

Navigating repatriation: factors influencing turnover intentions of self-initiated repatriates in emerging economies

Self-initiated
repatriates

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Abstract

Purpose – The repatriation process often involves challenging and unexpected readjustment issues, leading to high turnover amongst repatriates. However, research has focussed on the re-entry decisions and experiences of company-assigned (CA) repatriates, whilst studies on self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) that repatriate back to their home countries (i.e. self-initiated repatriates (SIRs)) are limited, particularly in emerging transition economies. This study develops and tests a model to explain the factors influencing professional SIRs' turnover intentions and how repatriation readjustment affects their intentions in Vietnam.

Design/methodology/approach – The data was collected from 445 Vietnamese professional SIRs who worked and/or studied for extended periods overseas and subsequently returned to Vietnam. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the data.

Findings – Results indicate that both work and life repatriation adjustment difficulties have significant positive effects on turnover intentions, whilst only repatriation life adjustment difficulties have an indirect effect via life dissatisfaction. Further, cultural distance positively influences repatriation adjustment difficulties and turnover intentions. SIRs' on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness negatively moderate the influence of repatriation work and life adjustment difficulties on turnover intentions, respectively.

Originality/value – The study develops a theoretical model explaining how repatriation difficulties impact the turnover intentions of SIRs, considering contextual factors including cultural distance and embeddedness. The research highlights the importance of job embeddedness as a form of social and organisational support for SIRs in managing psychological challenges related to repatriation, which can help reduce turnover and retain highly skilled talent. Additionally, the study extends repatriation research on an under-researched subgroup of SIEs, SIRs, in an under-researched emerging transition economy context.

Keywords Self-initiated repatriates, Repatriation adjustment difficulties, Cultural distance, Home-country embeddedness, Life dissatisfaction, Job dissatisfaction, Turnover intentions

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

As emerging economies experience greater economic growth relative to developed countries, self-initiated expatriates (SIEs)–individuals who go abroad in search of opportunities of their own volition as opposed to being assigned by their employer to a host country (Ellis *et al.*, 2020)–are increasingly returning to their home countries due to more career opportunities

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(Ho *et al.*, 2018). Extant literature on the re-entry experiences of company-assigned repatriates (CARs) indicate that the repatriation process often involves challenging and unexpected readjustment issues, leading to high turnover (e.g. Ye *et al.*, 2017). Research suggests that self-initiated repatriates (SIRs)–SIEs who return to their home country on their own volition–may experience a more difficult repatriation adjustment process than CARs, as SIRs have little or no organisational support (Begley *et al.*, 2008), which may lead to higher intention to quit. Conversely, other factors such as the influence of cultural distance between the host and home countries and level of job embeddedness may alleviate readjustment difficulties and/or facilitate easier re-adjustment and mitigate employee turnover (Chiang *et al.*, 2018). To date, the effects of these factors on SIRs' repatriation readjustment–turnover intention relationship have lacked investigation.

In addition, how SIRs' job attitudes during repatriation influence employee turnover have not been explicated. This is surprising, given turnover research reveals that job satisfaction is a major determinant of turnover intention and actual turnover (Lee *et al.*, 1999). Thus, the effects of factors influencing turnover intentions amongst professional SIRs might not operate directly; instead, they could manifest indirectly by affecting the work attitudes of employees. Collectively the foregoing gaps limit our theoretical understanding of SIRs' repatriation readjustment–turnover relationship.

To address these gaps, this study develops and tests a theoretical model that elucidates the factors that explain SIRs' intention to quit and the processes underlying the readjustment–turnover intention relationship in one emerging economy, Vietnam. We draw on expatriation adjustment theory and repatriation readjustment theory (Black *et al.*, 1992) to explain how two aspects of repatriation work and life adjustment difficulties directly or indirectly affect turnover intentions via job dissatisfaction or life dissatisfaction, respectively. We also adopt a cultural distance lens to account for the potential for different repatriation adjustment difficulties and turnover intentions (Wang and Varma, 2019). Finally, we integrate Mitchell *et al.* (2001)'s job embeddedness theory to explore how different levels of on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness moderate the relationship between repatriation work and life adjustment difficulties respectively and turnover intentions.

As emerging economies catch up in economic development with developed economies, an increasing proportion of professionals with foreign qualifications and/or highly skilled work experiences are repatriating to their home countries, in search of better career opportunities (Le and LaCost, 2017). In Vietnam, this phenomenon has led to a reversal of the brain drain that Vietnam previously experienced and parallels a similar phenomenon in China. Overseas experience leads to the acquisition of global skills highly valued by employers, especially critical thinking, communication skills and intercultural understanding (Lee, 2018). However, SIRs face career and non-career-related challenges in returning home which may affect their decisions to stay or leave their jobs and/or organisations. Yet there is a paucity of empirical evidence, with research focussed on the repatriation of SIRs from Western countries (Andresen *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, turnover research has largely been conducted in developed economies (Yue *et al.*, 2023). This lack of research is surprising, given the relative dearth of managerial and professional talent in emerging economies.

This study focusses on SIEs who repatriate, SIRs, who constitute a separate population of the globally mobile workforce (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). SIRs and skilled returnee migrants are seemingly similar, but distinct forms of mobility (Andresen *et al.*, 2018): SIRs are differentiated from returning skilled migrants based on their intention of temporary stay versus immigration. Further, studies on SIRs have tended to denote the repatriation phenomenon applying mainly to the internationally mobile workforce from developed countries (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). With the rapid growth of emerging transition economies leading to more career opportunities in these countries, SIRs warrant separate scholarly attention. However, in line with Al Ariss (2010), drawing a definitive line between

certain categories of the globally mobile, including SIRs and returning skilled migrants, is challenging and similarities may exist.

