

# Student Satisfaction In Secondary Education: An Empirical Study of Indian Expatriate Students

Journal of Research in  
International Education  
2023, Vol. 22(2) 73–83  
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DOI: 10.1177/14752409221093245  
<https://www.jrie.org>



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## Abstract

Children who live abroad with their parents are exposed to a wide diversity of cultural and educational influences. They face various challenges as they live in a different country and experience a different culture. It is therefore important to understand their perceptions with respect to factors that could potentially enhance their satisfaction with schooling and subsequent positive engagement. The main aim of this paper is to understand what factors lead to school experiences of secondary school expatriate Indian students which in turn could lead to their better engagement. Data were gathered relating to perceptions of 1786 expatriate Indian students experiencing secondary education in the Sultanate of Oman with respect to organizational support, teachers' support, peer support, school satisfaction and student engagement. Correlation and regression analyses carried out on this data revealed that variables including organizational support, teachers' support, and peer support were highly significant in predicting school satisfaction of these students. It was also revealed that there exists a highly significant relationship between school satisfaction and student engagement which is not moderated by the location – rural or urban – of the school.

## Keywords

Indian expatriate students, organizational support, teachers' support, peer support, school satisfaction, student engagement

## Introduction

The number of expatriates worldwide has been increasing notably with the growth of globalization. Many migrate to other countries for employment, for business or for official assignments (Fee & Gray, 2011). In many cases, families move with them, resulting in the rearing of their children in another country. As a result, children of expatriate employees experience specific challenges that would not be experienced in their own country (Peterson & Plamondon, 2009). Children of expatriates part from their close family circle, also leaving behind their friends from school (Weeks et al, 2010). Even though research has been carried out with respect to adjustment of family members in the process of expatriation (Takeuchi et al, 2002; Brown, 2008; Ali et al, 2003; Lazarova

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et al, 2010), little has been done in respect of children who accompany their family as expatriates in another country mainly for economic reasons. The education system plays a major role in creating better physical and mental health among students (Chevalier et al, 2009). Education is also argued to bring about positive changes in adult life (Grossman, 2005). The ways in which current students cope with those changes that contribute to the development of their attributes is a matter of great interest for researchers.

Expatriate children have some positive outcomes from their lifestyle as they develop skills that are suitable for the international labour market (Bonebright, 2010). Higher levels of social sensitivity, interpersonal sensitivity, intercultural sensitivity and tolerance for difference are the hallmark of this type of child (Sobre-Denton, 2011; Lyttle et al, 2011). However, being away from their home country puts pressure on them as they strive to develop a sense of identity and build relationships as a teenager and adolescent (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Such challenges could include sense of belonging, enculturation, identity, grief and loss. Teachers and parents play a huge role in understanding and appreciating the social and emotional wellbeing of expatriate children and how this may affect their mental health and academic performance (Weeks et al, 2010). The main aim of this paper is to explore those factors that lead to the satisfaction of expatriate children with respect to school, which in turn could lead to better student engagement in school.

## **Hypotheses investigated**

Factors including personnel, facilities and materials can facilitate better school experiences for students (Iyamu and Aduwa, 2004). However, one of the greatest motivators of successful students is the teacher. Teachers through proper guidance and social support can define and design the future of children. Teachers act as promoters of motivation and engagement of students (Ryan and Patrick, 2001). Ito and Smith (2006) observed that positive teacher-student relationships will ensure students' satisfaction with their schooling experience, while Vieno et al (2007) identified that psychologically motivating and caring teachers could enhance the effectiveness of school for children. When classroom learning is organized in a cooperative environment by teachers, students will feel increased efficacy (Nichols and Miller, 1994). Students become more engaged in the learning process when they find teachers attending to their social and academic needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Generally, children studying away from their home countries are more observant of their teachers and rate them on factors including their commitment to the profession, and attitude towards students, that could subsequently influence students to see teachers as role models for their adult lives (Linton, 2013). Also, the school experiences of expatriate children help them to develop their abilities through the influence of friends and extra-curricular activities (Tyler, 2002). Such studies suggest it is reasonable to assume that teachers' support would enhance student satisfaction with their schools, which in turn would result in better student engagement.

Of late, there has been a number of instances where students feel more motivated when they are provided with adequate support from the school resulting in better student autonomy (see, for example Ruzek et al, 2016). Students are empowered to raise their concerns, aspirations, and voice for their wellbeing in school. Noddings (2007) observed that school satisfaction is an important factor that could be enhanced through supporting mechanisms. Students with low autonomy are likely to exhibit less satisfaction with school as they do not experience social support from the school (Samdal et al, 1998). This lack of autonomy could even result in negative behavior among students. Patton et al (2006) identified that positive behavior among students could be expected to happen when organizational support is provided for students' social environment. This could in turn result in a favourable school climate that enhances students' satisfaction with the school (Flay, 2000). Schools could support students in many ways, such as provision of high level safety in the

school, cordial relationships within school, and physical environment (Cohen et al, 2007). The school facility is considered to be one of the primary domains that enhance the satisfaction of students with respect to their schooling experience (Zullig et al, 2010). As such, it is assumed in this study that there would be a positive relationship between school support and school satisfaction.

