

**RELIGIOSITY AND JOB PERFORMANCE
AMONG MUSLIM SELF-INITIATED
EXPATRIATES IN MALAYSIA'S SERVICE
SECTOR: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CROSS-
CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT**

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CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xi
LIST OF APPENDICES	xii
ABSTRAK	xiii
ABSTRACT.....	xv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of Study.....	1
1.3 Problem Statement	12
1.4 Research Questions	18
1.5 Research Objectives	18
1.6 Significance of Study	19
1.6.1 Theoretical Contributions	19
1.6.2 Pratical Contributions	22
1.7 Operational Definition of Key Term.....	24
1.8 Organizational of the Chapter	26
1.9 Summary of Chapter	27
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	28
2.1 Chapter Overview	28
2.2 SIE Job Performance.....	28
2.3 Cross-Cultural Adjustment.....	39
2.3.1 Measurement of Cross-Cultural Adjustment	41

2.3.1(a)	Dimensionality and Operationalization of Cross-Cultural Adjustment.....	42
2.3.2	The Dimension of Cross-Cultural Adjustment	46
2.3.2(a)	The Cognitive Dimension	48
2.3.2(b)	The Affective Dimension.....	50
2.3.2(c)	The Behaviour Dimension	51
2.4	Mediating Role of Cross-Cultural Adjustment on Job Performance Relationship.....	52
2.5	Religiosity	56
2.5.1	The Influence of Religiosity upon the Adjustment and Job Performance	60
2.5.2	Ascertaining Religiosity.....	68
2.6	Relationship between Religiosity and Cross-Cultural Adjustment and Job Performance	82
2.7	Criticism of Religiosity Measurement	96
2.8	Research Gap	99
2.9	Theoretical Base of the Study	104
2.9.1	PE Fit Theory	104
2.9.2	Self-Determination Theory	110
2.10	Research Theoretical Framework	117
2.11	Research Hypotheses	117
2.11.1	Religiosity and SIE Job Performance	119
2.11.2	Religiosity and SIE Cross-Cultural Adjustment	122
2.11.3	Cross-Cultural Adjustment and SIE Job Performance.....	125
2.11.4	Mediating Effect of Cross-Cultural Adjustment.....	127
2.12	Summary of Chapter	129
CHAPTER 3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	130
3.1	Chapter Overview	130
3.2	Research Paradigm, Research Method & Research Design.....	130

3.3	Target Population and Unit of Analysis	132
3.4	Reflectiveness of Population in the Sample and Sample Size	134
3.5	Sampling	136
3.6	Phase 1- Expert-Driven Pre-Test	137
3.7	Phase 2: Respondent- Driven Pre-test.....	139
3.8	Phase 3- Pilot Study	142
3.9	Phase 4- Data Collection	143
3.10	Scale and Measurement.....	145
3.11	Common Method Bias	148
3.12	Data Analysis Technique	149
3.13	Partial Lease Square (PLS) versus Covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM).....	151
3.14	Reflective and Formative Measurement Model	157
3.15	Evaluation of PLS Path Model Results.....	157
3.15.1	Assessment of Measurement Model	157
3.15.1(a)	Convergent Validity	158
3.15.2(b)	Discriminant Validity.....	159
3.15.2	Assessment of Structural Model	160
3.16	Testing Mediation in PLS	162
3.16	Chapter Summary.....	164
CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS		165
4.1	Chapter Overview	165
4.2	Response Rate	165
4.3	Respondents Profile	166
4.4	Descriptive Statistics of Individual Question Items and Latent Constructs.	169
4.5	Common Method Bias	172
4.6	Data Analysis	174
4.6.1	Measurement Model of PLS	176

4.6.1(a)Convergent Validity	176
4.6.1(b)Discriminant Validity.....	178
4.6.2 Assessment of Structural Model	179
4.6.2(a) Collinearity Assessment.....	180
4.6.2(b) Structural Model Path Coefficient.....	181
4.6.2(c) Analysis for Mediating Effects	183
4.6.2(d) Coefficient of Determination (R ² value).....	186
4.6.2(e) Assessing Effect Size (f^2).....	187
4.6.2(f) Blindfolding and Predictive Relevance (Q ²).....	188
4.6.2(g) Assessment of model fit - Goodness of Fit	189
4.6.2(h) Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA)	190
4.7 Summary of the Hypotheses	194
4.8 Summary of the Chapter	196
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS ...	198
5.1 Introduction	198
5.2 Recapitulation of the Study	198
5.3 Discussion of the Findings	200
5.3.1 Influence of Religiosity on SIE Job Performance.....	201
5.3.2 Influence of Religiosity on SIE Cross-Cultural Adjustment	205
5.3.3 Influence of Cross-Cultural Adjustment on SIE Job Performance	212
5.3.4 Mediating Effect of Cross-Cultural Adjustment.....	213
5.4 Contribution	219
5.4.1 Theoretical Implications	219
5.4.2 Practical Implications.....	223
5.5 Limitations	225
5.5 Scope for Future Research	226

5.6	Conclusion.....	227
	REFERENCES.....	230
	APPENDICES	

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 2.1 Self-evaluation of religiosity using single items.....	69
Table 2.2 Unidimensional measures of religiosity using multiple items	69
Table 2.3 Religiosity as multidimensional.....	70
Table 3.1 Narrative expert opinion	138
Table 3.2 Number of question items	141
Table 3.3 Cronbach's alpha score of instrument scales (n=30)	143
Table 3.4 Constructs and Sources	148
Table 3.5 Rules of thumb for selecting CB-SEM or PLS-SEM	153
Table 3.6 Criteria for reflective measurement	159
Table 4.1 Respondents background information (n=204)	168
Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics- Latent variables (n=204).....	170
Table 4.3 Means and Standard Deviations for Survey Indicators (n=204).....	170
Table 4.4 KMO and Bartlett's Test (n=204)	171
Table 4.5 Common Method Bias (CMB) - Total Variance Explained (n=204)	173
Table 4.6 Convergent Validity (n=204).....	177
Table 4.7 Discriminant validity - Fornell-Larcker Criterion (n=204)	179
Table 4.8 Discriminant validity of Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (n=204).....	179
Table 4.9 Collinearity Assessment - Inner VIF Values (n=204)	180
Table 4.10 Significance of direct effects- Path coefficients (n=204)	182
Table 4.11 Confidence Intervals	182

