



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



A comparative study on professional identity development and perceived social support among native and expatriate workers

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2026, 29(03), 2083-2089

Publication history: Received on 20 February 2026; revised on 28 March 2026; accepted on 30 March 2026

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2026.29.3.0764>

Abstract

The study was conducted to assess and compare the perceived social support and development of professional identity between native and expatriate workers. In this study a comparative research method was used. This study includes 300 participants, out of them 150 participants were native workers and 150 participants were expatriate workers. There are 170 males and 130 females, age ranged between 19 and 60 years were participated. Standardized instruments were used to measure perceived social support and development of professional identity. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to analyse the collected data. Descriptive statistics used for this study included mean and standard deviation. An independent sample t- test was used for inferential statistics. The results of this study revealed that there is no significant difference between these two groups of workers in terms of perceived social support and development of professional identity. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted. Discussion of the results was presented with special attention to equitable organizational practices and standardized professional development programs. The implications of this study were discussed on different levels. Moreover, the limitations of this study were also discussed. Suggestions for future research were also provided, which would motivate future research using larger samples, longitudinal research, and mixed-method approaches. The findings of this research revealed that both groups receive similar levels of social support and professional identity development. Finally, this research was able to conclude that both support systems and uniform professional development opportunities are vital for promoting employees' well-being and professional identity development. The suggestions provided in this research are aimed at assisting organizations in developing their support systems and promoting professional identity development among all employees.

Keywords: Perceived Social Support; Professional Identity Development; Native Workers; Expatriate Workers; Comparative Study.

1. Introduction

Today's work settings often include local staff alongside foreign hires, shaping varied teams across companies. Because of this mix, fresh ideas emerge - knowledge flows more freely, viewpoints differ. Still, challenges arise too, especially around how people feel internally: sense of belonging, confidence in role clarity. One key aspect? How supported someone believes they are at work. That feeling involves noticing care, advice, or practical help from coworkers, managers, or the company itself - (Sheldon Cohen and Thomas A. Wills, 1985). Studies done before suggest better mental well-being comes with social backing, less strain, lower job pressure. Moving across borders brings distinct difficulties - getting used to new cultural norms, handling different office settings - one path through this involves relying on employer-supported groups while settling in (John W. Berry, 1997). Professional identity grows gradually; it reflects how workers see themselves through values held, abilities used, promises made to their field (Herminia Ibarra, 1999).

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As this sense of self sharpens at work, employees gain clearer direction, firmer belief in capability, deeper ties to employers - this happens whether born locally or working abroad, shaped largely by daily exchanges among colleagues. While past writings examine social backing and evolving professional selves separately, what remains uncertain is how these factors play out differently across local versus overseas staff. Moreover, in the context of the Indian workforce, especially in regions with high growth rates of urbanization, such as the city of Chennai, where workforce diversity is still on the rise, a lack of empirical research in this domain suggests a notable research gap in understanding whether these two categories of workers differ in terms of perceived social support and professional identity development. In this context, the current study seeks to explore and compare the levels of perceived social support and professional identity development in native and expatriate workers, as well as whether significant differences exist in these levels between the two categories of workers. It is hypothesized that no significant difference exists in the levels of perceived social support and professional identity development between native and expatriate workers, which will help address a notable research gap in the existing literature on workforce diversity, contributing to the growing body of literature on this domain. The personal qualities like resilience, self-worth, perceived social support plays a significant role in predicting the well-being of adolescents exposed to domestic violence. Also, social support has played strong influence on well-being Chithrackal Chacko & Babu, (2024).The social support, professional identity, school belonging, and psychological adjustment (well-being and self-identity) are all positively correlated. School belonging partially mediated the relationship between social support and professional identity, and psychological adjustment and school belonging also have a part to play. The study concludes that social support indirectly affects professional identity and personal well-being (Y. Chen et al., 2023).The healthcare professionals with high psychological distress is accompanied with poor social support. Significant factors contributing to different levels of psychological distress are gender and relatively more frequent exposure to patients (Nazim et al., 2022).

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Aim

To explore the difference between perceived social support and perceived professional identity across native workers and expatriate workers.

2.2. Objectives

- To quantify the level of perceived social support among the native workers and expatriate workers.
- To investigate the level of perceived professional identity among native workers and expatriate workers.
- To understand the role of perceived social support in the development of perceived professional identity among native and expatriate workers.

