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Identifying Current Research Directions in the Field of Expatriate Management in Cross-National Firms: A Bibliometric Review from 1997 to 2023

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze earlier studies published from 1997 to 2023 and provide a structured overview of the themes examined as well as support scholars in navigating the topic and determining future research paths in the subject of expatriate management. This study collected 1598 journal publications on the topic of expatriates that were released between 1997 and 2023. Bibliometric analysis is applied to analyze the data. Science mapping combines analysis, classification, and visualization to demonstrate the dynamism of an area of research as well as the structures and interactions between bibliographic materials are presented accordingly. The current study figures out that there are four mainstream current research in the field of expatriate management in cross-national firms. The structure includes: "Strategic management of the multinational company," "expatriate career success," "managing expatriates," and "expatriates and adapting to the local environment." Additionally, "cross-cultural adjustment," "expatriate satisfaction," "expatriate's job performance," and "expatriate career success" are central in the respective clusters. Other topics that have received recent attention, and have some prominence in the analysis, indicate there is a shift in the literature. This study result provides several clear research maps and an organized overview of the subject and highlights both active study areas and understudied regions. Thus, future studies can be beneficial when using the research findings of this study to develop their future studies.

Keywords: Expatriate Management, Cross-National Firms, Bibliometric Approach

1. INTRODUCTION

The movement of the labor force between developing and developed nations, or vice versa, is becoming more common and important in the context of globalization. Finaccord (2018) predicts that there will be about 87 million expats in the world in 2021 and this is increasing annually. Similarly, Ariss and Crowley-Henry (2013) also indicate that 96 million people are expected to move from developing to industrialized nations during the next 50 years. Therefore, research on expatriates is considered a high priority in the international human resource management discipline, which covers a broad range of subjects and viewpoints (Markoulli et al., 2017). The purpose of this study is to give a structural overview of the themes looked at in the expatriate sector in order to help scholars navigate the area and find interesting directions for future research. There are three specific objectives. First, this study aims to map the structural landscape of topics in expatriate research. By encompassing the breadth of the area and its clusters of issues, this expands on prior systematic and meta-analytical reviews; thus, scholars will be able to work across the various "topic areas to see which flowers are blooming where – outside of their own particular topic area" (Byington et al., 2019, p. 230). A second objective is to give a summary of the subjects and areas that have been studied and reported in a variety of journals during the past 20 years; this

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will frame the numerous points of view for each of the selected topic clusters. Finally, this study shall provide an overview of the scholarly discussions that attracted substantial attention recently.

In order to fulfill those objectives, bibliometric analysis is applied and conducted to provide an overview of the outcomes of previous studies on expatriate literature. Science mapping (Boyack and Klavans, 2014) combines analysis, classification, and visualization to demonstrate the dynamism of an area of research as well as the structures and interactions between bibliographic materials. The article keywords and reference lists under study were collected from 1598 journal publications on the topic of expatriates that were released between 1997 and 2023.

2. BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS REVIEW

Alan Pritchard first introduced the bibliometric method in 1969, which was described as an essential measure of a research assessment methodology to enhance the quality of the quantitative approach to written publications and documents (Osareh, 1996). Bibliometric analysis has been attracting much attention from researchers in international management (Fan et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2020). Its functions can make use of bibliometric software such as Gephi, Leximancer, VOSviewer, and sources scientific databases such as Scopus and Web of Science in order to demonstrate advancement, availability, and accessibility and the multidisciplinary allogamy of the bibliometric methodology-based on information sources of science to business research. Significantly, the most important of bibliometric analysis was the function of the illustration of its advance for dealing with several scientific data and generating significant influence on research (Donthu et al., 2021).

Previous studies indicated that bibliometric analysis could be applied for different reasons based on the research aims. For instance, researchers aimed to disclose new research trends in papers and journal outcomes, cooperation patterns, and research constituents and discovered the knowledge framework detailed in the existent research (Donthu et al., 2021; Verma and Gustafsson, 2020). Donthu et al. (2021) further indicated that the information source that can be taken from the bibliometric analysis is usually enormous and objective, although the results frequently depend on objective and subjective analyses by methods and processes. Therefore, bibliometric analysis can support researchers get a "one-stop overview," figure out gap research, develop dominant ideas for examination, and specify the potential contributions in the specific research area (Donthu et al., 2021).

In this study, the author applied the bibliometric analysis with two techniques including co-occurrence and co-citation analysis. Accordingly, the co-occurrence analysis demonstrated the information of another study that used the same keyword (Donthu et al., 2021) with any words used from "article titles," "abstracts" and "full texts" for the analysis (e.g., Baker, Kumar, and Pandey, 2020; Burton et al., 2020). Donthu et al. (2021) emphasized that the co-occurrence analysis help researcher understand the domain knowledge of areas from the past and present and forecast future research direction Additionally, co-citation analysis was a tool to summarize commonly cited articles of researchers on the same topic (Donthu et al., 2021; Hjørland, 2013). Rossetto et al. (2018) confirmed that co-citation analysis can discover who is the most influential authors in the same research field.

