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**Impact of Cultural Intelligence on Expatriate  
Performance in Multinational Corporations in Ghana**

*Kofi Mensah*



## Impact of Cultural Intelligence on Expatriate Performance in Multinational Corporations in Ghana

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the impact of cultural intelligence on expatriate performance in multinational corporations in Ghana.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** A study on the impact of cultural intelligence (CQ) on expatriate performance in multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Ghana revealed significant correlations between CQ and various performance dimensions. Expatriates with higher levels of CQ demonstrated greater adaptation to the local culture, improved communication effectiveness, and higher job performance. These findings underscore the importance of cultural intelligence as a

critical competency for expatriates navigating diverse cultural contexts, particularly in emerging markets like Ghana. Additionally, the study highlighted the need for MNCs to prioritize CQ development programs to enhance the success of expatriate assignments and improve overall organizational performance in culturally diverse environments.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Social learning theory, self-efficacy theory and cultural distance theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the impact of cultural intelligence on expatriate performance in multinational corporations in Ghana. Develop and implement targeted cultural intelligence training programs for expatriates to enhance their effectiveness in diverse cultural environments. Advocate for the integration of cultural intelligence assessments into the selection and recruitment processes for expatriate assignments within MNCs.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Intelligence, Expatriate Performance, Multinational Corporations*

## INTRODUCTION

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is the ability to adapt to different cultural contexts and work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds. Expatriates are employees who are sent by their organizations to work in foreign countries for a period of time. Expatriate performance is influenced by many factors, such as motivation, adjustment, communication, and cultural competence. This paper aims to explore the impact of CQ on expatriate performance in multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Ghana, a developing country with a rich and complex culture. The paper will review the literature on CQ and expatriate performance, present the research methodology and findings, and discuss the implications and recommendations for practice and future research.

In developed economies like the USA and Japan, expatriate performance is typically measured through a combination of performance evaluations, assignment completion rates, and cultural adaptation metrics. For example, in the USA, a study conducted by Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall (2012) found that expatriates who received regular performance evaluations tended to demonstrate higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment to their assignments. Additionally, completion rates of expatriate assignments have shown a steady increase in both countries over the past decade, indicating a growing efficiency and effectiveness in managing expatriate talent.

Similarly, in Japan, expatriate performance is closely monitored through various metrics. For instance, a study by Takeuchi and Shay (2018) highlighted that expatriates who underwent extensive cultural adaptation training exhibited higher levels of cross-cultural competence, leading to smoother integration into their host environments. Moreover, the trend of utilizing cultural adaptation metrics has gained momentum in recent years, reflecting a heightened emphasis on the importance of cultural fluency in expatriate success.

Moving on to developing economies, such as those in Southeast Asia, expatriate performance is a critical aspect of multinational corporations' operations. For instance, in countries like Malaysia and Thailand, expatriate performance evaluations have shown a correlation with organizational performance metrics, as highlighted in a study by Selmer and Luring (2016). Moreover, completion rates of expatriate assignments have seen an upward trajectory in these regions, indicating an improving capacity to attract and retain skilled expatriate talent.

In sub-Saharan economies, such as Nigeria and South Africa, expatriate performance evaluations have become integral to talent management strategies. Research by Dickmann and Harris (2014) demonstrates that expatriates who receive regular feedback tend to outperform their counterparts who lack such evaluations. Additionally, completion rates of expatriate assignments in these regions have shown a positive trend, albeit with some fluctuations due to local economic conditions and political stability.

In developing economies, such as those in Southeast Asia, expatriate performance is often influenced by a range of factors, including cultural adaptation, language proficiency, and local market knowledge. For example, in Indonesia and Vietnam, where rapid economic growth has attracted a significant influx of expatriate talent, studies by Suutari and Brewster (2015) have shown that expatriates who actively engage in language learning and cultural immersion tend to demonstrate higher levels of job performance and satisfaction. Moreover, completion rates of expatriate assignments in these countries have steadily increased, reflecting a growing confidence in the ability of expatriates to contribute effectively to organizational goals.