Our research makes the following contributions to the repatriation literature and practice. First, we further understanding of SIRs in an emerging transition economy context by developing an integrated theoretical framework that explains the factors affecting SIRs' turnover intentions in Vietnam. In doing so, we leverage and extend the explanatory power of expatriation adjustment theory in the repatriation process (Black *et al.*, 1992) beyond CARs (Chiang *et al.*, 2018) and SIRs from the West (Vidal *et al.*, 2007) to include SIRs from one emerging transition economy. This focus on SIRs from one emerging economy, Vietnam, in and of itself is important, given the Western-centric focus of most repatriation research (Vidal *et al.*, 2007; Ellis *et al.*, 2020); by investigating SIRs from Vietnam, we increase our understanding of a non-Western under researched cohort of SIRs. We also extend Mitchell *et al.* (2001)'s theory of job embeddedness beyond expatriation to include the repatriation phase of the global mobility cycle of SIRs (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010).

Second, the study provides quantitative evidence explicating how repatriation work and life adjustment difficulties directly affect SIRs' turnover intentions, whilst only repatriation life adjustment difficulties have an indirect effect via life dissatisfaction. In doing so, we elaborate on life dissatisfaction as the underlying mechanism by which repatriation readjustment affects SIRs' intention to quit (Chiang *et al.*, 2018).

Third, we find that cultural distance between host and home countries affect SIRs' repatriation adjustment difficulties and turnover intentions. We reveal that repatriation work and life adjustment difficulties are positively related to turnover intentions when SIRs' on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness, respectively are low. Thus, in addition to delineating the pathways, we account for context, providing a granular understanding of the increasingly important, yet under-researched, repatriation adjustment-turnover intention relationship.

Fourth, the study provides evidence about why SIRs may leave their organisations, which has major negative organisational implications in emerging economies. This reinforces other studies (which mainly focus on CARs) that show that up to 38% of repatriates leave their companies within the first year of returning to their home countries (Brookfield, 2010). We outline practices to help organisations retain SIRs, who are an important talent source.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Difficulties in repatriation adjustment

Repatriation adjustment relates to the affective responses of individuals who have lived in another country for a significant period and then returned to their home country (Chiang *et al.*, 2018). Extending the expatriation adjustment theory to the repatriation process, Black *et al.* (1992) demonstrated that repatriation adjustment includes three facets: (1) Repatriation work adjustment refers to the adjustment of a person towards a job position in his/her home country; (2) Repatriation general adjustment is the overall adjustment of a person towards his/her home country environments; (3) Repatriation interaction readjustment concerns the adjustment of an individual towards social relations and interpersonal interaction.

Black *et al.* (1992)'s repatriation readjustment theory is influential in explaining the re-entry experiences of CARs (Chiang *et al.*, 2018). However, prior studies provided evidence that only repatriation work and general/life adjustment are relevant for explaining turnover intentions amongst repatriates (Vidal *et al.*, 2007). Interaction adjustment may be an issue for expatriates who may have problems and difficulties in communicating with foreigners due to conflict between cultures and language barriers. SIRs, in contrast, will be less likely to experience such difficulties, as they can re-integrate easily with the home-country communities that they had existing relationships with before going abroad and that they

may have maintained during the overseas experience. Therefore, we argue that repatriation work and life adjustment difficulties only are highly relevant to explain the re-entry experiences of SIRs.

SIRs likely experience two facets of repatriation adjustment. The differences in work lifestyle, and administrative and working practices between the host and home countries, lead to difficulties in work readjustment amongst SIRs (Le and LaCost, 2017).

We argue that difficulties in repatriation adjustment are the main reasons for high turnover amongst SIRs. Challenges in repatriation adjustment lead to psychological stress, less motivation at work, loss of control, uncertainty and alienation (Black *et al.*, 1992). Therefore, SIRs are more likely to quit their jobs if they lack feelings of control and satisfaction. Repatriation adjustment difficulties result in high job and life dissatisfaction and high intention to quit amongst CARs (Lee and Liu, 2007). We also expect similar relationships for SIRs. However, as work adjustment difficulties are related to job aspects, they only affect job dissatisfaction, whilst life adjustment difficulties are related to life dissatisfaction. Hence, we hypothesise:

- H1. Repatriation work adjustment difficulties are positively related to job dissatisfaction (H1a) and turnover intentions (H1b).
- H2. Repatriation life adjustment difficulties are positively related to life dissatisfaction (H2a) and turnover intentions (H2b).

Job dissatisfaction and life dissatisfaction

March and Simon (1958)'s turnover theory suggests that employee turnover is related to the perception of desirability of leaving and ease of leaving. The perceived desirability of quitting a job is usually conceptualised as job dissatisfaction or push forces, whilst the perception of movement is conceptualised as pulled forces for the external job market (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). The current study uses the concept of job dissatisfaction to explain turnover intentions, defined as an overall appraisal of a job situation (Shaffer and Harrison, 1998).

Job dissatisfaction is a critical influence on turnover intentions (Vidal *et al.*, 2007). Although the relationship between job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions has been established amongst CARs (Vidal *et al.*, 2007), evidence on the influence of job dissatisfaction on SIRs' turnover intentions is limited. The prospect of career advancement upon return is one of the main reasons why SIRs study and work abroad. Therefore, home-country companies need to appoint SIRs to positions satisfying their career expectations. In their absence, SIRs may think of leaving and searching for jobs that meet their needs and yield satisfaction.

Research indicates that SIRs will most likely use their experiences gained from overseas to further enhance skills for their future careers outside the boundaries of a single organisation (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). Therefore, SIRs are more likely to leave the organisation if their current jobs do not generate satisfaction and job dissatisfaction is one of the key drivers of life dissatisfaction (Bowling and Zelazny, 2022). Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H3. Job dissatisfaction is positively related to life dissatisfaction (H3a) and turnover intentions (H3b).

