

Self-Initiated Expatriate Academics (SIEAs) in the Malaysian Higher Education Sector: Instruments Development and Preliminary Results

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In Malaysia's quest to become the international hub of education in Asia, more expatriate academics are working in the country's higher education institutions. The high demand for an international academic workforce has created the opportunity for self-initiated expatriate academics (SIEAs) to take up employment opportunities. Consequently, the issues that are associated with expatriation experienced by expatriate academics especially SIEAs are becoming more complex. Failure to identify and manage these complex issues will affect the success or failure of SIEAs who would like to work overseas. This paper aims to develop a survey instrument based on important issues that have affected SIEAs as described in the literature. Multi-item scales were constructed and adapted to assess SIEAs' expatriation issues, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence. The item selection, item analysis, and determination of the final 122-item scale are also described. Reliability and validity of the instruments for the SIEAs Expatriation Issues Survey (SEIS) were also discussed.

Field of Research: Management

Keywords: Self-Initiated Expatriate, Higher Education, Instrument Development, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Following changes to the education system in 1996, Malaysia has successfully attracted foreign students with the establishment of private universities and foreign universities branch campuses (Education 2011). This success was in line with Malaysia's National Education Action Plan (2007-2010) on becoming an international hub of education in Asia. The UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in 2009 ranked Malaysia at 11th place in the world for attracting international students to Malaysia's institutions of higher learning, increasing from less than 2000 in 1995 to 75,000 in 2009. Most international students come from the MENA countries (Middle East and North Africa) and Western Asia, with one-third of students coming from China and Indonesia (Education 2011). More private higher education institutions (Private HEIs) are being established and the established public higher education institutions (Public HEIs) gradually changing to cater for the increased intake of international students.

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Public HEIs and private HEIs in Malaysia are governed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). Public HEIs are administered by the government and heavily funded by public funds (Economic Planning Unit 2010) while private HEIs are administered by the large Malaysian privately-owned companies (Fleming & Soborg 2010). To date, there are 19 public local universities, 1 public international university and 40 private universities. The first public university was established in 1962 and the most recent public university was established in 2006. Public HEIs are categorised into 3 categories: research-based, comprehensive and focused universities. Private HEIs have also shown tremendous growth since 1980. There are approximately 534 private HEIs as of June 2014 (Ministry of Higher Education 2014). These private HEIs are divided into two categories, Private HEIs with university status and without university status. Private HEIs with university status are further categorised into three kinds, namely private HEIs with university status, College University and foreign university branch campus.

This study will examine 40 private HEIs that have university status. Now that Malaysia plans to become the international hub of education, academics from all over the world are now employed in its higher education institutions. These professionals are not only referred to as expatriate, they are also specifically known as expatriate academic and mobile knowledge workers (Jones 2000; Williamson & Cable 2003). Ironically, despite the boom in both public and private HEIs, Malaysia still experiences shortages of highly skilled people and high rates of tertiary graduates who remain unemployed. In other words, this situation reflects flaws in the HEI system that needs to be remedied urgently.

Increasingly, universities are now considered to be business entities and must justify their existence in an increasingly market-oriented economy. According to Albach(1996), education in the twentieth century has become an academic enterprise. The concept of educational enterprise is still a vague one to academics and the notion of higher education becoming globalised creates stress and concerns for academics (Fanghanel 2012). Administrators and academics are viewed as businesspeople while students are viewed as clients and the 'end product' of the tertiary education system. It is therefore equally important for the universities to make sure that their clients receive sufficient input (theory/knowledge) in order to produce an efficient and successful output (practical). The clients' success is based on the marketability of their skills the real world and their ability to practice what they have learnt in real life (i.e. working life). In doing so, these universities that act as business entities play the role in outsourcing experts from overseas to provide the best input for their clients. Fanghanel (2012) in her book *Being an Academic* states that students are perceived to be consumers and learning is simply a commodity to the university. It is the academics' role to facilitate students' learning experience that reflects the real world. Hence more expatriate academics, mainly self-initiated expatriate academics, are recruited from other countries to cater for the tremendous increase in the number of students attending universities. Consequently, with the massive numbers of SIEAs employed, the ability of the HEIs in appointing and managing SIEAs is questioned.

