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Please cite the final published version:

Charlotte Jonasson, Jakob Luring, Jan Selmer, Jodie-Lee Trembath, (2017) "Job resources and demands for expatriate academics: Linking teacher-student relations, intercultural adjustment, and job satisfaction", Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research, Vol. 5 Issue: 1, pp.5-21, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-05-2016-0015>

Publication metadata

Title:	Job resources and demands for expatriate academics: Linking teacher-student relations, intercultural adjustment, and job satisfaction
Author(s):	Charlotte Jonasson, Jakob Luring, Jan Selmer, Jodie-Lee Trembath
Journal:	Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research
DOI/Link:	https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-05-2016-0015
Document version:	Accepted manuscript (post-print)

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Job resources and demands for expatriate academics

Linking teacher-student relations, intercultural adjustment, and job satisfaction

Abstract

Purpose – While there is a growing interest in expatriate academics, their specific role as teachers with daily contact to local students seems to have been largely ignored when examining their adjustment and work outcomes. Based on the job demands-resources model we predict that good teacher-student relations, as a supportive job resource, will have a positive effect on expatriate academics' job satisfaction. This effect, however, will be even stronger for individuals experiencing high job demands and challenges in terms of intercultural job adjustment. In other words, expatriate academics that have difficulties adjusting will benefit more from the social support that can originate from good relations to their students.

Design/methodology/approach – We surveyed expatriate academics adjusting to a university position in China by use of 124 responses from foreign university employees.

Findings – We found that teacher-student relations had a positive association with job satisfaction and that positive teacher-student relations increased job satisfaction more for individuals who were slower to adjust.

Originality/value – This is one of the few papers to explore the impact that students can have on expatriate academics and treat this relationship as a potential job resource for universities to capitalize upon in socializing their new foreign academic staff members.

Keywords: Expatriates, Academics, Teacher-student relations, Foreign-born teachers, Satisfaction, Adjustment, University

Introduction

The level of mobility among academics has increased dramatically in recent years (Romanowski and Nasser, 2014; Selmer, Trembath and Lauring, 2017). An important reason for academics to travel between countries for work is the global competition for talent (Isakovic and Whitman, 2013; Silvanto and Ryan, 2014). Propelled by the desire to attain world-class status, many

universities have embarked on ambitious and expensive programs of research and infrastructural advancement as well as curriculum development to meet international requirements (Munene, 2014; Trembath, 2016).

Central to the achievement of a high ranking for a university, however, is the staff employed. Hence, the importance of recruiting and retaining expatriate academics cannot be underestimated in the strategy of facilitating top tier higher education and research institutions.

Because of the significance of expatriate academics for the research and teaching achievements of many universities, the individual decision for such a person to remain at or leave an institution has received a great deal of attention from scholars (cf. Schoepp, 2011; Doherty, 2013). However, the employment conditions experienced by foreign academics in many institutions have led to some concern (Gress and Ilon, 2009; Austin et al., 2014). One of the issues often mentioned is the feeling of isolation and loneliness experienced by expatriate academics (Skachkova, 2007).

Our argument is that good relationships with students could function as a useful job resource, providing social support to expatriate academics – especially for those heavily affected by the job demands of undertaking extensive intercultural adjustment. While teacher-student relations as a job resource have been a focal area in educational research (Hargreaves, 2000; Spilt, Koomen and Thijs, 2011), this factor has not yet been included in the growing expatriation literature focused on academics (Selmer et al., 2017). Although there is little international research in this area, anecdotal evidence points to a positive influence of good student relations for expatriate academics' job satisfaction. Rong (2002), for example, described how her own position as a foreigner facilitated a good relationship with minority students in an American university. Jepsen et al. (2014) also described how expatriate academics in China can have good relationships with students due to the students' dedication. Accordingly, our focus on teacher-student relations (as a job resource), intercultural adjustment (as a job demand), and the link to job satisfaction in China is novel and relevant in the area of expatriate academics.

It is important to assess how students affect the work outcomes of expatriate academics. This is because research has found strong evidence that relations to host country national peers in the workplace can improve the wellbeing and productivity of expatriates (Wang and Kanungo, 2004; Sonesh and DeNisi, 2016). Students also represent individuals within the workplace with whom expatriates can develop social relations. If positive relations with students can lead to some of the same beneficial effects as positive relations with colleagues, then this suggests a need to widen our understanding of who else, in addition to colleagues, may function as a useful resource for expatriates in the job context.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to examine the role of students in relation to expatriate functioning in the work place. By doing this we add a new, unexplored and unexploited concept to the literature on expatriate academics.

