

Antecedents of work readjustment of professional returnees: evidence from Vietnam

Antecedents
of work
readjustment

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the factors influencing work readjustment of Vietnamese returnees who used to study and/or work in a developed country and are currently working in different positions in their home country.

Design/methodology/approach – Data for this study were collected through a survey of 433 returnees using both paper-based and online surveys. Multiple regression was used to test the relationships in the model.

Findings – The findings show that while the length of time spent overseas, work expectations and subjective norm significantly affect work readjustment, the influences of age, gender and length of time since return on work readjustment are not supported.

Practical implications – The findings provide useful insights for home country government and managers of returnees developing repatriation programs that help returnees deal with the issue of poor work readjustment.

Originality/value – Empirical studies on cross-cultural re-entry adjustment of both self-initiated repatriates and international students are scarcely investigated. Most prior studies focused on individual factors (such as gender, age, duration in overseas and since return), research on the effect of work expectation on work readjustment is still scant. Most prior studies focused on examining the relationship between work expectation and work readjustment of company repatriates, however, this relationship in the context of returnees, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, has not been investigated. Furthermore, this study is the first to examine the influence of subjective norm on work readjustment of returnees.

Keywords Vietnam, Subjective norm, Returnees, Work expectation, Work readjustment

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

With the rapid economic growth and the increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow, Vietnam has resulted in a growing demand for more highly skilled, networked and entrepreneurial individuals (*Thanh Nien News*, 2013). Meanwhile, Vietnam's education system has not kept pace with its economic development to provide sufficient high-quality human capital to meet the labor demand of Vietnam's economic growth (Tran and Marginson, 2018). These factors contribute to a growing number of Vietnamese students seeking overseas study with the hope of having international experiences, advanced knowledge and skills in more developed countries (Pham, 2018). According to UNESCO (2019), the number of Vietnamese studying tertiary abroad increased from approximately 8,000 in 1999 to more than 82,000 students in 2016. The relatively high economic growth rates and FDI inflows into Vietnam have also created a stronger labor market, better career opportunities and demand for more advanced skills, which has attracted more overseas Vietnamese back to their home country (Le, 2014; Vietnamnet, 2011).

However, there has been a lack of research on re-entry experiences of returnees in Asian emerging countries in general and particularly in the Vietnam context, who have studied



and/or worked in developed countries, which leads to some significant gaps in understanding (Ho, Seet and Jones, 2018; Ho, Seet, Jones *et al.*, 2018). Although there are a few studies on re-entry experiences of Vietnamese returnees, much of this research has largely focused on Vietnamese workers who went abroad for work under contract-based employment (referred to commonly as “export” labor) (e.g. Ngo, 2013) or Vietnamese return migrants (e.g. Anh, 2003; Nguyen, 2014; Dang *et al.*, 2010). There is a need to provide a better understanding of re-entry experiences of Vietnamese returnees who have studied undergraduate or postgraduate in more developed countries and have returned to Vietnam. It is because Vietnamese who have studied abroad represent an important human resource with strong global competencies, given the growth in importance of human capital as a source of a competitive advantage which underscores the importance of talent in the economy (Jones *et al.*, 2012).

