

# The Relationship Between Cultural Distance, Cultural Adaptation and Vocational Experience of Strain of Teachers Abroad

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In the context of the theoretical notions of cultural adaptation when migrating to distant cultures and proximal cultures, the results of an empirical study with  $N = 426$  teachers abroad are being reported. The investigation tried to answer the question if cultural adaptation is rather successful in proximal cultures and if vocational strain and vocational and general values of satisfaction of teachers dependent of the guest culture can be shown. The relationship between cultural adaptation and satisfaction, as well as between cultural adaptation and experience of strain could be shown. The relationship between cultural distance and cultural adaptation was only significant for non-European countries.

*Keywords:* cultural distance, cultural adaptation, vocational experience of strain, teachers abroad

## Introduction

That the profession of a teacher is connected with high psycho-physiological strain has often been shown in occupational medical and pedagogical research (Krause, Schüpbach, Ulich, & Wülser, 2008; Hillert & Schmitz, 2004). But when it is the case that in addition to the every day's strain, migration experience as a typical incident connected with high levels of stress is added, especially high strains can result that impair work satisfaction and possibly general life satisfaction, too. It is thinkable that teachers especially feel extremely strained when engaged in countries with a higher cultural distance compared to our society. At the same time, the foreign culture offers a high attraction and fascination functioning in a protective way. Because in the context of delegations abroad of teachers, many delegation contracts are untimely broken and those breakups are connected with psychological costs, the question of the relationship between cultural adaptation, cultural distance and the individual experience of strain of delegated teachers at German schools abroad is of importance. The study at hand thus deals with the relationship of migration experiences in different delegation countries and with the vocational experience of strain, as well as the vocational satisfaction of teachers abroad.

## Theoretical Background: Cultural Adaptation and Cultural Distance

Migration implies a high level of stress, comparable to the so-called big life incidents (marriage, birth of a

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child, and death of a relative) (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), whereupon stress can be accompanied by positive as well as negative emotions. To the vocational demands for German teachers abroad, the through cultural adaptation efforts induced strains are added. Cultural adaptation (or acculturation) means the ongoing contact between groups with different cultural backgrounds that often results in a change of cultural patterns for the involved groups (Berry, 2004, p. 175). The contact situations resulting changes are normally more significant for the non-dominant group, but also in the dominant societal groups there can be transformations in the long-term. The construct of *cultural adaptation* relates to the individual components of the acculturation process. It describes the complex process experienced by the individual until she or he is feeling well in the new cultural environment and is able to effectively act in the changed environmental conditions (Haslberger, 2005, p. 86; Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005, p. 1659). In the literature, cultural adaptation is often defined by the psychological extent of well-being connected different aspects of the new environment (e.g., Black, Stewart, & Mendenhall, 1991, p. 499). The ability of the individual to adapt to the culture of the host country as well as to the patterns of behavior of the host culture both determine if the delegation is “successful”, from the point of view of the teacher abroad, thus if well-being in the host country can be achieved. It does not only depend from the migrated individual, if cultural adaptation is successful (see Berry 2004, p. 355). A highly-recognized differentiation of the cultural adaptation process can be traced back to Ward and Kennedy (1993). These psychologists differentiate psychological and sociocultural adaptation as central theoretical dimensions. The construct of psychological adaptation is deeply-connected with stress and coping theories. A new cultural environment provokes stress and requires the activations of personal resources and coping mechanisms to manage this new environment. The focus of this dimension is on satisfaction and subjective well-being of the individual (accultural stress). Sociocultural adaptation on the other hand is based on the theory of cultural learning. Psychological learning approaches of intercultural adaptation rely on the hypothesis that problems occur in intercultural situations, because the individual has first of all difficulties in the foreign culture to successfully manage social interactions with members of the host culture. Cultural adaptation thus is achieved through the learning of the cultural specific norms of behavior that are essential to successfully act in the new cultural environment (Ward, 2004, p. 186). To be successful in the foreign environment, it is thus the central challenge of the migrant to learn cultural adequate behavior. This process of social learning is significantly determined by situational variables (e.g., extend of cultural differences, duration of the stay abroad, previous experiences abroad, preparation for the stay abroad) as well as individual variables (e.g., self-efficacy-expectations, relationship abilities, perception of the other culture) can lead to different processes of adaptation (Black & Mendenhall, 1991, 241ff). During the preparation phase of a stay abroad, intercultural trainings can support the learning of cultural adequate social behavior (ibid, p. 242).