2.1. Bibliometric Analysis Procedure

In this part, this study illustrated three steps to conduct bibliometric analysis as below:

2.1.1. Step 1: Collect the data for bibliometric analysis

The initial step was to gather the data needed for the bibliometric analysis methodologies that have been chosen. The author gathered the data from the Web of Science database produced by Thomson Reuters. The keywords: Expatriate(s), repatriate(s), international assignment (assignee), and global assignment (assignee) were looked for in the title, keyword, and abstract. In order to guarantee the quality of studies, this study only chose papers written in English with peer-reviewed. Books and monographs were excluded because while there are many outstanding articles dealing with expatriates, they tended to examine and integrate previous findings rather than proposing new and unique research (Andersen, 2019).

According to Andersen (2019), there were two main trends of previous studies in the area of international mobility: (1) The traditional pathway between the 1960s and 1980s, and mainly investigated the role of senior managers in global companies' shift abroad to oversee a subsidiary; (2) a contemporary trend that dated from the 1990s to the present and depicted a variety of worldwide movable workforces (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016). The journal entries in the databases before 1997 were inaccurate, as a starting point, that year was picked. Thus, the author gathered papers that were published from 1997 to 2023.

As these terms were applied in an enormous scope of the field, the author has narrowed the categories to management, business, applied psychology, interdisciplinary social science, and economics.

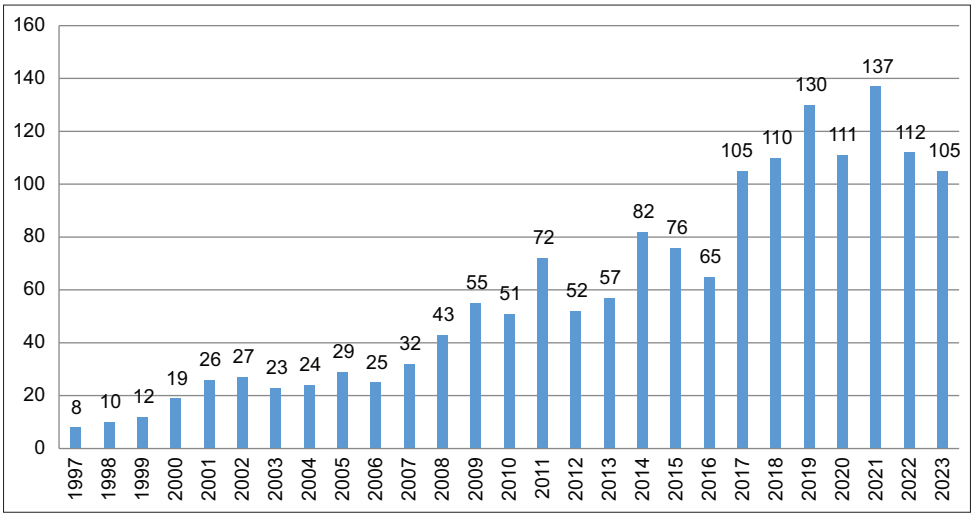
2.1.2. Step 2: Data screening

The title, keywords, and abstracts of papers were read carefully by the author to avoid duplicated and erroneous papers and papers not related to expatriates. One thousand three hundred and eighty suitable papers were included for data analysis.

2.1.3. Step 3: Data analyzing

The author read and corrected erroneous entries in terms of singular/plural, suitable synonyms, and abbreviations to ensure that all data are cleaned. After that, a coding standard was created for further analysis with three steps, including descriptive, co-occurrence, and co-citation. Firstly, the descriptive analysis presented the basic information of 1598 selected studies, including the copious number of publications and geographical distribution. Then research themes to uncover the groundwork and structure of expatriate research were classified. Thirdly, the author categorized all keywords from selected studies through a co-occurrence analysis of keywords. The current research streamline of expatriate studies was demonstrated based on classified co-citation themes. Last, the author used VOSviewer software to determine a co-

Figure 1: Number of publications from 1997 to 2023



citation network and visualize the outcomes (Giang et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2017).

2.2. Descriptive Analysis

This study applied the VOSviewer 1.6.8 software (Waltman et al., 2010), which was the most popular and beneficial software to obtain keywords, generate clusters, and visually map the results in the science mapping literature (Lee et al., 2014). Before clustering, the author eliminated the data without author or reference information and following the VOS analysis, extracted a thesaurus applied by VOSviewer to gather authors whose named have different spellings and were similar for keywords.