Table 4.12	Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected	183
Table 4.13	Significance of specific indirect effects- Path coefficients (n=204).	184
Table 4.14	Confidence Intervals	184
Table 4.15	Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected	185
Table 4.16	R-Square value and Q-Square value (n=204)	186
Table 4.17	Effect Size (f^2).....	187
Table 4.18	Predictive Relevance (R-Square value and Q-Square value) (n=204)	188
Table 4.19	Model Fit - Fit Summary.....	190
Table 4.20	Result of Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA)	192
Table 4.21	Summary of Findings.....	194

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Dimensions of SIE Job Performance by Caligiuri (1997)	34
Figure 2 The Dimension of Muslim Religiosity	77
Figure 3 Theoretical Research Framework	119
Figure 4 Conceptual Research framework	175
Figure 5 PLS-Path analysis of t-values (n=204)	185
Figure 6 PLS-Path analysis of R-square values (n=204)	187
Figure 7 Construct Cross validated Redundancy	189
Figure 8 IPMA Grid (Martilla and James, 1977)	191
Figure 9 Total effects -Importance-Performance Map [JP]	193
Figure 10 PE Fit of Muslim SIE- Internal Force & External Force	219

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SIE	Self-Initiated Expatriate
OE	Organizational Expatriate
PEF	Person-Environment Fit Theory
IHRM	International Human Resource Management
HR	Human Resource
CR	Cognitive Religiosity
AR	Affective Religiosity
BR	Behavioural Religiosity
CA	Cognitive Adjustment
BA	Behavioural Adjustment
AA	Affective Adjustment
JP	Job Performance

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	A SUMMARY OF RELIGIOSITY SCALES FOR USE BY MUSLIM POPULATIONS
APPENDIX B	QUESTIONNAIRE
APPENDIX C	LIST OF QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM ORIGINAL VS ADAPTED
APPENDIX D	FREQUENCIES
APPENDIX E	PLS RESULT
APPENDIX F	G*POWER RESULT

**FAKTOR PENGARUH RELIGIOSITI TERHADAP PRESTASI KERJA
EKSPATRIAT MUSLIM DI SEKTOR PERKHIDMATAN, MALAYSIA:
PERANAN FAKTOR PENYESUAIAN BUDAYA SEBAGAI
PEMBOLEHUBAH MEDIASI**

ABSTRAK

Globalisasi telah membolehkan individu untuk mencari peluang pekerjaan di negara asing yang baharu, dalam istilah lain fenomena ini dikenali sebagai mobiliti global. Dalam konteks ini, pelarasan budaya dan prestasi kerja ekspatriat adalah penting dalam prestasi organisasi keseluruhan. Dengan ini, kajian ini telah dimulakan untuk mendedahkan hubungan langsung antara religiositi (kognitif, afektif dan kelakuan) dan prestasi kerja serta melalui kesan pengantara pelarasan budaya (kognitif, afektif dan kelakuan) pada Ekspatriat Muslim di Malaysia. Varians berdasarkan PLS-SEM telah digunakan untuk menguji rangka kerja konsep menggunakan 204 maklumbalas daripada Ekspatriat Muslim dari industri perkhidmatan di Malaysia. Hasil kajian menunjukkan hubungan pertama antara religiositi (kognitif, afektif, dan kelakuan) dan prestasi kerja Ekspatriat Muslim adalah signifikan. Seterusnya, hubungan kedua menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan signifikan antara religiositi kognitif dan pelarasan (kognitif, afektif, dan kelakuan). Religiositi afektif didapati tidak mempunyai hubungan signifikan dengan pelarasan budaya. Hubungan antara religiositi kelakuan, pelarasan kognitif, dan pelarasan afektif didapati negative. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat hubungan positif antara religiositi kelakuan dan pelarasan kelakuan. Hubungan ketiga yang dikaji dalam kajian ini adalah hubungan antara pelarasan budaya dan prestasi kerja. Daripada tiga hipotesis, hanya pelarasan kognitif mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan dengan prestasi kerja. Sementara itu, pelarasan kognitif mempunyai

kesan mediasi terhadap hubungan antara religiositi kognitif dan prestasi kerja Ekspatriat Muslim. Dari aspek sumbangan, kajian ini dapat menyumbang panduan kepada majikan untuk menangani Ekspatriat Muslim secara berkesan. Di samping itu, kajian ini boleh menambah sumbangan kepada literatur pengurusan sumber manusia antarabangsa dan sektor-sektor lain di Malaysia secara keseluruhannya.

**RELIGIOSITY AND JOB PERFORMANCE AMONG MUSLIM SELF-
INITIATED EXPATRIATES IN MALAYSIA’S SERVICE SECTOR:
THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT**

ABSTRACT

The significant aspect of the expatriation process is the expatriates’ job performance in the host country and the cross-cultural adjustment to the socio-cultural environment. Expatriates’ by and large, come from quite different socio-cultural backgrounds and different work conditions. It is interesting yet a problematic phenomenon to study their job performance and their adjustment to the new socio-cultural milieu, work environment and adoption to innovation in professional arenas. Thus, this research analyse the effect of religiosity (cognitive, affective and behavioural) and the job performance through cross-cultural adjustment (cognitive, affective and behavioural) as an mediating variable to the specific type of expatriate population – namely, on 204 Muslim Self-Initiated Expatriate (SIE) in a host country whose population is predominantly of the same religious background as the SIE. This research used a questionnaire as the method of data collection. Whereas, the analysis method used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), SmartPLS v.3.0. The result of this research showed that the first path relationship between cognitive religiosity, affective religiosity, behavioural religiosity and job performance of SIE were significant. Next, the findings of the second path relationship indicated that there is a positive relationship between cognitive religiosity and cognitive adjustment, affective adjustment, and behavioural adjustment. Affective religiosity was found to have no relation with cross-cultural adjustment. The relationship between behavioural religiosity, cognitive adjustment, and affective adjustment was shown to be non-existent; however, there was

