



# THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE BARRIER AND BUSINESS COMMUNICATION ON CHINESE EXPATRIATES' WORK PERFORMANCE IN MYANMAR

Naing K.K<sup>1</sup>, Amia Bhaumik<sup>2</sup>, Mindhun Chakkaravarthy<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Ph.D in Management, Lincoln University College, Malaysia)

<sup>2</sup>(Professor, Lincoln University College, Malaysia)

**Abstract:** Cross-cultural challenges, including language barriers and business communication, are critical for foreign expatriates in multinational organizations. This study purposed to examine the impact of language barriers and business communication on Chinese expatriates' work performance in Myanmar. The research was conducted using a qualitative method, and data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The findings indicated that language and communication challenges are the major cross-cultural issues for Chinese expatriates in Myanmar. These challenges negatively impact staff performance and organizational development. This study recommends that multinational companies implement language and cultural training programs to solve cross-cultural adaptation challenges and improve business communication.

**Index Terms -** Language barrier, Communication errors, Performance, Chinese expatriates, Myanmar.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is a community of diverse people who show their thinking, acting, and feeling in their ways [1]. Culture can combine with attitudes and beliefs, which impact humanity's behaviors and perspectives. It is essential to realize that the culture of the workplace for a leader, especially for the expatriate in an organization as it is one of the factors that influence employees' performance [2]. In a foreign country, many expatriates face different problems of cultural differences, including lifestyle, work ethic, and language barrier [3]. Culture influences the instruction to perform in working either positively or negatively. For Chinese enterprises in Myanmar, the Chinese expatriates also face different problems of cross-cultural problems.

Chinese expatriates hold the leading positions and responsibilities for Chinese enterprises in Myanmar. When dealing with local employees, there will inevitably be cultural issues, including language barriers. Previous studies have focused on expatriates' cultural adjustment and adaptation in different countries, including Thailand [4], Malaysia [5], Indonesia [6], and Bangladesh [7]. The researchers concluded the negative consequences of communication and language barrier on staff performance of foreign expatriates. This research aims to explore the influence of cultural differences on Chinese expatriates, especially the language barrier in Myanmar, since the limitation of data reference available in Myanmar. This paper defines and elaborates on the construct of the language barrier, which will be helpful for further research on the impact of cultural differences in managing expatriates.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of culture is a variety consisting of the means of thinking and feeling of people, the symbols of a company, and its rules to follow by employees, which can be distinguished people from values, attitudes, and behaviors, and it can influence both nations and organization [8]. Cross-cultural adaptation is adapting to a new cultural environment that changes the perspectives and mediates the beliefs to suit the local culture [2]. Cross-cultural adaptation involves psychological and socio-cultural. Psychological adaptation is a positive feeling or satisfaction while cross-cultural transitions in life. Socio-cultural adaptation is the social skill to adjust to a new cultural environment, participating and learning in verbal and non-verbal interactions such as language understanding, gestures, and etiquette in daily life [9].

Language helps to exchange information and knowledge between humanity and the expression of people's feelings and emotions. Language barrier frequently occurs in workplaces when working with expatriates due to cultural differences. It can cause problems with local employees and affect working performance and productivity [2]. Language barriers can hinder management practices and operational performance between foreign and local managers and affect the company's performance in developing countries [10]. Cultural differences and language barriers are the main challenges that expatriates encounter [11]. When two employees in different languages have to communicate by using translation, it causes misunderstanding that impacts functional performance [2].

Business communication refers to language, signaling, and verbal and visual presentation [12]. Management and employee at work need to understand each other, reduce unnecessary troubles and promote individuals' careers and the organization's sustainable development. Communication between employees is critical, and miscommunication often occurs in the workplace [6]. Personal communication and social communication can hinder intercultural adaptation. Effective communication between employees is a critical factor for the organization's success [13].

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research method is implemented to answer the research objective. The Chinese expatriates working at multinational companies in Yangon are the targeted participants. The respondents must have at least five years of working experience in the conducted organization. A total of seven Chinese expatriates participated, and the purposive sampling method was applied to get a sample. Semi-structured interview questions are used to get information from respondents. The questions are developed based on previous research findings and translated into Chinese to ensure that interview questions are understood. The collected data are analyzed using content analysis.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents are working as manager-level employees at multinational companies in Myanmar. The first interview question, "What are the challenges at the workplace during working at multinational companies in Myanmar" targets to examine the critical issues of the workplace for Chinese expatriates. The trust relationship, communication errors, language barrier, currency inflation, safety issues, and workplace rules and regulation, including working hours and workplace culture, are critical issues for Chinese expatriates in Myanmar. The communication difficulties through the language barrier are the main issue for Chinese expatriates.

The second interview question is, "How do language barriers and communication difficulties impact your work performance?". The management level Chinese expatriates replied that "communication errors lead to misunderstanding in market research and also the management on local staff, which result in reducing organizational performance and operational errors" (HR manager, and sales and marketing manager). Furthermore, the HR manager replied as the "language barrier creates the communication gaps at the workplace and impacts negatively on staff performance and also organizational performance in competitive markets." Language barrier is the critical management and operational performance issue in multinational companies [10]. Clear communication effectively solves conflicts between local employees and expatriates to perform the job well and support the company's success [13].

The third interview question is, "Do you think cross-cultural challenges can bring negative business consequences, and why?". The country manager of an oil and gas organization answered as "cross-cultural challenges including the language barrier and communication error impact negatively on project acquisition with local companies and business expansion." Moreover, the country manager of a contractor-heavy industry claimed that "language barrier leads to communication difficulties for international trading practices which bring negative consequence for organizational success." The results support that where the cross-cultural challenges, including the language barrier and communication difficulties, impact negatively on employee performance and organizational development [2]. In multinational companies, organizational success highly depends on local staff and foreign expatriates. In Myanmar, the majority of multinational organizational hire foreign expatriates, including Chinese expatriates, to grow organizations and expand the business sectors. Thus, the communication and language barrier becomes a significant issue for foreign expatriates.

### V. CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the impact of communication and language barriers on Chinese expatriates' work performance in Myanmar. Qualitative research was conducted, and seven Chinese expatriates participated in the interview. The findings concluded that Chinese expatriates faced language and communication issues in the workplace in multinational companies in Myanmar. The language and communication difficulties create communication gaps and reduce business performance reduction. The Chinese expatriates reported that language and communication issues such as market research, project acquisition, and business expansion negatively affect organizational success. The results suggest solving cross-cultural challenges through language and cultural adaptation training for foreign expatriates to minimize the problems and improve working performance effectively. So, Chinese enterprises in Myanmar can understand cultural differences and adaptation, further improving their management and communication with local employees.

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