Figure 1 shows the number of annual publications of expatriates from 1997 to 2023. The number of publications appeared from about 8 to 82 papers from 1997 to 2014. Significantly, there have been more than 100 publications during the last 4 years. Those results indicated that the topic of expatriate management has been paid much attention by researchers recently.

Additionally, Table 1 demonstrated the location where expatriate studies were conducted. The United States, England, Australia, and China were the most attractive area to conduct and implement the research, with the number of publications in these places being 420, 272, 218, and 158, respectively. The impressive number of publications in these countries was the most attractive place for running the business with high demand in hiring many expatriates. The rest of the countries in the table were from Europe and Asia. Especially, Vietnam was considered one of the prominent places to conduct research in ASEAN with 9 publications.

Table 1. Country where expatriate research was conducted

No.	Country	Frequency
1.	The United States	420
2.	England	272
3.	Australia	218
4.	China	158
5.	Germany	114
6.	Canada	99
7.	Finland	60
8.	Taiwan	60
9.	Netherlands	58
10.	France	52
11.	Japan	52
12.	Denmark	51
13.	United Arab Emirate	44
14.	South Korea	39
15.	New Zealand	37
16.	Spain	37
17.	Singapore	36
18.	Ireland	30
19.	Malaysia	28
20.	India	26
21.	Austria	17
22.	Scotland	17
23.	Belgium	16
24.	Switzerland	16
25.	Turkey	16
26.	Vietnam	9

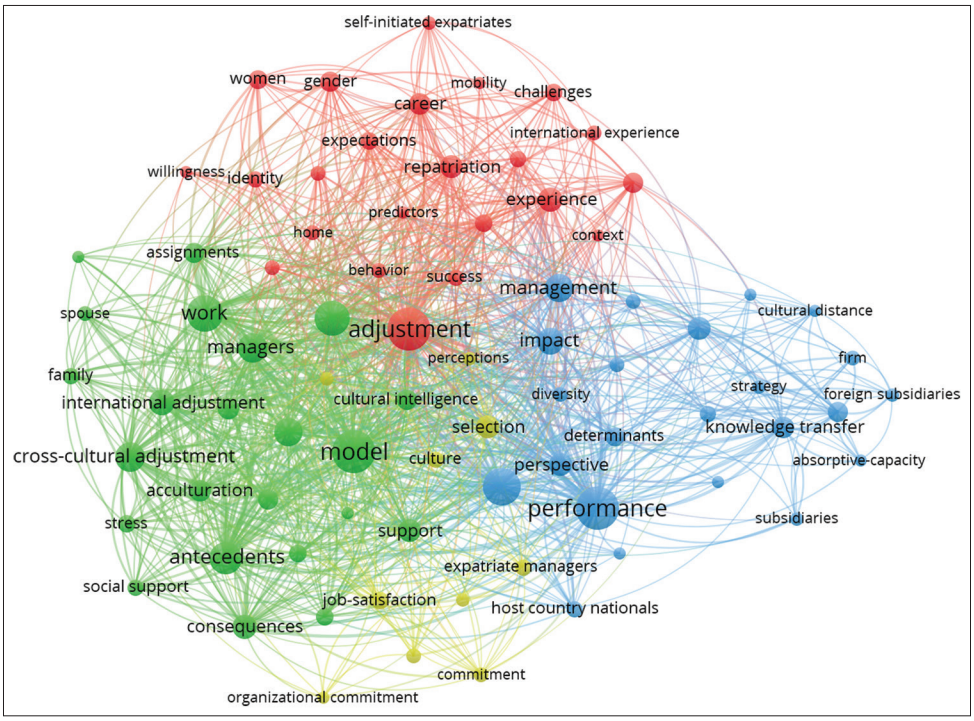
Source: summarized by authors

3. CO-OCCURRENCE AND CO-CITATION RESULTS

3.1 Structure of Topics in the Expatriate Area

The structure of the subject in the expatriate area was identified and demonstrated by co-occurrence analysis of keywords in published papers from 1997 to 2023. The detailed structure was illustrated in a network diagram (Figure 2), with the most notable keywords and connected metrics in each cluster demonstrated in Table 2. As shown in Figure 2, some prominent topics overshadow the field such as "adjustment" and "antecedent of the expatriate". "Performance" has grown significantly in the last decade and is now a prominent topic. Figure 2 also indicates that the concept of performance is still inconsistent, the terms expatriate performance, job performance, and performance are frequently used in this field. The result also showed the four main clusters that are associated with "strategic management of the cross-national companies" (cluster 1), "expatriate career" (cluster 2); "expatriate management" (cluster 3), and "cross-cultural adaptability of expatriates" (cluster 4).

Figure 2: The network visualization of keywords in the field of expatriate from 1997 to 2023. The circle size reflects the relative number of occurrences of a keyword, and the weight of the line indicates the frequency of keywords linked (set minimum to 2 for clarity). Cluster 1: Red, cluster 2: Green, cluster 3: Blue, and cluster 4: Purple.