a positive relationship between behavioural religiosity and behavioural adjustment. The third path relationship investigated in this study was the relationship between cross-cultural adjustment and job performance. Out of three hypotheses, only cognitive adjustment had a positive and significant relationship with job performance. Meanwhile, cognitive adjustment has a mediating effect on the relationship between cognitive religiosity and the job performance of Muslim SIE. The findings of this study demonstrate two important implications. First, the theoretical contribution is that the research highlight that the extent of an SIE's commitment to religious value and belief have important implication on job performance. Besides that, the research framework contributes knowledge to the literature on person-environment fit theory and self-determination theory and with the measurement scale demonstrates good psychometric properties and is a promising tool for the measurement of religiosity among Muslim SIE in majority Muslim host-country settings. Secondly, the practical contribution of this research servers as a guide to Muslim-majority host countries as a whole on how to enhance Muslim SIEs' job performance.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This is the introduction chapter for this thesis, which outlines the research background, context of study, rationale for the research, as well as the research's objectives and aims. A justification of originality is followed by the research design and an outline of the thesis.

1.2 Background of Study

The trends in recent years toward globalization and increased global mobility among professionals have resulted in greater complexity in overseas work assignments (Bonache & Froese, 2020); likewise, a global mobility trend mobility trends recognized the rise in international expatriation over the last 40 years (Price Waterhouse Cooper, 2020). As a result of this human mobility phenomenon, new concepts and definitions, such as “third-country expatriates”, “inpatriates”, “short-term project workers”, and “self-initiated expatriates (SIEs)”, have emerged (Fontinha & Brewster, 2020).

Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, and Barry (1997) were the first to describe the SIE-type of expatriate assignment. SIEs are people who, on their own volition and initiative, seek and find work overseas (Andresen *et al.*, 2020). These individuals are distinct from organizational expatriates (OEs), who are sent by their employer to an overseas subsidiary and are not necessarily expatriates by choice. Some studies in which SIEs were distinguished from OEs have shown that a high percentage of expatriates (30–70 per cent) were actually SIEs (Suutari & Brewster, 2000; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). Services industries are most amenable to SIEs because professionals with skills in these industries are likely to get employed across countries (Nagel, 2005; Richardson & McKenna, 2003).

Once the SIEs have made the decision to move internationally, SIEs' job performance becomes a key issue (Farcas & Gonçalves, 2019). For example, some of the factor that influence their job performance is the way the SIE observes cultural differences such as, time zone, punctuality difference and adaptation to work are factors that influence the expatriate's reaction to their new environment and the effectiveness of their integration (McNulty & Brewster, 2020). Bashir (2012) reiterate that no cultural adjustment by expatriates to the target countries results in high cost in terms of job performance, customer relations, productivity and operational efficiency.

McDonnell and Scullion (2013) contend that SIEs may face adjustment challenges greater than those experienced by OEs because they move not only to new countries but also to new organizations. Studies have identified that OEs have a range of supports from the organization to ease their adjustment process in the host country, including pre-departure training, language skills, training and supports for spouse and family, preparations for repatriation, career planning (McNulty, 2012).

Due to SIEs' absence of pre-existing company ties and lower degree of emotional support provided by headquarters compared with OEs, they have a need to integrate more with local culture independently. Besides less emotional support provided by company headquarters, SIEs also receive less financial support than do OEs, especially visible with special OE incentives and allowances, all of which contributing to lower cross-cultural adjustment and job performance among SIEs (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011; Lo,Wong, & Yam, 2012). As the organizational expatriation literature demonstrates, SIE failure to successfully adjust and cope with these conditions is likely to generate negative individual and organizational outcomes, including low job performance. Consequently, there is a significant need for specific consideration of the distinctive adjustment challenges that SIEs face.

Caligiuri (1997) evaluated an SIE's job performance through two criteria, namely, cross-cultural adjustments and performance in the international assignment. The cross-cultural adjustment was explained in terms of the SIEs degree of fit with the work and non-work environments. Adjustment model was not well conceptualized in the past studies (Andresen & Volodina, 2018). For instance, Haslberger (2005) argued that the variables in the Black *et al.*, (1991) model were not developed in a method driven by systematic theory, which, in effect, questioned the validity of the three facets of adjustment. Therefore, a study by Haslberger, Brewster, and Hippler (2012) has offered a framework, called the Model of Cross-Cultural Adjustment, for understanding different modes of cross-cultural adjustment through which SIEs approach and work their way through the various national and work structures and barriers that they have to cope with (Haslberger, Brewster, and Hippler, 2013).

An SIE is said to adjust to three dimensions: cognitive adjustment, affective adjustment, and behavioural adjustment (Haslberger, Brewster & Hippler, 2013; 2014). The cognitive dimension involves an SIE's knowledge and understanding of a new host-country environment. Affective adjustment is concerned with SIEs' feelings, and the behavioural dimension examines their physical interactions in the host society (Brandl and Neyer, 2009; Haslberger, Brewster & Hippler, 2013). Haslberger, Brewster, and Hippler's (2012) new adjustment model invited researchers to validate with cross-cultural empirical studies.

The existing research shows that cross-cultural adjustment and job performance of SIEs is interdependent and that the key determinant of poor performance is actually due to lack of adjustments in the host-country environment (Harrison *et al.*, 2005). Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, (2005) found that, on average, it takes expatriates more than five years or more to adjust to the new country's culture after which the curve of cultural

adjustment stabilizes. An expatriate who is unable to adjust with the new environment will experience a drop in observable performance and may elicit clashes and misunderstandings with co-workers, eventually resulting in turnover (Richardson and McKenna, 2006; Bhaskar Shrinivas, Shaffer & Luk, 2005; Mejia, Balkin & Cardy, 2012).

Hence, cross-cultural adjustment will help SIEs to retain their position, and job performance will be higher when SIEs are able to cope with challenges in the host country. Caligiuri, (1997), conceptualized expatriates job performance into four dimensions: technical/task performance, contextual/pro-social performance, contextual/managerial performance, and assignment-specific performance, which refers to expatriate-specific performance (Caligiuri & Day, 2000; Woods, Barker & Troth, 2012). SIEs' job performance and the moderating effect of expatriate cross-cultural adjustment is addressed in this study, since it represents a competitive advantage to a self-initiated expatriate (Palthe, 2004).