Mitchell *et al.* (2001) posited that both on-the-job and off-the-job factors affect employees' attachment to their company. However, off-the-job or life dissatisfaction is still relatively under-researched in the context of SIRs. Most studies on repatriates' turnover intentions have focussed on job dissatisfaction and job factors (Vidal *et al.*, 2007). We argue that life dissatisfaction also plays a vital role in predicting SIRs' intentions to leave their job because

returning home involves changes in living conditions and lifestyles to re-adapt to the home-country environment (Tharenou and Seet, 2014). SIRs may negatively evaluate their life back home due to their conflicting attitudes and values with home-country people and different lifestyles and cultures between the home and host countries (Thompson and Christofi, 2006), including challenges related to new schools for their children and new jobs for their spouses. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4. Life dissatisfaction is positively related to turnover intentions.

Contextual influences: cultural distance

Research has long acknowledged that cultural distance—comprising the degree of differences in the cultures of the home country and the host country—can have a significant influence on expatriate adjustment and expatriate staffing outcomes (Wang and Varma, 2019). For example, Hemmasi and Downes (2013) reported that greater differences in cultural distance were associated with greater work adjustment, although cultural distance did not significantly impact expatriate adjustment. Whilst Song *et al.* (2023) examined a different relationship amongst Chinese expatriates, they also found that cultural distance did not affect the relationship between motivational cultural intelligence and expatriate general adjustment, but higher cultural distance weakened the link between motivational cultural intelligence and expatriates' work adjustment.

Although much of this research focusses on multinational corporations (MNCs), scholars increasingly recognise MNC and other global organisations also rely on SIEs, with Song *et al.* (2023) observing that in the emerging economy MNC context, the talent pool is diverse and comprises many SIEs. However, in a study that disaggregated SIEs and CA expatriates and investigated the influence of cultural distance on expatriate outcomes, cultural distance between SIE's home culture and the host culture did not affect SIEs' (repatriation) intentions (Meuer *et al.*, 2019). Thus, research on the influence of cultural distance on the antecedents-expatriate outcome relationship remains mixed (Wang and Varma, 2019). Further, prior studies have largely focussed on expatriation outcomes, and little is known about whether cultural distance affects SIEs' re-entry experience. One exception is Ellis *et al.* (2020), who found that New Zealander SIRs have an easy transition upon returning from the UK, which has a similar culture to their home country. However, this study is limited to a single host country. The question of whether SIRs returning from different countries/cultures have different re-entry experiences is unknown, leading to calls for further research beyond the CA expatriates and expatriation stage and on culturally diverse samples (Meuer *et al.*, 2019).

We expect cultural distance to be a contextual boundary condition in explaining SIR outcomes, for the following reasons. When abroad, SIEs must adapt to and accommodate both the host country cultures, values, customs and working norms (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). Unlike CA expatriates, SIEs must take personal initiative to acculturate into the host country's environment (Andresen *et al.*, 2020). This process may lead to changes in SIRs' values with concomitant repatriation adjustment or re-entry challenges after returning to their home country (Ho *et al.*, 2016). However, re-entry challenges, and in particular, repatriates' ability to adjust also likely depend on the cultural distance between the host and the home country: a greater/lesser distance between the host country and the home country, leads to a more difficult/easier re-entry experience (Nerdrum and Sarpebakken, 2006). Thus, we expect that the higher the cultural distance between host and home country cultures, the more difficult the SIRs experience on re-entry, manifesting in repatriation work adjustment difficulties and repatriation life adjustment difficulties and the more likely SIRs are to intend to quit their jobs. Hence, we posit:

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- H5. Cultural distance is positively related to repatriation work adjustment difficulties (H5a) and repatriation life adjustment difficulties (H5b) and turnover intentions (H5c).

Dissatisfaction mediates the link between adjustment and turnover intentions

Qualitative studies in developed economies have suggested a link between dissatisfaction and turnover intentions amongst repatriates (Gaio Santos and Martins, 2021). However, there has been limited empirical testing of this link, despite some quantitative research suggesting that this is highly likely (Saxena and Das, 2022). As discussed above, when SIRs experience repatriation work adjustment difficulties, they are more likely to be dissatisfied with their job; similarly, when SIRs experience a lack of repatriation life adjustment, their attitude towards their home country is negative. Job and life dissatisfaction, in turn, lead to high intention to quit their organisation. Therefore, the influence of repatriation adjustment difficulties on turnover intentions is expected to be mediated by job and life dissatisfaction:

- H6a. Job dissatisfaction mediates the link between repatriation work adjustment difficulties and turnover intentions.
- H6b. Life dissatisfaction mediates the link between repatriation life adjustment difficulties and turnover intentions.

Moderation of job embeddedness

According to job embeddedness theory, employees are less likely to leave their job if they feel strongly embedded in their job or organisation and their community (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001). Both on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness include three dimensions: (1) links that refer to “formal or informal connections between a person and institutions or other people”; (2) fit that refers to “an employee’s perceived compatibility or comfort with an organisation and with his or her environment”; and (3) sacrifice that refers to “the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving a job” (Mitchell *et al.*, 2001, pp. 1104–1105).

Empirical evidence in management research, in general, indicates that on-the-job embeddedness can buffer the impact of negative shocks on job performance and citizenship behaviours (Burton *et al.*, 2010). For example, Fasbender *et al.* (2019) found the moderation role of both on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness in the relationship of job stress and nurses’ turnover intentions. However, most of the research has focussed on the turnover intentions of domestic employees; little is known about how job embeddedness moderates the effects of SIRs’ re-entry experiences on their turnover intentions.

The impact of re-entry experiences on SIRs’ attitudes can vary according to SIRs’ levels of job embeddedness. Job embeddedness can serve as social support that helps employees deal with psychological issues, including shocks (Treuren and Fein, 2021). Conversely, individuals who experience less fit are more vulnerable to shocks especially when they have fewer connections to their community or workplace thereby reducing social support and increasing isolation when facing unexpected challenges (Holtom and Inderrieden, 2006). Hence, SIRs may react more strongly to these difficulties if they have fewer ties to their life and job in their home country; high job embeddedness, on the other hand, can diminish repatriation work adjustment difficulties.

