving positive outcomes remains a challenge. This assertion is supported by empirical evidence. It is essential for international organizations to focus on enhancing the motivation of their workforce. Additionally, language has been shown to impact the effectiveness of expatriates, particularly in contexts where interpersonal relationships are prevalent, such as in education and media.

To ensure successful expatriation, Black and Gregersen (1999) recommend several strategies: expatriating for appropriate reasons, selecting the right individuals for expatriate roles, and managing expatriate assignments effectively. Following the rationale for expatriation, the selection of the most suitable candidate is crucial throughout the process. The empirical findings of the current study underscore the significance of selection, corroborating earlier research (Anderson, 2001; Edkins, 1995; Hutchings, 2002; Morley & Flynn, 2003).

Future Research Recommendation

The present study is thought to have established a conceptual basis for expatriation in Pakistan. Subsequent research should broaden the study's scope to encompass a larger sample size, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, it is essential to incorporate two significant variables: religion and security, which would provide a more comprehensive perspective on the matter. Furthermore, conducting qualitative studies with the same variables is necessary to obtain more nuanced insights. One potential avenue for research could involve a comparative analysis of expatriation in relation to other Asian or Western nations.

Table 1. Pearson Correlations

Item	Mean	S. D	Y1	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7
Y1 Performance	3.78	0.78	1.00							
X1 Expatriate Selection	3.63	0.64	*0.47	1.00						
X2 Pre-departure Training	2.08	0.33	*0.44	*0.41	1.00					
X3 Post-arrival Training	3.51	0.73	*0.51	*0.33	*0.50	1.00				
X4 Language Skills	3.66	0.82	*0.30	*0.22	*0.31	*0.30	1.00			
X5 Family Issues	3.66	0.89	*0.47	*0.30	*0.43	*0.50	*0.44	1.00		
X6 Personality Characteristics	3.70	0.65	*0.53	*0.56	*0.60	*0.63	*0.58	*0.70	1.00	
X7 Expatriate's Motivation	3.67	0.75	*0.40	*0.40	*0.42	*0.51	*0.54	*0.70	*0.60	1.00

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Conclusion

The objective of the present study was to elucidate and analyze the experiences of expatriate performance in Pakistan. The findings of this research offer valuable insights into the factors influencing expatriate performance. Empirical evidence suggests that various elements, including personality traits, expatriate motivation, family dynamics, language proficiency, cross-cultural training, and appropriate selection criteria, significantly impact expatriate performance to differing extents. This aligns with prior studies (Andreason, 2003; Hutchings, 2003; Mendenhall et al., 2002; Rushing & Kleiner, 2003; Shim & Paprock, 2002). Nevertheless, expatriation remains an area that warrants further investigation, particularly in contexts such as Pakistan. Consequently, it is anticipated that this research will serve as a valuable resource for international organizations, offering a comprehensive understanding of this complex issue and assisting them in considering these factors when making informed decisions regarding expatriation in Pakistan.

The narrative does not conclude at this point. There remains a significant opportunity to explore and seek deeper meanings and insightful analyses. This research focuses on a limited selection of cities in Pakistan, specifically Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, and Peshawar, which limits the applicability of the findings. It is essential to broaden the scope of such studies to encompass the entire nation. While it is often asserted that Pakistan possesses a largely uniform culture, this is not entirely accurate. There are substantial cultural disparities between Karachi and Peshawar, two cities situated approximately 1200 kilometers apart. Incorporating perspectives from expatriates residing in these cities would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of expatriation in Pakistan.

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