2.3. Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant difference between perceived social support and professional identity development among native and expatriate workers.

2.4. Research design

The nature of the present study follows a comparative research design. The study will look at perceived social support and professional identity development among workers who are natives and those that constitute expatriate workers in their comparative sphere. It is a comparative research design because it allows the researcher to identify the nature and direction of the difference between perceived social support and professional identity development without manipulating variables. The comparative aspect within enables the researcher to understand differences between native and expatriate workers in terms of their social support systems and professional identity formation.

2.5. Sampling design

The target population for the current study consists of native workers and expatriate workers who currently work in any organization. This population was selected because empirical research studying perceived social support and professional identity development among these groups has been scant, especially in the Indian context.

2.6. Sampling size

The study uses sample size of 300. From about 150 native workers and 150 expatriate workers. This balanced sample ensures a more comprehensive understanding of the variables

2.7. Sampling technique

A convenience sampling technique is used in this study. The participants sampled are those who are available and willing to participate in the study. This was a technique utilized for practical feasibility of ease of data collection among working populations.

2.7.1. Inclusive criteria

- The individuals who all are currently placed on job.
- The working persons who are all above the age of 18 years.
- The employers who are all having at least six months of experienced.

2.7.2. Exclusive criteria

- The individual who all are unemployed at present.
- The individual who all are doing part time work.
- The employees who are all not willing to take part in the research.

2.8. Data Collection

- Data was collected through offline questionnaires distributed to the participants.
- Participants had provide demographic information, followed by responses to the two standardized scales.

2.9. Tools used

- A Revised Thai Multi-Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Nahathai Wongpakaran and Tinakon Wongpakaran, 2011)
- The Macleod Clark Professional Identity Scale (MCPIS-9) Macleod Clark and Holmes (2000)

2.10. Tool description and procedure

- **Revised Thai Multi-Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support** by Wongpakaran & Wongpakaran (2011) was used to measure perceived social support among the participants. This scale contains 12 items, assess perceived supported by three sources: significant others, family, and friends. The items 1, 2, 5, and 10 are support received from significant others, the items 3, 4, 8, and 11 are support from family, and the items 6, 7, 9, and 12, which are support from friends, these items measured on a five-point likert scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Then each subscales scores are added up and a total score for perceived social support can be computed by summing up all 12 items, higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived social support. It has already showed a high level of reliability, with a total reliability coefficient of 0.92. The reliability coefficient of subscales are 0.91 for Friends, 0.88 for Family, and 0.92 for Significant Others. The scale also shown high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.81 to 0.98.
- **The Macleod Clark Professional Identity Scale (MCPIS-9)** was used to measure Professional identity development, developed by Macleod Clark and Holmes (2000). This scale comprises nine items and does not include any subscales, measuring professional identity as a single construct. Each one of the item is rated on a five-point likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Items 3, 4, and 5 are reverse scored prior to analysis. After reverse scoring, the responses to all items are summed to obtain a total professional identity score, with higher scores reflecting a stronger sense of professional identity development. The scale has shown satisfactory reliability with a coefficient of 0.80. This scale's internal consistency validity is good, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between 0.80 and 0.90.

2.11. Statistical analysis

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyses data for independent sample t-test.

2.12. Ethical considerations

The study was conducted by adhering to general ethical principles that can be applied to psychological research. Before the participants took part in the research, they were given a brief description of the nature of the research and what would be involved in the research. They were also told that participation in the research was completely voluntary and that their consent was sought for their participation in the research. They were also told that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time without any obligation.

Here throughout the research process confidentiality was maintained with the participants. There was no collection of personal identifying information, and all the responses were anonymous and for academic purposes only. The questionnaires employed in the study were designed to ensure that there was no sensitive or harmful information that could cause discomfort to the participants.

Moreover, all the collected data was stored in a safe manner and was only accessible to the researcher. All possible measures were taken to ensure that the dignity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained.

3. Result

The results and interpretation of the analysis done to understand the difference in perceived social support a professional identity development among native and expatriate workers. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed using spss. Independent sample t-test was used to test the hypothesis of the study.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarise the mean and standard deviation values of perceived social support and professional identity development for native and expatriate workers.

variable	group	N	mean	Standard deviation
Perceived social support	Native workers	150	62.84	5.73
	Expatriate workers	150	63.01	8.67
Professional identity development	Native workers	150	34.34	3.82
	Expatriate workers	150	34.49	3.54

Table1 represents the mean and standard deviation of perceived social support and professional identity development.

