

## **Communication Strategies and Intercultural Adjustments of Indonesian SIE in Germany**

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### **ABSTRACT**

As a result of globalization, the chances for self-initiated expatriates (SIE) to work abroad have broadened. Germany is one of the countries that has opened its borders to expatriates due to the workforce crisis in that developed nation. Despite Germany's reputation as full of 'unfriendly people', Indonesian self-initiated expatriates still decide to work there. This phenomenon attracts the researcher to conduct research within the focus areas of self-initiated expatriates' intercultural adjustment and communication strategies. The goal of this study is to understand how Indonesian self-initiated expatriates adjust themselves to German culture and the communication strategies they use to solve intercultural communication problems during their adjustment period. For the data collection, this study employs semi-structured interviews. The participants of this study are three Indonesian female professionals who work at educational institutions in Germany and three Indonesian male professionals who work in the engineering industries in Germany. The results of the interview sessions showed that the most difficult work adjustment challenges faced by Indonesian self-initiated expatriates are related to language barriers and cultural differences. To navigate the world of work in developed Germany, the communication strategies frequently utilized by these Indonesian self-initiated expatriates are non-verbal language, achieving clarity, and information-seeking.

**Keywords:** Communication Strategies; Intercultural Adjustments; Indonesian Self-Initiated Expatriates; Germany

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a result of globalization, opportunities for people around the world to work abroad have widened. Kim et al. (2019) explained that companies nowadays recruit employees from both their own countries and also other countries. For instance, according to Deutsche Welle (2019), Germany is in a workforce crisis and needs to recruit more international workers so that Germany's economy can grow stronger. It is estimated that Germany needs approximately 146,000 expatriates from non-European countries (Maris, 2019). However, Germany has a bad reputation for the expatriates. Wagner (2018) mentioned that in the eyes of expatriates Germany is well-known for its unfriendly character. Due to this character, some expatriates in Germany decide to move. Interestingly, despite the bad reputation of Germany, Indonesia is one of the non-European countries that sends self-initiated expatriates (professional workers who work abroad without sponsorship from organizations or companies) to work there (Maris, 2019). It is because Germany offers the best quality of training, and it is the best place for business (Wagner, 2018). Linking back to the situation in Germany as a developed nation, this has led to German companies becoming more diverse in terms of language and culture.

In multicultural workplaces, intercultural communication is unavoidable. Intercultural communication is defined as communication between people who do not share the same assumptions due to cultural differences. At some point, this can possibly lead to misunderstandings (Henderson et al., 2016) and communication strategies are required to solve this problem. Furthermore, as Froese et al. (2012) mentioned, if the expatriates' intercultural communication styles align with the host country's culture, there is a possibility that they will face no problems in terms of intercultural adjustment. It can be concluded that communication strategies and intercultural adjustment are interconnected. Hence, it is essential to have good communication strategies to achieve successful intercultural adjustment. According to Arsenault (2020), there are three specific areas for intercultural adjustment. The first is general adjustment that refers to the extent of comfort and familiarity with the host country. The second is interaction adjustment that refers to how well sojourners interact with the locals. Lastly is work adjustment that refers to the extent of adjustment related to jobs, responsibilities, and working conditions in the host country.

Accordingly, intercultural adjustment and communication strategies have become the focus of scholars and practitioners for many years. Some discussed the challenges and difficulties of self-initiated expatriates in adjusting to their new environments and intercultural communication (Arsenault, 2020; Froese et al., 2012; Henderson et al., 2016; Selmer & Luring, 2015), whilst other researchers discussed intercultural adjustment and communication of international students (Park et al., 2017; Zheng, 2017). However, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of this issue. For instance, first is the prior study by Froese et al. (2012). They investigated the influence of intercultural communication on English teachers' intercultural adjustment and work attitudes from various English-speaking countries such as the US, UK, Canada, and New Zealand in Korean educational institutions. They used quantitative analysis to measure the cross-cultural adjustments of their participants. However, factors that make this research fail to neutrally describe intercultural adjustment are the researchers collected the data via self-reports (Froese et al., 2012). Thus, it affected the objectivity of the results. Furthermore, they solely focused on the effect of English and indirect communication style on job satisfaction and turnover. They did not observe other factors that led to intercultural communication problems. Therefore, this research did not fully depict intercultural adjustment and communication challenges of international workers in the multicultural workplace. Second is the study by Selmer and Luring (2015), who investigated the effect of age on work engagement and intercultural adjustment of self-initiated expatriate academics in several Asian universities. They employed self-reported measures of work engagement and adjustment, but they did not consider peer ratings. Therefore, due to this methodological limitation in their research, the response rate was low, affecting the reliability of their findings.

Third, the study by Henderson et al. (2016) also has limitations. They investigated the intercultural communication challenges of nurses, academics, and students in Australia. Their participants were from various cultural backgrounds such as Anglo-Australian, European, Asian, and Middle Eastern. They employed a qualitative analysis for their methodology. However, their research focused solely on intercultural communication, and they did not correlate this with work adjustment. Further, their findings are only applicable to the Australian context and medical professionals. Lastly, Arsenault (2020) investigated the intercultural adjustment of Canadian SIE (Self-Initiated Expatriates) in the Korean workplace and Korean SIE in the Canadian workplace. He employed a qualitative methodology for his research however the findings are only applicable to Anglo-Canadian culture, the participants of this research came from the same industry, and it only covered cultural adjustment.

