


# The effects of perceived organisational support on expatriate adjustment, assignment completion and job satisfaction

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## Abstract

This study examines the influence of perceived organisational support (POS) on expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment, assignment completion and job satisfaction in the sub-Saharan African context. While multinationals depend on expatriates to manage their foreign subsidiaries, successful expatriation is influenced by expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment to their host country's environment. Survey responses from 229 expatriates were analysed using partial least squares path modelling. The results reveal that support from their organisations relates positively to expatriate adjustment, assignment completion and job satisfaction. The empirical results also demonstrate that expatriate adjustment partially mediates the relationship between POS and assignment completion and job satisfaction. Furthermore, findings suggest that assignment completion positively influences job satisfaction and partially mediates the association between POS and job satisfaction. The findings of this research have important theoretical and practical implications for multinational companies operating in sub-Saharan Africa.

## Keywords

Perceived organisational support, expatriate adjustment, assignment completion, job satisfaction, Ghana

## Introduction

The number of international assignees continues to increase as multinational companies rely on expatriates to effectively manage their foreign subsidiaries. However, the inability of the expatriate

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to culturally adjust to their host country's environment can lead to daunting experiences for them (Chan et al., 2019) and impact their work outcomes. This can have damaging consequences for both the expatriate and the multinational company (Bhaskar–Shrinivas et al., 2005; Takeuchi, 2010). Indeed, cross-cultural adjustment and interaction have been acknowledged as critical factors that significantly affect expatriate assignment outcomes (Abugre and Debrah, 2019; Lee and Kartika, 2014; Sokro and Moeti–Lysson, 2018). Expatriate adjustment refers to the adaptation process of expatriates in relation to living and working in their host countries (Black and Gregersen, 1991). It signifies low levels of stress and the ability to overcome the negative attitudes associated with living in a host culture and developing certain behavioural adaptations (Bhaskar–Shrinivas et al., 2005). Thus, the successful adjustment of expatriates requires that the individual understands the socio-cultural behaviours, cognition and emotions of their host culture (Chan et al., 2019). For example, previous studies demonstrate that the cultural fit between expatriates' personality traits and host country cultural values and norms predict expatriate adjustment in host countries (Huang et al., 2005; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2012; Searle and Ward, 1990). Chen et al. (2014) also found that cultural intelligence had a positive influence on international students' general and interactional adjustment in Taiwan. Similarly, factors including new job opportunities, family-related issues, work environment and security concerns have been identified to account for expatriate failure (Dowling et al., 2017). Given the high costs associated with expatriate failure, the support expatriates receive from their organisation is critical not only for facilitating expatriate adjustment but also positively influencing assignment completion and job satisfaction. In general, perceived organisational support (POS) is employees' beliefs about whether their employer values their contributions and is willing and able to assist them in performing their work and managing stressful situations (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). While the support available to expatriates include career, adjustment and financial support, most multinationals also provide tangible support such as host country language and cross-cultural training to ensure that expatriates adjust to their host culture and subsequently complete their assigned tasks (Cole and Nesbeth, 2014). Thus, availability of support from the organisation enables expatriates to adapt to their new environment in the host country, this is because they are often separated from their social network of friends and family in their home countries (Chan et al., 2019).

Perceived organisational support has been found to have a significant positive association with favourable employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction, positive mood, organisational commitment, job performance, organisational citizenship behaviour and a decrease in withdrawal behaviour (Colakoglu et al., 2010; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). However, previous studies have indicated that the effect of POS on the performance of expatriates within the cross-cultural context has received relatively little attention (Kawai and Strange, 2014; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Takeuchi et al., 2009). In addition, other scholars have investigated how expatriates from different cultures transition and adapt to the African culture (e.g. Abugre and Debrah, 2019; Abugre et al., 2020; Okpara and Kabongo, 2011) yet little is known about the support they receive from the organisation which is crucial for their adjustment.

Drawing on the psychological contract theory, we propose that an expatriate's perception of their organisation as providing adequate support will influence their adjustment, influencing assignment completion and job satisfaction. The psychological contract theory posits that fulfilling perceived obligations and expectations leads to higher satisfaction with the general experience and stronger intentions to continue to stay with the organisation (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). This theory provides possible explanations to how expectation and reality are aligned (Haski–Leventhal et al., 2020) and why some expatriates may receive similar kinds of support from their organisation but have different experiences in adjustment and job satisfaction. This study also explores the mediating

role of expatriate adjustment and assignment completion in the relationship between POS and job satisfaction.

