



Expatriate adjustment to cross-cultural learning and development among assignees in Nigeria



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Orientation: One of the reasons for expatriates' failure is their inability, as well as that of their families, to adapt and adjust to the host country's cultural and communication patterns.

Research purpose: Most of the multinational corporations (MNCs) struggled with adaptation and ached from cultural astonishment, which usually resulted in repatriation, leaving the company to lose substantial business opportunities.

Motivation for the study: As a result, this study examines the influence of cross-cultural training on expatriate adjustment concerning assignees in Nigeria.

Research approach/design and method: The study was primarily a survey design using a qualitative method for gathering data through in-depth interviews (IDIs) with expatriates working in companies across Nigeria Southwest. However, a suitable sample size of selected eight assignees was adopted based on the recommendation of the literature. The retrieved data were subjected to thematic analysis using NVIVO Mind analysis.

Main findings: Over time, most expatriates could adjust and adapt accordingly because of their longer stays. It was also found that expatriates adjusted more to Nigeria's communication styles because it is considered a critical aspect needed to thrive and be effective in the workspace. The study enumerated specific challenges such as raising voices while speaking and introducing cultural languages.

Practical/managerial implications: Based on constructive research, effective cross-cultural training and support systems are essential for helping expatriates navigate differences and improve their experience in a foreign environment. The MNCs should implement comprehensive cultural awareness training with a manual for expatriates before relocating them.

Contribution/value-add: This study analysed how nurturing cross-cultural learning and development for expatriates' adjustment enhances their willingness to stay abroad.

Keywords: cross-cultural learning and development; expatriate adjustment; assignees; cultural awareness; communication styles; cross-cultural adaptability.

Introduction

Research on cross-cultural learning and development (CCLD) has been prominent because of the growing importance of international trade and the economy's globalisation that necessitates employee movement across geographical borders. This makes the concept more substantial in the success or failure of expatriates, as it is an effective instrument to assist in their international assignments and accomplish organisational performance objectives. As a result, there has been an increase in the studies regarding CCLD and expatriate assignees abroad by academics and industry experts despite the disagreement about its effectiveness (Fang-Yi et al., 2023; Gohi et al., 2022). Initially, in the 1960s, CCLD was conceptualised as inter-cultural orientation programmes (ICO) and, subsequently, cross-cultural training (CCT) programmes as a means of acclimating individuals to live in a foreign culture (Kour & Jyoti, 2022).

Iheanachor et al. (2024) state that having a requisite CCLD will help assignees acquire the skills they need to live and work abroad and then be ready to return to their home country when their assignments are completed. This suggests that training the assignees to adapt to multicultural environments is necessary so that they can operate effectively. In a supporting statement by Gohi et al. (2022), one of the effective ways to promote communication and business globally is to formally equip individuals to have more productive interpersonal encounters and job effectiveness

whenever they engage with people from different cultural backgrounds. Głowacka et al. (2022) affirmed that conforming to the host country's culture commonly causes expatriates to fail on their international assignments.

Globally, there are more than 230 million workers, with 10% of people in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries being expatriates, signifying a steady rise in companies employing individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures (Statista, 2024). According to Statista (2024), more than 76% of organisations claim that diversity is a priority or a declared value, whereas 33% see diversity as a hindrance to their advancement. This discrepancy likely stems from the fact that while several global firms espouse and advocate for diversity, they often lack the necessary competencies to adeptly manage heterogeneous teams or adequately train expatriates for cultural differences in the workplace (Naeem et al., 2020; Pustovit, 2020). This suggests that insufficient training of people from diverse backgrounds would always result in conflicts and impede performance (Iheanachor et al., 2024; Kour & Jyoti, 2022).

Okpara and Kabongo (2022) indicated that personnel sent to other countries often have cross-cultural adjustment challenges, compelling suitable training for optimal performance outside their comfort zones. This can be substantiated by the findings by Lo and Nguyen (2023) that a lot of expatriates fail and, as a result, become repatriates as they prematurely return home because of a lack of adequate and necessary training to prepare them for the new system. There was an instance of Bangladeshi workers who had to endure a lack of respect in the host countries they were transferred to because they arrived there untrained and were not equipped with the necessary skills to adjust and adapt to the perceived host country's syndicates, impunity and systemic forced labour (Business Standard Report, 2024). This further confirms the lack of attention to CCLD policies and practices.

