

A framework for studying the individual related factors contributing to the in home country adjustment among repatriate spouses and children

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Introduction

Companies always look at the managerial talent and technical skill expertise as the main criteria when choosing expatriate candidates to carry out international assignments, hoping that the chosen expatriates would adapt and adjust themselves to the new working and living environment successfully. Throughout the years, more and more international companies include spouses and children in the selection process of selecting the right expatriate candidates. During the selection process, emphasize is given mostly on skills and factors of how the future expatriates and their family members would adapt to working and life situation in host country.

But how about the skills and factors needed by repatriates and their family members when they finally are no longer expatriates but repatriates? The end process of expatriation cycle, which is repatriation, is seldom discussed with the future repatriate and their family members. Repatriation involves the moves of repatriates from host country back to home country after spending a significant period of time working or studying (Hurn, 1999; Hurn & Bolon, 1998) or accompanying their spouses who are working or studying in foreign countries. Repatriation process, nevertheless, has also received less systematic exploration in the academic world (Suutari & Valima, 2002; Forster, 1994). Hunt and Bolon (1998) and Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall (1992) have proposed theoretical framework of repatriate adjustment. Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall (1992) has proved that repatriate adjustment is different from other forms of adjustment (e.g., domestic relocation and expatriate assignments) and thus to warrant separate theoretical and empirical investigation.

This manuscript has the objectives of producing a framework of repatriate spouses and children adjustment and presenting propositions for the benefits of future research. There are many variables that are related to repatriate spouses and children adjustment to their home country. Individual related factors contributing to the adjustment of repatriate spouses and children are the main focus variables of this manuscript. The individual related factors that will be discussed are personality characteristics, attachment styles, individual preferences and motivation, and individual satisfaction.

Repatriate spouses and children adjustment process in home country

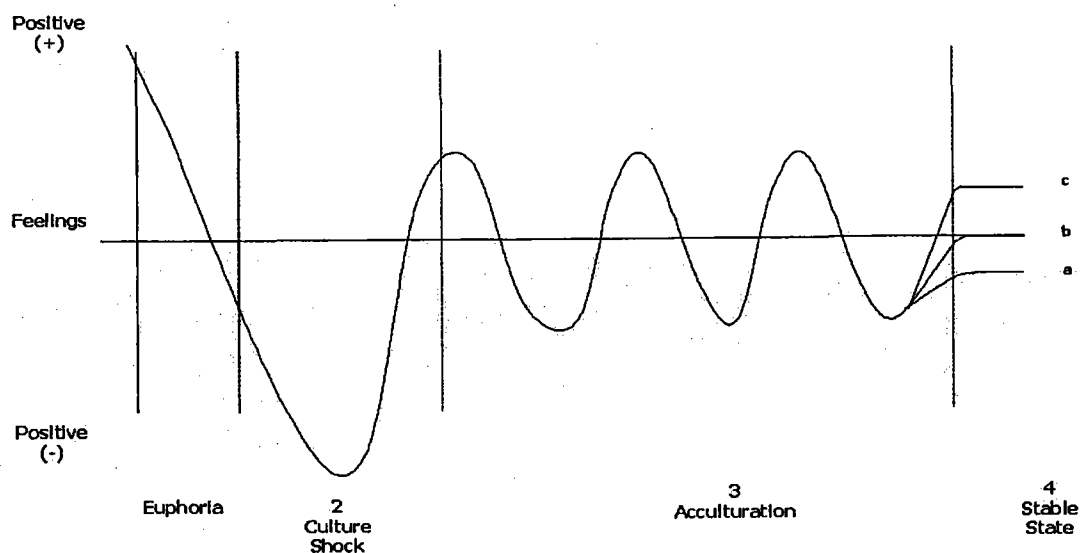
Many international companies tend to assume that "coming home" is easy. This is not the case. Repatriate family members have to reestablish themselves in a 'new environment' that they have left for quite some time. They may again find themselves going through a cycle of culture shock. All of this may be especially hard to deal with because this is

home and logically speaking it should be easy to reestablish one's life. Adler (1991), Gregerson (1992), and Hunt and Bolon (1998) agreed that adjustment to the host country is somewhat easier than the adjustment upon return to the home country.

We can relate the process of repatriation to the U-curve Theory of Adjustment or popularized as the Acculturation curve by Hofstede (1991, p. 210). Eventhough the Acculturation curve is applied to expatriation process, we would argue that the Acculturation curve is also logically applied to repatriation process. The four stages of adjustment are euphoria/honeymoon, culture shock, acculturation/adjustment and stable/mastery. We propose that repatriates will also experiencing these four stages in order to readjust to their home country.