Source: Summarized by authors

Table 2. The keyword by cluster

Cluster	Keyword
Cluster 1. Strategic management of the cross-national firms	Absorptive capacity (29); cultural distance (29); determinant (65); diversity (37); expatriate (231); firm (37); foreign subsidiaries (32); host country national (47); human resource management (88); impact (119); international HRM (24); knowledge (47); knowledge transfer (84); multinational-corporation (74); national culture (28); organizations (39); performance (300); perspectives (85); resources (25); strategy (35); subsidiaries (33).
Cluster 2: Expatriate career	Adjustment (308); Assignments (72); Behavior (37); Business (35); Career (81); Challenges (52); Context (28); Employees (41); Expatriation (72); Expectation (55); Experience (96); Gender (69); Home (40); Identity (43); International experience (36); Management (137); Mobility (26); Motivation (36); Repatriation (91); Self-initiated expatriate (35); Success (46); Willingness (26); Women (62).
Cluster 3. Expatriate management	Attitude (33); Commitment (40); Culture (49); Expatriate managers (47); Job satisfaction (55); Leadership (35); Organizational commitment (29); Perception (34); Selection (85); Turn over (39).
Cluster 4. Cross- cultural adaptability of expatriate	Acculation (78); Antecedents (181); Consequences (96); Cross-cultural adjustment (143); Cultural intelligence (74); Dimensions (71); Expatriate adjustment (131); Expatriate performance (28); Family (49); International adjustment (113); International assignment (207); Job performance (56); Managers (150); Perceived organizational support (53); Personality (76); Social support (47); Social-cultural adjustment (37); Spouse (39); Stress (56); Work (22).

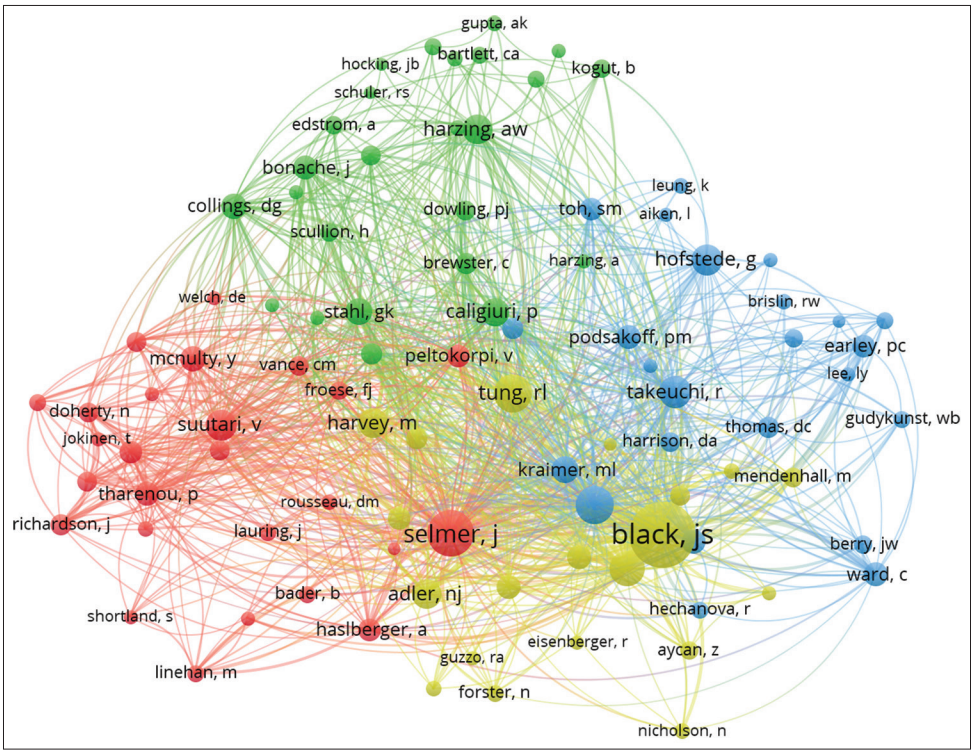
Source: Summarized by authors

Notably, some topics served as the field, such as "performance," "adjustment," "antecedents," and "international assignment," which took significant control of their clusters: Each has a high number of occurrences (300, 308, 181, 64 and 123, respectively). Other keywords represented satellite topics, such as "work," "resource," "organizational commitment," and "national culture," which were likely to be examined in a small setting within their cluster.

For the keyword co-occurrence analysis, a tremendous eigencentrality score showed that a keyword is associated with some mixture with a considerable number of other or imperative keywords. However, keywords with a low score were probably incidental to the range because those keywords are examined in a bit of background or little investigated. Therefore, they did not relate to other keywords. The level of a given keyword shows the field of other keywords connected with it; for instance, "performance" has a degree of 300, meaning it is associated with 300 other keywords (Figure 2).

