Exploring the Perceptions and Experiences of International Doctoral Students and Expatriates from Education and International Human Resource Management Perspectives

Abstract

Purpose The study addresses two related research questions. First, what complementary themes are evident in education and international human resource management (IHRM) literature, which are relevant to the challenges faced by international doctoral students and expatriates? Second, to what extent do the self-reported perceptions and experiences of international doctoral students studying in the UK reflect these key themes?

Design The methods adopted for this study were primarily qualitative in nature. An open inquiry approach involving semi-structured interviews with 33 participants was used to generate primary data and to draw out key findings.

Findings The findings reveal the potential for multi-disciplinary research designed to provide insights into key success factors involving both expatriates in host-country settings and international doctoral students in educational settings. For example, the findings highlight the potential relevance of education literature to scholars and practitioners working in the field of IHRM with reference to issues such as working in a second language, receiving oral and written feedback from supervisors in cross-cultural settings supervision, and the performance management of expatriates.

Originality The study makes an original contribution by demonstrating the extent of the compatibility between research studies in the field of education focused upon the perceptions and experiences of international doctoral students, and IHRM research into expatriates and their management.

Keywords Higher education; international doctoral students; international human resource management; expatriates; socialisation; cross-cultural; internationalisation;

Introduction

The internationalisation of Higher Education, particularly in English-speaking countries, has been well documented (R'boul, 2022; Robson & Wihlborg, 2019; Tight, 2022). One aspect of this internationalisation directly relates to decisions made by relatively large numbers of students to move across national boundaries to complete programmes of Higher Education. Data published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2024) reveal the extent to which international students, that is, students who received their prior education in another country, enrol on tertiary-level education programmes in host countries. The data highlight that countries, such as Australia, Austria, Canada, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom are hosting international students in relatively large numbers as viewed as a proportion of the total number of students enrolled in their tertiary level education systems (HESA, 2024).

Yang & MacCallum (2021:1) note that international student mobility is particularly prevalent in the field of doctoral education in which "*talented individuals have been pursuing doctoral education opportunities abroad*". Arguably, this pursuit of doctoral education by such individuals is linked to broader trends associated with globalisation. Kidman, Manathunga & Cornforth (2017:1208) state that international knowledge markets now rely on: "*... a ready supply of highly mobile doctoral students, many of whom are from the global South, to bring in revenue.*" This observation serves to highlight economic considerations associated with the recruitment and education of international doctoral students. Despite the potential benefits that

may accrue to national and global markets from international students' participation in doctoral programmes, there is a body of literature that has raised concerns about the multi-perspective challenges that exist when international students engage with doctoral programmes (Khozaei et al., 2015; Robinson-Pant, 2009). Aside from primarily research-centred concerns, other authors have drawn attention to issues linked to the socialisation processes,which international students are required to navigate (Lopez, 2021). For example, Soltani & Tomlinson (2024) highlight that language socialisation processes need to be navigated by international students during their studies to enhance their post-study employability in labour markets. Thus, it is emphasised that these challenges relate not only to academic success but extend into areas such as personal development and employability. This line of reasoning is evident in studies which have highlighted the need for students to develop socially sustainable characteristics '*to align with changing employer demands*' (Mohan et al. 2025: 1).

Prior studies have recognised that, as a result of facing these challenges, international doctoral students have acquired valuable knowledge which, if harnessed, can be utilised by various stakeholders. For example, in their study of doctoral students in the United Arab Emirates, David & Hill (2021: 574) conclude that: "*The experiences and perspectives of the postgraduate scholars on teaching and learning offer relevant insights for postgraduate learners, academics, researchers, curriculum developers and policymakers*". In broadening this perspective, we highlight that international human resource management (IHRM) literature has also explored challenges faced by individuals, that is, expatriates, who are engaging in professional work outside of their home countries. Undoubtedly, distinctions do exist between expatriates and international doctoral students. These distinctions involve factors such as employment status, sponsorship, reporting relationships, access to support mechanisms, the individual's legal status when living in the host country, and career trajectory (Li et al., 2021; Pinnington et al., 2022). Yet, when scoping this study, we found little evidence to indicate that literature on the reported experiences of international doctoral students is being systematically interrogated in IHRM literature to provide insights into the challenges faced by expatriates. Similarly, even though international doctoral students are required to adopt cross-cultural adaptation strategies (Li & Zhang, 2023; Lopez, 2021), we found little evidence to indicate that IHRM literature is being systematically interrogated in education literature to gain insights into how best to prepare, support and manage international doctoral students. This is somewhat surprising given that both international doctoral students and expatriates are required to engage in professional activities in a country other than their home country.