Aliyu et al. (2017) assert that multinational companies (MNCs) should provide comprehensive, sequential training, including pre-departure and post-arrival training, to enhance expatriates' knowledge and abilities, including those of their family members. The need for family inclusion predates some family members' inability to adapt to the host country's culture (Chenyang, 2022). However, Tahir (2022) deviates stating that an expatriate experiencing challenges with cultural adaptation may not lead to the forfeiting of critical commercial prospects. His argument pointed to the cost attached to redeployments of expatriates for both the individual and the organisation, citing the fact that the expatriate experiences psychological distress, including potential depression because of environmental imbalance and prematurely terminating the assignment, resulting in inefficiency and reduced productivity. Given the mixed findings from previous studies, the current research tends to solve the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of cultural awareness on expatriate adjustment?
2. What effects do the communication styles have on expatriate adjustment?
3. What are the cross-cultural leadership effects on expatriate adjustment?
4. What is the effect of adaptability on expatriate adjustment?

Literature review

Cross-cultural learning and development

The CCLD concept is a programme premised on the skills of individuals when working or interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds (Sit et al., 2017; Tahir & Ertek, 2018). The CCLD concept aims to train individuals to perform in national and international contexts by increasing their capability to deal with cross-cultural situations (Noman et al., 2023). However, preparing for work overseas varies from giving a man a two-page on the organisation, the type of work and the available time to provide training (Gai et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Lo and Nguyen (2023) identified culture assimilator as one of the methods for evaluating the resultant effect of CCT. This cultural assimilator is a structured learning experience intended to familiarise individuals from one culture with another culture's fundamental ideas, attitudes, role perceptions, practices and values.

Literature such as the works of Tahir and Ertek (2018); Okpara et al. (2021) has shown various forms of CCLD comprising pre-departure, post-arrival and language training necessary to achieve operational effectiveness. Predeparture training refers to the instruction provided to expatriates before they depart from their home country, emphasising essential information on the circumstances of the host area and enhancing the individual's understanding of cultural norms and values (Setti et al., 2022). The arrival in the host region is an essential resource, comparable to social support and on-site mentoring, for expatriates (Elvis et al., 2020). Moreover, post-arrival training aids expatriates in synthesising the explicit knowledge and information obtained during pre-departure training with practical experience (Elvis et al., 2020). Ultimately, language teaching enhances expatriates' confidence in interactions with local folks, increasing their ability to achieve positive outcomes in economic transactions (Głowacka et al., 2022).

Dimensions of cross-cultural learning and development

Abugre (2018) posits that cultural awareness is essential to cross-cultural competence, including comprehending each culture's unique values, beliefs, behaviours and communication styles. The ability to perceive and value cultural differences is essential in globalised contexts marked by international interactions. Communication styles refer to how individuals express themselves and interpret relationships, which may vary significantly between cultures (Oluwadare, 2019). Głowacka et al. (2023) categorise communication styles into high-context and low-context

classifications; high-context cultures, represented by Japan and various Middle Eastern countries, rely heavily on implicit, non-verbal cues and contextual factors, while low-context cultures, like the United States, emphasise explicit, direct communication (Aliyu et al. 2017).

Cross-cultural leaders comprehend their team members' cultural values and expectations, creating an inclusive workplace honouring multiple viewpoints (Saleh & Athari, 2023). The results indicate that leadership approaches are culturally dependent, signifying that effectiveness in one cultural setting may not translate to another. El Kassar (2018) stated that cross-cultural leaders often embrace a transformational style. This methodology fosters adaptability, cultural awareness and inclusion, enabling them to inspire and drive personnel in diverse cultural contexts. However, adapting one's actions, beliefs and plans to new situations is crucial, particularly when working in multiethnic settings. For instance, according to Saleh and Athari (2023), people who can adapt to different environments are better able to work together to solve problems and resolve conflicts, even when faced with unfamiliar and complicated cultural norms.

