
DYNAMIC CHARACTERISTIC
OF CROSS CULTURAL COMPETENCE
IN ADULT THIRD CULTURE KIDS (ATCKs)



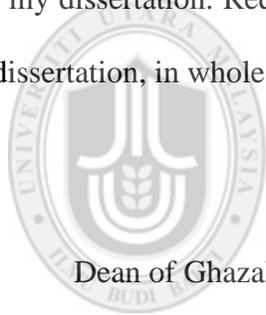
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Thesis Submitted to the Ghazali Shafie Graduate School of Government,
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Abstract

This study focused on the past and current literature on self-efficacy, cultural flexibility, ethnocentrism, Third Culture Kids and Adult Third Culture Kids, and multiculturalism seen from a perspective of Adult Third Culture Kids early experience (Chapter Two). Thereafter, the researcher employed a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews to study the perceptions of ATCKs with regards to self-efficacy, cultural flexibility, ethnocentrism competence (Chapter Three). The results of this analysis (Chapter Four) and the interpretations (Chapter Five) confirm what has been indicated by past research and provides avenues for future research. The “adult third culture kids” (ATCKs) is an individual who has spent significant periods living outside his or her parents’ culture. Research is needed to identify specific experiential variables responsible for the development of components of cross cultural competencies (CC) in ATCKs. The goal of this study is to gain insight into these relationships and provide a foundation for continuing investigation by examining how early international experience variable impact CC in ATCKs. Specifically, the study examines how adult third culture kids early international experience impact three dynamic characteristics of CC. These variables will be examined through in-depth interviews conducted in a small sample size, with sample taken from different sojourn populations, data from multiple sources and refinement of measurements with different forms of measurement. Additionally, the results indicated that ATCKs are able to successfully impact two dynamic cross cultural competencies: self-efficacy and cultural flexibility but negatively impact ethnocentrism on ATCKs early experiences.

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF STUDY

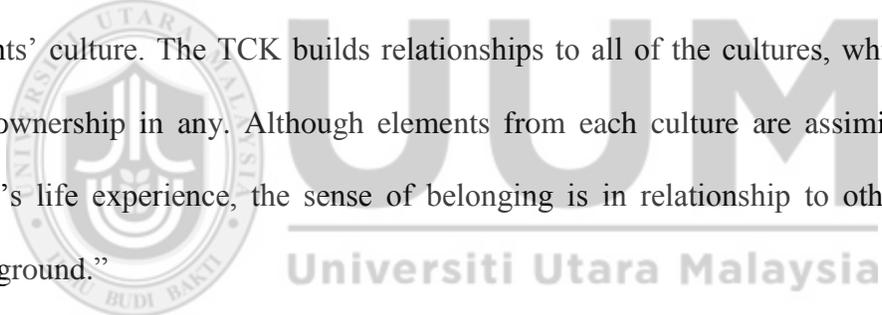
1.1 Introduction

The flow of ideas, goods and people across cultures is not new, but has significantly increased due to technology and media (Jensen, 2003). Diverse people are interacting and exposing each other to various ideas, values, beliefs and cultures. The interface of cultures has created a multicultural world where increased immigration, bicultural marriages and international adoptions have contributed to our world becoming a global village. Emerging from these cultural exchanges are people who have spent a significant part of their developmental years outside of their parent's culture due to a parent's occupation. These people are often referred to as "Adult Third Culture Kids" (ATCKs) or "global nomads" (McCaig, 1994). (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) explain that, "the TCK builds relationships to all cultures, while not having full ownership in any, although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background"

Several terms have been given to these internationally mobile children and adolescents such as global nomads (McCaig, 1992), cultural hybrids (Bhabha, 1994), and cultural chameleons (McCaig, 1996). For the purpose of this research, the term adult third culture kids (ATCKs) will be employed, a term used for children and adults alike. This term was first coined by sociologist Useem in the 1960s and she defined it as follows: "TCKs" is a term that "describes young people raised in a country other than that of their parents. They blend the culture of their passport country with their country of

residence and become truly multicultural, often finding it easier to relate to others who have lived abroad than to those who have stayed close to their roots”

(Eakin, 1998) estimated that there might be over 4 million TCKs worldwide. Taken into consideration that this estimate was from over a decade ago, it is safe to assume that this number has grown significantly since then. Due to the increased number of ATCKs, research has also increased considerably in this arena. (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999) have documented the experiences of TCKs in a significant and well known book and their definition of TCKs is now widely utilized: “A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.”



However, much of what has been written in this field focuses on the negative effects of a lifestyle of constant change and mobility. Since these children lived abroad during their developmental years, their sense of identity, relationships with others and view of the world are still being formed in the most basic ways while being shaped according to the different cultures with which they interact and exposed to. Therefore, according to some researchers, the greatest challenges that ATCKs face are in forming their sense of identity and a sense of belonging (Bennett, 1993; Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). When people travel to different cultures as adults, they may

experience culture shock but they most likely already have a sense of who they are and where they belong. The difference between adults who travel internationally and ATCKs is that ATCKs move between cultures before they have had the opportunity to complete the critical task of personal and cultural identity development (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001).

ATCKs have an ability to make friends quickly and consequently will likely have connections all over the world. They develop strong cross cultural skills and are comfortable among diverse people. As a result of frequent good byes and moves, ATCKs tend to move quickly beyond the surface level of relationship because they do not know when they will leave next. Not usually satisfied with small talk about the weather, ATCKs want to move to deeper issues, yet at the same time they are careful not to allow people to get too close (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999). Furthermore, for ATCKs, they are able to understand many different cues, cultural rules, behavior and values from the various cultures they have experienced. Finding a sense of identity becomes a difficult and confusing task. Developing a sense of identity is not a task limited to ATCKs. Identity is our sense of who we are and guides our interests and our life choices. ATCKs tend to develop their identities while living abroad, thus blending their “home” culture with the culture of the world around them (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001).

ATCKs’ rich international experience and exposure to diversity in childhood will lead to a high level of cross cultural competence (CC) that contributes to their success in

expatriate assignments as adults (Selmer & Lam, 2004). The importance of this question is evident in the ATCK management literature, where differences in the operationalization of the international experience construct results in different findings concerning dynamic CC and cross-cultural adjustment (Takeuchi, 2005). In sum, this research analyzes how three dynamic characteristics of CC impact early international experience allow successful adaptation to foreign environments.

1.2 Problem Statement

Many ATCKs experience high mobility during their impressionable formative years. Parents may travel the world multiple times within the ATCK's formative life cycle. Frequently, comings and goings leave ATCKs saying goodbye to people they are leaving or who are leaving them and create a state of ongoing grief. Throughout childhood and into adulthood, ATCKs have no single culture by which to frame their experiences. As humans we naturally make comparisons in an effort to make sense of our environments. Within a given cultural context, we make continual assumptions. But ATCKs lack an established set of norms with which to compare experiences. They may not know what assumptions to make, where their assumptions come from, or what assumptions their instructors or mentors are making.

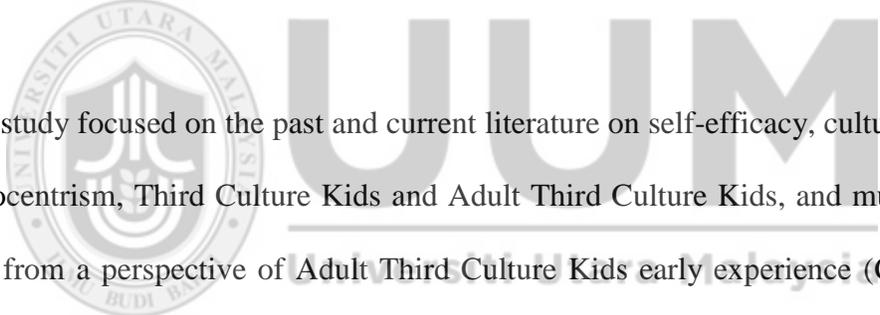
Early international experience provides individuals with opportunities to learn skills and behaviors necessary for living and working successfully in different cultural environments. As such, we argue that early international experience in ATCKs contributes to the development of dynamic CC. The theoretical logic behind this

argument can be found in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Social learning theory proposes that individuals develop through learning from their surroundings, either from interacting with people or observing their behavior. Events and consequences in the environment are cognitively processed prior to being learned and influencing behavior. Early international experiences allow ATCKs to learn skills and behaviors that are the essence of dynamic CC.

Today, the population of third culture kids also referred to as “Adult Third Culture Kids” (ATCK) is increasing with the rise of globalization, more opportunities for jobs and work overseas, with international education being more accessible and various other factors. One of the most important topics in the area of global mobility concerns the cross cultural competencies (CC) that are required when abroad. Be it for the population of global leaders, international expatriates and inpatriates, their spouses and kids or global nomads, we look for characteristics, abilities and skills that help people to adjust and function efficiently in foreign settings. Similarly, the population of the so called adult third culture kids (ATCKs) with their high levels of international experience living in foreign countries is seen as more cross culturally competent. But what is it exactly in these backgrounds and experiences that help to develop cross-cultural competencies? Recent research by scholars (Tarique & Weisbord, 2013) from Pace University sheds some light on the matter. Specifically, based on the sample of 159 adult third culture kids (ATCKs), the research looks into the specific components of international experience and some personal characteristics that impact cross-cultural

competencies. The findings revealed several important predictors of cross-cultural competencies.

