

Repatriation of academics: organizational support, adjustment and intention to leave

Robinson James

*Department of Human Resource Management, University of Jaffna,
Jaffna, Sri Lanka, and*

Theophilus Azungah

Department of Management Studies, Bolgatanga Polytechnic, Bolgatanga, Ghana

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine the influence of academic repatriates' perceived organizational support, adjustment and external employment opportunity on their intention to leave.

Design/methodology/approach – The data were collected from Sri Lankan academics who returned to their home university after completing their work (teaching/research) abroad. The repatriates who involved in teaching and research for one or more years abroad were included in this survey.

Findings – Results indicated that repatriates' both the perceived organizational support had an important role to play in the prediction of repatriation adjustment and intention to leave. In turn, academics who adjusted to their repatriation better were highly likely to stay at their home university. In addition, repatriates' perceived organizational support decreased their intention to leave through adjustment. In addition, when repatriates had trouble in adjustment and perceived high external employment opportunities, they reported higher intentions to leave the university than those who perceived fewer external employment opportunities.

Research limitations/implications – This study relied on cross-sectional and self-reported data and was conducted with small number of sample (112).

Practical implications – For the academic institutions, this study will help to clarify their role in managing repatriation adjustment and develop appropriate organizational systems that can facilitate repatriates to better adjust to their repatriation which, in turn, reduces their intention to leave. This study signifies the role of management in retaining repatriates.

Originality/value – This study further contributes to the current discussion on repatriation and moves this discussion to academic repatriates. This study, particularly, discusses the issues of retaining repatriates in a Sri Lankan context as a developing country where attracting and retaining academic repatriates are more challenging tasks for universities.

Keywords Repatriation, Academics, University, Adjustment, Intention to leave

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

The labor market in academia has become more international than in the past, and many universities look to the global market to find talented academics to increase their competitive position. However, this has created many challenges for recruiting universities. As universities are suffering from a shortage of talented academics (Gilliot *et al.*, 2002; van den Brink *et al.*, 2013; Isakovic and Whitman, 2013), the global market for them has become highly competitive and academics are more likely to move from a developing country to a developed country, and move from a low ranked university to a high ranked university. These trends are unfavorable for universities in developing countries. Above all,

universities, particularly universities in developing countries, expect their members to be highly committed and contribute to their university, but recruits from the international market may be less committed (they may be highly committed to their field), and they tend to leave when they find a better opportunity elsewhere.

Therefore, to ensure their sustainable growth, many universities have taken responsibility to develop their talent pool (Enders and Kaulisch, 2006; Kaulisch and Enders, 2005). For example, governments or universities in many countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Ghana and Iran encourage academics to gain overseas experience. In such countries, governments invest a substantial amount of money to allow their university academics to gain overseas experiences in teaching and research. In addition to the opportunities provided by their universities, academics also take their own steps to acquire international experience in teaching and research, and expect that such international experience will improve their career prospects in their institution.

Government and universities in developing countries have taken many steps to encourage the returns of academic to their home university. For example, the home university/government grant study/research leave, financial assistance, and assures their position/job upon their return. In addition, academics are required to sign an agreement with their university ensuring that they will return to their university and serve for a specified period. Consequently, large number of expatriated academics return to their home university (repatriation). Literature has highlighted the fact that unsuccessful management of repatriation leads to employees suffering from problems of adjustment which result in stress and loss of motivation at work (Greer and Stiles, 2016; Suutari and Brewster, 2003). This situation leads to adverse consequences, for example, high turnover and low performance have been observed among repatriates. Academic repatriates may be more inclined to leave the organization when they experience unsatisfactory adjustment (re-integration) since their academic career (with international experience) can be very marketable outside the current employer (Bauder, 2015; Jepsen *et al.*, 2014; Richardson and McKenna, 2002).