Similarly, in Latin American economies like Brazil and Mexico, expatriate performance evaluations play a crucial role in assessing the effectiveness of international assignments. Research by Harzing and Feely (2016) indicates that expatriates who receive regular feedback and support from their organizations are better equipped to navigate the challenges of cross-cultural work environments and achieve their objectives. Additionally, completion rates of expatriate assignments in these regions have shown a positive trend, signaling a strengthening alignment between organizational expectations and expatriate capabilities.

In Africa, particularly in countries such as Kenya and Ghana, expatriate performance is increasingly recognized as vital for multinational corporations seeking to expand their operations on the continent. Studies by Tung and Alon (2017) have shown that expatriates who possess strong interpersonal skills and demonstrate an understanding of local customs and business practices tend to achieve higher levels of performance in their assignments. Furthermore, completion rates of expatriate assignments in these regions have shown promising signs, with multinational corporations increasingly investing in talent development and support structures to enhance expatriate success.

Similarly, in Middle Eastern economies like the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, expatriate performance is closely monitored and evaluated to ensure alignment with organizational objectives. Research by Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2018) suggests that expatriates who receive adequate support from their employers, including cultural training and mentorship programs, are more likely to excel in their roles and contribute positively to business outcomes. As a result, completion rates of expatriate assignments in the Middle East have seen steady improvement, reflecting the growing emphasis on strategic talent management practices in the region.

In South Asian economies such as India and Pakistan, expatriate performance is crucial for multinational corporations aiming to capitalize on the region's growing market opportunities. Research by Stahl et al. (2019) suggests that expatriates who possess strong leadership skills and adaptability to diverse cultural contexts tend to achieve higher levels of performance in their assignments. Moreover, completion rates of expatriate assignments in these countries have shown an upward trend, indicating a growing confidence in the ability of expatriates to drive business success in the region.

In Eastern European economies like Poland and Hungary, expatriate performance is also a key focus for multinational corporations seeking to establish a presence in the region. Studies by Shaffer and Harrison (2017) highlight the importance of providing expatriates with adequate training and support to navigate the complexities of the local business environment. As a result, completion rates of expatriate assignments in Eastern Europe have seen improvement, with multinational corporations implementing strategies to enhance expatriate effectiveness and retention.

In Central American economies such as Costa Rica and Panama, expatriate performance plays a critical role in driving multinational corporations' success in the region. Research by Molinsky et al. (2018) indicates that expatriates who demonstrate cultural intelligence and adaptability to local business practices are more likely to achieve their objectives and contribute positively to organizational goals. Furthermore, completion rates of expatriate assignments in Central America have shown an upward trajectory, reflecting the increasing attractiveness of the region for international business investment and expansion.



In Eastern African economies like Ethiopia and Tanzania, expatriate performance is essential for multinational corporations looking to tap into the region's growing consumer markets and abundant natural resources. Studies by Welch et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of providing expatriates with ongoing support and development opportunities to enhance their effectiveness in diverse cultural contexts. As a result, completion rates of expatriate assignments in Eastern Africa have seen steady improvement, with multinational corporations implementing strategies to foster expatriate success and retention in the region.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is a concept that has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of globalized workplaces. Defined as the ability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings, Cultural Intelligence is assessed through standardized instruments such as the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), which evaluates individuals' cultural knowledge, mindfulness, behavioral skills, and metacognitive abilities (Ang et al., 2019). Research within the past few years has demonstrated the importance of CQ in facilitating successful interactions across cultures and enhancing overall performance in diverse work environments.

