

International Professional Mobility: Bibliometric Review in International Journals from 2013 to 2018

Mobilidade Internacional Profissional: Revisão Bibliométrica em Periódicos Internacionais no Período de 2013 a 2018

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Abstract

The theme of international mobility has been gaining worldwide prominence with respect to the practical implications of this phenomenon both for companies that seek to achieve their internationalization goals and for individuals who seek to obtain this professional experience. The present work sought to understand how the academic production about the theme of international mobility is in the field of Administration in the recent international scenario. For such purpose, a bibliometric study was carried out to identify and to analyze the articles in English on international mobility of the Administration area. According to the criteria used, 39 articles were found from the Capes Scientific Journals Portal database search, between the years of 2013 and 2018. The work has a quantitative approach of exploratory and descriptive character. The results confirm the three laws of bibliometrics, that is, it has been observed that there is concentration of production by few authors, in some journals and few keywords are often used to describe the theme and its sub-themes. It was identified that the theme is strongly linked to Human Resources, which seeks to identify the success and failure factors of international mobility processes of professionals as a strategic tool for companies to achieve their results and improvement for the organization and its employees.

Keywords: International mobility. Expatriation. Bibliometrics.

Resumo

O tema mobilidade internacional profissional vem ganhando destaque mundial no que diz respeito às implicações práticas de tal fenômeno, tanto para empresas que buscam alcançar seus objetivos de internacionalização quanto para indivíduos que almejam obter essa experiência profissional. O presente artigo buscou compreender como está a produção acadêmica sobre o tema da mobilidade internacional de profissionais, no campo da Administração, no cenário internacional recente. Para isso, foi realizado um estudo bibliométrico com objetivo de identificar e analisar os artigos

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sobre mobilidade internacional, em língua inglesa, da área de Administração. De acordo com os critérios utilizados, foram encontrados 39 artigos a partir de busca na base de dados do Portal de Periódicos Capes de 2013 a 2018. A pesquisa possui uma abordagem quantitativa de caráter exploratório e descritivo. Os resultados confirmam as três leis da bibliometria, ou seja, observou-se que há concentração da produção por poucos autores em alguns periódicos e poucas palavras-chave são usadas muitas vezes para descrever o tema e seus subtemas. Identificou-se que o tema está fortemente vinculado à área de Recursos Humanos, em estudos que buscam identificar os fatores de sucesso e fracasso dos processos de mobilidade internacional dos profissionais. A mobilidade internacional é vista como ferramenta estratégica para as empresas alcançarem seus objetivos e melhorias para a organização e seus empregados.

Palavras-Chave: Mobilidade internacional. Expatriação. Bibliometria.

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1 Introduction

Due to the country economic development and market globalization in the last decades, old trade barriers were reduced; such process has opened up opportunities for the appearance of several international agreements, which has also made the economic bloc appearance and formation possible (Faro & Faro, 2007). Such factor has increased competitiveness among countries, by enhancing productive capacities, causing the mobility of persons to gain greater prominence in the internationalization process of the economic capitalist relations.

As to the grounds of company performance expansion, Bueno and Freitas (2015) declare that with information technology development, greater ease of access, and the long distance transportation reduction costs, the organization performance expansion was possible, decreasing the restrictions to the mobility of persons. Hence, companies seek a labor force, which has a profile as a world professional due to the need to achieve competitive advantage by individual and organizational competences (Black & Gregersen, 1999).

The involvement of strategic level persons of an organization is essential in the internationalization process of the activities, being

increasingly necessary that managers and other qualified professionals become expatriates living and working abroad. For Caligiuri (2000), expatriates were executives sent by a multinational company to live and work in a foreign country for over a year. As time went by, this concept has been replaced by the international mobility one, considered as broader and more comprehensive for the professional profile study, the type of bond and mobility process length (Freitas, 2009).

Amid these transformations, the Human Resources area starts having a fundamental and strategic role in this labor force management within organizations; thus, subsystems such as the International Human Resources Management have appeared. The complexity to operate in different countries and to employ workers from different national categories is what differentiates the traditional human resources management from the international one (Schuler, 2000), enabling some additional occupations such as the expatriate management and the application, comparison and adequacy of personnel management practices in different countries (Schuler, Budhwar, & Florkowiski, 2002).

The objective of the article was to perform a bibliometric survey from Capes Journals Portal, via remote access to articles in English from federate academic community (CAFe) from 2013 to 2018. Thereby, the aim is to contribute to the understanding about international mobility of professionals and to analyse the pertinent questions and contributions of academic production on the theme.

The contribution of this bibliometric survey lies in the systematization and analysis on the academic publications about international mobility in a more specific way within the business setting, besides serving as a basis for further studies about the theme. As a practical contribution, it is intended to help by providing information for the international mobility planning processes, by focusing on organizational strategic objectives and on the professional and career objectives.

