

Structural Precarity vs. Cultural Fit: Determinants of Psychological Safety Among Expatriate Teachers in Indonesia

Glief Miranda Padillo

Pangasinan State University, Open University Systems
Pangasinan State University, Alvear St, Lingayen, Pangasinan, Philippines, 2401
Educational Management / Organizational Psychology

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Abstract: The retention and well-being of expatriate teachers in international education, particularly in Indonesia's Satuan Pendidikan Kerjasama (SPK) schools, present a critical challenge for educational leadership. While turnover is frequently attributed to cultural maladjustment or "culture shock," this study investigates the underlying structural and organizational determinants of psychological safety among this demographic. Employing a mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design, quantitative data was collected from a diverse sample of 113 expatriate teachers deployed across seven regions in Indonesia. The primary objective was to evaluate how various workplace stressors—ranging from cultural adaptation to institutional policy consistency—impact teachers' psychological safety and subsequent retention rates. Data analysis using the Spearman Rank Correlation revealed a paradigm-shifting finding: structural organizational factors significantly outweigh cultural factors in predicting educator well-being. Specifically, "Institutional Policies and Support" ($r = -0.633$) and "Job Security and Contractual Stability" ($r = -0.664$) demonstrated profound negative correlations with psychological safety, whereas "Cultural Adaptation" exhibited a comparatively weak negative correlation ($r = -0.323$). Furthermore, the study identified a "safety paradox" where teachers experience high peer trust but low institutional trust. Psychological safety was also found to be a critical, positive predictor of professional retention (Mean 4.47 out of 5.00). The major conclusion drawn from these results is that the primary obstacles to expatriate teacher well-being are structural rather than cultural. Consequently, the research argues that international school management must pivot their retention strategies away from superficial cultural orientation programs and focus on rigorous internal governance reform, contractual transparency, and the establishment of non-punitive error tolerance policies to foster a secure, effective teaching environment.

Keywords: *Psychological Safety, Expatriate Teachers, Institutional Policy, Job Security, Indonesia, Retention.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of international schools globally has created a high demand for expatriate educators. However, turnover rates remain persistently problematic, often destabilizing school environments and inflating recruitment costs. Traditionally, literature has attributed expatriate failure to "culture shock," language barriers, or the inability to adjust to host-country norms (Ayca, 1997; Nguyen et al., 2021). However, this prevailing narrative often obscures deeper systemic organizational failures.

Psychological safety, defined as the belief that individuals will not be punished or humiliated for expressing ideas, asking questions, raising concerns, or admitting mistakes (Edmondson, 1999), plays a pivotal role in promoting a productive work environment (Clark, 2020; Su and Abd Rani, 2025). Research confirms that when teachers lack psychological safety, they struggle to perform, collaborate, and remain in their roles (Jalilzadeh et al., 2024). This study aims to investigate the true determinants of psychological safety for expatriate teachers in Indonesia's Satuan Pendidikan Kerjasama (SPK) schools, challenging the cultural adaptation model by evaluating the impact of institutional instability and

policy inconsistency on educator well-being and retention.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design was employed to capture both the breadth and depth of the expatriate teacher experience. The quantitative phase, which is the focus of this manuscript, involved a diverse sample of 113 expatriate teachers currently employed in SPK schools across seven regions in Indonesia (including Java, Sumatra, and Kalimantan).

A survey instrument was developed and validated to measure Psychological Safety (adapting established scales with a Cronbach’s $\alpha > 0.8$) alongside specific Workplace Challenges. The survey utilized a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree/Rarely Experienced, 5 = Strongly Agree/Frequently Experienced) to assess variables including Cultural Adaptation, Institutional Policies, Job Security, and Professional Retention. Baseline levels of safety and challenge frequency were established using descriptive statistics (Means and Standard Deviations). Spearman Rank Correlation coefficients were subsequently calculated to test the rationale and determine the strength and direction of relationships between specific structural/cultural stressors and overall psychological safety.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The rationale of the experimental design was to isolate which specific workplace domains most severely compromised teacher well-being. The data indicates a clear hierarchy of challenges affecting expatriate teachers, refuting the assumption that cultural integration is the primary hurdle.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Workplace Challenges Among Expatriate Teachers

Rank	Challenge Domain	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Descriptive Rating
1	Institutional Policies and Support	2.74	0.95	Sometimes Experienced
2	Work-Life Balance	2.69	0.88	Sometimes Experienced
3	Job Security and Contractual Stability	2.65	0.91	Sometimes Experienced
4	Professional Expectations	2.57	0.85	Sometimes Experienced
5	Cultural Adaptation	2.38	0.80	Rarely Experienced

Legend: Means are based on a 5-point scale where higher scores indicate a higher frequency of the challenge being experienced. SPK = Satuan Pendidikan Kerjasama.

As observed in Table 1, respondents reported that "Inconsistent Institutional Policies" (Mean 2.74) and "Job Security" (Mean 2.65) were the most frequently experienced detractors from their work environment, scoring significantly higher than "Cultural Adaptation" (Mean 2.38).

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Workplace Stressors and Overall Psychological Safety

Challenge Domain	Spearman's rho (r)	p-value	Interpretation
Institutional Policies	-0.633	0.000	Strong Negative Correlation
Job Security	-0.664	0.000	Strong Negative Correlation
Professional Expectations	-0.578	0.000	Moderate Negative Correlation
Cultural Adaptation	-0.323	0.009	Weak Negative Correlation

Legend: Analysis conducted using Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient. Significance is evaluated at the $p < 0.01$ level.

The correlation analysis (Table 2) validates the descriptive findings. Challenges with Institutional Policies demonstrated a strong negative correlation with psychological safety ($r = -0.633, p < 0.01$). Job security exhibited the strongest negative correlation ($r = -0.664, p < 0.01$). While Cultural Adaptation was present as a stressor, its correlation with psychological safety was notably weak ($r = -0.323$).

contracts are vague, teachers experience a chronic lack of psychological safety that cannot be remedied by cultural immersion trips. Furthermore, the study found a direct, positive link between psychological safety and professional retention (Mean 4.47). Teachers clearly indicated that transparent governance and a "safe-to-speak" environment are strict prerequisites for renewing their contracts.

These results suggest a massive "blind spot" in international educational management. The data proves that teachers leave because of "structural precarity," not an inability to adapt culturally. When school policies are inconsistent, communication practices fail (Itzchakov et al., 2023), and

IV. CONCLUSION

This study utilized a mixed-methods design to investigate the well-being of 113 expatriate teachers in Indonesia, revealing that the primary obstacles to retention are structural rather than

cultural. The results demonstrated that inconsistent institutional policies and job insecurity have profound negative correlations with psychological safety, vastly outweighing the impact of cultural adaptation challenges. Consequently, to effectively improve teacher retention and performance, international school leaders must shift their focus from cultural orientation toward implementing transparent governance, secure contracting, and systemic policies that tolerate professional mistakes without punitive retaliation.

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