However, we would argue that there will be more than one U curve will occur during the culture shock and acculturation stages, that is, a series of multiple U curves exist. Repatriate spouses and children may face some difficulties readjusting to their home country. The difficulties and challenges may not challenge them in one shot. As time pass by, there will be a few more challenges and times that they may feel low during the adjustment process. We would argue that this process may go on for a period of time until they accept the fact that they have to continue their lives as good as it can be. Hofstede (1991, p. 211) added that migrants who have returned home sometimes find they do not fit anymore and emigrate again, this time for good. Hofstede (1991, p. 210) further mentioned that in the stable state of mind, that is the fourth stage of the Acculturation curve, one's feelings may remain negative (4a), or as good as before (4b) or even better (4c).

Figure 1
The Multiple U-curve of Acculturation



The Acculturation Curve

In its most general sense, adjustment to home country refers to a response to environmental demand that a repatriate should make in order to feel satisfied with his/her life, psychologically healthy and physically comfortable to their home country like they were used to before they were relocated. A distinction can be made between psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Searle & Ward, 1990). Psychological adaptation refers to internal psychological outcomes such as mental health and personal satisfaction. Socio-cultural adaptation refers to external psychological outcomes that link individuals to their new context such as the ability to deal with daily problems, particularly in the areas of family life, work and school (see Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999). In addition, interaction is another dimension of intercultural adaptation (Kealey & Ruben, 1983). This dimension was defined by having an interest in and being able to deal with other people and can be regarded as a sub-dimension of socio-cultural adaptation. Therefore, in order to be successful in the adjustment process, repatriate spouses and children must be satisfied with their life, psychologically and physically healthy and able to communicate and make new interactions with people in the home country.

The Framework and Propositions Development

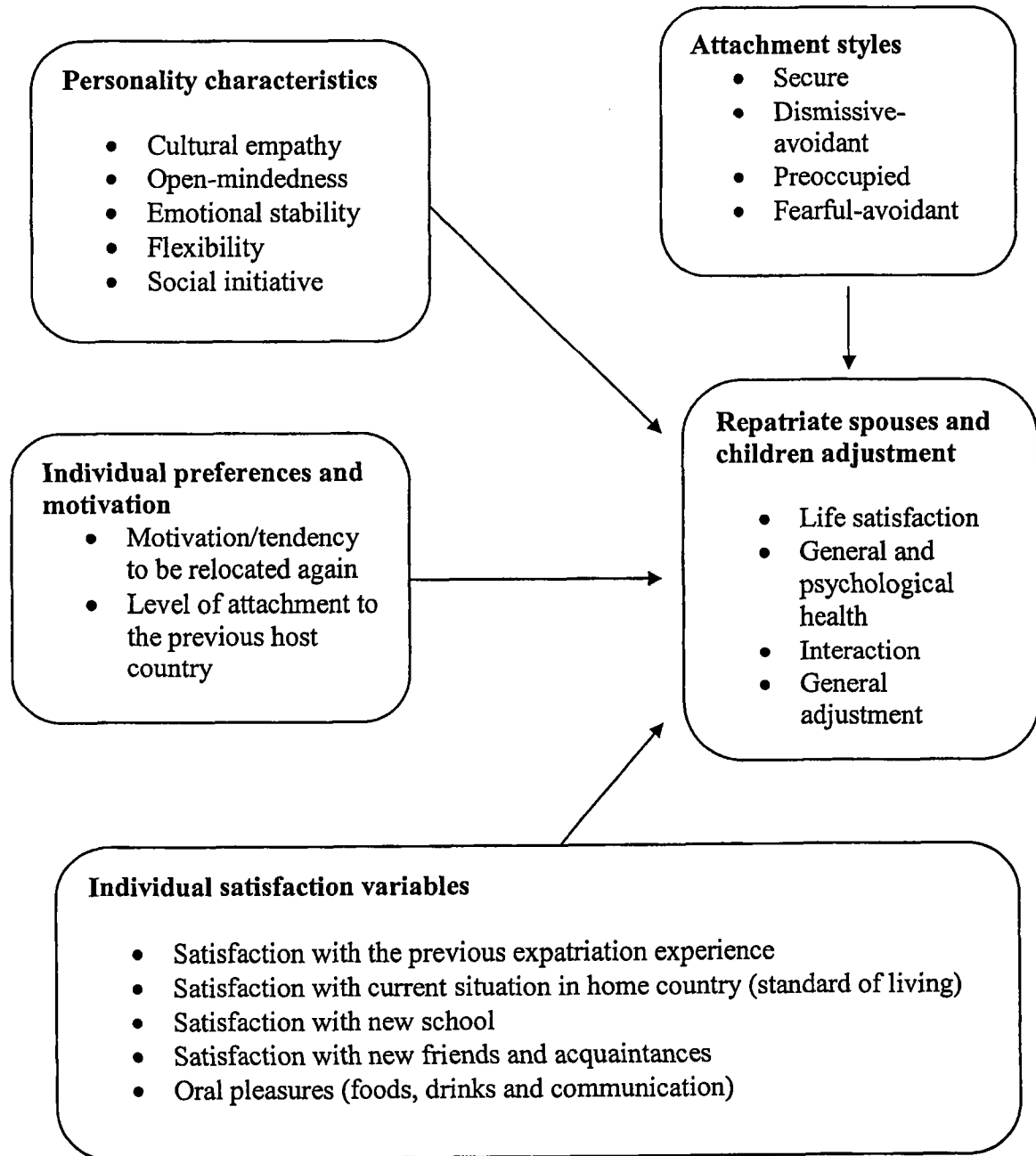
The main purpose of this manuscript is to produce a framework of repatriate spouses and children adjustment process to the home country (Figure 2). The main variables presented in the framework are repatriate spouses and children adjustment process, personality characteristics, attachment styles, individual preferences and motivation, individual satisfaction and other variables.