Social interaction of students is an important element in their development. This is especially true in respect of peers with whom they are likely to spend much of their time. Students feeling secure, respected and supported by their peers will lead to increased school satisfaction (Ito and Smith, 2006). Perceived social support from peer students is crucial for ensuring students' satisfaction with school (Vieno et al, 2007). Thus students' feelings about those factors that contribute to their school experience will affect their future health and well-being (Hurrelmann et al, 1995). Reduced quality of life arising from non-cooperation of peers could also result in unhealthy behaviors including psychological problems (Nutbeam et al, 1989). Nichols and Miller (1994) observed that a cooperative learning environment will eventually result in increased self-efficacy among students, which in turn leads to school satisfaction. Considerable numbers of studies have identified that children of expatriates take many decisions that are influenced by significant people in their life such as parents, relatives, friends, teachers, and counselors (Kim, 2001; Verbik et al, 2007). Verbik et al (2007) identified that of these significant people, friends are most influential as far as expatriate children of Asian origin (including Indians) are concerned. Therefore, it is assumed in this study that peer support will enhance school satisfaction and further engagement in this group of students.

Positive learning environments play an important role in the academic performance of students (Back et al, 2016). Learning environment includes the location of the school, which may be categorized as urban or rural, and it has been observed that the location of the learning environment influences the aspirations of students from that specific location (Barcinas, 1989). Though Bradshaw et al (2009) observed that rural schools have the credibility of providing a safe learning environment for students, there have also been instances where the location of the school did not matter in providing a safe environment to students (Bosworth et al, 2011). We also expected the location of the school to have some influence on the relationship between school satisfaction and consequent student engagement, as students from rural locations in the new country have access to fewer facilities, which could in turn affect their levels of engagement. The moderation effect of the location of school on the relationship between these two variables is therefore also tested in this study.

Arising from the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H1* : Teachers' support will have a positive impact on the school satisfaction of expatriate students.

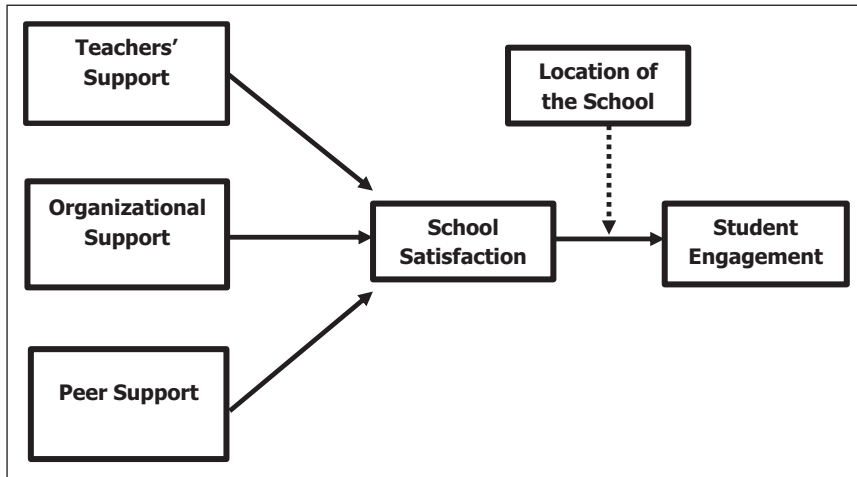
*H2* : School support will have a positive impact on the school satisfaction of expatriate students.

*H3* : Peer support will have a positive impact on the school satisfaction of expatriate students.

*H4* : School satisfaction will lead to a positive impact on the engagement of expatriate students.

*H5* : Location of the school will moderate the relationship between school satisfaction and student engagement for expatriate students.

The research model is as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Research Model.

**Table 1.** Demographic analysis of respondents.

School Location	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Rural	489	493	982
Urban	403	401	804
Total	892	894	1786

## Methodology

### *Participants and Procedures*

Participants in this study were 1786 expatriate Indian students who were studying at secondary level in the Sultanate of Oman, out of a total population of 6000 such students in that context (response rate of 29.7%). The cross tabulation of the demographic variables are as provided in Table 1. Participants were selected on a random basis from those who were currently studying at secondary level in Indian community schools in Oman. Of 1786 students, 894 were male and 892 female. A few schools were located in urban areas and others in rural areas of the country. Urban areas are characterized by high density of population as well as better school facilities, whereas children from rural area schools were more accustomed to the school environment, even though they had fewer facilities as compared to urban areas. In this study, 982 students were from rural area schools and 804 students from urban area schools. The statistical tool SPSS was used for data analysis.