2 Theoretical Framework

In the second half of the 20th century, the growth of large corporations and the information technology revolution, as well as their diffusion in economy and in society, contributed to the development of a global economy (Domingues, 2011). As Hall (2005, p. 67-68) argues, globalization is a set of processes that operates in a global level, crosses borders, integrates and connects “communities and organizations within new combinations of space-time, making the world more interconnected in reality and in experience”. Thus, Bueno and Freitas (2015) say that one of the responsible factors for the growth and dissemination of organizations and nations was the market globalization process. New competitive strategies such as alliances, mergers, acquisitions, agreements, partnerships and *joint-ventures* made companies from different cultural roots not only deal with different markets (Fleury & Fleury, 1997; Rodrigues, 2001), but also share their team competences by means of expatriation.

For a long period in the business history, the term “international” was enough to denominate the operations outside the country of origin, being the international executive someone who lived and worked “abroad” (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2003). The expatriation concept emerged from the labor relation increase and it started being seen with a certain *glamour* (Freitas, 2009; Gallon, Scheffer, & Bitencourt, 2013) and *status* (Gallon et al., 2013), varying according to the time that the professional is outside his/her country of origin and to the complexity of the held position. Nunes, Vasconcelos and Jaussaud (2008) consider that the expatriate is a professional who is sent to an international destination, with determination of elements such as position, period, financial conditions, localization, considering that the company strategy defines the objective and the expatriation model and, consequently, the expatriate profile. In Personnel Management, the expatriate can be seen as a strategy that aims to internationally develop the global executive competences in the organization and in the employees.

The success in international mobility has been more associated to the possibility of the international career development and to the learning opportunity in terms of cross-cultural competences (Stahl et al., 2009). Expatriation, then, is connected to personal factors and not only to the employee departure from the country of origin. Freitas e Dantas (2011) share this idea and, Nevado (2003) as do, they relate the experience to the capacity of adapting to different cultures and of dealing with the unknown.

The international strategy of organizations dictates the configurations of the mobility international use, due to the options of hiring locally, sending persons from other subsidiaries, among other possibilities. Rego and Cunha (2009) mention three categories which make up the international staff: (a) the short-term mission ones (up to six months); (b) the long-term mission ones (from six months to three-five years); and (c) the permanent expatriates.

It is worth highlighting that some professionals choose international careers regardless of the companies, thus emerging a more contemporary and poorly studied configuration: the self-expatriates (Nardi, 2015) or *self-initiated expatriates* (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008) who are professionals who travel abroad looking for a job, by performing their own expatriation (Nardi, 2015; Dickmann & Doherty, 2008). Some authors differentiate the act of sending a subsidiary employee to the headquarters and vice-versa. Thus, the impatriates, subsidiary employees who work in missions in the headquarters with the intent to learn the head office culture and take it to the subsidiary (Harvey, Ralston, & Napier, 2000; Rego & Cunha, 2009). In the several cases, when the expatriate returns to the company of origin, he/she is considered a repatriate (Gallon & Antunes, 2013).

A truly global strategy dissemination by the organization parties may involve the increase of cultural diversity in the managerial positions. The headquarter native executives have the challenge of developing the foreigners' skills or a global perspective at least (Antunes; Fraga; & Gallon, 2017). In view of such global perspective, the flexpatriate concept refers to

the employees who move around among countries in short-term stays abroad and who are not accompanied by the family in order to be able to respond to the flexibility needs of the companies. They contribute to the company global competence, but they are not required to go through the same degree of expatriate and impatriate cultural immersion (Rego & Cunha, 2009). Table 1 presents a synthesis of the configurations used in the context of mobility of professionals.

Table 1. Configuration synthesis on international mobility

Configuration	Characteristics	Authors
Expatriate	Employee sent by a company to work in another country	Dutra (2002), Caligiuri (2000) and Shephard (1996)
Repatriate	Employee who returns to the headquarters	Gallon and Antunes (2013, 2016)
Inpatriate	Subsidiary employee who works in temporary missions in the headquarters	Harvey, Ralston and Napier (2000), Rego and Cunha (2009)
Flexpatriate	Employee who moves around among several countries in short-term stays. He/she is not accompanied by the family	Rego and Cunha (2009)
Organizational Expatriate	Professional who has his/her expatriation bound to and facilitated by a company abroad	Peltokorpi and Froese (2009)
Self-expatriate	Professional who conducts his/her own expatriation without any bond to or any help from a foreign facilitator	Nardi (2015), Dickmann and Doherty (2008)

Source: Adapted from Gallon, Fraga and Antunes (2017).