From the above, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, past studies have not adequately discussed self-initiated expatriates' work adjustment. Most of them discussed all of the three specific areas of intercultural adjustment but work adjustment only received little attention. Secondly, these past studies have not highlighted the use of communication strategies and language in self-initiated expatriates' work adjustment. And thirdly, most of these past studies investigated only one profession. Therefore, these studies are only applicable to specific settings. Lastly, the previous studies have not looked at Indonesian self-initiated expatriates' perspective on intercultural communication and adjustment. Hence, to fill the gap of these past studies, the objectives of the present study are to examine the work adjustment challenges of Indonesian self-initiated expatriates in Germany and to investigate Indonesian self-initiated expatriates' communication strategies to solve intercultural communication problems during their work adjustment period.

### **Self-Initiated Expatriates**

According to Andresen et al. (2013), some scholars defined self-initiated expatriates (SIE) as professional workers who work abroad without sponsorship from organizations or companies. They are different from assigned expatriates (AE), who receive a contract from the parent company and migrant workers, who are unskilled (Przytula, 2015). The topic of self-initiated expatriates has attracted some researchers' attention because compared to AEs, the number of SIEs keeps escalating due to globalization (Andersen et al., 2013). Some researchers investigated the communication styles, language proficiency and language use, and the cultural adjustments of SIEs (see Arsenault, 2020; Froese et al., 2012; Henderson et al., 2016; Oh & Jang, 2020; Selmer & Luring, 2015).

Froese et al. (2012) investigated the impact of the host country on language proficiency, English used in the workplace, communication and conflict styles, and social interaction frequency with host country national workers on self-initiated expatriates' cultural adjustments. Their findings were significant because they showed us that English in the multilingual workplace, communication, and conflict styles of SIE that aligned with their host culture significantly affect job satisfaction. Moreover, social interactions with locals influence the general and interactional adjustments of SIEs. However, this study is limited for two reasons. First, the participants of this study were native English speakers; and second, the researchers did not include the employers or the co-workers from the host country. Thus, the findings could have been more objective if the researchers examined the links between the employers' perspectives of self-initiated expatriates' host country language proficiency, communication styles, and interaction.

In the following year, Henderson et al. (2016) examined communication strategies of international health workers and students in Australia. This study showed us the importance of cultural awareness and the use of communication strategies that can help medical expatriates to engage with the host nationals and adjust themselves to the new environment. However, this study solely focused on communication strategies. The researchers did not investigate other work adjustment factors such as job-related factors and organizational culture (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). Hence, the results could have been better if the researchers explored these factors as well.

In another study, Arsenault (2020) investigated Canadian expatriates' intercultural adjustment in Korea and Korean expatriates in Canada. Unlike Froese et al. (2012) that only covered one culture, Arsenault provided us with comparing cultural dimensions between Canada and Korea and how these expatriates adjust themselves in the host country. This

milestone study clearly illustrated the specific intercultural adjustment challenges of these two SIEs by employing the bidirectional model and Hofstede's cultural dimension theory. Arsenault found that one of the most crucial cross-cultural adjustment challenges for Canadian expatriates is an issue that relates to power distance. For example, the expatriates cannot fully express themselves due to the high-power distance between employees and managers in Korean culture. Whereas for Korean expatriates, language issues and Canada's individualistic culture are the most difficult challenges.

### **Intercultural Adjustments**

According to Puck et al. (2008), there are two intercultural adjustment concepts. The first concept defines an intercultural as “the degree of psychological adjustment experienced by the individual within a new society” (p. 10). For the second concept, intercultural adjustment focuses more on objective terms such as performance criteria or expatriates’ turnover rates. This present study emphasizes more on the first concept, which is intercultural adjustment as subjective perception.

Arsenault (2020) mentioned that Black et al. (1991) formulated the degree of adjustment model, which has three specific intercultural adjustment areas: general adjustment, work adjustment, and interaction adjustment. General adjustment refers to the extent of an individual’s comfort of general living conditions in the new environment. Work adjustment refers to the extent of an individual’s adjustment regarding the job, responsibilities, and working conditions in the host country. Finally, interaction adjustment is the extent of an individual’s comfort when interacting with the host country national in the host culture. This model is essential because it depicts all aspects of an individual’s intercultural adjustment in the new environment. Many researchers still use this model to investigate self-initiated expatriates’ intercultural adjustment (see Arsenault, 2020; Froese et al., 2012; Oh & Jang, 2020; Selmer & Luring, 2015).

Black et al. (1991) also claimed that the factors that contribute to intercultural adjustment might have a different effect on each of the three specific areas of intercultural adjustment. In this present study, the researcher focuses primarily on the work adjustment of the expatriates.

### **Work Adjustment**

Arsenault (2020) explained that work adjustment is related to the extent of an individual's adjustment with the responsibilities, job, and working conditions in the host country. Four factors affect in-country work adjustment: Individual, job, organization culture, and non-work-related factors (Black et al., 1991).