The main aim of this study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of international doctoral students and expatriates from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Thus, the study addresses two related research questions. First, what complementary key themes are evident in education and IHRM literature that are relevant to the challenges faced by international doctoral students and expatriates? Second, to what extent do the self-reported perceptions and experiences of international doctoral students studying in the UK reflect these key themes?

Literature Review

IHRM, globalisation and the management of expatriates

When considering education studies which have sought to identify key factors that are likely to arise at various stages of the students' experiences in unfamiliar international settings (Deem, 2022), we postulate that these studies may resonate with emergent themes in IHRM business and management literature. While the definition and scope of IHRM remain widely debated, Schuler & Tarique (2007: 718) provide a helpful and oft-cited description of IHRM.

They state that: "*the field of IHRM is about all HR activities in their internal and external contexts as they impact the processes of managing HRs in organizations throughout the global environment to enhance the experience of multiple stakeholders*". As such, IHRM is inextricably associated with globalisation (Sanders & De Cieri, 2021). Other writers take a similar stance when highlighting the centrality of the global environment and globalisation when discussing themes in IHRM research (Ererdi, 2022). In the light of increasing levels of globalisation over recent decades, the management of expatriates has emerged as a topical theme in IHRM literature (Apriyanti, Huchings, & Mcphail, 2021).

Expatriation is directly connected to employee mobility and involves a worker who is deployed in a "foreign country" (Andresen, Goldmann & Volodian, 2018: 315). McNulty & Brewster (2018) clarify the term business expatriates as people who are working (as opposed to say studying or retired) in a country, other than their own declared country, for a defined period of time. There is also wide-scale recognition that expatriate assignments are often problematic. For example, IHRM frequently grapples with expatriates' turnover intentions and the scale of the reported failure rates that are associated with expatriation (Benson & Pattie, 2009; Harzing, 1995; Shah, et. al., 2022). IHRM literature is replete with studies which have sought to address success and failure-related topics such as homesickness (Hack-Polay & Mahmoud, 2021); family adjustment (Shah et. al, 2022); stress, external support and coping strategies (Haist & Kurth, 2022); expatriates' maladjustment (McNulty et al., 2019); social support (Canhilal et al., 2022); pre-departure and post-arrival cross-cultural training (Okpara et al. 2020); and the role of home and host supervisors in expatriate success (Benson & Pattie, 2009). At the preliminary level of analysis, a number of these topics reflect issues raised in education literature about the challenges facing international doctoral students. Indeed, the occasional use of the phrase "*expatriate PhD students*" in education literature (Delicado, 2016) to describe doctoral students who cross national borders to embark on a research degree does offer preliminary support for exploring potential synergies that may exist between these disciplinary fields. In addition, there have been longstanding observations made in education literature, which point to the analogies that exist between, for example, doctoral supervision and management in business settings (Vilkinas, 2002).

Themes and keywords evident in IHRM literature

In attempting to explore IHRM theory with reference to the field of international doctoral education, we highlight studies in IHRM literature that have focused on various aspects of expatriate management. For example, in a systematic review of studies on expatriate-local interactions, van Bakel (2019) presents a framework that includes both the antecedents and outcomes of expatriate-local interactions at the individual, dyadic, group, and societal levels. In a complementary analysis, Andersen (2021) isolated central keywords from a corpus of N=1650 articles in expatriate literature and proceeded to group these keywords into four clusters. Cluster 1, labelled as '*adapting to the local environment*', included keywords such as 'adjustment, 'cross-cultural adjustment', 'expatriate performance', 'host-country nationals', 'turnover' and 'perceived organisational support'. Cluster 2, labelled as '*strategic management of international organization*', included keywords such as, 'multinational companies', 'HRM', 'culture', 'knowledge management', ,subsidiaries', 'managers' and 'cross-cultural communication'. Cluster 3, labelled as '*managing expatriates*', included keywords such as 'repatriation', 'cross-cultural training', 'IHRM' and 'organizational support'. Cluster 4 ,

labelled as '*expatriates' context*', included keywords such as, 'career', 'self-initiated expatriate', 'female expatriates', 'motivation', 'mentoring', and 'family'.