The main reasons why companies send expatriate to missions abroad are: (a) to open new markets; (b) to facilitate a merger or an acquisition; (c) to install new technologies and systems; (d) to increase *market share* or to prevent competitors from doing so; (e) to develop a long-term view of business in foreign countries; (f) to transfer knowledge to local professionals; (g) to learn and to generate innovative ideas; and (h) to either generate new knowledge for the organization or to acquire skills which will help the

development of global leaderships (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Halcrow, 1999). Gallon et al. (2017) declare that expatriation has to be seen in a strategic way for the Human Resources sector and it has to be planned in three stages, which are: the preparation for the mission, the mission itself, the mission return (repatriation).

The HR area begins to exercise an important function in the organization internationalization strategies, mainly in the elaboration process of international mobility of the professionals and their adaptation. Subsystems, such as the International Management of Human Resources, have helped this labor force management by playing an important role within the organizations. It can be considered as one of the success or failure determining factors in international businesses (Ashamalla, 1998; Schuler; Budwar; & Florkowski, 2002). The Expatriate Management, HR subdivision in some companies, is the one, which will be in charge of the bureaucratic and legal aspects, and it will also negotiate the benefits and the moving from one country to another (Domingues & Bueno, 2008).

Some authors and companies have replaced the word professional “expatriation” by professional “mobility” (Freitas, 2009). According to Barrère-Maurisson (2003), the reasons for such change seem to be the greater scope of the second term and the undeniable fact the first word includes the Latin word “patria”; then, it is not a “gender-neutral” word. Within such a context, the importance of a well planned international mobility process so that the organization reaches the organizational goals aimed at is evident. Domingues (2011) affirms that the development of the professional who will work as an international manager and the career thinking as a whole are important, as the building of internationalization strategies jointly with the HR is essential both for the company and for the employees.

3 Methodological Procedures

The present research was developed as a bibliometric review of publications from 2013 to 2018 on the international professional mobility theme. Due to the nature and the purpose of the study, an exploratory and descriptive research was carried out, with the intent of providing greater proximity to the theme and defining more specific questions that may be investigated in subsequent studies (Selltizz, Wrightsman, & Cook, 2004).

The bibliometric research has emerged as an answer to the need for the production and the scientific community studies and evaluations (Marcelo & Hayashi, 2013). The main differential between such method and the traditional bibliography is due to the fact that these methods are more quantitative than the discursive ones. According to Nicholas and Ritchie (1978), its process develops mainly from the empirical laws on the literature behavior, considering that the scientist productivity measurement method by Lotka, the scientific knowledge dispersion law by Bradford and the model of word distribution and frequency in a text by Zipf are among the main milestones of its development (Tague-Sutcliffe, 1992),

In particular, the bibliometric research was carried out in the electronic database of the Journal Portal of Coordination for Higher Education Staff Development (CAPES), by considering its easy free access and its importance for the scientific knowledge dissemination in Administration. Within this portal, the searches took place by remote access subscription of federate academic communities (CAFe), which allows to direct the studies from different international bases, which were used in this article. Initially, articles have been searched by using the keywords: *international mobility* and *expatriation*. After having analysed the first findings, new keywords were used: *internationalization*, *human resources* and *cross-cultural management*. In order to filter the large amount of information which was found, some criteria such as: articles written only in English from 2013 to 2018, use of quotation marks, use of the word *and* and junction of words were used, making it possible to find a total of 39 articles.

For the result categorization and analysis, a table was created by using Excel 2013, including the following information: year, title of article, number of authors, name of authors, author teaching institution, institution country, name of the publication means, keywords considered by the authors, abstract, kind of research (quantitative and/or qualitative), bibliographic references used and cited authors. On the basis of this table and with the aid of the *Word Art Cloud* virtual tool, the creation of figures, tables and charts was possible.

4 Presentation and Result Discussion

As it can be observed in Figure 1, articles in all the years of the analyzed period were found, occurring a relative constancy of publications on the subject matter over time, with an approximate average of 7 articles per year, with emphasis on 2016 which had 9 publications.