For the purpose of this present qualitative study, adult third culture kids (ATCKs) are defined as those who are at least 18 years of age or older and a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents' culture. They build relationships in all the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the third culture kid's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of the same background. (Useem, 1993)



This study focused on the past and current literature on self-efficacy, cultural flexibility, ethnocentrism, Third Culture Kids and Adult Third Culture Kids, and multiculturalism seen from a perspective of Adult Third Culture Kids early experience (Chapter Two). Thereafter, the researcher employed a qualitative approach through in depth interviews to study the perceptions of ATCKs with regards to self-efficacy, cultural flexibility, ethnocentrism competence (Chapter Three). The results of this analysis (Chapter Four) and the interpretations (Chapter Five) confirm what has been indicated by past research and provides avenue for future research. The “adult third culture kids” (ATCKs) is an individual who has spent significant periods living outside his or her parents' culture. Research is needed to identify specific experiential variables responsible for the development of components of cross cultural competencies (CC) in ATCKs. The goal of this study is to gain insight into these relationships and provide a foundation for

continuing investigation by examining how early international experience variable impact CC in ATCKs. Specifically, the study examines how three dynamic characteristics of CC impact adult third culture kids early international experience. These variables will be examined through in depth interviews conducted in a small sample size, with sample taken from different sojourn populations, data from multiple sources and refinement of measurements with different forms of measurement. This research will be conducted based on past research with different independent variables suggested by the author and expanded in circumstances that had been listed. Hence, this study is conducted to explain ‘How three dynamic characteristic of CC impact ATCKs’ early international experiences.

Dynamic characteristic of CC

- 1) Self-efficacy
- 2) Cultural Flexibility
- 3) Ethnocentrism

The first dynamic of CC is self-efficacy is defined as an extent or strength of one's belief in one's own ability to complete tasks and reach goals. This can be seen as the ability to persist and a person's ability to succeed with a task. As an example, self-efficacy directly relates to how long someone will stick to a host culture on their international assignments. High and low self-efficacy determines whether or not someone will choose to take on a challenging task or take it off as impossible. Secondly, cultural flexibility is adapting to a new environment and the pace of transition varies from person to person. The typical pattern of cultural flexibility often consists of

distinct phases: Honeymoon, Crisis, Recovery and Adjustment. The process of living in a culture different from our own can be an exciting and stimulating experience. It is also a tremendous challenge as we realize that our “normal” way of perceiving and behaving may not be appropriate in the new cultural setting. Finally, ethnocentrism is judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture. These three types of variables will be tested whether it impacts the early experience of ATCKs conducted in qualitative method.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research aim of identifying whether the dynamic of cross cultural competencies impact early experiences of ATCKs. Our approach to identify cases was as follows:

- 1.3.1 To investigate the impact of self-efficacy on ATCK's early experiences
- 1.3.2 To examine the impact of cultural flexibility on ATCK's early experiences
- 1.3.3 To investigate the impact of ethnocentrism on ATCK's early experiences

1.4 Research Questions

In order to investigate the impact of the three dynamic characteristics of CC on the adult third culture kids early international experience, this research is conducted based on the following questions:

- 1.4.1 To what extent do self efficacy impact the Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) early experiences?
- 1.4.2 To what extent and in what ways are cultural flexibility able to successfully affect Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) early?

1.4.3 How do ethnocentrism impact Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) early experiences?

1.5 Significance of Study

This study will be of value to the following group:

1.5.1 To the organization

Every organization has its own culture. Since many employees are spending 40 or more hours a week at their workplace, their organization's culture obviously affects both their work lives as well as their personal lives. Since the recruitment and hire of an ATCK is a significant expenditure, organizations should have a plan of action that would maximize the likelihood of a ATCKs success. One part of this would involve extensive cultural transitioning programs so that the ATCKs can have enough opportunity to understand the contours of success in a new country. There should be a transition process in which the ATCK is able to understand what success is supposed to resemble in both process and product in their new setting.

Additionally, organizations can develop a culture of inclusivity and tolerance that does not demoralize the ATCK. If an expatriate makes a mistake, organizations would be able to maximize the success of the ATCK by not entirely blaming them when a mistake is made. Embracing the mistake and transforming it into a teachable moment can ease the transition process for the ATCK. This can pay long term dividends in potentially maximizing their success. The ATCKs are more likely to contribute freely

and in greater amount if they know that the organization's culture embraces freedom in all of its forms and does not penalize for one's error.

Mentoring is another avenue that organizations can use to maximize the likelihood of an ATCKs' success. If someone in the organization is from the home country of the ATCK, it can assist in removing the feelings of cultural isolation and forlornness that might be experienced. Being able to use a mentor, ideally within the organization, that shares cultural backgrounds with the expatriate can help to form solidarity and thus increase the potential for an expatriate's success within an organization. This research will help to propose better ways on how organization could better utilize their ATCKs in ensuring the success of the organization.

1.5.2 To the society

Understanding and valuing cultural diversity are the keys to countering racism. All individuals must feel free to explore the uniqueness of their culture and identity while developing understandings of the cultural diversity that exists in the world around them. Denying cultural expression means limiting the expression of unique perspectives on life and the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. Individual factors found substantial criteria related validity for socio cultural adjustment. Social factors are significantly related to ATCKs socio cultural adjustment. Furthermore, firms may be well advised to implement policies and practices that provide support and encouragement to transferees on and off the job. With intentions of keeping ATCKs well adjusted, support services are encouraged to provide appropriate introductions to

the local society regarding activities that are of interest to the ATCKs. Equally important is the establishment of relationships and development of communication with the host nationals. These are effective factors for ensuring potential success in ATCKs' adjustment to the society. Organizations need to consider not only the employee's capabilities to perform his/her tasks, but also the need to assess his/her knowledge of the host country and their language proficiency. In addition, an ATCK willingness to communicate and establish relationship with the society and family support should be taken into account to increase their chances of adjusting well in the new environment.



CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Third Culture Kids and Adult Third Culture Kids

Research on TCKs and ATCKs is multidisciplinary. Considerable research has identified characteristics associated with TCKs and ATCKs such as open-mindedness, cultural empathy and creativity (Greenholtz & Kim, 2009). An emerging view in the relatively new focus on TCKs in the IHRM literature is that TCKs are a promising source of expatriate talent (Caligiuri, 2009; Selmer & Lam, 2004). (Selmer & Lam, 2004) used data from TCKs and their adolescent peers to examine whether TCKs have more characteristics useful for future expatriates than their peers. Their findings showed TCKs to have greater enjoyment of travel to foreign countries, knowledge of foreign languages, acceptance of differences among cultures and interest in international careers. Other studies have found TCKs to be adaptable and to relate well to people of different races, ethnicities, religions, and nationalities in a variety of settings (Eidse & Sichel, 2004).

Recently (Bonebright, 2010) reviewed the research on ATCKs from a human resource development perspective, with the goal of identifying implications for human resource teaching, research and practice. Bonebright's work provided further support to (Selmer & Lam's, 2004) findings and reported that research on human resource development implications of ATCKs in the workforce is scarce. As business becomes increasingly global and companies seek to expand their international workforces, research on the extent to which ATCKs make successful business expatriates has the potential to

contribute to both theory and practice. Toward that end, more work needs to be done on ATCKs from a human resource development perspective.

One way to view culture is as a pervasive set of values, habits, and ideals that permeate every social institution and, in fact, construct the boundaries of acceptable or even imaginable behavior. (Useem & Donoghue, 1963) coined the term “third culture” in reference to a complex set of patterns at the intersection of cultures. Third cultures involve behaviors shared among people of differing backgrounds in the process of relating their cultures to one another. A third culture is more than the sum of its parts and involves “composite patterns” (Useem & Donoghue, 1963) that transcend the individual nations of which it is comprised. At the time Useem and colleagues were writing, adults who work cross nationally and who, by virtue of this work, supported the third culture reached this supportive role in adulthood. Ideally, third cultures coordinate the two cultures of which they are comprised. A third culture involves false impressions of homogeneity.

TCKs are said to feel most comfortable with others who share the third culture experience (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). In recent years, various organizations and websites have sprung up to serve as points of connection for TCKs and raise awareness about their experience to help them work through it. There is also a children’s book written especially for TCKs entitled, *The Adventure Begins: First Day at Detinu International School* to help “little TCKs to finally have their own voice in the experience of living ‘among worlds’ (Munnerlyn, 2007). Yet, most researchers

recognize the need for further research on TCKs. A few areas of research which this research will explore are detailed in the ensuing paragraphs below.

2.2 Adult Third Culture Kids Early Experiences

Many TCKs experience a prolonged sense of identity crisis which can be understood in light of Erikson's concept of adolescent identity development. Their mobile and intercultural upbringing impacts on TCKs' sense of identity in several ways, a few of which will be discussed here. While they may know how to play the game of acting out certain parts of their identity at certain times in order to fit in, TCKs may not necessarily like playing the game and struggle to accept that their identity is multiple, fragmented and negotiable.

(Erikson, 1950) claims that adolescence marks a crucial phase in a person's development as they go through a process of establishing who they are within and who they are vis-à-vis society. (Jensen, 2003) identifies it as a time when individuals form a cultural identity by choosing a set of worldview beliefs which "often pertain to conceptions of human nature, the relation of the individual to others in society, and moral and religious ideals." This process can be particularly complicated for those who are exposed to multiple cultures, as is the case for TCKs. Presented with often conflicting worldviews, TCKs are faced with the additional task of sorting through the multiplicity of value systems by which they might come to define their identity. As a result, many reportedly experience a period of "delayed adolescence" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). During this period, they may appear to be flippant and have "no real

convictions about much of anything” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). (Phinney, 2008) uses the concept of “emerging adulthood” in discussing how a multicultural upbringing may prolong the time spent by individuals in exploring their identity to well into their 20s and beyond. In the case of TCKs, there is the added factor of rootlessness (feeling that home is everywhere and nowhere) and restlessness (having a migratory instinct) stemming from their transient lifestyle (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). (Erikson, 1950) says that in adolescence “the young individual must learn to be most himself where he means most to others, those others, to be sure, who have come to mean most to him.” TCKs often find this learning process difficult as the people who mean most to them are scattered across the globe. Their exposure to multiple cultures and their transient lifestyle pose challenges for TCKs in establishing who they are within.

Not to mention, each time they relocate, another culture is added to the list of cultural identities that the TCK must learn to manage. TCKs find it challenging to establish who they are in relation to others when only a fragment of their identity is being validated. Some TCKs who are unable to reconcile their multiple fragmented identity express this sense of loss by putting on what (Erikson, 1950) calls a “negative identity” where being different is their identity, which can come across to others as being arrogant (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Their inability to fit in with the dominant culture causes them to “learn more about who they are not, rather than who they are” (Walters, 2006).