Firstly, individual factors are factors that come from the person. It consists of communication and language proficiency (Arsenault, 2020; Henderson et al., 2016; Puck et al., 2008). Secondly, job factors refer to the factors that come from the workplace and beyond the self-initiated expatriates' control. It relates to role clarity, role discretion, role novelty, and language used in the workplace (Black et al., 1991; Froese et al., 2012). Thirdly, organizational culture factors. Black et al. (1991) mentioned that if the host country's organizational culture is significantly different from the organizational culture in the home country, it will be difficult for the expatriates to adjust themselves to the work environment. The final factor is a non-work-related factor. Black et al. (1991) mentioned that spouse, family, and children’s adjustments significantly impact expatriates' work adjustment.

These milestone findings illustrate that work adjustment can be affected by many factors, from personal to non-work-related ones, since Selmer and Luring (2015) did not emphasize the relationship between language, cultural differences, communication, and work adjustment. Therefore, the present study emphasizes the individual factors (i.e., language proficiency and communication strategies), job-related factors (i.e., role clarity, role novelty, and language used in the workplace) and organizational culture. This is because the work adjustment challenges that mainly occur are related to language use, communication, language proficiency, and cultural differences (Arsenault, 2020; Froese et al., 2012; Henderson et al., 2016).

## **METHOD**

In this study, the researcher employs qualitative analysis. According to Seidman (2006), Vygotsky (1987) stated that individual stories are the “microcosm of their consciousness” (p. 7). When someone tells us a story of their experience, that person will select details of their experiences from the stream of their consciousness. Hence, the researcher believes that by employing semi-structured interviews, the researcher can obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences regarding work adjustment challenges and communication strategies.

This method has been applied in other studies as well. For instance, Henderson et al. (2016) used qualitative interviews to investigate international students, academicians, and nurses' intercultural communication challenges and strategies. Likewise, Arsenault (2020) employed in-depth interviews with his participants to investigate Canadian and Korean expatriates' intercultural adjustment.

### **Research Setting**

Since the researcher wants to investigate work adjustment challenges and communication strategies in the multicultural workplace, the participants must have a different cultural background from the host country nationals. Germany is the perfect setting for this study because Indonesian and German cultures are significantly different (Meyer, 2015). For instance, the communication style. Indonesian people tend to speak indirectly while German people speak directly (Meyer, 2015). Furthermore, Germany is categorized as monochronic country which means it has strict time management. Whereas Indonesia tends to be flexible in time management (Nardon & Steers, 2009; Meyer, 2015). These differences in communication style and cultures can lead to work adjustment challenges (Froese et al., 2012). Therefore, the researcher chose Indonesian self-initiated expatriates in Germany as participants.

Moreover, currently Germany is interested in recruiting Indonesian self-initiated expatriates to work in Germany due to the workforce crisis (Maris, 2019). This situation makes companies such as engineering industries and educational institutions in Germany become more diverse in terms of culture and language. Hence, the setting and the participants are suitable for the researcher to investigate work adjustment challenges and communication strategies.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study are Indonesian self-initiated expatriates in Germany. In terms of the sample size, the researcher collaborated with eight participants. McCracken (1988) as cited in Arsenault (2020) suggested that in order for the researcher to obtain an in-depth and thorough

approach, it is better to work longer with fewer people rather than with many participants. Thus, he believes that eight participants are sufficient. In fact, Arsenault (2020) gathered only seven participants to investigate the intercultural adjustment challenges of Canadian and South Korean self-initiated expatriates.

### **Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique of this study is purposive sampling. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the researcher who applies purposive sampling must select participants who can provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, the researcher is required to delineate specific criteria for the participant selection process.

The first criteria for selection is that the researcher works only with Indonesian self-initiated expatriates with more than 1-year of work experience in Germany. If the participants have less than 1-year of work experience, there is a possibility that they cannot provide the researcher with enough information on work adjustment challenges and communication strategies in German's workplace. Arsenault (2020) also applied this sampling technique because he believed that self-initiated expatriates who have less than one year of work experience are still in the 'honeymoon effect' or 'cultural shock.' The second criteria is the language used in the workplace must be different from the lingua franca of the participants. In this case, the lingua franca of the participants is Indonesian language and the language used in the workplace is German language.

### **Research Instrument**

Researcher as the main instrument (refer to Sharon b Merriem). In this study, the researcher utilizes semi-structured interviews as the sole instrument of data collection. There are two sets of interview questions: First is the interview questions on the work adjustment, and the second is interview questions on communication strategies and language. The interview questions for work adjustment are adapted from Arsenault (2020), whereas the interview questions of communication strategies and language are adapted from Henderson et al. (2016).

Furthermore, the researcher developed the interview questions based on Carspecken's critical qualitative research approach (Hardcastle et al., 2006). There are two stages to develop the interview questions based on Carspecken's approach. First, the researcher must develop two lists of questions. The first list of questions is developed to identify issues that might arise. While the second list of questions will collect in-depth information by further discussing the issues in the first list of questions. Next is the second stage or 'Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis'. In this stage, the researcher must develop themes, key issues, and areas that need further exploration in the proceeding stages (Hardcastle et al., 2006). Tables 1 and 2 below, outline these further.