As job embeddedness has two distinct dimensions—on-the-job embeddedness that is related to job aspects and off-the-job embeddedness that is associated with life facets—we propose the following hypotheses:

- H7a. On-the-job embeddedness negatively moderates the relationship between repatriation work adjustment difficulties and turnover intentions.

H7b. Off-the-job embeddedness negatively moderates the relationship between repatriation life adjustment difficulties and turnover intentions.

Self-initiated repatriates

Research model

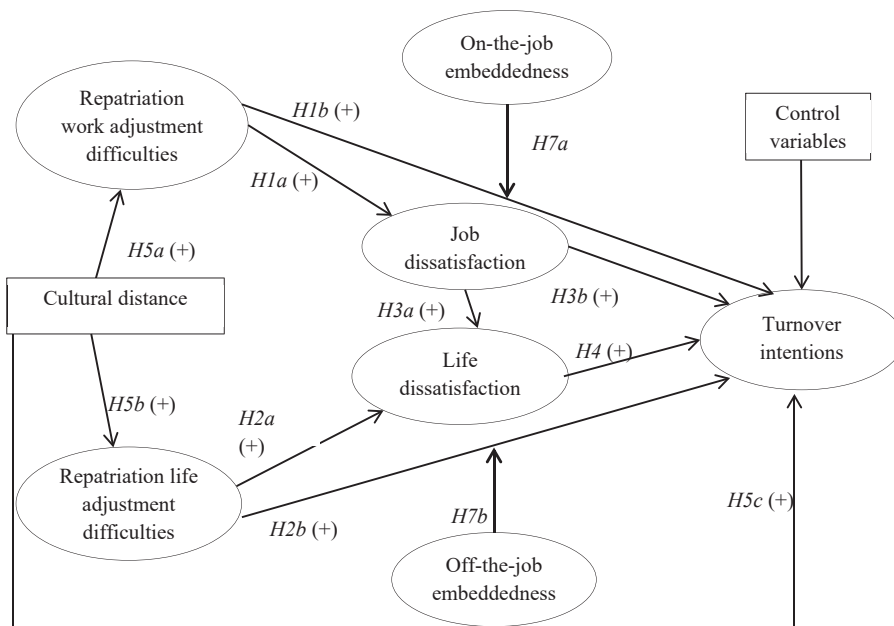
Figure 1 depicts the research model and hypotheses.

Methods

Sample and procedure

Following Tharenou and Caulfield (2010), we surveyed Vietnamese SIR professionals in different sectors who had worked and/or studied overseas for a significant period (a year or more) and who had returned to their home country on their own accord within five years before the date of the survey. We also followed Tharenou (2003) in including graduate employees as SIRs. We approached the alumni associations of Vietnamese graduates from various countries and the human resource (HR) departments of universities and large foreign companies who employ a high number of professional SIRs. These organisations distributed the paper questionnaires or sent emails with the online questionnaire. We developed the survey questionnaire in English and then translated and distributed it in Vietnamese.

We used backward translation to ensure semantic equivalence. The English version was translated into the Vietnamese language by an experienced translator. Next, the Vietnamese version was back-translated into English by another translator. Then a professional translator checked the new English version against the original version to ensure consistency between the two versions. After excluding unusable questionnaires (incomplete questionnaires, or questionnaires that had answered the questions but were not consistent in the answers), the sample comprised 455 questionnaires for further analysis.



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 1. Conceptual model of factors affect turnover intentions

Table 1 shows the profile of survey respondents. Of the 445 respondents, 51.5% were female and 48.5% were male. The large majority (82.2%) were aged between 26 and 40. Australia was the most popular destination host country for SIEs amongst 27 countries (21.3%), followed by the UK (11.5%), New Zealand (10.6%), the USA (10.3%), Japan (9.0%) and Korea (6.7%). Other countries accounted for a total of 30.6% with less than 5% each. All SIRs had overseas qualifications with more than half (57.3%) obtaining a master's degree. In terms of professional sectors that SIRs were working in, the academic sector constituted the highest percentage of 40.2%, followed by the service (25.6%) and industrial sectors (19.8%) and others (14.4%). 30.6% had ten years or above work experience in their current company, followed by those who had from five to less than ten years (26.7%), less than two years (22.5%) and from two to less than five years (20.2%), respectively. One-third (32.8%) had overseas working experience.

Measures

To measure the level of difficulty SIRs experience in adjusting back to their life in the home country, a four-item scale that measured challenges to SIRs' repatriation life adjustment was adapted from the general adjustment scale of [Suutari and Valimaa \(2002\)](#).

Repatriation work adjustment difficulties measure the level of difficulty SIRs experience in adjusting back to their job and organisation in their home country. This scale had four items, with two items adapted from the organisation and job adjustment of [Suutari and Valimaa \(2002\)](#). The other two items were developed by the authors of this paper.

		Number	%
Gender	Female	229	51.5
	Male	216	48.5
Age	20–25	10	2.3
	26–30	86	19.3
	31–35	157	35.3
	36–40	123	27.6
	Over 40	69	15.5
Countries	Australia	95	21.3
	UK	51	11.5
	New Zealand	47	10.6
	USA	46	10.3
	Japan	40	9.0
	Korea	30	6.7
	Others	136	30.6
Highest degree from overseas study	Bachelor	81	18.2
	Master	255	57.3
	Ph.D	109	24.5
Professions	Academic	179	40.2
	Service sector	114	25.6
	Industrial sector	88	19.8
	Others	64	14.4
Tenure in current companies	Less than 2 years	100	22.5
	From 2 to 5 years	90	20.2
	From 5 to 10 years	119	26.7
	From 10 years	136	30.6
Overseas working experience	Yes	146	32.8
	No	299	67.2

Table 1.

Respondents' profile

Source(s): Authors' own work

Life dissatisfaction measures SIRs' global cognitive judgements of their dissatisfaction with their lives upon return. This consisted of five items adapted from [Diener et al. \(1985\)](#).

