Host Communication Competence, Host/Ethnic Interpersonal Communication, and Psychological Health in the Process of Cross-cultural Adaptation: A Study of Indonesian Expatriate Workers in South Korea

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Abstract: The present study examined the communication patterns and the adaptation experiences of Indonesian expatriates in South Korea. Based on Y. Y. Kim's (1988, 2001, 2005, 2012, 2015, 2018) Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation, four hypotheses were developed linking four key factors: host communication competence, host/ethnic interpersonal communication, and psychological health. Numeric data was collected in a questionnaire survey among Indonesian expatriates living in South Korea. As predicted, the results indicate that expatriates with higher levels of host communication competence and more active engagements in interpersonal communication with host nationals experience greater psychological health.

Keywords: Host communication competence, host/ethnic interpersonal communication, psychological health, Indonesian expatriates

1. Introduction

The business environment is increasingly global. To implement global corporate strategies and manage subsidiaries, many companies dispatch their employees across borders. The number of expatriate assignments has steadily increased over the last few decades and this trend is expected to continue (Appadurai, 2020; Meyer, 2017). As temporary sojourners, expatriate managers immerse themselves in and navigate an unfamiliar cultural environment in order to accomplish an assigned job with the intent of eventual return. The benefits of a successful expatriate assignment include increased international business in new markets, transferring corporate knowledge and developing local talent (Kraimer et al., 2016; McNulty & Brewster, 2020) as well as individual career progress through personal development and skill acquisition (Liang, 2021; Zhou, 2021). Conversely, an expatriate failure ("Early or premature return") can be detrimental to a multinational corporation's global business, including negative customer relations and extensive costs for the organization as well as potential career damage, stress and family conflicts for the expatriates themselves (Guttormsen et al., 2018; Nowak & Linder, 2016). The inability to adjust to a foreign cultural environment, rather than a lack of technical competence, has been noted as the major contributing factor for ineffective performance and even premature return (Ritchie et al., 2015; Stroh et al., 2005). When expatriate managers perform poorly but remain in their international assignment, this can have negative ramifications on the organization's performance, reputation, and relationships (Harzing, 1995).

For these reasons, expatriate adjustment has been extensively researched over the past few decades. Numerous studies have identified specific factors that promote expatriate adjustment, including individual job, organizational and situational issues (e.g., Chan et al., 2019; Malek et al., 2015), personality traits (e.g., Shaffer, 2006; Wang et al., 2019; Hua et al., 2020; Han et al., 2022), spousal or family adjustment (Shah et al., 2022; Trompetter et al., 2016), culture novelty (Stoermer et al., 2020), cultural intelligence (e.g., Guðmundsdòttir,

2015; Setti et al., 2020), previous experience (Takeuchi & Chen, 2013), and training (e.g., Caligiuri, 2000; Sokro et al., 2021; Tahir, 2021).

Along with these factors, Black and his associates proposed a conceptual model to examine the process and mechanisms of expatriate adjustment (Black et al., 1991). The model categorized three types of predictors of expatriate adjustment: individual characteristics (demographic characteristics and prior international experience), the context (spouse or family adjustment and cultural novelty), and job-related factors (job role clarity and greater role discretion). The model identifies three distinct dimensions of adjustment: (1) work adjustment: adjustment to job responsibilities and supervision and successful accomplishment of work goals; (2) interaction adjustment: adjustment to socializing and maintaining successful relationships with host nationals in a host country; and (3) general life adjustment: adjustment to the general environment, such as housing and food.

Even though the above-described studies and conceptual model offer useful information on many of the specific issues of practical concern, they are largely descriptive in approach without seeking to explain the sojourner adjustment phenomenon from a systematic theoretical perspective. Thus, the present study seeks to add clarity and depth to the current theoretical understanding of expatriate adjustment. We do so by employing Y. Y. Kim's (1988, 2001, 2005, 2012, 2015, 2018) Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation. Incorporating macro- and micro-level factors into a single, comprehensive communication framework, Kim's theory offers a multidimensional and multifaceted account of the cross-cultural adaptation phenomenon in which an individual's ability to communicate and engage with local people in the host country is explained as a key factor driving his/her successful adaptation.