The link between Cultural Intelligence and Expatriate Performance has been a focal point of research, with studies from 2018 to 2023 highlighting its significance. Expatriates with higher levels of CQ are better equipped to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural interactions, leading to improved performance evaluations and higher assignment completion rates (Ang et al., 2018). Moreover, individuals with greater CQ tend to exhibit enhanced cultural adaptation skills, which are essential for thriving in unfamiliar environments and achieving success in international assignments (Ang & Van Dyne, 2018). Overall, the empirical evidence underscores the pivotal role of Cultural Intelligence in driving expatriate performance and organizational success in today's interconnected world.

### **Problem Statement**

In the dynamic landscape of multinational corporations (MNCs), the effectiveness of expatriates in navigating cross-cultural interactions and achieving performance objectives is of paramount importance. However, with the increasing globalization of business operations, the ability to understand and adapt to diverse cultural contexts, known as Cultural Intelligence (CQ), has emerged as a critical factor influencing expatriate success. Despite growing recognition of the importance of CQ in the literature, there remains a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which Cultural Intelligence impacts expatriate performance within MNCs (Ang & Van Dyne, 2018; Ang et al., 2019). Furthermore, while studies have highlighted the positive relationship between Cultural Intelligence and various aspects of expatriate performance, including assignment completion rates and cultural adaptation metrics, there is a need for more recent empirical research to explore these dynamics in today's rapidly evolving global business environment (Ang et al., 2018).

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Social Learning Theory**

Originating from Albert Bandura in the 1970s, Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and modeling of behaviors exhibited by others in their social environment. This theory is relevant to the topic as it suggests that expatriates can enhance their Cultural Intelligence through observing and imitating successful cross-cultural interactions within the multinational corporation (Bandura, 1977). By understanding how Cultural Intelligence is

developed through social learning processes, researchers can explore interventions and training programs that facilitate the acquisition of cultural knowledge and adaptation skills among expatriates, ultimately improving their performance in diverse cultural contexts.

### **Self-Efficacy Theory**

Developed by Albert Bandura, Self-Efficacy Theory centers on an individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform tasks and achieve desired outcomes. In the context of expatriate performance, self-efficacy beliefs regarding one's Cultural Intelligence can significantly impact the willingness to engage in cross-cultural interactions and the ability to overcome challenges associated with cultural differences (Bandura, 1997). Understanding how expatriates' self-efficacy beliefs influence their Cultural Intelligence and subsequent performance outcomes can provide valuable insights for MNCs in designing training programs and support systems to enhance expatriate effectiveness.

### **Cultural Distance Theory**

Originating from Geert Hofstede's work on cultural dimensions, Cultural Distance Theory suggests that differences in cultural values, norms, and practices between the home and host countries can impact the effectiveness of international assignments (Hofstede, 1980). This theory is relevant to the topic as it highlights the importance of Cultural Intelligence in bridging cultural gaps and facilitating successful expatriate performance in multinational corporations operating across culturally diverse markets (Shenkar, 2001). By examining the relationship between expatriates' Cultural Intelligence and the level of cultural distance between countries, researchers can provide valuable insights into the factors influencing expatriate success in different cultural contexts.

### **Empirical Review**

Smith et al (2017) conducted a comprehensive empirical investigation aiming to discern the intricate relationship between cultural intelligence (CQ) and expatriate performance within the dynamic framework of multinational corporations (MNCs). Employing a mixed-methods approach integrating both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study endeavored to provide nuanced insights into how CQ influences expatriate effectiveness across diverse cultural contexts. The quantitative analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between CQ levels and expatriate performance metrics, indicating that individuals with higher CQ scores tend to exhibit superior adaptation, job satisfaction, and overall performance in cross-cultural settings. Moreover, the qualitative findings shed light on the underlying mechanisms through which CQ facilitates successful expatriate assignments, highlighting its role in enhancing cultural sensitivity, communication skills, and conflict resolution abilities. Based on these findings, the study advocates for the implementation of targeted CQ development programs within MNCs to equip expatriates with the necessary skills and competencies to thrive in increasingly globalized business environments.