TABLE 1. Work Adjustment Interview Question Plan

Potential interests to be investigated	Information that needs to be collected to address these interests
<b>Work Adjustment Challenges</b>	
<i>Have you ever worked abroad before?</i>	Motivation to work abroad
<i>Do they provide you with cross-cultural training?</i>	Cross-cultural training
<i>Have you ever experienced discrimination in your workplace?</i>	Discrimination in the workplace
<i>How do you deal with cultural differences?</i>	Cultural differences
<i>Do you face difficulties in doing your task or fulfilling your work role?</i>	Job responsibilities

TABLE 2. Communication Strategies Interview Question Plan

Potential interests to be investigated	Information that needs to be collected to address these interests
<b>Communication Strategies</b>	
<i>Which language does your company use? German or English?</i>	The language used in the workplace
<i>What level of proficiency do you have in speaking German / English?</i>	Language proficiency
<i>Have you experienced difficulty in communicating with your co-workers?</i>	Communication strategies

After these two stages have been completed, the researcher can conduct the actual interview sessions with the participants.

### Data Collection Procedure

The participants were recruited through the researcher's social network and purposive sampling. During the selection, the researcher looked for Indonesian expatriates who have been working in Germany for more than one year so that they can provide the researcher with an in-depth understanding of their work adjustment and communication strategies. In qualitative work, this is called 'thick' data. According to Fiaidhi and Mohammed (2019), 'thick' data helps the researcher to understand "the quirks of human behaviour" and it offers "depth analytics" to the participants' stories. After the selection has been made, the researcher contacted each participant to carry out individual interview sessions. The interviews were conducted online through WhatsApp voice call. Before the researcher began with the questioning, the researcher asked for permission from the participants to record the interviews. The audio-recorded interviews captured dialogues between the researcher and the participants discussing work adjustment challenges and their communication strategies in the German workplace. The recorded interviews were then transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

### Data Analysis

After all participants have been interviewed, the data were analysed using a two-step process. According to Arsenault (2020), the first step is the coding analysis and then categorization using theoretical saturation. The interview transcripts were imported into NVivo 12 CAQDAS

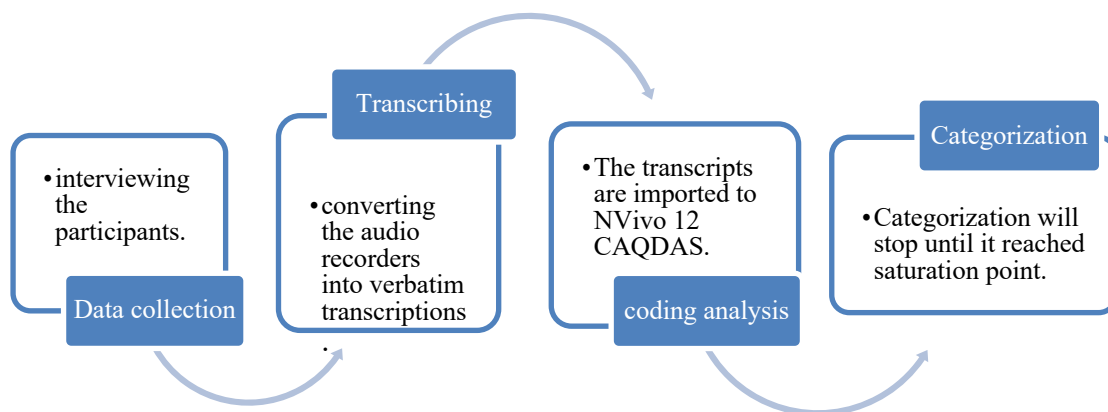


FIGURE 1. Data Analysis Process

software (computer-aided qualitative data analysis software). Figure 1 below illustrates the data analysis process in a graphical manner.

Similar to Arsenault (2020), the researcher depended on the principle of theoretical saturation, which will become apparent when narratives and themes start to overlap and sound similar to one another. Arsenault (2020) mentioned that Straus and Corbin (1990) stated that the saturation point is achieved when the researcher does not obtain new insight, themes, and issues during categorizing data. Table 3 below depicts the emerging themes.

TABLE 3. Emerging Themes

No.	Emerging Themes	
	Work Adjustment Challenges	Communication Strategies
1	Language Barrier	Non-verbal language
2	Cultural Differences	Achieving Clarity
3	Cultural Background Influence	Information-seeking
4	Working Styles	Honesty
5	Lack of Trust	Building Relationship with the host nationals
6	Job Responsibility	Describing the object
7	Job Expectation	Language Alteration

These themes were first delineated from the 'Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis' stage, in which the researcher predicted in advance key issues or themes that might arise during the interview session (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2). After the fieldwork stage, the statements from the participants supported the analysis. As a result, the researcher obtained seven cross-referenced work adjustment challenges and seven communication strategies. The researcher then stopped looking for new themes and sub-themes due to the fact that the point of saturation has been crossed (Arsenault, 2020).

## DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

### Work Adjustment

This study showed that Indonesian self-initiated expatriates need to deal with seven challenges during their work adjustment. The challenges are related to language, cultural differences, and job roles. This finding is aligned with Arsenault (2020) who found language and cultural

differences as stumbling blocks for Canadian and South Korean Expatriates' intercultural adjustment. The seven work adjustment challenges of Indonesian self-initiated expatriates in Germany are listed below.

The first and most complex challenge for Indonesian self-initiated expatriates is language. Participant A who works at German educational institution said that it was hard for her to speak to the parents due to her low language proficiency: *"I sometimes feel troubled when I have to inform the parents formally in scientific language."* The same situation also occurred to the other participants. As participant E explained her experience when she tried to tell something to her co-workers due to her limited German vocabularies:

*"ah, I want to say this... but I forgot what it is in German or I have no idea what I want to say. There are always moments like these. In German language for the word 'divide' there are many variations (e.g., teilen, verteilen, aufteilen, etc.) ya.. so, one word in Indonesian language has many variations in German language. Sometimes I'm not sure whether it is right or wrong, so I just use the common one (teilen)."*

Furthermore, their co-workers sometimes used dialects in their conversation. Thus, it was hard for Indonesian self-initiated expatriates to understand what their co-workers said. Participant F remarks: *"When I speak to German people who are older than me, they usually speak in their German dialects. It is hard for me to understand."* The same problem also occurred to the South Korean expatriates who worked in Canada (Arsenault, 2020). They cannot keep up with their co-workers due to their lack of more complex language skills related to dialects and regional variations. According to Kim et al. (2019), language diversity in the workplace can cause challenges for foreign workers and the company, especially when the expatriates have low language proficiency in the host-country language. This in turn affects communication, individual, and team performance. Therefore, language skill is an essential factor for a successful work adjustment although it is not formal language ability which is the issue; language barriers are formed by regional variations and cultural-based nuances that are known only to native speakers of a language (Puck et al., 2008).

However, departing from Froese et al. (2012) who showed that the use of the English language in the workplace helps expatriates adjust themselves in the workplace, this present study shows that Indonesian self-initiated expatriates in Germany prefer to use the German language instead of English or other languages. It is because they are already used to speaking in German. This is what participant C said: *"I prefer German because I have been living here for so long and I'm already used to it."*

The second challenge is cultural differences. Indeed, Indonesian and German cultures are different. Thus, it becomes a challenge for Indonesian self-initiated expatriates to adjust themselves to their new target culture. As cited by Black et al. (1991) Church (1982) stated that if the host country and organizational cultures are significantly different from the expatriates' cultural origin, it will be difficult for the expatriates to adjust themselves to the new environment. According to the participants, the most significant cultural differences between Indonesian and German cultures are strict time management, time orientation, and individualism.

According to Nardon and Steers (2009), Germany is categorized as a monochronic country which means German people have strict and precise time management. They also clearly demarcate between work life and personal life. On the other hand, some Asian countries, such as Indonesia, are categorized as polychronic countries (Meyer, 2015). It means that they are more flexible with time, and they tend to mix between work and personal matters.

Due to these differences, participants A and D had to put some effort into adjusting their time management to German culture. This is what participant D said about the strict time management:

*"At first, it was hard. From little things, like in Indonesia we can come late. On the other hand, in Germany they really value time."*

Similarly, participant C had to try to distinguish between work and personal life:

*"In Germany a co-worker is solely a friend in the office, but outside the office we don't interact that much. On the other hand, in Indonesia, a co-worker can be a friend in the office as well as a friend to hang out with."*

Furthermore, participants A, B, and D felt uncomfortable with how individualistic German people are. According to Dellner (2014), an individualistic society is where the bond between one another is loose, and people are expected to do things by themselves. She adds that this means people put themselves first rather than the group in an individualistic society. Therefore, German co-workers do not want to get involved in someone's job. This is because in their society, people are expected to do their things by themselves.

This individualistic character becomes a challenge for Indonesian self-initiated expatriates because Indonesians are collectivist people. Dellner (2014) stated that a collectivistic society has a strong bond with one another and maintaining interpersonal relationships is the top priority. Hence, participant B felt alone when she worked in Germany due to the individualistic character of the German people: *"We live here alone without family, so the workplace is the only place where we meet a lot of people. So, they should be more aware and compassionate to us. So, we feel like 'oh, they accept us.'"* It is a drastic change for Indonesian expatriates to be an individualistic person. This problem is also found in Arsenault's study (2020). He found that South Korean expatriates feel a lack of togetherness in their workplace in Canada.

The third challenge is cultural background influence. Some participants admitted that their Indonesian cultural upbringing and character hindered them from doing their work. For instance, participant F felt that Indonesian character such as being shy to say something should be avoided, he explained: *"As Indonesians sometimes we are too shy or feel uneasy to say something. In reality, we should say something like this immediately. So that if something happens, our boss can anticipate it."* As Puck et al. (2008) mentioned, Black (1990) found that cultural flexibility influences work adjustment. It indicates that for these expatriates to have a successful work adjustment, they have to change their actions and attitudes according to the host country's culture. It can be achieved if they have a good perception of the host country's culture. If they have a bad perception of the host country's culture, it can prevent them from adjusting themselves there.