2. Cultural Context of South Korea

Whereas most of the previous studies are on North American and European expatriates, this study investigates the adaptation experiences of Asian expatriates (i.e., Indonesians) residing in another Asian country (i.e., South Korea). Since the Indonesian-Korean strategic partnership agreement was signed in 2006, Indonesia has emerged as an important economic and diplomatic partner for the Korean government (Indonesia-Korea Partnership, 2017). At the time of this study, approximately 47,000 Indonesians resided in South Korea. Amongst them, 33,961 are Indonesian migrant workers, 1524 are students, and the rest include married people, professionals, and other categories (the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Indonesia, 2018). Korean society is one that is strongly tied to Confucianism and tends to exhibit the core value of collectivism, which establishes firm boundaries between in-groups and out-groups, accepts hierarchical relationships and is concerned about face saving, which leads to high-context communication.

2.1 In-Groups and Out-Groups: "Uri" (We) and "Nam" (Others)

Within collectivism, people not only put group interest over personal interests; they also treat in-groups and out-groups differently. According to Kohls (2001), Koreans tend to divide people "rigidly into insiders and outsiders." While Koreans tend to show collectivist behavior to in-group members such as attending to their needs, desires and goals, they tend to show individualistic behaviors to out-group members, because they are considered potential competitors rather than ordinary strangers (Hur & Hur, 1988). The concept of "*Uri*" ("we") and "*Nam*" ("others) clearly shows this tendency. In Korean language, **"*Uri*"** means "we", usually Koreans (i.e., in-groups) who share common traits while **"*Nam*"** are "others" (i.e., out-groups), foreigners or other people who do not belong to "*Uri*" community. For example,

in entering the Korean market, new foreign businesses face a potential barrier with a lack of blood, religious, or school ties to establish in-group networks. After adhering to cultural etiquette guidelines in order to build a sense of trust, which once developed, usually tends to long-lasting, they can be treated as in-group rather than out-group members (De Mente, 2004).

2.2 Hierarchy and Social Status

Based on Confucianism, which highlights unequal status relationships between people and a hierarchical social structure (e.g., Yum, 1987,1988), Koreans are sensitive to status differentials such as age, sex, family background, place of birth, and place of residence. The seniority-priority system also reflects this principle in the workplace (Lee & McNulty, 2003). In a similar vein, main traditional values in Korea include absolute loyalty to the hierarchy within the structure of authority, be it family, community, organization or nation (Choi & Wright, 1994). In this hierarchy, young businesspeople, for example, are not supposed to address their supervisor by only their name. Since position and status goes hand in hand, it is important for a person to address his/her boss's title and name together properly.

2.3 Face management: Chemyon and Nunchi

Like other Asian countries, face saving is one of the important core values in Korea. The Korean word, **Chemyon**, literally means face. More specifically it can be defined as" the prestige, pride, dignity, honor, and reputation related to one's position…it is living up to the expectations of others according to your-and your family's position and situation in society" (Oak & Martin, 2000, p. 30). Koreans are concerned about social recognition and how they are seen by others (by in-groups) (Shim et al., 2008) and immense efforts are made by individuals to avoid shameful occurrences that may cause themselves and others to lose **Chemyon** (Lee, 1999). Sometimes, foreign companies have difficulty fully understanding this concept. While in the U.S., companies criticize their competition through advertising and through media, in Korea it is highly inappropriate for businesses to criticize each other. Such comments are expected to be made in private (De Mente, 2001).

The concept **Chemyon** is linked to **Nunchi**, which can be defined as "social awareness" or "reading the room." Or it may be considered a type of "mind-reading" (Kim, 2003). **Nunchi** is used to discover another's unspoken "hidden agenda" by "reading between the lines" (Samovar & Porter, 2003); **Nunchi** is a form of high-context communication and it is often used to interpret and comprehend another's thoughts, intentions, feelings, and desires which are seldom verbally expressed (Kim, 2003). In communicating with Koreans in social or business contexts, a mutual understanding of both parties' **Nunchi** results not only in successful communication, but also in the maintenance and preservation of both parties' **Chemyon**.

2.4 High-Context Communication

As mentioned above, Korean communication styles can be characterized as high-context communication, which emphasizes that the communicators convey messages in an abstract, implicit and indirect manner, and meanings are interpreted based on intuition and contemplation of the audience (Cho, Kwon, Gentry, Jun, & Kropp, 1999). Thus, since meanings are implied and contingent on context, it is important for a person to read not only the words themselves but also understand context and nonverbal codes including silence or pauses. In this style of communication, influenced by Confucian ideology, preserving

harmony and trust in relationships lead to indirect communication, and the virtue of silence in conversations is often regarded as a sign of humbleness and modesty (Kim, 2003).

