Retaining the repatriate by organisation in developing countries (in Africa): understanding the decision-making point (stay or leave) of the expatriate

Linus Kekleli Kudo and Ruth McPhail

Department of ERHR, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia, and

William Vuk Despotovic

Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – Despite the high rates of repatriate attrition, organisations in developing countries continue to send some of their employees to study in tertiary institutions in developed countries to acquire and build competencies that are deemed strategically important for contemporary work. Although several studies have been conducted on expatriate experience and challenges, those relating repatriation experiences are limited, particularly those concerning organisationally assigned scholars (employees who are sponsored to study overseas). Consequently, the present study explored the intention to stay or leave of organisationally assigned Ghanaian scholars who pursued higher degrees in Australia.

Design/methodology/approach – To understand the decision of organisationally assigned sponsored scholars to either stay in or leave the host-organisation upon their return, a phenomenological methodology was adopted to explore the lived experiences of organisation assigned scholars (OAS) from Ghana, studying in Australia. The face-to-face interview approach was used to interview 20 Ghanaians who pursued their further studies in Australia. The interviewees consisted of six females and 14 males.

Findings – The results reveal that for expatriate's in this study, the decision to stay or leave the organisation upon repatriation was made mid-way through the expatriation process in the host county. Hence, organisations intending on retaining their OAS when they return home must focus their support and engagement efforts during this crucial period.

Practical implications – Although they are away on further studies, OAS are still active members of the organisation. Therefore, organisations need to maintain contact with them (OAS), constantly check progress of their study and provide some support, as they might motivate them to want to return and work with the organisation. Consequently, more effective strategies (those for managing them while they are away and those for managing them when they return) should be deployed to incentivise their expatriate to return home.

Originality/value – The study explored an important yet understudied research questions in the repatriation literature. By studying the decision of OASs to either return and stay in or leave an organisation back home contributes uniquely to the existing literature, as studies focusing on that population (i.e. OAS's) are scarce.

Keywords | Expatriate, Expatriation, Repatriate, Repatriation, Host-country, Home-country, Attrition, Retain, Study abroad, Organisation assigned scholar (OAS)

Paper type | Case study

Introduction

Many developing countries throughout Africa, and arguably around the world, are struggling with the challenge of losing large numbers of their professionally trained staff to developed countries. For example, it is estimated that Africa has already lost one-third of its human capital and is continuing to lose its skilled personnel at an increasing rate, with an estimated 20,000 doctors, university lecturers, engineers and other professionals leaving the
continent annually since 1990 (Adeyemi et al., 2018; International Organization for Migration, 2010; Koser and Laczko, 2010). Developed countries on the other hand are also complaining about the rate of people migrating to their countries. One means by which professionals migrate from developing countries to developed ones is through expatriation. While research considering expatriation and repatriation is no longer in its infancy (see for instance Hofstede, 2001; McNulty, 2017; Mischel, 1965; Naumann, 1993; Selmer, 2010; Tung, 1981) much of what has been written has tended to focus on expatriates from developed economies while expatriates from developing economies have received comparatively limited attention (Chiang et al., 2018). The rationale of sending expatriates from developed countries has traditionally focussed on transferring of knowledge through managing the subsidiary, training locals and promoting organisational culture (Alshahrani and Morley, 2015; Fan et al., 2018). However, the use of expatriates by developing countries tends to focus more on the means by which they acquire knowledge and skills which would redress knowledge gaps in organisational capabilities and allow organisations to compete more favourably in a global context. Due to a dearth of knowledge relating to the management practices of expatriates from developing countries, organisations which rely on them are unable to manage them effectively, often resulting in the non-return of the expatriates after their assignment and subsequent negative implications for the organisations which employ them and the developing economies which rely on them. The reasons why expatriates from developing countries fail to repatriate after their assignment or leave the organisation when they repatriate has receive limited attention because the extant literature has focussed on expatriates from developed countries. Consequently, the present study aims to explore why expatriates from developing countries, in this case Ghana, leave their organisations when they return home.