Thus, there are factors that contribute to the success of cultural adaptation efforts. These are internal psychological factors of the teachers (patterns of managing strain, advantageous vocational beliefs, etc.) structural framing conditions (social support at school, good preparation for the delegation, organizational factors at school, etc.) and last but not least the challenge resulting from the cultural distance between the host culture and our origin culture. Countries with a higher degree of cultural distance compared to the origin culture require therefore higher adaptation efforts than countries with less distance, whereupon an underestimation of the distance of seemingly cultural alike countries (e.g, cultures of Western Europe, USA) can be a problem.

Church (1982) states that a less cultural distance between visitors and members of a host culture facilitates the adaptation to a foreign culture due to the values and patterns of behavior are similar and thus are easier to learn (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001, p. 182).

Cultural distance always arises when there is a distance between the origin culture and the culture of the host country perceived. The construct of *cultural distance* bases on the work of Hofstede (1980), who proclaims that there are five aspects of human life to whom every culture develops its own shapes. The five dimensions are: power distance, avoidance of uncertainty, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and long-term versus short-term orientation. Cultures can be classified between the poles of these five dimensions and can be compared with other cultures. With the help of this, distance measures can be calculated (see Flörkemeier, 2001) that result in the case of teachers abroad in a delegation in a rather distant or rather proximal culture. Different studies showed that cultural distance impedes cultural adaptation efforts (Black, & Stephens, 1989; Ward, & Searle, 1991; Van Vianen, De Pater, Kristof-Brown, & Johnson, 2004), on the other hand, there were also findings showing that the distance to the host culture has no negative effects on cultural adaptation, thus that intercultural workshops or trainings for both, migrants of proximal as well as distant origin cultures are necessary to successfully prepare stays abroad (see Selmer, 2006).

### Questions and Hypotheses

From the overall study dealing with the factors of success of teacher's delegations abroad (see Mägdefrau & Genkova, 2013), the following questions shall be answered in the context of this article:

(1) Do the teachers delegated abroad differ from compared German samples by means of their vocational patterns of behavior and experience? In other words: Are there higher ratios of teachers showing risky patterns of behavior and experience relating to teachers abroad?

(2) Are there relationships between the distribution of risk patterns of vocational behavior and experience and the cultural distance of the host country compared to the German origin culture of the respondents?

(3) Is there a positive relationship between cultural adaptation and vocational satisfaction as well as a negative relationship between cultural adaptation and vocational strain?

(4) Is there a relationship between cultural distance and vocational strain as well as between cultural distance and less cultural adaptation?

(5) Do persons that less achieve cultural adaptation and that feel a higher degree of vocational strain have thoughts about breaking their delegation contract?

From these research questions, the following seven hypotheses have been deviated from:

H1: The ratio of persons showing risky vocational patterns of behavior and experience is higher relating to teachers abroad than in the calibration sample of German teachers at home country schools of the study of Schaarschmidt and Fischer (2006).

H2: Patterns of risk in the management of strain are more frequent in countries showing a higher degree of cultural distance than in countries more alike with the German culture.

H3: Persons that superior successfully manage cultural adaptation show a higher degree of general satisfaction relating to profession and life in the host country than those that less successfully master cultural adaptation.

H4: Persons that superior successfully master cultural adaptation show lower values for the scale “vocational strain” than those less successfully master cultural adaptation.

H5: The vocational strain is higher for countries showing a higher degree of cultural distance than for those showing a smaller degree of cultural distance.

H6: Cultural adaptation can be superior managed in countries showing a smaller degree of cultural distance than to countries where there is a high degree of cultural distance existing to.

H7: Persons stating a break of their delegation contract show low values for the scale “cultural adaptation” and higher ones for the scale “vocational strain”.

### **Realization, Sample, and Research Instruments**

For the answering of these research questions, an online-survey was conducted in 2012 with the help of the teachers abroad delegated by the central institution for the German school system abroad. Respondents are either engaged at German schools abroad and teach their studied subjects either on German or bilingual, or they work at schools of the particular host country in the context of the German Language Certificate thus teaching German as a foreign language.