This study aimed to investigate the extent to which religiosity affects cross-cultural adjustments and performance on a specific type of SIEs population – namely, Muslim SIEs in a host country whose population is predominantly of the same religious background as the SIEs. As of 2017, there are about 1.8 billion Muslims in the world, according to the Pew Research Center (2017). Together, they make up nearly one-fourth of the world's population, making Islam the world's second largest religion after Christianity. Within the second half of this century, Muslims are expected to become the world's largest religious group. The Pew Research Center estimates that by 2070, Islam will overtake Christianity, due to faster birth rates (2.7 children per family vs. 2.2 for Christian families). As of 2017, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. The Muslim population is a diverse community of believers spanning the globe. Over

50 countries have Muslim-majority populations, while other groups of Muslims are clustered in minority communities in nations on nearly every continent.

Past studies on global mobility, particularly on SIEs' job performance and adjustment in a host-country organization has been conducted in Western countries with little focus in Muslim-majority countries (Kriger and Seng, 2005; Vinten, 2000). Previous research had identified a failure rate between 25 to 40 percent for international relocations leading up to the new millennium which ended with job withdrawal especially in developing countries (Wang & Varma, 2019). Among the reasons attributed to these failure rates include: (1) the inability of the spouse to adapt to the host religious and cultural system; (2) the inability of the expatriates themselves to adapt to the host religious and cultural system; and (3) family-related problems associated with foreign assignment. The higher failure rate in developing countries is described as rather alarming as this is the region where the most "attractive" and "growing" countries of the world are located (Halim, Bakar, & Mohamad, 2019 and Tahir, 2018).

Past research shows that religious discrimination is prevalent among Muslim SIEs in the labour market (The Guardian, 2017). One-third of Muslim expatriates who are working in Western counties leave their jobs before completing their experience. HSBC Expat Explorer survey shows that 34 per cent of expatriates are seeking to exit their host country (Expat, H. S. B. C., 2013)

Islamic religion constitutes several requirements that impact the daily lives of Muslim practitioners, such as praying five times a day, attending the Friday congregational prayer, fasting, celebrating holidays at the end of Ramadan, making the pilgrimage to Mecca, following dietary prescriptions, and abiding by restrictions on shaking hands (Bouma *et al.*, 2003). These requirements can impact Muslim employees'

behaviour in the work place either as direct or indirect symbols of faith, e.g. their food preferences during lunch or dinner, days off, dress, work schedules, and attitudes toward hierarchy and leadership (Rao, 2015). A study by Kamenou and Fearfull (2006) stated that religious stereotyping is central to Muslim people's work and societal experiences in the West.

This statement was supported by the finding in Berger, Essers, and Himi's (2017) study on Muslim expatriates' performance in Dutch organizations, whereby Muslim expatriates faced difficulties in aligning their professional identity and their Islamic identity in the workplace. For example, this relates to discomfort with western organizational practices or engaging in after work gathering with alcoholic drinks. Besides drinks, these expatriates experience difficulties regarding practices within the organization. For Muslims, halal food and the avoidance of non-halal food are important eating practices (Bouma *et al.*, 2003).

Other discrimination faced by Muslim SIEs is related to dress code. Kamenou and Fearfull (2006) found that Muslim expatriates with headscarves tend to encounter more conflict in Western organizations (Berger, Essers, & Himi, 2017). Furthermore, following the September 11th attack in New York City and an increase in terrorism, Muslims have been subject to negative stereotyping in Western countries (Nassar *et al.*, 2015; Timothy & Iverson, 2006). A number of scholars has summarized that the discrimination of Muslim expatriates is due to anti-Muslim feelings in the United States and Europe under the label of Islamophobia (Mastnak, 2010; Rana, 2007).

Consequently, countries with Muslim-majority populations where the religion of Islam is widespread such as Malaysia, Maldives, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Indonesia, have become attractive for Muslims (Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015; Timothy & Iverson 2006). There is now a considerable body of literature that argues that Muslim

expatriates prefer to work with same-religious-background countries (Shams, 2020; Battour *et al.*, 2011; Nassar *et al.*, 2015). Malaysia, as a majority-Muslim country offers freedom for Muslim SIEs' religious practice. For instance, Malaysia provides prayer rooms for Muslim SIEs to pray, additional break hours for Friday congregational prayers, public holidays at the end of Ramadan, approval for leave for the pilgrimage to Mecca, and widely available halal dietary options, which has allowed for Malaysia to be an attractive work location (Bouma *et al.*, 2003; Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015).

Although studies have revealed that Muslim expatriates experience satisfaction, fit in, and perform well in Muslim-majority countries, a study conducted by Tahir & Ismail (2007) on the cross-cultural adjustment of Muslim expatriates in Malaysia revealed that there is some difference in the cultural environments and expatriate adjustment processes in Islamic states which adopted Islam as the ideological foundation of state and constitution versus majority-Muslim countries which endorsed Islam as their state religion. Therefore, it is important for this thesis to recognize the factors contributing to Muslim SIEs' cross-cultural adjustments and job performance in a majority-Muslim country, Malaysia.

The rapid development and growing trend in the number of expatriates in Malaysia has heightened the need for research and understanding of how these expatriates adjust to a developing country like Malaysia during their assignments. Although there has been abundance of research have found a myriad of factors that influence cross-cultural adjustment and job performance of expatriates in a developing countries, multiracial country or Muslim Majority country are still scarce (Halim, Bakar, & Mustaffa, 2017). With the exception of Mohd Tahir and Ismail (2007) who investigated cross-cultural challenges; Subramaniam, Raduan, Jegak and Naresh (2010) on personality; Halim et al. (2017) on the mediating effects of communication and

interaction; and Miranda (2009) on expatriates' learning style, Shimazu *et al.*, (2015) on job satisfaction and performance; it can be said that very limited research on expatriate job performance in a multicultural environment have been published.