As shown in Figure 3, co-citation analysis of the corpus produced a diagram of the papers cited as most dominant in the area grouped in five clusters. According to the diagram, there was an apparent similarity between the keyword clusters and the co-citation clusters; for example, articles in red (cluster 1) generally

Figure 3: A static image of the network visualization of co-citation analysis in the field of expatriates from 1997 to 2023. A minimum of 20 co-citations is set as the lower limit. The circle size shows the relative number of citations; the weight of lines indicates how often the articles are co-cited



Source: summarized by authors

corresponded to the blue cluster (cluster 3). Additionally, papers in the green clustered to a keyword (cluster 2), and those in the purple clustered to a keyword (cluster 4). Especially, Black and Gregersen (1991a; 1991b), Selmer and Fenner (2009), Tungli and Peiperl (2009), and Hofstede (1980) were the most influential researchers in cross-cultural and expatriate study. The following section showed the keyword cluster associated with the foundational papers recognized by a co-citation analysis.

3.2. Cluster Analysis and Discussions

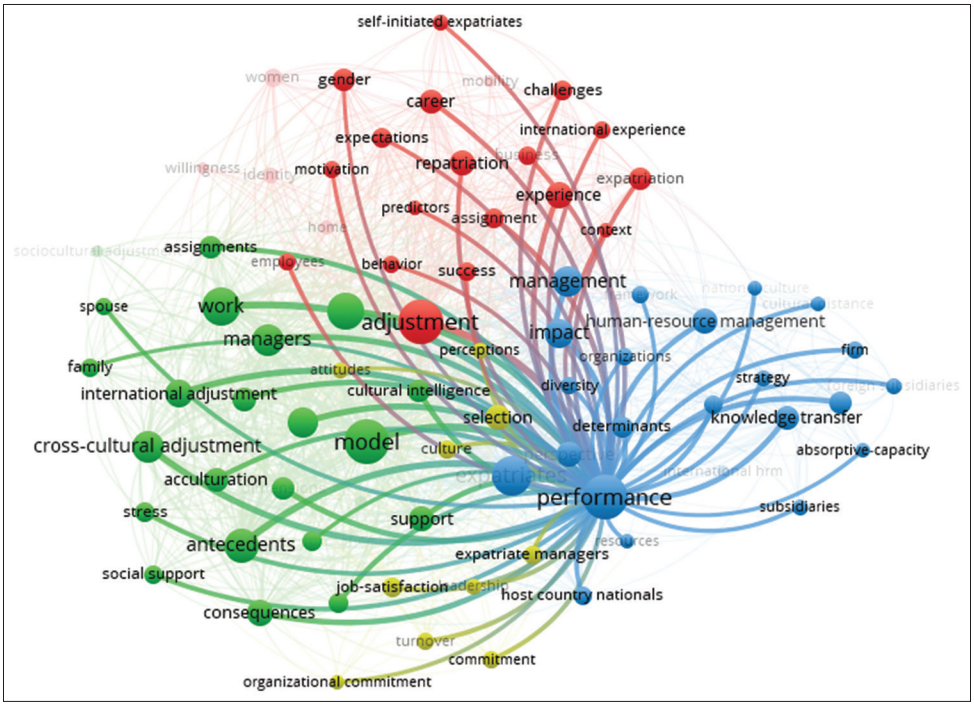
Cluster 1 strategic management of the cross-national firms (see Figure 4), one of the two main clusters in this study, was about 33% of the keywords in the diagram and focused on management and organization level in the field of the expatriate. The keyword "performance" was the leading keyword with 300 occurrences and associated with most of the other keywords in the cluster and another cluster. It indicated that the "performance" topic has gained much attention from previous and current studies. A kind of keywords in the cluster referred to expatriates and the management of multinational management such as "human resource management," "multinational-corporation," "foreign subsidiaries," and "strategy." This cluster was in line with the finding of of Andersen (2019) and the research direction by Edstrom and Galbraith (1977). Accordingly, the authors demonstrated that through successful sending expatriates to work abroad, multinational companies can control and follow their strategies, plans, and goals in foreign subsidiaries.

Cluster 2: Expatriates career (see Figure 5), cluster 2 referred to the various kinds of expatriates and the motivation that forces their expatriation, this study finding was also in line with the study of Andersen (2019). Cluster 4 was also correlated with cluster 1 (strategic management of the multinational company) and cluster 2 (adaptability to the host country).