Expatriate adjustment

An expatriate can be defined as a person who stays or resides in a country that is not their native (Jochems, 2019). Han et al. (2022) refer to expatriates as skilled workers, professionals or even artists who reside or stay in another country, either because of personal business or are even sent abroad by their employers, which can be universities, companies, governments or other typical organisations. The mode of adjustment pertains to how individuals acclimatise to their environment or endeavour to modify it to align with their needs and capabilities (Sousa et al., 2017), as well as the extent of adjustment related to the psychological comfort and familiarity of expatriates with various elements of a foreign culture (Salgado & Bastida, 2017). The degree of adjustment comprises three interconnected dimensions: (1) general adjustment, which refers to the level of psychological comfort with various environmental aspects in the host country; (2) interaction adjustment, which pertains to the level of psychological comfort in engaging with locals in both professional and social contexts and (3) work adjustment, which denotes the level of psychological comfort with specific expectations and standards within the workplace.

According to a case study conducted in China by Chew et al. (2021), expats have a better chance of adjusting to their new home when their preferred learning methods mesh well with the locals. Conversely, research from Japan indicates that open-mindedness, emotional stability, cultural empathy and general adaptability are positively correlated with expatriates' job adjustment, social initiative and general adjustment (Chenyang, 2022). Most studies on cross-cultural transition to a new country follow the same standard reasoning as those involving expats in China and Japan (Chenyang, 2022; Chew et al., 2021). An insight from South Africa reveals that the country has been a key destination for international assignees because of its economic

significance, particularly in industries like mining, finance, technology, professional services, among others. An exploratory cross-cultural study by Sharpe et al. (2024) emphasises on the need of cultural knowledge, flexibility and community-based health literacy interventions, adding that a well-organised overseas assignment should result in professional development on the part of employees as well as the company success.

Therefore, interaction, employment and overall adjustment were categorised as the three dimensions of cultural adjustment (Chenyang, 2022; Chew et al., 2021). All three aspects of behaviour, emotion and thought are part of the individual-environment interaction that is adjustment (Chew et al., 2021). Głowacka et al. (2023) defined cultural adjustment as the extent to which an expatriate feels comfortable carrying out their duties abroad or on a global assignment. This comfort level was also incorporated into a definition of expatriate effectiveness, which was a measure of the overall effectiveness or success of the assignment.

Theoretical framing/model

This study is anchored on two theories, namely Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1961) and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 1993, 2001). Social learning theory was initially conceptualised by Bandura (1961) as an element in sustainable learning and developing favourable behavioural change (Akers & Jennings, 2015). This theory posits that individuals can acquire knowledge via interactions with others within a social framework and where they cultivate analogous behaviours via observing others' actions. They absorb and replicate the behaviours of others, mainly when their observational experiences are favourable or associated with incentives linked to the observed conduct. For example, Rotter (2021) posits that imitation entails precisely replicating observed motor actions.

In the context of this study, SLT emphasises the need to facilitate expatriates' acquisition of culturally acceptable behaviours via the observation of role models, including trainers or seasoned expats, within the host culture. Armstrong et al. (2017) observed that expatriates can assimilate cultural norms, communication styles, adaptability and social signals via CCLD. This is to cultivate self-efficacy, enabling expatriates to successfully navigate new cultural contexts and improve adaptability by aligning their behaviours with the expectations of the host country (Maisto et al., 1999; Renjing et al., 2025).

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

Various studies have utilised Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, initially developed for cultural comparisons theoretical and model framework development (Minkov & Kaasa, 2022). Because no one approach is adequate to meet all of the methodological and conceptual requirements for the valid identification of a cultural group (Hofstede, 1991), it is necessary to use a combination of approaches when evaluating cultures. According to Žemojtel-Piotrowska and

Piotrowski (2023), there are three ways to evaluate culture in the cross-cultural research of exploratory behaviour: direct value inference, indirect value and regional affinity.

Table 1 illustrates Hofstede's cultural factors, with a high score of 80 in power distance, meaning that Nigerians seem to have no problem with and embrace a clearly defined social hierarchy. With 0 individualism, Nigeria is dedicated to the member 'group', whether it is a family, a large extended family or a group of close friends, which is collectivism. Nigeria has a score of 60 on people 'live in order to work' on the motivation towards achievement and success scale. Nigeria gets a 55, which is in the middle and does not indicate a strong preference and a very low 8, indicating that Nigerian culture is highly normative and not pragmatic. Nigerian culture is characterised by a high level of indulgence (84). A high Indulgence score indicates a society whose members are likelier to act on their wishes and whims when having fun and enjoying life.