Empirical evidence from an African perspective allows for further insights into how expatriates from different cultures adjust to an Africa context. By investigating the role POS plays in expatriate assignment outcomes, this study extends cross-cultural management research by focussing attention on the supportive systems that will facilitate adjustment of expatriates on international assignment in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, the study broadens the scope of expatriate management research while contributing to the advancement of research by sharing the experiences and views of expatriates working in a distant culture. First, as MNCs are increasingly extending their operations to all parts of Africa, the findings of this study may provide valuable information to headquarters' management regarding organisational support systems and practices which, when employed, could enhance the adjustment of expatriates and facilitate the realisation of corporate strategy. Second, the design of this study is partly influenced by [Kawai and Strange \(2014\)](#)'s request that future research on POS and expatriate performance should be conducted in a different cultural context. The present study explores the responses of expatriates working in Ghanaian MNCs to address issues relating to expatriate experiences in a context that is relatively under-studied in the expatriate management literature. Africa, as a unique continent, hosts a large diversity of ethnicities, cultures and languages. Ghana, in particular, has a unique and rich culture ([Abugre, 2014](#)). Ghanaians respect traditions and espouse certain core values such as politeness, collectivism, hospitality and respect for authority. Even though the Ghanaian workplace is friendly, it is hierarchically structured with a well-defined chain of command where subordinates are answerable to their supervisors and managers. As such, adjusting to such a culture could be complex for expatriates who are required to learn new ways of doing things, making support from their organisation very important.

## **Theoretical background**

### *Perceived organisational support and psychological contract*

From the perspective of the norm of reciprocity ([Blau, 1964](#)), the psychological contract theory provides a framework for understanding employees' interpretations of their organisation or employer's support and care as it has been found to influence organisational outcomes such as employee work engagement and turnover ([Halbesleben, 2010](#)). A psychological contract reflects an individual's subjective beliefs about the terms and conditions of engagement, including mutual obligations between the employee and employer, which are based on the employee's interpretations of verbal and written contracts and observations of repeated patterns of exchange with the employer ([Rousseau, 1998](#)). The psychological contract theory suggests that when individuals in an employment relationship act in ways that are beneficial to each other, an implied obligation of reciprocity is created, leading to desired outcomes ([Gouldner, 1960](#)). As a result, a bundle of human resource management (HRM) practices has been found to significantly predict the fulfilment of the psychological contract in organisations ([Raeder et al., 2012](#)).

Also, some scholars have maintained that the fulfilment of the psychological contract has a significant positive effect on employee attitudes, organisational citizenship behaviour and performance (e.g. [Ahmad and Zafar, 2018](#)). When an employee perceives that the organisation does not fulfil its obligations, a psychological contract breach occurs (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). Research seems to affirm that POS represents a vital construct that can either enhance the gratification or a breach of an employee's psychological contract with the organisation ([Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2005](#); [Eisenberger et al., 2004](#)). Existing literature suggests that perceptions of breach

may provoke feelings of violation and impact employees' general work attitudes and counter-productive workplace behaviours; these employees may experience decreased affective commitment and trust in the organisation (Dulac et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2019). Based on such assumptions, we argue that expatriates who perceive their organisations to be supportive and caring are likely to experience psychological contract fulfilment and exert extra effort to adjust to the host culture and work environment, thereby accomplishing their assigned duties.

Studies on POS began with the belief that employees will remain loyal and committed to an organisation if managers are generally concerned about their well-being and value their commitment to the organisation (Eisenberger et al., 2004). Research indicates (e.g. Chan et al., 2012; Malek et al., 2015; Shu et al., 2020) that organisations function as a crucial provider of socio-emotional support for employees, such as respect and care, and tangible benefits, such as wages and healthcare. The POS framework presumes that employees evaluate the degree to which their respective organisations are interested in their general welfare by establishing and implementing various HRM policies, programmes, practices and support. It is assumed that employees, on the other hand, reciprocate the organisation's gestures with increased loyalty, commitment and performance (Moorman et al., 1998; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Leveson et al. (2009) contend that POS mirrors employee perceptions of their organisation's willingness to reward improved work effort and satisfy their socio-emotional needs. Organisations that exhibit high positive regard for their employees helps to gratify employees' need for approval, esteem and affiliation (Eisenberger et al., 2004; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Employees' emotional attachment to the organisation often leads to favourable organisational outcomes such as enhanced performance, reduced absenteeism and a low employee turnover rate (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1997; Mowday et al., 2013).

In addition, employees view their favourable or unfavourable treatment as an indication that their organisation values them or not. Hence, employees feel obligated to reciprocate POS with increased loyalty, effort, commitment and improved performance (Allen and Shanock, 2013; Blau, 1964; Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2005; Gouldner, 1960; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). An organisation's supportive work environment and favourable treatment suggest that it not only fulfils its part of the psychological contract but likewise demonstrates its trustworthiness in the eyes of its employees.

## Literature and hypotheses

### *Perceived organisational support and expatriate adjustment*

Some studies (see Allen and Shanock, 2013; Shu et al., 2020; Perrot et al., 2014) have acknowledged that POS plays a crucial role in the socialisation process of new recruits regarding learning the different scopes of a new job. For example, Bauer and Green (1998) argue that when new employees feel supported, they are more secure in their identity as learners; hence, they are motivated to be active participants during the learning process without making mistakes. Indeed, POS has been found to significantly moderate the relationship between socialisation tactics and three important socialisation outcomes, including learning the job, learning work-group norms and role innovation (Perrot et al., 2014). Several scholars have provided ample evidence suggesting that information about an organisation's support to its employees is crucial, especially within the context of expatriation; hence, expatriates are more likely to notice the various aspects of how they are treated by their company (Allen and Shanock, 2013; Aycan, 1997; Baran et al., 2012; Guzzo et al., 1994; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Takeuchi et al., 2009). In this light, Kraimer and Wayne (2004)

have identified three dimensions of organisational support that are most relevant to expatriate success (i.e. career POS, financial POS and adjustment POS). Kraimer and Wayne argue that an individual's perceptions about these three specific kinds of support provided by their organisation have a significant positive relationship with expatriate adjustment and commitment.