3. Kim's Integrative Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory

The present study uses key research variables based on Kim's (1988, 2001, 2005, 2012, 2015, 2018) Integrative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation. Offering the inclusive term, "strangers," to cover immigrants, refugees, and sojourners, Kim proposed that individuals, or "strangers" as "open systems" respond to drastic environmental challenges with psychological stress, better known as culture shock, to maintain equilibrium. The term "adaptation" is used broadly, embracing more specific terms such as assimilation, acculturation, integration and adjustment (Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p. 90).

The theory addresses two basic questions: (1) What is the essential nature of the adaptation process individual settlers undergo over time? and (2) Why are some settlers more successful than others in attaining a level of fitness in the host environment? To address the first question, in a process model, the theory explains cross-cultural adaptation as a long-term process of systematic change in the individual's psyche, a gradual psychic transformation involving a "stress-adaptation-growth interplay"—a movement of increased chances of success in meeting the demands of the host environment.

3.1 The Structural Model

In addition to the process model, Kim's theory offers a multidimensional structural model (See Figure 1) to address the second question: 'Why do some settlers adapt faster than others?' or 'Given the same length of time, why do some settlers attain a higher level of adaptation?' The structural model identifies key factors that may facilitate or impede the adaptation process in a culturally different environment. Emphasizing the centrality of communication as the crux of cross-cultural adaptation, the theory posits that the individual adapts to the host environment through various communication activities, ranging from intrapersonal (or personal) to social (interpersonal/mass communication), which are identified as the dimension of personal communication, or host communication competence (Dimension 1) and host social communication (Dimension 2). Kim (2001) describes host communication competence as the overall capacity of the stranger to decode and encode information in accordance with the host communication system. It consists of the cognitive, affective, and operational (or behavioral) capabilities of an individual, which is deemed as the very engine that makes it possible for an individual to move forward along the adaptive path. Host communication competence is inseparably linked with host social communication (Dimension 2), which is the degree of engagement in the host social communication system through interpersonal and mass communication activities of the host environment. Ethnic social communication (Dimension 3) involves interpersonal and mass communication with coethnics in the host society. There are three key conditions to the host environment (Dimension 4): host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength. The theory also recognizes the individual's predisposition (Dimension 5) which is the internal condition of strangers prior to their resettlement in the host society, consisting of preparedness for the new environment, ethnic proximity (or distance), and adaptive personality. The five dimensions of factors influence one another and, together, these factors facilitate or impede the overall process of intercultural transformation (Dimension 6) which includes three aspects, increased functional fitness, psychological health and intercultural identity. The level of intercultural transformation, in turn, helps to explain and predict the levels of all the other dimensions.
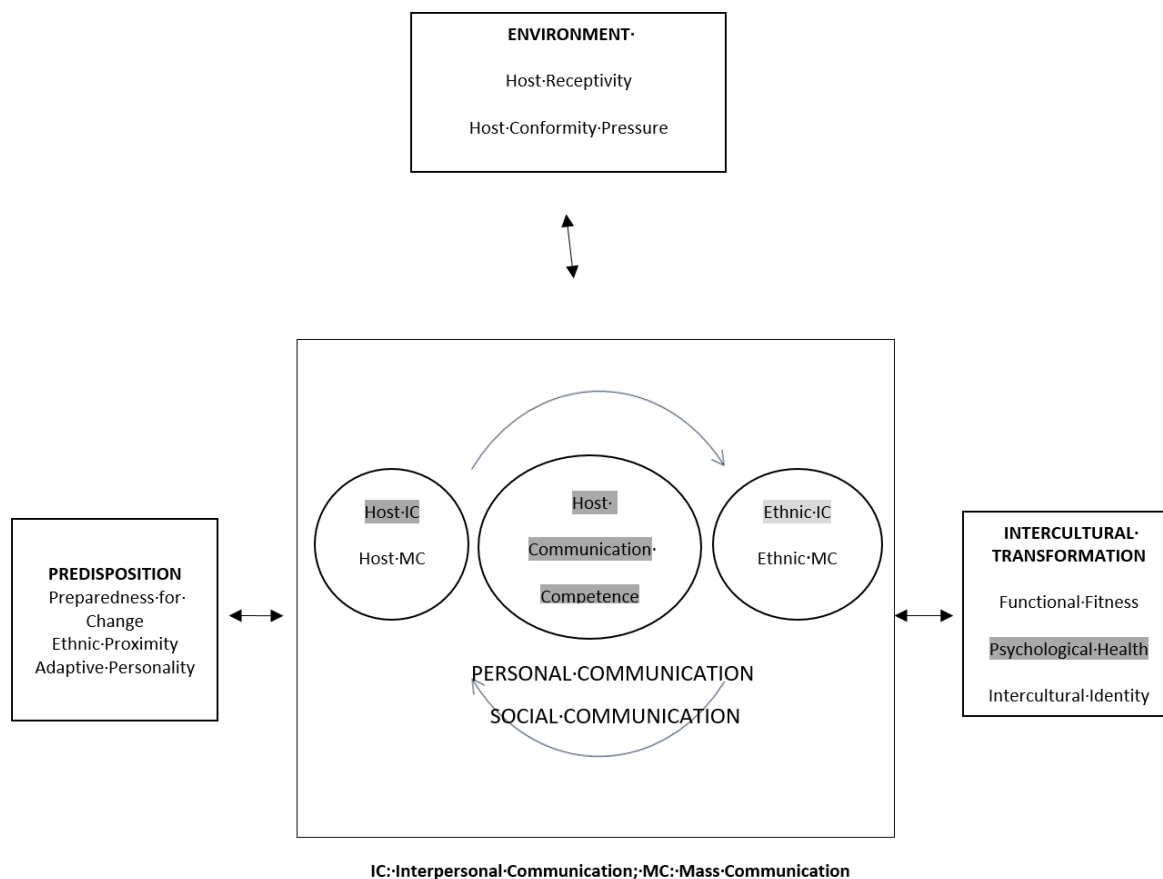
Figure 1. Y. Y. Kim's Structural Model: Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Adaptation. (Source: Y. Y. Kim, 2001, p. 87).