### *Measures*

Participants responded to a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 24 items structured around different sections including Teachers' Support, Organizational Support, Peer Support,

**Table 2.** Factor Analysis of Items.

Items	Rotated Component Value in Factor Analysis
<b>Factor – 1 Teachers' Support</b>	
1. My teachers make my learning interesting and joyful.	.690
2. My teachers & other staff treat me with respect.	.663
3. I get feedback about my performance from my teachers.	.720
4. My teachers help me to improve whenever I perform poorly.	.757
5. My teachers encourage me.	.673
6. My teachers recognize my good works in public.	.736
7. My teachers really care about me.	.477
8. When I have a problem I know whom to approach for help.	.523
9. I feel comfortable about approaching teachers/counselors for discussing my troubles.	.601
<b>Factor – 2 Organizational Support</b>	
10. My school provides opportunities for getting involved in sports, clubs, and other activities outside the class.	.661
11. The grounds, buildings and outdoors are kept in clean & good condition.	.711
12. I find classrooms at school excellent & well equipped with learning & teaching resources.	.706
13. I find computer laboratories at school excellent & well equipped with learning & teaching resources.	.700
14. I find science laboratories at school excellent & well equipped with learning & teaching resources.	.679
15. I find library at school excellent & well equipped with relevant books.	.470
<b>Factor – 3 School Satisfaction</b>	
16. I am happy at school.	.616
17. I feel that the discipline in school is adequate.	.629
18. I feel safe in school.	.690
19. I feel proud of my school.	.601
<b>Factor – 4 Peer Support</b>	
20. Students in my school treat others with respect.	.711
21. My friends in school are mostly cooperative and work in teams.	.801
22. My friends help me in completing my assignments.	.778
<b>Factor – 5 Student engagement</b>	
23. I am actively involved in extra-curricular/co-curricular activities.	.766
24. I am actively involved in sports activities.	.794

School Satisfaction, and Student Engagement, to which responses were given on a 5 point Likert scale based on a scale of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree. After gathering data we carried out factor analysis, a method of data reduction, on all 24 items to check their credibility representing appropriate constructs that we proposed. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) argued that any sample above 1000 would yield excellent results in identifying the validity of each item mentioned in the questionnaire. Details of the factor analysis are as shown in Table 2. It was observed that the rotated component values of all these items are above .40, reflecting the appropriateness of the items in measuring the proposed constructs. As such, all 24 items were included in our further analysis.

**Table 3.** Reliability Statistics.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
.897	.900	24

**Table 4.** Correlation Analysis.

	Teachers' Support	Organizational Support	Peer Support	School Satisfaction
Organizational Support	.563**			
Peer Support	.270**	.278**		
School Satisfaction	.614**	.554**	.371**	
Students' Engagement	.147**	.149**	.170**	.175**

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Cronbach's Alpha test was performed in order to check the reliability of the items. As the Cronbach's Alpha score was greater than the minimum threshold level of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978), the reliability of the questionnaire was established in elucidating appropriate data as shown in Table 3.

## Variables

Two parts of data analysis were carried out in this study. The first part was based on the independent variables Organizational Support, Teachers' Support and Peer Support, and dependent variable School Satisfaction. In the second part of the analysis, we tested for the relationships between School Satisfaction and Student Engagement variables.

## Findings

### Correlation

Correlation analysis between variables is as shown in Table 4. All research variables were observed to be highly significant in relation to other variables in this study ( $p < .01$ ). The relationship between Organizational Support and Teachers' Support was observed to be highly significant with  $r = .56$ . The dependent variable 'School Satisfaction' of students was also reported to be in a strong and highly significant relationship with Teachers' Support and Organizational Support ( $r = .61$  and  $.55$  respectively). However, demographic variables such as gender and location of school did not have a significant relationship with the research variables.

Since a strong relationship was observed between research variables, it was deemed appropriate to carry out regression analysis in order to identify the influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable. Linear regression analysis was then performed with research variables in order to gain further insight into these relationships.

### Regression Analysis

In the first regression analysis, we tested the predictability of Teachers' Support, Organizational Support and Peer Support on the School Satisfaction variable. The model was highly significant in

**Table 5.** Regression Analysis – 1.

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
I	(Constant)	.492	.087		5.671	.000
	Teachers' Support	.452	.023	.411	19.511	.000
	Organizational Support	.265	.021	.271	12.828	.000
	Peer Support	.175	.017	.184	10.176	.000

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable: School Satisfaction.