Q1

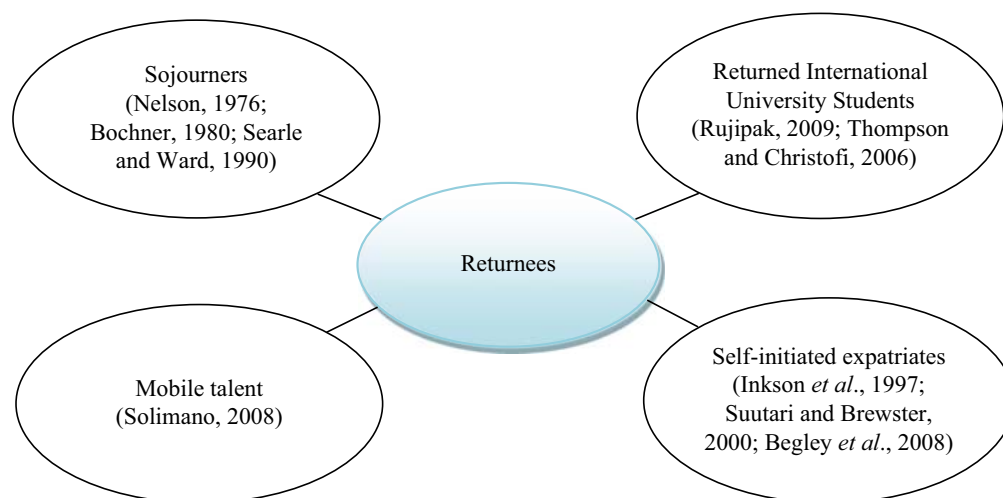
Furthermore, it is important to examine the re-entry process of returnees as returnees may have negative experiences upon return which prompts them to leave their current companies (Cox *et al.*, 2013; Stroh *et al.*, 1998) or even go back abroad to live (Ho *et al.*, 2016; Ho, Seet, Jones *et al.*, 2018). Returnees might expect an unfamiliar culture, customs and working lifestyle when going overseas, but they may not have such expectations when they return home. The unexpected difficulties faced by returnees are due to their changes in lifestyle and perceptions and changes in the home country itself while being overseas (Martin, 1984; Stroh *et al.*, 1998). Therefore, several previous studies reported that the re-entry process is not always easy for returnees (Stroh *et al.*, 1998). In many cases, these difficulties encourage returnees seek employment elsewhere (Stroh *et al.*, 1998; Cox *et al.*, 2013). When turnover happens, companies lose employees’ advanced skills and knowledge including those gained from abroad (Stroh *et al.*, 1998; Cox *et al.*, 2013). Returnees may even go back abroad to live if they face difficulties when returning home, which results in a critical issue for Vietnam, in particular, when Vietnam needs to attract and retain highly skilled Vietnamese with strong global competencies to promote its economy. In order to address the gap in understanding re-entry experiences of Vietnamese returnees, this study focuses on investigating the factors affecting work readjustment of Vietnamese returnees. This study examines the impact of not only individual factors (e.g. gender, age, length of time overseas and length of time since return) but also work-related factors (work expectation) and psychological factor (subjective norm).

2. Theoretical background and research hypotheses

Returnees

The purpose of this study is to examine the re-entry adjustment of those who had studied abroad and returned to Vietnam and are currently working in different professions. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish the respondents (referred as “returnees”) in this study from other forms of migration. Returnees in this study are different from previous studies as they are highly skilled and mobile professionals, who have studied overseas and are now working in Vietnam. Figure 1 shows that the returnees are a mix of sojourners, self-initiated expatriates, mobile talents and returned international university students as follows:

- Sojourners are a form of temporary migrants (Nelson, 1976), which mean individuals go abroad for particular purposes for a non-infinite time. For example, international students are sojourners as they go abroad for education-related purposes but subsequently return home (Bochner, 1980; Searle and Ward, 1990; Ward and Kennedy, 1993).
- Returnees in this study are also returned international university students who studied at any overseas university (Rujipak, 2009; Thompson and Christofi, 2006). Some of them went back to Vietnam immediately after graduating, some might have further training to get professional certification such as CPA and CFA and some might work in foreign countries for a period of time before going back.



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Figure 1.
Professional returnees

- Self-initiated repatriates – the term self-initiated repatriates refer to individuals who voluntary expatriate for foreign work (or international assignment) and voluntary return to their home countries without being transferred by employers (Inkson *et al.*, 1997; Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Begley *et al.*, 2008). Students studying abroad are similar to self-initiated repatriates as they are both going abroad for “Overseas Experience” (OE) by their own initiative without organizational support.
- Mobile talent – returnees in this study are professionals who are considered as mobile talents, because they are skilled and highly educated people and they can choose where to go to start and develop their career (Solimano, 2008). This is compounded the fact that many developed countries suffer a shortage skilled professionals, such as accounting and finance (OECD, 2008) and fill this vacancy by hiring foreign students. These countries also have pro-active immigration policies for foreign students to obtain permanent residence visa after graduating (Kuptsch, 2006).

Work readjustment

As discussed above, returnees in this study are a form of sojourners. Although there are different types of sojourners, returnees in this study are only associated with international university students and self-initiated repatriates. Therefore, literature on re-entry adjustment and re-expatriation intentions for the two groups will be synthesized.