Literature review

China has experienced significant changes in higher education policy over the last three decades, particularly with regard to internationalization, and it is to this end that ‘international’ academics are being hired more frequently throughout the country (Kim, 2015). Despite this strategic push at higher levels to recruit expatriate academics, however, previous studies have established that China presents a unique set of cultural, linguistic, and higher education-specific challenges for expatriates (Selmer et al., 2015). The effects of these challenges may be borne out in the low job satisfaction of expatriate academic staff members experienced at universities in China (Zhuang, 2010). One factor that generally could influence job satisfaction for expatriate academics is the character of the new workplace environment (Zimmermann, Holman and Sparrow, 2003). Here, a number of mostly qualitative studies show that expatriate academics, at times, experience feelings of loneliness and isolation contributing to them being less satisfied on the job than their local counterparts (Lin, Pearce and Wang, 2009). For example, Skachkova (2007) found that expatriate academics regularly experience exclusion based on collegial ethnocentrism. In a different study by Garson (2005), the author, an American expatriate, also described how she was informally excluded from a central network of colleagues at an Egyptian university. Similarly, in an American university, Munene (2014) identified problems related to isolation of the foreign faculty. We explore whether teacher-student relations could be one source of social

support for expatriate academics, mitigating problems related to exclusion and isolation and leading to increased job satisfaction.

Teacher-student relations as a job resource

Social support has been found to protect individuals against adverse effects of stressors by leading them to deal more constructively with them (Lakey and Orehek, 2011). Expatriates can receive social support from many sources, such as spouses (Lauring and Selmer, 2010) and colleagues (Sonesh and DeNisi, 2016). Although these are very important job resources, for expatriate academics there could also be an additional alternative: namely, the students they interact with in their daily work activities. Hence, although students may not be the only or even the most central basis for social support, good relations to students in the classroom or during supervision sessions could compensate if an expatriate academic feels isolated from the local staff.

We base this proposition on the extensive educational literature on teacher-student relations, arguing that close relations founded on positive emotions to students will have a direct effect on teacher job satisfaction in domestic settings (e.g. Hargreaves, 2000; den Brok, Brekelmans and Wubbels, 2004). This argument rests on the understanding that teachers will be more motivated to do their best when feeling that the effort is highly appreciated and thus receive emotional and evaluative rewards in terms of students' recognition and classroom effectiveness (den Brok et al., 2004). For example, it has been documented that students as part of a social network are important for the professional development of novice teachers (Cole, 1991). Since positive teacher-student relations have been shown to increase job satisfaction for teachers in domestic contexts this may well also be the case for expatriate academics. Moreover, for academics working outside their home countries, students may be able to provide the local knowledge and host country support these expatriates find invaluable, and critical to their subsequent job satisfaction (Wang and Fang, 2014; van Bakel, van Oudenhoven and Gerritsen, 2015). Yet so far, the impact of teacher-student relations for expatriate academics' job satisfaction has not been studied.

Expatriate job satisfaction and intercultural adjustment

Job satisfaction has been most commonly characterized as a positive feeling that an employee has about his/her job, resulting from an evaluation of its characteristics (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2014). The literature on job satisfaction with expatriates is quite extensive, and demonstrates that there are some common antecedents of satisfaction between domestic and expatriate employees, including work novelty, autonomy, participation in organizational decision making and career advancement opportunities (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011). However, various authors have also found some antecedents that are more specifically related to expatriates. Downes et al. (2002), for example, found evidence for previous work experience with the home organization, previous experience as an expatriate, mentorship upon arrival and ongoing training as significant antecedents. Bonache (2005) in a comparative study between expatriates, repatriates, and domestic employees with no previous overseas work experience, found that expatriates were more likely to report satisfaction with job novelty, variety, and autonomy, but reported lower levels of satisfaction in relation to internal communications, supporting previous literature on the feelings of isolation expatriates often experience. The nationality of the expatriate and the distance between their own cultural values and the values of their host country have also been found to have an impact on satisfaction (Elamin, 2011; Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011). Results of studies linking personality traits to expatriate job satisfaction, however, have been mixed and somewhat inconclusive (Selmer and Luring, 2013b; Cerdin and Le Pargneux, 2014; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2014).