Overall, 438 persons answered two questionnaires. 426 respondents delivered analyzable questionnaires. 309 persons sent both questionnaires back, 28 only questionnaire 2, and 89 only questionnaire 1. This return equals towards the overall population a recourse of 23%, what indicates a small response rate. With accordant caution, the data has to be interpreted, because we have no knowledge whether the sample is biased concerning its experience of strain. Genders are equally distributed in this sample (49.8% males). This approximately is in accordance with the distribution of the overall population, where men are slightly overrepresented (54.6%). Also for the age structure, the sample is in accordance with the overall population with a mean value 46.2 years towards 46.6 years for the overall population.

The *vocational patterns of behavior and experience* were investigated with the help of the so-called AVEM-questionnaire (see Schaarschmidt, & Fischer, 2001; 2006). Schaarschmidt and colleagues identified four patterns of behavior and experience, a so-called “healthy pattern” that is characterized by a high degree of work engagement connected to a distinctive psychic resilience, a pattern *S* (“clemency”) that is to be described through an attitude of clemency towards work, the pattern *A* (effort or self-overstrain) that means persons with a lower degree of resilience but extremely high work engagement and finally the burn-out risk pattern *B* characterizing persons that show a very low degree of psychic resilience and a high degree of exhaustion.

Vocational strain was investigated with the help of the scales “vocational strain” (Enzmann & Kleiber, 1989, with 15 items; alpha value of the overall scale:  $\alpha = 0.86$ ) with the subscales work overstrain ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ) experience of controlledness ( $\alpha = 0.67$ ) and work-dissatisfaction ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ). For the here described analyses, the overall scale was used for calculation.

Satisfaction in the host country and at work was investigated with the help of a newly developed scale that converted the items of the overall life- and vocational satisfaction to the context of school work abroad. The scale consists of 9 items and shows a reliability of  $\alpha = 0.77$ . Statements had to be rated concerning the degree of satisfaction ranging from “totally dissatisfied” to “totally satisfied” on a two-stage Likert-scale (Example items: work conditions in the host country; feeling of being accepted by natives when working as a teacher).

*Cultural Adaptation* was measured with the help of the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) by Ward and Kennedy (1999). This scale investigates the ability of sociocultural adaptation of people in intercultural transition situations. According to the authors, concerning the scales, the both constructs of sociocultural and psychological adaptation can be separated. During our study, no two distinctive dimensions could be factor analytically identified, wherefore we use in the following the overall scale ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ) and speak of cultural adaptation in the broad sense.

With the help of discriminant analyses, Roose (2010) worked out a similarity index for 325 European country pairs. The data basis is a questionnaire inventory of Schwartz (2001) about value attitudes, which were the basis for the calculation of value attitudes between countries. For the operationalization of cultural distance for the European countries involved in our study, the index by Roose was used. For this, the countries that were involved in his country (18 of the overall 22 states in our study) have been divided into three groups, depending on their distance values to Germany (low, medium and high cultural distance). The four countries not involved are Romania, Serbia, Croatia and Latvia. Accepting certain blurs, the values of Latvia have been replaced by the one of Estonia, for Romania the value of Bulgaria, for Serbia the value of Turkey and for Croatia the value of Slovenia.

Table 1 shows the countries, the particular index values and the amount of respondents coming from the particular countries.

Table 1

*Roose-Index for European Countries and Specifications for the Sample*

Country	Roose-Index	<i>N</i>	Distance Value	Label
Switzerland	0.850	2	1	low
Spain	0.822	14	1	low
Belgium	0.813	5	1	low
Finland	0.768	4	1	low
Great Britain	0.725	5	1	low
Estonia	0.724	1	1	low
Latvia	0.724	2	1	low
Portugal	0.717	5	1	low
Czech Republic	0.697	6	2	medium
France	0.689	5	2	medium
Sweden	0.688	6	2	medium
Croatia	0.679	2	2	medium
Slovenia	0.679	3	2	medium
Ireland	0.677	1	2	medium
Russia	0.660	17	2	medium
Poland	0.613	9	2	medium

(Table 1 continued)

Country	Roose-Index	N	Distance Value	Label
Hungary	0.608	7	2	medium
Ukraine	0.596	3	3	high
Italy	0.578	7	3	high
Turkey	0.577	18	3	high
Serbia	0.577	1	3	high
Romania	0.557	10	3	high
Bulgaria	0.557	1	3	high

For index values above 0.7 the value 1 (low cultural distance) was assigned, for values above 0.6 the value 2 (medium distance), and for values under 0.6 the value 3 for a high cultural distance. The reference country is particularly Germany.