This article contributes to understanding of the intention of expatriates from Ghana to return home by addressing the question of how the expatriates’ experiences in the host country shape their decision to stay or leave the organisation on their return home.

Literature review

Repatriation is commonly defined as the returning home from an assignment abroad and has received less research attention than expatriation (Baruch et al., 2016; Lazarova, 2015). The process of repatriation begins administratively and psychologically while the employee is on assignment. The expatriate’s knowledge of the process and preparation being made by the organisation for the employee to return home may influence the expatriate’s intention to return home. Reviewing the literature on repatriation is therefore relevant in understanding the process and how it may influence the employee’s intention to go home. The lack of research on the experiences of repatriates is grounded in the thinking that they are returning to a familiar environment (Law et al., 2009); thus, they are not expected to face any adjustment issues as in the initial expatriation process where the individual was going to a different environment.

Indeed, not much is known about the experience of expatriates when they eventually return home as repatriates (Reiche, 2012). However, researchers suggest that the repatriation experience may actually be more daunting than the challenges of expatriation (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2002; Morgan et al., 2004; Szkudlarek, 2010), which could be the reason for the high rate of repatriates resigning from their organisation upon completion of the overseas assignment. For example, attrition of repatriates ranged from 12% for the first year and 13% before the end of the second year to 44% within two years after returning home (Cox et al., 2013; Kraimer et al., 2009), and the organisational cost of attrition is substantial considering investment made on the employee sent abroad (e.g. salary, training alongside other direct and indirect costs) (Cox et al., 2013). To invest so much on expatriates only for them to terminate
their appointment upon return affects the organisation financially and in regard to human
capital, the organisation loses the skills, knowledge and experience, which are relevant for
their continued success and growth (Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007).

A key factor underlying the high attrition is the concept of “reverse culture shock”
experienced by expatriates on their return home from assignment (Baruch and Altman, 2002;
Bossard and Peterson, 2005). The term suggests that when expatriates return home, they
experience culture shock in way which can be similar to what they encountered in the host
country (Chiang et al., 2018). This phenomenon arises because the expatriate might still expect
that the environment they are returning to has remained the same as they left it. However,
expatriates may often find a somewhat different home environment than they expected,
resulting in reverse culture shock (Koenig et al., 2014). Other challenges accounting for non-
adjustment of repatriates include a lack of understanding of current trends in the home
country, lack of organisational support (Hyder and Lovblad, 2007; Lazarova and Cerdin,
2007), role conflict (Black and Gregersen, 1991), poor or total lack of counselling and career
planning (Hyder and Lovblad, 2007; Kraimer et al., 2009; Stahl et al., 2009), stalled career
advancement, non-acknowledgement of the experience gained by colleagues and friends at
work (Hyder and Lovblad, 2007; Jassawalla et al., 2004), reduced autonomy, uncertainty about
jobs, housing and missing life abroad (Osland, 2000). Linehan and Scullion (2002), in a study
among international repatriated managers, found that the growing size of the home
organisation, family challenges, loss of status and lack of knowledge of repatriate skills by
the home organisation and colleagues are potential hindrances to fitting repatriates back into
the home environment.

The above challenges in repatriation give credence to the importance of examining the
process of repatriation more methodically and thoroughly (Kraimer et al., 2009). In addressing
some of the above challenges, researchers have begun examining areas such as repatriation
satisfaction, adjustment, commitment, attrition and retention (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2002;
Lee and Liu, 2007; Stevens et al., 2006; Stroh and Caligiuri, 1998). Even though some attempts
have been made towards providing understanding to address the prevention of attrition
when expatriates return to their home organisation, researchers in the field have focussed on
organisational support practices and employees’ expectations, with little or no attention as to
how employees’ experiences on expatriate assignment affect their careers upon repatriation
(Kraimer et al., 2009). Thus, to address this gap in the research, this paper seeks to address the
key question of how the expatriates’ experiences in the host country shape their decision to
stay or leave the organisation on their return home.