3.2 Hypotheses

The theoretical relationships among key constructs are presented in 21 theorems (See Kim, 2001, pp. 91–92). As highlighted in Figure 1, the present study examines four of these theorems addressing the four factors investigated: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, ethnic interpersonal communication and psychological health.

The four theorems are presented in their original numbering by Kim (2001) as follows:

Theorem 1. The greater the host communication competence, the greater the host interpersonal and mass communication.

Theorem 3. The greater the host communication competence, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).

Theorem 5. The greater the host interpersonal and mass communication, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).

Theorem 6. The greater the ethnic interpersonal and mass communication, the lesser the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity).

Based on these four theorems identifying the interrelationships between the four factors examined in this study, the following four research hypotheses were proposed.

H1: The host communication competence of expatriate workers is positively associated with their psychological health.

H2: The host interpersonal communication of expatriate workers is positively associated with their psychological health.

H3: The host communication competence of expatriate workers is positively associated with their host interpersonal communication.

H4: The ethnic interpersonal communication of expatriate workers is negatively associated with their psychological health.

4. Methods

To test hypotheses, the present study employed a standardized and self-administered questionnaire to collect numerical data from Indonesian expatriates in South Korea. The survey questionnaire consisted of demographic information (e.g., gender, age, length of stay, education, etc.) and main questions assessing research variables, followed by open-ended questions about perceived differences when working with Koreans, their different attitudes toward work and how to deal with these differences.

4.1 The Participants

The 81 Indonesian participants consisted of 43 expatriates working at companies in Korea and 38 students. All 38 Indonesian students were government workers in Indonesia who were working in agencies and companies in Korea while attending university as part of a government exchange program. This warranted the inclusion of this group of students into the category of expatriates. Their ages ranged from 19 to 40 ($M = 27$, $SD = 4.81$), with 45 (55.5%) male and 55 (67.9%) married. The educational degrees they had earned consisted of 35 undergraduate (43.3%), 16 graduate (19.8%), and 29 high school (35.9%). The lengths of residence in Korea ranged from one month to 12 years and eight months ($M = 2.42$ years, $SD = 2.08$). Regarding the Indonesian participants' prior intercultural experience, 17 (24.6%) had lived in a foreign country or countries, while 52 (75.4%) had no experience in a foreign country at all. About one-third of them (20, 30.3%) had received training prior to their assignment in South Korea (Refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Indonesian Expatriates ($N = 81$).