Research design

The research employs a qualitative survey to collect data via in-depth interviews (IDI). This allows researchers to get extensive, descriptive data on participants' perspectives, experiences and contexts (Kraimer et al., 2019). The study's population comprises expatriates from various nations assigned to Nigeria's Southwest. However, the exact population of expatriate assignees in Southwest Nigeria is not readily available because of limited official data. Because of the uncertainty about the number of expats employed in Nigeria, this study chose a sample size of eight assignees by convenience technique because it ensures openness and applicability to the research objective (Hair et al., 2016).

These assignees were selected from Chevron in oil and gas, Julius Berger in construction, Stanbic IBTC Bank in the banking sector, Unilever in manufacturing, MTN in telecommunications, Konga in the retail, KPMG in the financial service and DHL in the transportation industry. These sectors were selected as they are a major part of Nigeria's economy because they have many expatriate

employees and for robust analysis to achieve the study's objectives.

However, to explore the individual meanings attached to expatriate adjustment to CCLD, eight IDI were conducted. This implies that one staff member was selected from each sector across Southwest Nigeria. The instrument's validity was established using techniques presented in the work of Aliyu et al. (2017). Triangulation, that is, comparing responses and trends across interviews, was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the research (Saunders et al., 2003). Participants also examined and verified the correctness of their responses when checking members.

More significantly, reflexivity was used throughout the research to reduce researcher bias (Alghamdi et al., 2021). Direct quotations from participants were presented to ground results in their own words, while researcher notes and journals allowed one to consider possible impacts on data interpretation.

The IDI was conducted at each expatriate site and assignment location, using interview questions linked with the research objectives. The interview questions included the expatriate's demographics segment and four parts related to the study objectives. However, for the IDI, researchers reach out to selected assignees in southwest Nigeria to schedule interview appointments at a convenient time. The interview was conducted in person with the participants' consent, and interviews were recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. Ethical standards were strictly followed throughout the data-collection process, and informed permission, confidentiality and voluntary participation were meticulously maintained. Participants were apprised of the study's objective, their entitlements and the confidentiality of their responses.

The obtained data underwent six steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps involved were: (1) transcribing the eight IDI verbatim and repeatedly read through them to become immersed in the data, (2) codes

TABLE 1: Hofstede cultural dimensions' Nigeria score.

Cultural factors	Score	Description	Literature
Power distance	80	People believe that organisational hierarchies reflect underlying inequality, that centralisation is popular, that subordinates should be taught what to do and that the ideal boss is a kind dictator.	Gohi et al. (2022); Madan et al. (2022)
Individualism	0	In a collectivist society, loyalty takes precedence over all other norms of behaviour. Everyone takes responsibility for their fellow group members, promoting strong community ties.	Heydari et al. (2021); Akhimien and Umemezia (2021)
Motivation towards Achievement and Success	60	There is a strong focus on fairness, competitiveness and performance, and managers must be forceful and confident when necessary.	Werdhiastutie et al. (2020); Enatto (2024)
Uncertainty Avoidance	55	Nigeria gets a 55, which is in the middle and does not indicate a strong preference.	Watts et al. (2020); Iheanachor et al. (2024)
Long-term orientation	8	This kind of society is characterised by normative thought and a deep interest in discovering the ultimate truth. They prioritise immediate gratification above long-term planning and show a tremendous deal of reverence for established customs.	Chun et al. (2021); Minkov and Kaasa (2022)
Indulgence	84	Nigeria value free time more highly, do what they want with their money and behave independently.	Heydari et al. (2021); Enatto (2024)

Note: Please see the full reference list of this article, Aliyu, M.O., & Iwu, C.G. (2025). Expatriate adjustment to cross-cultural learning and development among assignees in Nigeria. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 23(0), a2951. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.2951>, for more information.

were assigned to significant text excerpts using manual coding technique, (3) the codes were grouped into themes, (4) preliminary themes were reviewed against the coded extracts, (5) themes were defined to reflect the core meanings expressed by expatriates regarding their adjustment experiences and (6) themes were presented in the findings section with supporting quotes from the interviews.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Ilorin Ethical Review Committee on 03 October 2024.