To be able to involve the non-European countries, the clustering of the Globe-study by House and colleagues (2006) was consulted. The comprehension of culture, that is the basis for this classification, is described by House and colleagues as follows: “Shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across ages and generations” (House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002, p. 8).

Of the Globe-Clusterin, those countries were clustered that were involved in our survey. The following country classification resulted:

Table 2

*Global Country Cluster and Specifications for the Sample*

Cluster	Global Labeling	Countries With Participants for the Survey	N
1	Anglo	Australia, Canada, South Africa, USA	37
2	Latin America	Argentina, Brasil, Chile, CostaRica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Columbia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela	89
3	Middle East	Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates	25
4	Sub-Saharan-Africa	Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia	5*
5	South-Asia	India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand	19
6	Confucian-Asia	China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan	27

Note. \*, the small number of cases in the 4th cluster leads to the exclusion from the category in the case of several analyses. This is particularly indicated at the accordant point.

## Results

Hypothesis 1 supposed that the amount of persons with risky patterns of behavior and experience is bigger for teachers abroad than for home country teachers. This was theoretically reasoned by the high degree of stress implicated by transitions experiences like work migration. We thus tested, whether our sample deviated from the distribution concerning the belonging of patterns in the way that risky patterns (A for effort and

self-overstrain patterns and *B* for burnout risk patterns) occurred more frequently than in the comparison sample (see Schaarschmidt & Fischer, 2006, p. 41). Figure 1 shows that this notion could not be affirmed.

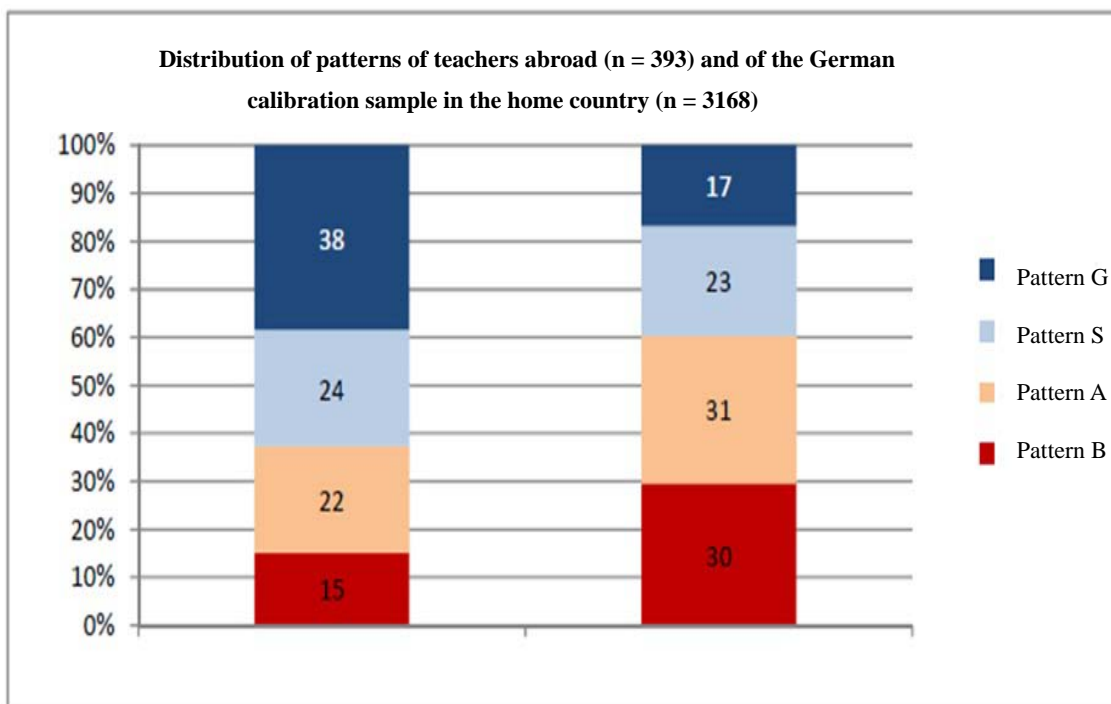


Figure 1. Distribution of patterns for teachers abroad and the German calibration sample.