Personality characteristics

The first major part of this manuscript concerns personality characteristics of repatriate spouses and children. Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, (2000, 2001) and Ali, Van der Zee and Sanders (2003) proposed that a number of intercultural traits are related to successful adjustment of expatriates and their family members: Cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, flexibility and social initiative. We would argue that these five traits are also important for repatriate spouses and children in order to readjust successfully to the home country.

The first dimension is cultural empathy. Cultural empathy, also referred to as "sensitivity" (e.g., Hawes & Kealy, 1981). Ruben (1976) defined it as "the capacity to clearly project an interest in others, as well as to obtain and to reflect a reasonably complete and accurate sense of another's thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences". It can be argued that repatriate spouses and children should have constant interest in the culture and behaviour of the home country people and at the same time they should try to understand and accept the differences that have occurred during the last few years when they were absent in their motherland. We therefore predict that the quality of this dimension among repatriate spouses and children is positively related to their adjustment process to the home country.

Figure 2
Framework of repatriate spouses and children adjustment



Open-mindedness is defined as an open and unprejudiced attitude towards different groups and towards different cultures norms and values. Arthur and Bennet (1995) classify open-mindedness among the relational skills and use items as non-judgmentalness and racial/ethnic tolerance to measure this dimension. In addition, Harris (1973) found "interest in the local people" as one of the predictors of adjustment success. Thus, we would argue that repatriate spouses and children with open-minded would readjust easily to the home country.

The third dimension is emotional stability, which is defined as the tendency to remain calm in stressful situations versus a tendency to show strong emotional reactions under stressful circumstances. Abe and Weisman (1983) and Church (1982) mentioned that the ability to deal with psychological stress as an essential dimension of adjustment. Flexibility is the fourth dimension, and it can be defined as "a tendency and ability to adjust one's behavioral strategies to different or more restricted circumstances within a foreign culture versus the inability to do so and a tendency to stick to familiar behavioral strategies". Several scholars have stressed the importance of this dimension (Arthur & Bennet, 1995; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Torbion, 1982). Repatriate spouses and children need to be flexible in the home country, particularly when their expectations of their home country do not match or are totally different from what they had in the host country. Elements of flexibility, such as the ability to learn from mistakes and adjustment of behaviour, are associated with the ability to learn to adjust to new places and experiences. This is true for repatriate children who were born overseas and the relocation to the home country may be their first experience dealing with their motherland. The fifth dimension is social initiative, which is defined as "a tendency to stand out in a different culture, to establish contact and to be active" (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). Several researchers have pointed at the relevance of the ability to establish and maintain contacts (Hawes & Kealy, 1981; Kets de Vries & Mead, 1991). For instance, Hawes and Kealy (1981) stressed the importance of interaction with people and making friends.

