



EFFECT OF CRITICAL FACTORS ON EXPATRIATE ASSIGNMENT PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN OIL AND GAS SECTOR

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Abstract

Expatriates are indispensable in the oil and gas sector, owing to the numerous roles they play in imparting knowledge, and representing their home offices. However, these expatriates face difficulties in communication, climatic change, culture difference, short term assignments and expatriates personal characteristics. Consequently, the main objective of this project is to assess the effect of these critical factors on expatriate assignment performance in the Nigerian oil and gas sector. Survey research design was adopted. Questionnaires were used to carry out a survey. A pilot test was also performed to confirm the reliability of the instrument (questionnaire) and after that the questionnaires were given out to 150 expatriates. After data collection, the five (5) hypotheses of the study were tested using multiple regression analysis. Findings of the study reveals the validation of all tested hypotheses at 5% level of significant. From the results obtained, the study found out that expatriates on international assignment in Nigeria do face problems due to difficulty in communication, cultural differences, short-term assignment, expatriates personal characteristics and climate change. In conclusion, the study posits that open communication helps in creating an enabling environment that reduces communication difficulty for expatriates and then improve their performance. Majority of the expatriates noted that short term assignments have no negative impacts on their performance but long term assignment will be preferred, the culture shock experienced by most expatriates is counter-productive and can be reduced via cross-cultural trainings. Age and previous work experience are two personal characteristics agreed to impact most on job performance at work in Nigerian oil and gas sector. Expatriates identified the difference in climate condition as one factor that can reduce their performance at work but agreed that the climate in Nigeria is good and encouraged expatriate performance. The implications and contributions to knowledge of this study are as follows: a validation of the theoretical framework, as well as, guidance to any expatriate coming to Nigeria. This will certainly help the human resource professionals in knowing who to delegate for expatriate assignment based on age, experience and general attitude.

Keywords: *Critical factors; expatriate failure; expatriate assignment performance; regression analysis; Nigeria*

1 Introduction

According to Maley & Moeller (2017), an expatriate is an employee sent by his organization to a different country to work. They can also be explained as people who live in a country on a temporary basis having the intention to return to their native home after a given time. Naeem et al., (2015) noted that expatriates differ from tourists or migrants due to the length of time they stay in such foreign lands which usually range between six months to five years. They are also primarily with the intention of returning to their home country at the expiration of their tenure. Noe., Hollenbeck., Gerhart, & Wright (2006), also noted that for an expatriate to be successful in his work overseas, he needs to be imbued with some virtues which includes being: competent, able to communicate (verbally and nonverbally), flexible, tolerant and sensitive to cultural differences. He should also be motivated, interested and supported by their families.

Despite all the positive attitudes supposedly possessed by most expatriates as mentioned by Noe et al., (2006) some expatriate assignments sail through while others fail. Expatriate assignment failure occurs when an expatriate on foreign assignment for any reason fails to accomplish his mission and/or returns home before the scheduled time for his return. Harzing (1995) noted that expatriate assignment failure should not be measured only from the perspective of premature re-entry into the expatriate's home country but that those that do not return prematurely but stayed without accomplishing their assignments do more harm to their organizations. He further opined that completing a foreign assignment successfully does not eliminate the possibility of expatriate assignment failure until the returnee has fully re-adjusted to her/his home culture/organization (Lauring & Selmer, 2010; Selmer & Lauring, 2010).

Consequently, factors such as communication difficulties, short term assignments, cultural differences, personal characteristics of individual expatriates and difference in climatic conditions can affect the performance of

an expatriate while on international assignment in Nigeria, and these constructs represented our definition of critical factors in this study (Okpara & Kabongo, 2011; Maley & Moeller, 2017).

The more we know about these factors, the better it becomes for both the expatriates and their respective organizations that bear the burden of financial losses when these assignments fail to achieve their objectives (Tharenou, 2013; Ambos & Håkanson, 2013). The organizations will be better placed in making better decisions from expatriate selection to provision of adequate training and according proper time span for such assignments. The individual on his side will be better placed in knowing what to expect and how best to conduct himself and manage his expectations (Beugelsdijk., Maseland., Hoorn, & Slangen, 2015; Betancourt & Wezel, 2016). In addition, since, these critical factors can make or mar an expatriate's performance in Nigeria, they are therefore worthy to be looked into carefully.

Historically, Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious West African country heavily endowed with crude oil and natural gas deposits. The discovery of oil in (commercial quantity) Nigeria on the 12th of June, 1956 was followed with the influx of multinational companies (MNCs) into Nigeria. Their entrance also resulted to an increase in the number of foreigners coming into Nigeria to work. Among these foreigners are people being sent on international assignments by their respective home based organizations. The need for these expatriates came as a result of expansion of the activities of multinational companies (MNCs) into foreign countries including Nigeria due to the establishment of subsidiaries. This has resulted in the constant influx of expatriates from the foreign organizations that come to represent their respective parent companies. These expatriates play important roles for the organizations they represent as they are heavily relied upon by their organizations for knowledge and skills transfer to new employees and sustenance of uniform organizational culture in the new subsidiaries. These international assignees or expatriates are also needed for the purpose of developing global competencies within a management team thereby strengthening the organization's competitive advantage (Naeem et al., 2015). Naeem et al. (2015) and Collings et al., (2011) also noted that expatriate workers can be used as position fillers in foreign subsidiaries where there is vacancy. Moulik and Mazumdar (2012) points out that expatriate assignment also increased due to rapid globalization and boundary less business ventures.