Result

This subsection presents the result derived from the qualitative data obtained from eight IDI transcribed and analysed through thematic analysis. The themes and subthemes emerged through an inductive thematic analysis process recommended by Byrne (2022), which involves assembling, coding, sorting and organising data to reduce errors.

Table 2 shows that the male predominance reflects the gender distribution often seen in expatriate assignments in the selected sectors from 6 major countries: South Africa, India, Lebanon, China, Togo and Ghana. The length of stay of these expatriates varies from 8 years, 6 years, 5 years, 4 years and 2 years. Table 2 shows that assignees have various degrees of experience staying in Nigeria that are positive or negative to their expectations.

Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4 presents a thematic summary derived from the NVIVO 11 Map Path output, which visually represents the key themes identified in relation to the study's objectives. These figures illustrate how construct variables are interconnected and each map path underlying structure of the participants' responses towards achieving research objectives.

Theme 1: Cultural awareness and expatriate adjustment

The first theme addresses the first research question, which is to examine the effect of cultural awareness on expatriate adjustment of assignees to Nigeria. To ensure transferability, the following direct quotations were obtained from the participants (P_01 to P_08):

'Understanding Nigeria's culture has helped me to embrace the existence of cultural diversity.' (P_01, Managerial role, Male)

'The nature of diet (like the food) has helped me adapt to Nigeria's Nigerian culture.' (P_02, Administrative Manager, Female)

'The way Nigeria works differently and the level of technology.' (P_03, Clinical Trials, Male)

'Nigeria's culture has influenced me in the social networks of different tribes.' (P_04, Executive Officer, Male)

TABLE 2: Demographic of the assignees.

Code	Background	Gender	Assignee to Nigeria	Staying experience in Nigeria
P_01	Managerial role	Male	From August 2018	'At first, adjusting was challenging. The way people interact was new. But over time, I found myself appreciating the hospitality of Nigerians'.
P_02	Administrative Manager	Female	From 2016	'I've had to adopt certain precautions in daily life, like limiting movement at night and avoiding certain areas'.
P_03	Clinical Trials	Male	From October 2018	'I have learned to be flexible and patient, especially with how long some processes can take because of challenges'.
P_04	Executive Officer	Male	From 2023	'Power outages and water shortages happen from time to time. You have to learn to be adaptable'.
P_05	Human Resource Officer	Female	From August 2023	'Nigerians are friendly, and I've found ways to integrate'.
P_06	Coordinator	Male	From November 2022	'A mix of good and challenging experiences'.
P_07	Executive Officer	Male	From January 2020	'Nigerian dishes are flavourful, but the spice level took some getting used to'.
P_08	Disaster Recovery Manager	Female	From January 2019	'My adaptability has grown, and this experience will add great value to my career'.

'I've learned that respect for hierarchy, and elders are highly valued, both in the workplace and socially.' (P_05, Human Resource Officer, Female)

'I've observed that Nigeria is very diverse, with different ethnic groups, languages, and customs. For example, while English is widely spoken, people often mix in their local languages, which makes it important to be patient and open-minded when communicating.' (P_06, Coordinator, Male)

'I have learned a relaxed approach to timing is part of the culture, and I've learned to adapt my expectations accordingly.' (P_07, Executive Officer, Male)

'Attending some of their local events and participating in these celebrations has helped me understand and appreciate the values.' (P_08, Disaster Recovery Manager, Female)

The analysis provided revealed that expatriates have been able to adjust to the Nigerian culture because of a new perspective that diverse cultures exist. Some of the assignees have discovered Nigerian culture by adapting to it and learning about various foods in Nigeria, different working hours, the use of technologies and work ethics. The analysis also shows that assignees who take the time to learn about Nigeria's cultural norms, such as the importance of hierarchy, communal values and respect for elders, can foster stronger connections with local stakeholders. The way Nigerians greet each other is entirely different from other cultures. However, a deep understanding of Nigerian culture equips assignees to operate more effectively, ensuring their initiatives resonate with the local populace and align with cultural expectations.