In order to address this question a number of theoretical explanations of repatriate
experiences are considered to develop a means to explore what influences their decision to
stay or leave. For example, Black et al. (1992) developed a theoretical model which suggests
that organisation, individual, job and non-work-related factors influence repatriate
adjustment. Using identity theory, these authors suggested that unmet expectations,
perceptions that expatriation is valueless, and the inability to fit into new trends back home
account for the high rate of repatriate turnover (Kraimer et al., 2016; Lazarova and Caligiuri,
2002; Suutari and Brewster, 2003). However, other studies show that expatriate experiences
are beneficial as they contribute to the progress and advancement of the repatriate’s career
in their sponsored organisation or another organisation in their country of origin (Stroh and
Caligiuri, 1998; Suutari and Brewster, 2003).

Stahl et al. (2009) emphasise that effective management of the repatriation process is
important for repatriate retention, and an organisation might retain or lose its repatriate
when (1) lack of perceived company provided support during the assignment, (2) the
perceived effectiveness of managing the repatriation process and (3) the perceived long-term
career advancement inside the company compared with alternatives outside the company.
Although these three factors are important drivers of repatriate retention, researchers posit
that satisfaction with the repatriation management process component contributes much more to repatriate retention than the other two aspects (Stahl et al., 2009), suggesting that the most important of the three was the expatriate’s satisfaction with how well the company planned and managed the repatriation process. Providing organisational support during the repatriation process and throughout the transition to the home country was proposed to also have a direct influence on the turnover intentions of repatriates, because supportive organisational practices communicate to employees the importance management accords the assignments and how they are valued by the organisation (Kraimer et al., 2009). Likewise, it has also been noted that repatriates who perceive they have received adequate support from their organisation were more likely to repay that care and support the organisation showed by staying with the organisation. As a result, the repatriates would fulfil their part of the psychological contract (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2002).

Apart from Black et al.’s (1992) model, which explains factors that motivate repatriation intentions, the construct of job embeddedness adds another perspective as to why repatriation intentions may be motivated by work and non-work-related factors. Mitchell et al. (2001) proposed the concept of embeddedness and argued that job embeddedness could be the reason people stay in their jobs. Other studies have also given credence to the notion that job embeddedness is associated with staying intentions (Holton et al., 2008). According to Mitchell et al. (2001), job embeddedness represents the totality of forces that solidify staying in an organisation. Employees who are embedded in the job may stay because of their formal or informal ties to other individuals or groups at work or in the community (links such as family, spouse and children), or because of fit or overall compatibility with the job or surrounding environment, or sacrifices may embed people who would otherwise forfeit material or psychological benefits when leaving an organisation or community (Kiazad et al., 2015). Central to job embeddedness are the ideas of embedded figures and field theory (Lewin, 1951). Embedded figures are construed as images used in a psychological test and are attached to their backgrounds to the extent that they cannot be separated. Thus, embedded figures become part of the surroundings. Field theory, on the other hand, speaks to the idea that people have a perceptual life space in which the aspects of their lives are represented and connected. The connections can be few or many and close or distant but they have an impact on the staying decisions of the employee. Together, the job embeddedness perspective highlights three important reasons people may stay with their organisation: (1) the extent to which people have links to other people or activities, (2) the extent to which their jobs and communities are similar to or fit with the other aspects in their life spaces and (3) the ease with which these links can be broken – what they would give up if they left, especially if they had to physically move to other cities or homes (Lu et al., 2014).

The underlying assumption of job embeddedness departs from that of the psychological contract and to a large extent the person–environment fit perspective. Breach or violation of contract or unfulfilled promises by the organisation and lack of fit with the environment or organisation may lead to repatriate dissatisfaction, resulting in repatriates leaving their sponsoring organisation. However, the job embedded perspective argues that an integrated web of forces influences staying or leaving intentions (Kiazad et al., 2015). Indeed, job embeddedness represents a state of inertia (“stuckness”) as opposed to an energising force because “most of the time, [staying] is not even seen or considered as a choice process” (Kiazad et al., 2015, p. 642), and most importantly, from a turnover perspective, job embeddedness reduces the desirability of leaving an organisation (March and Simon, 1958). In light of this finding, a dissatisfied repatriate may not necessarily leave the sponsoring organisation where they have many attachments to people or feel compatible with the work setting (Mitchell et al., 2001). In addition, job links may motivate a repatriate’s staying intention (Kiazad et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2001) by imposing normative pressures on them to stay (Maertz et al., 2003). People are social by nature, so they form relationships outside work,
and relationships such as friends and families (that is, spouse and children) or community memberships such as church and volunteer groups may exert normative control, and thus, influence the staying decision of repatriates (Hom et al., 2012; Maertz and Griffeth, 2004).