The fourth challenge is working style. Participant A works at an educational institution. Her way of teaching kids is different from her co-workers. In her school, it is acceptable to yell at the children. However, participant A disagreed with this technique. Thus, she had a hard time changing her working style:

*"If this kid has made the same mistake three times, I will take it (toy), calm him down, and ask him to sit down and say 'you stay here. Don't play with the other kids. You are only allowed to watch them play.' I used not only verbal language but also non-verbal"*

*(body language). 'don't push them, they will fall. If they fall, they will get hurt.' The point is I tell them not to do that with my body language as well. That is my way, why should I yell at them? It should not be like that. However, my co-worker wants me to do that, be angry at them. But I cannot do that, I don't want to.'*

Similarly, participant D, who worked in the engineering industry, had to learn to work as fast as his co-workers. He found out that the way German people work is to try to complete tasks as quickly as possible: *"The job that I handle is new. So, at the beginning I have to see how people work. After I have learned from them, I can do the same thing like they did. The way they work is so fast."* According to Puck et al. (2008), adjusting to the work situation will positively influence work adjustment. Therefore, Indonesian self-initiated expatriates need to shift from their past working style to the new one so that they can keep up with their co-workers.

Next, the fifth challenge is the lack of trust. As a teacher, participant A has to teach German children and maintain her relationship with the parents. However, she felt that the parents of her students did not trust her to teach their children because she was a foreigner. She shared her story:

*"They wanted their children to be taught well and when they saw me 'wah, a foreigner. Can she do it? Is she able to teach my kids well?' It was more like that. Why did I think that way? Because when I tried to greet and say hi to them, there was no reaction. For example, I said 'Guten Morgen', they pretended not to hear me, when I talked to them, they did not want to see my face so it was like 'if you want to say something, just say it.' But when they saw their children's happiness, comfort, and feel happier around me, in fact they did not want to get in the class if I was not there. They saw it and appreciated my effort."*

Hence, this condition challenged her to show her ability. After she has shown her ability to the parents, she received due acknowledgement from the parents, and she could fulfil her job role. Thus, it can be concluded that the challenge for Indonesian academic expatriates to fulfil their job role can also come from the parents of students.

Furthermore, according to Nardon and Steers (2009), in Trompenaar's cultural dimensions, there are two types of society. First is a society that respects someone due to his or her achievement. The second ideal type is a society that respects someone from their status. Fortunately, German people perceive someone from his or her achievements. So, when Indonesian self-initiated expatriates want to get acknowledgement from their employer or clients, they can show their good performance or abilities to their employer or clients.

The sixth challenge is the job responsibility. Participant F felt that his task was hard because his company's products were customized products, and no one in his workplace mastered the task. Therefore, he always had difficulties in doing his task:

*"In my workplace, my speciality is in mechanical engineering. The product is not a standard product, 95% of them are customized products and there are a lot of variations of it. So, it is like no one in my workplace can master all of the products along with the details. Therefore, I always have difficulty in doing my task."*

This situation might lead to work stress. According to Chen (2019), Gullo et al. (2015) categorized work stress into four groups and one of them is task relationship. It refers to the

stress because of the “large workload, unclear task, and task conflicts”. However, if the expatriates are open to new experiences, this pressure will not stop them from performing well. This character can increase their work adjustment as well (see Puck et al., 2008). In addition, Chen (2019) believes that positive pressure motivates expatriates to achieve personal success at individual, work, and organizational levels.

The last challenge is job expectation. Participant D worked in an engineering industry that provides service for logistics. He thought that his job role did not require his physical strength, but his expectation was wrong and it actually required his physical strength. This is what he said: *“I thought my job does not require physical strength, but reality shows differently. It requires my physical strength.”* This problem might cause a complex challenge for the expatriates. Black et al. (1991) believed that if the expectation of the expatriates is accurate, uncertainty can decrease, and anticipation will be greatly enhanced. Accordingly, when positive anticipation levels go up, the expatriates will receive less culture shock and adverse affective reactions. Thus, it will lead to successful work adjustment.

In the case of participant D, his expectation was wrong because he has never worked before. He had no information or clues about the job role he has to fulfil. Black et al. (1991) suggested that to prevent false expectation, expatriates must look for further information about the job that they are going for. This is so that they have a clear depiction of what they will do in the workplace. On the other hand, they mentioned that Church (1982) said that if the expatriates already possessed international work experiences, their previous experiences can be good sources to form accurate expectations.

### Communication Strategies

The researcher found seven communication strategies that Indonesian self-initiated expatriates applied to mitigate intercultural communication problems. Between the seven strategies, the most common strategies are non-verbal language, achieving clarity, and information-seeking.