Previous studies have paid much attention to the investigation of the term "expatriate." On the one hand, prior researchers have focused on the two main types of expatriates who were assigned for a specific period to work within the same organization in another country and who relocated on their plan and motivation to go abroad (Andersen, 2019; McNulty and Brewster, 2017; Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Tharenou, 2015). On the other hand, the expression and self-initiated expatriate keywords have occurred 72 and 35. "Adjustment," "challenge," "management," "gender," and "women" were other keywords in cluster 2. Similarly, these keywords were their great proportion of connections to keywords in cluster 4 (cross-cultural adaptability of expatriates), which showed that much attention was paid to the individual level rather than the organization level (Andersen, 2019). Another keyword in cluster 3 was "career," together with "experiences," "international experience," "motivation," and "willingness" demonstrated the critical reasons for their expatriation were to improve their international experience and develop their career (Andersen, 2019, Feldman and Thomas, 1992; Stahl et al., 2002). Additionally, these keywords have a significant connection with cluster 1 and cluster 4, emphasizing the relationship between individuals' careers and organizational context (Andersen, 2019).

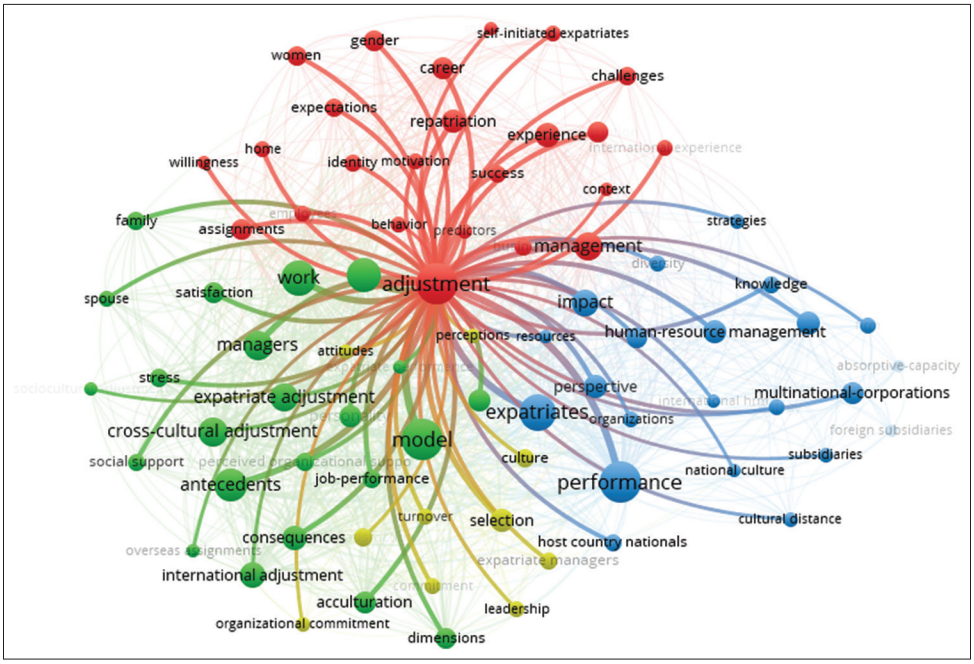
Cluster 3: Expatriate management (see Figure 6), was one of the minor clusters on the map, which referred to the individual level as investigated from a company's perspective. The central core

Figure 4: An enlarged section of Figure 1, where the cluster "*strategic management of the multi-national firms*" was highlighted



Source: summarized by authorsAnother theme of keywords in cluster 1 regarded "managing a company in an international environment context," "culture distance," "national culture" and "impact" were the most dominant keywords. Regarding these subjects, Hofstede (1980) was one of the key authors who demonstrated the cultural dimension. Central to these topics were the different dimensions of national culture in a longitudinal study among countries and continents. The results showed that Hofstede's research (cultural dimensions' theory) was the most influential finding in the field, which applied statistical analysis to examine the research questions. Anderson (2019) explained that culture can be one part of a resource for the significant importance and quantity of links of these keywords because the difference between domestic and multinational studies may be illustrated by cultural factors, for instance, the effect of culture on entry mode (Kogut and Singh, 1988) and work attitudes (Ronen and Shenkar, 1985)

Figure 5: An enlarged section of Figure 1, where the cluster "*expatriates career*" was highlighted



Source: summarized by authors

keywords in cluster 3, in terms of occurrence, were "attitude" (33); "commitment" (40); "culture" (49); and "organizational commitment" (29) which together with the keyword "selection," generally relate to the company's procedure of finding and recruiting a suitable employee for an oversea assignment (Andersen, 2019). Regarding its occurrence, the second group of keywords, "job

Figure 6: An enlarged section of Figure 1, where the cluster "*expatriate management*" was highlighted