Job dissatisfaction measures SIRs' dissatisfaction with their job. Five items were adapted from [Judge et al. \(1998\)](#). We recoded the scale so that a higher score is related to a higher level of dissatisfaction.

Turnover intentions measure the extent to which a returnee intends to leave their current organisation. This measurement had four items adapted from [Wayne et al. \(1997\)](#).

On-the-job embeddedness was adapted from the career embeddedness of [Tharenou and Caulfield \(2010\)](#) and was modified to measure the attachment of SIRs to their current job or organisation. We removed the other two items, measuring link dimension, including tenure and permanency of the job as they were categorical variables.

Off-the-job embeddedness measures the attachment of SIRs to their community in the home country. This had 8 items adapted from [Tharenou and Caulfield \(2010\)](#).

All above constructs were measured by a 7-point-Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), except on-the-job/off-the-job sacrifices (dimensions of embeddedness) which were measured from 1 (No loss at all) to 7 (A very great loss).

Cultural distance was measured as the logarithm of the absolute value of [Hofstede's \(1980\)](#) individualism index of the host country minus that of the home country. This study used tenure in the organisation, age and gender of SIRs as control variables as we expected that less experienced, younger and male SIRs are more likely to leave than the other colleagues. We also controlled for types of the profession (0 for Academics and 1 for others) as we expected academics have a higher intention to quit their job than others.

Data analysis

We first applied confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the fit of the measurement model. Second, we used the standardised factor loadings, the average variance extracted (AVE) and construct reliability (CR) to check the constructs' discriminant validity and convergent validity ([Hair et al., 2010](#)). Third, we tested for common method bias. Fourth, we tested the proposed relationships in the research model using structural equation modelling (SEM) in SPSS AMOS 23.0. Fifth, we used 2000 re-samples to assess the significance of indirect effects ([Cheung and Lau, 2008](#)). Finally, we applied [Hayes \(2013\)](#) PROCESS macro to test the moderation effects.

Results

Measurement models

As part of the CFA, five common goodness-of-fit indices were utilised, including: χ^2/df , goodness-of-fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis' coefficient (TLI), standardised root mean residual (SRMR) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) to check whether the models fit the data. The results showed a reasonably good model fit in full measurement model ($\chi^2/df = 3.01$, GFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, SRMR = 0.048 and RMSEA = 0.068).

Both discriminant and convergent validity were used to assess construct validity. After removing some items that had factor loadings <0.5, all others had standardised factor loadings higher than 0.5 ([Table 2](#)). All constructs had CR values higher than 0.7 and AVE values higher than 0.5. All the squared roots of AVE were higher than its correlation with other latent variables ([Table 3](#)). Therefore, all constructs showed convergent and discriminant validity ([Hair et al., 2010](#)).

We used several ways to reduce the influence of common method bias ([Podsakoff et al., 2003](#)). First, the information sheet of questionnaire included a clear introduction about the

Items	Loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's alpha
<i>Repatriation work adjustment difficulties</i>		0.900	0.698	0.911
Adjustment to the home organization was challenging	0.938			
I had problems adjusting to my job in Vietnam	0.935			
I had problems adjusting to the working style in Vietnam	0.798			
I had problems adjusting to the management style in Vietnam	0.633			
<i>Repatriation life adjustment difficulties</i>		0.890	0.619	0.890
It was difficult for me to adjust back to the Vietnamese lifestyle	0.785			
I found my home country to be surprisingly unfamiliar on repatriation	0.782			
I felt that I had changed so much on my international assignment that I had difficulties adjusting to Vietnam once more	0.896			
I felt that I had changed so much on my international assignment that returning to old friend circles did not go easily	0.747			
I had difficulties in finding a "common tune" with my Vietnamese job colleagues	0.712			
<i>Life dissatisfaction</i>		0.897	0.686	0.894
The conditions of my current life are excellent (Reverse scored)	0.802			
I am satisfied with my current life (Reverse scored)	0.859			
So far I have gotten the important things I want in my current life (Reverse scored)	0.893			
If I could live my life over in Vietnam after returning from abroad, I would change almost nothing (Reverse scored)	0.751			
<i>Job dissatisfaction</i>		0.921	0.700	0.927
I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job (Reverse scored)	0.911			
Most days I am enthusiastic about my work (Reverse scored)	0.898			
Each day of work seems like it will never end	0.773			
I find real enjoyment in my work (Reverse scored)	0.819			
I consider my job rather unpleasant	0.773			
<i>Turnover intentions</i>		0.932	0.821	0.932
I am actively looking for a job outside of my current company	0.898			
As soon as I can find a better job, I'll leave my current company	0.897			
I am seriously thinking about quitting my job	0.917			
<i>Off-the-job embeddedness</i>		0.824	0.610	
<i>Fit</i>	0.801	0.839	0.636	0.832
The community I live in is a good match to me	0.811			
The area where I live offers the leisure activities that I like	0.714			
I think of the community where I live as home	0.851			
<i>Sacrifices</i>	0.814	0.829	0.619	0.733
The range of social activities and events I have in Vietnam	0.704			
The friends and social ties I have in Vietnam	0.785			
The lifestyle of Vietnam	0.864			
<i>Links</i>	0.719	0.779	0.639	0.701
My close friends live nearby	0.842			
My family roots are in the community I live in	0.754			
<i>On-the-job embeddedness</i>		0.790	0.654	
<i>Fit</i>	0.765	0.846	0.647	0.844
My career needs fit with the opportunities available in Vietnam	0.833			

Table 2.
Reliability and validity

(continued)

Items	Loadings	CR	AVE	Cronbach's alpha	Self-initiated repatriates
My professional growth and development fits with what is happening in Vietnam	0.826				
I have needs for work experience met by the opportunities in Vietnam	0.751				
<i>Sacrifices</i>	0.850	0.816	0.597	0.793	
The career and employment opportunities I have in Vietnam	0.724				
The money I earn or can earn in Vietnam	0.843				
The business opportunities I have in Vietnam	0.746				
Note(s): N = 445; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; some items were removed as their factor loadings were below 0.5					
Source(s): Authors' own work					

Table 2.

topic and clear instructions on how to answer the questionnaire. Second, we conducted a pilot study on 20 SIRs to amend the questionnaire and ensure that respondents understood the questions correctly and clearly. Third, we ensured anonymity by not collecting names and addresses and using confidential mailboxes. Fourth, we conducted Common Latent Factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) to assess for common method bias. The differences in the factor loadings before and after adding the common latent factor were all below 0.2 (Chin, 1998). Thus, common method bias was not a problem in the study.