Both universities and repatriates have expectation in relation to repatriation. Achievement of expected returns for both organizations and repatriates can be possible when repatriates re-integrate to their organization well and stay with. Inability to retain repatriates hampers the expectations of both organization and repatriates (Chiang, van Esch, Birtch, and Shaffer, 2018; Greer and Stiles, 2016; James, 2018; Oddou *et al.*, 2008; Valk *et al.*, 2014). Thus, unsuccessful adjustment is a potential hurdle for retaining top talent and making use of this in the organization. This, in turn, hampers the successful process of internationalization of a university and its competitive position.

Retaining repatriates has become more challenging to organizations (Baruch *et al.*, 2002; Brookfield, 2015; Chiang *et al.*, 2018; Stroh *et al.*, 1998). Repatriates feel they are in a new environment and experience feelings of uncertainty, loss of control and stress. When they have insufficient resources to reduce that uncertainty and stress and increase control over the environment they are in, they may find adjustment difficulties and intend to leave the organization (Black *et al.*, 1992). Organization support as a resource can facilitate repatriates to better adjust their repatriation and intend to stay at their home organization.

For academics, the availability of external employment opportunities has increased beyond the current employer (Richardson and McKenna, 2002), and academic institutions seek talent in global markets by providing unique benefits such as attractive remuneration packages and flexible working time. When repatriates have trouble in the adjustment process, they may think about capitalizing on these benefits (Isakovic and Whitman, 2013).

Although, since the last decade, research scholars have paid attention to the expatriation of academics and causes and consequences of expatriation adjustment (Jonasson *et al.*, 2017; Richardson and McKenna, 2002; Selmer and Luring, 2009, 2011, 2013; Trembath, 2016), the repatriation of academics has not yet been sufficiently discussed in the literature (Garson, 2005; James, 2018). Particularly, there is no study investigate the influence of organizational support, adjustment and external employment opportunities on turnover intention among academic repatriates.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate:

- the role of academic repatriates' perceived organizational support on adjustment and intention to leave; and
- the role of adjustment on academic repatriates' intention to leave.

This study also aims to examine the role of perceived external employment opportunities together with adjustment, on repatriates' intention to leave. Contemporary literature on repatriation and career management highlights increased external employment opportunities for repatriates is the primary cause of repatriates' intention to leave (Inkson *et al.*, 1998; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2002). But, the current study proposes that when repatriates find difficulties in their adjustment process their perceived external employment opportunity can accelerate their intention to leave rather than just predicting it.

This study further contributes to the current discussion on repatriation and moves this discussion to academic repatriates. For the academic institutions, this study will help to clarify their role in managing repatriation adjustment, and to develop appropriate organizational policy that can facilitate repatriates to better adjust to their repatriation which, in turn, reduces their intention to leave.

Hypotheses

Perceived organizational support and repatriates' intention to leave

Positive association between perceived support and turnover intention among repatriates has been well documented (Bonache, 2005; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007). The positive relationship between perceived organizational support and intention to leave can be explained through equity theory too (Adams, 1965). According to equity theory, repatriates compare their work situation with those of employees without international experience. Repatriates feel that they have valuable international experience, and they are more valuable assets of an organization compared to local employees. In other words, repatriates feel that they have more to offer than others have. Thus, they expect more favorable treatment from the organization than local employees. They expect career advancement opportunities and recognition for their newly acquired skills and knowledge. If their expectations are not fulfilled, they may feel inequity and intent to leave the organization.

At present, most of the universities have developed policies and practices to manage their staff like corporate employees (Holland *et al.*, 2007; Lorange, 2006). When HR policies and practices are related to recognizing and respecting repatriates' global expertise and their career success, academic repatriates may make use of the opportunities within their organization rather than think of leaving the organization. Given that, one can perceive organizational support could influence repatriate's intention to leave negatively. Thus, this study proposes that:

- H1. Perceived organizational support of academic repatriates is negatively related to intention to leave

Perceived organizational support and adjustment

Repatriation transitions are anxious and stressful, and create surprise and uncertainty (Black, *et al.*, 1992; Harvey, 1989; Stroh *et al.*, 2000). A successful re-socialization process facilitates repatriates to adjust (better fit) to the organization's environment. According to organizational socialization theory (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) organizational support reduces uncertainty associated with adjustment, and thus it can facilitate repatriation adjustment through uncertainty reduction. The empirical research on the influence of organizational factors on repatriation adjustment is lacking, remarkably, there is no such research among academic repatriates.