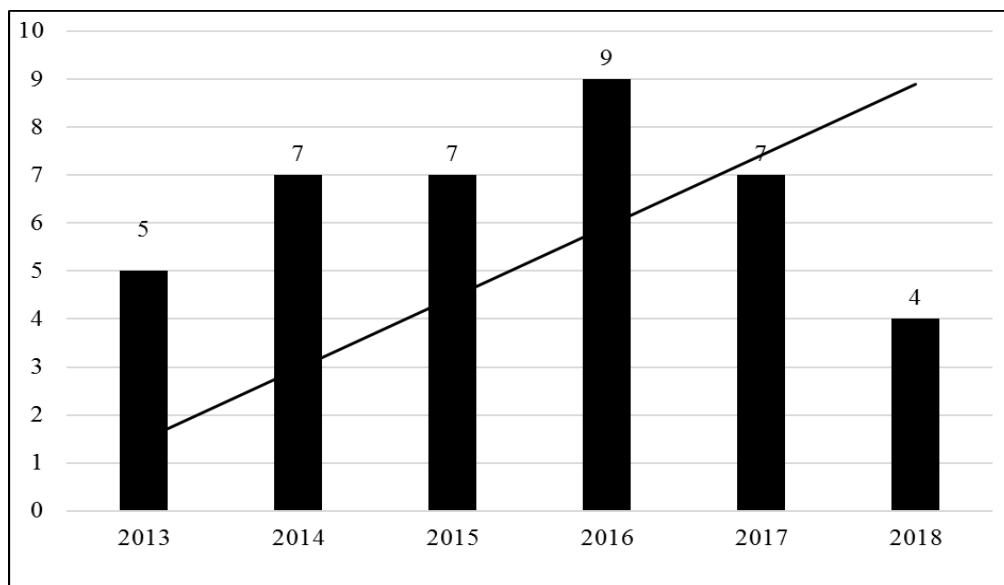


Figure 1. Number of publications over the years

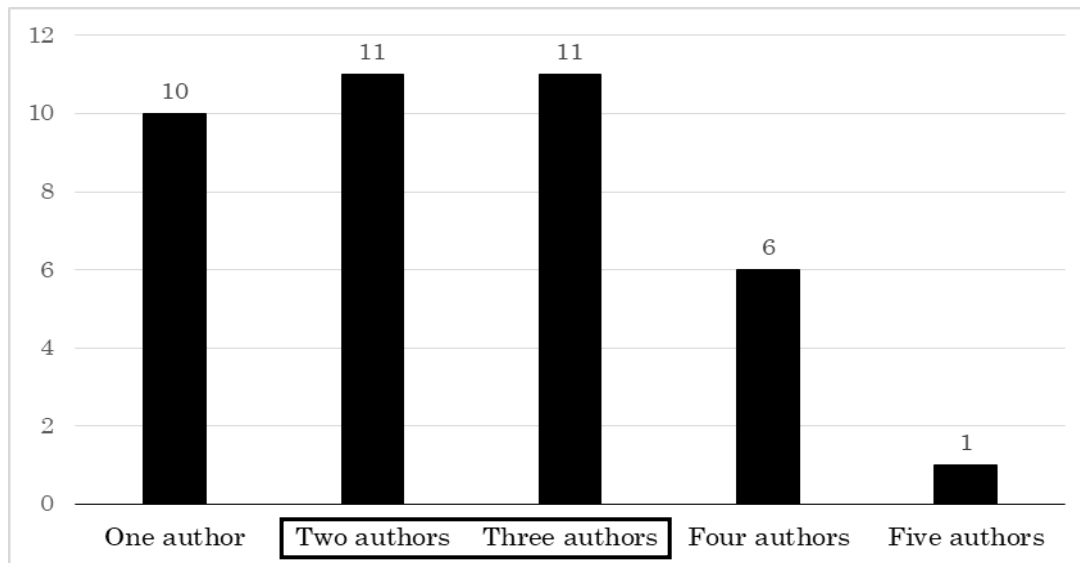


Figure 2. Number of publications according to the quantity of authors

Furthermore, an expectation that studies on the theme in question continue to emerge can be observed by the trend line; it is important to emphasize that 2018 was not used in the calculation due to the fact that that year had not ended until the final stage of this research preparation, which could influence the obtained result.

By analyzing Figure 2, one can notice that 74% of the articles were created jointly, and the combination of three and two authors has been the most used one, representing 56% of the publications, followed by individual publications with 26%. Such results highlight the fact that it is preferable to carry out studies jointly within the scientific production, by aiming at aggregating content and perspectives from different knowledge areas to the studies, and as a means for the authors to increase their participation in different journals.

In Figure 3, one can notice that Chris Brewster was the author with the largest number of publications in the research period, by presenting a 4% participation. In sequence, each of them with two publications, Susan Shortland, Yvonne McNulty, Li-Yueh Lee and Sou Veasna come next. On the whole, these five authors represent 13% of the findings. One can also notice the discrepancy concerning the number of authors who wrote only one

publication during the period, 87% of the total 95 names wrote only one article. This result partially confirms the application of Lotka's Law, which is grounded on the basic premise that some researchers publish many articles and many researchers publish few articles.