In our study, there were fewer persons with risky strain management patterns by trend (sum pattern *A* and *B* = 37%) than in the comparison sample (*A* and *B* = 61%). The sample could thus be especially positively biased in the direction of a higher degree of participation willingness for persons showing the healthy pattern, or persons being delegated abroad already show before successful vocational patterns of behavior and experience and are thus overrepresented in the overall population. This can't be tested with our data.

Hypothesis 2 stated: Risk patterns of strain management are more frequent for countries with a higher degree of cultural distance than in countries being more alike with the German culture.

The ratio of persons with risky patterns (sum of *A* + *B*) increases with the degree of cultural distance to the host country. At the same time, the ratio of persons with the healthy pattern *G* decreases, pattern *S* (for clemency) does not vary with cultural distance. In the context of the rather by trend biased sample, for the distributions, the assumed relationships between vocational patterns of behavior and experience and cultural distance can be shown. But the percentage differences do not become significant when testing with  $\chi^2$ . Thus, hypothesis 1 is temporarily rejected.

Unfortunately, the return rates for the European countries are too small to justify a split-up into the 4 AVEM-patterns. The overall biggest partial group in the non-European sample is delegated to Latin American countries ( $N = 87$ ). For them, the patterns *A* and *B* were at 34.5%, the patterns *G* and *S* at 65.5% of the respondent.

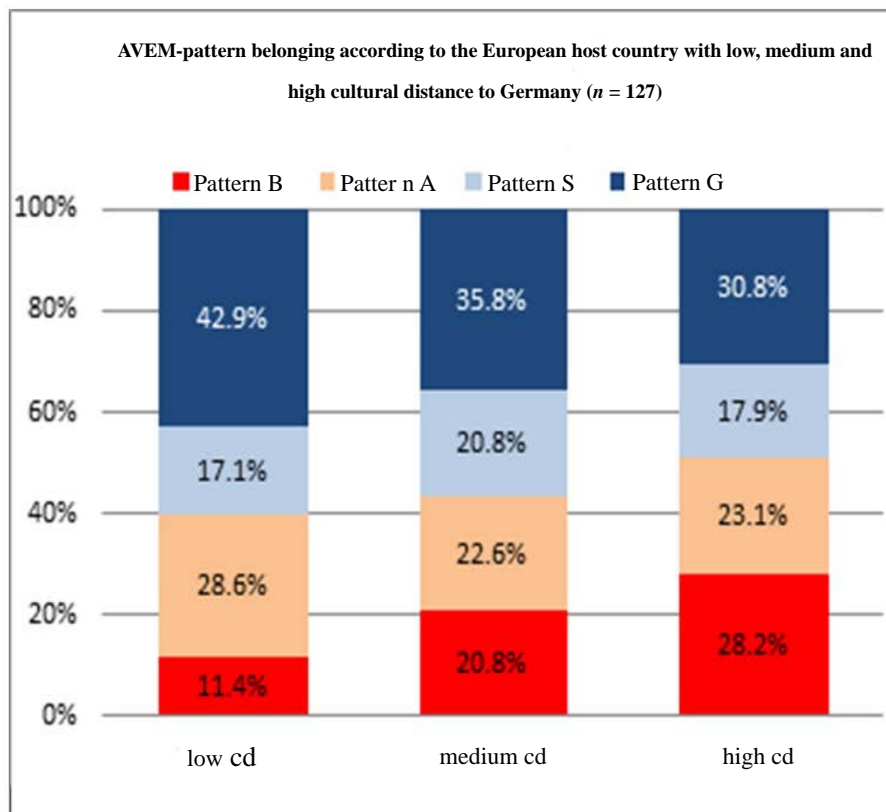


Figure 2. AVEM-pattern belonging according to the European host country.  
 Note. sum A and B when cd is low: 40%, when medium: 43.4%, when high: 51.3%.

Hypothesis 3: Persons that superior successfully manage cultural adaptation show a higher degree of general satisfaction relating to profession and life in the host country than those that less successfully master cultural adaptation.