Talent and performance management has become a strategic HRM agenda of many universities (van den Brink *et al.*, 2013). Universities adopt objective approaches to evaluate the performance of academics, and reward them accordingly. Even though repatriates have more opportunities to market their talent abroad they return to their home university expecting that they can take advantage of their global expertise to achieve their personal and career aspirations at their home university. When universities are supportive to repatriates, repatriates are more able to satisfy their repatriation expectations which enable them to handle their repatriation related stress. According to organizational socialization theory and socialization resource theory, perceived organizational support increases learning enables repatriates to overcome repatriation challenges and stress. Given that, one can expect that perceived organizational support leads to better repatriation adjustment:

H2. Perceived organizational support of academic repatriates is positively related to their adjustment

Adjustment and intention to leave

An unsuccessful process of adjustment leads to repatriates' feeling stress and loss of motivation at work (Black *et al.*, 1992), alienation (Adler, 1981), uncertainty and loss of control (Black *et al.*, 1992), which are the antecedent conditions of employees' turnover intention (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, when repatriates are unable to increase their feeling of satisfaction and motivation at work, increase certainty and their feeling of control, they are more likely to intend to leave the organization. In other words, better repatriation adjustment reduces the repatriates' intention to leave the organization (Suutari and Brewster, 2003; Vidal *et al.*, 2007). Confirming this argument Lee and Liu (2006, 2007) found that adjustment difficulties were a strong and significant predictor of repatriates' turnover intention.

Research on the relationship between repatriation adjustment and intention to leave among academics is lacking. However, contemporary literature on internationalization of higher education highlights that academics need not depend on a single employer for their career advancement (Richardson and McKenna, 2002; Jepsen *et al.*, 2014), and thus one can assume that when academic repatriates experience unsatisfactory adjustment they are more likely to intend to leave their organization. Therefore, based on the theoretical explanation and empirical evidence found in research on corporate repatriates' adjustment this study assumes that better adjustment of academic repatriates reduces academic repatriates' intention to leave:

H3. Adjustment of academic repatriates is negatively related to intention to leave

The above discussion clearly highlights that when employees perceive that they are supported by their organization, they are more likely to adjust to their repatriation and

intend to remain at the organization. Therefore, the relationship between organizational support and intention to leave can be explained as such: when repatriates perceive that they are supported by their organization they adjust to their repatriation better, and better-adjusted repatriates are less likely to intend to leave the organization. It suggests that the relationship between organizational support and intention to leave is partially because of the adjustment. Therefore, this study proposes that:

- H4. The relationship between perceived organizational support of academic repatriates and their intention to leave is mediated by their adjustment

Perceived external employment opportunities and intention to leave

An academic career has become more boundaryless due to a growing international market for academic staff positions and competition for talent. Particularly, at present, national academic boundaries have been blurred; the mobility of academics has been increased between institutions and countries (Altbach and Lewis, 1996; Jepsen *et al.*, 2014) and “academic careers draw validation – and marketability – from outside the present employer” (Richardson and McKenna, 2002, p. 776). Saleem and Qamar (2017) found that perceived alternative employment positively influence turnover intention of academics. Universities, which invest little towards in-house training for their own staff, often find talent externally and are offering more benefits to their new recruits. In addition, repatriates may feel when they enter into the global market they can easily move from one university to another university where they can find more opportunities for personal and career success. Therefore, external employment opportunities always are more attractive to academic repatriates than the opportunities available at a home university for them. Given that, when academic repatriates perceive that they can get a better job outside their organization they are more inclined to leave the organization:

- H5. Perceived external employment opportunities of academic repatriates is positively related to their intention to leave

Academics with international experience have more opportunities in the global job market (Jepsen *et al.*, 2014; Richardson and Zikic, 2007; Selmer and Lauring, 2011). In addition, academics perceive that they are responsible for their career: They drive their career, and they re-invent their career from time to time when they change and/or their environment is changed. Academics’ expatriation experiences change their knowledge, skill and attitudes, and they search for opportunities which better-fit their newly acquired knowledge, skill and attitudes.