As a subset of the expatriate community, expatriate academics share many of these antecedents of job satisfaction (Selmer and Luring 2011), with some differences worth mentioning. Previous research has indicated that levels of job satisfaction in expatriate academics are heavily influenced by the organizational and academic/intellectual climate of the university, and have particularly emphasized the importance of collegial relationships (Schoepp, 2011). There are mixed findings regarding whether it is more useful for expatriate academics to form collegial networks with host country nationals or other expatriates. Although the majority of expatriate studies emphasize the importance of host country nationals as socializing agents (Toh and Denisi, 2007; van Bakel et al., 2015), one exploratory study of expatriate academics in Oman recently indicated that job satisfaction may increase, and emotional exhaustion may decrease, when expatriate academics reduce their interactions with their local colleagues (Kumar, 2015).

This nascent school of thought posits that avoiding relationships with locals may actually allow expatriate academics to focus less on their intercultural adjustment and more on their chosen intellectual pursuits.

Job adjustment has been found to be closely related to job satisfaction with expatriates (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011) and thus we also include job adjustment in our study. In literature on intercultural relations, job adjustment generally depicts the individual's psychological comfort with various aspects of work life (Hippler, Caligiuri and Johnson, 2014). Adjustment is caused by the relationship between the expatriate and the new context. It has been argued that expatriates adjust as a consequence of exposure to demands resulting from the uncertainty of work stressors in an international relocation (Ren et al., 2014). Poor job adjustment leads to job withdrawal and low job satisfaction (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011).

It should be noted that since Black's three-dimensional adjustment scale is now under heavy criticism for its lack of theoretical foundation and its weak empirical properties, we have deliberately chosen to focus only on job adjustment (Hippler et al., 2014; Kubovcikova, 2016).

Expatriate intercultural job adjustment may, however, also be considered from a time perspective (Selmer et al., 2015). The time perspective relates to the speed with which the expatriate academic achieves a feeling of adjustment to the job at the new location. Time to proficiency was originally defined by Pinder and Schroeder (1987) as the period it takes for an employee in a new job to reach an acceptable performance level. A longer time to proficiency could be seen as a conceptualization of maladjustment, representing a lack of speed in skill acquisition in order to function as an expatriate academic. In recent years, the role of time to proficiency for expatriates has mainly been explored by Selmer and Luring. Selmer and Luring (2016) found, for example, that job dedication reduced time to proficiency for expatriate academics and that this effect was stronger for older individuals. In another study of expatriate academics, Selmer and Luring (2013a) found that for expatriates that relocated to escape the home situation, the time to proficiency was extended. In a mixed sample, Selmer and Luring (2014) found positive dispositional affectivity to prolong time to proficiency while the opposite was true for negative dispositional affectivity.

Theoretical foundation and hypotheses

In this paper we focus on the connections between teacher-student relations, intercultural adjustment, and job satisfaction. The job demands-resources model hypothesizes that job demands and job resources interact in the prediction of positive work outcomes. In particular, job resources are beneficial for ensuring employees' wellbeing under conditions of high job demands (Bakker, 2011). More specifically, Bakker and Demerouti (2007) state that: "job resources may buffer the impact of job demands on job strain" (p. 314). Job demands can be psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained effort or skills. It is important to note that no exhaustive list of job demands and job resources should be made, but that the precise relevant demands and resources are contingent upon the context and characteristics of the job (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). In the case of expatriates, job demands could, for example, be the demand of having to adjust to a foreign culture which is often associated with great emotional and cognitive costs (Lazarova, Shaffer and Westman, 2010; Ren et al., 2014; Luring and Selmer, 2015). Job resources, on the other hand, are aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals and may reduce the intensity of job demands. With regard to expatriates, an important job resource that buffers the strain following from job demands can be argued to consist of collegial support from host country nationals, as outlined below.