While some of these keywords in IHRM literature (such as multi-national companies and subsidiaries) appear to have marginal relevance to international doctoral programmes and students, others (such as adjustment, culture, and mentoring) also feature prominently in education literature focused on international doctoral students (for example, see Haist & Kurth, 2022; Mason & Hickman, 2019; Yang & Bai, 2020). What remains unclear is the extent to which the full range of keywords prevalent in IHRM literature resonate with themes found in the literature on international doctoral students such as withdrawal, supervision, and completion rates (see, Devos et al, 2017; Gao, 2019; Kidman, Manathunga, & Cornforth, 2017; Stephens, 2014; Sverdlik et al. 2018). This question raises the intriguing possibility of establishing broader multi-disciplinary work into the challenges and difficulties faced by both international doctoral students studying in Higher Education settings and expatriates working for MNCs in host country contexts.

In summary, globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education are characteristics of the field of doctoral education in which international doctoral students travel to host countries to embark on doctoral programmes. Literature in the field of education has explored a plethora of issues faced by these students as they study in unfamiliar cross-cultural contexts. In the field of IHRM, in-depth literature reviews on cross-cultural issues involving expatriate workers have been presented by authors such as van Bakel (2019), Andersen (2021), and Fee et al, (2015). Notably, with reference to research question 1, reviews of this nature provide preliminary evidence of the potential relevance of education studies focused on challenges faced by international doctoral students to key strands of enquiry found in IHRM literature. Hence, in following sections of the paper, we proceed to focus primarily on research question 2, using primary data gathered from interviews with international doctoral students.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was identified as an appropriate methodology to address research questions regarding the perceptions and experiences of international doctoral students. A qualitative strategy allows the experiences of the participants to be expressed, while minimising the obligation of the expectations or values of the researchers (Merriam & Grenier, 2009). We aimed for an open approach to inquiry, allowing for a description of the complex, lived experiences of participants within various doctoral business and management programs. The authors are aware of a great diversity of doctoral supervision practice and experiences, even within a department or faculty (Rees & Rowlands, 2021). Therefore, this study adopted a qualitative methodology to bring forward the experiences of international doctoral students and to capture their context-specific understanding of their institutional reality. In order to guide the semi-structured interviews, we devised questions around established themes found in studies focused on the experiences of international PhD students (see Table 1).

(Take in Table 1)

A convenience sampling strategy was adopted to maximise the number of participants (Robinson, 2014). Due to the exploratory nature of the study, this approach was judged appropriate to generate rich data as it allows participants to share their experiences in relative depth. Face-to-face one-on-one interviews were then held on multiple university campuses.

The interviews were conducted in English and lasted for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. They were recorded and later transcribed by the authors. Thus, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 33 doctoral research students studying business and management-related topics on a full-time basis in multiple Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within the UK. The sample of 33 included 17 females. 18 of the participants were under 30 years of age. The sample included participants from 12 non-UK countries, with 18 of the 33 participants originating from China. Eight participants were in the second year of their PhD studies; five were in their third year; 14 were in their 4th year; three were in their 5th year; and three were in their sixth year. In their study of the internationalisation of doctoral education, Olenina et al. (2023) highlight factors such as the prominent role of the UK in global doctoral education, the numerical dominance of research-led doctoral programmes over taught doctoral programmes, and the relatively strong representation of Chinese doctoral students in subject areas such as business and administration. Given the exploratory nature of our study, these contextual factors offer additional explanation and a degree of support for the methodology we adopted, including the choice of geographical focus of the study, the sampling strategy and the profile of the participants.

Having generated interview data based on themes from education literature (see Table 1), we sought to map summative interview data against the four clusters of keywords identified in expatriate literature by Andersen (2021) to explore the relevance of these clusters to the self-reported perceptions and experiences of international PhD students studying in the UK.

Findings

IHRM Keywords Cluster One: Adapting to the local environment

The interviews with international PhD students generated responses that were directly relevant to Andersen's (2021) Cluster One, which is focused on '*adapting to the local environment*'. More specifically, a number of interviewees expressed their perceptions about socialising in the UK and, on occasions, how they adapted their behaviour based on the perceptions they hold about the local environment. The data provide evidence that, as international PhD students, the interviewees were making assessments about the local environment and local people during their time in the UK. These assessments of the local environment involved a range of issues including religion, ways of speaking and language, social customs, traditions, and levels of formality. The emergent themes from the interviews which are presented in Table 3 reveal the extent to which '*adapting to the local environment*' keywords, which Andersen (2021) found in IHRM expatriate literature, resonated with the interview data generated by the international PhD students studying in the UK.