The *T*-test for independent samples results for the comparison of the mean values for satisfaction for persons with a high degree and a low degree of cultural adaptation ( $AM = 3.0$  for a high degree of adaptation and  $AM = 2.3$  for a low degree of on a four-staged scale) in a significant result in the expected direction ( $t(327) = 6.19; p < 0.001$ ). Persons with high values in the area of cultural adaptation also show high values concerning their vocational and life satisfaction and vice versa. Successfully cultural adaptation is evidently an important (but of course not the only) condition for the vocational und life satisfaction in the host country.

Hypothesis 4: Persons that superior successfully master cultural adaptation show lower values for the scale “vocational strain” than those less successfully master cultural adaptation.

The values for “vocational strain” and “cultural adaptation” correlate with  $r = 0.33$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). When splitting up in two groups, with a higher and a lower degree of cultural adaptation, higher strain values can be shown for persons with a lower degree of adaptation ( $AM = 2.7$  in comparison with  $AM = 2.1$  for a high degree of adaptation;  $t(326) = -4.08; p < 0.001$ ). Hypothesis 4 is confirmed.

As the next step, we want to test (Hypothesis 5), if the vocational strain is higher for countries with a high



degree of cultural distance than for those with a low degree of cultural distance. The following figure particularly shows for all delegation cluster the deviation of the respondents from the overall mean value of all respondents on the scale “vocational strain”.

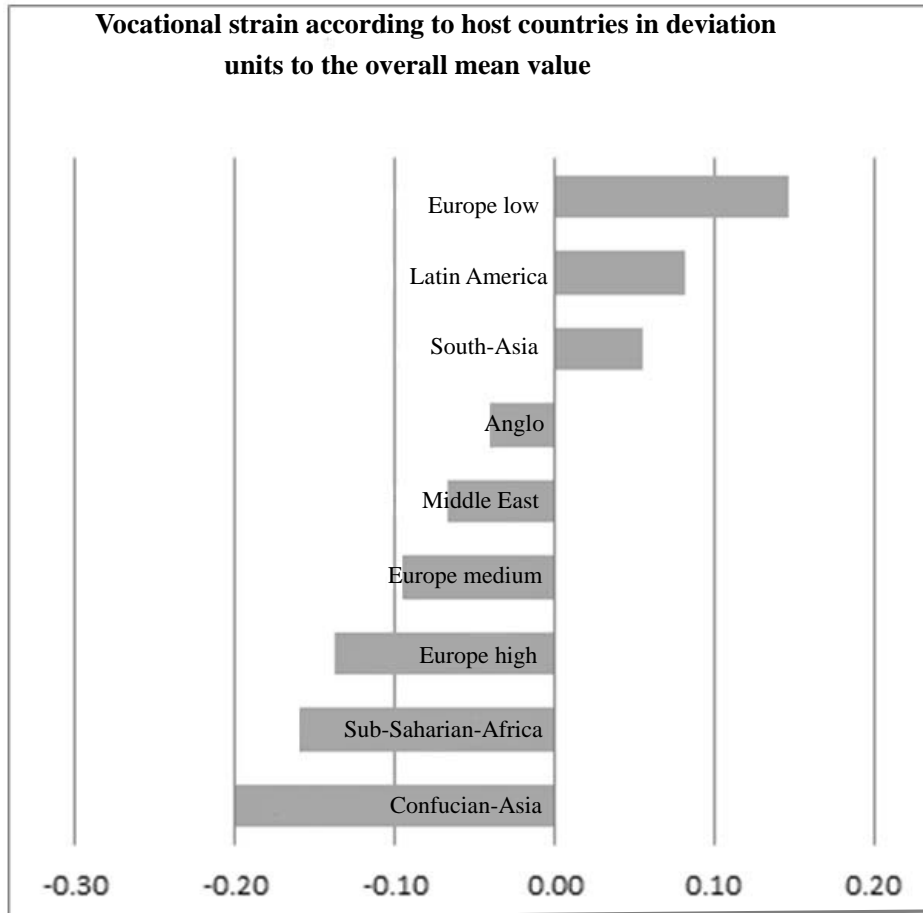


Figure 3. Vocational strain accordant to host countries.

The strain values overall are very close to each other; for the sub-saharian Africa, the values are less reliable due to they are only based on  $N = 5$  respondents. The findings are especially interesting concerning the values of persons working in cultures being the most similar to the German culture, because just those show the highest strain values, whereas persons with the relatively foreign host culture of Confucian Asia vice versa state the lowest strain values. A single factor ANOVA, however, did not result in a significant finding, nevertheless, this finding for the differences in Europe barely misses the level of significance of 5% ( $p = 0.08$ ; n.-s.). Hypothesis 5 is rejected: we cannot prove that vocational strain varies with cultural distance.