Theme 2: Communication styles and expatriate adjustment

Theme 2 addresses the second research question, which examines the effects of communication styles on expatriate adjustment of assignees to Nigeria. To ensure transferability,

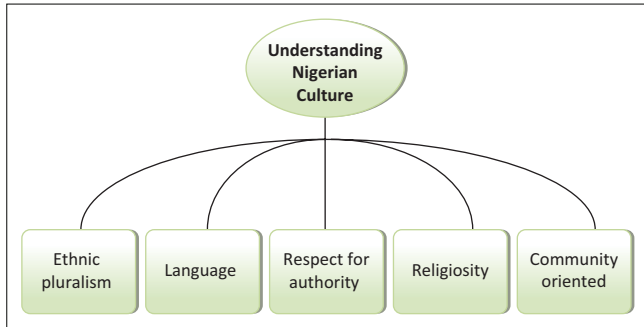


FIGURE 1: Map-up output for Theme 1.

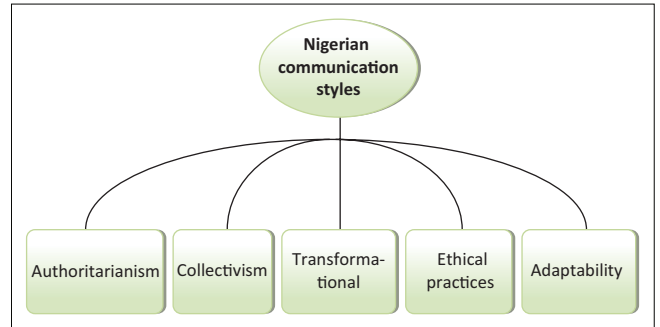


FIGURE 3: Map-up output for Theme 3.

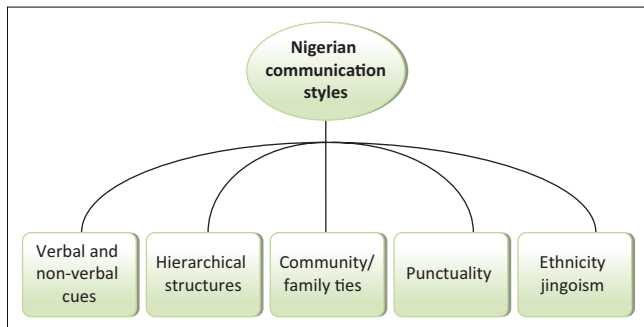


FIGURE 2: Map-up output for Theme 2.

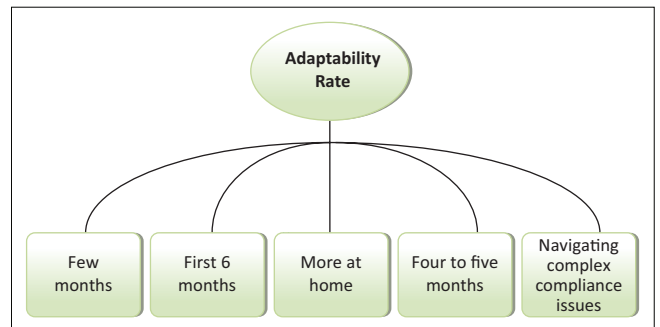


FIGURE 4: Map-up output for Theme 4.

the following direct quotations were obtained from the participants (P_01 to P_08):

'The cultural languages spoken by Nigerians are quite difficult to understand. The language is challenging because there are many.' (P_01, Managerial role, Male)

'The food is the most challenging aspect of the Nigerian culture.' (P_02, Administrative Manager, Female)

'The native cultural greeting is the challenging cultural aspect of Nigeria.' (P_03, Clinical Trials, Male)

'The challenge I face is that the culture differs from ours, but the people cooperate.' (P_04, Executive Officer, Male)

'I find it challenging that Nigerians are always raising their voice while communicating to you in a friendly way.' (P_05, Human Resource Officer, Female)

'One of the main challenges I faced was understanding and adapting to the hierarchical structure within the workplace.' (P_06, Coordinator, Male)

'I had to adapt to the slower pace and be more flexible in my schedule, learning to see the value in building relationships and allowing meetings to flow organically rather than adhering to rigid start and end times.' (P_07, Executive Officer, Male)