(Take in Table 2)

As indicated in Table 2, there was, predictably, a degree of divergence surrounding the emphasis placed by the international PhD students on the relative importance on subjects linked to various keywords associated with '*adapting to the local environment*'. For example, aspects of the interview data often related directly to IHRM keywords such as '*language*' and

'*psychological well-being*'. In contrast, it was more difficult to link the IHRM keyword '*job satisfaction*' to emergent themes from the interview data.

IHRM Keywords Cluster Two: 'Strategic Management'

Table 3 reports the cluster of keywords found in IHRM expatriate literature which Andersen (2021) placed in Cluster Two entitled '*strategic management*'. While the relevance of strategic management to the experiences and behaviour of international doctoral students may not be immediately apparent, examination of the keywords in this cluster provides some justification for further analysis of the cluster's relevance to doctoral programmes and students. These keywords include, for example, '*knowledge transfer*', '*learning*', and '*internationalisation*'. The emergent themes from the interviews which are presented in Table 3 provide further insights into the extent to which '*adapting to the local environment*' keywords, which Andersen (2021) found in IHRM expatriate literature relate to the interview data generated by the international PhD students studying in the UK.

(Take in Table 3)

The contents of Table 3 provide evidence of the extent to which '*strategic management*' keywords identified by Andersen (2021) are potentially relevant to international doctoral students. For example, the interview data covering topics such as the students' perceptions of doctoral studies as experience of a global setting and the impact of the global pandemic, manifestly relate to the broader topic of globalisation. Similarly, the keyword of '*control*' can be applied to issues such as the UK Border, visa, and attendance monitoring, all of which were raised by the international students during the interviews. Notably, it was more difficult to match readily elements of the interview data to the keyword '*cross-cultural management*'.

IHRM Keywords Cluster Three: 'Expatriate Management'

The contents of Table 4 report the cluster of keywords found in IHRM expatriate literature which Andersen (2021) placed in Cluster Three entitled '*Expatriate Management*'. The exploration of interview data provided indications of the relevance of a number of these keywords to doctoral programmes and international doctoral students studying in the UK. For example, in relation to the keyword '*recruitment and selection*', IHRM literature is heavily focused on how business organisations, such as MNCs, recruit and select people for expatriate assignments. Notably, our interview data highlight the potential relevance of this IHRM keyword to the individualised perspectives of doctoral candidates.. That is, in the case of doctoral programmes, the focus on recruitment and selection has the potential to provide insights into the motivations and challenges faced by international doctoral students rather than primarily focusing on universities that are seeking to recruit doctoral students.

(Take in Table 4)

The contents of Table 4 further illustrate the potential relevance of IHRM Cluster Three Keywords to international doctoral programmes and students. It is highlighted that the potential applicability of certain IHRM Keywords on *Expatriate Management*, such as '*cross-cultural training*' and '*recruitment and selection*' was readily apparent when exploring the interview data.   In contrast, associations between IHRM Keywords such as '*repatriation*' and '*international management*' were more difficult to isolate from the data generated from the interview questions put to the international doctoral students.

IHRM Keywords Cluster Four: 'Expatriates' Context'

As can be seen from Table 5, IHRM Keywords falling under the heading '*Expatriates Context*' (Andersen, 2021) relate to subjects such as '*career*', '*gender diversity*', '*mentoring*' and '*family*'. Arguably, the relevance and applicability of these themes to international doctoral students were manifest across the interview data. It was notable, however, that the interview data generated by the questions listed did not resonate as clearly with other IHRM Keywords such as '*self-initiated expatriate*', '*gender diversity*', and '*non-traditional expatriates*' (see Table 5).

(Take in Table 5)

In contrast, the contents of Table 5 also demonstrate the extent to which some of the themes that are commonly found in educational literature on international doctoral education, such as supervision, motivation to study, and family considerations, can be associated readily with keywords that are prevalent in IHRM literature (Andersen 2021).

Discussion of Findings

In relation to research question 1, our review of IHRM literature drew us towards the four themes identified by Andersen (2021), that is: (a) '*adapting to the local environment*'; (b) '*strategic management*'; (c) '*expatriate management*'; and (d) '*expatriates' context*' (Andersen, 2021). It is notable that the relevance of themes such as '*strategic management*' and '*expatriate management*' to international doctoral students may not be immediately apparent to stakeholders such as international doctoral students and their supervisors. Nevertheless, when grouping our interview data using these themes in order to address research question 2, the potential overlap between aspects of the themes and the self-described perceptions and experiences of doctoral students emerged (see Tables 2 to 5 above).