Since the beneficial effect of interpersonal connections in helping employees' job satisfaction has been well documented (Lakey and Orehek, 2011), the relationships that an expatriate academic has at work can thus be seen as a job resource. Mahajan and De Silva (2012) also use the job demands-resources model, viewing host country national support as a job resource that can reduce the negative influence of unmet role expectations on expatriate adjustment. As host country staff possess crucial local information, contact with these individuals is likely to facilitate a better understanding of the work place and, ultimately, to better adjustment (Toh and DeNisi, 2003; Varma et al., 2012).

This positive influence of collegial relations is also not unheard of in academic contexts; indeed, trusting relationships with other academics have been described as one of the key tools for survival in academia (Bogler and Kremer-Hayon, 1999). However, such relations to colleagues

as a resource is not always readily available to expatriates since positive relations between host country nationals and expatriates may not always materialize. Prior studies have found that greater cultural differences and ethnocentric policies/attitudes will decrease the motivation of host country nationals to help expatriates (Toh and Denisi, 2007; Sonesh and DeNisi, 2016). Yet, in terms of expatriate academics, there may be opportunities to widen our understanding of who in addition to colleagues, may be able to provide expatriate academics with social support as a job resource. In this regard, the concept of expatriate academics relying on relationships with their students as an additional source of social support, and as such as a job resource, is less established, and will be explored further in the following hypotheses. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model formulated.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Teacher-student relations as a job resource creating job satisfaction

In relation to emotional outcomes, such as satisfaction, it can be argued that since relationships play a central role in human happiness and mental health (Berscheid, 1994), good relationships in the workplace should positively affect academic staff members' emotional surplus and well-being on the job. It has indeed been found that good relationships generally fulfill basic needs for belonging and nurturance, and that the social support provided by relationships, as a job resource, buffers the negative impact of life stressors (Schutte et al., 2001).

Some empirical findings exist on the link between teacher-student relations and teachers' job satisfaction. For example, Veldman et al. (2013) found that Dutch secondary teachers' job satisfaction was positively related to the quality of teacher-student relationships. Similar results were found by Grayson and Alvarez (2008) in rural elementary schools. The positive effect of good relations to students could well be the same for expatriate academics as for domestic teachers. Moreover, it is possible that academics rely even more heavily on their relationships with their students as a resource to compensate for isolation from local colleagues. A number of studies have found that expatriate academics do not always experience positive relationships with their local colleagues. Romanowski and Nasser (2014) and Schoepp (2011) indicated that their participants felt excluded from collegial networks, particularly when the majority of their

colleagues were host nationals. Although the expatriates' good social relations with their students may not necessarily lessen the feelings of exclusion and isolation from their colleagues, we predict that such good social relations to the students can work as a compensating job resource to enhance job satisfaction (cf. Bakker & Demerouti 2007). This leads us to the first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive association between teacher-student relations and expatriate academics' job satisfaction.

Intercultural adjustment as a moderating job demand

Expatriates are often in a vulnerable situation being in a new country without their normal network and without a full knowledge of the local circumstances (Ren et al., 2014). In such a situation, it has been shown that the social and psychological support that expatriates may receive from locals is highly valuable (Wang and Fang, 2014; van Bakel et al., 2015). According to the job demands-resources model, social support as a job resource would have a larger impact for those experiencing difficulties in achieving their job demands. This is especially true if the job resources can compensate for or reduce the difficulty of the job demands – in this case the need for intercultural adjustment (cf. Bakker & Demerouti 2007).

For academics it could be speculated that good relations with students as a job resource becomes more salient when expatriates are confronted with the difficult job demands of adjusting well to a new job in a foreign country (cf. Lazarova et al., 2010). In other words, the effect of teacher-student relations on work outcomes could be stronger for expatriates struggling to adjust to the new context. This argument is based on the notion that teachers in a new context can benefit from greater social support (cf. Birch and Ladd, 1997; Thomas and Johnson, 2004). In other words, if expatriate academics are struggling to adjust, then the social support from their students, providing confidence, information and connection, could be even more important than if they are adjusting more easily. Hence, in line with the job demands-resources model stating an interaction of job demands and resources for predicting positive work outcomes (cf. Bakker and Demerouti 2007), it can be proposed that in situations of low fulfillment of the job demand

(intercultural job adjustment), good teacher-student relations as a job resource for creating job satisfaction are more important. Hence, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2a: Intercultural job adjustment moderates the positive association between teacher-student relations and job satisfaction of expatriate academics so that when the individual's intercultural job adjustment is lower, the association between teacher-student relations and job satisfaction will be stronger.