In addition, the reason for the growing number of expatriates in the Nigerian oil and gas sector arise from the fact that they help to transfer knowledge and skills to newly recruited staff at the subsidiaries and they also represent their parent companies at the new locations (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Noe., Hollenbeck., Gerhart, & Wright, 2006; Collings., Scullion, & Morley, 2007). But, the ultimate aims of these expatriates and their organizations is for them to perform well in their numerous assignments but sometimes some other factors emerge to interfere in the assignment process. Some of these factors (tagged, critical factors) often result to abrupt ending of the assignment (Okpara & Kabongo, 2011; Maley & Moeller, 2017), thereby resulting to considerable loss of income for the organization and pride for the expatriate concerned; while some of the factors also help the expatriates achieve success in their assignments. The difficulties experienced by expatriates in the oil and gas sector include *communication difficulties, short term assignments, cultural differences, personal characteristics and difference in climatic conditions* (Maley & Moeller, 2017; He & Fang, 2016; Costa & Pedro, 2017; McNulty, 2016; Pardo & Alfonso, 2017; Sanders & Yang, 2016; Ejohwomu., Olalekan, & Ka, 2017). These conditions are easily adapted to by some expatriates while some see them as high hurdles difficult to overcome.

For example, short term assignments do not give room for married expatriates to take their family along. This creates a divide between the family members especially when the children are still young or when the wife/husband has a job in their home country. It also creates a distraction to the partner who must travel abroad to provide for his family, then call home every now and then to find out how his family is faring. He works with a divided attention and whether his family is settled at home or not will certainly affect his mood and performance at his workplace. Such situations created by short term assignments can cause staff to reject expatriate assignments (Tung, 1988; Maley & Moeller, 2017)

These unfavourable conditions must be eliminated for expatriate assignment performance to become completely fruitful since expatriate assignments have been proven to be cost intensive and unavoidable (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Maley & Moeller, 2017; Hagemayer, 2016; Dutta., Attila, & Dhruv, 2017). Eliminating the above unfavourable critical factors from expatriate assignments would reverse the anaemic returns on expatriate investments (Black and Gregersen, 1999; Maley & Moeller, 2017). Consequently, the effects of these critical factors should be well studied and understood to eliminate/limit the occurrence of any accidents borne out of lack of concentration by any staff especially expatriates who are being looked up to by the locals as pacesetters. Consequently, the main objective of this study was to evaluate the effect of the critical factors on expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria oil and gas sector. These critical factors have been highlighted by authors such as Okpara and Kabongo (2011), and Maley & Moeller (2017). However, the specific objectives are as follows:

1. To test the effect of communication difficulties on expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria
2. To test the effect of short term assignments on expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria.
3. To test the effect of cultural differences on expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria
4. To test the effect of expatriate's personal characteristics on expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria and
5. To test the effect of change in climatic conditions on expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria.

By establishing the effects of the five critical factors on expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria, the knowledge gap created by not knowing exactly how these factors contribute to expatriate assignment performance would have been significantly closed (Maley & Moeller, 2017). The closure of this knowledge gap will be a great way of reducing the losses incurred via expatriate assignments. Another motivation of this study was based on the fact that when performances are affected negatively, MNCs suffer huge financial losses. Therefore since expatriate assignments are unavoidable (Black and Gregersen, 1999) and cannot be replaced with any other effective alternatives, this study becomes very significant to highlight the critical factors that should be looked out for during any expatriate assignment to Nigeria to ensure that the expatriate assignment performance is affected positively.

2 Review of Related Literature

2.1 Conceptual Framework.

A research on the effects of critical factors such as communication difficulties, short term assignments, cultural differences, personal characteristics of expatriates and differences in climatic conditions, on expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria can be said to be long overdue (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011; Maley & Moeller, 2017; Lin-Hi & Blumberg, 2016; Rofcanin., Kiefer, & Strauss, 2017). My organization practices a routine cross posting of staff with joint venture companies therefore making this research results very pertinent in understanding the very crucial factors that can influence an expatriate employee's performance while on international assignment. The old ideas of sending employees (with their families sometimes) into strange environments casually should be jettisoned. Employees leaving their comfort zones should be given overwhelming supports by the nature of provisions made for their survival as individuals and delivery of core duties on the job (Romani., Silvia, & Richard, 2016; Zinko., Zhan., Hunt, & Adam, 2017). The old era of sending expatriates out to work without proper preparations should be reviewed (Maley & Moeller, 2017; Zinko., William, & Laird, 2016). In my organization, the failure of an expatriate is costly to the organization and devastating to the individual involved. Some individuals can become so frustrated or depressed to the extent of trying to take their own lives due to shame and loss of pride. Failure leaves behind a seemingly perpetual sour taste in the mind of the individual and a large hole in the coffers of the organization (Karaosmanoglu., Nesenur, & Didem, 2016; Hjerto & Kuvaas, 2017). In an organization like mine where flammable liquids/gases are handled, the danger of poor performance is even more worrisome. Hydrocarbons can get ignited uncontrollably and the result is better imagined than experienced. Therefore, all the conditions necessary for an expatriate worker to perform creditably well must be well provided; he must be well supported (psychologically, emotionally and physically) before, during and after the assignment (Maley & Moeller, 2017; Sugathan., Kumar, & Avinash, 2017), hence, the need for this research project.

In the conceptual framework for this study (figure 1), dependent variable is expatriate performance and independent variables are the critical factors - communication difficulties, short term assignments, cultural differences, personal characteristics of expatriates and differences in climatic conditions.