Hypothesis 6 stated: cultural adaptation is more successful in countries with a low degree of cultural distance than in countries to whom a high degree of cultural distance is existent.

The comparison of mean values does not become significant for the European countries, even when the mean values point in the expected direction:

Table 3

*Mean Values on the Scale “Cultural Adaptation” for Persons in Countries With Low, Medium and High Cultural Distance To Germany*

Cultural Distance Europe	<i>AM</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>s</i>
low	1.83	36	0.51
medium	1.86	50	0.47
high	2.00	41	0.45
overall	1.90	127	0.48

The more distant the culture is, the higher are the mean values for the difficulties with cultural adaptation. However, the differences in mean values are very small for all respondents from the European countries. The scale reached from “not a bit difficult” to “very difficult” for the different questioned adaptation efforts. (example items: to adjust to the local way of life; understand the native’s humor...). Low mean values thus stand for low adaptation difficulties.

What about the non-European countries?

Table 4

*Mean Values on the Scale “Cultural Adaptation” for Persons in the Globe-Clusters*

Globecountry Cluster	<i>AM</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>s</i>
Anglo	1.87	31	0.33
Latin America	2.11	88	0.49
Middle East	2.46	20	0.59
Sub-Saharan-Africa	2.53	5	0.44
South-Asia	2.37	18	0.65
Confucian-Asia	2.35	24	0.48
overall	2.17	186	0.52

Here, the variance analysis results in a significant finding; pairwise conducted *T*-tests (because of the little partial sample without Africa) show that the adaptation value for Anglo significantly differs from the ones of the other country groups, as well as the values for Latin America differ from the ones of the other country groups, too. The easiest is successful cultural adaptation achieved in countries, to whom the cultural distance is smaller. The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is to be rejected for hypothesis 6.

The respondents were provided with the following question: “Some colleagues break up their service abroad before the intended moment for this has come. Have you also thought about breaking up before?” We assumed with hypothesis 7 that persons stating to break up show higher values on the scales “cultural adaptation” (that means more difficulties) and “vocational strain”.

The *T*-tests for the verification of hypothesis 7 both became significant. The mean values for persons with thoughts about breaking up in the comparison with those not having thoughts about breaking up are as follows for the both scales of cultural adaptation and vocational strain:

Table 5

*Mean Values for Cultural Adaptation and Vocational Strain for Persons With and Without Thoughts About Contract Breaching*

Thoughts About Contract Breaching	Amcultural Adaptation*	s	AM Vocational Strain*	s
No	1.9	0.49	1.9	0.48
Yes	2.3	0.57	2.5	0.62

*Note.* \*, higher values particularly indicate more disadvantageous adaptation or strain values, respectively ( $t(321) = 4.9$ ;  $p < 0.001$  and  $t(321) = 8.37$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

### Summary and Discussion of Findings

The delegation to a German school abroad, was the assumption, exposes the teachers to higher strains due to migration, because they have to perform intercultural adaptation efforts, being added to the usual strains of the teacher's profession. The more distant the culture of the host country is, the higher is the adaptation effort and the higher is thus the strain, as it was assumed. Our findings modify these statements. However, the limitations because of the sample are to be considered for the interpretation. The return rate was disappointing and thus it can't be discovered if the in comparison with the comparison sample advantageous distribution of patterns of experience could be traced back to a selection effect. Maybe heavily strained teachers have rarely exposed themselves to a time-consuming survey. Maybe, the teachers abroad are an already positively selected partial population of teachers confronted with the special requirements of the education in a foreign culture. With 37% persons showing risky vocational patterns of behavior and experience, a substantial group among them shows disadvantageous patterns for the management of their vocational strain: More than every third teacher is to be assigned to either the effort pattern or the burnout risk pattern. Even when this is significantly lower than in other samples, these values are still remarkable. In their study about the relationship between vocational patterns of behavior and experience of maths teachers of the PISA-sample, Klusmann, Kunter, Trautwein, and Baumert (2006) found e.g., 45% of teachers of the pattern groups A and B. Regarding Schaarschmidt's study, those values are regularly at about 60% (see Schaarschmidt, 2004; Schaarschmidt & Fischer, 2001). Indeed we found for those European countries, being more unlike the German culture, a higher ratio of persons with risky patterns of behavior and experience, but this finding did not become significant. Here, a new investigation with a more reliable sample would be necessary. Another possibility would be to resign the anyway problematic methodological assignment to the patterns and calculate comparison analyses with a bigger sample on the level of the partial scales.