While increasing the degree of intercultural adjustment is an obvious job demand for most expatriate academics, the time this takes is also important (Selmer and Luring, 2016). If the expatriate is slow at adjusting, similar to being poorly adjusted, this could be a stressor that raises the need for a compensating job resource in the form of positive teacher-student relations in order to maintain a high level of job satisfaction. Accordingly, we formulate a final hypothesis in relation to the time it takes the expatriate academic to adjust:

Hypothesis 2b: Time to proficiency moderates the positive association between teacher-student relations and job satisfaction of expatriate academics so that when the individual is slow at adjusting, the association between teacher-student relations and job satisfaction will be stronger.

Method

Target population and data collection

As aforementioned, this study targeted expatriate academics residing in China. We used Chinese-reading research assistants to examine websites of Chinese universities looking for non-Chinese names listed there among the academic staff. Such names were found at 21 universities. The online questionnaire was sent to the 319 persons with those non-Chinese names. Initial screening questions focusing on the nationality and the job role were applied to retain only our target group. Eventually, 137 responses were received, amounting to a response rate of 43 per cent. Of

these, 124 respondents passed the screening questions indicating that they were all expatriate academics residing in China.

Sample

The average age of the respondents was 43.13 years ($SD=11.68$) and, on average, they had spent 2.69 years in China ($SD=2.04$) having worked as an expatriate academic for an average of 6.84 years ($SD=7.24$), including in their current job. The majority were male (79.0%) and married (59.7%). An overwhelming majority reported a non-Asian nationality (93.5%). The largest nationality groups were from the U.K. (27.9%), U.S.A. (18%), Germany (9.8%), and Italy (7.4 %). Other nationality groups were much smaller and almost evenly distributed over 28 other nationalities.

Instrument

Teacher-Student Relations were measured by a five-item, seven-point scale adapted from August and Waltman (2004). Response categories ranged from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree”, with sample item: “I feel I am valued as a mentor/advisor by students” ($\alpha=.79$).

Job Satisfaction was gauged by a four-item, seven-point scale by West, Nicholson, and Reese (1987). This scale ranged from (1) “strongly disagree” to (7) “strongly agree”, with sample item: “I am satisfied with my job” ($\alpha=.75$).

Intercultural Job Adjustment was assessed by a three-item, seven-point scale developed by Black and Stephens (1989) to assess expatriate job adjustment measuring the quality of adjustment. Response categories ranged from (1) “not adjusted at all” to (7) “completely adjusted”, with sample item: “Specific job responsibilities” ($\alpha=.85$).

Time to Proficiency, focusing on the timely dimension of adjustment, was measured by four items from Pinder and Schroeder (1987). Sample item: ‘How many months did it take you to become effective at your new job?’ ($\alpha=.70$).

Controls

Among a plethora of other predictors, previous research suggests that personal characteristics may predict job satisfaction. Therefore, a number of control variables depicting both generic and acquired characteristics were applied, including respondents' age, academic field, current position, gender, marital status, number of previous jobs as an expatriate academic, time as an expatriate academic, and time in host location.

Results

Table 1 displays sample means, standard deviations, and zero-order Pearson correlations of the variables.

Insert Table 1 about here

The hypotheses were formally tested by way of hierarchical multiple regression (Table 2). In Step 1, the control variables were entered. This did not produce any significant relationships with the criterion variable. In Step 2, the predictor variable was entered. Teacher-student relations had a positive relationship with job satisfaction ($\beta=.31$; $p<.001$). In Step 3, the two moderator variables were entered. That produced a significant positive association between intercultural job adjustment and job satisfaction ($\beta=.32$; $p<.001$). Time to proficiency had a significant negative association with job satisfaction ($\beta=-.22$; $p<.01$). Finally, in Step 4, the interaction terms were entered. This resulted in a significant relationship with the criterion variable. There was a positive association between teacher-student relations x time to proficiency and job satisfaction ($\beta=.16$; $p<.05$). All F values were statistically significant, indicating a proper fit between the regression model and the data.