This paper aims to develop item scales based on the identified expatriation issues that concern SIEAs throughout their international experience. This scale measures four aspects of expatriation issues, which were chosen from a review of the literature on expatriate adjustment. Ibrahim and Muenjohn (2012) have identified four expatriation issues for SIEAs and these are: motivation; pre-departure preparation; difficulties; and organisational support. This scale was designed specifically for SIEAs who are working in public and private universities in Malaysia. It may not be applicable to traditional or organisational expatriates as the nature of their expatriation differs from that of the

traditional expatriate who is backed up and supported by the company sending them on an overseas assignment. SIEAs are people who decided to move abroad to take up opportunities for an international career. Sutaari and Brewster (2000) have comprehensively compared organisational expatriates and self-initiated expatriates, whereby the authors divided the differences into five main characteristics of the SIEs: individual variables; employer and task variables; motives; repatriation and future career; and compensation.

Although an existing scale could have been used in this research, a new one was developed for three reasons. First, it was intended that the content of the items should be applicable specifically to SIEAs. Most existing scales were constructed to suit traditional expatriates or expatriates in general and consequently some items may not suit SIEAs who at their own instigation have risked venturing into an international career. Second, the scale was intended to cover the major issues, these being motivation, pre-departure preparation, challenges and organisational support. Finally, 46 items that cover expatriation issues were adapted and developed to produce 139 items, which were then divided into 6 sections for this full-scale study.

A better understanding of such issues and their effect will help both SIEAs and Malaysian universities to better manage and anticipate potential problems/obstacles concerning SIEAs' expatriation. As a result the findings here could help expatriates enjoy enhanced job satisfaction and commitment to their institution or university.

The paper is organised into four sections. The first section introduces the background and the aim of the study. Then, a review of previous studies and literature is provided in the second section. The review is given on every variable within the research framework. The third section presents key results of the study that are collected in the pre-test. Finally, the summary provides key discussion and contribution of the results and limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research Instrument

The self-reporting survey questionnaire was developed after an extensive review of the current research literature used in this study. Forty-six items were assembled in a Likert format covering a broad array of possible variables concerning expatriation issues. Overall this survey consists of 139 items organised into 6 sections. Out of 139 items, 17 background variables were estimated through single direct questions to the respondents in Section 1. A new composite consisting of items drawn from existing scales on international adjustment, reasons for expatriation, and organisational support were developed, adapted and used to suit the measurement for every sub-issue in this study (Section 2a). Thus, to identify the motivation or reason behind SIEAs' expatriation, six motivation items were adapted based on Selmer and Lauring's (2010a) five motivation dimensions, following Richardson and Malon's seven-point scale on SIE motivation. However, their study only used a five-point scale (Richardson & Malon 2005). The five individual reasons: adventure/travel, career, family, financial incentives and life change/escape used by Selmer and Lauring (2010) were used to construct the motivation scales. For example, the Cronbach's alpha for adventure/travel is =0.88, career =0.82, family =0.62; financial incentives =0.41; and life change/escape =0.71.

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While three items concerning family members or relatives in Malaysia were devised, reasonable cost of living and personal commitment were developed and adapted after a comprehensive report by Global Relocation Trends (2012). Section 2b consists of a pre-departure preparation scale which was developed following the comprehensive literature by Dickmann and Baruch (2011). Ten items were chosen and used in this research. Section 2c consists of 19 items based on the *indicators for calculating return-on-investment on international assignment* devised by Dowling, Festing and Engle (2009). These refer to the following: settling in services; spouse and family support; cross-cultural and language adjustments; destination familiarisation; and looking for accommodation.

Section 2d on organisational support consists of 8 items which were developed based on International Human Resource Management (IHRM) activities as documented by Dowling, Festing and Engle (2009). According to these authors, "To operate in an international environment, a human resources department must engage in a number of activities that would not be necessary in a domestic environment: international taxation; international relocation and orientation; administrative services for expatriates; host-government relations; and language translation services" (Dowling, Festing & Engle 2009, p. 5). Furthermore, Dowling et al. (2009, p. 6) elaborate on the elements that deal with international relocation and orientation which are: "arranging for departure training; providing immigration and travel detail; providing housing, shopping, medical care, recreation and schooling information; and finalizing compensation details such as delivery of salary overseas, determination of various overseas allowances and taxation treatment".