Recent literature suggested that religion factors also influence expatriates' job performance, value, and attitude and play a significant role in determining how people behave in certain situations (Onyemah, *et al.*, 2018). SIE cross-cultural adjustment is perceived as a way of expressing cultural identity (Williams, 2002). As such, Mole *et al.*, (2005) highlighted the importance in considering religious needs in the organization setting.

Religiosity affects expatriates through rules, beliefs, ways of life, and priorities (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Various authors have suggested religiosity as an important dimension in management and the workplace, yet this construct is generally ignored or incorporated into other constructs (Guiso, Sapienza & Zingales, 2002; Mansori, 2012). Despite the broad consensus that religiosity plays an important role in literature, religiosity as a predictor for performance has been understudied and still lacks a clear direction for such relationships (Bakar *et al.*, 2018; Mellahi & Budhwar, 2010 ; Mol *et al.*, 2005). Additionally, few research studies have suggested that Islamic religiosity influences employee's behaviour (Barhem & Muhamad, 2009).

For Muslims, religion is prevalent in everyday decisions that are guided by Shariah-compliance (Jafari & Scott, 2014; Stephenson, 2014). Fostering SIEs with an Islamic approach and Islamic mind-set will encourage them to be aware that their main intention to work is to worship Allah and to obtain His blessing (Sharabi, 2012). Simultaneously, this awareness will encourage the individual to perform any tasks assigned as good as possible, even when confronted with difficulties. This is due to the belief that Allah will help and give blessings to his servants who are patient.

Abeng (1997) and Khan *et al.*, (2015), stated that Muslims are obligated to work hard to provide benefits to others and not be lazy, as well as maintain awareness that Allah always sees His servants. Through this belief, each of the individuals will be encouraged to keep *amanah*, or trust, and perform well in their international tasks. While dealing with difficulties, a Muslim SIE is obligated to be patient, self-controlled, *tawakal*, or reliant on Allah's will, and hold the belief that there is great wisdom behind everything that Allah does. In fulfilling these obligations, the individual will likely make his or her best effort to engage and perform well in his or her international assignment.

Zahrah *et al.*, (2016) found that there is a significant relationship between religiosity and job performance among Muslims, and other research revealed that people who have higher religiosity are more inclined to work properly (Sharabi, 2012). Muslim religiosity in this study consists of three dimensions: the Islam-Behavioural Dimension of Religiosity, which emphasises the bodily action of human activity; the Iman-Cognitive Dimension of Religiosity, which refers to the understanding of Allah; and the Ihsan-Affective Dimension of Religiosity, which covers the spirit or actualisation of virtue and goodness (Mahudin, *et al.*, 2016; Parboteeah *et al.*, 2004). It is crucial to identify the degree of religiosity of SIEs, as such belief is purported to motivate SIEs to perform their tasks effectively in the host country. This may lead to better cross-cultural adjustments and optimum job performance in a Malaysia.

The rapid development and growing trend in the number of expatriates in Malaysia has heightened the need for research and understanding of how these expatriates adjust to a developing country like Malaysia during their assignments. According to extant literature, previous studies using religion as a predictor have relied primarily on examples and data from Arab-speaking countries or countries with Islamic

pilgrimage sites in the Middle East and North Africa region to make inferences on the research in the Islamic world (Richardson & Rammal, 2018; Yousef, 2000). Although Islam is often associated with the Arab world and the Middle East, fewer than 15 per cent of Muslims are Arab and by far, the largest populations of Muslims live in Southeast Asia (more than 60 per cent of the world's total) (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Similarly, several previous studies on international businesses and IHRM by Achour *et al.*, (2015), Alam *et al.* (2011), Bakar *et al.*, (2016), and Richardson and Rammal (2018) chose Malaysia as the context of their research to explore the Muslim perspective from a non-Arab viewpoint. Previous studies of Southeast Asian majority-Muslim country have investigated the relationship between religiosity and performance in Indonesia (Darto *et al.*, 2015 and Wening & Choerudin, 2015).

As a developing, multicultural society, Malaysia is worth investigating especially when the country has become one of the preferred foreign direct investment (FDI) destinations in the South East Asia (Jomo, 2019; Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, 2019; UNCTAD, 2017). The aggressive promotion on Malaysia as a tourism destination, together with the government's policy has clearly indicated that the country will face a continuous increase in the number of expatriates in various sectors.

In fact, a part of the Economic Transformation Program (ETP) set up by the previous government has also acknowledged the human capital needs of the Entry Points Projects (EPPs) and business opportunities, whereby the government will take action to attract foreign talent (expatriates) to work in Malaysia and ease immigration rules to facilitate the entry of talent as it is believed that this will provide a ready pool of technical, critical thinking and leaderships skills needed to run future business

opportunities as well as projects in non-National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs). The government's policy further proves that the number of expatriates working in Malaysia will increase tremendously. According to the TalentCorp Malaysia (2019), the total number of expatriates in Malaysia for 2018 was 185,790, and it was verified that the highest number expatriates was found in the service industry, amounting to 57 per cent of the total number of expatriates in Malaysia. Since this industry has been attracting the largest amount of FDI in Malaysia, this thesis specifically concentrated on the service industry in Malaysia, for example education services, hotel and tourism, financial services, health services, and global establishments.

The service sector in Malaysia recorded its highest approved private investment in 2018 at RM103, 404.00 million in various economic sectors as compared to the manufacturing sector at only RM87, 375.60 million. This industry increases international mobility in Malaysia; therefore, it is crucial to examine the job performance and cross-cultural adjustments of SIEs in this industry to inform ways of increasing performance in productivity that allow firms to produce greater output for the same level of input, earn higher revenues, and ultimately generate higher GDP.

To further enhance our understanding on expatriate adjustment in Malaysia, this research aimed to investigate the extent to which religiosity affects cross-cultural adjustment and job performance among Muslim SIEs in a host country whose population is predominantly of the same religious background as the SIE. These studies assumed that Muslim SIEs are homogenous. There was no consideration of the diversity of Muslims due to cultural differences from political, social, and historical trajectories. One approach to account for diversity of Muslims is measuring religiosity (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2012). Additionally, this study contribute to international human resource management (IHRM) literature by providing new

evidence regarding factors which influence self-initiating expatriates (SIE) cross-cultural adjustments and job performance.