Ali, Van der Zee and Sanders (2003) carried out a study of these traits among expatriate spouses and it was showed that emotional stability and open-mindedness are important traits of effective intercultural adjustment. The five intercultural traits have never been studied in relation to the adjustment of repatriate spouses and children. Nevertheless, there was no reason to assume that traits that are related to the ability to establish contacts within a new culture, to maintain a high level of psychological well-being, and to perform successfully among expatriates and expatriate spouses differ from traits that determine successful adjustment process among repatriate spouses and children in their home country. Therefore, the prediction was that the five traits would be positively related to the adjustment process of repatriate spouses and children, as a result of which the following proposition is formulated:

P1: Cultural Empathy, Open-mindedness, Emotional Stability, Flexibility and Social Initiative are positively related to the adjustment process of repatriate spouses and children.

Attachment styles

The second determinant of intercultural adaptation studied in the present study is the attachment style of repatriate children. There are four different attachment styles: secure attachment style, dismissive-avoidant attachment style, preoccupied attachment style, and fearful-avoidant attachment style (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

A child's attachment style can be referred to as the security in the mother-child relationship (Baron & Byrne, 1997). According to Bowlby's (1977) theory, children internalize experiences with caretakers in such a way that early attachment relations come to form a prototype for later relationships outside the family. In the first few years of his/her life, a child directly learns from his/her mother of how future relationships with other people can be developed. Furthermore, a positive influence is passed to a child whenever the child builds a strong sense of trust and can confidently count on his/her mother. Bowlby (1982) revealed three attachment styles of a baby, namely secure, avoidant, and ambivalent. The first two styles respectively, teach a baby to trust and care for other persons (secure) and to distrust and avoid other people (avoidant) meanwhile an ambivalent attachment style is a combination of the two attachment styles. Of these three attachment styles, according to Shaver and Hazan (1993), solely a person with the secure attachment style can build fully involved and satisfying long-term relationship.

Interestingly, Bartholomew (1990) formulated a model that is related to the adult's attachment style. He argued that a person develops attachment styles during childhood and then remain relatively stable throughout a person's lifetime. Bartholomew (*ibid*) distinguished between four attachment patterns that vary on two dimensions, namely, positive and negative patterns of one-self, and positive and negative patterns of others. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) later named the dimensions as secure attachment style, dismissive-avoidant attachment style, preoccupied attachment style, and fearful-avoidant ambivalent attachment style. People with a *secure attachment style* indicate a sense of worthiness (lovability) plus an expectation that other people are generally accepting and responsive. They are self-confident and have no doubts/misgiving feelings towards others. Findings show that secure persons perceive themselves in a positive and coherent way, possess good problem solving skills, tend to view stressful situations optimistically, and believe that others will help them in time of need. These qualities enable them to confront stress with a sense of mastery, to choose effective coping strategies, and to make use of social support in stressful situations (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). People with the *dismissive-avoidant attachment style* indicate a sense of love-worthiness combined with a negative disposition toward other people. Such people protect themselves against disappointment by avoiding close relationships and maintaining a sense of independence and invulnerability. Third, individuals with a *preoccupied attachment style* indicate a sense of unworthiness (unlovability) combined with a positive evaluation of others. This combination of characteristics leads individuals to strive for self-acceptance by gaining the acceptance of others. The final attachment style is the *fearful-avoidant attachment style* that indicates a sense of unworthiness (unlovability) combined with an expectation that others will be negatively disposed (untrustworthy and rejecting). People with dismissive-avoidant and fearful-avoidant attachment styles establish little contact with other people since they

have little trust in others and do not manage to integrate with other people. In the home country with a new challenging changes and environment, repatriate spouses and children may have to put extra effort in order to make contact with other people, namely their relatives, friends and neighbours. We therefore expected that repatriate spouses and children with a dismissive-avoidant attachment style, a preoccupied attachment style, or a fearful-avoidant attachment style would be less successful in adjusting to their home country than repatriate spouses and children with a secure attachment style. The next proposition can be formulated as follows:

P2: A dismissive-avoidant attachment style, preoccupied attachment style, and fearful-avoidant attachment style are negatively related to the adjustment process whereas a secure attachment style is positively related to the adjustment process of repatriate spouses and children.

Individual preferences and motivation

In this manuscript, we propose two variables of individual preferences and motivation that are: (a) motivation/tendency to be relocated again and (b) level of attachment to the previous host country.

a. Motivation to be relocated again

One repatriate spouse says,

“Once in a while, I ask my husband when we are going to be relocated to overseas again. There are many things that I am not satisfied here and they make me feels upset. I think I feel a lot safer in Holland. I wish very hard to be relocated again.”