For the purposes of this study, the elements provided by Dowling et al. (2009) are clustered into two categories: work-related; and personal-related. Section 3 on academic job satisfaction consists of 33 items devised by Al-Rubaish et al. (2011): Academic Job Satisfaction (AJS) served to measure academic job satisfaction. Section 4 consists of 9 items. Organisational commitment constructs were measured by Meyer, Allen and Smith's (1993) established Three-Component Model Employee Commitment Survey. The Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) 2005 measured cultural intelligence (CQ) in section 5 and 14 items derived from the Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory-Short (Genos 2007) measured emotional intelligence (EQ) in section 6. All scales utilised a 5-point Likert-type format (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Table 1 summarises the measures used in this analysis to measure the respective variables of interest.

The final section was divided into two. Firstly, respondents were asked if they had any comments on issues that they would like to address which had not been covered by the survey. Secondly, the respondents were asked whether they would like to participate in the second phase of the research data collection, which consisted of semi-structured interviews. If respondents agreed to participate, they were required to provide their contact details. The researcher will contact them to establish an interview date and time at the respondents' convenience.

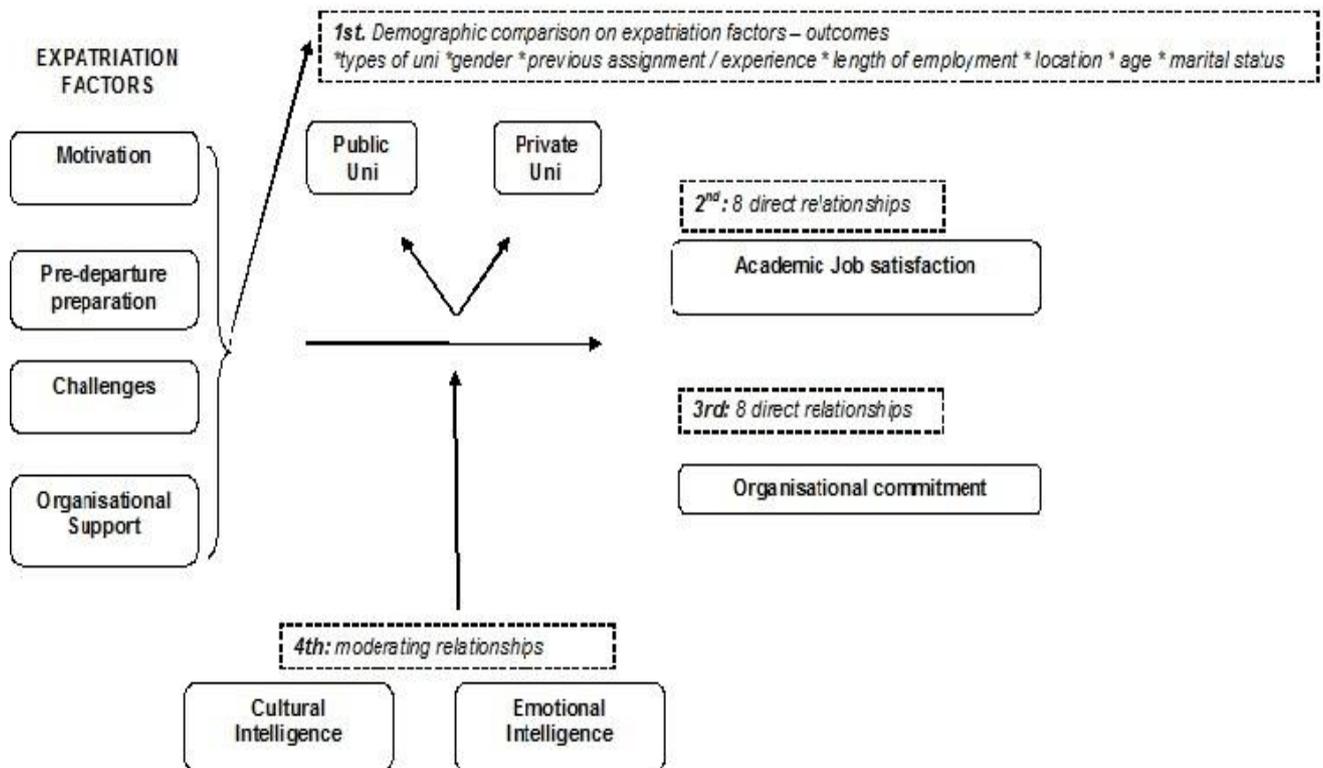
Table 1: Variables of Interest and Sources of Items