Academics, who expect that they can find suitable career openings at their organization, return to their home university. Repatriates who have trouble in adjustment, experience stress, dissatisfaction, loss of control, and uncertainty, all of which hamper the academics’ repatriation expectations and their personal and career success. Thus, when academic repatriates have trouble in the adjustment process, they may think of leaving the organization to make use of their external opportunities for their personal and career advancement. Hence, this study presumes that although academic repatriates’ intention to leave is eventually due to the stressful experience of repatriation, repatriates’ intention to leave can be accelerated by their perceived external employment opportunities:

- H6. The relationship between adjustment and intention to leave of academic repatriates is moderated by their perceived external employment opportunities

Methods

Sample and data collection

This study used Sri Lankan academic repatriates as sample of this study. Sri Lankan universities have a long history dating back to monastic institutions. The formal university system which evolved after the establishment of a single unitary University of Ceylon in 1942 has expanded to 15 Universities and 17 Higher Educational Institutes. At present, Sri Lankan universities are a mixture of the western model and a localized context bound system evolving from the social, political and economic route of post independent Sri Lanka (Samaranayake, 2011). Thus, the Sri Lankan government and universities, like other universities and governments in developing countries, are very keen to upgrade their universities to reach a high international standard and meet national needs.

The data were collected from Sri Lankan academics who returned to their home university after completing their work (teaching/research) abroad. The repatriates who involved in teaching and research for one or more years abroad were included in this survey. After getting employer consent, the questionnaires were sent to the repatriates who had been identified as fitting the criteria. Respondents' anonymity was maintained by not directly contacting the respondents and not collecting personal data that might identify the particular respondent. Respondents were requested to send the survey directly to the researcher without mentioning their name or address. In total 148 questionnaire were distributed and the ultimate response rate was 79 per cent (118 respondents). Six questionnaires were rejected because missing points on a questionnaire were more than 15 per cent. Hence, this study was carried out with 112 respondents.

Respondents' profile. Male participants accounted for 74 respondents (66 per cent). Seventy-eight repatriates, accounting for 70 per cent, were married. Regarding country of overseas assignment, only 39 (35 per cent) respondents had overseas experience in Asian countries. Respondents' average age and working experience were 41.9 years and 11.3 years, respectively, with a standard deviation of 6.5 years and 4.8 years respectively. Respondents' expatriation and repatriation experiences were 41.5 months and 13.0 months respectively, with a standard deviation of 12.0 and 7.8 months respectively (Table I).

Respondent's Profile	No.	(%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	74	66
Female	38	34
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	78	70
Unmarried	34	30
<i>Country of overseas assignments</i>		
Asia (developing countries)	39	35
Other countries (developed countries)	73	65
	Mean	Std. deviation
Age	41.9 years	6.5
Working experience	11.3 years	4.8
Length of overseas assignment	41.5 months	12.0
The time passed upon repatriation	13.0 months	7.8

Table I.
Respondents' profile

Variables and measures

In the process of repatriation adjustment repatriates attempt to reduce uncertainty and achieve a degree of fit with different aspects of the home context and better-adjusted repatriates feel better-fit to the home context (Black *et al.*, 1992; James, 2018). As this study focuses on to what extent repatriates adjust to their home university context person-organization fit (P-O fit) would be a suitable and relevant index to measure the adjustment of academic repatriates. To what extent repatriates perceive they fit their organization will indicate to what extent they have adjusted to the home organization. Therefore, in the present study, repatriates' adjustment was measured by measuring the degree of repatriates' perceived P-O fit. For measuring P-O fit, five items were used (Cable and DeRue, 2002; Judge, 1994) with minor modification without changing the meaning of the item to maintain consistency among other items.