There is a high tendency for same repatriates to be relocated overseas again. Hofstede (1991, pg 211) mentioned that immigrants who have returned home sometimes found that they do not fit anymore and later emigrate again. Schwartz (1992, 1994) laid out ten motivational value types. Among the ten motivational values are hedonism, stimulation and self-direction. Hedonism refers to pleasure and enjoying life, stimulation is having excitement, novelty and challenge in life (i.e. daring, a varied and an exciting life) and self-direction refers to creativity, freedom, independent, curious and choosing own goal. Repatriates spouses and children who possessed high motivation values of hedonism, stimulation and self-direction may have high tendency and looking forward to be relocated overseas again. Thus, the next proposition read as:

P3a : Repatriate spouses and children with high motivation to be relocated again are negatively related to the success of adjustment to their own home country.

b. Level of attachment to the host country

It is undeniable that some expatriate spouses and children have difficulties while adjusting to the host country. For those who have passed the acculturation stage and entered the stable stage, living overseas may have been an enhancing life experiences. Values exist in a hierarchy of our minds (Ravlin and Meglino, 1987) and each of us ranking them differently. Continuing the discussion of motivational values which was introduced by Schwartz (1992, 1994), we would argue that repatriate spouses and children have developed some of these values before being relocated to the host country. Among the motivational values are inner harmony, social power, pleasure, freedom, a

spiritual life, sense of belonging, social order, an exciting life, meaning in life, self-request, creativity, family security, social recognition, true friendship, world of beauty, ambition, broad-minded, clearing, choosing own goals, capable, accepting my portion in life, enjoying life, curious and successful. Repatriate spouses and children who are high in the elements of motivational values mentioned above would be enjoying themselves while expatriating in the host country. They most probably had tried and participated many host country's activities and found themselves attach to the locals' activities, ceremonies and ways of life. There are some expatriate spouses and children who are really attached to the hobbies and activities that have created and participated in the host country. Sadly, when they return to the home country, they really miss the hobbies and activities. Unfortunately, some or may be none of the hobbies and activities are available in the home country. Thus, the next proposition reads as,

P3b: Repatriate spouse and children with high level of attachment to the host country are negatively related to their adjustment process to the home country.

Individual satisfaction

In this manuscript, we group the individual satisfaction variables into three domain: (a) Satisfaction with the previous expatriation experiences, satisfaction with the current situation in the home country (standard of living) and satisfaction with new school in the home country; (b) Satisfaction with new friends and acquaintances; and (c) oral pleasures.

a. Satisfaction with the previous expatriation experiences, Satisfaction with the current situation in the home country (standard of living) and Satisfaction with new school in the home country

Values exist in a hierarchy of our minds (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987) with each of us ranking them differently. The Rokeach value survey (Rokeach, 1973) measures personal values that consist of 18 terminal values that represent preferred outcomes enhancing our state of being and 18 instrumental values which constitute belief that guide people's behaviour and conduct (Table 1).

Table 1
The Rokeach Value Survey

Terminal values		Instrumental values	
Comfortable life	Inner harmony	Ambitious	Imaginative
Exciting	Mature love	Broad-minded	Independent
Sense of accomplishment	National security	Capable	Intellectual
World at peace	Pleasure	Cheerful	Logical
World of beauty	Salvation	Clean	Loving
Equality	Self-respect	Courageous	Obedient
Family security	Social recognition	Forgiving	Polite
Freedom	True friendship	Helpful	Responsible
Happiness	Wisdom	Honest	Self-contributed

Source: Rokeach (1973, p. 26-32)

Some repatriate spouses and children with good values such as presented by Rokeach (for examples, comfortable life, exciting, sense of accomplishment, courageous,

helpful and loving) would cherish and value the experiences that they had living in the host country especially to those who had been relocated to a host country that has a better standard of living. When they return to their home country they may feel deterioration in their life styles. Repatriates themselves report reductions in pay, status, and autonomy upon return to the home country (Oddou & Mendenhall, 1991). At the same time, repatriate spouses and children may feel disoriented with the changing culture and environment that had occurred in the home country. The reality of their current home country situation may be different from their expectations. The home country, people and culture may change rapidly over a couple of years. Local people in the home country who used to be friendly may be now becoming more individualistic. Repatriates who used to have friends and friendly neighbours before the international relocation now find that the adjustment experiences may be worse than what they had experienced adjusting to host country. People are no longer friendly and helpful, neighbours do not know each other and worse, repatriate spouses and children may feel alienated in their own home country.