Studies on international students’ re-entry adjustment have primarily focused on reverse culture shock that refers to feelings, emotional reactions and mental responses of returnees (Gama and Pedersen, 1977; Gaw, 2000; Thompson and Christofi, 2006; Rohrlich and Martin, 1991). Reverse culture shock involves international students returning home and facing difficulties in readjusting to their home culture, for example, lack of freedom and privacy at home (Thompson and Christofi, 2006), value conflicts and difficult social and interpersonal relationships with others (Gama and Pedersen, 1977). Reverse culture shock of international students is also related to their expectations (Butcher, 2002).

Most of reverse culture shock studies use a qualitative research method, e.g. case studies, which can limit the generalizability of their results. While there were a few quantitative studies on the re-entry adjustment of university students in their home country, most of these studies focused on psychological adjustment, including well-being and satisfaction (Rujipak, 2009). Rohrlich and Martin (1991), for example, found that students report dissatisfaction with the living back home.

There were some studies examining cross-cultural readjustment of returning students (e.g. Rujipak, 2009); however, these studies focused on the readjustment to the home culture rather than readjustment to work. Black and his colleagues (Black, 1992, 1994; Black and Gregersen, 1991; Black *et al.*, 1992) suggested that repatriate adjustment has three distinct facets: work, general and interact readjustment. However, the model of Black and his colleagues was rarely applied for returning international students. One notable exception was the work by Rujipak (2009). Rujipak (2009) argued that since students were transitioning from study to work, work-related factors and work adjustment should not be considered. Respondents in Rujipak's study included students who had just returned from overseas and were seeking jobs. However, Hansel (1993) found that re-entry adjustment of Indian students who had studied in the USA is associated with their frustrations in the work environment. Those who had jobs before going abroad seemed to have a smoother adjustment than those who had jobs while staying abroad. Similarly, in Gill's (2010) study, several international Chinese students who had some experience working abroad found difficulties readjusting to Chinese workplaces which are heavily affected by *Guan-Xi* network (cultivation of personal connections with those of power or influence). However, Hansel (1993) and Gill (2010) did not investigate whether a given antecedent was associated with only readjustment to work or all facets of readjustment as suggested by Black *et al.* (1992).

There is a significant gap in the international human resource management (IHRM) literature on the re-entry experiences of returning international students who are subsequently employed in firms in their home country. While studies of IHRM have traditionally focused on company assignment expatriation, an increasing number of scholars have shifted their focus to expatriation outside this traditional context (Begley *et al.*, 2008). This reflects the fact that individuals increasingly focus on career mobility rather than rely on organizations (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1996; Scullion *et al.*, 2007). The increasing number of self-initiated international assignment is an example of the changing nature of careers (Scullion *et al.*, 2007). The term self-initiated foreign work (or international assignment) expatriates was defined in the previous section as individuals who voluntarily expatriate without being transferred by employers (Inkson *et al.*, 1997; Suutari and Brewster, 2000) and have higher organizational mobility compared to traditional company assignment (Biemann and Andresen, 2010). To some extent, students studying abroad are similar to self-initiated expatriates as they are both going abroad for "Overseas Experience" by their own initiative without organizational support. Their OE fit well with boundaryless career approach within the context of global movements across borders (Baruch *et al.*, 2007). Boundaryless career approach argues that OE enhance internal careers (of one's work life) rather than external careers (advancement within the organizational hierarchy) (Tung, 1998). Similarly, Inkson *et al.* (1997) argued that "Overseas Experience" includes individuals developing careers through self-directed overseas learning and experience and is an alternative model of "boundaryless career." However, empirical studies on cross-cultural re-entry adjustment of both self-initiated repatriates and international students are scarce investigated. One exception is that Begley *et al.* (2008) found that the perceived negative value of international experiences among employers leads to difficulties in the readjustment of self-initiated repatriation.

Furthermore, most prior studies focused on individual factors (such as gender, age, duration in overseas and since return), research on the effect of work expectation on work readjustment is still scant. Previous studies (e.g. Black, 1992; Black and Gregersen, 1990; Suutari and Brewster, 2003; Cox *et al.*, 2013) focused on examining the relationship between work expectation and work readjustment of companies repatriates, this relationship in the context of returnees has not been investigated. Additionally, this study is the first to examine the influence of subjective norm on work readjustment of returnees.

Conceptual framework

Figure 2 shows the conceptual framework which is derived from factors that may have an impact on the work readjustment of professional returnees. These factors include individual variables (age, gender, length of time spent overseas and length of time since return), a work-related variable (work expectation) and a psychological variable (subjective norm).