Previous studies (e.g. [Lapalme et al., 2009](#); [Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe, 2003](#); [Quenneville et al., 2010](#); [Takeuchi et al., 2009](#)) have also shown that while POS is positively related to outcomes such as job satisfaction, affective commitment and performance, it is negatively related to turnover intention ([Allen et al., 2003](#); [Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002](#)). Other researchers also maintain that an organisation's support enhances expatriates' ability to cope with work stress in their host country, and in turn, is positively associated with expatriation outcomes such as expatriate adjustment ([Shaffer et al., 1999](#)), intention to stay in the host country and complete their assignment ([Cao et al., 2014](#)) and job performance ([Kraimer and Wayne, 2004](#)). In addition, [Lazarova and Cerdin \(2007\)](#) have found that repatriation support from an organisation, including career planning sessions and briefings, positively influence expatriates' intention to stay in that organisation. In advancing the debate further, [Cao et al. \(2014\)](#) assessed POS and intention to stay in host countries among 112 self-initiated expatriates in Germany and found a direct positive effect between POS and intention to stay.

Although expatriates need time to learn and become familiar with their host country's culture, [Hechanova et al. \(2003\)](#) assert that cultural adjustment is the primary outcome of expatriation and would influence other outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance. In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, [Okpara \(2016\)](#) identified six factors including age, gender, previous experience, cross-cultural training, socialisation and job satisfaction as predictors of expatriate adjustment. [Jun et al. \(2001\)](#) argue that adequate adjustment to their host culture influences expatriate commitment to both their parent company and host subsidiary. Therefore, a better understanding of the host country's culture enables expatriates to relate more effectively with host country nationals (HCNs) ([Cao et al., 2014](#); [Froese and Peltokorpi, 2013](#); [Koveshnikov et al., 2014](#)). In a study exploring how Japanese managers adapt in the USA, [Yamazaki and Kayes \(2007\)](#) contend that expatriates can learn and subsequently adapt better to foreign cultures through concrete experience, reflective observations, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Thus, due to differences in cultures, Western expatriates may discover that behaviours that are acceptable in their home countries are not considered appropriate in their host country, such as Ghana. For example, while Western societies perceive work relations to be determined largely by job descriptions and task-related responsibilities ([Maurer and Li, 2006](#)), Ghanaian culture values personal relationships than formal contracts, informal communication styles are used, and performance evaluations are usually ambiguous ([Hofstede, 1980](#); [Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1990](#)). These cultural values affect all individuals and groups in Ghanaian work and non-work environments.

Work-related adjustment refers to expatriates' comfort and adaptation in relation to new job tasks, their work roles, different performance standards and work values in a new environment ([Black, 1988](#); [Liu and Lee, 2008](#)). In other words, work-related adjustment represents the overall integration of expatriates into their new work environment. It has been recognised that the success of a foreign assignment is strongly dependent on an expatriate's work adjustment ([Breiden et al., 2006](#)). Adjusting to a work environment becomes easier if there are perceived similarities in procedures, policies and task requirements between the parent company and the host subsidiary. A study involving expatriates, spanning all continents except for Africa, using the multicultural personality questionnaire, shows a positive relationship between expatriate personality traits and interaction adjustment. It has also been argued that work adjustment depends primarily on the extent to which different work role elements reduce or increase an expatriate's perceived insecurity in a

new, foreign work environment (Black et al., 1991). In a similar vein, Froese and Peltokorpi (2011) contend that the host country context affects expatriate's job satisfaction. Hence, per the outlined arguments, researchers attempt to demonstrate that when expatriates are sufficiently supported, their adjustment into their host culture and work environment is enhanced, thereby influencing assignment completion and job satisfaction. Thus, we hypothesise that

H1: Expatriates' perception of support from their organisation relates positively to their adjustment.

H2: Expatriates' perception of support from their organisation has a positive influence on assignment completion.

H3: Expatriates' perception of support from their organisation has a positive influence on job satisfaction.

### *Assignment completion and job satisfaction*

Assignment completion is an expatriate's intention and willingness to remain in their host culture and successfully execute assigned tasks. Consequently, premature returns have been historically viewed as expatriate failures (Hemmasi et al., 2010; Solomon, 1996). There are direct and indirect costs associated with expatriate assignment failure. Apart from the significant financial costs associated with relocation, failed assignments reduce the firm's productivity, business opportunities, market share and competitive position, and damage corporate image and reputation (Dowling and Welch, 2004; Shaffer and Harrison, 1998). Although previous studies associate premature returns with assignment failure, Toh and Srinivas (2012) argue that even though an expatriate may stay in their host country for the entire period of the assignment, the assignee may fail. This argument is perhaps valid because an expatriate may remain on the job but may not be able to meet the organisation's expectations and, in some instances, even become a burden to their co-workers in the host unit. Thus, it is far more damaging for a company to keep an expatriate who is not good at the task in the host country until they complete their assignment (Harzing, 1995). This is because assignment completion does not mean expatriate failure has been avoided. Based on this assumption, it is more beneficial to the organisation to have an underperforming expatriate leave than to stay on the job (Harzing and Christensen, 2004; Naumann, 1992). An expatriate who is not perceived as successful by their parent company is unlikely to report job satisfaction. Also, how expatriates get embedded into their host country positively relates to expatriates' satisfaction with the host country.