Examining why repatriates would stay with a sponsoring organisation, researchers in the field of job embeddedness suggested that a repatriate’s fit to the work environment is an important motivator in staying intentions. Using Schneider’s (1987) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) theory, job embedded researchers argued that individuals and organisations select one another when they are mutually attracted (Wheeler et al., 2007), and this mutual attraction is the glue that keeps the employee in the organisation. However, when either party no longer fits, he or she voluntarily or involuntarily leaves (Wheeler et al., 2007). In addition, the expatriate’s appreciation of community qualities such as climate, locale, culture, amenities and activity level enhance their fit to the work environment or organisation (Mitchell et al., 2001), which may potentially influence their repatriation intentions. The sacrifices repatriates make may also influence their repatriation intentions because the concept of sacrifice is grounded in the literature of turnover intentions (Mobley, 1977; Rusbult and Farrel, 1983; Shaw et al., 1998). Reasoning from the perspective of sacrifice, a repatriate who perceives that it is more costly to leave than to stay may not quit. According to Mitchell et al. (2001), repatriates become embedded because the benefits associated with the training they received outside increase over time. Further, familiarity with office politics (“the devil you know is better than the angel you don’t know”) can become the sacrifice when leaving. Moreover, community sacrifices such as not giving up family-friendly neighbourhoods may prove embedding to repatriates (Mitchell et al., 2001). In short, the job embeddedness perspective argues that repatriates may stay and perform well in the sponsoring organisation due to fit, links and sacrifices (Lee et al., 2004).

The literature reviewed suggests that the process of repatriation may be more daunting than the expatriation process if the former is not managed well. The challenges resulting from a poorly managed repatriation process results in organisations losing repatriates at an alarming rate. The concepts of psychological contract, person–environment fit and job embeddedness were employed to highlight some reasons why an expatriate will leave or stay in the organisation when they return home. The review of the extant literature has also identified that while the experiences of repatriates from developing countries has been discussed in the literature, there has been a dearth of knowledge relating to the management practices of expatriates from developing countries. Organisations which rely on them are unable to manage them effectively, often resulting in high attrition rates and subsequent negative implications for the organisations which employ them and the developing economies which rely on them. In addressing these gaps, this article contributes to understanding of the intention of expatriates from Ghana to return home by exploring the question of how the expatriates’ experiences in the host country shape their decision to stay or leave the organisation on their return home.

Method
A qualitative methodology was adopted for this study, since it is appropriate for questions where pre-emptive reduction of the data would prevent discovery of knowledge. Such an approach is appropriate for exploring the experiences, feelings and perceptions of the people and uncover the meaning the participant gives to their experiences in the way they interpret them (Tracy, 2013). A phenomenological research design was employed for the study in order to enable a vivid description of the lived experiences of participants and to enquire about “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced it (Hays and Wood, 2011). A phenomenological case study method was adopted in exploring the intention of expatriates from Ghana to stay or leave their organisation when they repatriate. According to
Creswell and Creswell (2005), case studies enable exploration of a bounded system (that is, a case) or multiple bounded systems (that is, cases), through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (for example, observations, interviews, audio-visual material, documents and reports). The phenomenological case study method therefore permitted the phenomena (the intention to stay or leave) from the perspective of those who have experienced or are experiencing expatriation (Marshall et al., 2012) to be explored and understood, within a specific case context, i.e. expatriates from Ghana assigned, as part of their work, by their organisation to study in Australia.