First, is non-verbal language. This communication strategy is used not only by academic expatriates but also by engineers. Participant F works as an engineer. He preferred using a visual image when he communicated with his co-workers through phone and used German dialect:

*“When I talk about the project, it will be better to use visuals as well. Sometimes if it is face to face, it is still understandable. However, if we talk on the phone, I cannot understand it. Therefore, it will be better to share screens or use visuals. So that I can understand it better, especially when that person speaks in German dialect.”*

Likewise, participants E and B, who work at an educational institution, rely on facial expressions and body language to show confusion and difficulty speaking in German. This is what participant E said:

*“If it is an expression (Ausdruck) like ‘ah, I want to eat.’ And then you suddenly don’t know how to say it in German. Sometimes if the condition is like that, it is difficult to explain because it is not a thing that you can point at or describe it with a simple language. So, sometimes I use body language if it is really hard to explain.”*

Sapar and AbuIssac (2017) agree that verbal and non-verbal communication are important factors in multicultural workplaces. Similarly, Dumitrascu-Baldau and Dumitrascu

(2019) stated that facial expression is a ‘universal language’ that can be a solution for intercultural communication problems. However, it is important to note that the interlocutor must be careful when they use non-verbal language. This is because body language is culturally bound and it can offend someone if the interlocutor misuses body language during their communication (Sapar & AbuIssac, 2017).

The second strategy is achieving clarity. B and D used this strategy with high frequency to gain a better understanding of the world around them. According to Guirdham and Guirdham (2017), this is the basic communication strategy. Its aim is to obtain clarity without harming or threatening someone’s face. In this case, Participant B and D asked their co-workers to speak slowly or use a more accessible language due to their low German language proficiency. This is how participant B achieved her clarity:

*“I usually use my facial expression to show that I don’t understand. And then, they will realize that I don’t understand. They explained it again to me. But now, I’m more confident to say ‘I don’t understand. Could you please explain it with easier language?’”*

The third strategy is information-seeking. Participant A and F used interrogation techniques to obtain the information they needed. This is aligned with the statement of Guirdham and Guirdham (2017). This strategy aims at preventing misunderstanding by asking for clarification and feedback from the host nationals. This is how participant F applied this strategy:

*“After they explain something to me, I always reconfirm to them ‘this is what it means right?’ and when they say ‘yes’, then I know my interpretation is correct. So, after I get explanations, I don’t say ‘yes I understand.’ I always repeat his words again to make sure it is correct.”*

This strategy was also found in the study of Henderson et al. (2016).

The fourth strategy is honesty. Participants F and C prefer to be honest with their co-workers because being honest can prevent future problems and German people also understand that they are non-native speakers. This is what participant C said: *“We are used to being transparent, which means anything that becomes the problem or issues, it should be said in the beginning.”* According to Meyer (2015), Germany is categorized as a low-context country in Hall’s cultural dimension. This means that they tend to speak in a direct manner. In contrast, Asian countries such as Japan, China, and Indonesia are categorized as high-context countries. This means that they often speak in an indirect manner and the listener must be able to read between the lines.

As we can see in the case of participants F and C, they have adapted to the way German people communicate. They directly convey the problems that hinder them from working to their co-workers. It is an excellent decision to adapt to the host nationals’ communication styles because Froese et al. (2012) found that expatriates with similar communication styles can adapt to the new environment more easily.

The next strategy is building relationships with host nationals. Participants A and C believe that interacting regularly with the host nationals can help them build a relationship with the host nationals and decrease miscommunication. Participant A explained:

*“When we try to interact with Germans whether it (German language) is good or bad, but we keep in touch with them well. They will appreciate that.”*

This communication strategy has been found successful in the study of Henderson et al. (2016). They found that this strategy can prevent the expatriates from an unwanted situation. It can be applied by showing friendliness and keeping in contact with others.

Another strategy is describing the object. When participant E forgot the name of the object in German, she usually describes the object to her co-workers so that they can understand the object she is talking about: “

*If it is still a thing, I still can describe it with a simple language like ‘this thing is round and the colour is red.’”*

Mariani (2010) also suggested using this strategy when someone has difficulty speaking in his or her second language. This is better than saying nothing and making the host nationals confused.

The seventh and last communication strategy is language alteration or code-switching. In the case of participant D, his co-workers like to speak in German dialect. Thus, participant D asks his co-workers to switch their language to standard German so that he can understand what they said: “

*I would ask him to speak slowly, repeat, or use standard German language. Because for me Frankish is unclear, it sounds like British people.”*

According to Seitz and Smith (2021), what participant D has asked his co-workers to do is called ‘forced’ language-switching. It means that they switch languages because the hearers are non-native speakers. It is called forced because they are not doing it by choice but because of external factors.

In the multicultural workplace, language switching is common. In fact, Seitz and Smith (2021) believe that language switching is a part of “job responsibility that the employee has to manage as they complete their job duties”

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that language, communication, and culture are prominent factors that impact on self-initiated expatriates’ work adjustment. Furthermore, in terms of language used in the workplace, the present study shows that the use of English in the workplace is not always preferable by the expatriates. Indonesian self-initiated expatriates who work in German multicultural workplaces prefer to use the German language because they are more accustomed to speaking in German.

The present study has theoretical implications for research literature on the work adjustment of self-initiated expatriates. The participants of the present study are Indonesian self-initiated expatriates who have received little attention from past studies. Thus, this study provides a new perspective of work adjustment challenges and communication strategies. Furthermore, the findings of this study prove that language, communication, and cultural differences are the crucial factors for expatriates to adjust themselves in the workplace.