(Priest, 2003) outlined a different model to describe the TCK experience. The model looks at cultural competency as the key in having lower psychological symptoms when

re-entering the home culture. The data supported the notion that lack of cultural competence would lead to relational problems, and result in feelings of loneliness of the TCK. As cultural competence is a skill that can be learned, Priest suggested that TCKs who are in a boarding school setting may have an easier transition back to their home country than a TCK who is raised rurally and home-schooled. Priest postulated this difference would be due to the skills acquired in a boarding school which is typically set-up in a Western fashion, while an individual not raised in a boarding school setting may be completely competent in his host culture, but struggle to adapt to the complexities of his home culture (Priest, 2003).

2.3 Cultural Flexibility

Cultural flexibility is an individual's ability to substitute activities enjoyed in one's home country with different and distinctive activities available in the host country (Black, 1990). The inaccessibility of activities enjoyed in one's native culture may result in feelings of loneliness, isolation, and frustration, inhibiting adjustment and assimilation (Church, 1982) and individuals with a high level of cultural flexibility are better able than others to avoid those feelings (Chwo-Mingyu, 2005). Studies have shown cultural flexibility to be positively related to cross-cultural adjustment (Shaffer, 2006), adaptation to the foreign environments (Black, 1990) and success in foreign assignments (Arthur & Bennett, 1995).

2.4 Self Efficacy

Self-efficacy develops through four main channels: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1995). The first channel, mastery experiences, is the most effective at building a strong sense of efficacy because it builds off of successes. Through guided practice, instructors facilitate mastery experiences with educational aids (i.e. thinking maps, graphic organizers), modeling, and instructional feedback on cognitive strategies. Mastery experiences can be guided or self-directed and share the goal of promoting intellectual competency (Zimmerman, 2006). Building a strong sense of efficacy through mastery experiences means developing the behavioral, cognitive, and self-regulatory tools to help navigate challenging life experiences (Bandura, 1995). Self-directed mastery experiences involve specific activities, incentives, and personal challenges that keep the individual motivated in order to manage educational development. When the result of a student's performance is positive, self-efficacy is positively affected. For example, if a student's performance results in a good grade, positive praise, or recognition, the student's self-efficacy is likely to be affected in an affirmative way. Both guided and self-directed mastery experiences help strengthen and broaden one's sense of self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2006). Mastery experiences help form self-efficacy perceptions when individuals judge the effects of their actions and their interpretations assist in developing efficacy beliefs (Pajares, 1996). Repeated successes or failures impact self-efficacy. In fact, failures have the biggest impact unless one has already developed bedrock of success on the same level.

Self-esteem and self-efficacy are sometimes used interchangeably though they represent entirely different phenomena. Self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of personal capability, whereas self-esteem is concerned with judgments of self-worth. People may judge themselves inefficient in a given activity without any loss of self-esteem, if they do not invest their self-worth in that activity. Conversely, a person may feel highly efficient in a certain activity but take no pride in performing it well if it reflects injurious consequences on others. People can gain self-esteem only by setting low standards of achievement or by fulfilling standards of merit in desired activities. Perceived personal efficacy predicts the goals people set for themselves and their performance achievements, whereas self-esteem neither influences personal goals nor academic performance (Bandura, 1997).

2.5 Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to view one's own culture as correct and other cultures and cultural behaviors as incorrect. Ethnocentric individuals evaluate behavior according to their own home culture and do not modify their behavior in keeping with host country values (Black, 1990). Indeed, they cope poorly with unfamiliar social norms (Church, 1982). Ethnocentrism is negatively related to interaction adjustment (e.g. comfort level with people outside work in a foreign country) and contextual performance (e.g. volunteer work, helping coworkers), and positively related to withdrawal cognitions (e.g. decisions by expatriates to prematurely quit their foreign assignments) (Shaffer, 2006). In addition ethnocentric attitudes are particularly

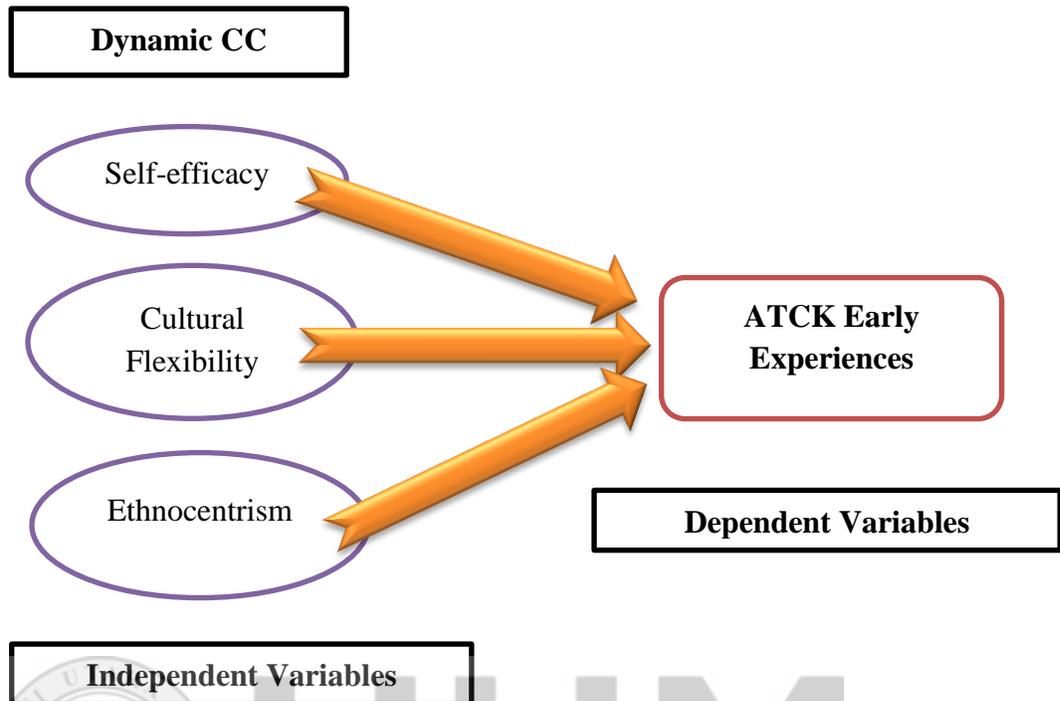
damaging to the development and maintenance of cross-cultural interpersonal interactions (Thomas, 1996).

2.6 Research Framework

Specifically, the study examines how three dynamic characteristics of CC impact the early international experience of ATCKs. According to what has been mentioned above and based on the previous review of literature and related studies, the researcher suggests the following model.

The expected relationship between ATCK early experiences and dynamic CC characteristic are as per below





2.7 Propositions

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy will be a significant positive or negative predictor of ATCKs early experiences.

Cultural Flexibility

Cultural flexibility will be a significant positive or negative predictor of ATCKs early experiences.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism will be a significant positive or negative predictor of ATCKs early experiences.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a detailed justification on the methods and the data used in this study. The choice of research methodology used in this study is outlined and discussed in this chapter. The focus of the chapter is on the methodological issues related to this study. It is done to justify and substantiate the selected research method, the process of data collection and the implementation of data analysis. The methodology used in this study is qualitative method. It is in line with the purpose of this exploratory study where the objectives are to investigate how the three dynamic characteristics of CC; self-efficacy, cultural flexibility and ethnocentrism in ATCKs impact Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) early international experience.

3.2 Research Approach

This section presents details of the research method adopted in this study. This study had used qualitative method as the main objective is to gain deeper understanding of the extent to which adult third culture kids (ATCKs) are able to successfully alternate between their two or more cultural identities and achieve cross cultural competence in multiple cultures. This study attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1: To what extent does self-efficacy impact Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) early experiences?

RQ2: To what extent and in what ways are cultural flexibility able to successfully affect Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) early experiences?

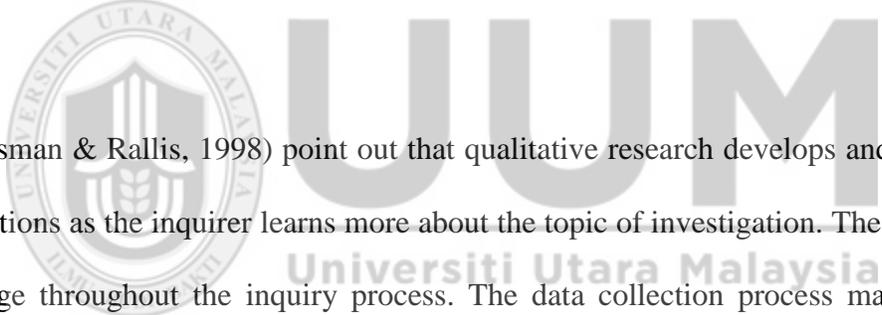
RQ3: How does ethnocentrism would impact the Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) early experiences?

The qualitative in-depth interview approach was chosen as the method of data collection for the present study for two main reasons. First, it allows participants to describe their experiences of cross-cultural interactions as much as possible. Second, it facilitates the researchers' obtaining of the information needed to make this study as rich and detailed as possible. (Rossman & Rallis, 1998) note that an in-depth interview enables researchers to conduct a "guided conversation with a goal of eliciting from the interviewee rich, detailed materials".

3.3 Qualitative Approach using Interviews

A qualitative research approach was selected for this study in order to accommodate the personal contributions of each participant. The suitability of an interview method in collecting data for a case study has been highlighted by (Yin, 1994) as it allows flexibility and closeness to the subjects which have been one of the integral criteria for qualitative approach. The description of qualitative research that follows and the

rationale for selecting this approach will further explain the fit between the research questions and the research method used to collect and analyze the data in this study. Qualitative approaches, according to (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001), focus on studying the complexity of phenomena that occur in natural settings and thus provide detailed descriptions that can reveal the nature of particular situations. These insights lead to developing new concepts about the phenomenon or phenomena under study and allow the researcher to test the validity of existing assumptions as well as to evaluate the related literature. (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004) wrote, “Moreover, qualitative research allows us to ask and answer a wide range of socially relevant questions and develop theories with both descriptive and explanatory power”.