Sample size and sampling method
Sampling in qualitative research has a profound effect on the quality of the research outcome. Failure to describe the sampling method in detail makes interpretation of the findings difficult and potentially affects the replicability of the research (Coyne, 1997; Kitson et al., 1982). A non-probability sampling strategy was considered ideal based on the research aim and design. More specifically, purposeful and snowball sampling methods were used. As individuals within the target population (expatriates from Ghana, studying in Australia) were not easy to identify, selecting a respondent who met the inclusion criteria (i.e. purposeful sampling) and using them to access other targets (i.e. snowball), makes the integration of these two sampling approaches most appropriate in the present study.

In this current study, saturation, where no new insights or knowledge were being generated, was reached at 20 participants. It is noted that sample size in qualitative inquiry is not governed by rules but determined by what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, and the saturation point (Patton, 2002). Moreover, Kagee (2006), also noted that sample size may depend on the kind of study the researcher wishes to conduct, where the participants are located, what will yield optimum understanding, and available time to complete the research. Baker et al. (2012) propose a sample size of 12–20 because this number gives the researcher time to plan and structure interviews, conduct and partially transcribe these, and generate quotes for papers. Ko and Yang (2011), in similar qualitative research, reached saturation after sampling eight interviewees.

Data collection
In this study, organisation-assigned scholars (OAS) are defined as those being employees who, as part of their ongoing employment, are expatriated to study rather than work, the aim being that they acquire new skills and knowledge with the intention of returning to assist the organisation to compete favourably in the global economy.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 20 OAS from Ghana who were studying in Australia. The OASs came from different industries in the economy of Ghana and were pursuing different courses at the tertiary level of education. Organisations granted permission to applicants who got admission to pursue programmes that aligned with the organisational goals and aspiration as well as the individual aspirations of the employees. The duration of study was determined by the course and the institution of study. Out of the 20 participants eight were pursuing masters’ degrees, six of which were focussed on the agriculture industry, while the remaining two were in the health sector. The remaining 12 participants were pursuing doctoral programs. The duration of these doctoral programmes varied from institution to another but ranged from three to five years for full time students. Australia as a choice of country was solely determined by the participant. The employing organisation encouraged participants to go to a country of their choice once the participants qualified for sponsorship and the organisation perceived that the course they were pursuing would contribute to the growth of the organisation and aid them in becoming
more competitive. Appendix (Table 1) presents the characteristics of the participants. The average length of the interviews which were digitally recorded was 45 min. All of the interviews were conducted in person and at the designated venue selected by the respondent and at a time convenient to them. The medium of communication through which the interview was conducted was the English language. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A summary of the demographic data of the interviewees is presented in Appendix (Table 1). To ensure anonymity, code identifiers are used. For instance, the code GH-F1-001M refers to interviewee 1, who worked in the Finance industry and was a male.

Data analysis
An inductive data analysis approach was employed in analysing the data. Data from the interviews was transcribed and coded into an organised set of responses to easily generate themes. The transcripts were reviewed, and equal attention given to each data item and identify interesting aspects in the data that form the basis of themes across the data set (Braun et al., 2014). Themes were generated to represent the different perspective of each interviewee, highlight the similarities and differences, and generate unanticipated insights (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Braun et al., 2014; King, 2004).

Findings
The focus of this study sought to understand the intention of expatriates from Ghana to return home by exploring the question of how the expatriates’ experiences in the host country shape their decision to stay or leave the organisation on their return home. In line with this focus the findings are presented to capture firstly, the expatriate host country experiences which is expected to influence the OAS intention to repatriate or not; second, the intention of the expatriate to return home; and lastly the decision to stay or leave the organisation when they repatriate.