From table1 we understand the mean score of perceived social support an professional identity development are very similar for both native and expatriate workers. This indicates that at descriptive level both groups experience comparable level of social support and professional growth.

Table 2 The independent sample t-test of variables perceived social support and Professional identity development among native workers and expatriate workers.

variable	group	N	mean	Standard deviation	t-value	df	p-value
Perceived social support	Native workers	150	62.84	5.73			
	Expatriate workers	150	63.01	8.67	-0.195	254.19	0.846
Professional identity development	Native workers	150	34.34	3.82			
	Expatriate workers	150	34.49	3.54	-0.349	297	0.727

From table 2 we understand that for perceived social support an independent sample t-test was applied to compare perceived social support between native and expatriate workers. It indicated violation of homogeneity of variance therefore under unequal variances were consider. It shows no significant difference between the two groups, $t(254.19) = -0.195$, $p = 0.846$. This indicated that both group perceives similar level of social support. And then for professional identity development an independent sample t-test was applied to compare professional identity development between native and expatriate workers. It indicated of equality of variances. It shows no significant difference between the two groups, $t(297) = -0.350$, $p = 0.727$. This indicated that both group perceives similar level of professional identity development.

4. Discussion

The finding of this study indicates that native and expatriate workers do not differ significantly on perceived social support and professional identity development. It indicates that both groups have a similar level of emotional, informational, and professional support within their organisations. The similarity in professional identity development may be attributed to uniform organisational policies, standardised training programs, and shared professional responsibilities. In addition to this, a good work environment and practices of inclusiveness may help to ensure equal opportunities for development and growth for workers regardless of their background. The results of these findings point to the need for an inclusive work culture where there is equal treatment and development for all. From the demographic study of the sample population, it was established that they were mostly young and middle-aged middle-class workers from nuclear families. Moreover, there was an almost equal number of native and expatriate workers. This equal distribution between the two groups makes these findings reliable. Also, the fact that they were mostly middle-class and from nuclear families means they were almost homogenous in socio-economic background. This may be part of the reason why there was similarity in their perceived social support and development of their professional identities. For perceived social support, the p-value (0.846) is greater than the standard level of significance (0.05). From the above it can be seen that both the native and expatriate workers have a similar perception of social support within their working environment. The p-value obtained for professional identity is 0.727, which is higher than 0.05. This indicates that both the native and expatriate workers possess similar levels of professional identity development. Accordingly, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference between perceived social support and professional identity development among native and expatriate workers is accepted.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research study, the main aim was to compare the perceived social support and professional identity development between native workers and expatriate workers. The main findings indicated that there is no significant difference between the two groups concerning perceived social support and professional identity development. This implies that both native workers and expatriate workers receive the same support and develop their professional identity. This study has contributed to the existing body of knowledge by stressing the need for a balanced system and the provision of the same opportunities for workers in the modern work environment.

Limitations

- The sample size and geographical location of the sample (Tamil Nadu only) were limited and raised questions about the generalizability of the findings.
- There were some issues with how the data was collected (self-reported) and its potential for bias from social desirability.
- The cross-sectional design limits the possibility of understanding the changes that happen over a period of time.
- There was no inclusion of qualitative data, which couldn't have helped in a better understanding of the participant's experience.

Suggestions for Future Research:

- Future studies may include larger sample size and more diverse samples from different regions and industries/organization.
- Longitudinal research design could be used to assess the dynamics of perceived social support and professional identity development over a period of time.
- Uses Mixed approaches in research such as qualitative and quantitative could provide a greater understanding of the data.
- More variables could also be explored such as job satisfaction, work-related stress, organizational commitment, and work-life balance.
- Comparative studies over different cultures could also be conducted.

Recommendations

- Organizations could improve mentoring and peer support mechanisms.
- Training sessions could be conducted on a regular basis to improve professional competency.
- Organizations could also improve communication and supportive leadership.
- Employee well-being initiatives should be expanded.
- Orientation programs for expatriate workers should be continuously improved.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author of this research makes a declaration that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this research.

Statement of ethical approval

The research was carried out in a manner that adheres to the guidelines of conducting research among human beings. The research was carried out in a manner that is fair and just for individuals who participate in this research. The research among the participants was carried out in consideration of the guidelines of ethical principles.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before they could take part in the research. The participants were made aware of the objectives of the research and were free to take part or not.

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