Employee satisfaction, on the other hand, is generally considered as an overall feeling about a job or a related set of attitudes about various aspects of the job (Spector, 1997). It reflects a positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1976). While Lévy-Garboua and Montmarquette (2004) describe it as an index of preference for one's experience on the job against outside opportunities, Rice et al. (1989) suggest that satisfaction is determined, in part, by the disparities resulting from a psychological comparison process involving the appraisal of one's current job experiences against some personal standards. Thus, employee satisfaction is an important variable that may potentially influence employees' expectations regarding the workplace and their general attitudes toward the job (Turkyilmaz et al., 2011; Weiss, 2002). Some scholars have examined job satisfaction from a psycho-sociological viewpoint and conceptualised job satisfaction as an affective or emotional response to various aspects of one's job, such as job characteristics, career prospects, salary, co-workers and internal communication (Bonache, 2005; Coomber and Barriball, 2007). Various job, task and organisational factors are good predictors of

job satisfaction, not only in a domestic setting but also in overseas assignments. For example, consistent with previous research, expatriate job satisfaction is associated with lower turnover (Birdseye and Hill, 1995; Vidal et al., 2007), withdrawal cognition (Shaffer and Harrison, 1998) and higher motivation to perform and complete assigned tasks (Downes et al., 2002). Also, Spector (1997) argues that job satisfaction could be a reflection of organisational functioning. Some researchers, including Kim et al. (2005), Anne and Grønholdt (2001) and Wu and Norman (2006), observe that employee satisfaction is positively associated with employees' loyalty to their organisation.

Considering the complexity of expatriate assignments, other factors strongly related to expatriate satisfaction have also received attention in the expatriation literature. For example, expatriate satisfaction has been found to relate positively with successful adjustment to overseas job requirements and the formation of relationships with the host country's employees and customers (Black et al., 1991; Hechanova et al., 2003; Shaffer and Harrison, 1998; Liu and Lee, 2008). Existing literature on expatriation suggests that cultural adjustment is the prominent indicator of expatriation success and has, therefore, been the object of much research (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Cao et al., 2012; Froese and Peltokorpi, 2013; Malek and Budhwar, 2013). Some scholars maintain that an expatriate's inability to adjust to the host culture is largely caused by socio-cultural factors not associated with their professional work skills (Malek and Budhwar, 2013; Shin et al., 2007). While past studies on POS and expatriate work outcomes have established direct relationships, there is not much empirical evidence for the mediating role of expatriate adjustment in the POS-expatriate work outcomes relationship, thereby providing the opportunity to explore the mediating mechanisms among the variables. In this context, we hypothesise that

H4: Expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between POS and assignment completion.

H5: Expatriate adjustment mediates the relationship between POS and job satisfaction.

H6: Assignment completion mediates the relationship between POS and job satisfaction.

## **Research methods**

### *Data collection*

Data were collected from expatriates who were on assignment in Ghana in different sectors, including mining, construction, energy, oil and gas, telecommunications, manufacturing and banking. Four cities were purposively selected as they were considered the hub of Ghana's industrial activities and had the largest concentration of MNCs. Cold-call invitations were sent to subsidiaries of MNCs in Ghana describing the purpose of the survey, the background of researchers and their contact addresses, and an assurance of confidentiality of their information. A self-completed questionnaire was used for the purposes of data collection. Previous studies (Dillman, 2011; Malek and Budhwar, 2013) suggest that web surveys can be used simultaneously with postal surveys to maximise response rates and counter the drawback of the other data collection methods. Hence, both online and printed questionnaires were used in the current research. Online and printed questionnaires were distributed because the local postal system is mainly associated with undue delays. Thus, attempting to use the postal service could have led to unwarranted delays and a poor response rate. Out of the 350 questionnaires that were distributed, 232 of them were returned. A total of 81 of the completed questionnaires were retrieved online and 151 were physically retrieved. Three of them were tagged as incomplete, leaving 229 usable questionnaires, representing an effective response rate of 65.4%. Expatriates were mostly male (80%), and a majority of them were below 40 years of age.

Half of them were from Asia (50%) and had worked in Ghana for at least 3 years. Sixty-three percent had previous international assignment experience, nearly half (46%) had pre-departure knowledge of the Ghanaian culture and 66% were familiar with at least one Ghanaian language.