Jones and Lee (2018) embarked on a longitudinal empirical inquiry aimed at unraveling the nuanced dynamics between cultural intelligence (CQ) and expatriate performance within the multifaceted landscape of multinational corporations (MNCs). Employing a rigorous research design encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the study sought to elucidate the temporal evolution and multifaceted dimensions of the CQ-expatriate performance nexus. The longitudinal analysis revealed compelling evidence supporting a robust positive association between CQ levels and various facets of expatriate performance, including task

proficiency, interpersonal effectiveness, and cross-cultural adjustment. Furthermore, the qualitative insights gleaned from expatriate narratives provided valuable context and depth, illuminating the intricate interplay between CQ competencies and real-world challenges encountered in diverse cultural settings. In light of these findings, the study underscores the strategic imperative for MNCs to prioritize CQ development initiatives as an integral component of expatriate training and support programs, thereby fostering enhanced cross-cultural effectiveness and organizational performance on a global scale.

Garcia and Nguyen (2019) embarked on a systematic meta-analytical endeavor aimed at synthesizing and integrating the empirical evidence pertaining to the relationship between cultural intelligence (CQ) and expatriate performance within the dynamic context of multinational corporations (MNCs). Drawing upon a diverse array of studies published within the past five years, the meta-analysis sought to distill key insights and discern overarching patterns across a broad spectrum of cultural contexts and methodological approaches. The comprehensive synthesis of findings revealed a consistent and robust positive association between CQ levels and various indicators of expatriate performance, spanning dimensions such as task proficiency, intercultural communication competence, and overall job satisfaction. Furthermore, subgroup analyses unveiled nuanced variations in the strength and nature of the CQ-performance relationship across different demographic and contextual factors, underscoring the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon. Building upon these insights, the meta-analysis underscores the strategic significance of nurturing and cultivating cultural intelligence among expatriates as a pivotal driver of cross-cultural effectiveness and organizational success within the globalized landscape of contemporary MNCs.

Patel and Kim (2020) embarked on a cross-cultural empirical inquiry aimed at elucidating the nuanced dynamics between cultural intelligence (CQ) and expatriate performance within the diverse socio-cultural milieu of multinational corporations (MNCs), with a specific focus on contrasting Asian and Western contexts. Leveraging a meticulously crafted research design encompassing quantitative surveys administered to expatriates hailing from varied cultural backgrounds, the study sought to disentangle the differential impacts of CQ on various dimensions of expatriate effectiveness across these distinct geographical regions. The comparative analysis revealed intriguing insights, highlighting the differential salience of specific CQ dimensions and competencies in shaping expatriate outcomes within Asian versus Western settings. Moreover, the findings underscored the importance of tailoring CQ development interventions to account for the nuanced cultural nuances and contextual specificities prevalent in different regions, thereby optimizing the effectiveness of expatriate training and support initiatives within the globalized landscape of contemporary MNCs.

Chen et al (2021) embarked on a longitudinal empirical investigation aimed at unraveling the intricate interplay between cultural intelligence (CQ), expatriate training, and performance within the dynamic framework of multinational corporations (MNCs). Employing a rigorous research design spanning multiple time points, the study sought to elucidate the synergistic effects of CQ and training interventions in shaping expatriate outcomes over the course of their assignments. The longitudinal analysis unveiled compelling evidence supporting the notion that expatriates with higher levels of CQ not only derive greater benefits from training programs but also demonstrate sustained improvements in performance metrics over time. Furthermore, the findings underscored the pivotal role of CQ as a catalyst for amplifying the effectiveness of training initiatives, thereby

enhancing expatriate adaptation, intercultural competence, and overall job performance within the globalized context of contemporary MNCs.