'Sometimes, I missed local expressions or non-verbal cues, which caused misunderstandings.' (P_08, Disaster Recovery Manager, Female)

Information from assignees shows that they are faced with certain communication barriers, meaning that Nigerian communication style can be indirect in verbal and non-verbal cues, sometimes leading to misunderstandings for those unfamiliar with local customs. Also, the hierarchical structures in Nigerian workplaces are another barrier to their interactions, which may contrast sharply with more egalitarian cultures. Community and familial

connections may hinder the assimilation of expatriates who tend to emphasise individuality. The significance of timeliness is underestimated, while ethnic and religious factors are intruding upon the populace. These factors highlight assignees' challenges when adjusting to the Nigerian setting.

Theme 3: Cross-cultural leadership and expatriate adjustment

The third theme is premised on addressing question 3, which examines the effects of cross-cultural leadership on expatriate adjustment of assignees to Nigeria. To ensure transferability, the following direct quotations were obtained from the participants (P_01 to P_08):

'The structure provides clarity, but sometimes I feel limited in offering feedback or contributing ideas.' (P_01, Managerial role, Male)

'Nigerian leaders are often very supportive on a personal level, which helped me feel welcome and valued.' (P_02, Administrative Manager, Female)

'It took time for me to adjust and understand the nuances of workplace interactions here.' (P_03, Clinical Trials, Male)

'Sometimes, getting things done can be slower because of protocol, which can feel frustrating.' (P_04, Executive Officer, Male)

'Leadership in Nigeria often involves mentoring and close supervision, which initially benefited me. But over time, I felt the need for more autonomy, which wasn't always encouraged.' (P_05, Human Resource Officer, Female)

'I learned to be more assertive in my approach and clearer in communication.' (P_06, Coordinator, Male)

'I appreciate the leaders' accessibility and willingness to help with personal challenges, as it made adjusting to the new environment easier.' (P_07, Executive Officer, Male)

'The leadership style often emphasises unity and loyalty, which helped me feel like part of a larger family.' (P_08, Disaster Recovery Manager, Female)

The assignees' responses shows that Nigeria's leadership style influences organisations' work and adjustment processes. For example, some assignees perceived Nigerian leadership to be stifled by employee creativity, which can hamper adjustment. Conversely, some defined Nigerian leadership as collectivist, enhancing employee adjustment processes. While some assignees recognised transformative leaders in driving change and facilitating smoother organisational transitions, some believed there was a lack of transparency, leading to repatriation. In addition, some assignees noted that some leaders failed to acknowledge changing circumstances and economic and socio-political influences.

Theme 4: Adaptability rate to Nigeria's new environment

Theme 4 is premised on addressing research question 4, which examines the effect of adaptability on expatriate adjustment of assignees to Nigeria. To ensure transferability, the following direct quotations were obtained from the participants (P_01 to P_08):

'It took me a few months to get used to the pace of life, particularly regarding work culture and social expectations.' (P_01, Managerial role, Male)

'I adapted within the first six months by developing a routine that aligns with local conditions.' (P_02, Administrative Manager, Female)

'I felt more at home in Nigeria's environment.' (P_03, Clinical Trials, Male)

'Being patient, listening more, and observing local communication styles helped me adjust by my second month here.' (P_04, Executive Officer, Male)

'It took about four to five months to feel fully comfortable.' (P_05, Human Resource Officer, Female)

'I felt much more settled. It took roughly two months to get comfortable.' (P_06, Coordinator, Male)

'By the end of my third month, I was more confident navigating work and personal life here.' (P_07, Executive Officer, Male)

'I noticed that building strong relationships requires a more personable approach, which I adapted to after about 5 months.' (P_08, Disaster Recovery Manager, Female)

The analysis in Theme 4 illustrates the fact that assignees have various experiences regarding their adaptability to the Nigerian environment. For example, it took some of them months to get used to the pace of life, particularly in terms of work culture and social expectations of society. Similarly, organisations that prioritise adaptability are better positioned to sustain competitive advantages, enhance operational efficiency and meet the evolving needs of the stakeholders.