To explore the character of the moderating relationship detected, the significant interactions were plotted in Figure 2. This figure shows that time to proficiency moderates teacher-student relations. For a high (long) time to proficiency, teacher-student relations correlate more strongly with higher job satisfaction than for a low (short) time to proficiency. It is also worth noticing that the moderating effect of time to proficiency is stronger for expatriate academic teachers with a high (long) time to proficiency than for those with a low (short) time to proficiency irrespective of whether the extent of teacher-student relations is low or high. Tests of the simple slope indicated that the linkage between student relations and job satisfaction was significant, both

when the time to proficiency variable was low ($t=1.77$, $p<.10$) and high ($t=4.69$, $p<.001$). These findings provide support for hypotheses H1 and H2b, while H2a was not supported.

Insert Table 2 about here

Insert Figure 2 about here

Discussion

Main findings

As predicted, results showed a clear and direct effect of teacher-student relations on expatriate academics' job satisfaction. This finding supports the theory that positive interpersonal relations at work are rewarding, leading to positive levels of professional wellbeing (den Brok et al., 2004; Wubbels and Brekelmans, 2005; Veldman et al., 2013). Hence, in line with prior empirical studies (Hargreaves, 2000; Spilt et al., 2011), our research indicates that positive relationships with students can be useful for expatriate academics in order to feel good about the work situation. In addition, job adjustment and low (short) time to proficiency also appear to have produced higher job satisfaction. This is similar to findings among business expatriates, which also demonstrate a strong correlation between increased job adjustment and increased job satisfaction (Pinto, Cabral-Cardoso and Werther, 2012; Froese and Peltokorpi, 2013; Kawai and Mohr, 2015).

The most interesting finding, however, is that for expatriate academics who have taken a long time to adjust, the relationship with the students is more important for their job satisfaction than for those who adjusted quickly. In other words, as predicted by use of the job demands-resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), our study contributes to the field by showing that expatriate academics' relations to their students, as a job resource, are beneficial in creating job satisfaction – especially when the expatriate is most vulnerable in the foreign context. An explanation for this could be that teachers use good student relations as social support mechanisms that can yield wellbeing, as is also the case for students if they have recently moved to a new institutional context or to a foreign country (cf. van Tartwijk et al., 2009). Whether this

job resource is related to the interpersonal relationship with the students as host country national mentors, or whether these positive relationships provide the expatriate with feedback about their success in the classroom (and thus at least one area of their work context) is an area that requires further research.

The argument that, when in a difficult situation at work, expatriates may not only seek support in their foreign culture colleagues is not new. For example, extensive research has established an expatriate's spouse as a valuable resource for support (Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Davoine et al., 2013). Other studies have looked to the expatriate's social network (Wang and Kanungo, 2004; Bruning, Sonpar and Wang, 2012). However, extant research in this area has mainly focused on business expatriates. Fewer attempts have been made to look at supporting job resources in the context of expatriate academics. Accordingly, the identification of students as a possible job resource for support that could increase the wellbeing of expatriate academics is a new addition to this line of research. Future research could explore specific non-colleague, but still job-related, types of social support for promoting work outcomes. This could be done for other groups of expatriates such as NGO expatriates (e.g. relations between doctors and patients), military expatriates (e.g. relations to local civilians), missionary expatriates (e.g. relations to congregation members), and flexpatriates (e.g. relations to customers or suppliers).

We expected to find an interaction effect of both the extent and the speed of intercultural adjustment as important job demands. However, while time to proficiency moderated the relation between teacher student relations and job satisfaction, there was no effect of intercultural job adjustment. From our studies it is not clear why the slow speed of adjustment had a stronger impact than low quality of adjustment. One may speculate that being slow at adjusting could give further incentives to engage more with one's students rather than if one was merely poorly adjusted. However, more research would be needed to attain more detailed knowledge on this.

Also surprisingly, we did not find any significant effect of the control variable marital status. We included marital status since this variable has been found to influence expatriate work outcomes (Selmer and Lauring, 2011). For example, Lauring and Selmer (2013) found married self-initiated expatriates in Asia to have greater job satisfaction than those who were singles.

Moreover, Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley (1999) demonstrate that marital status can assist in improving expatriate adjustment. In an ethnographic study, Luring and Selmer (2010) show how spousal support can increase performance and wellbeing. While it is not clear why marital status does not have an effect in this study it may be related to the special conditions surrounding academic work. According to Luring and Selmer (2015), many academics are deeply engaged with their work and may not procure the same degree of job satisfaction from their non-work relations. This, however, would need to be further explored in coming studies.