Test of hypotheses

The theoretical model showed a good-fit model ($\chi^2/df = 2.51$; GFI = 0.90; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.055; SRRM = 0.058). Figure 2 and Table 4 show the completely standardised structural coefficients of factors' effects on turnover intentions.

Direct linkages

Hypothesis 1 stated that repatriation work adjustment difficulties are positively associated with job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions. The results in Figure 2 show that repatriation work adjustment difficulties were significantly positively related to job dissatisfaction ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.01$) and turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.13, p < 0.05$). Thus, both Hypotheses 1a and 1b are supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that repatriation life adjustment difficulties are positively associated with life dissatisfaction and turnover intentions. Results indicate that repatriation life adjustment difficulties both significantly affected life dissatisfaction ($\beta = 0.07, p < 0.05$) and turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.01$). Therefore, both Hypotheses 2a and 2b are supported.

Hypothesis 3 posited a positive relationship between job dissatisfaction and life dissatisfaction and between job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions. Results show that job dissatisfaction had a significantly positive influence on life dissatisfaction ($\beta = 0.75, p < 0.01$), but did not significantly directly affect turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.09, p > 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 3a, but not Hypothesis 3b.

Hypothesis 4 postulated a positive relationship between life dissatisfaction and turnover intentions. Results showed that life dissatisfaction had a significant positive impact on turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.05$); therefore, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

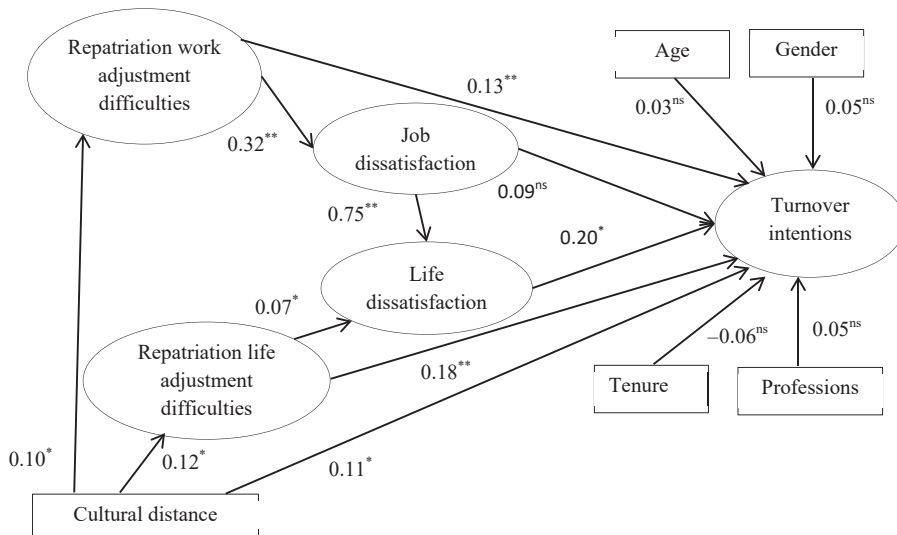
Hypothesis 5 proposed that cultural distance positively affects repatriation adjustment difficulties and turnover intentions. Results indicated that cultural distance was significantly associated with work and life adjustment difficulties ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.12, p < 0.05$,

Table 3.
Descriptive statistics,
correlations and
reliability statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7
Repatriation work adjustment difficulties (V1)	4.220	1.514	<i>0.835</i>						
Repatriation life adjustment difficulties (V2)	3.266	1.365	0.665***	<i>0.787</i>					
Life dissatisfaction (V3)	3.942	1.342	0.284***	0.276***	<i>0.828</i>				
Job dissatisfaction (V4)	3.929	1.322	0.311***	0.274***	0.769***	<i>0.837</i>			
Turnover intentions (V5)	3.708	1.598	0.348***	0.370***	0.352***	0.330***	<i>0.906</i>		
Off-the-job embeddedness (V6)	4.915	1.099	0.003	-0.201***	-0.485***	-0.472***	-0.100†	<i>0.781</i>	
On-the-job embeddedness (V7)	4.403	1.148	-0.164**	-0.145**	-0.484***	-0.594***	-0.178**	0.715***	<i>0.809</i>

Note(s): N = 445; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; italic numbers in the diagonal represent square root of the AVE of each construct, Pearson correlations are presented below the diagonal

Source(s): Authors' own work



Note(s): ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, nsnon-significant
Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 2.
 Completely standardized structural coefficients for the theoretical model

Variables	Std. beta	Std. error	Critical ratio
Repatriation work adjustment difficulties → Job dissatisfaction	0.32**	0.041	6.434
Repatriation work adjustment difficulties → Turnover intentions	0.13*	0.064	2.029
Repatriation life adjustment difficulties → Life dissatisfaction	0.07*	0.034	1.943
Repatriation life adjustment difficulties → Turnover intentions	0.18**	0.075	2.745
Job dissatisfaction → Life dissatisfaction	0.75**	0.046	14.822
Job dissatisfaction → turnover intentions	0.09 ^{ns}	0.093	1.186
Life dissatisfaction → turnover intentions	0.20*	0.103	2.515
Cultural distance → Repatriation work adjustment difficulties	0.10*	0.132	2.081
Cultural distance → Repatriation life adjustment difficulties	0.12*	0.115	2.365
Cultural distance → Turnover intentions	0.11*	0.117	2.478

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$
Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 4.
 Standardized coefficients

respectively) and turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$), supporting [Hypotheses 5a, 5b and 5c](#).