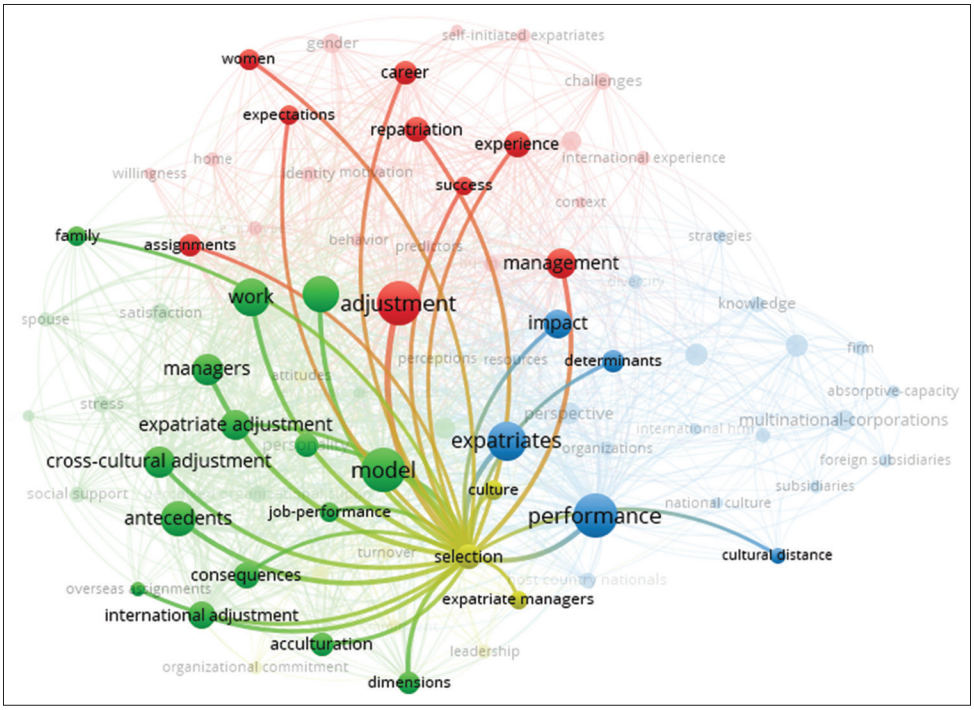
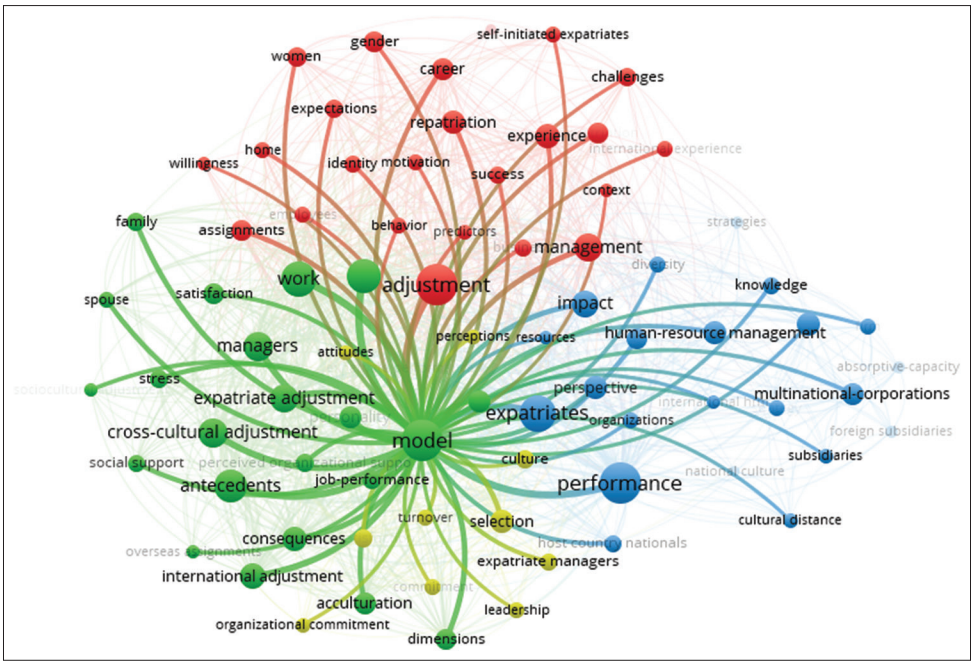


Figure 7: An enlarged section of Figure 1, where the cluster *"cross-cultural adaptability of expatriates"* was highlighted



Source: Summarized by authors

satisfaction" (55) and "leadership" (35) are also among the primary keywords in cluster 3. Together with the keyword "turn over," they related to the reason for the failure of an international assignment. However, what and why expatriates succeed or fail, was not easy to find an answer because it depended on who was involved in the examination process and the motivation of the given factor (Brewster et al., 2014) and remarkably on whether failure levels are correctly predicted (Harzing, 2002). Interestingly, this study identfied that most of international organizations are trying to figure several way to improve the expatriate's job satisfaction in order to increase their job performance and limit their turn over due to the high cost of their giving up international assignment.

