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## Adapting to Indonesian Culture: Success Stories and Implications for Sustainable Expat Relocation

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### Abstract

The article examines the cultural adaptation of two expatriate families from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who moved to Semarang, Indonesia. In the context of green value creation and sustainable economics, the aim is to identify key factors for successful adaptation and their impact on sustainable relocation. The study is conducted through surveys and interviews exploring the stages of cultural adaptation according to the U-curve theory: honeymoon, culture shock, adaptation and final integration. The results show successful overcoming of culture shock and comfortable integration of families into Indonesian culture, highlighting the importance of understanding cultural differences and similarities. The article highlights the economic and managerial aspects of cultural adaptation, which contributes to the development of effective HR strategies and sustainable business development. These aspects are important for economics, management and business faculties, as the successful integration of expatriates directly impacts the economic stability of the region and the achievement of Golden Indonesia 2045 goals.

### Keywords

U-curve, Culture Shock, Adaptation, Expats, Sustainable Relocation, Green Cost, Indonesia 2045.

## 1. Introduction

Globalization has significantly increased the number of expatriates moving to countries like Indonesia, attracted by its unique culture and dynamic economy (Lubis et al., 2024). However, the transition to a new cultural and economic environment can be challenging, often causing significant stress for expatriates and their families. This study focuses on the adjustment experiences of two expatriate families from Central Asia (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) living in Indonesia. It aims to identify key cultural and economic factors that influence their adaptation process. Cultural differences, language barriers, and changes in daily routines and habits can make the adaptation process difficult. The study explores these challenges in detail, analysing how they impact the expatriates' daily lives and overall well-being.

Economic factors, such as the cost of living, salary levels, financial support, and working conditions, also play a crucial role in the success of expatriate integration (Oriekhoe et al., 2024). The U-shaped theory of cultural adjustment, developed (Oberg, 1960). This theory explains that individuals adapting to a new cultural environment go through a series of stages that begin with the honeymoon stage where individuals feel excitement and attraction to the new culture. However, after some time, they enter a stage of culture shock which is characterized by feelings of frustration, confusion, and discomfort due to the cultural differences they encounter. Challenges in this stage are often caused by differences in language, social norms, and behaviors that encourage adjustment (Bukran & Ramdani, 2024). After passing through the culture shock stage, individuals begin to enter a stage of adjustment where they develop coping strategies to deal with cultural stress and begin to feel more comfortable with their new environment. These coping mechanisms can include learning the local language, seeking social support, or changing their expectations of the new culture. The final stage of the U-shaped curve is integration (Wulandari, 2013).

when the individual has fully adapted and is able to function effectively in the new cultural context without experiencing significant stress (Sturiale, & Scuderi, 2018; Reic, 2023). This study provides important insights into the factors that influence cross-cultural adaptation and how expatriates can overcome challenges in this process, thereby strengthening their ability to integrate successfully in a new environment. Through qualitative analysis of the experiences of the two families, this study highlights the importance of intercultural understanding and the development of effective support systems for expatriates. Recommendations are offered to help improve the support provided to expatriates, aiming to ease their transition, enhance their cultural integration, and ultimately improve their overall experience in Indonesia. This research contributes to the broader literature on cross-cultural adaptation and offers practical insights for organizations and policymakers involved in supporting expatriates.

## 2. Methods

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach. This method facilitates an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and identifies key factors influencing their adaptation to a new cultural and economic environment. Primary data collection methods included in-depth interviews and surveys with expatriate families from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who moved to Semarang, Indonesia. The sample consisted of two expatriate families, each with three to four members. The selection criteria were Country of origin: Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Place of residence: Semarang, Indonesia. Length of stay in Indonesia: Family A - 10 years, Family B - 3 years. This ensured sufficient time to complete all stages of adaptation according to the U-curve theory. Data Collection Methods in this study used in-

depth semi-structured interviews conducted with family members. Data Analysis Data from interviews and surveys were analyzed using thematic analysis. This research methodology, which is based on a qualitative phenomenological approach, provides an in-depth understanding of the processes and factors influencing expatriate adaptation in Indonesia. Using interviews and surveys resulted in a rich data set, which revealed key elements of successful adaptation, such as economic support, social networks, and cultural learning. These findings can inform the development of expatriate support strategies, assist their successful integration, and contribute to sustainable economic development in the region.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