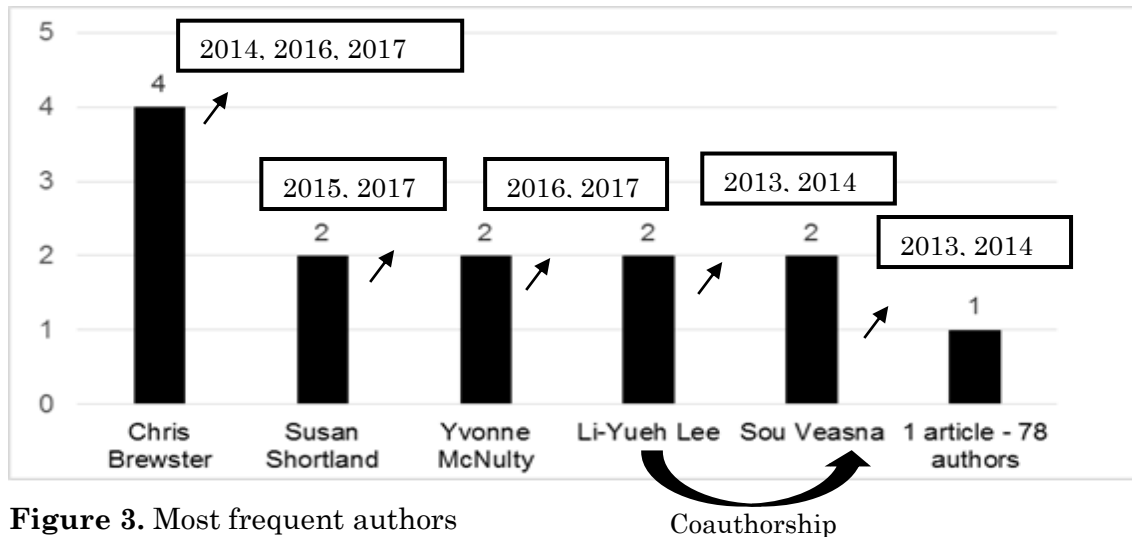


Figure 3. Most frequent authors

Coauthorship

It is noteworthy that 2017 was the year which concentrated more publications of the most cited authors, by showing that they have gained importance in the scientific study field. In such period, the British author Chris Brewster always published his articles in partnership with more authors, namely: the German one Washika Haak-Saheem, the French one Jean-Luc Cerdin, the Finn ones Vesa Suutar and Liisa Mäkelä, the British one Michael Dickmann, the French one Christelle Tornikoski and the Japanese one Masayuki Furusawa. The British author Susan Shortland presented only individual publications. The Australian Yvonne McNulty published her articles in pairs with the American Charles M. Vance and the Australian Helen de Cieri, whereas the Taiwanese Li-Yueh Lee and the Cambodian Sou Veasna always published in trios, as partners in the publications of their two articles.

By means of the academic profile search results of the most cited authors, it was possible to notice, as it is presented in Table 2, that all are connected to the studies focused on the Human Resources area.

Furthermore, regarding the theme in question, the authors guide themselves based on themes, which compare the traditional human resources management to the new format of human resources international management, as well as cross-cultural management, revealing that the new ways of relations between organizations and employees have their own characteristics that require further and more specific studies.

Table 2. Line of action of the most frequent authors

Author	Line of action	Research line according to academic profile
Chris Brewster	Human Resources	International and Comparative Human Resources Management
Susan Shortland	Human Resources	Human Resources Management and International HRM
Yvonne McNulty	Human Resources	Specializing in Expatriation and Global HR Research
Li-Yueh Lee	Human Resources	International Negotiation, International Human Resources Management
Sou Veasna	Strategic Management	Cross-Cultural Management, Brand Management, and International Marketing
	Human Resources	

The co-authors' line of action analysis of the found articles, as seen in Table 3, corroborates the study quality prestige, because it confirms the expertise of the involved ones on the studied theme in question. Additionally, when one observes the researches lines by which the co-authors permeate their academic studies, one can once again observe the search to aggregate different kinds of knowledge for the preparation of the studies. The different academic bonds between the most cited authors and their pairs also demonstrate the interest in sharing the studies among different institutions, thus promoting knowledge dissemination in the scientific setting.

It was observed that the universities, which the authors were linked to when there were publications, which appeared most frequently in the articles, were in the European continent. The interest in this study field can be explained due to the fact that it is one of the continents which receives the largest number of expatriates of several nationalities.