1.3 Problem Statement

Expatriation has several benefits, it not only helps the economies of the expatriates' home and host countries, but also supports the expatriates and host-country nationals themselves (Pandian, 2008). In addition, expatriates also contribute to the diversity of the organization by creating a multicultural working environment for the host-country nationals. This situation, though, also presents challenges and opportunities in solving an organization's diversity issues. While expatriates provide good opportunities for cross-cultural learning and communication, they also may face many barriers that hinder their international experiences (Pandian, 2008). As noted by Tepeci and Barlett (2002), in their global mobility projects, new cultures, and psychological and social contexts, SIE appears to encounter numerous dilemmas due to their different in cross-cultural backgrounds, and found that interacting with locals and host environments are potentially challenging for them living in a foreign country found that (Pandian, 2002).

Generally, Malaysia directly benefited from the shift away of SIE from the United States and the United Kingdom following the 11 September 2001 attacks on New York City (Mustaffa & Ilias, 2013). The combined effect of visa restrictions, increased scrutiny of applicants and discrimination in the labour market, as well as anxieties about the spread of "Islamophobia" and the harassment of Muslims, has enabled an alternative destination to emerge. As a nation with a large Muslim population and a reputation as a safe destination for Muslims, Malaysia has become active in attracting Muslim SIEs (Mustaffa & Ilias, 2013).

Despite Malaysia being a Muslim majority country that is considered a safe destination for Muslim SIEs to work in, a study by Tahir & Ismail (2007) on the cross-cultural adjustment of Muslim expatriates in Malaysia revealed that there is some disparity in the cultural environments and processes of expatriate adjustment majority-Muslim countries due to cultural clashes between their home country and local values.

Researchers agree that it is vital for employers to understand the importance of culture for expatriates (Ramlan *et al.*, 2018). Unlike a country's political and legal environments, cultural borders is dynamic factor. This is because, just like identity, culture is an essential part of a societal level which is learned and assimilated into oneself through the environment. When people from different cultures are working together, there might be some complications due to the differences in behaviours, values, and ethics.

Previous studies have demonstrated that expatriates often face difficulties in adapting to a new place with a vastly different culture from their native countries. Successful cross-cultural adjustment is required to ensure that an expatriate can perform their best as an employee in an organization environment (Warren, 2017; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). Living in a new cultural environment, expatriates are bound to face challenges and thus need to make adjustments in their lifestyles in order to work more effectively (Ward and Rana-Deuba, 2000; Zakaria, 2000).

According to Chan *et al.*, (2019), among the common challenges that SIEs encounter during their stay in Malaysia is the cultural clash. Some cultural factors such as languages and cultural differences are difficult for expatriates to overcome. In addition, the personal and business norms may vary for expatriates performing their assignments in developing countries like Malaysia, where the culture places a high

priority on age, hierarchy and seniority (Chan *et al.*, 2019). Among the common cultural challenges faced by SIE working in Malaysia is firstly, they encounter difficulty in understanding the indirect and non-confrontational behaviour of Malaysians. Hwang (2006) mentioned that indirect and non-confrontational behaviour of Malaysians is also related to values of respect for seniors or elders, and avoiding embarrassment to others by the act of "saving face". There has been much difficulty throughout the years in defining "face." The concept of face is Chinese in origin (Ho, 1976) but has been argued to be universal in nature, stemming from everyone's desire for social acceptance (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lerner, 1996; Hwang, Francesco, & Kessler, 2003). All societies may have experienced feelings of gaining or losing face as a result of a positive or negative social evaluation from others (Hwang, 2006; Zhang, Cao, & Grigoriou, 2011). Nonetheless, it more consistently permeates collectivistic societies across Asia (Ho, 1976), whereby the opinions of others are more heavily weighted.

Being an Asian countries, Malaysians tend to avoid conflict when interacting with others. Thus, to Malaysians, it is better to dismiss confronting over unpleasant issues. Due to this, the expatriates found it difficult to have direct confrontation or any discussion with the locals especially when a problem arose and a solution was required since most of the time the reaction from the locals would either be positive or impartial towards the issue at hand (Zakaria, 2019). This type of behaviour is consistent with Hofstede's dimension of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede Insight, 2020), whereby members of the society feel uncomfortable expressing their views in situations, which are unstructured, unclear and unpredictable.

The second challenges is the difficulty of SIE in addressing social status in Malaysia (Ramlan *et al.*, 2018). This is different from the other countries culture in which informality and direct way of interaction are the norms. Such differences pose

challenges to the expatriates since they are required to acknowledge with whom they are talking or addressing to in terms of the person's title (i.e. Tan Sri, Dato' and Professor). Social formalities may also act as a gap or a barrier in communication, and in some instances making the social interaction uncomfortable. This category is related to the values of respect for elders and hierarchical relationships, which make Malaysians very receptive without much questioning (Asma, 1996). Another concept which is consistent to this challenge is the concept of power distances by Hofstede (1980) whereby, the higher the hierarchy, the greater the power distance. The cultural aspect model of power distance is the degree to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country agree and anticipate power to be unequally distributed (Hofstede, 2005). The cultural value dimensions of Malaysia have high power distance characteristics (100 out of 100), which means that an organization's hierarchy is seen as reflecting inherent inequalities (Hofstede Insight, 2020). In Malaysian businesses, centralization is popular, and SIEs' superiors are likely to reject the dissemination of information and exclude subordinates in decision-making. Therefore, if SIEs are from Turkey, which scores 66 out of 100 on the power-distance dimension those SIEs would face uncertainty ambiguity and consequently stress in host country environments with a higher power dimension.

Next problem which is encountered by the SIE is the difficulty in complying with the working pace of Malaysian (Tahir *et al.*, 2007). Since their previous working trend differs from the working style that they are currently experiencing in Malaysia, it posed as a challenge for most of these expatriates. From what the researcher gathered, among the challenges include slow-paced working speed and inefficient services offered (Abu-Bakar, 2020). Moreover, there are high level of bureaucracy hinders job implementation. According to a number of informants interviewed conducted by Abu-

Bakar, (2020), the level of bureaucracy in Malaysia is high. Malaysia is regarded as a polychronic society where they perceive time as less tangible and thus, several things can happen at one time. Due to this Malaysians concentrated more on relationship building rather than the task given. Giacalone and Beard (1994) also mentioned the concept of “impression management” whereby an expatriate gives an impression which can easily be misunderstood by others. In the case of the working style of Malaysians, perhaps the Malaysians could not understand the sense of urgency in completing their tasks due to the impression that the expatriates give to the locals that it is permissible for them to do their assignments at their own normal pace.