To measure POS the nine items scale developed by Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) was adopted with minor modification. This shortened version was previously used and gained acceptable reliability value (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990; Wayne *et al.*, 1997). Intention to leave was measured by the instrument developed by Wayne *et al.* (1997) ($\alpha = 0.86$) which has been widely used in the repatriation and expatriation literature with satisfactory reliability (Vidal *et al.*, 2008, $\alpha = 0.93$; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007, $\alpha = 0.93$). Perceived external employment opportunity was measured with a four-item scale derived from Petera *et al.* (1981), and Lazarova and Cerdin (2007). All measures were Likert-type scale with possible responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

This study relied on cross-sectional and self-reported data. Self-reports might be suitable when the study focus is on perceived experiences, and it can be more appropriate in the process of employee socialization and adjustment. However, cross-sectional and self-reported survey may be vulnerable to common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). To minimize CMB at the survey design stage absolute anonymity and confidentiality was maintained; ambiguities, vague and unfamiliar terms were excluded and each item was placed as concisely as possible. At the analysis stage Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) and full coliniarity assessment (Kock, 2015) were performed to assess the common method variance, and both tests confirmed that there is no evidence for a substantial amount of common method variance in this data set.

Data analysis

Although this study tests hypotheses, it is prediction-oriented, where PLS-SEM is preferred to covariance-based (CB) SEM (Hair *et al.*, 2011, 2013). Further, the available sample of 112 is not sufficient to analyze the proposed model using CB-SEM which includes mediating and moderating variables; however PLS-SEM is a powerful tool for such complex model analysis with comparatively a small sample size (Hair *et al.*, 2013; Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, to test the proposed model, this study employed PLS-SEM with SmartPLS.

At the beginning of the analysis the accuracy of the data were checked; no values outside of the specified range were found, mean standard deviation and correlation appeared to be reasonable. Further, no straight-lining response or inconsistent responses were found in the data set. The correlation between respondent's profile variables and research variables (included in the model) disclosed that only one profile variable (repatriate's country of overseas assignment) had significant (positive) relationship with perceived external employment opportunity and intention to leave. It implies that the repatriates who have expatriation experience in developed country perceived more external employment opportunity and more likely to intend to leave.

Reliability and validity.

The factor loading of each indicator, Cronbach’s alpha, and composite reliability of each construct were larger than the threshold value of 0.70. AVEs of all reflective latent variables were equal to or greater than 0.6 (Table II). The square root of AVE is greater than inter-construct correlations (Table II). Moreover, each indicator’s loadings to the specified constructs is significantly higher than the loading to any other construct. Therefore, it can be concluded that the measurement model has adequate indicator reliability, construct reliability, discriminant validity and convergent validity (Chin, 2010; Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2011).

Regarding the structural model, the determinant of the coefficient of the key endogenous construct was satisfactory. The predictive relevance of the model was calculated using Stone-Geisser’s Q^2 statistics. The cross-validated redundancy of dependent variables was more than the threshold value of zero; suggesting the model had predictive relevance. Moreover, all VIF resulting from full collinearity test were <3.3, indicating that multicollinearity was not a threat to this structural model and the model was free from common method bias (Kock, 2015).

Hypotheses testing

In order to examine the hypothesized relationships, firstly the significance of each path coefficient was assessed via a bootstrapping technique. The Bootstrapping procedure requires no distributional assumption (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) and produces reasonable standard error estimates (Tenenhaus et al., 2005). In PLS-SEM setting, the researcher used the no sign changes option, 0.05 significance levels, 112 cases, and 5,000 samples in the bootstrapping setting to generate standard error and *t*-statistics (Table III).

The path coefficient and its significance indicate that all the proposed direct relationships are in with the expected direction with significant impact (at 0.05 sig levels). It reflects that higher the level of repatriates’ perceived support the higher the level of their adjustment and intention to stay at the organization, and the higher the level of repatriation adjustment the lower the level of their intention to leave. Also the higher the level of