In overall terms, key themes found in IHRM literature resonated with the self-described perceptions and experiences of the international doctoral students we interviewed. For example, the IHRM theme of '*strategic management*' emerged when the interviewees expressed views about the doctoral training they had received, their desire to publish their research findings, and visa considerations. Similarly, within the '*managing expatriates*' IHRM theme, interview data covering topics such as admissions and the students' expectations readily mapped against IHRM keywords and phrases such as '*recruitment and selection*' and '*psychological contract*' (see Table 4).   Hence, consideration of the IHRM keyword '*recruitment and selection*' from the perspective of international doctoral students is likely to encompass factors such as the cost of studying, the stringency of application processes, language requirements, perceived cultural benefits accruing to international doctoral students, and prior knowledge of an educational system. One of the practical implications of this finding is that, in the light of IHRM studies, it may be advisable for universities to review their

recruitment literature for doctoral programmes to assess the extent to which this recruitment literature addresses these emergent concerns. Likewise, the IHRM theme '*adapting to the local environment*' was reflected in the interview data at points where the interviewees discussed issues such as the impact of their previous studies on their ability to adjust to life as a doctoral student, their interactions with host-country nationals, and homesickness. Consideration of IHRM studies on these topics may offer valuable practice-oriented insights and direction to university staff engaged with activities such as induction training, personal development initiatives and counselling programmes for international doctoral students. Thus, our findings provide additional impetus to revisit subjects such homesickness among doctoral students from a multi-disciplinary perspective to understand more fully its identification, prevention, and management among international doctoral students (Gao, 2019; Hack-Polay, 2020).

We emphasise that multi-disciplinary work involving IHRM and education research is likely to involve areas in which lessons drawn from prior research into international doctoral education may prove to be highly relevant to IHRM scholars and practitioners. For example, there have been numerous studies in the field of doctoral education which have explored subjects such as working in a second language, receiving oral and written feedback from supervisors in cross-cultural settings, and the performance of both international doctoral students and their supervisors (Åkerlind & McAlpine, 2017; Lindahl et al., 2021; Odena & Burgess, 2017). Our findings provide a preliminary basis for investigating the extent to which education studies of this nature have the potential to offer insights to researchers and practitioners in the field of IHRM, particularly as they relate to activities focused on expatriates such as cross-cultural teamwork initiatives, management development programmes and performance management

When focusing more specifically on keywords and phrases within IHRM research themes, it was, at times, difficult to identify their direct relevance to the interview data. Specifically, it proved difficult to identify obvious resonance between the interview data and keywords and phrases such as '*repatriation*' and '*self-initiated*' which are prevalent in IHRM literature (Wechtler et al. 2023; Xiang et al. 2023). While studies in IHRM literature on '*repatriation*' may have potential relevance to studies into attrition rates among doctoral students (Gardner, 2008), our interview data did not highlight obvious links between these terms. Thus, despite the overlaps and resonance that we have identified between certain themes and keywords found within IHRM and the perceptions and experiences of international doctoral students, we also identified examples of distinctive emphases within IHRM literature, which may, at best, be indirectly relevant to the field of doctoral education. Yet, the fact that these emphases are present in IHRM literature suggests that there may still be value in exploring their potential relevance to international doctoral students. For example, one study on self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), that is, workers who emigrate and then seek employment in the host country, highlights that employers tend to place the responsibility for integration on government agencies and the SIEs themselves; the findings demonstrate that "… *employers do not engage in activities that uniquely assess or assist SIEs…*" (Chhinzer & Oh, 2022: 224). This observation leads to questions about type of assistance universities provide to help self-sponsored international doctoral students integrate into their programme of study and wider communal activities.

As indicated in Table 2, IHRM literature has explored, in some depth, the critical importance of pre-departure and cross-cultural training for expatriates' adjustment and success in host

country settings (Guo et al. 2021; Powell et al., 2024; Setti et al. 2022). Notably, the need for university employees (more specifically, academics) to receive this type of training when teaching transnationally in partner institutions overseas has been specifically recognised (Nawaz, 2018). Similarly, as indicated in Table 5, IHRM literature is replete with studies which emphasise the critical importance of expatriates' families and social support mechanisms during host country assignments (Dang et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2022). This observation, derived from IHRM research and our interview data, raises questions as to whether additional attention should be given to factors such as pre-departure training, students' family considerations, cross-cultural training, social support mechanisms and self-initiation, when seeking to prepare and support those who are either engaged or planning to engage with international doctoral education.