(Rossman & Rallis, 1998) point out that qualitative research develops and takes unique directions as the inquirer learns more about the topic of investigation. The questions can change throughout the inquiry process. The data collection process may also take a different direction as the researcher learns more about the phenomenon of interest. The theory or general understanding emerges and develops as the inquiry progresses. The researcher is introspective and acknowledges biases, values, and interests and the personal self is closely linked with the researcher self. Qualitative researchers do bring questions, however, they do not “impose a rigid apriority framework on the social world; they want to learn what constitute important questions about the participant’s lives from them” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

According to (Wiersma, 2000), research of this nature is focused on obtaining accurate description of the phenomenon under study rather than on quantitative and generalizable data about the phenomenon. This focus requires the researcher to establish the type of relationship with the participants that will provide access to the data from their personal perspectives while still being alert to any personal biases they may hold concerning the topic or issue being studied. The ability to seek in-depth understanding is the strength of qualitative method. (Creswell, 1998) described qualitative research as a process of inquiry that can be used to develop understanding concerning social problems and various human dilemmas. The researcher, according to Creswell, “builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting”. Research on TCKs is still in its infancy. Much of the early research was anecdotal in nature or was based on informal interviews with TCKs (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001).

Therefore, by using interviews approach, this study is able to provide new evidence and contribute to an increased understanding the extent to which adult third culture kids (ATCKs) are able to successfully alternate between their two or more cultural identities and achieve cross cultural competence in multiple cultures.

3.4 Data Collection Process

The data was collected through interviews in order to best elicit the experiences of the participants and to have them best answer the research questions. The interview focused

primarily on the assessment to identify specific experiential variables responsible for the development of components of cross cultural competencies; self-efficacy, cultural flexibility and ethnocentrism in ATCKs. Questions were asked about the duration and the methods used in their early experience whether during the pre-departure or the post-arrival stage. In order to facilitate the interview protocol in terms of the assessment of the success of overseas assignments, the three main constructs suggested by (Caligiuri, 1997) were adopted, namely, premature termination, cross-cultural adjustment, and actual job performance. According to (Caligiuri, 1997) an expatriate who remains in the host country for the entire duration of his/her assignment, and thus is not hit by premature termination, is termed a success. From this perspective, all participants in this study were considered to have been successful. As for cross-cultural adjustment, the questions were directed at what the participants perceived as most stressful while engaged cross-culturally and how well, psychologically and behaviorally, they adjusted to working and living abroad (Black & Mendenhall, 1991).

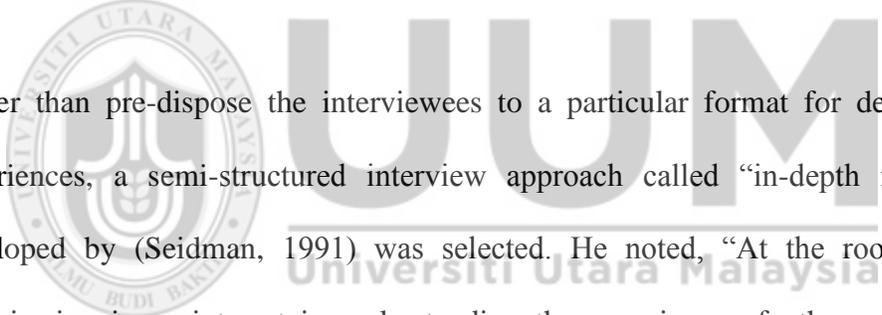
This study will use one type of data in order to collect related information, which is primary data. Primary data for this research is very important which was gathered by interviewing the respondents; the ATCKs. This method is considered as the main method in collecting primary data and many researcher accepted it as to be less expensive. (Chauvel & Depres, 2002) mentioned that a questionnaire focus on getting clear about issues in hand and also will give a large coverage of respondents in sample of study. However, a questionnaire does not provide an avenue for the gathering of in-depth responses as an interview could provide. As such, this study employed a

qualitative data collection method known as biographical phenomenology or life story interviewing, which allows the participants to express themselves in their own words and through their own stories (Chaitin, 2004). The purpose of phenomenology is to capture the lived experience of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Phenomenological research is not intended to test hypotheses, but it is intended to describe a lived experience from the perspective of the individual (Osborne, 1990).

The phenomenon, or lived experience, under examination in the current study was identity formation and communication skills within the context of movement between multiple cultures, specifically in Adult Third Culture Kids. This method is appropriate and sensitive to the exploration of identity, especially for those who may be grappling with their personal sense of identity (Chaitin, 2004). It was necessary to listen to the voices and stories of TCKs in order to better understand how TCKs form their identity and how they communicate.

This research also took an “emic” approach; that is, one which views social life from the perspective of the participants themselves (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is premised on the notion that cultures can only really be understood in their own terms. Research of this kind has been described as “understanding-from-within” (Hofstede, 1980), its methodology being interpretative and in nature. By adopting an emic approach, the researcher aimed to ensure that the participants remained at the center throughout the research process, and that the findings were firmly grounded in their experiences.

It is important to remember that life history and personal narratives analysis are how people make sense of their life stories. When a person tells his or her life story, the information has been edited and events selected to create a story which is compatible with the present (Clausen, 1998): “Memory has a way of making the past consistent with the present as people amend their ongoing autobiographies” (Josselson, 1995). Narratives are the representation of a process, of a self in conversation with itself and with its world over time. Narratives are not records of facts, of how things actually were, but meaning-making system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of a life (Josselson, 1995).



Rather than pre-dispose the interviewees to a particular format for describing their experiences, a semi-structured interview approach called “in-depth interviewing,” developed by (Seidman, 1991) was selected. He noted, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 1991).

In order to maximize the number of participants involved in the study and allow for the participation of geographically dispersed individuals, the interview protocol was designed in a manner that was most convenient to the participant. Interviews were conducted face-to-face. A semi-structured approach was used with open-ended questions that were few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the

participants. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed following standard procedures for qualitative research methodology (Chaitin, 2004; Osborne, 1990).

3.5 Respondents Selection

The interviews have been conducted with respondents from 8 different countries. Participants in this study included Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) who spent at least one year of their developmental years, outside of their passport country. This purposeful sample consisted of participants from various nations who are now residing in their passport country or another host country. The ATCKs participating in this research were between the ages of 18 and 44 and were located through personal networking and website searching. Detailed respondents are listed in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1

List of Respondents

Name of interviewees	Country of Birth	Occupation	Years of experience living in other countries	Place of interview
R1	Sudan	Lecturer	5 years	UUM
R2	Nigeria	Lecturer	10 years	UUM
R3	Somalia	Lecturer	6 years	UUM
R4	Oman	Lecturer	7 years	UUM
R5	Korea	PhD Candidate	3 years	UUM
R6	Uzbekistan	PhD Candidate	2years	UUM
R7	Pakistan	PhD Candidate	2years	UUM
R8	Slovakia	PhD Candidate	2 years	UUM

3.6 The Interview Process

In order to guarantee reliability, the details of the procedures followed in the interview process were constructed. Firstly, the author has contacted directly via phone and emails to the respective subject to officially inform and seek their permission regarding the interview sessions and the issues that would be addressed during the interview. Apart from that, the content of the letter has assured that whatever information derived from the interview is strictly meant for this study and would not be used for other purposes. All participants signed a consent form, which informed them that participation was voluntary and all information would be kept confidential and only the researcher would have access to such information. Participants were free to express their opinions as no names or personal information was released in the research. However, the countries in which they resided as well as the purpose for their living abroad might have been mentioned in the study due to the nature of the research.

Each of the interview session has taken the maximum of one hour to cover various angles and topics from the items in the interview guides. Among the items are *International experience variables*: participants' biographic histories were used to determine early international experience variables. *Dynamic CC variables*: based on the work of (Shaffer, 2006), three facets of dynamic CC were measured: self-efficacy, cultural flexibility and ethnocentrism. *Self-efficacy*: based on the importance in the process of learning (Bandura, 1977) as well as in the process of transfer of training. *Cultural flexibility*: open-ended responses to questions provide the evaluator with

quotations, which are the main source of raw data. (Patton, 1987) notes that quotations "reveal the respondents' levels of emotion, the way in which they have organized the world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions. The task for the qualitative evaluator is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their point of view about the program." *Ethnocentrism*: open-ended responses that measure people's attitudes about emotionally sensitive matters.

The purpose of having an interview guide is not to follow strictly the items contained in the guide but to be used to refresh the thinking as well as to ignite and spur further and deeper discussion during the interview session. This has helped in allowing the subjects to express themselves freely according to their thinking, feeling and emotion. The limitation on the number of themes contained in the interview guide and to set the maximum time for the interview session to one hour is to avoid superficial discussion as one can easily lose interest after being engaged for a long time in an interview session.

The interviews were conducted at various places from office, cafe, library and students residential hall. Each session was tape recorded and transcribed. As mentioned above, not all the questions prepared were asked since the interviews were in the semi-structured format. This was done to keep the interviews in a conversation form; leading to a better synthesis. The detail accounts of the interviews which included the transcription and coding process will be presented in Chapter 4.

3.7 Data Analysis

The aim was to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individuals' descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived; in other words, the essences or structures of the experience.

The data analysis for this study was conducted via a three-part process with the ultimate intention of culling from within the data set the most common/prominent themes apparent in the interviews. First, the researcher reviewed each interview, line-by-line, with the goal of becoming comprehensively acquainted with the data collected. Next, the data was analyzed via a second reading with a pen in hand making immediate notes on certain observations with special attention to those elements of continuity apparent in the individual responses and the observable incongruities between others. Finally, the researcher gave a third reading of all the material, and while doing so she collected certain data samples by noting particularly revealing quotes from the interview participants. It is also worth noting that each phase of the analysis was embarked upon within a time span that provided an above average amount of data retention. It was also advantageous that the researcher was also the "interviewer." This additional acquaintance with the data allowed the researcher to build upon observations made during the actual interviews. This was, essentially, a fourth step of data analysis that in effect preceded the other three.