Our use of the job demands-resources model to some extent resembles the way it was used by Mahajan and De Silva (2012). They also use relations to locals as a job resource but instead of adjustment as a demand, they include unmet role expectations. Ren et al. (2014) describes job demands as requiring effort or resource depletion on the part of employees leading to psychological and physiological costs. They include cultural and linguistic differences as what they term cross-cultural demands. In the original model by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), work pressure and emotional strains are mentioned as job demands which could well be translated to the need for job adjustment as in our case.

Limitations

As always, this study may have a number of potential shortcomings that could limit to what extent it can be generalized. A potential problem of this study could be common method variance (CMV) since all the data were collected by cross-sectional self-reports. However, given that this paper is specific to academics' perceptions of their experiences, self-reports were considered advantageous rather than a severe limitation in this instance. To investigate the potential for biases of CMV, Harman's single factor test was applied (Aulakh and Gencturk, 2000). The exploratory factor analysis of the items, corresponding to all the variables of the study, resulted in five distinct factors. These accounted for 69.81% of the total variance, with the first factor explaining 30.95%, suggesting that no single factor accounted for most of the variance. Additionally, it has been argued that moderation effects, commensurate with the one we found, are unlikely to be caused by CMV because relationships among the dependent and independent variables are not so simple that these relationships are expected to be part of the individual respondents' cognitive maps (Chang, van Witteloostuijn and Eden, 2010). Finally, the direct effect between teacher-student relations and job

satisfaction has been documented in several other studies (for a meta-analysis see Spilt, Koomen and Thuijs, 2011). Hence, there is little reason to doubt this result.

Implications

Although there has been a growing interest in expatriate academics, the connection to local students seems, so far, to have been ignored in most literature. Therefore, our findings – that good teacher-student relations may be related to job satisfaction, and that this relationship is stronger when the expatriate academic is adjusting slowly – provide novel information that can be used to advance theory and to suggest guidelines for practitioners.

With regard to theory, the most important contribution of this study is that expatriate academics who were slow at adjusting benefitted more from good relations to their students than those who adjusted quickly. Since very few other studies have focused on the role of the students in facilitating work outcomes of expatriate academics, this finding could potentially be useful when developing models for antecedents of expatriate adjustment in relation to this group of workers. Student relations are a factor that distinguishes expatriate academics from business expatriates. Hence, the role of students in relation to expatriate academics deserves more attention in future research. Our research identifies students as a potential source for emotional support for expatriate academics adjusting to a new foreign work environment, thus leading to increased job satisfaction. However, we also direct more general attention to alternative sources for support and wellbeing that can exist in the work and non-work environment of different types of expatriates. Hence, future research could take departure from this exploratory study and, on the one hand, assess in more detail the role of students for work outcomes of expatriate academics and, on the other hand, further investigate various types of support found in expatriates' work and non-work environments.

Implications for practice are also pertinent. Since teacher-student relations seem to affect not only students' wellbeing, but also the job satisfaction of the academics involved in teaching activities, the concept is of high importance. Accordingly, universities would be advised to spend resources trying to improve such relations.

Improvement to teacher-student relations may be fostered by selection (recruitment) and by development (training). With regard to selection, it has been argued that emotional and cultural intelligence is positively related to good social relations – especially when dealing with students across cultural divides (cf. Lin, Chen and Song, 2012; Huff, Song and Gresch, 2014). Because emotional intelligence, theoretically, includes the ability to understand and relate to others' as well as to one's own emotions, emotional intelligence may be linked both to characteristics that build relationships and to the quality of those relationships (Schutte, et al., 2001). Hence, those responsible for employment at universities should consider using some of the available tools for assessing the emotional and cultural intelligence of expatriate academic job applicants (see Borg and Johnston, 2013).