Conclusion

In concluding the study, we emphasise again the self-evident distinctions, which exist between international doctoral students pursuing research programmes in higher education institutions and expatriates who are in paid employment. Despite these distinctions, the findings of our study reveal that certain commonalities relating to critical well-being issues, such as adjustment, support networks, and homesickness, are likely to exist among expatriates and international doctoral students. Our findings lead us to conclude that literature in the field of education has the potential to provide helpful insights into the motivations, challenges, and management of expatriates, while literature in the field of IHRM has potential application to the preparation, socialisation, well-being, and success of doctoral students.

Thus, our analysis of both education and IHRM literature, when coupled with our interview data, leads us to encourage higher education institutions to review their provision and support for international doctoral students in specific areas highlighted in IHRM literature such as family engagement during admissions processes, pre-departure training, induction, cross-cultural training, and social support networks. Correspondingly, the findings lead us to encourage those exploring critical success factors for expatriates to engage with education studies involving international doctoral students in areas such as second language functionality, performance feedback, and supervisory relationships. In drawing these conclusions, we note the call for researchers to: "*conduct longitudinal studies, tracing the full arc of cultural transitions*" that will provide insights into expatriates' adjustment and psychological transition when working abroad (Sussman, 2011: 404). Interestingly, the duration of full-time doctoral programmes in the UK is usually between three and four years. In the light of our findings, we posit that longitudinal collaborative studies focused on the challenges faced by international doctoral students over the duration of their studies may well prove to be a realistic and valuable way of addressing calls of this nature, which are emanating from scholars primarily focused on expatriates.

Finally, the research was conducted at multiple research universities in the UK, which attract diverse populations of international doctoral students. We acknowledge, however, that the study's findings have limitations with regard to their generalisability to other institutions and populations both within the UK and more widely. For example, we highlight the lack of generalisability of our findings, especially given that our data were gathered in one country and that approximately 50% of the international doctoral students we interviewed were from China. We also recognise that our study does not offer any comparative analyses using primary data

obtained from expatriates and other stakeholders such as employers and academics. These limitations, when coupled with the findings of the study, lead us to call for future comparative and multi-disciplinary research involving larger and more diverse samples of participants.

Ethics Statement

Following engagement with the authors' institutional ethics processes, it was confirmed that full ethics approval was not required as the research did not involve, for example, sensitive topics, personal data, or vulnerable participants.

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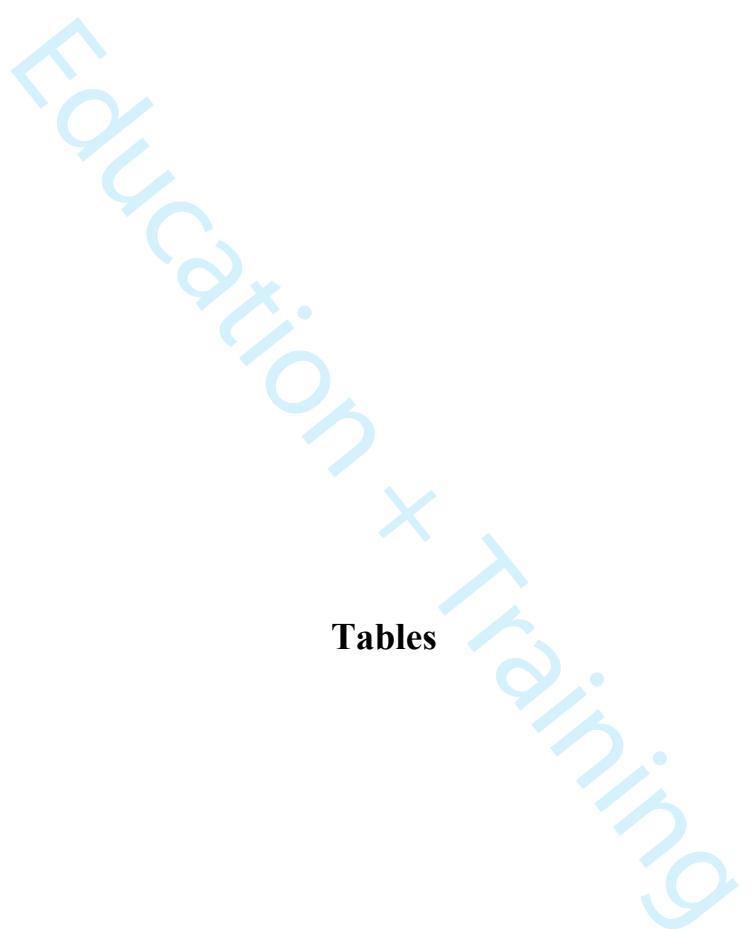43
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Exploring the Perceptions and Experiences of International Doctoral Students and Expatriates from Education and International Human Resource Management Perspectives

Tables

Table 1: Interview themes and indicative interview questions.