These apparent themes that were withdrawn during the review process were then clustered together in an attempt to answer the research questions posed. However, attention was also given to other themes that also emerged during the study that the researcher did not anticipate. These were also noted in the research findings.

This process more than sufficiently met the parameters defined in empirical phenomenological approach. The data collected constituted a return to experience via open-ended questions and dialogue while eventually affording the researcher an opportunity to analyze the structures of the stated experience based upon reflective analysis and interpretation of the research participant's account or story.

In the following chapter, the results of the study are presented.

3.8 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has explained the research method employed in this study. The underlying principle for the desired method was thoroughly described.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The study supports extant research emphasizing the importance of self-efficacy, mindfulness of different values from one's own culture (cultural flexibility and the beliefs of one particular culture to judge other cultures (ethnocentrism). The predominant themes centered on the ATCK's cultural competence of self-efficacy, cultural flexibility and ethnocentrism. The participants of this study were asked to address the issue of how cross cultural competency assists or facilitates the performance of their overseas early experiences. Since the majority of the participants were very professional in this area, they were all very open to share experiences and discussing them. Three important categories emerged from this discussion and experience-sharing, especially regarding how self-efficacy, cultural flexibility and ethnocentrism impact their early experiences.

4.2 Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) Early Experiences and Self-efficacy.

When asked about the most rewarding part of the ATCK's experience the response was: Learning about another culture and to perform a job well in a foreign work environment. The initial six months are intense while the ATCK is still learning the language and norms of a new culture. For most of the ATCK in this study, English was the second language and Malaysia was the "foreign" culture though they all worked for

UUM that is an education institution. The ATCK is constantly learning nuances of differences in behavior and communication and contrasting them to familiar ones. In this way, the ATCK assumes the role of the “cultural bridge” between the two cultures.

One ATCK explained he feels the

“need to accept...be respectful” and “be open to be a part of this culture...to do what they do” (R1)

but noted that it would be helpful if his boss (UUM Management) would

“meet me halfway” (R1)

and understand the effort put into the cultural adjustment. One of the respondents stressed:

“The experience of living outside of your own country, you cannot put a value on it. It’s very nice...and you can never lose it. The pain is part of the experience as well...You get to see how the management treats their workers and...to cope with the culture” (R2)

ATCK referred to the process of learning the culture as “thrilling” and “frustrating” in the same breath. He added:

“To being able to live in another country, doing the work there, and take a deep dive into the culture... is also the most challenging...It’s a rewarding thing to test my limits...expand my horizon” (R2)

Another ATCK said,

“every day is a learning experience” and “It took a while to figure it out. The first year is every day you are figuring things out by yourself” (R5)

The dedication to the ongoing cultural adaptation process was articulated this way. He added:

“That’s exciting...Every day I read the press from my country and also the reviews from here, from the Malaysia itself...the angle is different ...the same event will have two different interpretations...really exciting to see both sides...We understand the same event. It’s not better or worse it’s just different...at the beginning you think you understand but you don’t understand...It’s exciting as well...once you know that you don’t know” (R5)

The interviews revealed a multitude of tiny distractions produced by cultural differences throughout the assignment. One ATCK from Nigeria (R2) initially relied on his colleagues (Malaysian lecturers) to respond to the questions from his students about culture during the first six months of his teaching because he was not sure how his Malaysian students would respond. One ATCK from Somalia recollected the first few months. He said:

“I was frustrated...at work I felt like I was banging my head against the wall...then you learn the culture and the language...how to motivate people...” (R3)

Another ATCK, who brought her family from other part of Asia, reflected on her self-efficacy adjustment. She stressed:

“You are learning about it the hard way. You need dedication to wanting to learn with a steep learning curve...if you did not have the positive attitude you would give up” (R6)

A common goal of the ATCK is to engage in a constant cultural learning process outside of their comfort zone. This bridging would be made easier by management, colleagues, students and other professionals who have experienced life in another

culture or received some intercultural training to understand the self efficacy adaptation process. Moving to a new address disrupts a family's routine for weeks and months after the initial move. One common solution among the study participants was to find another ATCKs from their home country to guide the process. One of the respondents said:

“The initial move up there was overwhelming...Any move is stressful, then you go and add the, ‘this is a foreign country...’ You’ve got to think about visas...It was certainly beneficial having another ATCKs from the home country there. People on both sides were very supportive about me being there, more than willing to help.” (R7)

Another ATCK added:

“It’s hard to get anything done directly, and if you tried, the people who were responsible for those areas felt like saying, ‘Well, that’s my area, and I should be making those improvements’. Okay, then when are you going to do it? They know that there are problems, but they’re just not taking steps to make improvements” (R6)

Most ATCKs experienced a sense of pride in “figuring things out on their own.” Several expressed the new level of confidence they felt after taking the assignment. One of the respondents stressed:

“It was a piece of the experience made it challenging and exciting risktaking, adventurous, a mystery to be solved, a test of their perseverance. Just the experience of living alone, coming to a new country, being reasonably successful where you are, learning about the new culture...Gives you a level of confidence, I think. First time I came to Malaysia was my first international flight, second or third air travel ... Now I feel like if you sent me to other Asian country or anywhere, I have the confidence....” (R8)

The participants were asked to describe what stressed them the most during the first few weeks and how they learned to adjust to the local culture. All of the eight participants stated that cultural differences in work attitudes/behavior, plus local norms and regulations, posed the main challenges to their overseas assignments while interacting with the locals in the host country. All of the eight participants emphasized that even though their local language skills were not strong enough, their knowledge of English still facilitated their adjustment to the local environment.

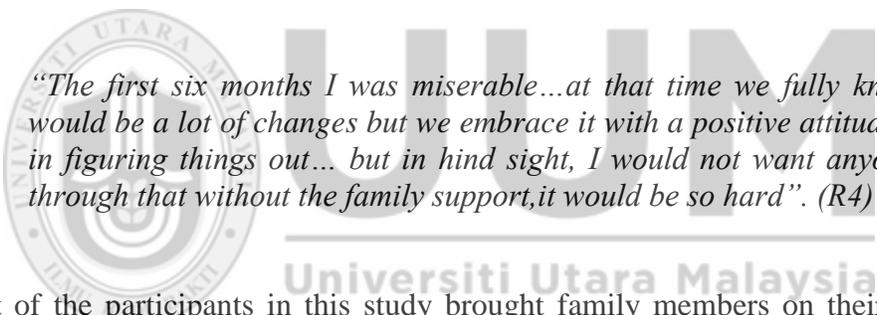
“Your ability to resist stress is very important, for the difficulties will be many. For example, I did not know how to get fuel by myself when I just arrived in the Malaysia. It was a stress factor for me at that time. But because I could read and follow the instructions on the screen, I managed to overcome the problem”
(R2)

For others, self-efficacy and hardiness was demonstrated with a combination of patience, persistence, and problem solving to obtain resources needed to function both at work and at home. One ATCK, who arrived in Malaysia from other part of Asia (R6), described her disbelief and amusement in finding her home stocked with appliances she would never use in her home country, while missing the proper pot to cook rice, a staple for her family. The narratives of these employees reflected a positive attitude and humor while finding away to overcome obstacles to carry out their daily routines.

4.3 Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) Early Experiences Successfully affect the Cultural Flexibility.

ATCK's who go on assignment with their family credit their success to the support and encouragement they derive from their spouse and children. Several ATCKs mentioned the importance of learning another language, for themselves and their family. Accepting ATCK's experiences may be a deliberate move to grow professionally and growth for the entire family. Although past ATCK's research has indicated that families may be a liability on ATCK's experiences, this was not the case for the ATCKs in this sample.

One of the respondents said:



“The first six months I was miserable...at that time we fully knew that there would be a lot of changes but we embrace it with a positive attitude we have fun in figuring things out... but in hind sight, I would not want anyone else to go through that without the family support,it would be so hard”. (R4)

Eight of the participants in this study brought family members on their international working assignments. Each one expressed the importance of the family dynamics in their new surroundings. One of the respondents stressed:

“Another reward is that I got closer to my family. So you have to stick together. It's not easy, I would say but it's a good test of how good your relations are. So I think also the relationship grew throughout these assignments...forced to talk about problems because you can't avoid them...have to bring them up and put them on the table.” (R2)

One ATCK from Oman reaffirmed the importance of his wife approaching this assignment with him as a team. He said:

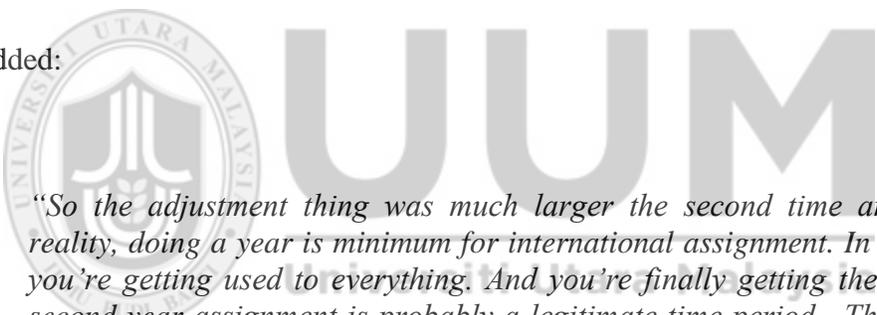
“ My wife...fit right in...she was never homesick. She was very active in the community and the things that interest her...it was just easy” (R4)

The issues that may cause emotional stress for ATCKs and their families are not necessarily a result of culture shock but their own absence and the separation from events and relationships at home. Several ATCKs mentioned “missing” weddings of friends and relatives or other events since they could not “fly home for a weekend.”

How the spouse copes with the experience, one ATCK stressed:

“...probably the success of ATCKs, the success is definitely the family” (R8)

He added:



“So the adjustment thing was much larger the second time around...but in reality, doing a year is minimum for international assignment. In that one year, you’re getting used to everything. And you’re finally getting the hang of it. A second year assignment is probably a legitimate time period...That’s how I felt the whole time [like I had one foot out the door]. So... I didn’t bring a lot with me. But I always felt like I was [living out of a suitcase]... Even though I was living in a house that was just wonderful” (R8)

For family who want to stay in contact with friends and family in their home country and with spouses on business travel, ATCKs reported that mobile phone plans, Skype, and email make it easier to maintain international personal relationships, affordably, on a daily basis.