This study shows that expatriate families from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan successfully overcome culture shock and adapt to the new environment in Indonesia through active engagement with the local community (Fadhillah et al., 2017). They engage in social and cultural activities, such as attending traditional events and participating in local celebrations, which help them understand and appreciate Indonesian cultural norms and values. In addition, they make efforts to learn Indonesian as an effective means of communication, which accelerates their adaptation process and improves their ability to build better relationships with the local community (Ma'ruf, 2012). Initially, they face various challenges, including language barriers, differences in food types, climate, and daily habits. However, through active participation and support from the surrounding environment, they successfully overcome these difficulties (Aslam & Fayaz, 2022; Lai et al., 2020; Sorbello, 2020; Zinia et al., 2018; Ayuningtyas, 2018). In addition, significant economic support from employers plays a significant role in reducing financial stress, allowing these families to focus on the cultural adaptation process without excessive worries about living expenses. This emphasizes the importance of social and economic support in facilitating the cross-cultural adaptation process for expatriates (Nadeem et al., 2015).

Family A, consisting of parents and one child, benefited greatly from the financial assistance provided by their employer. This assistance allowed them to rent a comfortable place to live, reducing the stress related to basic needs and giving them the opportunity to focus more on cultural integration. By not having to worry about living expenses, the family was able to more freely establish relationships with the local community, learn the language, and engage in social activities, which accelerated their adaptation process in the new environment. Meanwhile, Family B, consisting of a husband and wife, faced a stronger culture shock when they first arrived (Alsavira, 2021). However, they managed to overcome it by actively engaging in the local community and participating in social activities. Over time, they found jobs that increased their financial stability and self-confidence, which significantly helped them in the adaptation process. Through intense involvement in the new environment, Family B was able to overcome the initial challenges and build a more stable and integrated life in a foreign country (Umarqulova, 2024).

Indonesia's economic stability and the availability of professional opportunities play a significant role in the successful integration of expatriate families (Valentinov & Iliopoulos, 2024). A strong economic environment and opportunities for professional development facilitate their adaptation process, allowing expatriates to focus more on cultural learning and social engagement. This suggests that economic support is not only a supporting factor, but also an important element in helping expatriate families navigate the challenges of a new environment. These findings highlight the importance of economic stability, social networks, and cultural learning in the expatriate adaptation process. In addition to financial support, involvement in the local community and understanding the local culture have been shown to be key factors in accelerating successful integration (Naratri & Perdhana,

2019). By combining adequate economic support and active participation in social and cultural life, expatriates can more easily adapt and feel comfortable in their new environment.

This study examines the adaptation process of two expatriate families from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who moved to Semarang, Indonesia, focusing on cultural and economic aspects. Both families experienced all stages of culture shock, starting with a positive honeymoon phase, followed by disorientation and stress, and finally reaching the mastery stage where they felt integrated into Indonesian society (Maulana et al., 2022). In each of these stages, they had to navigate significant cultural differences, develop coping mechanisms, and build a deeper understanding of local norms and values. Economic stability and support from employers played a significant role in providing financial security and reducing relocation stress. This support enabled them to better adjust to challenges such as the high cost of living. However, financial challenges persist, especially related to the higher cost of living, requiring effective adaptation strategies to manage expenses and maintain a balance between economic and social needs (Malek et al., 2015).

#### 4. Conclusion

Cultural differences, particularly language barriers and dietary changes, were significant obstacles. However, support from family, new social connections, and active engagement with the local community facilitated their adaptation. Families participated in local cultural activities and maintained ties to their home culture, which helped alleviate homesickness and fostered a sense of belonging. The study underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to expatriate adaptation, combining cultural understanding, economic support, and social integration. Recommendations for future expatriates include researching living costs, planning budgets, familiarizing themselves with local culture, and seeking advice from those with prior experience in Indonesia. Future research should include more diverse samples, explore long-term adaptation dynamics, and assess the impact of various support strategies. Developing effective training programs and support mechanisms is vital for easing the transition and promoting successful integration, ultimately contributing to sustainable economic growth and regional development.

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