| Variables of interest | Measures | Items |
|------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Demographic | Background of participants | 17 items |
| Expatriation Issues | | |
| Motivation | Selmer and Luring (2010b) | 9 items |
| Pre-departure Preparation | Dickmann& Baruch (2011) | 10 items |
| Difficulties | Dowling, Festing and Engle (2009) | 19 items |
| Organisational Support | Dowling, Festing and Engle (2009) | 8 items |
| Academic Job Satisfaction | Al-Rubaish et al. (2011) | 33 items |
| Normative Commitment | Three-Component Model Employee | 3 items |
| Affective Commitment | Commitment Survey | 3 items |
| Continuance Commitment | Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993) | 3 items |
| Cultural intelligence | The Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) 2005 | 20 items |
| Emotional Intelligence | Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory-Short (Genos 2007) | 14 items |
| TOTAL | | 139 items |

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The model below (Figure 1) displays the conceptual framework concerning SIEAs' expatriation issues. While previous studies mainly agree that the inability to adjust to an unfamiliar environment can seriously impact on expatriates' international assignments (Caligiuri 1997; Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley 1999), this proposed research intends to explore and highlight the detailed work-related and personal-related issues of expatriation face by SIEAs. It does so by taking into account the scant literature and findings on the factors affecting the expatriate international assignment. The work-related and personal-related expatriate issues experienced by SIEAs are categorised into four kinds: pre-departure preparation; motives for expatriation; challenges in adjustment; and organisational support.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



3. The Results

3.1 Validity

A pre-test was conducted with 10 fellow Higher Degree Research (HDR) students from different nationalities at RMIT University. The pre-test was conducted in December 2012 to assess the content validity, scales and measures. The paper-based questionnaires were distributed by hand to each student individually. The HDR students reviewed the questionnaires and gave their feedback on the content, language, readability and relevance of the questionnaires. Participants were asked to comment on the clarity and readability of the items and point out if any were misleading, ambiguous or too lengthy. They were also asked to time themselves when they answered the questionnaires. All negative words were reworded except for items dealing with difficulties. To ensure the items could be understood and suited by the sample of this study, all “organisation” words were replaced with “University” which covered all the main organisational commitment and expatriation issues items. At this stage, all items were retained. Overall, on average, the participants took approximately 15 minutes to answer the whole questionnaire consisting of 139 items.

A pilot study was conducted in February 2013 involving 20 expatriate academics in foreign branch private universities in Malaysia. The participants were contacted via email and participated in the online pilot test administered by Qualtrics. Johanson and Brooks (2009) suggest employing a pilot test to make sure the items have sufficient psychometric properties before it is used on a larger scale and to examine the viability of the study. In