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	*n*	*%*	*M*	*SD*
Gender				
Male	45	55.5		
Female	36	44.5		
Age (in years)			27 [a]	4.81
Length of Stay (in years)			2.42 [b]	2.08
Education				
High School	29	35.9		
Bachelor's	35	43.3		
Master's	16	19.8		
Doctorate				
Marital Status				
(1) Married having having family in Indonesia (Korea)	55	67.9		
(2) Not Married	25	32.1		
Have prior intercultural experience	17	24.6		
Have prior training experience	20	30.3		

Types of training	
(1) intercultural training	9.1
(2) language training	45.5
(3) language/intercultural training	27.3
(4) others	18.2

[a] Range: 19–40 years. [b] Range: 1 month–12.08 years.

4.2 Data Collection Procedure

To recruit the participants, a combination of the convenience sampling method and the snowball sampling technique was used. Due to the inaccessibility and/or difficulties in obtaining cooperation with eligible respondents as a result of their tight work schedules, this method was a practical alternative to probability-based sampling.

In the absence of a comprehensive list of Indonesian expatriates residing in South Korea, the author contacted three organizations: The Indonesia Student Association in Korea, The Korea Muslim Federation Busan Branch, and the Asian-Korea Center in Seoul. Questionnaires were distributed in person and via email depending on accessibility to the organizations and the preferences of the participants. In the case that the author was allowed to visit a meeting of an organization, the questionnaires were administered and collected in person. If participants preferred email delivery, the questionnaires were distributed and collected using email. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed, of which 84 (56%) were completed and returned. Of the 84 questionnaires from Indonesians, 3 were excluded due to excessive unanswered questions, and the remaining 81 questionnaires were used for the present analysis.

4.3 The Questionnaire and Measurement Scales

An original version of the questionnaire was initially developed and pilot-tested among five Indonesian expatriates in South Korea. The wording of the questionnaire was refined based on comments and suggestions from the pilot study participants. The questionnaire was first written in English and translated into the Indonesian language ("*Bahasa Indonesia*") by an Indonesian bilingual interpreter. Following Brislin's (1980) method, the Indonesian questionnaire was then back-translated into English by the bilingual interpreter. Both English and Indonesian versions were also given to the Indonesian participants, and all the participants chose the Indonesian version.

The four theoretical constructs examined in the present analysis (host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, ethnic interpersonal communication and psychological health) were mostly operationalized into five-point Likert-type scales. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the scale reliability.

Host Communication Competence. Kim's theory identifies three dimensions of this construct: cognitive, affective, and operational. Each of these dimensions was assessed in the present study. To assess the cognitive dimension of host communication competence, respondents were asked to assess their *knowledge of host culture.* A five Likert-type scale was used (1 = not at all; 5 = completely): (1) "I understand Korean cultural norms"; (2) "I understand Korean cultural values"; (3) "I understand how Koreans communicate nonverbally, such as through facial expression and body language"; (4) "I understand how most Koreans express themselves verbally; and (5) "I understand Korean ways of thinking." A reliability test of the five-item scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91, suggesting a high level of internal consistency.

The affective dimension of host communication competence was measured with a five-point Likert-type scale of *adaptation motivation* (1 = not at all; 5 = very much). The five items were: (1) "How interested are you in understanding the way Korean people behave and think?"; (2) "How interested are you in making friends with Korean people?"; (3) "How interested are you in knowing about the current political, economic, and social situations and issues of Korea?"; (4) "How interested are you in learning Korean language?"; (5) "How interested are you in adapting to Korean culture?" The combined five-item scale yielded the Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.

The operational dimension of host communication competence was assessed by the *behavioral competence scale*, comprised of eight five-point Likert-type scale items (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree). The scale measured the participants' self-assessments of their effectiveness in communicating with and relating to local people in the host culture: (1) "I am able to avoid misunderstanding with Koreans"; (2) "I am able to achieve what I hope to achieve in my interactions with Koreans"; (3) "My communication usually flows smoothly when interacting with Koreans"; (4) "I can get my point across easily when I communicate with Koreans"; (5) "I am flexible enough to handle any unexpected situations when interacting with Koreans"; (6) "I have difficulty establishing personal relationships with Koreans"; (7) "I feel awkward and unnatural when I communicate with Koreans"; (8) "I find interactions with Koreans challenging." Because the last item did not highly correlate with the rest of the items, this item was dropped from the scale to improve reliability. The reliability tests yielded an alpha of 0.71.