## Measures

All measures for this study were either adopted or adapted from existing literature; therefore, they have been tested and validated by previous studies in different contexts (e.g. [Cao et al., 2014](#); [Kawai and Strange, 2014](#); [Kraimer and Wayne, 2004](#); [Malek et al., 2015](#)). All statements were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) and expatriates indicated their level of agreement or disagreement. First, the multi-dimensional construct of POS was measured using a 12-item scale by [Kraimer and Wayne \(2004\)](#). Sample items include 'My company considers my goals when making decisions about my career', 'The financial incentives and allowances my company provides to me are good' and 'Help is available within my company whenever I have questions or concerns about living in Ghana'. Second, expatriate adjustment consisting of two sub-scales (i.e. adjustment to the host Ghanaian culture and the work environment) was measured using a 7-item scale ([Hemmasi et al., 2010](#)), a revised version of [Black and Stephen's \(1989\)](#) multi-dimensional scale. Sample items for adjustment to host culture include 'I found it easy to adjust to the cultural norms of Ghana' and 'I have adjusted well to the non-work aspects of the host country (e.g. food, music and lifestyle)'. A sample item for work-related adjustment is 'I have adjusted well to the level of responsibility required by my work role in Ghana'. Third, the measurement scale for assignment completion and job satisfaction were adapted from [Hemmasi et al. \(2010\)](#) and slightly rephrased to suit the present study's context. Sample items for assignment completion and job satisfaction, respectively, include 'I have no trouble in completing the work tasks assigned to me' and 'My overall experience of living and working in Ghana has been a positive one'.

## Results

To examine the relationship between POS, expatriate adjustment, assignment completion and job satisfaction, we utilised the structural equation modelling technique of partial least squares (PLS-SEM) (SmartPLS Release: 3.2.7 ([Ringle et al., 2015](#))). PLS is neither affected by sample size ([Chin, 1998](#); [Hair et al., 2011](#)) nor the distribution of data ([Chin and Newsted, 1999](#)). The significance of each path was tested using bootstrap t-values (5000 sub-samples) ([Tortosa et al., 2009](#)), a procedure available in PLS.

## Confirmatory factor analysis

The three dimensions of POS, two dimensions of expatriate adjustment, assignment completion and job satisfaction, were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling using PLS-SEM. [Table 1](#) presents information on the convergent validity of the eight first-order constructs of this study. Cronbach's alphas, composite reliability and average variance extracted estimates meet the minimum of 0.7, 0.7 and 0.5, respectively, as recommended for exploratory study ([Hair et al., 2016](#)). The results imply that convergent validity has been adequately met. Discriminant validity is met because the square root of the average variance extracted estimate for each of the eight constructs is greater than the inter-construct correlations between them ([Fornell and Larcker, 1981](#)), as shown in [Table 2](#). Since the SEM applied in this study is variance-based SEM, discriminant validity was also assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio 0.85 approach (HTMT<sub>0.85</sub>)



**Table I.** Convergent validity.

Codes	Item	Loading	Bootstrap t-values	A	C.R	AVE
Career POS	CPos1	0.853	35.443	0.886	0.921	0.744
	CPos2	0.878	35.305			
	CPos3	0.887	47.210			
	CPos4	0.831	27.647			
Financial POS	FPos1	0.773	20.328	0.834	0.889	0.667
	FPos2	0.885	53.850			
	FPos3	0.852	35.386			
	FPos4	0.749	16.129			
Adjustment POS	AdPos3	0.884	22.622	0.772	0.897	0.813
	AdPos4	0.920	48.283			
Adjustment to Ghanaian culture	GCultAd1	0.787	18.114	0.850	0.898	0.689
	GCultAd2	0.851	28.762			
	GCultAd3	0.844	27.703			
	GCultAd4	0.834	26.383			
Work-related adjustment	WRA1	0.818	16.009	0.818	0.891	0.731
	WRA2	0.891	44.002			
	WRA3	0.856	26.016			
Assignment completion	AssComp1	0.854	30.877	0.823	0.894	0.738
	AssComp2	0.868	35.740			
	AssComp3	0.856	26.257			
Job satisfaction	Sat1	0.894	56.490	0.821	0.893	0.737
	Sat2	0.853	26.245			
	Sat3	0.828	29.074			

POS: perceived organisational support.

All t-values are significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

(Henseler et al., 2015). The results also presented in Table 4 shows that all the correlations were below 0.85, affirming the uniqueness of the constructs.

Since the focus of this study is to examine the relationship between POS (and not its antecedents), expatriate adjustment, assignment completion and job satisfaction, following the recommendations of Wetzels et al., 2009, we examined confirmatory factor analysis for the model using a second-order construct for POS. The results presented in Table 3 show that convergent and discriminant validity are adequately met at the second-order construct level.

## Structural model and hypothesis testing

Because this study was interested in the relationships between POS, expatriate adjustment, assignment completion and job satisfaction, rather than their antecedents, POS was obtained by averaging the ratings obtained for the 10 items validated under career, financial and adjustment POS (Hair et al., 2016). Similarly, expatriate adjustment was obtained by averaging the ratings attained for the seven items validated under adjustment to the host Ghanaian culture and work environment. The results of the structural model are presented in Figure 1 and Table 4. The study supports all three direct hypotheses (H1–H3) in the present context. Specifically, a significant positive relationship exists between POS and expatriate adjustment, POS and assignment completion, and POS and job satisfaction.