Discussion

The following findings were reached based on the interview conducted for expatriates in Nigeria. Most expatriates could

adjust properly to the Nigerian culture because of a longer stay in Nigeria. It was also discovered that they adjusted more to Nigeria's communication method because it was the most critical aspect needed to thrive and be effective in the workspace. Although they faced challenges in some areas, such as not understanding what some behaviours by Nigerians at the workplace meant to them, like raising voices while speaking and introducing cultural languages, they were able to adjust and adapt well to the differences (Akhimien & Umemezia, 2021). It was also discovered that they committed themselves to training, learning and observing Nigerian culture from their colleagues, which increased and improved their learning process and adaptability. It shows that most expatriates in Nigeria can adapt and adjust to Nigeria's culture. They also received support and guidance from the Nigerian leaders, who helped them adjust. The results indicate that expatriates were eager to acquire strategic methods to facilitate their job adjustment, enhancing their ability to grow swiftly and effortlessly (Enatto, 2024; Iheanachor et al., 2024). AbdulNaeem et al. (2020) found that cultural and spiritual intelligence positively and substantially impacted expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment.

Scholars (Abugre, 2018; Gohi et al. 2022; Okpara et al., 2021) supported the construct effect of cultural awareness and work and interaction adjustments, while Enatto (2024) differed on the cross-cultural competence performance of American expatriates in Nigeria. In addition, regarding the communication styles, the finding is consistent with the works of Akhimien and Umemezia (2021); Chenyang (2022) on work/interaction adjustments, cross-cultural competence. Likewise, the findings for cross-cultural leadership were found positive with the works of Noman et al. (2020); Alghamdi et al. (2021); Grill et al. (2021); Fang-Yi et al. (2023) in relation to cross-cultural adjustments.

Limitations and direction for further research

Some notable limitations were observed during this study. For example, this study aligns with previous empirical studies concerning expatriate adjustment. This study primarily gathered samples from selected assignees across Southwest Nigeria, which may raise concerns about the generalisability of our findings to other international contexts and towns within these areas; future researchers may also gather data from other zones of Nigeria with industry-specific study. Future research may avoid the mono-method bias by using other information sources, such as individual expatriates, their spouses or relatives, colleagues and supervisors. Future studies may consider the link between families and relatives and the coping strategies for international adaptation and performance.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study confirms the long-held perspective of scholars over the last two decades that pre-move cultural learning and development positively influences adaption to overseas

assignments. However, this study demonstrates that experimental training methods on cultural awareness, communication styles, cross-cultural leadership and adaptability are the most successful. This study proved that the efficacy of CCLD on expatriate managers' adaptation depends on the particular circumstances and is essential for aiding expatriates in navigating cultural awareness, communication styles, cross-cultural leadership and adaptability in improving expatriate adjustment in Nigeria. For example, it was found that heightened cultural awareness significantly enhances expatriates' adaptation, promoting smoother integration into various cultural settings. Moreover, communication styles are essential as they strengthen relationships and facilitate relationship building, minimising potential misunderstandings. Furthermore, proficient cross-cultural leadership significantly improves expatriates' adjustment as leaders who understand and value cultural differences foster an efficient work environment. Equally, adaptability is a crucial trait that enables expatriates to manoeuvre the challenges of living and working in a foreign culture, augmenting their success in the host country:

1. MNCs should provide comprehensive cultural awareness training for expats prior to their relocation. This training must include the host country's cultural norms, attitudes and behaviours to enhance understanding and alleviate culture shock.
2. MNCs should implement successful communication methods by providing training prioritising active listening, empathy and clarity.
3. MNCs should implement cross-cultural leadership development programmes to provide leaders with the necessary skills for managing diverse teams. Leaders must be taught to recognise and respect cultural differences, fostering an inclusive workplace that aids expatriate adjustment.
4. MNCs should conduct regular assessments of expatriate adjustment levels and collect feedback to identify potential areas for improvement. This will enable organisations to adjust their expatriate management policies and provide additional support as necessary.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

M.O.A. conceptualised the study, data, drafted the literature review, drew insights from prior scholarly works, designed the research methodology, conducted qualitative interviews

with expatriate assignees to Nigeria, analysed the data collected and wrote the final draft of the research paper. C.G.I. provided academic and logistical support, facilitated access to critical resources and played a supervisory role through which he guided the research process, reviewed drafts and offered constructive feedback.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, M.O.A. upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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