

Challenges in Employment and Adjustment of Academic Expatriates Based in Higher Education Institutions in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa

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Abstract : The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges encountered in the mediation of attracting and recruiting academic expatriates who in turn encounter their own obstacles in adjusting into and settling in their host country, host academic institutions and host communities. The non-existence of literature on attraction, placement and management of academic expatriates in the South African context has been acknowledged. Moreover, Higher Education Institutions in South Africa have voiced concerns relating to delayed and prolonged recruitment and selection processes experienced in the employment process of academic expatriates. Once employed, academic expatriates should be supported and acquainted with the surroundings, the local communities as well as be assisted to establish working relations with colleagues in order to facilitate their adjustment and integration process. Hence, an employer should play a critical role in facilitating the adjustment of academic expatriates. This mixed methods study was located in four Higher Education Institutions based in the KwaZulu-Natal province, in South Africa. The explanatory sequential design approach was deployed in the study. The merits of this approach were chiefly that it employed both the quantitative and qualitative techniques of inquiry. Therefore, the study examined and interrogated its subject from a multiplicity of quantitative and qualitative vantage points, yielding a much more enriched and enriching illumination. Mixing the strengths of both the quantitative and the qualitative techniques delivered much more durable articulation and understanding of the subject. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data relating to interaction adjustment, general adjustment and work adjustment from academic expatriates. One hundred and forty two (142) academic expatriates participated in the quantitative study. Qualitative data relating to employment process and support offered to academic expatriates was collected through a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. A total of 48 respondents; including, line managers, human resources practitioners, and academic expatriates participated in the qualitative study. The Independent T-test, ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics were performed to analyse, interpret and make meaning of quantitative data and thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. The qualitative results revealed that academic talent is sourced from outside the borders of the country because of the academic skills shortage in almost all academic disciplines especially in the disciplines associated with Science, Engineering and Accounting. However, delays in work permit application process made it difficult to finalise the recruitment and selection process on time. Furthermore, the quantitative results revealed that academic expatriates experience general and interaction adjustment challenges associated with the use of local language and understanding of local culture. However, female academic expatriates were found to be better adjusted in the two areas as compared to male academic expatriates. Moreover, significant mean differences were found between institutions suggesting that academic expatriates based in rural areas experienced adjustment challenges differently from the academic expatriates based in urban areas. The study gestured to the need for policy revisions in the area of immigration, human resources and academic administration.

Keywords : academic expatriates, recruitment and selection, interaction and general adjustment, work adjustment

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