Regarding the control variables, [Figure 2](#) indicates that none of the control variables affected turnover intentions.

Mediation linkages

In order to test the mediating effects, we used 2000 re-samples to test the significance of indirect effects ([Cheung and Lau, 2008](#)). If the independent variable significantly affects the mediation variable, which, in turn, significantly affects the dependent variable and the indirect effects are significant, we can confirm the mediated links. [Table 4](#) shows that job dissatisfaction ([Hypothesis 3b](#)) was not significantly related to turnover intentions, and [Table 5](#) indicates its indirect effect on turnover intentions via job dissatisfaction was not

Variables	Std. beta	Bootstrapping Bia-corrected 95%CI	
		Lower	Upper
Repatriation work adjustment difficulties → Job dissatisfaction → Turnover intentions	0.04 ^{ns}	-0.005	0.084
Repatriation life adjustment difficulties → Life dissatisfaction → Turnover intentions	0.06*	0.020	0.115

Table 5.
Mediation effects

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ns non-significant
Source(s): Authors' own work

significant ($\beta = 0.04$, $p > 0.05$) thus not supporting the mediation role of job dissatisfaction (Hypothesis 6a). However, Table 4 shows that repatriation life adjustment difficulties were significantly associated with life dissatisfaction ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), and Table 5 indicates its indirect effect on turnover intentions via life dissatisfaction was significant ($\beta = 0.06$, $p < 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 6b.

Moderation effects

We used Hayes (2013)'s PROCESS macro for SPSS with 5,000 bootstrap resamples to test moderation effects. Table 6 shows repatriation work adjustment difficulties were more positively related to turnover intentions when SIRs' job embeddedness was low (conditional effect of 0.44 with a 95% confidence interval (CI) of [0.34, 0.55]) than when it was high (conditional effect of 0.18 with a 95% CI of [0.06, 0.31]), supporting Hypothesis 7a. Similarly, repatriation life adjustment difficulties were more positively associated to turnover intentions for SIRs indicated a lower off-the-job embeddedness (conditional effect of 0.48 with a 95% CI of [0.37, 0.60]) than those with higher off-the-job embeddedness (conditional effect of 0.27 with a 95% CI of [0.13, 0.40]), supporting Hypothesis 7b. Figure 3a and b graphically reveal the moderating effects of home-country embeddedness.

Discussion and implications

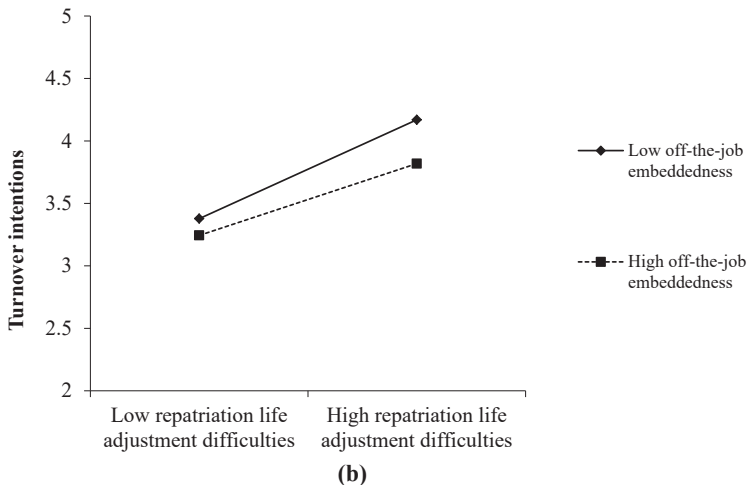
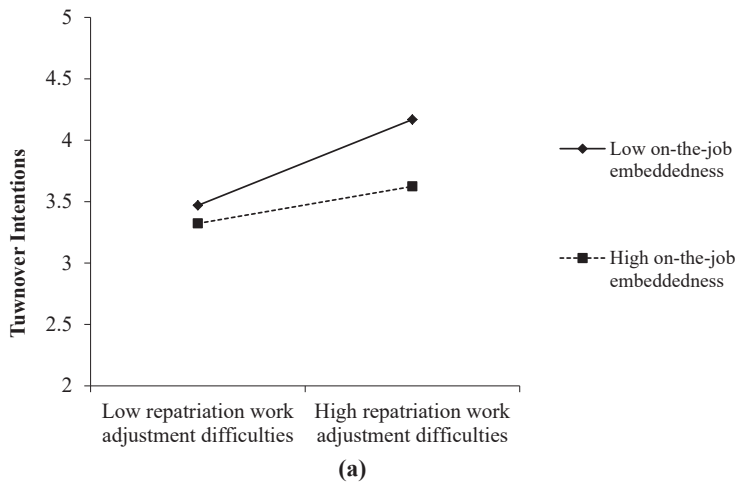
Theoretical implications

The study advances our understanding of SIRs in Vietnam by developing and testing an integrated theoretical framework that explains how different facets of repatriation

Variables	Level of moderator	Conditional effect	Std. error	<i>t</i> -values	Bootstrapping 95%CI	
					Lower	Upper
Repatriation work adjustment difficulties x On-the-job embeddedness	Low on-the-job embeddedness	0.44**	0.05	8.600	0.34	0.55
	High on-the-job embeddedness	0.18**	0.06	2.981	0.06	0.31
Repatriation life adjustment difficulties x Off-the-job embeddedness	Low off-the-job embeddedness	0.48**	0.06	8.251	0.37	0.60
	High off-the-job embeddedness	0.27**	0.07	3.850	0.13	0.40

Table 6.
Moderation effects

Note(s): ** $p < 0.01$
Source(s): Authors' own work



Source(s): Authors' own work

Self-initiated
repatriates

Figure 3.
(a) Interaction effect of repatriation work adjustment difficulties and job embeddedness on turnover intentions and (b) interaction effect of repatriation life adjustment difficulties and off-the-job embeddedness on turnover intentions

adjustment difficulties directly and indirectly affect SIRs turnover intention, as well as the moderating effects of different forms of embeddedness.