For repatriate children who have developed the fluency of the language and had been exposed to friends and culture of the host country may find it hard to adjust to the 'new' and strange environment and language. For some it is a devastating experience. They cannot understand the local language that is used as a medium at school. Not being able to communicate in the language, some repatriate children may feel left out at school. In addition, the method of teaching employed at local school in the home country may be different from what the repatriate children used too in the host country. This creates another problem to the repatriate children. There were cases where these repatriate children acted out their anger by being violence at school and at home.

Thus, repatriate spouses and children who were satisfied with the previous expatriation experience, who have had better conditions and living standard in the host country compared to the home country and satisfied with school in the host country may somewhat affect their adjustment process to the home country . The next three propositions read as:

P4a: A high level of satisfaction with previous expatriation experience is related to the adjustment process of repatriate spouses and children to their home country.

P4b: The level of satisfaction with the current situation in home country (i.e., standard of living) is positively related to repatriate spouses' and children's adjustment to their home country.

P4c: The level of satisfaction with new school in the home country positively related to repatriate children's adjustment to their home country.

b. Satisfaction with new friends and acquaintances

Both Rokeach (1973) and Schwartz (1992) proposed 'true friendship' as a major element of values. Being broad-minded, cheerful, loving, polite, daring, capable, curious and having an exciting life may have motivated some repatriate spouses and children to make many friends (both local and other expatriates) while living in a host country. The bonding of newly built friendship may have become very strong since expatriate spouses and children can relate themselves very strongly with other expatriates who share same experiences. Curious and eagerly to know about the host country's history, geography

and cultures, some expatriate spouses and children may have developed strong relationship with the host country's local people. This kind of friendship is very special since it may help the expatriates to have a meaningful and cheerful life and experiences while expatriating in the host country.

When the expatriate spouses and children are relocated to their home country, it is not necessarily that they stay at the same places as they resided before they were relocated to the host country. Thus, they have to make new friends and acquaintances. This process may take some time if the repatriate spouses and children are not prepared with the changes that happened in their home country while they were away. They may have some expectations of what the local people of the home country would be like before they were repatriated, but the real and current situation in the home country can be totally different from their expectations. Feeling frustrated with the hardships of making new friends, repatriates spouses and children may feel unhappy. Repatriate spouses may find this situation harder for them to accept compared to repatriate children. Repatriate children have the chances of going to schools and are exposed to many students that they can choose to be their friends. Hence, the resulting proposition reads:

P4d: Satisfaction with new friends and acquaintances is positively related to repatriate spouses' and children's adjustment process to their home country.

c. Oral pleasures (foods, drinks and communication)

Usunier (1998) carried out an interesting research on expatriate experience of a loss of oral pleasure related to the absence of their native language, and eating and drinking habits in the host country. It was found that it affects the expatriates' overall satisfaction with the expatriation experience. Usunier (1998) who made a research among American expatriates in France evidenced that an oral pleasure deficiency and assess the negative relationship between this deficiency and the expatriate's personal satisfaction.

We would propose that the reverse situation may occur to repatriates. After spending many years in the host country, repatriates spouses and children may have tried different foods, drinks, and also the language of the host country. Some may have developed a high degree of fondness towards the host country's foods, drinks and language. When they return to their home country, these foods and drinks may be not available. The host country's language may not being used or exists at all in the home country. The acquired skill of the new language and the tastes of foods and drinks may make repatriate spouses and children longing for them. Through the host country's language, some repatriate spouses and children may have developed good friendships with local people that may have become their best friends in the host country. In addition, communication process in the host country may have been practiced openly and freely and some repatriates spouses and children have enjoyed the communication styles. When they are in their home country, communication process may be a little bit difficult for them, especially for those who live in countries with high power distance cultures. Therefore, the next proposition reads as:

P4e: The longing of oral pleasures (foods, drinks and communication) of the host country is negatively related to the adjustment process of repatriate spouses and children.

Conclusion

Whilst there are many factors contributing to the success of adjustment process of repatriate spouses and children, this manuscript serves the purpose of proposing a framework of adjustment with factors that are individually related to repatriate spouses and children. This manuscript has introduced that personality characteristics, attachment styles, individual preferences and motivation, and individual satisfaction variables may be related to the adjustment process of repatriate spouses and children. Since there is a lacuna in the literature of repatriate spouses and children, this manuscript was written in hope that it will trigger interest among researchers to carry out scientific studies in this topic.

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