One ATCK reported that he had to be trained by culture training (by their own society) and it helps increased his work productivity and his spouse's adjustment compared to a past assignment in Indonesia for which there was no culture training. One ATCK added:

“Culture training here at the beginning is a big plus, to know what is coming. You are aware you will have the cultural shock. In another experience we did not have any training either before or during the time we were there. This I think would decrease work efficiency for say the first half year. My wife did not do well even though she is from the continent we were assigned. We were not prepared that the location was like...time had gone back 50 years. We were not fully aware of that before going on the assignment. Especially not just the work environment but the social environment is just as important” (R3)

According to ATCKs who have been on several assignments, some countries afford an easier cultural adjustment. Health care and safety are primary concerns, especially for ATCKs with families in developing or politically unstable countries. Connections with other ATCKs from the same culture are helpful in preparing for differences between country systems. One ATCK was distressed over the disparity in standard of living between workers in the same institution. These are the kinds of issues that culture adaptability/adjustment may address to ease culture shock and help the ATCKs understand on the national differences. The contrast between cultures may be very extreme. One of the respondents said:

“You can drink water from the tap...things you never thought about...a good health system...”. (R5)

ATCKs who went on two or more assignments noted that one international move does not eliminate culture shock the second time around. One reported that the adjustment was difficult as one of the respondents stressed:

“really hard the second time...probably harder...” (R6)

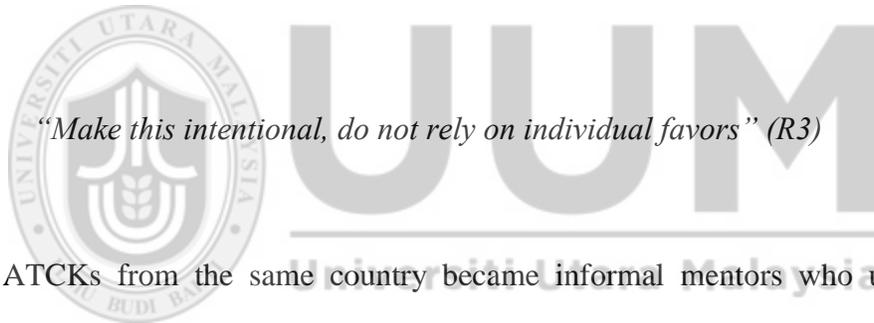
According to one African respondent, people cannot make the assumption that Western Europeans have an easy time adapting to life in North America and vice versa. He pointed out:

“This adjustment was longer than I expected...to me it was easier to adjust in Malaysia than in the Germany....The organization of the day to day life was the same in Africa as my home country” (R1)

Many TCKs have a love-hate relationship with their birth country, especially those who are from the same country as their parents. Most of these TCKs visit their birth country because it is where their parents call home. TCKs have a habit of longing for the place they are not. When they return to their birth country they may become dissatisfied with it because it is not what they had envisioned, but when they are away they miss certain aspects of it. Amongst TCKs there is also a loss of patriotism to one specific country.

“Bring what they have learned through this cultural exchange home and teach others about the cultures they have experienced” (R7)

ATCKs who had not received culture adaptation were aware of the recent implementation of the assignment. Roughly half of the ATCKs in this study met members of the host country work group prior to their assignment, which was helpful in the transition both professionally and personally. Several ATCKs mentioned it would have been beneficial for the institution to arrange introductions to meet others from their native country on ATCKs assignment in the same institution location as part of the on boarding process. Most ATCKs took initiative to find other workers from their country on their own but felt the office's assistance would expedite the process and prevent them from feeling isolated during their initial months away from home. One of the respondents said:



“Make this intentional, do not rely on individual favors” (R3)

The ATCKs from the same country became informal mentors who understood the culture from the ATCK's standpoint and became the cultural bridge. For some lecturers it took several months up to a year to find these colleagues to assist them in interpreting the new culture. One African lecturer tracked down another African assigned to the same country to coach him with the initial logistics of the move. He said:

“Having somebody there who has already gone through those things that are very prevalent in their mind, looking back, going.... Here's the form you really need for the license. They're not going to tell you about this, and having the office to take care of the Visa so I don't have to worry about that myself.” (R4)

They reported a sense of both pride and frustration in obtaining basic resources to perform their job and function in their new home. They kept their sense of humor while

acknowledging the inconvenience of logistical problems with establishing consumer credit, receiving a driver's license, government visa, or work permit, which can take months to obtain.

Culture and language are intertwined and can be misinterpreted easily even after years of living in another culture.

“every time I think, ‘I got it now’... oh no I don't! It's really confusing” (R7)

was the description of the experience by ATCK from Pakistan. Moreover, learning a language does not always mean the ATCKs can speak words understandably to colleagues in work and social situations. One of the respondents pointed out:

“You have a word but you don't pronounce it correctly, so the person doesn't understand” (R5).

The experience enabled him to understand and communicate with colleagues and manage his direct reports in other countries more effectively than he could. He added:

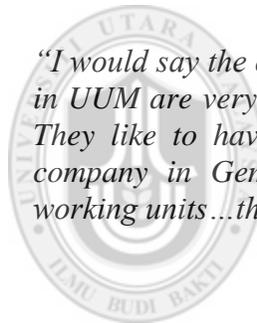
“Learning a second language opened up a lot of doors for me...It's been beneficial to be able to conduct safety meetings now with other lecturers in Bahasa and English, that's their first and second language, so that's really helped...Growing up in the part of Asia, I just had no exposure to diversity, and I tell you...when you start working in other cultures, and not only in Malaysia but India and Belgium, you really start to look at people and understand their differences. And you kind of focus on, ‘hey this person is good at this,’ and ‘this is what we will focus on’, and ‘this is where we need to develop this person” (R5)

Diversity can also be a source of joy. One of the ATCKs commented that:

“it is wonderful to work with colleagues with international backgrounds in their same college and work groups” (R4)

However, diversity also can be a source of conflict as detailed below. The breadth of difference between communication styles can affect the institutional norms, as is seen by ATCK who have been on multiple assignments. Asian communication involves face to face meetings and telling the details behind a decision whereas European managers want people to get to the point and may request for conference calls instead of face to face meetings. One of the respondents stressed:

“I would say the corporate culture is different...More meetings, in terms of here in UUM are very, very interactive, very, very much in terms of communication. They like to have face to face communication. We do a lot of things in a company in Gemany by conference call because of efficiency and larger working units...that’s one difference” (R1)



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He added:

“In Asia, leaders employ indirect communication whereas in the Europe leadership training may suggest direct communication and “speaking up” to make a point: “The negative in management sometimes it’s hard to know if it’s a good job or not a good job. Are people being nice? Or being....” (R1)

Another ATCK shared the difference in African communication style and behaviors that, in an Asian culture would be considered “very disrespectful.” He pointed out:

“When I talked to my boss over here he did not understand...they did not understand from the tone of my voice....Communication style is very different. Working values and faces are the same...gives me a level of comfort. Management style is not the same here and they respect each other whenever we

communicate....In Africa my boss put his feet up on his desk...In this country that is totally offensive. (R2)

Still another ATCK from Somalia felt decisions were made more quickly in his home country corporate offices compared to his experience in the institution:

“Management more supportive here in my group. We all want to be successful. People are willing to help you. More efficient. Make decisions quicker...it’s a positive. Can make a wrong decision and change...sometimes in Europe we cantake too long to make a decision” (R3)

In summary, new international assignees had many questions they wanted answered from the time they were going through their early experiences in new environment. Finding the resources that could fill the void of knowledge on work socialization, logistical information and cultural awareness needed to complete their assignment fell into several categories of experience: finding other ATCKs, interactions with human resources, relocation consultants, relying on family, and building relationships with host country colleagues and neighbors to adjust to life and work in the host country.

4.4 Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) Early Experiences and Ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism involves using the ideas and beliefs of one particular culture to judge other cultures. It is so similar to pride in the sense that we loath it in other cultures but we are hardly conscious of it in our own culture. Our beliefs and worldview is as a result of years of living in our community and seeing things done in a particular way.

One of the respondents said:

“We usually perceived our culture as the logical, reasonable and normal way to live and we often wonder "How anyone could ever live like THAT?!" It is usually the chief enemy of marriages. The husband has grown up in a different home environment, under different circumstances, and with a different experience. He would wonder why the wife is behaving in a certain manner that is contrary to his ways and so does the wife” (R5)

Another ATCK added:

“I work with many different cultures, and while it is evident that the people I work with always approach tasks from a familiar starting point....their own cultural perspective, what I see again and again is that we are all human first and culturally determined second. This is not to downplay the effect that cultural determination can have on our interactions with the world. It can sometimes be very significant. For example, I lived with some native Americans up near Alaska for a while and I lent one of them my jacket. He kept it! When I started to inquire about why he wasn't giving my jacket back, I discovered the idea that native ideas of private property are very different than my own. In my culture, his action might be called stealing, whereas in his culture, I was part of his community and my jacket was community property. When I discovered this, I was not angry that he kept the jacket. Rather, I was gratified that, even as an outsider, I had been included in his community. I give this example to show that cultural ideas are very powerful, yet even more powerful is our capacity for understanding each other as human beings” (R1)

The ease with which all respondents explain to themselves the normative differences of ethnocentrism as a moral failure underscores how ethnocentric judgments appear to people. Moreover, the fact that they have merely flow from the observation of normative differences. One of the respondent said:

“It would seem as though ethnocentrism almost certainly is inevitable. As humans, we automatically see the things that we do, as the only and right way of doing them. We all have our cultures, and look at ours as the best. However, there really isn't any culture that is better than any other. We are entitled to our own opinions, but that shouldn't give us any right to judge the way others do things. I think that we shouldn't make ignorant judgments of any one person or group because of their culture. We should keep an open mind, and realize that

our way isn't the only way things are done. Hence, ethnocentrism may be inevitable, but it can be overcome” (R3)

Another ATCK add:

“I have always taught that Ethnocentrism is a doctrine or policy of a specific group of people in a set location. That they share ideals, values, and culture. If that culture is introduced to another than yes, ethnocentrism is inevitable. What we as educators, and parents, need to do is teach about cultural relativism. Teaching the art of looking at other cultures through their eyes, not tainted by our own experiences, and not judging. Using what they call the sociological perspective, standing back and observing. My children have traveled and interacted with many people from around the world and I am always amazed at the friendships they have made, even though in our discussions they may say that a certain way the kids from Romania act are weird or different, they still understand that it is a cultural thing”. (R2)

Ethnocentrism may be what happens when the cognitive mechanism that looks for ‘cheaters’ such as norm violators inside the ethnic is applied to people outside the ethnic. Ethnocentric judgments very often are essentialist, as if the ‘moral failures’ of a different ethnic community were believed to result from an unalterable biological ‘nature.’ One respondent stressed that:

“Yes, We are all brought up differently with our own unique behaviors, thoughts, beliefs, etc. that make up our culture. Why do we do what we do in our culture? Why are there specific ways to analyze something where as other countries look at the same thing and give it completely different thoughts? That's the kind of thought that makes us all unique and amazing. All of our different perspectives give us so many ideas that form into opportunities. There is exactly no reason or right to judge other cultures. They are all incomparable and radical in their own ways. Everyone is made in an image that reflects a higher "being." Who are we to make a negative comment towards others? Either we are ignorant or have a good amount of jealousy towards others cultures, ideas and beliefs. In the end ethnocentrism leans towards the inevitable side, but it is our decision to make the right choice and build our world up instead of tearing it down by pointing out flaws” (R4)

Another respondent added:

“To me, I believe that ethnocentrism is inevitable. Everyone has their own culture that they believe in and there is no culture that is better than another. Each and every single person that believes in a culture has the right to believe in that culture and it is not fair to judge it based on what you have heard or seen about it. I believe that more people have to be open to other cultures because they have no right to judge another culture. As long as you are proud of your culture and who you are, there should be no problem. Sure, there are some things about other cultures that we are not used to but if we gave it a try there should be no problem with another culture. In the end, we're all the same and there should be no judging without knowing the facts and keep an open mind to things that are not what you were taught” (R6)

Ethnocentrism is widely used in research on social and political attitudes because it proves to be a very powerful and easily identifiable attitude that can be measured in a valid manner with a limited number of variables. Although ethnocentric prejudice can be directed toward one specific outsider group, empirical research reveals that usually ethnocentrism is generalized toward all outsider groups.

“In my opinion, I believe that ethnocentrism is inevitable. I think this because everyone has the right to his or her own beliefs in their culture. You should be able to believe what you want and others should respect you for what you believe. No one should judge other cultures, because everyone has his or her own way of doing things. No matter what culture you are, you should have pride in your culture as well. No one culture is better than another culture. People may have different opinions about other cultures, but that is just because everyone does things differently than others. No matter what culture you are, you should not judge someone on their culture just because you do not agree with it or like something about it” (R7)

Various explanations have been suggested for ethnocentrism. Social identity approaches assume that ethnocentrism is the result of a strong identification with the in-group of the

actor, which almost automatically leads to negative feelings toward and stereotyping of members of the out group. One ATCK explained:

“I believe that ethnocentrism is inevitable. Everyone comes from a culture, and everyone has different beliefs. No matter if you are Latino or Caucasian, you come from a culture and everyone should have pride in where their ancestors come from. Although people will encounter altercations as to which culture is better than the other, that's all a part of life. People take things too far, and things should just be fair and not argue but that is also inevitable. Culture and theory is everywhere, it is impossible to get away from it. Ethnocentrism cannot be ignored, we are taught about where we come from and who created us. It will always be a part of our lives, and it could never be ignored” (R8)

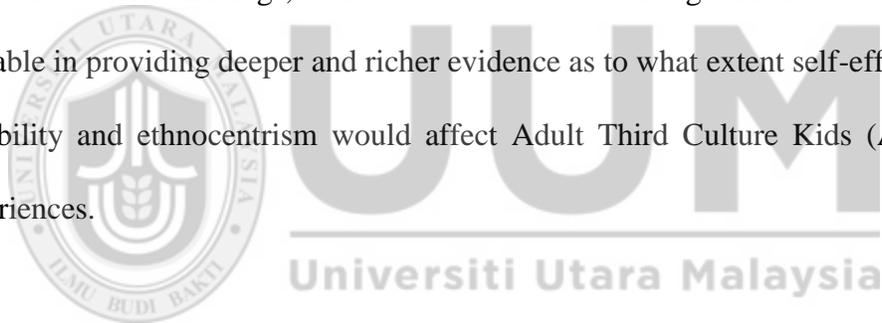
Finally, the social dynamics of ethnocentric charge and countercharge are confined almost exclusively to the cultural wars over values and their scope. Social power and the relative positioning of those charging and charged remain largely unaddressed. And yet power is at the heart of the ethnocentric concern, in both its universalistic versions, to maintain and refine social homogeneity. Ethnocentrism as a concept fails in its self-assured lack of relational analysis. It refuses, by extension, any engagement with relations of social power and differentiated social positioning that has been the mark, by contrast, of race critical theory.

The following chapter will discuss the findings based on the responses gathered in this chapter. It will also address whether the objectives of this research have been met.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings and analysis from the interviews that had been carried out. As mentioned in previous chapter, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship of ATCKs early experiences and variables of dynamic CC in a sample of ATCKs from 8 countries. In particular, it intends to draw out the insights of ATCKs' experiences and examine the effect of cross cultural competencies on ATCKs early experiences. The findings, which were collected through interviews proved to be valuable in providing deeper and richer evidence as to what extent self-efficacy, cultural flexibility and ethnocentrism would affect Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) early experiences.



5.2 Self Efficacy and ATCKs early experiences

Using social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) as a foundation to explain CC, the study suggested three important predictors of dynamic CC in ATCKs: self-efficacy, cultural flexibility and ethnocentrism. This is consistent with past research on TCKs which suggested that experiencing international travelling during their developmental years outside of their home countries can provide competencies that employers currently seek in their employees (Bandura, 1977). In addition, the findings from this study suggest that it is vital to pay attention to the type of early international experience and not treat

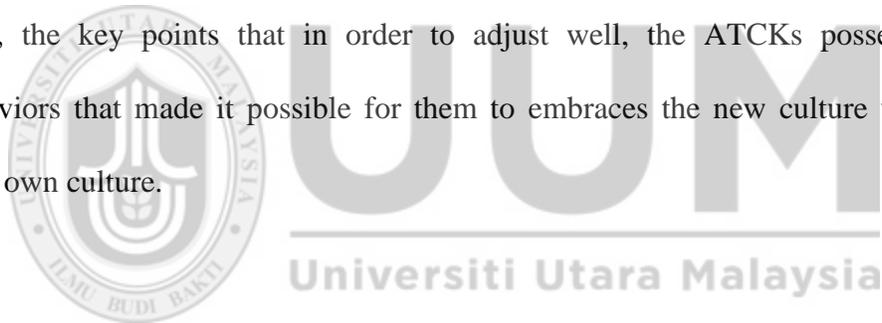
early international experience in generic terms. This is because it is characterized by intense fear in one or more social situations, causing considerable distress and impaired ability to function in at least some parts of daily life. These fears can be triggered by perceived or actual scrutiny from others. While the fear of social interaction may be recognized by the person as excessive or unreasonable, overcoming it can be quite difficult. Some people suffering from social anxiety disorder fear a wide range of social situations while others may only show anxiety in performance situations.

The results indicate that pre-departure training facilitates cultural training and support mentoring the ATCKs which in turn could enhance their self-efficacy, cross cultural adjustment and the development of their cross cultural communication skills. These, would impact positively upon their ability to build up a good relationship with the local staff, colleagues, students and other international ATCKs from various of culture to reach the goals of their overseas assignments and, consequently, to enhance their self-efficacy and cultural flexibility. However, the pre-departure training negatively impact on ethnocentrism.

It is important to point out that all participants agreed that language ability or fluency is the most important skill for the success of an overseas assignment. This means that mastering the local language is a must for the expatriates, for it helps them to better understand the local culture and have a more positive view of its characteristics. It is important to note that the literature on cross cultural competence indicates that language

instruction is either overlooked or quite limited (Peltokorpi, 2010) and considered an important component of the cultural values needed for successful international assignment.

It is also gathered that the ATCKs had to take the time and effort to explore and learn new things by trial and error. If left to chance, they might not be able to adjust as fast as they wanted to be. The process of adjusting to the new culture and the new workplace can be nerve-wracking as you might never know what you are doing is wrong until you have done it and the locals are not amused by the cultural faux pas you committed. As such, the key points that in order to adjust well, the ATCKs possessed positive behaviors that made it possible for them to embrace the new culture while keeping their own culture.



5.3 Cultural Flexibility and ATCKs early experiences

In addition, these findings may indicate that in order to facilitate the ATCKs cultural flexibility and to attain success in their assignments, the selection criteria should consider language ability as one of top priorities, and language training programs should be incorporated into the training content of the local culture.

It should also be noted that this study provides empirical support for focusing on post arrival cross cultural training on the learning of the local norms and regulations, since it

has a positive impact on the cross cultural adjustment, the development of cross cultural competence and the performance of the ATCKs. The extent of training can depend on a variety of variables: previous overseas experience (if applicable), time until departure, and novelty of the new country. Training, at the minimum, inform the ATCKs about the new country, and at its best, would allow immersion of ATCKs into the new culture. The fact that all participants of this study were lecturers and PhD candidates, it is important to note that they viewed knowledge and understanding of the local norms and regulations as critical to the successful handling of the local culture.

Furthermore, most ATCKs take their families with them to the foreign country, and their family situation is one of the most critical factors in the successful completion of an overseas assignment. Family transition must be taken very seriously. ATCKs must be comfortable on a personal level because the major stress can be caused for the entire family by something as seemingly trivial as the transportation of a family pet. ATCKs spouse must have a very strong willingness to live abroad and should be supportive as well as adaptive. ATCK's who go on assignment with their family credit their success to the support and encouragement they derived from their spouse and children. It is also important to note on the spillover effects that can affect the ATCKs if their families are not happy with the new environment (Takeuchi, 2005).