Constructs	Mean	Std.	CrA	CR	AVE	ADJ	EEO	INL	POS
Adjustment (ADJ)	3.73	1.49	0.93	0.95	0.84	<i>0.91</i>			
Ext. emp. opportunity (EEO)	4.49	1.50	0.84	0.90	0.76	<i>-0.21</i>	<i>0.87</i>		
Intention to leave (INL)	3.51	1.61	0.90	0.93	0.72	<i>-0.62</i>	<i>0.27</i>	<i>0.85</i>	
Organizational support (POS)	5.02	1.10	0.93	0.94	0.68	<i>0.50</i>	<i>0.03</i>	<i>-0.42</i>	<i>0.82</i>

Table II. Construct’s mean, standard deviation, reliability, validity and correlations

Note: CrA = Cronbach’s Alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted; Italic diagonal figures (bold) are the square root of AVE, italic figures shows correlation between constructs

Proposed Paths	Path coefficient	T Statistics	<i>p</i> -values	Bias	95(%) BCa CI	
					2.5(%)	97.5(%)
ADJ → INL	-0.498	5.11	0.00	0.00	-0.67	-0.28
EEO → INL	0.171	2.39	0.01	0.00	0.03	0.30
POS → ADJ	0.499	7.50	0.00	0.00	0.34	0.61
POS → INL	-0.174	1.99	0.04	-0.00	-0.34	-0.00

Table III. Path coefficient, T statistics, *p*-value and confidence interval (CI)

perceived external employment opportunities the higher the level of repatriates' turnover intention (Figure 1).

Mediator effect analysis. The mediation effect of adjustment on the relationship between perceived support and intention to leave was assessed following Baron and Kenny (1986) and Hair *et al.*'s (2013) guidelines. The direct relationship between organization support and intention to leave without the mediator was negative ($\beta = -0.379$) and significant ($p < 0.05$). After including the mediator variable (adjustment), the path coefficients for organization support to adjustment (0.499) and adjustment to intention to leave (-0.498) were both significant. Thus, the indirect effect of organization support to intention to leave through the mediator (ADJ) was 0.25 (0.499×0.498), and its significance was tested using the bootstrapping results. The standard deviation was calculated from the product of the two path coefficients from the bootstrapping subsample which was significant at 0.05. The significant indirect effect concludes that the relationship between organization support and intention to leave is mediated by adjustment.

Finally, the strength of mediation was examined by estimating the variance accounted for (VAF) (Hair *et al.*, 2013). The total effect was 0.42 (direct effect (0.17) plus indirect effect (0.25)). Thus, the VAF has a value of 0.48 ($0.174/0.424$). This shows that there is partial mediation and the 41 per cent effect of organization support on intention to leave is explained by the indirect relationship between organization support and intention to leave, through adjustment (Hair *et al.*, 2013), thereby supporting *H4*.

Moderator effect assessment. To examine the moderation effect of perceived external employment opportunity (PEEO) on the relationship between adjustment (ADJ) and intention to leave, the guidelines proposed by Hair *et al.* (2013) and Henseler *et al.* (2012) were followed. The interaction term (PEEO * ADJ) significantly influenced intention to leave ($\beta = -0.191$, $p < 0.05$). The simple effect of adjustment to turnover intention ($\beta = -0.498$) indicates a medium effect size. When perceived external employment opportunity becomes higher (i.e. when external employment opportunity is increased by one standard deviation point) the relationship between adjustment and intention to leave increases to ($\beta = -0.689$ (i.e. $-0.498 + -0.191$)). Conversely, at a lower level of perceived external employment opportunity, the influence of adjustment on intention to leave is reduced ($\beta = -0.307$ (i.e. $-0.498 + 0.191$)). That is, when repatriates perceived external employment opportunity as higher, adjustment becomes a more influential variable on repatriates' intention to leave. When external employment opportunity is lower, adjustment becomes less important in explaining intention to leave.