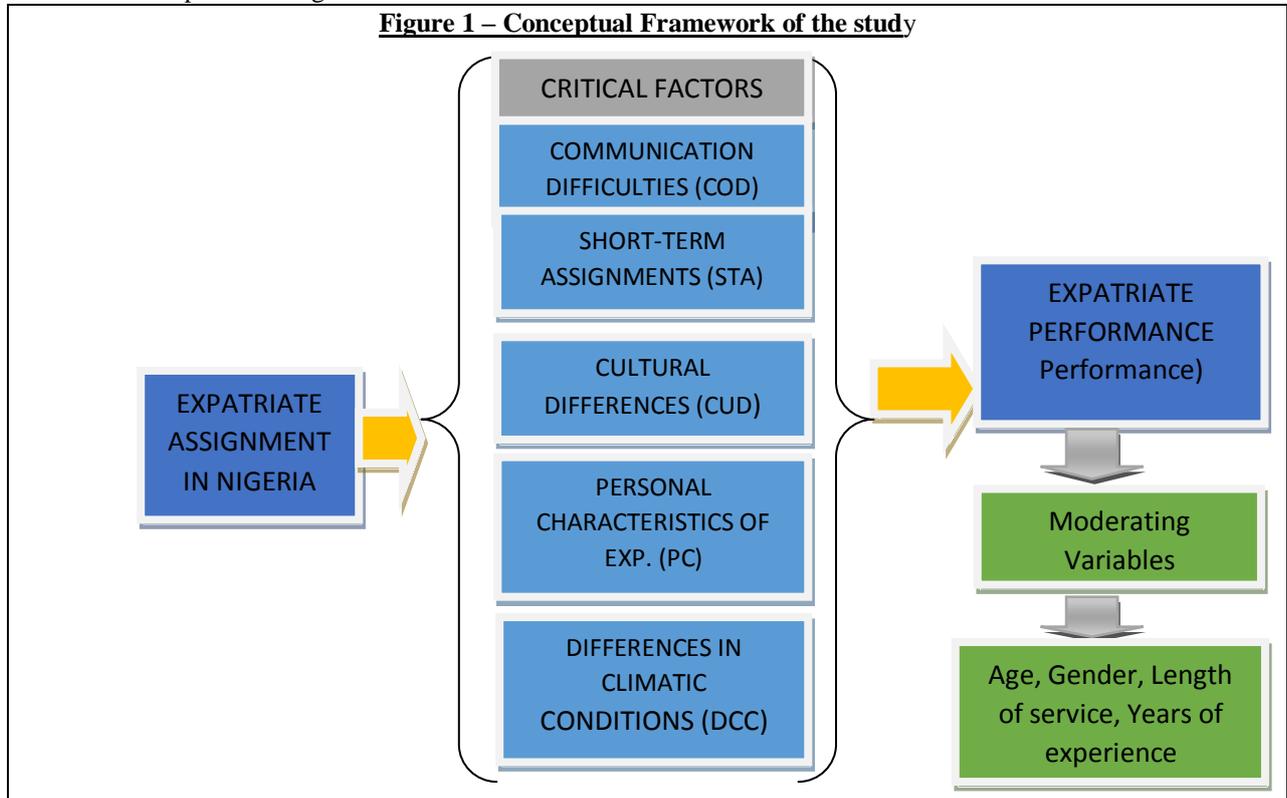
Communication barrier is a critical factor that affects expatriate assignment performance (Betancourt & Wezel, 2016; Maley & Moeller, 2017). When an expatriate cannot speak English (which is the Lingua franca in Nigeria) fluently or speaks with a mixture of his mother tongue, it becomes difficult to interact with him. It also goes either way. Nigerians being multi ethnic is also multi lingual and when their mother tongues and local dialects interfere with their spoken English, the expatriate finds it difficult to understand what they actually mean. This can lead to misunderstanding that will eventually affect his performance on the job.

Another critical factor that has effect on expatriate performance in my workplace is cultural difference between the expatriate's host and home countries. Most multi-ethnic countries are also multi-cultural and multi-religious Nigeria inclusive. Some expatriate workers plunge into culture shock (Naeem et al, 2015; Xia, 2009) when confronted with a culture different from theirs. The impact of the culture shock on their personal psychology may also affect their performance in the workplace. Consequently, Maley and Moeller (2017) opine that programs should be put in place to help expatriates adjust properly to the new culture and hence avoid culture shock.

An expatriates personal attributes can also be a major determinant on whether he performs well or not in a given assignment (Betancourt & Wezel, 2016; Maley & Moeller, 2017; He & Fang, 2016; Costa & Pedro, 2017). For instance an expatriate given to fear/phobia may have heard different kinds of news on Nigeria without knowing that majority of the news are hyped. News about political unrests, terrorism, xenophobic attacks, religious and inter communal skirmishes has easily unsettled expatriates in the past and disrupted their performances at work. It took the brave and courageous expatriates to discover that some of the news are blown out of proportion. Shy and introverted expatriates may also find it difficult to cope whereas outspoken and extroverted expatriates would find things easier. Personal attributes will play a great role here.

Differences in climatic conditions can also induce unexpected changes in the human body (Snow, 2015; Maley & Moeller, 2017). Nigeria being in the tropical climate is predominantly hot compared to Europe and some parts of Asia. This change may not augur well with some expatriates while others may quickly adapt to the change and continue with their assignment. Climatic differences can also bring about unfamiliar illnesses like malaria which the expatriates have never witnessed. This has cost my organization lots of funds in providing fumigation and malaria drugs to expatriate who are not immune to the malaria parasite.

In this research, my view is from the perspective of a senior superintendent who is driven by the fact that in my organization, these critical factors seem to have tremendous effects on the performance of expatriates and in most cases these effects could be negative and counterproductive. My concept of expatriate performance success is the ability of an expatriate to deliver on his core duties as planned or even beyond. Throwing more light on the critical factors will reduce the negative impacts and improve on the positives considerably by closing any knowledge gaps that have hitherto existed (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Collings et al., 2007). When this is achieved, it will reduce the number of frustrations and danger faced in the organization due to the negative effects of these factors on the performance of expatriates. Moreover, this will save enormous cost for the organization due to reduction in expatriate assignment failures.



Source: Adapted from Sanders and Yang (2016); Ejohwomu., Olalekan, and Ka (2017)

The outcome/result (expatriate performance) is strictly viewed from the angle of employee performance and depends on which direction the effect of the critical factor tends. Expatriate performance can also be affected by other moderating variables such as age, gender, duration of service of an expatriate (Ambos & Håkanson, 2013; Beugelsdijk et al., 2015; Betancourt & Wezel, 2016; Maley & Moeller, 2017). Using a critical factor (communication difficulties) for illustration, an expatriate who quickly understands the language of the locals will certainly be able to communicate better with them and will eventually be the choice of the locals if they were to choose who to work with. He will be more effective in transferring knowledge to the locals since he can communicate easily with them. Eventually, his performance in terms of communication will be positive. However the reverse would be the case if the expatriate has problems communicating with the locals. A positive in one critical factor does not necessarily imply a positive in another.