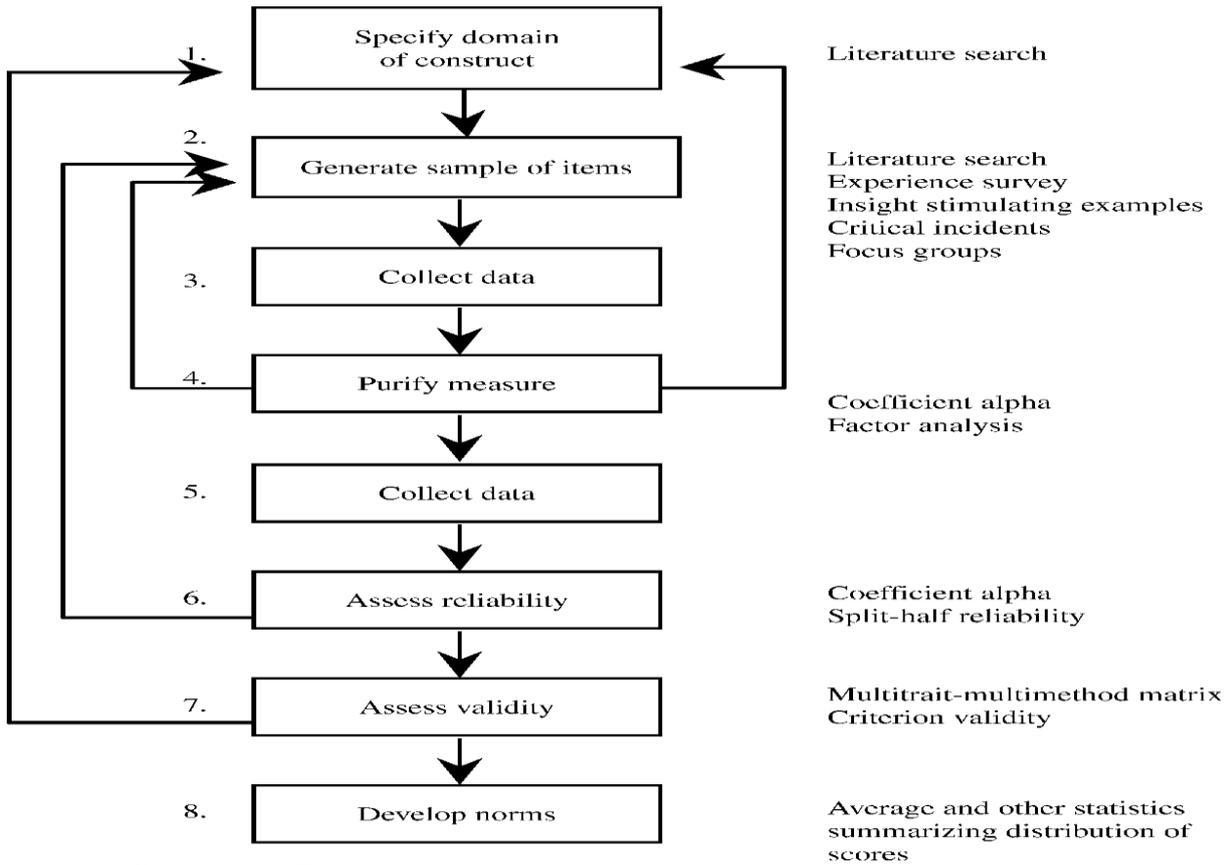
regard to the minimum number of responses for a pilot study, Isaac and Michael (1995) and Hill (1998) maintain 10 to 30 participants are sufficient to test hypotheses and a pilot study. Additionally, Johanson and Brooks (2009) contend that the pilot study sample should represent the actual population of interest. Thus in this study, 20 expatriate academics were invited to participate in this online pilot study. These expatriate academics represent the actual sample in this study, the self-initiated expatriate academics (SIEAs). They were purposely chosen since foreign branch private universities in Malaysia were not included as the sample in the actual research. This study used expatriate academics from privately owned higher education institutions with university status and foreign branch universities. Nevertheless, expatriate academics in foreign branch universities share the same characteristics with the actual population of interest. Light, Singer and Willet (1990) maintain that:

One facet of a measurement pilot must not be compromised: the sample design. Be sure the sample in your pilot fully represents your chosen target population. You must evaluate your instruments in a context that makes the results of the pilot directly generalizable to your ultimate study. Reliability and validity coefficients must be portable between the pilot and future studies (pp. 215-216).

3.2 Reliability

The pilot test is then analysed using SPSS Statistical Package for Social Sciences to find the reliability coefficients or scales' internal consistencies (Cronbach's alphas coefficients). At this stage, all 19 items on the difficulties scale were reverse coded because they implied negative meaning. Thus nineteen questions were reverse coded, for example, 1 to 5 replaced the original codes of 5 to 1. These questions were items relating to difficulties in expatriation. The question asked was "*How would you rate the challenges that you experience in expatriation?*" The implicit answer would begin with "*I found it hard to...*" followed by the scale items. The example of scale items for difficulties are: "*I found it hard to get / find / adapt...*" support from the University: Difficulties item 1 (DIFF 1), support from the family: (DIFF 3), and finding accommodation: (DIFF 4). The reliability coefficient (alpha) of .70 and above for all items is considered acceptable reliability (Gilbert A. Churchill, Jr 1979). Since Cronbach's alpha is sensitive to the number of items in the scale, Pallant (2011) maintains that Cronbach's alpha value of .50 is sufficient for a scale with less than 10 items. Figure 2 is based on Churchill's (1979) suggestion for developing better measures. Following Churchill's (1979) procedures for better measures, the coefficient alpha and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for each variable were computed to assess the reliability and validity of the items. At this stage in this paper only the coefficient alpha results are reported.