Host country and OAS experiences
The interviewees largely reported that they did not find the environment in their host country intimidating or challenging. In fact, the data indicates that they adjusted into the Australian environment quickly. They described the cultural environment as “nice”, and its people as “friendly”. They also did not encounter much challenge in communicating or interacting with Australians, since their shared common language was English. A minor challenge some interviewees encountered in communication related to differences in accent and intonation, making pronunciation of some words not comprehensible immediately if the Australians did not speak slowly. Nevertheless, interviewees noted they were able to navigate within the community easily because they were able to communicate, ask for direction when in doubt, or read maps to find their way around. The ability to interact with people in their new community helped them to appreciate their host country, even though they missed their home country. As one interviewee noted:

Obviously, it is nicer [in Australia]; it is easy to get around and yeah, you will miss home because of family and obviously more friends, but people here are nicer, and you make new friends and meet the rest of the world. GH-MG-006F

The OASs described the environment as conducive for them to pursue their studies due to better academic infrastructure in the host country as compared with the home country. Interviewees reported that academics in Australia were more committed to their responsibilities than were their colleagues in Ghana. The challenge the OAS’s had in the host country was the deterioration of existing workplace relationships back in Ghana.
Participants reported that these relationships deteriorated immediately they arrived in the host country often due to communication between themselves and their organisation stalling. The vast majority of the respondents stated that following their expatriation, the relationship became poor or, in some cases, non-existent. Exemplifying the responses, GH-ED-002M stated:

The moment you leave Ghana and come here you feel isolated because nobody checks on you. I don’t remember anybody, not only my immediate supervisor, not even my colleagues – nobody in a management position has ever written to me to find out how am I faring in my PhD, have I abandoned the course, am I working?... Nobody asks or cares about that, all they said was for me to finish and come back within the period I have been given the study leave.

The data suggest that the OAS’s expected, while abroad, to maintain established work or social relationships with colleagues and management in the home country. Participants perceived that their expectation of an ongoing relationship with their workplace was reasonable given their ongoing employment and intended return. Instead, they found that most relationships deteriorated after they arrived in the host country.

**Repatriation intentions**

OASs in Australia had intended to repatriate back to Ghana after their studies for various reasons, despite the challenges they perceived they might encounter when they returned. For example, GH-ED-009M noted

As for staying [in Australia], it is out of the question. However conducive it may be, I don’t intend living here after my studies, I don’t. I may go and come back but I don’t intend living here for long or staying here for long.

The key rationale influencing the OAS’s decision to repatriate after completion of their studies was the fact that they felt they would be more useful back home than staying in the host country. As one interviewee noted:

I believe I will be very useful and relevant in Ghana, you know, because we don’t have the expertise at the moment in [my field] in Ghana. So instead of just working over here and competing in the masses where there is a lot of expertise and being swallowed by those masses, I think I will make a lot of impact by going back home, regardless of the challenges that we are facing at home and how luxurious and juicy this place is. GH-ED-002

The data showed that most interviewees perceived their skills would be in greater demand in their home country than in the host country, hence it would be prudent to return home where there was a high demand for their expertise. Furthermore the intention to repatriate may be influenced by the bond and contract entered into with their organisation and third-party sponsors or third-party sponsors alone to repatriate after their studies. In this sense, if the OASs decided not to repatriate they have to pay the cost of sponsorship to the organisation, as recognised by one of the interviewees:

The third-party sponsor requires me to go home and serve my country, so that one doesn’t bind me to my organisation. I can be in Ghana, but I will not work with my organisation though my organisation requires me to come back with the knowledge and skills and serve them. GH-HT-015F

**Decision to leave the organisation**

The data revealed that OASs perceived that their experience in Australia has adjusted their own expectations and perspectives around work and many reported desires to potentially leave their employer in Ghana if their ability to cope with perceived challenges in the
organisation did not match their renewed expectations. The findings indicated that the failure to cope with readjusting to their workplace in Ghana may lead them to resign or look for better job offers elsewhere.

Specifically, the results indicated that the exposure in the host country to better technology and lifestyle gave OAS’s a different perspective of their organisations, which were facing challenges of inadequate resources and outmoded technology. Perceiving that they would be needing to return to what they now perceived as an unfulfilling work environment, a number of interviewees planned to leave the organisation. This point was exemplified in the words of GH-ED-002M:

If I go and I realise that things continue to persist like [they were] and there is very little I can do to change and I try my best and it’s still not changing, I think I will just advise myself because I cannot stay in a place where it would have huge effect on me – I will begin to decay and rust and I will not be of much relevance to the institution. I will leave.