Cluster 4: Cross-cultural adaptability of expatriates (see Figure 7),, cluster 4 was the other crucial cluster and related to expatriates on the personal level of analysis and the manner in which they communicated, interacted, and adjusted to the new cultural setting. "Cross-cultural adjustment," "expatriate adjustment," and "international adjustment" were the most dominant topics in cluster 4, occurring in 143, 131, and 113 research papers.

According to Andersen (2019), the measurement of cross-cultural adjustment was vital for a variety of different subjects, which indicated that they operate as both antecedents and consequences of cluster two and the remainder of clusters. Other keywords in cluster 4, such as "international assignment," "stress," "satisfaction," and "turnover," demonstrated the level of their cross-cultural adaptability to the cross-cultural working environment (Andersen, 2019; Bader and Schuster, 2015; Law et al., 2004). Cluster 4 was similar to the view and findings of previous studies (Andersen, 2019; Bjorkman and Welch, 2015; Takeuchi, 2010), which emphasized the critical role of recognizing the complicated situation where individuals are implanted. The keywords "perceived organizational support," "social support," "spouse," and "family" in cluster 4 related to how expatriates receive support from social and organizations for their daily life and their job (Andersen, 2019; Schuster and Bader, 2017; van Bakel, 2018). Individual differences including "cultural intelligence" and "personality" were also investigated to influence their adjustment ability (Andersen, 2019; Caligiuri, 2000; Mol et al., 2005; Shaffer et al., 2006). These keywords were associated with other keywords in this cluster, especially "international adjustment" and "cross-cultural adjustment." This finding was also in line with the recent finding of Andersen (2019).

As mentioned previously, performance was the most often studied subject in the area of expatriates, with articles published between 1997 and 2023 having this as a keyword, which showed sustained attention by researchers. The high occurrence scored for "job performance" (28), and "expatriate performance" (56). The main reason for the increasing attention to "performance" was that it was the main factor that decides the success of individuals and the competitiveness of the multinational organization. This study argued that expatriates and adjusting to the local environment will continue to be a major topic in the expatriate area based on the results of keywords in the expatriate area of research (Figure 3 and cluster 4). As a result, future studies can choose to focus on cluster 4 in order to develop a research model that includes new causes and consequences of expatriate competence and resilience, as well as contributing to the present literature in the expatriate area.

4. CONCLUSION

The current study makes several contributions to the field of expatriate management through using a bibliometric approach. The first contribution of this study is to determine how relevant topics in the field are structured. The structure includes a range of topics that generally cluster into four main groups: "Strategic management of the multinational company," "expatriate career," "expatriate management," and "cross-cultural adaptability of expatriates." Familiar topics, such as "adjustment," and "performance" are central topics in their respective clusters. Other topics have received recent attention and prominence in the analysis, which indicates there is a shift among these topics in the literature. For instance, one interesting keyword was identified is "self-initiated expatriates" that demonstrate the definition of expatriate has expanded and changed recently. In the past, traditional expatriates were considered as those who moved to another nation for a temporary job assignment with a multinational corporation or international organization (Berry and Bell, 2012). However, the idea has been broadened to include self-initiated expatriates, who are knowledgeable people who arrange their own travel and stay abroad with the aim of working there for a specific period of time (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014).

Another illustration is paying attention to resources in the host environment that relate to expatriate career success, as evidenced by the increase in phrases like"organizational commitment, and "turnover," and "repatriation." Although these topics are grouped together, they are interconnected significantly, showing an integrated research field, the keywords like "cross-cultural adjustment," and "expatriate's job performance" providing links between the clusters. This structural overview can assist new researchers in starting their work on the topic while giving more seasoned researchers the opportunity to come up with creative ways to integrate their findings across clusters and levels of study (Anderson, 2018). For instance, despite the fact that the majority of overseas assignments are successfully completed (Brookfield, 2012), expatriates and their families could have trouble adjusting to changes in social support, work status, culture, language, environment, and environment. Therefore, it is important to recognize characteristics that encourage positive adjustment in expatriate populations.

The third contribution consists of analyzing the ongoing scholarly debates, sometimes referred to as research fronts, in the literature. Four subjects are formed from the research fronts such as "international adjustment," "job performance," "expatriate performance," and "expatriate career success." Based on these debate topics, researchers may be motivated to investigate how to advance a particular discourse by being aware of the many intellectual discussions, or they may become aware of the absence of a conversation and raise a fresh concern (Andersen, 2019). Last but not least, similar to the other research using the bibliometric method, this study contributes the analytical graphics to which the researcher can download the maps as additional references. The findings are meant to stimulate the reader's thinking, show how to interact with the data, and, ultimately, inspire other academics to find, consider, and research novel and fruitful techniques to advance the field (Andersen, 2019).

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