**Table 2.** Discriminant validity of first-order constructs (Square root of AVEs in diagonal-bold).

Construct	Fornell-Larcker criterion							Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) 0.85 criterion							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1. Career POS	<b>0.863</b>														
2. Financial POS	0.596	<b>0.817</b>						0.700							
3. Adjustment POS	0.653	0.464	<b>0.902</b>					0.797	<b>0.593</b>						
5. Adjustment to Ghanaian culture	0.260	0.307	0.182	<b>0.830</b>				0.292	0.356	<b>0.228</b>					
6. Work-related adjustment	0.361	0.358	0.243	0.612	<b>0.855</b>			0.404	0.407	0.285	<b>0.729</b>				
7. Assignment completion	0.349	0.467	0.246	0.463	0.653	<b>0.859</b>		0.404	0.544	0.307	0.557	<b>0.789</b>			
8. Job satisfaction	0.439	0.484	0.351	0.368	0.468	0.502	<b>0.858</b>	0.506	0.572	0.436	0.434	0.560	<b>0.611</b>		

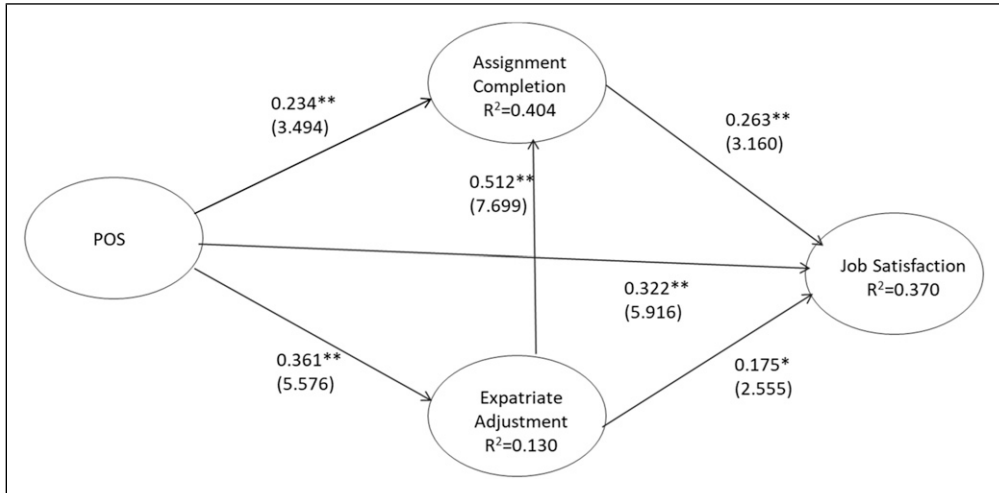
POS: perceived organisational support.

**Table 3.** Structural path results.

Hypothesis	Structural path	Path coefficient	t-value (bootstrap)	Hypothesis results
H1	POS → expatriate adjustment	0.361**	5.576	Supported
H2	POS → assignment completion	0.234**	3.494	Supported
H3	POS → job satisfaction	0.322**	5.916	Supported

POS: perceived organisational support.

\*\*p is significant at 0.01 level of significance; \*p is significant at 0.05 level of significance.



**Figure 1.** Structural paths showing regression weights and t-values.

### Mediation test

Mediation test was conducted using the procedures recommended by Nitzl et al., 2016. According to the authors, mediation test involves the testing of the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator. Specifically, if POS has a significant indirect effect on job satisfaction through expatriate adjustment, then there is mediation. The mediation is full provided the direct effect of POS on job satisfaction is no longer significant after the inclusion of the mediator. The mediation is said to be partial if both the direct and indirect effects are significant. As a result, the current study found that expatriate adjustment partially mediates the association between POS and assignment completion, lending support to hypothesis H4. Also, expatriate adjustment partially mediates the relationship between POS and job satisfaction, thus, lending support to hypothesis H5. Finally, assignment completion partially mediates the association between POS and job satisfaction, thus, lending support to hypothesis H6. See Table 4 for details.

### Discussion

This study has examined expatriates’ perception of the support provided by their organisations and its effects on their assignment outcomes in host subsidiaries of multinational companies in Ghana. Overall, the results of the present research support the argument that POS has direct positive effects

**Table 4.** Mediation of expatriate adjustment and assignment completion.

Hypothesis	Mediation path	Path coefficient 'a'	Path coefficient 'b'	Path coefficient 'c'	Indirect effect (a*b)	SD (a*b)	t	Mediation type	Proportion of mediation	Hypothesis results
H4	POS>EA>AC	0.361**	0.512**	0.234**	0.185**	0.047	3.940	Partial	0.4413	Supported
H5	POS>EA>JS	0.361**	0.175*	0.322**	0.063*	0.028	2.230	Partial	0.164	Supported
H6	POS>AC>JS	0.234**	0.263**	0.322**	0.062*	0.025	2.446	Partial	0.1605	Supported