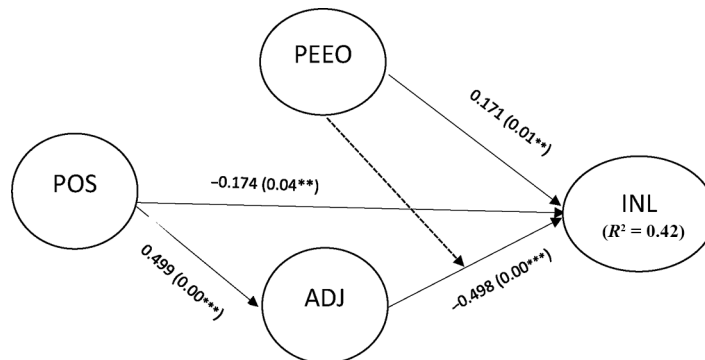


Figure 1.
Research model with
path coefficient and
its significance (in
bracket)

Discussion and conclusion

Repatriates' perceived organizational support had positive impact on repatriation adjustment. In line with socialization resource theory organizational support is a form of a resource that facilitates repatriation adjustment through helping repatriates overcoming repatriation challenges and stress. In addition, organizational support is a resource that enables repatriates to accumulate more resources (Hobfoll, 2002). For example, when universities respect repatriates' overseas experience and take care of their wellbeing repatriates feel happy and motivated. It produces positive energy that can enable repatriates to get rid of their repatriation stress.

At present, in universities, the managerialist form of control has increased the power of administrators and managers to make decisions in the university (Enders and Kaulisch, 2006) and increasingly standardize and control the work of academics (Harley *et al.*, 2004; Townley, 1997). This trend has increased the influence of the universities on academician job satisfaction and career success. When academic repatriates perceive they are not supported by their university, they may feel uncertainty about their career progress, and loss of control, which increases repatriation stress and challenges. Therefore, organizational support has become a strong predictor of repatriation adjustment of academics.

As predicted it was found that repatriates who perceive high organizational support are less likely to intend to leave their home organization. The relationship between organization support and turnover intention was consistently supported in the literature. Although it will not be a surprise for repatriate management scholars to discover that the influence of organizational support on intention to leave, the mediating influence of adjustment between repatriates' perceived organizational support and intention to leave has not been empirically studied before, particularly it has not been studied among academic repatriates sample.

Repatriates who experience adjustment difficulties feel uncertainty, stress, alienation, loss of control, and lack of motivation at work (Adler, 1981; Black *et al.*, 1992; Suutari and Brewster, 2003). Such undesirable conditions can motivate repatriates to leave the home organization. Further, as predicted, repatriates who perceive higher external employment opportunities are more likely to intend to leave the organization. This result is consistent with the view that repatriates' personal ambition and career aims influence repatriates' decision to stay with or quit the organization, and thus repatriates intend to leave the organization when they find suitable career advancement opportunities outside their home organization (Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007).

This study evidently proved that both repatriation adjustment and perceived external employment are the predictors of academic repatriates' turnover intention. However, the effect of repatriation adjustment ($f^2 = 0.303$) is greater than the effect of perceived external employment opportunity ($f^2 = 0.048$) which underlines the importance of adjustment in retaining repatriates. The literature on international assignments argues that global expertise gained through expatriation experiences increases repatriates' external employment opportunities, which lead to increased turnover among repatriates. However, this study found that adjustment is still a stronger predictor of repatriates' turnover intention than repatriates' external employment opportunities among academic repatriates. If external employment opportunity is a reason for their intention to leave, repatriates would not have returned to their organization, they might have found a suitable opportunity before returning to their home organization (Bauder, 2015). Therefore, in this study context, perceived external employment opportunity had less influence on repatriate's intention to leave.

The most striking finding of this investigation was the moderating effect of external employment opportunities on the relationship between adjustment and intention to leave. The existing literature on repatriation has highlighted that repatriation adjustment and

external employment opportunities are the predictors of repatriates' intention to leave (Lee and Liu, 2006, 2007; Sanchez *et al.*, 2000; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007). This study has gone further; it has analyzed the interrelated role of both adjustment and external employment opportunities on repatriates' intention to leave by performing moderator analysis; and explored that repatriates' perceived external employment opportunities interact with repatriation adjustment in predicting repatriates' intentions to leave. The negative relationship of adjustment to intention to leave becomes stronger for repatriates with high perceived external employment opportunity than for repatriates with little perceived external employment opportunity. The moderator analysis evidently showed that repatriation adjustment is still a strong predictor of repatriates' turnover intention, and the prediction strength is moderated by external employment opportunity; it also signifies that unsuccessful adjustment badly affects more talented repatriates (repatriates who perceive high external employment opportunity), thereby contributing to the literature on repatriation adjustment.