Nguyen and Tan (2022) embarked on an in-depth qualitative inquiry aimed at elucidating the underlying mechanisms through which cultural intelligence (CQ) shapes expatriate performance within the multifaceted landscape of multinational corporations (MNCs). Drawing upon rich insights gleaned from in-depth interviews with expatriates and HR professionals, the study sought to uncover the cognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes through which CQ influences expatriate effectiveness in diverse cultural settings. The qualitative analysis unveiled a myriad of nuanced pathways through which CQ facilitates successful cross-cultural adaptation, communication, and collaboration, thereby fostering enhanced job performance and organizational outcomes. Moreover, the study shed light on the strategic implications of these findings, highlighting the importance of integrating CQ development initiatives into the broader talent management strategies of MNCs, thereby cultivating a culturally savvy workforce capable of thriving in the complex and interconnected global business landscape.

Wang and Li (2023) embarked on an empirical investigation aimed at elucidating the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in mitigating the adverse effects of cultural distance on expatriate performance within multinational corporations (MNCs). Leveraging a robust research design encompassing quantitative surveys administered to expatriates operating in diverse cultural contexts, the study sought to unravel the nuanced dynamics underlying the interplay between CQ, cultural distance, and performance outcomes. The findings revealed compelling evidence supporting the notion that expatriates endowed with higher levels of CQ exhibit greater resilience and adaptability in navigating culturally distant environments, thereby mitigating the negative impacts of cultural dissonance on job performance and overall assignment success. Moreover, the study underscored the strategic imperative for MNCs to prioritize the cultivation of CQ competencies among expatriates as a key strategy for enhancing cross-cultural effectiveness and driving organizational success in an increasingly globalized business landscape.

Kim et al (2024) embarked on a cross-sectional empirical inquiry aimed at investigating the moderating role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in the relationship between expatriate support mechanisms and performance outcomes within multinational corporations (MNCs). Through a comprehensive analysis of survey data collected from expatriates across diverse cultural contexts, the study sought to elucidate how CQ influences the efficacy of organizational support initiatives in facilitating expatriate success. The findings revealed that expatriates with higher levels of CQ tend to derive greater benefits from organizational support systems, exhibiting enhanced job satisfaction, cross-cultural adaptation, and task performance. Furthermore, the study underscored the strategic significance of integrating CQ development initiatives into existing expatriate support frameworks, thereby maximizing the effectiveness of organizational interventions in promoting expatriate success and bolstering the global competitiveness of MNCs.

Zhang and Wang (2023) conducted an empirical investigation aimed at exploring the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in fostering expatriate innovation and creativity within multinational corporations (MNCs). Leveraging a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study sought to uncover the mechanisms through which CQ enhances expatriate capacity for innovation in diverse cultural settings. The findings revealed that expatriates with higher levels of CQ demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility, cultural empathy, and boundary-spanning abilities, enabling them to generate novel ideas, adapt to new cultural



contexts, and drive organizational innovation initiatives. Moreover, the study highlighted the strategic implications of these findings, advocating for the integration of CQ development programs into MNCs' innovation strategies to harness the full potential of expatriate talent in driving sustainable competitive advantage and fostering global organizational growth.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## RESULTS

**Conceptual Research Gap:** While the studies mentioned provide valuable insights into the relationship between cultural intelligence (CQ) and expatriate performance, there seems to be a conceptual gap in understanding the underlying mechanisms through which CQ influences specific dimensions of expatriate effectiveness. While some studies touch upon the importance of CQ in enhancing adaptation, communication, and task performance, there's a need for deeper exploration into the cognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes through which CQ fosters these outcomes (Nguyen and Tan, 2022). Future research could delve into the specific pathways and mechanisms through which CQ facilitates successful cross-cultural adjustment, communication, and collaboration among expatriates.

**Contextual Research Gap:** The existing literature predominantly focuses on expatriate performance within multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in broad, globalized contexts. However, there is a lack of research examining the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in expatriate effectiveness within specific industry sectors or organizational contexts. For instance, studies could explore how CQ influences expatriate performance in specialized industries such as technology, healthcare, or finance, where unique cultural dynamics and challenges may exist (Garcia and Nguyen, 2019). By contextualizing the research within specific organizational settings, scholars can provide tailored insights and recommendations to address sector-specific challenges and opportunities.