POS: perceived organisational support; EA: expatriate adjustment; AC: assignment completion; JS: job satisfaction.  
 \*\*t-values are significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

on expatriate assignment outcomes, in particular, expatriates' adjustment, assignment completion and job satisfaction. Thus, POS encourages employees to achieve favourable work-related outcomes, including job performance, organisational commitment, adjustment and organisational citizenship behaviour (Chan et al., 2019; Fee and Gray, 2020; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). The findings of the present study are consistent with the suggestion that social support provided by various groups is significant and contributes to expatriate adjustment and performance (Bayraktar, 2019; Liu and Shaffer, 2005). Through support from their organisation, expatriates can overcome the challenges associated with adjusting and working in diverse cultures. As cultural differences and specific host-country values and norms remain critical in expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment (Malek and Budhwar, 2013), multinational companies are urged to provide adequate support to their expatriates to enable them to adjust quickly and discharge their assigned duties. For example, prior to an expatriate's arrival in Ghana, the host subsidiary would have telephone conversations to clarify issues regarding accommodation; travel documents; personal belongings handling and storage; crime, safety and security; shops and restaurants and issues relating to schools and transportation for the expatriate family. A short write-up on Ghana's democracy and political system, weather, traditions, cultural norms, sensitive cultural practices, links to rental companies, tourist sites and websites is forwarded to the expatriate as a supplementary information. At arrival, the expatriate is housed in a temporary self-service apartment in the best location for 4 weeks where arrangements are made for house and apartment viewing in different locations to allow the expatriate to choose where to stay permanently. In addition, planned trips are organised for the expatriate to visit various shopping centres, restaurants, evening hangouts and any specific location requested by the expatriate. A company driver is normally assigned to chauffeur the expatriate around town during the first 2 months while arrangements are made to assist the expatriate acquire an international or local driver's licence. Series of bilateral meetings are also organised with staff, partners, industry players, politicians and government agencies and any other institutions or persons of strategic value. At the end of the assignment, the expatriate is assisted to dispose of personal belongings that are not needed such as car, furniture and generator. Arrangement is made with a haulage company to pack and ship personal effects to the next destination.

In addition, this study affirmed the mediating role of expatriate adjustment in the relationship between POS and expatriate assignment completion as well as job satisfaction. As previous research (e.g. Kawai and Strange, 2014; Malek and Budhwar, 2013) has not provided such evidence, the findings of this study offer a useful insight in enhancing our understanding of the mediating mechanisms associated with expatriation. This suggests that employees interpret the support from their organisation in ways that are relevant to moving and working in a new culture. Therefore, MNCs are encouraged to pay attention to factors that contribute to the adjustment of expatriates in host subsidiaries. The current study provides first-hand information on expatriation in a sub-Saharan African context, which cannot be easily obtained by Western international human resource management (IHRM) researchers. While the study results are based within a diverse cultural context, differing from previous expatriate management studies that focused on countries in the Triad (the United States, Western Europe and Japan), this study has provided supplementary literature in furthering our understanding of the significance of organisational support in expatriate adjustment, assignment completion and job satisfaction.

## **Theoretical contributions and implications**

The findings from this study extend the expatriation literature in several ways. First, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the effect of POS on expatriate assignment outcomes in an

unfamiliar cultural environment. The study attempted to understand expatriates' perceptions of their organisations' support even as they execute their assigned duties within an African host country context – a context that has received little scholarly attention in terms of expatriate management research. Hence, this study contributes to expatriation research by empirically examining the relationships between organisational support and expatriate adjustment in explaining the assignment completion and job satisfaction variables.

Second, the results enrich our understanding of the organisational support theory by providing evidence of the significant positive associations between POS and expatriate assignment outcomes. Employees in an employment relationship would feel obligated to reciprocate the company's supportive work environment with both social and emotional resources such as commitment, trust, attachment and loyalty (Brief and Motowidlo, 1986; Levinson, 1965; Van der Heijden et al., 2009). As such, expatriates may feel obligated to reciprocate when they perceive that their companies support them during their assignment's duration. Such a perception usually yields positive work-related outcomes. Given that foreign assignments are characterised by high levels of anxiety, support from their organisation could be valuable in helping expatriates minimise the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty that are associated with relocating to new cultural settings. Since reciprocity occurs spontaneously, it is likely that international assignees would engage in actions that favour their organisation, leading to enhanced job performance and better expatriation outcomes. Consistent with the psychological contract perspective, employees will withdraw their loyalty and commitment to an organisation if they feel that they are neither being fairly treated nor sufficiently supported to adjust and perform their assigned tasks in their host country. Thus, the support extended to expatriates by their organisations becomes even more relevant in ensuring successful expatriation. In general, the current study contributes to the growing body of research highlighting the effect of POS on expatriate assignment outcomes.

Finally, findings from this study lend support to the assertion that support enhances expatriates' adjustment to their host country's work environment and contributes to assignment completion and job satisfaction. Hence, expatriates on assignment in subsidiaries of multinational companies in Ghana can rely on POS as coping mechanisms to strengthen their assignment success. Even as this study underscores the significance of POS, it further argues that other sources of support such as support from the expatriate community, family and support from different social groups (Bayraktar, 2019; Sokro and Moeti-Lysson, 2018; Toh and Srinivas, 2012; Varma et al., 2009), which are not explored in this study could also be useful in facilitating successful expatriate adjustment and assignment success in diverse cultures.