Further, the present unique study context that has investigated repatriation of academics in developing country context made the findings of this study remarkable. In this study context, universities make the massive investment to develop their own talent and expect to make use of the repatriate's global expertise in the process of internationalizing the institutions, and to ensure its continued existence and competitive position. Developing country, like Sri Lanka, may not be an attractive place to academic repatriates who have global expertise as encouragement and facilities available to enhance their research career are limited; however, the returning academics are keen to make tremendous contribution to upgrade their home university practices (Robinson-Pant, 2009), and to ensure its competitive position. Therefore, the findings of this study that the interrelated influence of adjustment and perceived external employment opportunity on repatriate's intention to leave among academic repatriates in Sri Lanka as a developing country is significant and this would be a meaningful avenue for further research. Further, the findings of this study awaken university administration in developing countries which are not aware of the repatriation stress and challenges of academics.

In academia, internationalization and marketization of higher education in many countries has increased tremendously (Richardson and McKenna, 2002; Selmer and Luring, 2011, 2013; Trembath, 2016), and seek talented academics in the global job market to increase their competitive position (Silvanto and Ryan, 2014). Moreover, and historically there is a trend that academics are moving from developing country to developed country (Potts, 2004; Trembath, 2016). This situation increases the challenges in retaining academics with international expertise at universities in developing countries. Therefore, to retain repatriates and harness their valuable experiences in the process of internationalization of their universities and to ensure its continued existence and competitive position, universities in developing countries, need to facilitate repatriation adjustment of academics in all possible ways.

Implication for further research and practice

By investigating the repatriation adjustment of academics, this study called on research scholars to pay attention to repatriation of academics. This study validated the proposed model by testing it among academic repatriates in Sri Lanka. Testing this model among academic repatriates in different countries and cultural contexts would ensure the external validity of the model.

Further, testing this model among repatriates who themselves expatriated (self-initiated expatriates) would provide insights into the similarities and differences, if any, in the adjustment process between these two groups. Further, including individual level variables

(proactive behavior, PsyCap, emotional intelligence) into the model can help to understand the individual's role in the adjustment process better. Further studies can be conducted by adopting a longitudinal approach and collecting data for independent and dependent variables from different sources to enhance the quality finding of the study.

In terms of practical implications, this study helps both organizations and individuals for their success. This study ensures that perceived organization support has become crucial in repatriation adjustment, retention of academic repatriates and making use of their talents at the home university. Universities need to have support practices that match the individual's needs at the time of repatriation, and such practices should be linked with resources that help to overcome repatriation stress and challenges. Also, university need to develop a mechanism to recognize and respect repatriates' global expertise and provide opportunities to make use of their global expertise at their home organization (Garson, 2005; James, 2018; Valk *et al.*, 2014). University is advised to introduce diversified and dynamic career policies and paying attention to work-life balance to encourage repatriates to stay at home university. Also, this study, by identifying the single and interrelated effect of perceived organizational support, adjustment and external employment opportunity on intention to leave, provide insights to organization management to develop HR policies and strategies in managing repatriates. For repatriates, this study provides clear perception about the issues related to their repatriation and their retention that enable them to develop their own strategies to manage their repatriation and contribute to the success of their home university.

Limitation

In general, 112 responses is a small sample for testing a complex model such as I proposed. To ensure the quality of the findings by overcoming the limitations of the small sample size I used PLS-SEM with Smartpls 3, which is highly recommended for SEM analysis with a small sample size (Chin and Newsted, 1999; Hair *et al.*, 2011; Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). To understand the repatriation adjustment process well, adjustment has to be measured over the time from the beginning to the end. The longitudinal method may be suitable for testing the different degrees of adjustment and can provide further insights into the repatriation process (Vidal *et al.*, 2007).

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Corresponding author

Robinson James can be contacted at: robinson435@gmail.com

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