**Table 6.** Regression Analysis – 2.

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
I	(Constant)	2.503	.112		22.449	.000
	School Satisfaction	.217	.029	.175	7.522	.000

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable: Student Engagement.

predicting a positive relationship between these independent variables and dependent variable ( $p < .001$ ), as shown in Table 5. Among these predictor variables, Teachers' Support appeared to be dominant in ensuring School Satisfaction among students, followed by Organizational Support and Peer Support. This provides a clear indication that teachers contribute heavily in making the school experience a productive one for students.

Regression analysis was subsequently carried out to test the predictability of School Satisfaction for Student Engagement as shown in Table 6. It was observed in this highly significant model that when a student is satisfied with their school experience, they are more likely to engage in those activities that lead them to experience different facets of school life such as sport, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that could result in their overall development.

In order to understand if the relationship between School Satisfaction and Student Engagement could be moderated by location of the school (urban or rural), we developed a regression model which is highly significant (see Table 7). It was identified that students at schools located in rural areas were more likely to engage themselves constructively as compared to their counterparts in urban areas once they were satisfied with their school.

However, the regression analysis carried out to identify the combined moderation effect of Location of the School on the relationship between School Satisfaction and School Engagement (Table 8) revealed that there is hardly any noticeable influence of moderator variable on the relationship between School Satisfaction and Student Engagement. This is evident from the standardized coefficient score of the independent variable (School Satisfaction) on the dependent variable, as shown in Table 6 and Table 8.

**Table 7.** Regression Analysis – 3.

School Place		Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
			B	Std. Error	Beta		
Rural	I	(Constant)	2.453	.147		16.681	.000
		School_Sat	.246	.038	.204	6.526	.000
Urban	I	(Constant)	2.578	.170		15.211	.000
		School_Sat	.177	.044	.140	3.994	.000

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable: Student Engagement.

**Table 8.** Regression Analysis – 4.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
I	(Constant)	2.579	.115		22.478	.000
	School Satisfaction	.213	.029	.172	7.382	.000
	School Location	-.134	.049	-.063	-2.725	.007

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable: Student Engagement.

## Discussion

The correlation and regression analysis conducted in this study revealed that expatriate students need support, be it from teachers or school or fellow students, in order to feel good about their school. It is only through these kinds of support that students develop affinity towards learning which would ultimately result in their overall development in a different country. Of these forms of support, support provided by teachers is highly influential in improving School Satisfaction of expatriate students, followed by Organizational Support and Peer Support respectively. A strong relationship between Organizational Support and Teachers' Support was also identified, which points to the inference that in an educational institution where adequate support is provided for stakeholders such as students, teachers and parents, it is more likely to create a satisfied and conducive learning environment for all of them. From that perspective, the role of the organization is of prime importance in establishing a favorable perception among students with respect to their schooling experience.

Another important finding from this study is that the relationship between School Satisfaction and consequent Student Engagement is not moderated by the location of the school, whether urban or rural: the location of the school does not moderate the influence of School Satisfaction on Student Engagement activities. However, students from rural areas were observed to be more inclined towards Engagement activities once they felt satisfied with the schooling experience, as compared to their urban counterparts. This disposition may be related to the fact that rural area students spend more time on activities in school as they experience fewer distractions in terms of



facilities available in the locality. They therefore engage themselves more actively once they are happy with the kind of support received from teachers, school and peers. School administrators who focus on providing support to students would seem more likely to create favourable school satisfaction levels among students that would in turn engage these students in those activities and thus potentially benefit the image of the school in the longer term.

## Implications

From this study, it appears that expatriate students may need greater support from different stakeholders, especially teachers, peers and the organization. Students' willingness to continue to strive for better school experience and adjustment to the school environment is proportional to the reciprocation by teachers, fellow students and management of the schools in terms of providing better satisfaction with the school. However, non-significance of the location where expatriate students are studying (whether urban or rural) suggests that the experience is the same for expatriate students once they are out of their homeland. This study highlights the importance of support provided for students by the institution in enabling them to have the most positive experience in school.

This study is limited to Indian expatriate students who are studying in the Sultanate of Oman. As such, the outcomes of this study may not be generalized to those who are studying in other parts of the world. A detailed study involving those who are studying in developed countries with better facilities may perhaps throw more light on the perception of students with respect to different forms of support that increase their satisfaction with their school experience. The findings of this study might also be utilized for comparison with those of other studies that consider the perspectives of local national students with respect to variables used in this study. Such a comparison could shed further light on school experiences of different categories of students.

## Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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