## Managerial implications

First, MNCs should recognise that cross-cultural adjustment and expatriate job satisfaction are closely linked with POS (Kawai and Strange, 2014; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004). For this reason, expatriates' perceptions of how they are supported by their sending organisation to adjust and complete their assigned duties in a foreign country cannot be underestimated. A multinational company that fails to recognise the contributions of its expatriates and care about their well-being is unlikely to achieve its performance targets. Therefore, parent companies should put in place rewards and compensation systems that would be perceived by expatriates as enticing, thus, motivating them to willingly accept relocation to foreign subsidiaries. Furthermore, when expatriate employees learn to appreciate their host culture and erase the erroneous impression that everything in the host nation should be as in their home country, they are likely to adjust with ease in the host country and become more productive, as every society has its own social values, belief systems and ways of doing things.

Indeed, the degree to which individual expatriates come to recognise, accept and respect the local norms and values of their host society could impact their interactions in the new culture. Consequently, multinational firms aspiring to be successful in sub-Saharan Africa countries must align their management systems, styles and practices with the local cultural context of the host country (Jackson et al., 2008; Seriki et al., 2010).

Secondly, even though expatriates' psychological contract fulfilment was not examined, this study's findings suggest that the perception of being adequately supported to adjust and complete one's assigned duties in the foreign culture may potentially strengthen the value of the psychological contract between the expatriate and their parent company. For example, research has shown that when the organisation fulfils its obligations towards employees as anticipated, it has significant positive effects on organisational citizenship behaviour, employees' attitudes and job performance (Ahmad and Zafar, 2018; Kumarika Perera et al., 2017; Raeder et al., 2012). As a result, when the support received meets expectation, the expatriate may become more committed, motivated and be willing to increase their efforts to ensure that assigned tasks in the foreign subsidiary are executed with expedience. Conversely, perceptions of lack of support may elicit feelings of unmet expectations, which, in turn, could lead to difficulties in adjustment and the overall effectiveness of the expatriate. This argument is in line with the assertion that employees who have a supportive relationship with their employer may not be compelled to monitor whether their psychological contracts are being met or not, as they would have a benevolent view of their employer's actions (Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2005). It is, therefore, beneficial for MNCs to pursue an integrated approach by providing support systems that are strategically aligned with HRM practices. Employees who perceive their organisations to be supportive and committed to helping them meet their social, emotional and tangible needs could reciprocate by assisting the organisation in achieving its desired goals (Ko and Hur, 2014). Companies should also make every effort to fulfil international assignees' expectations by providing them with the needed support and incentives that were promised and communicated to the expatriates prior to the assignment. Thus, a feeling of being empowered or supported on assignments may lead to the perception that the organisation has fulfilled its obligations or promises (Agarwal and Bhargava, 2014; Bhatnagar, 2014).

## **Limitations and future research**

Despite the aforementioned contributions and implications, this study has several limitations that merit consideration in the design of future research. First, it has been acknowledged by previous studies that expatriates' experiences are affected by their country of origin (Tungli and Peiperl, 2009); hence, care should be taken in the generalisation of the findings of this study to all expatriate population. Even though some scholars argue persuasively that there is cultural proximity between employees from some regions of Africa and Asia (Horwitz, 2012; Xing et al., 2016), there still exist significant differences in their cultural values, norms and behaviours. Indeed, ethnographic studies of multinational teams and organisations indicate that expatriate employees do not necessarily reflect general population tendencies (Salk and Brannen, 2000; Schneider and Barsoux, 1997). Future studies could also examine whether the findings of this research are able to be generalised to other contexts, in particular, that of North Africa. This is because the cultural values and beliefs of the people of North Africa are undoubtedly more similar to those of the European Mediterranean and the Middle East than those in sub-Saharan Africa (Gannon and Pillai, 2013).

Secondly, cross-cultural adjustment varies greatly between organisational expatriates (OEs) and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), but only a few studies have examined why differences occur in expatriation outcomes in relation to expatriate adjustment and job satisfaction (Doherty

et al., 2011; Froese, 2012; Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011, 2013; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009) of OEs and SIEs. In particular, Doherty et al. (2011) found that SIEs working in Western Europe were mainly motivated to relocate as a result of specific interests in the host country and a desire for adventure, while OEs were motivated by job-related factors. Building on the current research, future studies may investigate and compare the differences in cross-cultural adjustment between OEs and SIEs. Future studies may also test whether POS moderates the relationship between expatriates' adjustment and job satisfaction within these two groups of expatriates in the African context.

Finally, it is also acknowledged that this research was limited to the analysis of data from global assignees who are currently on assignments in Ghana. Given that the study collected information from expatriates from different countries working in subsidiaries of MNCs, it would be insightful to extend this research to include the perspective of repatriates and expatriate co-workers, particularly those who supervise the work of expatriates in the host subsidiaries. Building on the current research, future research should employ a mixed methods research design in order to explore and validate the links between the constructs that are presented in this research.

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