Key themes from the education literature	Indicative Interview Questions
Key considerations influencing international doctoral students' choice of country and programme.

Indicative study: Phan (2023) | Why did you decide to embark on PhD studies in the UK?, |
	What was your career aim prior to starting the PhD? Has this aim changed?
	Who is sponsoring your PhD, and what if any influence did the sponsor exert on your choice of country and institution?
Pre-departure preparation undertaken by international doctoral students

Indicative study: Khanal & Gaulee (2019) | What were your biggest concerns before starting the programme? Looking back, how realistic were those concerns? |
	Looking back, do you think you prepared yourself well for your PhD studies in the UK? Why/why not?
	What advice would you give to an international student about how best to prepare for PhD studies in the UK?
Challenges encountered by international doctoral students in relation to socialisation processes.

Indicative study: Zeivots (2021). | Approximately how many close friendships have you made since starting the programme? If you have made friends, how did you meet them? Do they tend to be from the same country as you? |
	What is your impression of the formality/informality of life in the UK compared to life in your home country? How has this affected you?
	What's been the hardest part about fitting in socially to life away from home?
International doctoral students' engagement with formal aspects of the University.

Indicative study: Caliskan & Holley (2017) | How useful was the University's induction programme to you? Please explain. |
	What training offered by the University have you received which has been particularly useful to you?
	Is there anything you feel the University should be doing to help PhD students to engage more effectively with their studies?
	Have you had any interactions with the University's support services? How useful were these interactions?
The types of well-being-related challenges faced by international doctoral students.

Indicative study: Schmidt & Hansson (2018). | To what extent do you feel that loneliness is a problem for international PhD students in the UK? Please explain your answer. |
| | Have you ever felt like packing in your studies? Why/why not? |
| | |

| The factors which are central to an effective student/supervisor relationship from the international doctoral student's perspective.

Indicative study: Parker-Jenkins (2018). | On the basis of your experience as a PhD student, what qualities do you think a good supervisor needs to possess? |
| | What's the biggest challenge you face in your interactions with your supervisor? |

Source: Authors' own work

Table 2: Mapping IHRM Cluster One keywords to themes from interviews

Keywords in Cluster One: 'Adapting to the local environment' (from Andersen, 2021)	Indicative emergent themes from interviews with international doctoral students
Adjustment	• Previous Master's study in the UK made it easier to adjust to studying for a PhD in UK. • Difficult to understand host country jokes and humour, cooking and sports. • Shock when hearing supervisors acknowledge lack of knowledge and even mistakes. Contrasts drawn with far less open behaviour of academics in home countries.
Cultural intelligence	• Cultural gain by moving to UK for PGR study rather than to USA. • U.K. seen as generally much less formal than home country • Fewer obligations and more freedom in U.K. than in home country. • Surprise expressed at the casual nature of social interactions with supervisors in U.K. • Far more privacy in home country compared to UK. • Prevalence of alcohol in the UK compared to home countries.
Host Country Nationals	• Staying within own group as not easy to make friends with 'foreign people'. • Mixing with friends on WeChat group only. • Making mainly acquaintances not friends. • Meeting people from all over the world but mainly those around my PhD topic. • Asking about salary normal in China.
Performance	• Returning home after masters to continue with professional work before applying for PhD. • Competitiveness in home country for publications and becoming an academic. • Funding opportunities competitive.
Turnover	• Discussions about importance of completing PhD and not giving up.
Job Satisfaction	• (*Relevance not readily evident in interview data*)
Social support	• Existing networks from previous studies often highlighted • Back home in China, life is more communal in nature and 'your concern is other people's concern'.
Language	• IELTS test and ease of passing so chose U.K. • Tended to make friends who spoke the same language (Chinese). • Understanding the accent. • Attended training but could not understand it fully due to their language.
Stress	• It is really difficult for PhD students to make friends due to the amount of work and stress in daily lives. • Without socialising, stress is only amplified.