Development of hypotheses

There are a number of individual variables related to re-entry adjustments of returnees, such as age and gender. First, age positively associates with re-entry adjustment that older returnees experience less re-entry adjustment problems (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963; Cox, 2004; Black and Gregersen, 1991; Hyder and Lövblad, 2007). Older returnees generally have more experiences about life and working environment and the change in these areas at home that help reduce uncertainty about readjustment in home country (Black and Gregersen, 1991). This is also because younger individuals often have better learning abilities and skills to adapt the life in host countries, which results in changing in their identities, thus they will find difficulties in adjusting back to their home country (Cox, 2004). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1. Age is positively related to work readjustment.

Gender also relates to re-entry adjustment in which female returnees often report more re-entry adjustment problems than males (Brabant *et al.*, 1990; Gama and Pedersen, 1977; Cox, 2004). Females reported more family problems (Brabant *et al.*, 1990), as women returnees experience more value conflict with their family and feel more pressure to fulfill expectations of their family (Gama and Pedersen, 1977). When returning, females also have more problems with daily life and are more sensitive with changes in their social environment than males (Brabant *et al.*, 1990). Female repatriates are also expected to experience more difficulties in working environment than male because of their pioneering roles (Linehan and Scullion, 2002). Hence, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H2. Female returnees are negatively associated with work readjustment.

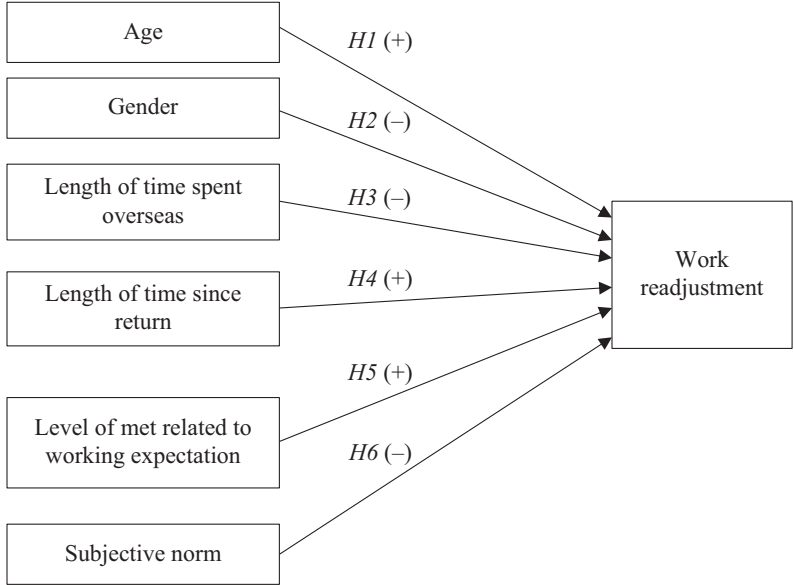


Figure 2.
Conceptual framework

Length of time spent overseas has been argued to be related to re-entry adjustment (Black and Gregersen, 1991; Suutari and Valimaa, 2002; Forster, 1994; Black, 1994; Gregersen and Stroh, 1997). Returnees who spent more time overseas would have more re-entry adjustment difficulties than those lived abroad for a shorter period. Longer time away from home leads to more changes in sojourners themselves and their family, friends and workplaces, which triggers re-entry adjustment problems. Thus, this study proposes:

H3. Length of time spent overseas is negatively associated with work readjustment.

Similar to overseas duration, the time since returnees came back home has also been used as a predictor of re-entry readjustment (Black, 1994; Black and Gregersen, 1991; Suutari and Valimaa, 2002; Gregersen and Stroh, 1997). According to “W shaped curve” model, returnees will experience reverse culture shock after a few weeks of “honeymoon stage,” than will feel less reverse culture shock and gradually adjust to their home country (Adler, 1981; Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963). This is because longer duration since returning, returnees would update more information about their work and their living in home country; therefore, will have less difficulties in adjustment (Black, 1994). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4. Length of time since return is positively associated with work readjustment.