By applying expatriation adjustment theory with repatriation readjustment theory, this study extends research on the repatriation adjustment-turnover intention relationship that, to date, focusses on CARs and SIRs from mostly Western countries (James and Azungah, 2019) to include SIRs from an emerging transition economy, Vietnam. Consistent with prior research on CARs (Lee and Liu, 2007), results also indicate that work and life repatriation adjustment difficulties have significant positive effects on turnover intentions. However, unlike studies on CARs, repatriation life adjustment difficulties only have an indirect effect via life dissatisfaction amongst SIRs in an emerging transition economy. In doing so, we elaborate on life dissatisfaction as the mediating mechanism by which repatriation readjustment affects SIRs' intention to quit (Chiang *et al.*, 2018). In addition, results

indicate that both job and life dissatisfaction play an important role in predicting SIRs' intentions to leave their jobs.

SIRs from emerging transition economies initially go abroad with the expectation of career advancement, such as better positions and professional development upon return (Hoang and Ho, 2019; Le and LaCost, 2017). Therefore, if SIRs are not satisfied with their job in companies in their home-country, they may think of leaving again, particularly as their overseas qualification and experience typically qualifies them for additional job opportunities. Life dissatisfaction may also arise if SIRs change their living conditions and lifestyles to re-integrate into their home-country environment (Tharenou and Seet, 2014). Therefore, SIRs are more likely to leave their current organisation if their job does not increase their well-being in work and life.

The findings also suggest that cultural distance significantly affect repatriation adjustment difficulties and turnover intentions. This implies that the more dissimilar host and home cultures, the more difficulties that SIRs experience on re-entry and the more likely they leave their organisations.

Finally, the study extends Mitchell *et al.* (2001)'s theory of job embeddedness beyond expatriation to include the repatriation phase of the global mobility cycle of SIRs (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). Off-the-job and on-the-job embeddedness moderate the influence of repatriation life adjustment difficulties and repatriation work adjustment difficulties on turnover intentions, respectively. Both on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness lessen the effects of repatriation adjustment difficulties on turnover intentions, with on-the-job embeddedness having a more significant effect. This indicates that career-related factors related to a home country's economy and job opportunities play a more important role in turnover intentions. This contrasts with Tharenou and Caulfield (2010) who report stronger effects of off-the-job or community embeddedness amongst SIEs when they were making decisions to stay or leave their host countries. The difference may arise because Vietnam, as the home country, has a relatively less-developed transition economy vis-à-vis the relatively more developed liberal economies of host countries in the sample. In contrast, Tharenou and Caulfield's (2010) research used respondents from countries with similar economic development status (Australia–USA). It may also be a consequence of a larger cultural orientation difference between the home and host countries in our study.

Practical implications

Our findings have important implications for HR practitioners in employing organisations and SIRs' managers and networks. By providing meaningful insights into the factors that affect the repatriation-turnover intention relationship of SIRs, this study can help HR professionals to develop targeted repatriation and HR practices to alleviate SIRs' dissatisfaction and intention to quit. This is especially important for emerging economies where professional SIRs are an important source of human capital, but also in short supply (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2014; Boamah *et al.*, 2023).

To alleviate readjustment difficulties and dissatisfaction and thereby SIRs' turnover intentions, HR practitioners should develop and provide repatriation programs that facilitate SIRs' work and life adjustment, focussing on SIRs returning from countries with larger cultural distance from their home countries. These programs, delivered collaboratively by HR practitioners and SIRs' supervisors, will help SIRs to develop realistic expectations about post-repatriation career opportunities and general living conditions in their home countries and reduce uncertainty and alienation upon return (Hoang and Ho, 2019).

HR practitioners should also ensure that SIRs are placed in positions that are aligned with their skills and knowledge. Targeted opportunities for professional and career development that utilise and enhance SIRs' skills developed from their overseas experiences (Sutari and

Valimaa, 2002) should be a priority. Collectively, these initiatives will increase SIRs' job satisfaction. SIRs should also be provided with the requisite organisational and repatriation resources and supportive supervisors, which may reduce SIRs' turnover intentions.

Professional networks can also provide opportunities for SIRs to strengthen their links with home country organisations, thus helping to increase SIRs' level of job embeddedness. Networks should focus on facilitating SIRs' connections with local communities. Once embedded in their organisation and community, repatriation adjustment difficulties may be perceived more positively, with SIRs less likely to quit. Policies that provide tax benefits and subsidised education and healthcare for the SIR's family may also alleviate potential dissatisfaction arising from changed living conditions and lifestyles upon repatriation.

Limitations and future research

This study's limitations provide opportunities for future research. Our focus was on the under-researched category of SIRs, which we distinguished from a seemingly similar but distinct group of mobile workers, returning skilled migrants. Acknowledging the difficulties in clearly demarcating the two groups, additional research could investigate the extent to which the findings on SIRs and skilled returnee migrants are similar. Furthermore, the research model is limited to SIRs in Vietnam and should be tested in other contexts.

This study is also cross-sectional. Thus longitudinal research can examine the process of repatriation adjustment that may affect SIRs' intentions or actual turnover decisions (Yue *et al.*, 2023). Future research can integrate the antecedents of repatriation adjustment difficulties such as individual factors and organisational factors that may have an indirect impact on SIRs' turnover intentions via repatriation adjustment difficulties.

Conclusion

Our study contributes to understanding how repatriation adjustment difficulties in/directly affect turnover intentions of SIRs from one emerging transition economy's perspective, Vietnam, providing a granular understanding of the mechanism and contextual factors influencing the repatriation readjustment-turnover relationship.

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