	• In China life is faster and stressful.
Social networks	• Family friends are already settled in U.K.
	• Friends are waste of time for help with studies.
Spouse	• Bringing partner and dependants with them influenced choice to study in UK.
	• Left son at home with spouse so more reliant on supervisory support.
Commitment	• Not committed specifically to a UK university (looked at Canada, Australia also).
	• First choice influenced by ease of travel home.
Hostile Environment	• Education system in China is complicated.
	• USA unsafe in the big cities.
Organisational support	• Funding opportunities were available.
Coping	• PhD is 'definitely' a lonely life.
Decision Making	• Drawn to world class universities in the U.K. Educational system.
	• Shorter PhD course in the U.K.
	• No consultation with family so decided independently.
Psychological well-being	• Independence of UK approach to PhD.
	• Loneliness of PhD journey.
	• Lonely as not yet married.

Source: Authors' own work

Table 3: Mapping IHRM Cluster Two keywords to themes from interviews

Keywords in Cluster Two: 'Strategic Management' (from Andersen 2021)	Indicative emergent themes from interviews with international doctoral students
Knowledge Transfer	• Useful training sessions. • Explanation of research philosophy. • Training on methodology and software training. • More specific department training required. • Work experience was a priority before starting PhD. • Difficult to start publication path in U.K.
Cross-cultural management	• (*Relevance not readily evident in interview data*)
Culture	• Encouraged to find a job by parents through personal relationships. • In home country, marriage a priority for women under 30yrs.
Globalisation	• Doctoral studies in UK give experience of global settings. • COVID and restrictions limited socialising and going into study spaces.
Localisation	• Food • Sports • Humour
Expatriate Manager	• Good relationship with supervisor is useful. • Biggest support system is through supervisor. • Guidance for PhD and publications through supervisory inputs.
Control	• UK Border and travel home. • Visa checks and attendance monitoring • COVID restrictions when in place.
Learning	• Training courses • Methodology, software systems relating to analysis/data collection. • Learning from other international students through their experiences.
Internationalisation	• Education system in U.K. • World-class reputation and resources of UK.

Source: Authors' own work

Table 4: Mapping IHRM Cluster Three keywords to themes from interviews

Keywords in Cluster Three: 'Managing Expatriates' (from Andersen 2021)	Indicative emergent themes from interviews with international doctoral students
Repatriation	• *(Relevance not readily evident in interview data)*
Cross Cultural Training	• Induction training was part of formal university process. • Cannot remember anything about PhD at beginning apart from meeting my supervisors.
Recruitment and Selection	• Application process based not on institution/course but on identifying supervisor. • Gained experience of application processes for PhD programmes in USA, UK, Canada and Australia. • Knowledge of potential supervisor.
Psychological Contract	• Differing expectations about Universities at home and in the U.K. • Hierarchy, relationship with supervisor and student, and talking openly. • More relaxed/casual in U.K.
International Experience	• Mainly based on previous Master's experience in the UK. • Discussions with family and friends about living and studying in the UK.
International Management	• *(Relevance not readily evident in interview data)*

Source: Authors' own work

Table 5: Mapping IHRM Cluster Four keywords to themes from interviews

Keywords in Cluster Four: 'Expatriates' Context ' (from Andersen 2021)	Indicative emergent themes from interviews with international doctoral students
Career	• Parents worry about whether students can live alone in the U.K. yet support their career goal. • University department helping to align us with career aspirations. • PhD results in two career pathways, academia and non-academia related industry. • Wish more guidance information was given to PhD students.
Self-initiated expatriate	• (*Relevance not evident in interview data*)
Female Expatriates	• In China, assumed that females should be married before 30 years old so introduction of boys more important than education. • In China people always ask females about age and salary and discriminate if not married before 30yrs old.
Gender diversity	• (*Relevance not evident in interview data*)
Motivation	• Supervisor is good but does not motivate or push hard enough. • PhD is working for yourself, so there is a need for self-motivation. • You have to work hard and be self-motivated.
Academic	• Research methods course a good chance to meet others. Academic writing training very helpful. • Academic writing course very good because it had good supervisors.
Mentoring	• Getting a good supervisor and having a clear development plan is key. • Hard to discuss independent research programme with anybody but my supervisor. • A good supervisor has an empowering skill. • My supervisor has been my biggest support system in the U.K.
Family	• Biggest concern was leaving my young son behind. My family support has been phenomenal. • Concerns about PhD because of effects on other family members. of my family. • Being away from family and being lonely worried me. • My family put pressure on me to graduate and this makes me want to quit. • Talk every day to parents but loneliness is what kills me. • Being away from family has been very difficult, even the weather has been challenging.
Non-traditional expatriates	• (*Relevance not evident in interview data*)

Source: Authors' own work