Table 3. Academic institutions and co-author action line

Author - University	Co-authors	Co-author action line (academic profile)	Co-author university	University Countries
Chris Brewster <i>Reading University</i>	Washika Haak-Saheem	International Business Management	<i>University in Luneburg</i>	Germany
	Jean-Luc Cerdin	International Career and Mobility	<i>Essec Business School</i>	France
	Vesa Suutari	Expatriation, International human resources, Cross-cultural management and human resource management	<i>University of Vaasa</i>	Finland
	Liisa Mäkelä	People management issues, Occupational well-being and work-life interface	<i>University of Vaasa</i>	Finland
	Michael Dickmann	Human resource strategies, structures and processes of multinational organisations, international mobility and global careers.	<i>Cranfield University</i>	England
	Christelle Tornikoski	Self-confidence, psychological contract, personal and managerial development, expatriation and collective intelligence	<i>University of Vaasa</i>	Finland
	Masayuki Furusawa	International Human Resource Management	<i>Kindai University</i>	Japan
Yvonne McNulty <i>SIM University</i>	Charles M. Vance	International human resources, leadership, career management and performance management	<i>Loyola Marymount University</i>	United States
	Helen de Cieri	Work health and safety and employee wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, international HRM and organizational performance	<i>Monash University</i>	Australia
Li-Yueh Lee <i>Kun Shan University</i>	Sou Veasna	Cross-Cultural Management, Brand Management, and International Marketing	<i>National Cheng Kung University</i>	Taiwan
Sou Veasna <i>National Cheng Kung University</i>	Li-Yueh Lee	International Negotiation, International Human Management	<i>Kun Shan University</i>	Taiwan

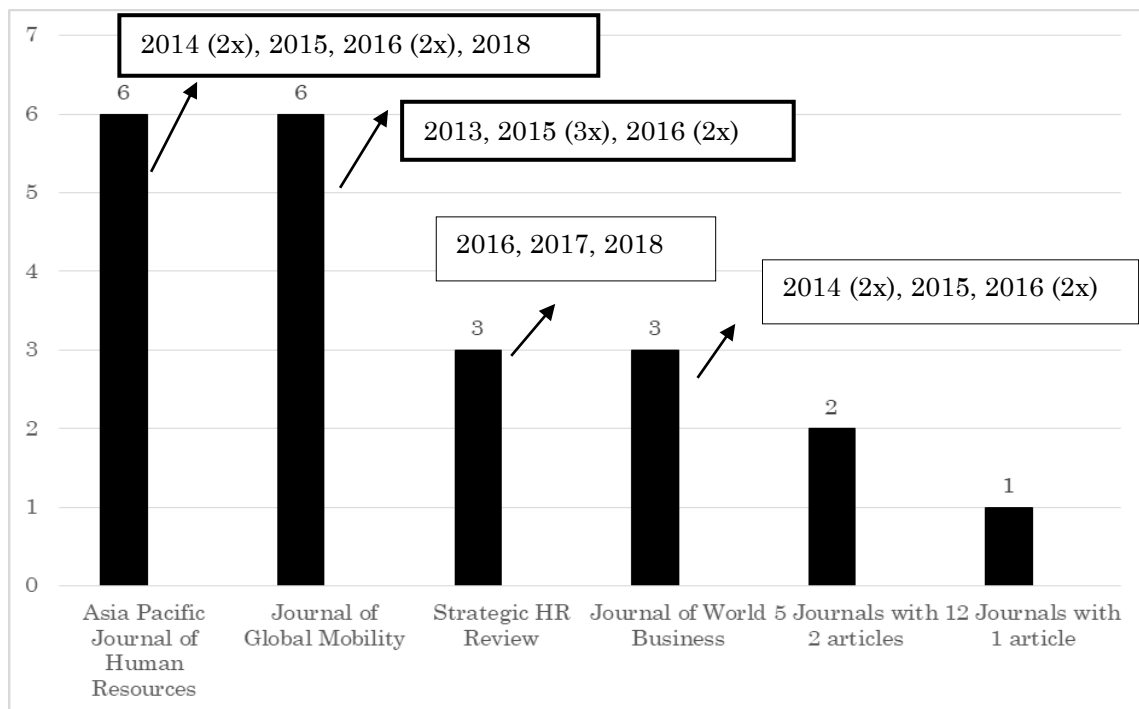


Figure 5. Most frequent journals

In Figure 5, the distribution of the articles by 11 different journals is shown. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* and the *Journal of Global Mobility* (one of the most important on the subject matter, according to what the website itself states) journals were the ones, which presented more publications of the theme during the analysed period. It is also relevant to observe the interest in the theme in the Asian continent journals, which can be related to the economic growth and to the company internationalization processes, which are happening in some countries. Then comes the *Strategic HR Review* and the *Journal of World Business* journals with 3 publications each. This shows that 9 publications on international mobility were published in journals with focus on personnel management. The found data also reinforces Bradford's Law, which states that few journals produce many articles and many journals produce few articles.

Among the analyzed articles, 75% were accomplished by using the qualitative approach, which indicates that most authors aimed at better

understanding the theme characteristics and particularities in order to interpret them afterwards. By means of the theoretical framework analysis of each article, Figure 6 was created and it shows the 15 most cited authors. The American author J. Stewart Black, with 42 citations in 56% of the articles, was the most cited one. Secondly, with 29 citations, 41% of the articles, another American author Paula M. Caligiuri.