Host/Ethnic Interpersonal Communication. Host and ethnic interpersonal communication were measured by the participant's interpersonal ties with host nationals as well as co-ethnics/other groups and the degree of intimacy of their informal and formal social relationships. The participants were asked to indicate the percentages of people with whom they had relationships in each group (e.g., Koreans, Indonesians, and others) and the corresponding levels of closeness (casual acquaintances, casual friends, close friends). The reliability test for *host interpersonal communication* yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.90. For *ethnic interpersonal communication*, the alpha coefficients were 0.86.

Psychological Health. The construct, *psychological health*, was assessed by six items pertaining to the overall sense of well-being (or lack of it) the participants were experiencing in the host environment: (1) "In general, how satisfied are you with your present life in Korea?"; (2) "In general, how comfortable do you feel living in Korea?"; (3) "How rewarding is your life in Korea?"; (4) "How satisfied are you with the attitudes of Korean people toward you?"; (5) "How satisfied are you with your relationships with Korean people?"; (6) "How satisfied are you with your experiences in Korean culture?" The combined six-item scale has yielded Cronbach's alphas of 0.83.

5. Results

The numeric data collected from the questionnaire survey was analyzed in two stages: (a) descriptive analysis to examine the distribution of data on the key research variables; and (b) statistical tests of the four research hypotheses.

5.1 Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis examined the distribution of data on the key research variables in terms of the means and standard deviations pertaining to the Indonesians (Refer to Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis on Key Research Variables for Indonesian expatriates.

Variables	Indonesian Expatriates (N = 81)	
	Mean	SD
Host Communication Competence		
-Knowledge of Host Culture	3.17	0.77
-Adaptation motivation	3.53	0.84
-Operational (behavioral) competence	3.22	0.51
Host Interpersonal Communication	21.24	15.98
-Casual Acquaintances	26.21	17.09
-Casual Friends	22.24	17.19
-Close Friends	16.28	18.10
Ethnic Interpersonal Communication	56.22	21.85
-Casual Acquaintances	51.17	20.81
-Casual Friends	54.85	24.97
-Close Friends	65.76	27.28
Psychological Health	3.36	0.71

Host Communication Competence. The three measures of host communication competence include *knowledge of the host culture* ("cognitive dimension"), *adaptation motivation* ("affective dimension"), and *operational competence* ("operational dimension"). The overall score of the participants is: *knowledge of the host culture* ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.77$); *adaptation motivation* ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.84$), and *operational competence* ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.51$).

Host Interpersonal Communication. The overall mean score of *host interpersonal communication* is 21.24 ($SD = 15.98$). In describing respective mean scores according to the level of intimacy, the Indonesian expatriates report an average of 26.21 Koreans ($SD = 17.09$) in the level of casual acquaintances, an average of 22.24 Koreans ($SD = 17.19$) in the level of casual friends and an average of 16.28 Koreans ($SD = 18.10$) in the level of close friends. The Indonesians tend to maintain the highest degree of relationships with host nationals (i.e., Koreans) on the casual acquaintance level.

Ethnic Interpersonal Communication. Conversely, Indonesian participants reported an overall mean score of *ethnic interpersonal communication*, 56.22 ($SD = 21.85$). In describing respective means scores according to the level of intimacy, the Indonesians reported an average of 51.17 Indonesians (coethnics) ($SD = 20.81$) in the level of casual acquaintances, an average of 54.85 Indonesians ($SD = 24.97$) in the level of casual friends and an average of 65.76 Indonesians ($SD = 27.28$) in the level of close friends. Obviously, Indonesian participants are prone to maintaining interpersonal relationships coethnics in the level of close friends.

Psychological Health. The mean score of psychological health is 3.36 ($SD = 0.71$), which shows that the level of satisfaction of Indonesia expatriates is slightly over "3."

5.2 Hypothesis Testing

To test the four hypotheses, a correlation analysis has been conducted to test the hypothesized interrelationships between the four theoretical constructs: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, ethnic interpersonal communication and psychological health (Refer to Table 3).

Table 3. Simple Correlation Coefficients (r) between Research Variables for Indonesians.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Host Communication Competence						
1. Knowledge of Host Culture	1					
2. Adaptive Motivation	0.56 **	1				
3. Operational (Behavioral) Competence	0.44 **	0.41 **	1			
Interpersonal Communication						
4. Host Interpersonal Communication	0.16	0.12	0.32 **	1		
5. Ethnic Interpersonal Communication	−0.08	−0.03	−0.09	−0.55 **	1	
6. Psychological Health	0.15	0.37 **	0.40 **	0.25 *	−0.14	1

Note: $* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01$.