Mainly, the people at the high management level of their hierarchical positions acquire strong control over issues at the workplace. Therefore, at certain instances it affects the flow of work among the locals and the expatriates. Decision making processes and the duration of task completion may take longer than expected. This was a challenge that expatriates encountered, which required some skills of cross-cultural negotiations to adjust and to overcome any related problems arise. Being in this situation, one of the informants. Being a leader in a certain project that is assigned to an expatriate, problem arise when the Malaysian subordinates do not complete their task in time due to orders given by the higher management team to complete another new task without consulting the expatriate beforehand (Abu-Bakar,2020). Past studies so also indicated that among others challenges faced by expatriates in Malaysia the host country’s culture, environment, working norms, social interaction foreign and language issues (Iuan & Mohamed, 2020; Heismac & Aqwu, 2015).

Expatriates will perform successful at work if they adjust to the new environment in the host country. Lack of adjustment to local culture, traditions, religions, and surroundings cause expatriates to feel unfulfilled with their work and

lives abroad. Eventually, by attaining higher adjustment levels, the SIE will show optimum job performance in the tasks given, which contributes to achieving organizational effectiveness and producing positive growth for the SIE and the company. Many factors determine job performance (Brien *et al.*, 2019; Hussein, 2019; Suhartanto & Brien, 2018), including commitment and enthusiasm which is seen as key drivers to adjustment that leads to higher job performance (Saks Alan, 2019). Besides adjustment, the extant literature has discussed the important role of religiosity has in influencing employee job-related attitude and behavior (King & Williamson, 2005; Mathew *et al.*, 2018; Tiliouine, Cummins, & Davern, 2009). Further, literature has stated the influence of religiosity on job performance (Kutcher, Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, & Masco, 2010; Osman-Gani, Hashim, & Ismail, 2013); however, only limited research examined the role of religiosity on job performance.

Given the role religion plays in a person's life (Abu-Alhaija, Raja Yusof, Hashim, & Jaharuddin, 2019; Saroglou, 2011; Tiliouine *et al.*, 2009), and the plausible influence of religion on a person's attitude and behavior in work (Mathew *et al.*, 2018; Sikorska-Simmons, 2005), clarifying the role of religiosity on job performance is an important step in comprehending the expatriates' job-related attitude in relation to religion factor. As such, this research is ground-breaking in terms of future work-religion studies and is a practical reference for managing SIEs cross-cultural adjustment and job performance. Hence, this study examines the effect of religiosity on SIE job performance directly and indirectly through cross-cultural adjustment in Malaysia where the majority of Malaysian are Muslim.

1.4 Research Objectives

The study was conducted with the following research objectives:

- i. To investigate the relationship between religiosity and job performance among Muslim SIEs in Malaysian's service industry.
- ii. To examine the relationship between religiosity and cross-cultural adjustment of Muslim SIEs in Malaysian's service industry.
- iii. To assess whether cross-cultural adjustment influences Muslim SIEs' job performance in Malaysian's service industry.
- iv. To determine the mediating effect of cross-cultural adjustment on the relationship between religiosity and job performance among Muslim SIEs in Malaysian's service industry.

1.5 Research Questions

Considering the research objective and problem statement, the current study examined the following research questions:

- i. To what extent does religiosity influence job performance of Muslim SIEs working Malaysian's service industry?
- ii. How effective is religiosity factor influencing cross-cultural adjustment of Muslim SIEs working in Malaysian's service industry?
- iii. How does cross-cultural adjustment effect job performance of Muslim SIEs working in Malaysian's service industry?
- iv. How does cross-cultural adjustment mediate the relationship between religiosity and job performance among Muslim SIEs working in Malaysian's service industry?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The current research has the potential to provide significant theoretical and practical contributions in the area of Muslim SIE performance. One of the theoretical contributions of the present study is validating scale measurements of the religiosity variables on the job performance of Muslim SIE. The other significant contribution is the implanting of cross-cultural adjustment as a mediator between the religiosity and job performance. The following is a detailed understanding of the significance of understanding of the significance of job performance in terms of practical considerations, which are categorized into two sub-sections:

1.6.1 Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contributions of the study can be considered in terms of the following areas of knowledge:

1. The framework of the study explored and was primarily drawn from a new conceptualized framework. The significance of this study is the uniqueness of path relationships, which tests the relationships between the cognitive, affective, and behavioural religiosity with a mediating effect of cross-cultural adjustment (cognitive, affective, and behavioural) on SIE job performance. Given the lack of studies examining the influence of religion on Muslim SIE job performance and cross-cultural adjustments, this study will provide insights to SIE cross-cultural adjustment and job performance in a majority-Muslim host country.
2. Accordingly, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the literature on IHRM practices, as it proposes new areas of research and findings. The prominence of Islamic values and the influence of the Quran and Hadith in

the lives of Muslims, especially the more spiritually-minded Muslims, should not be overlooked. It definitely at least partially stimulates the way expatriates think, speak, and conceive of life (as in personality and character), which in turn influences their dealings in an international assignment.

3. The proposed framework of cross-cultural adjustment was adopted from Haslberg *et al.*, (2013), the conceptualization of cross-cultural adjustment by Haslberg is more comprehensive and more in tune with reality than previous attempts by Black (1990) and provides a better fit with expatriate literature. By taking account of the cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of adjustment, this research was able to reflect more accurately on the reality of the SIE experience.
4. The dependent variable of job performance was divided into four dimensions in this study: technical/task performance, contextual/pro-social performance, contextual/managerial performance, and assignment-specific performance, which refers to expatriate-specific performance (Barker & Troth, 2012; Caligiuri & Day, 2000). Previous literature that posited a relationship between influencing factors affecting expatriate job performance (Lynham & Chermack, 2006; Voegtling & Scherer, 2012) does not appear to be linear in this case. The inability to establish a direct link between cognitive, attitude, and behaviour religiosity in cross-cultural adjustment and SIE's job performance is prevalent, and the results of this research were proposed as salient to Muslim SIEs as they are to other expatriates. This study sought to make a contribution and give an explanation that the level of SIE cross-cultural adjustment will have

consequences on job performance, and previous studies revealed that SIE performance is an outcome of adjustment (Branco, 2018).