Before repatriating, returnees developed various work expectations that might be unmet upon return (Black, 1992). Returnees propose that advanced overseas education and foreign language fluency help them have better skills and knowledge compared with locals. Thus, they expect that they can get professional development and high salary at home country (Zweig and Han, 2010; Zweig, 2006). They also expect to return to their former environment and interaction with friends and colleagues (Rujipak, 2009). However, returnees are often dissatisfied with their jobs as their organizations do not utilize or value their international experiences (Cox *et al.*, 2013). In reality, those expectations are often optimistic and unmet (the reality is worse than expectation) prior their return (Zweig and Han, 2010; Stroh *et al.*, 1998). The unmet expectations lead to poor re-entry work adjustment (Black, 1992; Rogers and Ward, 1993). This is because unmet expectation is often evaluated negatively and anticipated to predict negative evaluations (Martin *et al.*, 1995; Burgoon and Walther, 1990; Black, 1992; Black and Gregersen, 1990). Researchers (Black, 1992; Rogers and Ward, 1993) supported this notion in the repatriation context. Rogers and Ward (1993), for example, found that returnees who had unmet expectations about their work reported psychological stress that constrained their adjustment to their work in home country. In contrast, when returnees’ expectations about their working in the home country are met, their work readjustment is easier. Hence, this study proposes the following:

H5. The level of met related to working expectation is positively related to work readjustment.

Subjective norm refers to a person’s perception about whether significant others think that he or she should leave his or her current country. Significant others, especially family members, are either barriers or forms of encouragement for returnees to go back abroad to live (e.g. Carr *et al.*, 2005; Brett and Stroh, 1995; Konopaske *et al.*, 2005; Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010; Inkson *et al.*, 2008). Returnees might be encouraged or pushed to expatriate or re-expatriate because they and their family believe that going abroad brings a better future for the whole family, especially for their children and descendants (Carr *et al.*, 2005; Richardson, 2006; Richardson and Mallon, 2005; Tung, 2007). The pressure from important others will lead to returnees’ psychological stress, which, in turn, make their adjustment to their working environment in their home country become more difficulty. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H6. Subjective norm toward going back abroad is negatively related to work readjustment.

3. Methods

Sample and procedures

The sample of this study includes Vietnamese professional returnees who had studied or worked overseas for at least one year, and then returned to Vietnam and are currently working in different professions in Vietnam. We approached big firms and universities in Vietnam, which have a high density of returnee professionals. We also posted the survey questionnaires on social media (e.g. Facebook) of a variety of alumni of Vietnamese students who have studied and graduated offshore. After removing questionnaires that have missing data for important constructs, 433 respondents were retained for further analysis. Table I shows the profiles of sample respondents.

Of the 433 returnees, two-thirds were between 26 and 35 years of age and 57 percent were female. Two-thirds of returnees had lived abroad for between one and three years and the overwhelming majority of respondents (81 percent) had returned to Vietnam within the past five years. Nearly two-thirds (61 percent) of returnees had returned from Australia, UK or the USA and the rest from other countries, such as France, Japan, New Zealand and Singapore.

Measures

Work readjustment measures returnees' subjective evaluation on their ability to adjust to job responsibilities, supervisory responsibilities and performance in the work place after returning to home countries. This study used a three-item scale adopted from Black and Gregersen's (1991) repatriation adjustment scale to measure work readjustment. An example item includes "Since your return to live in Vietnam, please indicate to what extent you are not adjusted or adjusted to job responsibilities." These items were scored on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not adjusted at all) to 7 (very well adjusted). The Cronbach's α internal consistency reliabilities of this construct was 0.89.

Subjective norm measures a returnee's perception or opinion about whether important others think he or she should engage in re-expatriation. For this construct measure, all three items were adopted from Park and Smith (2013) and were scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Example items include "Most people who are important to me think that I should return abroad to live" and "It is expected of me that I return abroad to live." The Cronbach's α for this construct was 0.91.

A. Background	Percent	A. Background	Percent
1. Gender		4. Length of time since returning home country (in years)	
Male	45	< 1	35
Female	55	1-2	15
2. Age		2-3	11
20-25	11	3-4	20
26-30	35	4-5	10
31-35	37	> 5	9
36-40	14	5. Returned from	
Over 40	3	Australia	31
3. Length of time overseas (in years)		UK	17
1-2	54	USA	13
2-3	15	France	8
3-4	10	Japan	6
4-5	9	Others	24
> 5	12	Missing	2

Table I.
Sample profiles

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Work expectation refers to the level of met expectation of returnees about their work such as their positions, their tasks and the level of autonomy in their jobs. This study adapted a four-item construct from Suutari and Brewster (2003). Example items include “My position is at the organizational level I expected” and “My task is at the level of responsibility I expected.” These items were scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 1 (much less than expect) to 7 (much more than expect). The Cronbach’s α for this construct was 0.94.