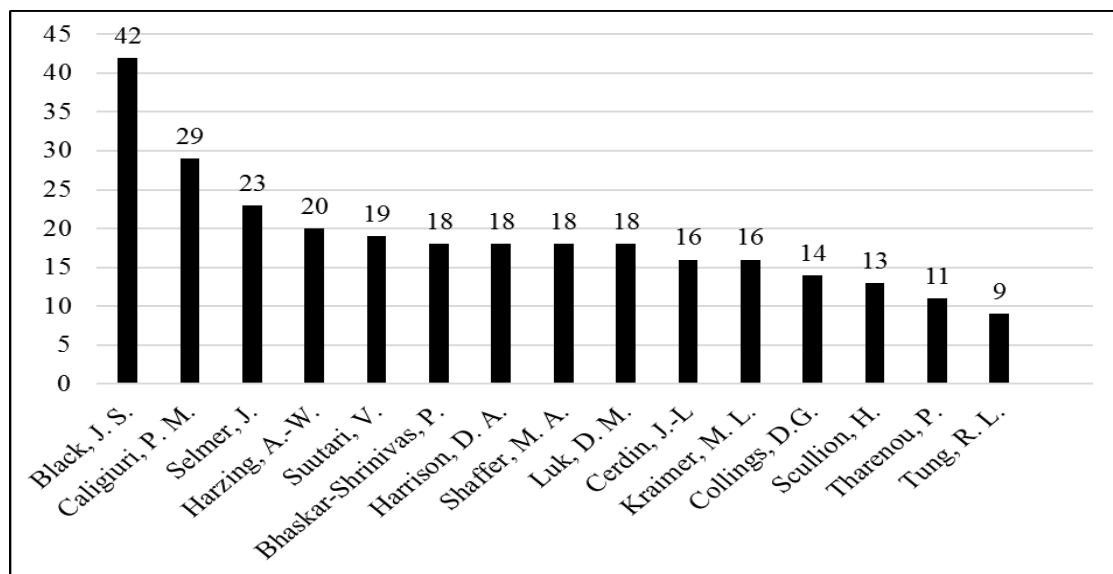


Figure 6. Most cited authors

In Table 4, the most cited scientific studies from a total of 679 citations are presented. Firstly, with emphasis on the “*Input-based and time-based models of international adjustment: meta-analytic evidence and theoretical extensions*” scientific work, published in the *Academy of Management Journal* in 2005, authorship of Purnima Bhaskar-Shrinivas, David A. Harrison, Margaret A. Shaffer and Dora M. Luk, which appeared in 19 citations in 9 different articles. Secondly, the *Toward a comprehensive model of international adjustment: an integration of multiple theoretical perspectives* scientific work by Black, J. S., M. Mendenhall and G. Oddou 1991, with 14 citations in 11 different articles.

Table 4. Most cited authors

Most cited authors	
1	Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P., Harrison, D.A., Shaffer, M.A. & Luk, D.M. (2005), Input-based and time-based models of international adjustment: meta-analytic evidence and theoretical extensions. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , 48(1), 257-281.
2	Black, J. S., Mendenhall, M., & Oddou, G. (1991). Toward a comprehensive model of international adjustment: an integration of multiple theoretical perspectives. <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 16(2), 291–317.
3	Black, J. S. & Stephens, G. K. (1989). The influence of the spouse on American expatriate adjustment and intent to stay in Pacific Rim overseas assignments <i>Journal of Management</i> , 15(4), 529–544.
4	Kim, K., Kirkman, B.L. & Chen, G. (2008). Cultural intelligence and international assignment effectiveness: a conceptual model and preliminary findings. In S. Ang and L. Van Dyne (Eds), <i>Handbook of Cultural Intelligence: Theory, Measurement, and Applications</i> [pp. 71-90], M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY.
5	Collings, D.G., Scullion, H. & Morley, M.J. (2007). Changing patterns of global staffing in the multinational enterprise: challenges to the conventional expatriate assignment and emerging alternatives. <i>Journal of World Business</i> , 42(2), 198–213.
6	Black, J. S. (1988). Work role transitions: a study of American expatriate managers in Japan. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 19(2), 277–294.
7	Edstrom, A. & Galbraith, J.R. (1977). Transfer of managers as a coordination and control strategy in multinational organizations. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i> , 22(2), 248-263.
8	Harzing, A.W. (2001). Of bears, bumble-bees, and spiders: the role of expatriates in controlling foreign subsidiaries. <i>Journal of World Business</i> , 36(4), 366-379.
9	Hechanova, R., Beehr, T.A. & Christiansen, N.D. (2003). Antecedents and consequences of employees' adjustment to overseas assignment: a meta-analytic review. <i>Applied Psychology: An International Review</i> , 52(2), 213-236.
10	Shaffer, M. A., Kraimer, M. L., Chen, Y.-P., & Bolino, M. C. (2012). Choices, challenges, and career consequences of global work experiences: A review and future agenda. <i>Journal of Management</i> , 38(4), 1282-1327.