For training and development of expatriate academics, an important starting point in the intervention effort would be to work with them in ways that help them recognize the importance of their relationships with students. Such efforts might include discussions about strategies which academics can use to reduce conflicts in teacher-student relations in the new country (Murray, 2002; Chang, 2009). Efforts could also include the development of communities of practice for specific areas of teaching that would help facilitate both improved pedagogical practice and potentially even lower barriers between foreign and local academics, providing the expatriates with another potential socializing agent to choose from (Heinrich, 2014). Interventions may also be directed at the organizational level. For example, since it has been argued that teachers who experience higher levels of burnout tend to withdraw from student-teacher relationships, the teaching environment should be taken into consideration so that high stress levels among academics can be avoided (Burke, Greenglass and Schwarzer, 1996). This is particularly important in relation to expatriate academics, as adjusting to a foreign country has been shown to be a highly stressful experience for other types of expatriates (Brown, 2008).

Conclusion

In this article, we have studied teacher-student relations (as a job resource) and their relation to job satisfaction and intercultural adjustment (as job demands) among expatriate academics in China. Our results show that teacher-student relations are positively associated with expatriate academics' job satisfaction and adjustment. We also found that for expatriate academics who are

slow to adjust, the effect of student relations on job satisfaction is stronger. These findings indicate that teaching practices and student relations should be included as part of the context of academic expatriation. Also, it should be noted that students do not only pose problems for expatriate academics. Rather, positive relations can potentially lead to improved outcomes – especially for those who have difficulties adjusting.

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TABLE 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among the Variables¹

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Job Satisfaction	5.50	1.03	1.00											
2. Teacher-Student Relations	5.84	.85	.47***	1.00										
3. Intercultural Job Adjustment	5.59	1.07	.54***	.32***	1.00									
4. Time to Proficiency	-.23	.65	-.32***	-.15	-.22*	1.00								
5. Age (years)	43.13	11.68	.19*	.06	.14	.03	1.00							
6. Academic Field ²	3.07	1.57	.13	.24**	.03	-.13	.10	1.00						
7. Current Position ³	3.19	1.25	-.03	.14	.01	-.07	.14	.11	1.00					
8. Gender ⁴	1.21	.41	-.02	.01	-.08	.02	-.06	.04	.07	1.00				
9. Marital Status ⁵	1.40	.49	-.11	-.11	-.02	.01	-.01	-.08	-.07	.10	1.00			
10. Number of Previous Jobs as an Expatriate Academic	2.40	1.61	.15	.13	.15	-.06	.14	.01	.36***	.02	.03	1.00		
11. Time as an Expatriate Academic (years)	6.84	7.24	.17	.10	.21*	-.02	.47***	.02	.34***	.11	.06	.63***	1.00	
12. Time in Host Location (years)	2.69	2.04	-.02	.02	.06	.03	.42***	-.02	.31***	-.06	.02	.15	.30***	1.00

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (2-tailed)

¹ $122 \leq n \leq 124$; ² Natural Sciences/Engineering=1, Humanities=2, Social Sciences and Education=3, Business, Law and Communication=3, and Health Sciences=4; ³

Tutor/Teacher/Instructor=1, Research/Teaching Assistant=2, Assistant Professor=3, Associate Professor=4, and Full/Chair Professor=5; ⁴ Male=1 and Female=2; ⁵ Married=1 and Not Married=2.

TABLE 2: Results of Hierarchical Regressions for Teacher-Student Relations on Job Satisfaction Moderated by Intercultural Job Adjustment and Time to Proficiency ^a

	Job Satisfaction β
Step 1 (Controls)	
Age	.13
Academic Field	.04
Current Position	-.11
Gender	.03
Marital Status	-.05
Number of Previous Jobs as an Expatriate Academic	.06
Time as an Expatriate Academic	.05
Time in Host Location	-.10
R^2	.11
F	1.53
Step 2 (Predictor)	
Teacher-Student Relations (TSR)	.31***
ΔR^2	.20
R^2	.31
ΔF	30.84***
F	4.83***
Step 3 (Moderators)	
Intercultural Job Adjustment (IJA)	.32***
Time to Proficiency (TTP)	-.22**
ΔR^2	.16
R^2	.47
ΔF	15.91***
F	4.87***
Step 4 (Interactions)	
TSR x IJA	-.13
TSR x TTP	.16*
ΔR^2	.03
R^2	.50
ΔF	3.09*
F	7.37***

^a All standardized regression coefficients are from the last model of the analysis.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; two-tailed

FIGURE 1 - Conceptual Model

FIGURE 2: Moderation of the Effect of Teacher-Student Relations (TSR) on Job Satisfaction by Time to Proficiency (TTP).