Figure 2: Suggested Procedure for Developing Better Measures



Source: Churchill (1979)

The Cronbach’s alphas were computed for each variable as well as their dimensions to ascertain the extent to which the items making up each dimension and the variables were similar. The reliability analysis ranged from 0.552 to 0.896. The dimensions were retained since they presented sufficient reliabilities.

Table 2: Reliability of Scales for Pilot Study

| Scales | Cronbach’s Alpha (α) | No. of Item |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| Motivation | 0.552 | 9 |
| Pre-departure Preparation | 0.687 | 10 |
| Difficulties | 0.894 | 19 |
| Organisational Support | 0.896 | 8 |

4. Conclusion

The SIEAs Expatriation Issues Survey (SEIS) was developed to measure various expatriation issues that SIEAs may have encountered in their international career. It was designed specifically to describe their experience in Malaysia and therefore may or may not be applicable to other developing countries in South East Asia. Reliability data suggested that the total scale has reasonable and adequate reliability and is ready to be used in the final or actual study using a larger sample. It was developed and validated on expatriate academics who belong to the same sampling category but were excluded from the actual or final study. Thus SEIS constitutes an appropriate and reasonable scale for

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exploring the complex issues of expatriation that SIEAs may have experienced throughout their international career.

This paper makes a contribution to the development of the instrument used for the self-initiated expatriate academics (SIEAs) and expatriate management research. The instrument and its test results could be adopted to address the expatriate work-related and personal-related issues of SIEA working in Higher Education Institutions.

Although many studies on expatriate focus on the expatriate adjustment, not many studies examined directly on the expatriate work-related and personal-related issues of SIEAs. For example, Selmer & Luring (2010a) posit that their study did not include non-work factors such as social and life-style issues. The focus of Selmer & Luring (2010a) is on the work outcomes and their study has mainly covered work adjustment, work performance, work effectiveness, job satisfaction and time to proficiency as the basic construct of the work outcome. Organisational commitment is not included as a construct in this instrument.

Moreover, there are no research studies that address the job satisfaction and organisational commitment of SIEA in Malaysia. Although there are quite a number of studies on self-initiated expatriate, only few studies have focused on self-initiated expatriate academic. By developing an instrument to measure SIEA issues particularly targeting on Malaysia, it would provide a better understanding of variables such as personal-related and work-related of expatriate issues face by the SIEA link to job satisfaction and organisational commitment in Malaysia as how these variables from the perspective of SIEA affect job satisfaction and organisational commitment are not clearly measured in this country.

The implication of the new instrument would direct to the future studies that focus purposely on SIEAs employed by universities. SIEAs in this context will be those from the home country who make their own volition to work at the host country without any influence from the home organisation. These SIEAs may or may not be working at the home country before they take the international assignment. Therefore, the particular type of the instrument should be developed to measure interest variables this context, which is different to the traditional expatriates. In addition, by using more nuance approach from previous study, this study provides more comprehensive perspectives on the issues and provides a more refine theories that incorporate theories of Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley (1999) model of international adjustment to investigate the expatriate issues influencing the job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Similar to other studies, this study has its own limitations. The new instrument was developed to measure the relationship between the expatriate issues and job satisfaction and organisational commitment of Self-initiated expatriate academics (SIEAs) working in Malaysian Universities. However, there are only four facets of the expatriate issues are derived from the expatriate adjustment literature, pre-departure preparation; motives; challenges; and organisational supports. Other expatriate issues are not included in the new instrument. In addition, the instrument only focuses on SIEA and not traditional expatriate in general or business expatriate and it only gives emphasis on SIEA in Malaysian setting, precisely in Public and Private Universities. Finally, this study fully depends on the responses and views given by the SIEA and does not cover the views of HRM. Finally, the sample size of this study is relatively small and the further tests of the instrument are needed with a larger sample.

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To sum up, research in SIEA is still limited and it needs a more comprehensive instrument to measure the expatriate issues within this context. Without specific measurement, the interpretation of the results and validity of the findings might be questioned.

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