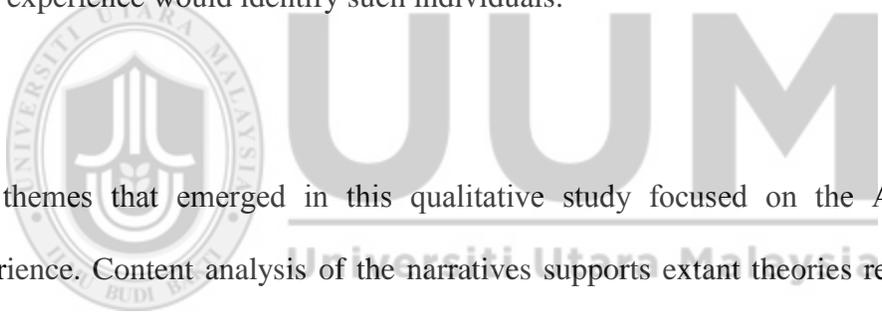
5.4 Ethnocentrism ATCKs early experiences

Lastly, ethnocentrism probably cannot entirely be eliminated, because it is going to always take more effort to think in ways of one person to one's own culture. However, this is an area in which it pays to be conscious of that judgment, and to consciously suspend it. That being said, many ideas of others have been carved deep into our minds and remain as part of us forever. However, it is also important to consider that as the ATCKs are more exposed to different cultures and education system, there will be a higher possibility of being more receptive of culturally different others.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, implications for international experience literature by following (Takeuchi, 2005), study results demonstrate the different ways that the international experience construct can be operationalized and show the importance of including multiple aspects of experience, advancing the international experience literature in several ways. First, the findings provide support to prior research on international experience that suggests that non-work international experiences, like work related international experiences, are important for gaining a global perspective. Second, prior literature on international experiences has simultaneously examined work and travel experiences, potentially confounding research findings. This study addressed this concern by using a sample with no international work experience. Third, this study considered family diversity, learning goal orientation and language diversity in the formation of characteristics of CC. These, too, should be considered in future research.

Furthermore, implications of CC literature assessed the impact of early international experiences on three aspects of dynamic CC: cultural flexibility, self-efficacy and ethnocentrism. These were appropriate given this study's focus on the experiential and personality characteristics leading to the development of CC and study findings contribute to the CC literature, particularly given the variety of ways CC is defined and operationalized. Including additional components of CC in future research would help focus the CC construct and make it more useful for research and practice in the development of CC in expatriates or other global managers as well as the primacy of early experience would identify such individuals.



The themes that emerged in this qualitative study focused on the ATCK's early experience. Content analysis of the narratives supports extant theories regarding cross cultural adaptation and development through experience in another culture allowing them to become cultural bridges to colleagues, students and social environment. ATCKs expressed the importance of family and mentors in completing their assignments. In particular, ATCKs expressed the value of mentors (senior from the same home country that knows about the other culture) for ATCKs from the same culture, the value of culture adaptability and self-efficacy in their early experiences.

In addition, research shows that the adaptation process involves the understanding of norms and expectations, while learning how to function in the current culture

(Holtzman, 2000). The current study found that regardless of the desire to fit in, participants had difficulties identifying the surrounding culture. By adapting and accommodating, ATCKs chance giving up a portion of their identity and sense of self. This desire to fit in is sometimes so acute that ATCKs forfeit their ability to remain true to themselves (Quick, 2010). ATCKs are capable of benefitting people across a range of cultural settings when they and those around them understand what they have to offer. These benefits partly relate to the ability of ATCKs and those around them to accept their hidden differences. By virtue of experiencing so many new situations throughout their lives, and particularly during their formative years, ATCKs are able to enter new situations with minimal difficulty. They intuitively assess multiple dynamics and may be able to offer suggestions when others are at a loss for ideas.

Furthermore, Third Culture Kids are a growing demographic in the world and often encounters difficulties transitioning to college (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). The study confirmed that even though ATCKs are used for environmental adjustment, they do face challenges adjusting to the local culture. ATCKs utilized a variety of accommodation methods to either conform or rebel against their new surrounding culture. ATCKs also have distinct challenges because they do not always understand the local culture and may also afraid of losing their sense of self. As ATCK are accustomed to change, one might expect that adaptation would come easy. This study provides evidence that ATCKs do face self-efficacy and cultural flexibility challenges which positively impact their early experiences, but negatively impact on the ethnocentrism culture environment.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the overall conclusion to the study. This chapter highlights and concludes the main findings, contribution, implications of the study as well as limitation and future research.

6.2 The Main Findings

The intent of this study was to investigate whether ATCKs perceive that their cross-cultural early experiences impact their self-efficacy, cultural flexibility and ethnocentrism as adults. This study also aimed to understand the extent to which ATCKs are able to successfully alternate between their two or more cultural identities and achieve cross cultural competency in multiple cultures.

Overall, this study found that this research fulfilled its purposes of identifying the factors that influences ATCKs early experience and how such adjustments could influence cultural flexibility and self-efficacy. In short, the conclusion is that language, mentoring and cultural training are significant influencing factor that helps ATCKs to adjust to the new environment followed by institutional and family support. Therefore, it is important to consider the personality traits of the ATCKs before the institution can recruit or select the candidates for the job. Therefore, this research concludes that by

improving the cross cultural adjustments through various initiatives such as family support and personal preferences could improve ATCKs performance and enable them to complete international assignments more successfully.

The research questions were appropriate for guiding this study and the 8 interviewees provided sufficient evidence to justify the conclusions. The results of this study add to the existing literature. Sense of belonging affects our sense of who we are. It is during the formative years that a sense of belonging and a sense of identity are developed. These two concepts are closely related. Both identity and sense of belonging can elicit differing emotions and hold different meanings among different people; however it can be safely assumed that these are issues that most TCKs will face at one time or another but also clearly demonstrates the absolute necessity of continuing this line of research in order to gather a more informed view of how the ATCKs' early experience impacts dynamic CC.

6.3 Implications of the Study

This paper has focused primarily on the conceptualization and measurement of adult third culture kid early experiences that impact dynamic of CC. Hence, the findings would be beneficial to fellow researchers, managers and industry professionals to understand how the ATCKs could potentially be an asset to hiring companies with the wealth of cultural understanding that they possess in line with the increasing diversity at the workplace. This is especially pertinent as the world is becoming increasingly

multicultural such that it is vital for persons with more cultural exposure to be fully utilized and their rich cultural understanding would be welcomed in understanding the complexities that affect globalizing persons and contexts. ATCKs must also understand the cultural richness they have to offer, and must work to better communicate that knowledge to those around them.

The findings in this research may be in some ways applicable for parents, friends, communities, and ATCKs themselves. Many interviewees had never heard of the term Adult Third Culture Kids before and were not aware that there was an entire field of study dedicated to this area. Perhaps increased awareness could have helped smooth the adaptation process and help them realize that they are not the only one experiencing the effects of a life of constant change and mobility. After the interviews, many participants were interested in studying more about ATCKs and reading the available literature. More studies should be devoted to increasing awareness among the ATCK community, such as ATCKs themselves, parents, international schools, and international organizations and the term 'fitting in' could perhaps be a thing of the past as organizations strive to find the best fit in terms of human capital in their respective organizations.

In addition, this study suggests the importance of ongoing exploration of various aspects of culture, cultural flexibility and sense of belonging as it relates to Adult Third Culture Kids. With the rapid expansion of information technology and the shrinking of

the globe through globalization, there will only be more ATCKs. Therefore, the research should continue so that this increasingly relevant area of study might be fully explored for the good of ATCKs and to support the increasing trend of geocentric staffing policy and mobility of human capital in line with the demands of regional integration and expansion of markets abroad.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

A number of limitations in this study should be acknowledged and potentially provide as recommendations for future research in this area. Firstly, only eight ATCKs were interviewed. Although this is an acceptable number of in depth qualitative research, the researcher believed more conclusive information could have been gathered with a higher number of participants. The reason being is that a few of the participants had experienced more on one culture than the others. It is uncertain, but this experience could have weighed their responses towards easier adaptation.

Secondly, another limitation involved the wide range of geographical backgrounds from which the ATCKs experienced. Although this range of information is beneficial, a study limited to geographical locations may allow for more extensive research. Furthermore, it would be desirable to repeat the study on a sample from different sojourn populations. Most of the independent variables were biodata items, and common method variance is typically an issue with attitudinal variables. Besides that, future research should gather data from multiple sources or use objective measure such Hofstede's country scores (Hofstede, 2001). The family diversity variable is also a concern. It is possible that born

in a country in which neither of your parents was born would suggest greater family diversity. Research is needed to further refine this measurement.

Thirdly, this study examined several components of ATCKs experiences as they relate to the development of components of dynamic CC. Examining the components of both constructs as separate variables enabled us to identify variables that provide a foundation for examining the mechanisms through which early international experiences influence development. This is because prior research provided little guidance on how to position these variables; therefore future studies should revisit the influence of control variables and independent variables. It is possible that what we used as control variables could be considered independent variables, and that there are other variables that mediate the relationship between early international experience and the independent variables. Moreover, the IHRM literature suggests that the impact of early international experience of dynamic CC may be influenced by other stable competencies such as family diversity, learning goal orientation and other type of personality traits. These and other personality traits would further extend our understanding of the unique development of ATCKs.

Another area for future research is the examination of the mechanism or the process by which learning occurs from early international experience. We posited but did not test the role of social learning such as attention, retention, and reproduction, as the mediators between early international experience and facets of dynamic CC. One way is

to view is incorporating the transfer of learning perspective should facilitate in understanding this aspect. Overall, the study provided valuable information and show potential for future studies. Human capital remains to be the most valuable asset in an organization and any means to better understand how well they fit with each other in an organization would be a welcomed intervention that could potentially maximize human capital utilization and minimize unnecessary training and other related costs.



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