Hypothesis 1. The first hypothesis posits that the host communication competence of expatriate workers is positively associated with their psychological health. This hypothesis is partially supported. The correlational analysis shows that two of the three host communication competence measures, adaptation motivation and operational competence, are statistically significant in their respective association with psychological health (r [adaptation motivation] = 0.37, $p < 0.01$; r [operational competence] = 0.40, $p < 0.01$; while the cognitive measure, knowledge of the host culture, is not (r = 0.15, $p > 0.05$). It suggests that for Indonesian expatriates in South Korea, cognitive knowledge of their host culture might not be a strong factor in facilitating their psychological health.

Hypothesis 2. The second hypothesis states that host interpersonal communication is positively associated with expatriate workers' psychological health. As predicted, the results of the correlational analysis clearly support this hypothesis. Correlational analysis reveals that there is a positive and statistically significant association between host interpersonal communication and psychological health (r = 0.25, $p < 0.05$). Obviously, regardless of the level of intimacy of relationships, maintaining interpersonal relations with host nationals (i.e., Koreans) tends to help Indonesians have more pleasant and comfortable experiences during their sojourn.

Hypothesis 3. The third hypothesis predicts the positive association between host communication competence and host interpersonal communication. This hypothesis is supported by the correlational analysis showing that all three dimensions are positively correlated with host interpersonal communication, although only one dimension, operational competence, is found to be statistically significant (r [knowledge of culture] = 0.16, $p > 0.05$; r [adaptation motivation] = 0.12, $p > 0.05$; r [operational competence] = 0.32, $p < 0.01$). This result suggests that the skills to carry out effective communication in their daily life tend to enhance meaningful relationships with host nationals (i.e., Korean people).

Hypothesis 4. The fourth hypothesis posits that ethnic interpersonal communication is negatively associated with psychological health. Although the correlation analysis shows that there is a negative relationship between ethnic interpersonal communication and psychological health, it is not statistically significant (r = −0.14, $p > 0.05$). This hypothesis is not supported. It appears that Indonesian expatriates' interpersonal ties with their coethnics tend to not have a significant impact on their psychological health.

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpretation of Findings

This study has investigated the host communication competence, host/ethnic interpersonal communication and psychological health of Indonesian expatriate workers in South Korea in their cross-cultural adaptation processes. Employing four of the 21 theorems in Kim's Integrative Communication Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation, four hypotheses were posed with respect to the interrelationships between host communication competence, host/ethnic interpersonal communication and psychological health.

Of the four hypotheses, three hypotheses have been supported. This study clearly indicates the positive relationships between individual expatriates' host communication competence (adaptation motivation and operational skills with respect to the host culture), and psychological well-being with respect to their quality of life.

The expatriates are more likely to be satisfied in their life overseas when they have higher adaptation motivation and competent behavioral skills. These findings are consistent with findings from previous studies of Korean expatriates (Kim & Kim, 2007; Kim & Koh, 2023; Kim & Lee, 2021) and Bosnian Refugees in the U.S. (Cheah et al., 2011). Other expatriate studies also reported that motivational (i.e., motivation and self-efficacy in functioning in diverse cultural settings), and behavioral (i.e., adoption of appropriate behaviors during cross-cultural interactions) dimensions of cultural intelligence (CQ) are important predictor variables to expatriate work adjustment (e.g., Setti et al., 2020). Expatriates high in motivational CQ tends to have confidence in their capabilities and intrinsic motivation to adjust to new workplaces (Khairunnisa, 2023; Palthe, 2004). Expatriates with greater behavioral CQ can use culturally appropriate expressions in communication, in addition to flexibly adapting their behavior to create comfort zones for the other individuals involved in cross-cultural encounters (Earley & Peterson, 2004). This ability facilitates communication with host colleagues and reduces the risk of cross-cultural misunderstandings (Ang et al., 2007), which results in better work adjustment.