5. The framework also contributes knowledge to management literature on person–environment fit (PE fit) theory and self-determination theory (SDT). When linking PE fit to employee attitudes and behaviours, management scholars have largely confined the environment elements of the PE relationship to the organization. Jansen and Kristof-Brown (2006) identified PE fit as a general construct composed of fit with the vocation, organization, group, job, and other persons, primarily supervisors and emphasized the importance of looking at these simultaneously rather than in isolation. Highlighting the fact that "individuals are simultaneously embedded in multiple aspects of the environment" (Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006, p. 197) was an important contribution to the literature.
6. Next, when relating SDT, a SIE's performance outcome are predominantly influenced by the type of motivation (i.e., intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) operating in individual. Drawing from self determination theory, highly religious individual are practically instrically motivated, intrinsic motivation plays an important role in an individual job performance and adjustment. Intrinsic motivation - the sense of fulfilment and enjoyment that drives an individual towards the achievement of goals (Presbitero, 2017). The framework of this research focuses on the influence of religiosity on job performance, intrinsic motivation is viewed in this study as a driving force for religious expatriates, making them determined despite the challenges they encounter while working in another cultural context. The argument is consistent with

earlier findings (e.g., Smither and Walker, 2015) suggesting the relevance of intrinsic motivation for people living and working in religious communities.

1.6.2 Practical Contributions

In the current research, several practical contributions are expected to emerge; they are listed below:

1. There has been very little research into this path relationship of the conceptualized framework, so this research current should add considerable knowledge and value in the areas of IHRM and substantial insights on Muslim SIEs. Human resource management (HRM) researchers acknowledge the important role of religiosity in the work environment, where religiosity seems to act as an important driver towards an employee's job performance (Parboteeah *et al.*, 2008). Froese & Peltokorpi (2013) proposed that every organization and institution needs to take necessary actions to improve SIEs' cross-cultural adjustment. An excellent adjustment will lead to a higher level of the job performance from SIEs; therefore, the higher the level of religious belief the higher the adjustment of SIEs will be (Tucker *et al.*, 2004). This study provided empirical evidence on the relationships between these variables.
2. In Islam, work is not performed to only achieve material gains. More importantly, it is a form of worship to obtain Allah's blessing (Sharabi, 2012). Muslim employees are expected to perform their job diligently despite facing hardships. With the belief that Allah is constantly watching their deeds, Muslim employees should strive to perform their jobs ethically (Al-Kilani, 2010; Mohammad *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the other Muslim-majority countries could

find the discovery of this research benefiting in attracting, hiring, and retaining this inbound mobility of SIEs.

3. On top of that, this research will be a guideline for Muslim SIEs to be hired and retained in Muslim-majority countries by suggesting factors that influence the job performance. This will enable Muslim SIEs to avoid discrimination and Islamophobia in the West. Besides that, this study will also provide insights not only in countries where religiosity underpins people's behaviour but also in Western countries with diverse workforces, particularly those that rely heavily on immigrants to fill their skill shortages, such as Australia and Canada.
4. This study will also help managers to understand why expatriates are able to adjust or not at their international tasks and how to tailor HR interventions to improve cross-cultural adjustments and job performance. This study also helps raise organizational awareness, particularly for multi-cultural and multi-religious organizations, that religiosity is not something that individual employees hold in private but may form an integral part of HRM at the workplace. Additionally, in a multi-religious setting, the majority religion may have impacts on minority belief systems. As a result, better support may be provided to the employees by the organization through having a greater understanding of what motivates religious employees at work and what HR or organizational support they may desire.

1.7 Operational Definition of Key Terms

Definitions for key terms used in this study are provided in this section.

1. Self-Initiated Expatriate (SIE)

A SIE is a group in the international workforce who goes to work in another country on their own initiative, as compared to the traditional expatriates that are sent by companies. (Lidström, 2014; Walsh & Schyns, 2010).

2. Religiosity

Religiosity refers to the practice and depth of engagement with one's religious values and activities (Ayranci & Semercioz, 2011).

3. Behavioural Religiosity-Islam

The behavioural religiosity emphasises the bodily action of human activity towards God. This element covers one's religious obligations signified by behavioural acts of worship (Mahudin, *et al.*, 2016; Parboteeah *et al.*, 2004).

4. Cognitive Religiosity-Iman

Cognitive religiosity represents the cognitive and belief system in the understanding of God (Mahudin, *et al.*, 2016; Parboteeah *et al.*, 2004).

5. Affective Religiosity-Ihsan:

Affective religiosity covers the spiritual excellence or actualisation of virtue and goodness (Mahudin, *et al.*, 2016; Parboteeah *et al.*, 2004).

6. Cross-cultural Adjustment

Haslberg *et al.*, (2013) defined cross-cultural adjustment as the degree of fit between the individual and new environment in various work and non-work aspects or a path to reduce conflict in another country (Stahl & Caligiuri, 2005).

7. Behavioural Adjustment

The behavioural dimension examines the physical interactions of SIEs in the host society (Haslberg *et al.*, 2013).

8. Cognitive Adjustment

The cognitive dimension involves an SIE's knowledge and understanding of the new host-country environment in which the SIE is working, (Haslberg *et al.*, 2013).

9. Affective Adjustment

The affective adjustment encompasses concerns on SIEs' feelings in the host country environment (e.g. how happy is an SIE in the new environment?) (Haslberg *et al.*, 2013).

10. Job Performance

Job performance is defined as how an employee fulfills their job duties and executes their required tasks. It refers to the effectiveness, quality, and efficiency of their output (Bohlander, Snell & Sherman, 2001).

11. Co-religious Host Country

Co-religious host country is the country that have majority population who have the same religion (Ives, 2019).