The conceptual model generally shows how these factors affect expatriate assignment to yield a performance (positively/negatively). As can be seen from the model, the critical factors sit between the expatriate assignment and expatriate performance. In other words, a positive manipulation of the critical factors by the expatriate can result to a positive influence on the overall performance and vice versa.

2.2 Theoretical review

The following theoretical views on effects of critical factors on expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria were considered. They include transaction cost theory, resource based theory, institutional theories and eclectic theory.

The *resource based view/ theory* revolves on the knowledge that a good combination of all useful resources available to the organization can help to determine its competitive advantage (Ambos & Håkanson, 2013; Beugelsdijk et al., 2015; Betancourt & Wezel, 2016; Maley & Moeller, 2017). A firm can also rely on its relationship with its natural environment to create a competitive advantage (Hart, 1995; Grant, 1991). The *transaction cost theory* dominates other theoretical frameworks in explaining organizational boundary decisions (Geyskens et al., 2006; He & Fang, 2016; Costa & Pedro, 2017). It helps to decide whether a firm will outsource the

production of its products and the costs involved. It also considers the costs incurred during decision making. The *eclectic theories* depend on common economic factors to decide if the value derived from a strategy is greater than alternative trans-national strategies (McNulty, 2016; Pardo & Alfonso, 2017; Sanders & Yang, 2016; Ejohwomu et al., 2017). Oviatt and McDougall (1994) noted that this framework describes four necessary elements for the existence of new international ventures among which are the control of unique resources and establishment of foreign location advantages. The *institutional theory* considers the effects of government established institutions (like petroleum ministries, police and other law enforcement agencies, rule of law) on expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria (Tatiana et al., 2008). Consequently, one important derivative or contribution to knowledge in this study would be the validation of the above theories (He & Fang, 2016; Costa & Pedro, 2017). However, in spite of the various theoretical views, my approach to this project is from the resource based view since the main aim of expatriate assignment in Nigeria is to gain competitive advantage over rival organizations (Ejohwomu et al., 2017; Hagmayer, 2016; Dutta et al., 2017). This is in line with the principles of resource based theory hence; all useful and efficient resources must be assembled to achieve this. This includes applying all resources to ensure that all critical factors are made to work to enhance expatriate performance in Nigeria.

2.3 Empirical Review

The topic of expatriate assignment has been widely discussed as evident in the literature. Very many authors (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011; Okpara, 2010; Caliguiri and Bonache, 2016 etc.) approached the topic from different angles depending on which aspect of expatriation/repatriation they consider expedient at the time of their research. However one may not be entirely wrong to say that the topic of expatriate assignment performance and other related topics are inexhaustible owing to the different political, economic and social factors influencing it.

As mentioned earlier, several researchers have worked on expatriate assignment and closely related topics on expatriation. Okpara and Kabongo (2011) identified the critical factors in Nigeria such as communication difficulties, short term assignments, expatriate's personal characteristics and difference in climatic conditions, which may have affected the performances in most expatriate assignments (Ejohwomu et al., 2017; Hagmayer, 2016; Dutta et al., 2017). Okpara and Kabongo (2011) also noted the place culture, history, and general behaviour of Nigerians citizens as another factor that can reduce the expatriate's level of anxiety, anger, frustration, and concern which may have impacted negatively in expatriate assignment performance (Maley & Moeller, 2017; Sanders & Yang, 2016; Ejohwomu et al., 2017). In the words of Naem et al, (2015) and Xia, (2009), cross-cultural training will help reduce any culture shock.

Tung (2016) noted that the subsequent outcome on the career path of the expatriate upon return to his native country is often neglected during researches on expatriation. Researchers should investigate whether the international assignment had a positive impact on career development of all expatriates studied (Harzing, 1995). Tung (2016) like all other authors also acknowledged that the issues with expatriation are manifold and complex as well as the issues with repatriation. She noted that though the organizations make efforts to help expatriates adapt to the foreign environment through provision of pre-departure trainings and other relocation assistances the actual problems of career advancement opportunities and relocation upon return are usually neglected. Tung stressed that the re-entry process, if not properly managed, can result to frustration, especially, when the newly acquires skills cannot be used. Tung (2016) also noted that being sent on international assignments can also cause stagnation of career or can result to negative career move and this is the reason some high achievers reject international assignments. Negative career moves are always experienced where the organization does not consider international experience a criterion for promotion. In some organizations (including mine), workers see international assignment as a way of making more money. Other issues highlighted by Tung (2016) include "out of sight, out of mind" syndrome, redundant positions resulting from organizational changes and existing skills and knowledge going obsolete due to technological advances. Tung (2016) however failed to show how communication difficulties, short term assignments, cultural differences, personal characteristics/personality traits and difference in climatic conditions could affect the performance of expatriates during expatriation and repatriation. This knowledge gap will be closed with the results of this research project.

Caliguiri and Bonache (2016) towed similar line as other authors in defining global mobility as a situation when individuals and sometimes their families, are relocated from one country (where they are familiar with things) to another (a completely new environment) for a fixed period of time. The authors (Caliguiri and Bonache, 2016) noted that as firms expand their reach globally via the expansion in the number of foreign subsidiaries, the number of expatriates working in them also increase. Caliguiri and Bonache (2016) stressed that international assignments and assignees have shifted from being predictable, homogenous and uniform to being unpredictable, diverse and full of surprises. From all indications, the expatriate of today has more hurdles to jump (being in a more diverse environment). This lack of homogeneity can be a distraction to the expatriate and can have a critical effect on his performance. Though the authors were not specific in their research target with regards to location as we are doing currently, their points are still very valid as same concerns still occur with expatriates on foreign assignments today. On another study, Okpara (2010) noted that personal circumstances of expatriate workers can be a critical factor to their success or failure in international assignment. Personal characteristics here according to Okpara (2010) include age, gender, marital status, children and spouse and previous work experience. He stressed that respect for old age

is emphasized in Nigerian culture and that an elderly expatriate is more likely to be accorded respect than younger ones. Age therefore becomes a major determinant in an expatriate's success or failure while in Nigeria. On gender, Okpara (2010) noted that discriminatory practices may be meted out to women trying to attain higher managerial positions and this can be attributed to the socio-cultural environment of the country where women are given traditional status as home makers and looked down on as professionals. Women expatriates being foreign are however seen differently than their local counterparts (Adler, 1987; 1994; 1995; Jelinek & Adler, 1988), while fewer and younger children (Naumann, 1993) are linked to successful international assignments since younger children adapt to new environments easily. Also an expatriate's previous international experience impacts positively on their adjustment since he is believed to have acquired necessary skills to overcome most hurdles.