In terms of practical implication, the findings of this study are beneficial for international human resources and employers of Indonesian self-initiated expatriates in Germany. They can understand the struggle of Indonesian self-initiated expatriates to adjust themselves in the workplace and the type of training that Indonesian self-initiated expatriates need. For instance, the findings show that Indonesian self-initiated expatriates struggle with language and cultural differences. Thus, the employers can develop training materials that

facilitate the transnational transition process of Indonesian self-initiated expatriates to improve their language skill and cultural awareness.

Additionally, this study helps Indonesians who plan to work in Germany to know the real challenges of working in Germany and how German people work so that they can make better preparations and will not give up easily. For instance, the findings show that the most complex challenge is language, and it also gives some communication strategies that Indonesian self-initiated expatriates have applied to mitigate intercultural communication problems. Hence, future Indonesian self-initiated expatriates can utilize the same strategies to enhance their foreign language proficiency levels.

For future study, since this study focuses on the roles of language, communication, and culture in Indonesian self-initiated expatriates' work adjustment in German workplaces. Other researchers might test the effects of language, communication, and culture on the work adjustment of other Indonesian self-initiated expatriates in other countries all over the globe. Furthermore, since the participants of this study are solely Indonesian self-initiated expatriates, future studies can even investigate the work adjustment challenges of Indonesian assigned expatriates. According to Farcas and Gonçalves (2016), there are some differences between self-initiated expatriates and assigned expatriates in terms of how they cope with stress, their adjustment, and repatriation. Finally, future researchers should investigate both Indonesian expatriates and foreign-based employers so that the findings can provide two perspectives of international level work adjustments.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions (Indonesian Language Version)

#### Work Adjustment Challenges

1. Tema: Motivasi bekerja di luar negeri  
Apakah sebelumnya pernah bekerja di luar negeri?
  - 1.1. Pertanyaan lanjutan
    - 1.1.1. Mengapa memilih bekerja di Jerman?
    - 1.1.2. Apakah pengalaman bekerja di luar negeri sebelumnya membantu Anda untuk beradaptasi dengan budaya lainnya?
2. Tema: Pelatihan Antar-Budaya  
Apakah perusahaan Anda memfasilitasi Anda pelatihan antar-budaya?
  - 2.1. Pertanyaan lanjutan
    - 2.1.1. Bagaimana Anda belajar tentang budaya Jerman?
    - 2.1.2. Apakah teman kerja Anda membantu Anda untuk memahami budaya Jerman?
3. Tema: Diskriminasi di tempat kerja  
Apakah Anda pernah mengalami diskriminasi di tempat kerja Anda?
  - 3.1. Pertanyaan lanjutan
    - 3.1.1. Bagaimana Anda mengatasinya?
    - 3.1.2. Apakah manajer/teman kerja Anda membantu Anda?
    - 3.1.3. Apakah kejadian ini menurunkan semangat Anda?
4. Tema: Perbedaan budaya  
Bagaimana Anda menghadapi perbedaan budaya ini?
  - 4.1. Pertanyaan lanjutan
    - 4.1.1. Apa perbedaan paling menonjol antara budaya Indonesia dan Jerman?
    - 4.1.2. Apakah Anda merasa bahwa kebudayaan Anda mempengaruhi perilaku Anda?
5. Tema: Tanggung jawab pekerjaan  
Apakah Anda mengalami kesulitan dalam mengerjakan tugas Anda / memenuhi kewajiban kerja Anda?
  - 5.1. Pertanyaan lanjutan
    - 5.1.1. Apakah ekspektasi Anda tentang kewajiban atau beban kerja Anda berbeda dengan yang Anda bayangkan?
    - 5.1.2. Bagaimana Anda mempertahankan performa kerja Anda?
    - 5.1.3. Apa menurut Anda yang dapat dilakukan oleh perekrut di Jerman untuk membantu ekspatriat asal Indonesia?

#### Communication Strategies

1. Tema: Bahasa yang digunakan di kantor  
Bahasa Apa yang digunakan di kantor? Jerman atau Inggris?
  - 1.1. Pertanyaan lanjutan
    - 1.1.1. Apakah Anda lebih memilih menggunakan bahasa Jerman atau bahasa Inggris?

2. Tema: Tingkat kemampuan bahasa  
Apa tingkat kemahiran berbahasa Anda?
  - 2.1. Pertanyaan lanjutan
    - 2.1.1. Bagaimana Anda meningkatkan tingkat kemampuan berbahasa Anda?
    - 2.1.2. Apakah perusahaan Anda memfasilitasi Anda dengan kursus bahasa?
  
3. Tema: Strategi komunikasi  
Apakah Anda pernah mengalami kesulitan dalam berkomunikasi dengan rekan kerja Anda?
  - 3.1. Pertanyaan lanjutan
    - 3.1.1. Bagaimana Anda mengatasinya?
    - 3.1.2. Strategi apa yang menurut Anda paling efektif?
    - 3.1.3. Apakah ada orang lain yang membantu memperbaiki kesalahan Anda?