Some interviewees were of the view that things would not change from the state they were in prior to their expatriation. Hence the decision to leave the organisation on their return had already been made by a number of the participants. GH-AG-003F stated, “Yes, I will move if I get a job which is good. I am still in Ghana, so I am still contributing to the development of the country”.

For some of those intending to leave their current employers, it would not be immediate and would be dependent on whether they could attain a more fulfilling and competitive position elsewhere. Some OASs indicated they had made the decision to leave the organisation but the inhibiting factor precluding them from doing so was the bond or contract they signed which had compelled them to serve the organisation for a defined period (often one-four years); once the contract terms were met, they would leave the organisation. For instance, GH-SC-005M noted:

I feel like if I get the chance I will serve my bond and find my way out. One, because I feel the support is not enough; two, I feel my conditions of service are not good enough for me. So I am bonded for some number of years. I feel I will go and serve my bond and if I get any opportunity along the way, I will also make good use of those opportunities.

As indicated above, while some interviewees intended to leave the organisation after serving their bond others had indicated that they may leave as soon as possible and not stay until the end of their contractual bond. In doing so they faced an enforceable requirement to pay off the cost of sponsorship over a period. Some participants expressed the hope that if they secured a competitive role that this would enable the means to save and to pay off the mandated sponsorship costs they had incurred. GH-ED-14M captured this view:

You will not be the first person to have gone through that anyway [leave the organisation without serving your bond]; people even finish [schooling overseas], they come back to Ghana, but they move to other institutions. It is just an arrangement you do with them [the organisation] for them to let them know how much you owe, spread it over a period, amortise it and then you pay them on a monthly basis or whatever basis that is agreed on; this is not something which is uncommon.

OAS’s reported knowing of individuals who had returned from their studies and left their organisation on the condition that they paid off the cost of the sponsorship to the organisation. The employee and the management agreed on the cost involved (at times with interest), which was then spread over an agreed period. OAS who failed to fulfil their part of the agreed terms were legally liable.
**Discussion**

*Host country experiences and repatriation intentions*

The findings reveal that OASs found their adjustment into the host country comfortable given the comparative attractiveness of settling from a developed to developing country. Despite interviewees describing the host country as a conducive environment to study and work, they indicated their intention to return home. While in this study the intent of the OASs to repatriate to Ghana seems to contradict the findings from the International Organization for Migration (2010) and Koser and Laczko (2010), which recognised how developing countries often face losing their human capital to developed countries, the experiences of participants in this sample is limited to one country (Ghana). Additionally, the findings highlighted the mandated requirement to return to Ghana or face financial penalties relating to prematurely severing the specified contractual bond.

**Decision to leave the organisation**

In responding to whether they will leave their organisation when they return home a number of interviewees highlighted their intent to leave their organisation on returning home. The findings indicated that the interviewees return to their organisation was seen by them as a temporary measure to resettle back home and fulfil their contractual requirements. Moreover, returning to their organisation ensures that they have some job security and avoid having to engage in job-seeking immediately upon their return to Ghana. The findings from this study affirm the extant literature which emphasises the high attrition rate of expatriates from their organisations when they return home (Cox et al., 2013; Kraimer et al., 2009). As in prior research, repatriates expressed they were likely to leave the organisation due to: lack of organisational support (Hyder and Lovblad, 2007; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007), this support refers to organisation support whilst the expatriate is in the host country, poor or total lack of counselling and career planning (Hyder and Lovblad, 2007; Kraimer et al., 2009; Stahl et al., 2009), stalled career advancement and non-acknowledgement of experience gained by colleagues and friends at work (Hyder and Lovblad, 2007; Jassawalla et al., 2004). Another major reason highlighted in the findings was that many OASs intended to return to their organisation to fulfil a contract entered into with their employers to return and serve the organisation for a number of years, which ranges from a year to four years.

The results suggest that the decision to leave the organisation is taken mid-way through the expatriation process hence the proposed repatriation programmes in the literature therefore seems to have little or no effect on the repatriate decision to leave the organisation. Some repatriates perceive they have added value to themselves and their organisation cannot afford to retain them on local compensation rates on their return. That is, they perceive the organisation cannot pay them to maintain the lifestyle they have been exposed to, hence the decision to leave the organisation.