Though I quite agree with Okpara (2010) on this issue, I will like to add that an expatriate's personal socio-cultural and psychological characteristics can only reflect positively on his performance when the ambience is right. Some critical factors as communication difficulties, short term assignments, cultural differences, personal characteristics and difference in climatic conditions may not allow for sincere expression of personal characteristics. This implies that when several personal variables such as age, gender, children and spouses' adjustment are significantly adjusted, we still need to have a calm, serene and enabling ambience for these variables to successfully count otherwise prevalence of critical factors as mentioned earlier will not allow the effectiveness of the personal attributes to count.

Finally, Yeathon & Hall (2008) looked into what organizations can do to influence these critical factors to increase the chances of success of expatriate assignment performance. They noted that though managers are trying different strategies to cope with increased global competition by using expatriation to gain knowledge of international operations, the managers still do fail due to poor expatriate assignment performance. However, there is also need for international comparative studies, since critical factors might differ and therefore would need different solutions (Tatiana et al., 2008). One size does not fit all.

Majority of the authors used both theoretical and empirical values in their studies citing instances from other authors who have done researches on similar topics. They commonly used researches - mainly survey research, to prove or disprove their earlier beliefs. Their studies were mainly systematic reviews (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Maley & Moeller, 2017; Sanders & Yang, 2016; Ejohwomu et al., 2017). In systematic reviews, each process of decision making is noted down and is transparent for others to see and so be able to judge the importance of the review (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Also according to (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012), systematic review means that the criteria for judgment on which study goes into which list have also been identified and justified.

The epistemological perspectives that served as the foundation for these studies are premised on the existence of some critical factors that can impact the success/ failure of expatriate assignment performance. The epistemological perspective is the philosophy to investigate the listed factors that affect expatriate assignment performance and the nature (manifestation) of such factors using the methods and limits of human knowledge (exploratory research) in this case to validate the claim. The dominant epistemology underlying survey research as seen in most of the articles is positivism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012)

The research approaches and methodologies used in most of our reviewed literature were mainly survey (exploratory and factual) research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Maley & Moeller, 2017; Sanders & Yang, 2016; Ejohwomu et al., 2017). Exploratory research digs to explore and expose hidden/unknown facts about a topic as the one under review. Some of the authors also used qualitative method whereas majority used quantitative research methods. The methodology i.e. the rules and procedures used by the authors here to establish the epistemological and ontological claims was by carrying out survey researches. In these cases, the researchers used mainly positivist research design methodology where the researchers assumed that there are true answers and then state some hypothesis with the intension of collecting data to confirm or disapprove their earlier claims (Maley & Moeller, 2017; Ejohwomu et al., 2017). This method was employed by most of the researchers because quantitative and positivist paradigms can provide a wide coverage of the range of situations and can be fast and economical (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Consequently, the same method was adopted in this study.

3 Methodology

Among the two main design approaches to a research problem (qualitative and quantitative methods), the research design adopted in this study was a quantitative design approach. Specifically, the research design could be tagged a quantitative, positivist and exploratory survey approach. Quantitative designs are employed in examining the relationship between variables (in this case, the critical factors and expatriate assignment performance) with the aim of analyzing and representing the relationship mathematically through statistical analysis and inferences established (Sanders & Yang, 2016; Ejohwomu et al., 2017). Consequently, considering the main objective of this study, the adopted research design was a quantitative, positivist and exploratory survey approach. This methodology was adjudged to be capable of establishing the connection between the critical factors and expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria (Ejohwomu et al., 2017). The methodology adopted is also capable of addressing the various research questions and hypotheses (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

Basically, the research procedure entails presenting the research questions through questionnaires in a simplified language. As noted by Easterby-Smith et al., (2012:224), the shorter the questionnaire and the simpler the question, the more likely it is that respondents will comply. In view of this, simple questions highlighting the previously stated critical factors that could affect expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria were prepared on a five point likert scale, where 1- indicate strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- neutral, 4 – agree and 5- strongly agree. The project samples were taken from the population of expatriate workers in the Nigeria LNG Limited. The Nigeria LNG Limited, located in Bonny Island, Rivers state, Nigeria, is a joint venture owned by four shareholders (Shell (25.6%), Total (15%), the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (49%) and Nigerian Agip Oil Company – Eni (10.4%). The company currently employs thousands of Nigerians and other nationalities both as direct staff and indirectly as contractors.

Generally, the total population is one hundred and eighty (180) expatriate assignees as at the time of conducting this study. For **ethical reasons** participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their reports (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) in order to build trust and increase response rates. The selection of the intended participants was entirely based on participants' willingness to partake in the research survey. Nobody was coerced to partake in the survey. Participants have complete autonomy (Artal and Rubinfeld, 2017) and can withdraw at will. Snell (1993) as cited by Easterby-Smith et al., (2012) noted that ethical issues are very complex. Several ethical issues could be involved in data collection with the methods I have chosen. According to (Easterby- Smith et al., 2012) the most likely ethical issues occur when the confidences of employees partaking in the research is betrayed by not keeping their identities confidential as promised or the data acquired is not used as supposed. The researcher must not circulate or publicize any message that is likely to harm the informants or the organization. Where the employer is the researcher, employees must not be coerced to participate (Resnik, 2016).

Consequently, all participants were first contacted via emails for record purposes and were prompted from time to time. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and the data obtained from the research must be guarded jealously to ensure no harm to any participant; respecting participants' dignity, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and ensuring informed consent of participants. I avoided deception and any misleading reports. I also ensured conflict of interest was promptly declared while communicating in honesty and transparency (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) was enshrined throughout the data collection process.

Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1967) formula was used to calculate the sample size of this research, based on 95% confidence level. Consequently, based on previous studies, the sample size was settled at one hundred and fifty-150 (Yamane, 1967; Easterby- Smith et al., 2012; Artal and Rubinfeld, 2017). All items used to measure the six major constructs were adopted from previous literatures (Maley & Moeller, 2017; He & Fang, 2016; Costa & Pedro, 2017; McNulty, 2016; Pardo & Alfonso, 2017; Sanders & Yang, 2016; Ejohwomu et al., 2017). The research instrument (questionnaire) was divided into four sections, via a five point Likert scale. The sections are: **Section 1:** contains demographic information of respondents which includes age, gender, work experience etc. **Section 2:** is on questions pertaining to each critical factor being considered; how they affect expatriates' performance. **Section 3:** is on expatriates' assignment performance. **Section 4:** is optional, for general remarks, comments or any addendum.

Pilot Test, Validity and Reliability Analysis

A pilot test was conducted to check the reliability of the research instrument. This involved the selection of 10 respondents, using convenience sampling, and ten (10) copies of the initial questionnaire were distributed to the selected 10 respondents (these respondent did not participated in the main study, to avoid biases) and using various tools in SPSS software to analyse the data collected from the 10 respondents.

In constructing the initial questionnaire, **face validity** was carried out by first giving the questionnaires to the project supervisor for scrutiny. This was followed by **Content validity**, by giving the questionnaire to five experts in the human resource management and expatriation to confirm that the questionnaire items were good, representative and fit for purpose. Suggestions from the supervisor and experts were incorporated into the questionnaire before the final draft was distributed during the pilot stage. **Construct validity** was carried out via cronbach's alpha method (Hagmayer, 2016; Dutta et al., 2017). The 10 data from the pilot stage were analysed, and various reliability figures established. Consequently, a mean cronbach's alpha value (α) of 0.89 was achieved for all the six constructs (Karaosmanoglu et al., 2016; Hjerto & Kuvaas, 2017). These value was deemed adequate since it was above the recommended value of 0.7 (Zinko et al., 2016; Sugathan et al., 2017). In addition, the following reliability indexes were obtained from our analysis of the pilot data: average variance extracted, 0.71; and composite reliability, 0.81; and dublin-watson, 2.102. All the calculated indexes were above the recommended thresholds (Romani et al., 2016; Zinko et al., 2017). These however, implied there was great internal consistency in the questionnaire questions and they measure the same value. After sample collection, data was presented in a legible, easily understandable and attractive format using tables, followed by evaluation and sense-making of the data gathered. Then data was further analysed using the measures of location i.e. the median, mean and mode and standard deviation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The adopted method of data analysis was both *correlational* and multiple *regression analysis*. Multiple regression analysis using SPSS statistics software application was then employed in estimating the hypotheses (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011). Correlation analysis is similar to regression but measures the linear relationship between two variables (Romani et al., 2016). Correlation coefficient values

usually range between -1 and +1 (Park & Park, 2016; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Regression analysis, on the other hand, entails identifying the relationship that exists between a dependent variable (expatriate assignment performance) and one or more independent variables (the critical factors) (Maley & Moeller, 2017). Easterby-Smith (2012) justifies the strengths of quantitative and positivist paradigm, hence its adoption in this study.

4 Results and discussion of findings

Table 4.1 depicts the demographic characteristics of respondents. Specifically, the respondents were in the age range of 26 -55+years, all married and working in the oil and gas sector, with diverse educational backgrounds. All have worked between 1 – 21+ years.

Table 4.1 – Demographic details of respondents

Demographic characteristics	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	128	98.46
Female	2	1.54
Age range		
18 – 25	0	0
26 – 35	18	13.85
36 – 45	40	30.77
46 - 55	40	30.77
55+	32	24.61
Marital status		
Married	130	100
Single	0	0
Experience		
1 -5 years	24	18.46
6 – 10 years	24	18.46
11 – 15 years	48	36.92
16 – 20 years	10	7.70
21+ years	24	18.46
Sector		
Oil and Gas	130	100
Public sector	0	0

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data collected, due to its appropriateness and as used in previous studies (Selmer & Luring, 2010; Tharenou, 2013). However, before establishing the effect, mean, standard deviation and correlation analysis was performed to establish the robustness and relationships between the various constructs (Selmer & Luring, 2010; Tharenou, 2013). The results of these analysis are depicted in table 4.2. The correlations in table 4.2 attest to the robustness of all constructs, which shows positive significant relationships amongst the constructs, at various levels of significance. The mean and the standard deviations among the constructs are also robust and validates the various data collection (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Collings et al., 2007).

Table 4.2: Mean, standard deviations (SD), and correlations of the main regression variables

Constructs	Obs.	Mean	SD	1	2	3	1	2	3
OPERF	130	4.21	0.944	1.00					
EC	130	3.37	0.933	0.39***	1.00				
WFRC	130	4.24	0.831	0.25*	0.31**	1.00			
OPERF	130	3.66	0.844	0.24*	0.31**	0.31**	1.00		
EC	130	3.12	0.933	0.25*	0.31**	0.35*	0.31**	1.00	
WFRC	130	3.28	0.931	0.21*	0.31**	0.25*	0.31**	0.31**	1.00

Note: *p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.001

4.1 Testing of research hypotheses

Hypothesis 1-5

Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of the Result of Research Hypothesis 1-5

Critical factors will not significantly interact with expatriate assignment performance.

4.1.1. Model Specification, Measurement of Variables and results for Hypothesis 1-5

MODEL

$$EAPERF = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 COD + \alpha_2 STA + \alpha_3 CUD + \alpha_4 EPC + \alpha_5 DCC + \varepsilon \text{ --- (1)}$$

Where:

EAPERF represents Expatriate assignment performance, COD is communication difficulties, STA is short-term assignment, CUD is cultural difference, EPC is Expatriates' personal characteristics and DCC is difference in climatic conditions, and $\alpha_0, \alpha_1, \alpha_2, \alpha_3, \alpha_4$ and α_5 are the estimated parameters, while ϵ is the error term.