Age was measured by five categories from 1 to 5 for age groups from 20 to 25, 26 to 30, 31 to 35, 36 to 40 and over 40 years old. Gender equals 1 for male and 0 for female. Length of time in overseas (Years abroad) and length of time since return (Years since return) were measured from 1 to 5 for five-year groups from 1 to up to 2, 2 up to 3, 3 up to 4, 4 up to 5 and more than 5 years.

4. Results

Table II shows the means, standard deviations, Cronbach’s α s and bivariate correlations for all variables. All correlation coefficients in this study were below 0.70 and significant at the p -value lower than 0.01 level, and the Cronbach’s α s for all constructs were above 0.70, suggesting that all measures were appropriate for further analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996). Additionally, all variance inflation factors in the regressions were lower than 2, indicating that multicollinearity is not problematic in this study.

Table III shows the regression results. The adjusted R^2 is 0.269 indicating that the predictors explained 26.9 percent of the variance of work readjustment. Of six hypotheses, three hypotheses were supported. $H1$ and $H2$ were not supported. Both age and gender do not significantly affect work readjustment ($\beta = -0.073$, $p > 0.05$; $\beta = -0.052$, $p > 0.05$, respectively). $H3$ was supported. Years abroad significantly affects work readjustment ($\beta = -0.108$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the longer duration staying overseas the harder the

Table II.
Descriptive statistics,
correlations and
scale reliabilities
for scale variables

	Mean	SD	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7
Work readjustment (V1)	5.243	1.267	(0.890)						
Age (V2)	3.628	0.978	0.035	–					
Gender (V3)	0.573	0.495	–0.030	–0.042	–				
Years abroad (V4)	2.120	1.458	–0.100*	–0.047	–0.156**	–			
Years since return (V5)	3.887	2.105	0.146**	0.460**	0.005	0.037	–		
Work expectation (V6)	4.254	1.416	0.482**	0.155**	0.030	–0.023	0.270**	(0.938)	
Subjective norm (V7)	4.200	1.357	–0.243**	–0.065	0.065	–0.029	–0.117*	–0.138**	(0.911)

Notes: Figures in parentheses are Cronbach’s α s. *,**Significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels (two-tailed), respectively

Table III.
Regression results

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	SE	β			
(Constant)	4.761	0.310			150.345	0.000
Age	–0.095	0.060	–0.073		–1.579	0.115
Gender	–0.133	0.107	–0.052		–1.241	0.215
Years abroad	–0.094	0.036	–0.108		–2.585	0.010
Years since return	0.024	0.029	0.040		0.835	0.404
Work expectation	0.382	0.036	0.457		10.614	0.000
Subjective norm	–0.146	0.034	–0.180		–4.302	0.000
F					24.051	0.000
Adjusted R^2					0.269	

returnees adjust to their work in their home country. *H4* was not supported as years since return is not significantly related to work readjustment ($\beta = 0.040, p > 0.05$), thus the length of time since return did not have an impact on returnees' work readjustment. *H5* was supported as work expectation is significantly positively related to work readjustment ($\beta = 0.457, p < 0.01$), demonstrating that when returnees' expectation about their work is met, they easily adjust back to their work in the home country. *H6* was also supported as subjective norm significantly influences work readjustment ($\beta = -0.18, p < 0.01$). The result indicates that if other important people think that returnees should go back abroad to live, their work readjustment in their home country become more difficult.

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5. Discussion and implications

Discussion

Prior studies focused on psychological readjustment of returnee students and few studies examined the antecedents of work readjustment. Of these few studies, they only focused on company assignment repatriates. This study first examines the factors affecting the work readjustment of returnees who had overseas work/study experiences and returned to their home country without organizational support. Given the re-entry experiences of different repatriate groups are different, this study investigates the relationship between subjective norm and work readjustment of returnees. Thus, the study contributes to the literature on work readjustment by examining not only individual factors (age, gender, length of time in overseas and since return), but also work-related factors (work expectation) and psychological factor (subjective norm).