The decision to leave the organisation is made prior to the organisation initiating any repatriation process which questions the effectiveness of the repatriation programs aimed at retaining expatriates on their return. The high attrition rate of repatriates affirms this finding of the decision being made before the expatriate return home.

*Job embeddedness and repatriation intentions*

The results showed that the relationship between OASs and their organisations stalled the moment they expatriated to Australia for further studies. This is concerning as an important relationship the OAS’s share with the organisation had collapsed. Some interviewees (i.e. expatriates) indicated that nobody from the organisation (e.g. senior management staff, supervisor, colleagues, etc.) cared about them, check on them nor, bordered to check how they
were faring in Australia or on the course. The perception that their organisation does not care about their welfare can decrease their intention to want to stay with their organisation upon return. Prior studies show that job embeddedness [where the individual has formed strong ties with people at work and surrounding environment] increases intention to want to stay in a relationship or with an organisation, even when one is dissatisfied some aspects of the working relationship (March and Simon, 1958; Mitchell et al., 2001). Not checking on the OAS’s can weaken the social glue (i.e. the ties or attachment) that binds the repatriates and the organisation (cf. Mitchell et al., 2001). However, the only reason OAS’s will return to their sponsoring organisation is because of the bond. Consequently, what keeps the relationship going is the bond, which the OAS’s must come and serve or, pay in lieu of serving the bond.

Conclusion
This article contributes to understanding of the intention of expatriates from Ghana to return home by exploring the question of how the expatriates’ experiences in the host country shape their decision to stay or leave the organisation on their return home. The findings of this study contribute to the extant literature in a number of ways.

First, this study addresses concerns in the literature relating to a dearth of knowledge on the experiences of repatriates from developing nations and contributes knowledge to an underexplored area. Knowledge of this is of particular significance to nations such as Ghana given the high rates of repatriate attrition and brain-drain and the subsequent negative implications for the organisations which employ them and the developing economies which rely on them. Second, this study introduces a distinct group of expatriates known as organisation-assigned scholars (OAS) and defines them as those being employees whom, as part of their ongoing employment, are expatriated and sponsored to study rather than work, the aim being that they acquire new skills and knowledge with the strategic intention of returning to assist the organisation to gain competitive advantage in the global economy. Contributing to knowledge is the finding that the individual level decision to leave the organisation is made midway through their stay in the host country. Once the decision to leave the organisation is made far in advance of formal repatriation proceedings undertaken by the organisation, proposed solutions to attrition of repatriates attributed to the repatriation process needs to be revisited. It is recommended that future studies consider an investigation into the decision-making point of expatriates to stay or leave their organisation on return using a broader sample comprising of OASs from different developing countries. Also, it is imperative that future studies quantitatively examine why organisationally assigned scholars leave their organisations upon return from their studies overseas. The decision to leave or stay is not a simple one, as organisational, personal, and family-related factors might be involved. Thus, a quantitative study investigating how organisational, personal, and family-related factors operate in concert in a three-way interactive model would shed insight into the complex nature of the decision-making process of organisationally assigned scholars who returned after successfully pursuing further studies abroad. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could also be conducted to ascertain whether the effect of organisational, personal, and family-related factors on intention to leave or stay upon return might change with the passage of time. Specifically, variables such as perceived organisational support, job embeddedness, self-efficacy, availability of expertise back home, etc. could be investigated in the longitudinal model. We encourage that apart from within country longitudinal study, a cross-cultural approach should also be adopted to empirically examine how availability of expertise back home influence the decision-to-return home despite the opportunities available overseas (e.g. Australia). Finally, an experienced sampling approach (i.e. diary method) should be employed to investigate the moment-to-moment experiences of returned scholars.
References


Retaining repatriate in developing countries


Further reading


Corresponding author

Linus Kekeli Kudo can be contacted at: linus.kudo@alumni.griffithuni.edu.au

Retaining repatriate in developing countries
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