Regression Analysis

Table 4.3: Regression Results: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.671 ^a	.511	.581	.68437

Source: Researcher Framework, 2017

The R squared (coefficient of determination) depicts the changes/ variation in our dependent variable due to changes in independent variable (Lauring & Selmer, 2010; Selmer & Lauring, 2010). Consequently, from the above table (table 4.3) the adjusted R squared was 0.581 which simply implied that 58% variation in expatriate assignment performance are due to changes in all the critical factors, while the remaining 42% are factors which affect expatriate assignment performance but are not captured in the model.

Table 4.4 Regression Results: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	572.852	3	157.877	141.861	.000
Residual	257.114	134	1.156		
Total	637.877	147			

Source: Researcher Framework, 2017

The p-value for the F-calculated of 0.000 was greater than the critical value of 0.05, for this, the null hypothesis which stated that the critical factors will not significantly affect expatriate assignment performance was rejected (based on our decision rule).

Table 4.5: Test of Individual Regression Coefficient (Expatriate assignment performance on Critical factors)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	0.352	.080		4.131	.000
COD	-0.237	.047	.382	-30.350	.023
STA	-0.152	.050	.272	-24.102	.048
CUD	-0.237	.047	.382	-31.350	.035
EPC	-0.253	.051	.272	-14.102	.046
DCC	-0.137	.046	.281	-21.460	.021

Source: Researcher Framework, 2017

The parameter estimates suggest that there is negative relationships between all the critical factors and expatriate assignment performance. In addition, all critical factors and expatriate assignment performance were statistically significant at 5 per cent level; this implies that all the critical factors (Communication difficulties, short-term assignment, cultural difference, Expatriates' personal characteristics and difference in climatic conditions) are significant factors influencing expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria oil and gas sector.

4.2 Discussion of findings

Summarily, the study posits the importance of a seamless, and two-way communication prior to expatriates coming to Nigeria. The objectives of their assignments were also discussed and they also communicated freely with the locals. The length of assignments is just good enough for the expatriates to adapt and execute his assignment though they agreed that a longer time will create better performance. In addition, results also observed a clear cultural difference between Nigerian culture and that of the respondents in terms of food, dressing and educational system. Most of the expatriates experienced culture shock probably because there was no cross-cultural training. This will likely be a topic for further research. Age, experience and attitude play important role in expatriate performance. Young but experienced expatriates with positive attitudes made great performance. Results show that gender has no clear effect on expatriate performance. Expatriates agreed that climatic conditions in Nigeria are generally clement and contributed positively to their performance. Results also showed marked differences in rainfall, sunshine and heat. Finally, most respondents agreed that they are happy working in Nigeria, family members support their stay in Nigeria and if given another chance, they will like to come again to Nigeria. All respondents agreed that there assignment is a success.

On communication difficulty, majority of the respondents (66.67%), agreed that they were well communicated prior to their journey to Nigeria, expatriate assignment program is well documented and that communication is seamless in their organization. Half of the population (50%) noted that two way communications is prioritized and 61.11% agreed that the problems of expatriate assignment in the organization are well communicated. This open

communication on issues of expatriate assignment in Nigeria for sure affects the performance of the expatriates positively. A greater part of the population (66.67%) also agrees that the objectives/aims of their expatriate assignment are communicated to them before they proceeded on their journey. This early information and clarity of purpose positions most of the expatriates for greater exploits. They can also learn the language of the locals ahead of time making their adaptation and integration easier. This fact may have resulted to 83.3% of the expatriates communicating freely with the locals. This answers our first question and confirms that communication difficulty has a negative effect on expatriate performance in Nigeria as we hypothesized (H1) earlier.

From the results of this survey it can be deduced that 77.78% of expatriates agreed that short term assignment did not affect their time to adapt and 66.67% also agreed that the duration of their assignment is enough for them to execute their assignments properly. Large number of expatriates (66.67%) also agreed that STA separate them and their family since they cannot take their family along with them owing to the short duration of the assignment. However, 77.78% agreed that long-term assignment will create better performance and 50% agree that long-term assignments will unite them better with their families. Though short-term assignments are not entirely of negative effects as hypothesized (H2) long-term assignments would be preferred. This answers our second question.

The main excerpts from the survey on the effects of cultural diversity on expatriate performance in Nigeria show that 50% of the expatriates experienced culture shock, and 88.89% never received cross-cultural training prior to coming to Nigeria. Majority of the respondents disagreed that men are respected more in their culture, the food in Nigeria and their country is similar and elderly people are treated better in their country than in Nigeria. More of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed on the similarity of their educational system and Nigeria's. Many more disagreed that there is cultural similarity, dressing similarity and general way of life between their country and Nigeria. These findings answered our third question and confirmed our third hypothesis (H3).

A greater percentage of expatriates (>80%) agreed that age, experience and attitude enhanced their performance at work. They were all indifferent on whether gender has an influence on their performance at work. This answers the fourth question and confirms the fourth hypothesis (H4) as earlier proposed.

Most of the respondents (>60%) noted that there is difference in the pattern of rainfall, climate and general condition between their country and Nigeria. About 60% of respondents disagreed that Nigeria is hotter than their countries or that life became more difficult and complex due to climate change. A greater percentage (>60%) agreed that the climate in Nigeria is good and encouraged good employee performance. This answers the fifth question and approves hypothesis (H5)

From the survey, we gathered that all the expatriates (100%) are very happy working in Nigeria. Greater numbers (>75%) also agree that their careers had grown since they came to Nigeria, and they received adequate support during their assignment. They do agree also that the climatic conditions in Nigeria contributed to their great performance at work and their family members support their Nigerian assignment. Half of the respondents (50%) were undecided on their family members being happy staying in Nigeria. All the expatriates (100%) strongly agreed that their expatriate assignment in Nigeria is a success and if given the chance, they will come back again to Nigeria.