Additionally, active engagement in interpersonal communication with members of the host society was found to contribute to expatriate adjustment. These findings are consistent with previous studies that reported that building and maintaining relationships with host nationals is a significant predictor of expatriate adjustment (e.g., Chan et al., 2021; Kim & Koh, 2023; Kim & Lee, 2021; Pustovit, 2020). Numerous studies revealed that network ties with host nationals tend to provide expatriates with the support and resources they need in order to adjust (e.g., Bader, 2017; Toh & Denisi, 2007; Varma et al., 2016). Particularly, host interpersonal network ties provide expatriates with "information support", the information that assists expatriates' functioning and problem solving in the host country, as well as "emotional support", which are the emotional resources that help expatriates feel better about themselves and their situation when adjustment difficulties become overwhelming (e.g., Johnson et al., 2003).

Contrary to the theoretically hypothesized prediction, Indonesian expatriates' ethnic interpersonal communication tends to not affect their psychological health. Numerous studies, however, revealed that reliance on ethnic networks has been found to be associated with reliance on nonstandard language (Gal, 1978), a lack of sociocultural adaptation to the host milieu (Ward & Kennedy, 1994) and negative relationships with psychological well-being (Kim et al., 1998a, 1998b). While the relatively stress-free ethnic communication activities offer temporary relief, it is likely to impede adaptation even further when strangers rely on it for a prolonged period beyond the phase of initial settlement. To acquire the host culture (acculturation) means to lose at least some of the original cultural patterns

(deculturation) (Kim, 2001). If we conducted a longitudinal follow-up study it would be necessary to reexamine this issue.

6.2 Practical Implications

The findings of the present study have significant practical implications for the management of expatriate workers in multinational corporations. Given that successful cross-cultural adaptation is an immediate determinant of successful job performance for expatriates (e.g., Hassan & Diallo, 2013; Wang & Tran, 2012; Zakariya et al., 2019), multinational organizations can offer carefully designed training programs to help their employees successfully adjust to an unfamiliar cultural environment.

Using this program, multinational corporations could help their employees acquire a sufficient level of host communication competence, particularly the skills necessary to carry out appropriate and effective daily communication activities with members of the host society (operational dimension). Considering the role of host interpersonal ties in expatriates' adjustment, multinational organizations should educate their employees on how to develop meaningful relationships with host nationals as well as foster social interactions with local colleagues.

6.3 Limitations and Considerations for Future Studies

Future investigations of expatriate adjustment need to address the shortcomings in the present study in terms of sampling and measurement scales. With respect to sampling, we used a relatively small and non-probability sampling due to difficulties in accessing the two groups of research populations. More time and effort would be needed to secure larger and more representative samples selected through a probability sampling method. Researchers also need to be prepared to devote a sufficient amount of time in order to be able to identify and develop personal contacts in various companies. In this way, research team members can distribute and collect survey questionnaires in person, and conduct on-site one-on-one interviews over an extended period of time.

With respect to the quantitative measurement, the scales assessing the research variables (three categories of host communication competence, host/ethnic interpersonal communication and psychological health) have been found satisfactorily reliable, with the alpha coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.91. One of these six scales, the behavioral competence scale, shows the alpha coefficients, 0.71, which is lower than the commonly accepted level, 0.80. Further efforts are needed to improve the reliabilities of this scale for greater confidence in drawing conclusions about the theoretical relationships involving this variable.

In regards to statistical analysis, other than correlations, more sophisticated statistical analysis could have been conducted to further analyze the relationships among focal theoretical variables. A relatively small sample size, however, did not make this plausible. A future study based on a larger sample size could warrant this type of analysis.

7. Conclusions

Whereas most of previous studies examined Western expatriates sojourning in non-Western countries and vice versa, the present study has focused on a non-Western group of expatriates in another non-Western country, offering some insight into the adaptation experiences in a non-Western cultural context. This study clearly highlights the centrality of communication, "the very engine" that drives the process in which each expatriate is able to navigate a new

and unfamiliar culture and, thereby, shapes the quality of his or her adaptive efforts (Kim, 2001, p. 97).

For individual expatriates, crossing cultural boundaries can be a significant and even transformative event. Life in a foreign land is filled with eye-opening and often stressful experiences that challenge their existing cultural assumptions and expectations. Yet, through new learning and active interpersonal engagements, most expatriates will gain insights into the new environment through which they can carry out their daily tasks as expatriate workers. In so doing, they may also find themselves partaking in a journey of personal development— a psychological movement in the direction of a deepened sense of self-efficacy and an expanded perspective on work, culture, and humanity itself in our globalizing world.

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