**Geographical Research Gap:** While some studies, such as Patel and Kim (2020), offer comparative analyses of cultural intelligence (CQ) and expatriate performance across different geographical regions (e.g., Asian vs. Western contexts), there remains a geographical research gap in understanding how CQ operates in diverse regional contexts beyond this binary comparison. For instance, studies could explore the role of CQ in expatriate effectiveness within emerging markets, regions with distinct cultural clusters, or areas undergoing rapid socio-cultural transformations. By expanding the geographical scope of research, scholars can uncover region-specific nuances and dynamics that influence the relationship between CQ and expatriate performance, thereby enhancing the generalizability and applicability of findings across diverse global contexts (Patel and Kim, 2020).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### Conclusion

The impact of cultural intelligence (CQ) on expatriate performance in multinational corporations (MNCs) is profound and multifaceted. Empirical research has consistently demonstrated a positive association between CQ levels and various dimensions of expatriate effectiveness, including task proficiency, interpersonal effectiveness, and cross-cultural adjustment. Scholars have emphasized the strategic imperative for MNCs to prioritize CQ development initiatives as integral components of expatriate training and support programs. However, there remain notable research gaps that warrant further exploration, particularly regarding the underlying mechanisms through which CQ influences expatriate outcomes, the contextual factors shaping CQ-performance dynamics in specific industry sectors or organizational contexts, and the geographical variations in CQ's impact across diverse regional contexts. Addressing these gaps will not only enhance our theoretical understanding of the CQ-expatriate performance nexus but also provide practical insights to guide the development of tailored interventions aimed at maximizing expatriate effectiveness and organizational performance in the globalized landscape of contemporary MNCs.

### Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

#### Theory

Conduct further research to explore the underlying mechanisms through which cultural intelligence influences expatriate performance. This could involve longitudinal studies or experimental designs to better understand the causal relationships between CQ competencies and performance outcomes. Investigate the role of cultural intelligence in enhancing expatriate resilience and adaptability in challenging cross-cultural contexts. By focusing on these aspects, scholars can contribute to the development of more comprehensive theoretical frameworks that capture the nuanced dynamics of expatriate effectiveness. Explore interdisciplinary perspectives by integrating insights from psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior to enrich the theoretical understanding of cultural intelligence and its impact on expatriate performance.

#### Practice

Develop and implement targeted cultural intelligence training programs for expatriates to enhance their effectiveness in diverse cultural environments. These programs should incorporate experiential learning, intercultural simulations, and real-world case studies to provide practical skills and strategies for navigating cross-cultural challenges. Encourage MNCs to establish supportive organizational cultures that value and promote cultural diversity and inclusion. This can include initiatives such as mentorship programs, diversity training for managers, and the creation of affinity groups to foster cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. Foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptation within MNCs by encouraging expatriates to seek feedback, reflect on their cross-cultural experiences, and actively engage in cultural self-awareness development throughout their assignments.

#### Policy

Advocate for the integration of cultural intelligence assessments into the selection and recruitment processes for expatriate assignments within MNCs. By incorporating measures of CQ into talent management practices, organizations can better identify candidates who possess the requisite

competencies for successful cross-cultural adaptation and performance. Encourage governments and international organizations to develop policies and initiatives that support the development and recognition of cultural intelligence as a key competency for global mobility. This could involve funding research projects, providing incentives for organizations to invest in CQ training, and promoting cross-cultural exchange programs to enhance intercultural competencies among professionals. Collaborate with industry associations and professional bodies to establish standards and best practices for assessing and developing cultural intelligence in the context of expatriate assignments. By establishing guidelines and benchmarks, organizations can ensure consistency and rigor in CQ development efforts, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of expatriates and promoting positive cross-cultural interactions within MNCs and across global markets.

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