Lastly, the findings above are similar to many previous studies (Groysberg and Abraham, 2014; Molinsky and Melissa, 2016). Specifically, Groysberg and Abraham (2014) noted the significant influence of experience and family factors on expatriation. The study therefore concludes that before one should embark on an international assignment, he should first consider the impact the assignment would have on his human capital which includes his skills, experiences, networks and family. In addition, Molinsky and Melissa (2016) also emphasized that for overseas assignments to be successful, candidates should have open mind to adapt to foreign cultures also bearing in mind the skill to be developed. The study also maintained that constant communication should be maintained with the assignee to get updates as well as make adequate plans for his reintegration (Molinsky and Melissa, 2016).

5 Conclusion and implications of findings

5.1 Conclusion

Similar to previous studies, findings from this study reveals the impacts of factors such as communication difficulty (COD), short-term assignment (STA), cultural difference/diversity (CUD), expatriate's personal characteristics(PC) and difference in climatic conditions (DCC). These factors contribute positively or negatively to the outcome of expatriate performance depending on the way the factor is handled.

The data also revealed that majority of the expatriates are males, of diverse age range, wide range of experience in the oil and gas industry, are all married and with diverse levels of education. The findings on all the factors can now be discussed in turn. However, based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that all the critical factors (Communication difficulties, short-term assignment, cultural difference, Expatriates' personal characteristics and difference in climatic conditions) are significant factors influencing expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria. The critical factors and expatriate assignment performance were statistically significant at 5 per cent level.

The findings from the survey indicate that expatriate assignment performance can be really influenced by the above mentioned factors. Conclusively, excerpts from the findings can be summarized as follows:

- i. Open communication/ two-way communication forms a good basis for success in expatriate assignment in Nigeria.
- ii. Short-term assignments might not be as negatively influential as thought but long-term assignments will be preferred for greater performance.
- iii. Cultural differences has little or no negative influence on expatriate performance in Nigeria but cross-cultural training will help to reduce culture shock and improve performance (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011)
- iv. Age, experience and positive attitude is very importance in expatriate assignment performance in Nigeria and gender is hardly of any influence.
- v. The climate in Nigeria is generally clement to expatriates and aided their performance.

Based on the above findings and summary, open /two-way communication between expatriates and their employers is highly recommended whether assignments are on short term or long term. Cross cultural training is also very well recommended to avoid culture shock experienced by most expatriates who did not have cross-cultural training. A pre-knowledge of the local language used in their proposed destinations will be of immense help as this will improve their communication with the locals and improve their performance.

5.2 Implications and Contributions to Knowledge

This study has several managerial and theoretical implications (Tharenou, 2013; Ambos & Håkanson, 2013). First, our findings show that critical factors and Expatriate assignment performance are negatively related, thus the need for the affected organisation to formulate policies that to manage the impact of all the identified critical factors (Beugelsdijk et al., 2015; Betancourt & Wezel, 2016; Maley & Moeller, 2017). In terms of theoretical implications and contributions, this study validated the theoretical propositions for the study (Ambos & Håkanson, 2013; Beugelsdijk et al., 2015; Betancourt & Wezel, 2016; Maley & Moeller, 2017; He & Fang, 2016; Costa & Pedro, 2017; McNulty, 2016; Pardo & Alfonso, 2017; Sanders & Yang, 2016; Ejohwomu et al., 2017). In addition, there is plethora of literature on expatriate failures in both developing and developed economies. However, there seem to be few studies who have examined the impact of the identified critical factors on expatriate assignment performance in the Nigerian context (Betancourt & Wezel, 2016; Maley & Moeller, 2017).

This research project therefore bring to light some of the critical factors that can affect an expatriate assignment performance in the Nigerian oil and gas sector. The study is also important in creating a proactive situational awareness to would be expatriates to Nigeria. It is also significant in assisting human resource professionals in addressing expatriate assignment issues ahead of time thereby helping to curtail the huge losses incurred when expatriate performances are negatively impacted. By creating awareness, management can create better cross-cultural programs (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011) to help expatriates adapt easily in their new environment and easily overcome culture shock (Naeem et al., 2015). This will also help to close up the 'psychic distance' (Hosseini, 2008), between the expatriate worker and his hosts.

This study also seems to be one of the few studies to test the effect of the critical factors on subjective (rather than objective measures) measures of expatriates' performance; a gap identified by previous studies (Maley & Moeller, 2017; He & Fang, 2016).

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for further studies

As a survey study, our study has few potential limitations and the findings should be used with care. First, is the common limitation of all survey research, which is the subjective (perceptual) measures of both dependent and independent variables? Specifically, there might be presentational bias due to the adoption of various subjective measures of our constructs, as different studies could obtain different results if different items were used to capture both the dependent and the independent variables (Maley & Moeller, 2017; He & Fang, 2016). In addition, due to the scope of this study, our findings might not be capable of being generalized to other organisations in the industry (Hagmayer, 2016; Dutta et al., 2017). However, all the limitations were countered by closely following the recommendations of previous studies (Ambos & Håkanson, 2013; Beugelsdijk et al., 2015; Betancourt & Wezel, 2016; Maley & Moeller, 2017; He & Fang, 2016; Costa & Pedro, 2017). Our use of five point likert scale (which has been well established in the literature) and the strict validity and reliability analysis also reduced the impact of the above potential limitations (Karaosmanoglu et al., 2016; Hjerto & Kuvaas, 2017). Again, as some of the expatriates might be afraid to give honest answers for fear of being victimized, a reassurance of anonymity was enforced and participants were re-assured that results from the data collected will be used strictly for this research only.

Consequent upon the above limitations, future studies could focus on the followings:

- i. Future studies may extend the scope to include other multinational companies in both marketing, down-stream and up-stream sectors of the Nigerian oil industry.
- ii. Since performance is a multi-facets construct, future studies should use objective measures (e.g. profitability, return on investment) to capture the dependent variable (Lin-Hi & Blumberg, 2016; Rofcanin et al., 2017; Romani et al., 2016; Zinko et al., 2017).

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