The results of this study indicate that age groups, gender groups and length of time since return are not different in terms of work readjustment. These results differ with some prior studies (Cox, 2004; Hyder and Lövblad, 2007; Linehan and Scullion, 2002) which argued that younger returnees and female returnees are associated with more difficulties in adjusting back to their work in their home country. However, there were contradictory findings regarding age and gender in prior studies (Szkudlarek, 2010). Taking the study of Robinson (2016), for example, age and gender were not proved to have a significant impact on the work readjustment of academic repatriates. Being consistent with the finding of Robinson (2016), our research suggests that female returnees may have difficulties in non-work readjustment as they have duties to maintain their household roles and to fulfill their family expectations, however, these responsibilities do not affect their work readjustment. Furthermore, it may be true to argue that younger returnees have better abilities to learn and skills to adjust to new culture, leading to more profound identity changes during overseas sojourn. Nevertheless, the identity changes may result in more distress in cultural readjustment upon return (Szkudlarek, 2010) rather than work readjustment. This is because returnees in our study, regardless of their ages, mainly went abroad for studying rather than working; therefore, OE may significantly change young returnees' values about culture or interpersonal relationships but do not have knock-on-effects on their perceptions about working styles and their work readjustment. Therefore, both young and old returnee groups are likely to experience similar level of difficulties in work readjustment. In addition, the result was consistent with the finding of Cox (2004) which did not support the notion that the length of time since return affects returnees' work readjustment, suggesting a need of further investigating this relationship in other contexts.

In contrast, the result shows that length of time spent overseas is significantly negatively related to work readjustment, which supports the findings of prior studies (e.g. Black and Gregersen, 1991; Suutari and Valimaa, 2002; Forster, 1994; Black, 1994; Gregersen and Stroh, 1997). This indicates that returnees who spent more time overseas would have more re-entry adjustment difficulties than those lived abroad for a shorter period. Longer time

away from home results in more changes in sojourners themselves which triggers their re-entry adjustment to their work in their home country.

The prior studies proved the relationship between work expectation and work readjustment of company assignment repatriates (Black, 1992; Rogers and Ward, 1993). The findings of this study also support this hypothesis in the context of Vietnamese returnees. The findings of this study suggest that the unmet work expectations lead to poor re-entry work adjustment as unmet work expectation is often evaluated negatively and anticipated to predict negative evaluations about their work in their home country.

The result of this study also shows that subjective norm significantly affects work readjustment. This suggests that other important people (e.g. spouse, father, children, etc.) think returnees should live overseas as going abroad brings a better future for the whole family, especially for their children and descendants (Carr *et al.*, 2005; Richardson, 2006; Richardson and Mallon, 2005; Tung, 2007). The pressure from important others makes their adjustment to their working environment become more difficult.

Practical implications

Vietnamese Government and managers need to help returnees have smooth work readjustment as poor working readjustment will lead to career dissatisfaction and life dissatisfaction (Ho, Seet, Jones *et al.*, 2018). In particular, they need to develop repatriation programs that help returnees deal with the issue of poor work readjustment. The new working cultural values acquired abroad may be in conflict with the working styles and cultures of the home country. In addition, working environment in the home country might have changed while returnees were abroad (Christofi and Thompson, 2007; Haines, 2012). Returnees may be not aware of these changes, which may lead to their discomfort with their career on re-entry (Martin and Harrell, 2004). Therefore, repatriation programs should focus on providing critical information that will help returnees have realistic career expectations during repatriation. The information may include the changes of working environment and career opportunities in the home country. Furthermore, it also should involve information about how to utilize the skills and knowledge acquired abroad to achieve or advance their career goals. The program should focus on returnees who had stayed in overseas in a longer duration as the returnees have less updated information about their home country than who have short time in overseas. The program also needs to mentor returnees' families and relatives so that they can help returnees have less difficulties in the readjustment process to their work in their home country.

Limitations and future research

This study is subject to some limitations. First, it focuses on examining only one work-related variable (work expectation), future research should investigate the impact of other work-related factors. For example, human resource practices such as skill utilization, working motivation and organizational climate in returnees' current organizations may affect the work readjustment of returnees. If their organizations provide further support for returnees when going back home, and offer incentive policies in utilizing their talent, knowledge and skills, returnees may have smoother work readjustment. Furthermore, this study considers all returnees as one homological group, future research should compare the effects of factors on work readjustment of different professional groups. This may allow us to see whether the determinants behind the work readjustment differ between different occupations. Finally, this study is limited to only one country in Asia-Pacific region, Vietnam. Future research could expand the study to other Asia-Pacific countries to check for similarities and differences or conduct a cross-cultural study in understanding the factors that explain work readjustment of returnees.

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