Cultural adaptation and satisfaction with life and profession in the host country significantly correlate with each other. This finding is in accordance with the theory and highly plausible: If the psychological adaptation to the life and work conditions is successful in the host country, it is possible that-despite of still existing strains and vocational and private problems-a feeling of satisfaction is achieved, because a potential strong stressor is not active. Overall, there is only a very little group of respondents for whom the values of "cultural adaptation" are extremely low. They would have to be supported in a special way, if breaches of their contracts shall be avoided.

Also the hypothetically assumed relationship between cultural adaptation and vocational strain could be

affirmed. Analog to satisfaction, for strain, higher values can be shown persons that are less successful with cultural adaptation.

The central question is, if vocational strain is indeed higher in countries whose culture is more distant to the German culture. It could also be assumed that the foreignness of the host country leads to a special curiosity, happiness or other positive emotions that in turn have a protective function in the face of high vocational strains or high requirements of cultural adaptation. Our findings are not able to discover this: Indeed, there are differences in mean values regarding the stated vocational strain in different countries, but these differences miss the level of significance of 5%. Regarding cultural adaptation, the trends for Europe indeed point in the hypothetically assumed direction, but the findings do not become significant. This in contrast to the other countries: Here, the assumed relationship between cultural proximity (Anglo) and successful adaptation could be verified. However, the difference in the mean value between Latin America and the other Globe-clusters (Middle East, South-Asia and Confucian Asia) became significant. Due to no distance measures are assigned to the Globe-clusters, the interpretation of this finding is a little bit notional. Hence, this should be avoided. Thus, the theoretically assumed relationships can be shown by trend. However, in context of the small partial samples of the cluster-countries, there should absolutely be a new investigation on the basis of a bigger sample.

Cultural distance with its effects for the success or failure of delegations abroad is probably to be considered and not to be underestimated. Especially when regarding delegations to culturally alike countries, seemingly often problems caused by an underestimation of distance arise. Selmer and Shiu (1999) found with the help of an investigation about expatriates from Hong Kong being in China that the common cultural heritage and the great similarities do not facilitate the adaptation, but impede them. The authors reason that when there is a small cultural distance, intercultural problems are underestimated and thus a worse cultural adaptation results from this (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001, p. 182). Otherness strains, even when it is fascinating at the same time, thus is also accompanied by positive emotions. Hence, it is of great importance that feelings of foreignness are accepted and are self-allowed and not locked due to the claim of intercultural competence.

Thoughts about contract breaches could be indeed significantly more often shown for persons with lower values on the scale “cultural adaptation” and for persons with high values on “vocational strain”. In the interviews, one of the respondents said:

I think, regarding the colleague [that broke his contract] indeed intercultural reasons played the central role. I think, he was not able to found a common language. Neither with pupils, nor with teachers. I think, he didn't speak Russian. I think, he was indeed not open towards the possibility to get involved with this and to try anyhow to understand that there is another way to do it. If you are gridlocked concerning your own perspective; he just was gridlocked concerning his own point of view. I really would have tried to help him, but it was not possible to help him. Maybe he just wanted to stay for two/three years, he left after one year.

This quotation from an interview conducted via Skype shows that failed cultural adaptation can lead to the giving up of the service abroad. In our sample, every fourth persons stated to sometimes having had thoughts about to give up, during his/her service abroad.

Contract breaches are not only financially irksome, but maybe also cause high psychological costs for the person concerned. The ones however not giving up, but having “to keep up” for several years also pay a high

price for this (that is probably also paid by colleagues, pupils and parents). Studies about persons giving up count to the urgent desiderata, if one wants to discover the reasons for contract breaches. Cultural distance, which is shown by our analyses, can possibly play a role for the question, if services abroad are successful. At this point, further studies with bigger samples are needed. In either case the analyses show that cultural adaptation makes a substantial contribution.

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