Figure 7 was created after an analysis of the research objectives of the found articles, aiming at presenting the main themes, which guided the development of such studies.

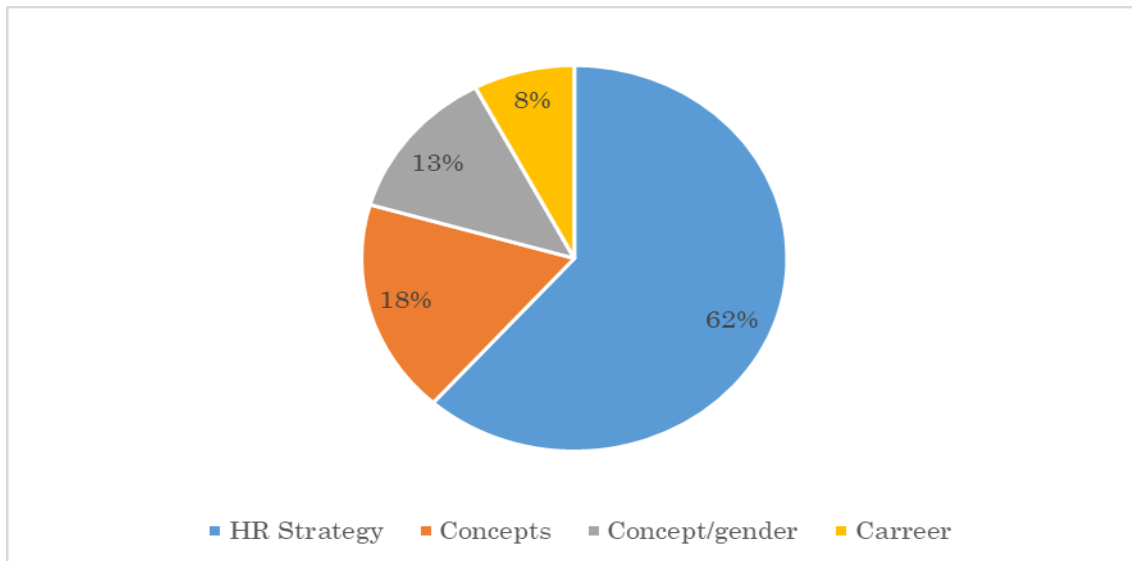


Figure 7. Most addressed themes

The majority of articles, 62%, presented studies focused on the better understanding of the expatriation process as a strategic practice of the Human Resources area. These studies analyse the benefits of such process for the organization, and identify the best practices, which should be developed by the HR department for the employee best cultural adaptation during the various stages of his/her expatriation process. This reinforces the importance of the international mobility theme for personnel management.

Secondly, 28% of the articles seek to conceptualize the different ways of existing expatriation, as well as the reasons which make the employees become expatriates, and the characteristics which facilitate the cultural adaptation process. It is worth highlighting that the concern for gender is gradually present in the studies. After having analysed the articles, the low representativeness of expatriate women in multinationals is the factor, which has motivated some authors to address the theme. Moreover, studies focused on the creation of organizational procedures and practices aiming at greater equality concerning the international opportunities, which are offered to women and to men by organizations were found. Some studies, 8%, focused on the expatriation benefits for the career, aiming at understanding such process benefits in the professional career advancement and in the achievement of interpersonal skills.

5 Conclusion

The International Mobility theme has been studied for various decades from different perspectives. After having analysed the publications from 2013 to 2018, the themes, which guide these studies (Figure 7) were identified. Hence, an increasing concern from the Human Resources area about the theme study was observed, which seeks to identify the characteristics and the most adequate processes which should be applied during different expatriation phases, aiming at increasing the chances of excellence throughout the whole process. This demonstrates the fact that expatriation has been seen as a strategic option in order to achieve results, and to help companies under an expansion process.

From the professional point of view, international mobility is studied as an important factor when achieving professional career goals and targets, either by option or by necessity; thus, the importance of well planned processes so that the company and professionals can reach their objectives. Furthermore, one could notice the interest in the study of gender influence in the international mobility field, and in the identification of factors, which make it impossible for women to have the same opportunities.

The three laws of bibliometric review were used; two of them were confirmed (Zipf and Bradford) one was partially confirmed (Lotka). The present research contribution lies in the panorama demonstration of more recent studies on international mobility, main authors, journals, cited studies and sub-themes. As a suggestion, further studies could enhance the search on the theme in other databases and also deepen the analysis about the found sub-themes, their contributions and developments.

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