Article

Journal of International Students
Volume 15, Issue 5 (2025), pp. 151-162
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
jistudents.org
https://doi.org/10.32674/1tb65j82

The Predictive Ability of Cultural Intelligence and Character Orientations for Psychological Adaptation in Expatriates

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the predictive relationships between cultural intelligence (CQ), personal orientation, and psychological adaptation among 193 expatriate students at the University of Jordan. Using a correlational descriptive design, the study employed the Cultural Intelligence Scale, a character orientation scale based on Fromm's theory, and a psychological adaptation scale. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between CQ, personal orientation, and psychological adaptation. Regression analysis indicated that motivational CQ

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was the strongest predictor of psychological adaptation (62.5%), with a 73.2% prediction combined with metacognitive CQ. Productive personal orientation also demonstrated a significant predictive relationship with adaptation (52.1%). Interestingly, the cognitive dimension of CQ exhibited lower predictive power than the motivational and metacognitive dimensions, suggesting the importance of action-oriented and reflective capacities over purely knowledge-based components. Additionally, gender differences emerged, with females showing higher levels of both CQ and psychological adaptation. While CQ and personal orientation both influence adaptation, their independence from one another suggests distinct pathways. The study highlights the importance of fostering motivational and behavioral CQ and adaptive personal orientations to support expatriate well-being and identifies implications for designing targeted interventions and support programs. Limitations include self-report measures, a single-university sample, and a cross-sectional design. Future research should address these limitations and explore contextual factors to understand the complex dynamics of intercultural adaptation further.

Keywords: predictive ability, cultural intelligence, personal orientations for psychological adaptation, expatriates.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, rapid changes and interconnectedness profoundly impact all areas of life, underscoring the need for individuals to maximize their potential to adapt effectively. Cultural intelligence (CQ) has emerged as a critical factor enabling individuals to navigate and thrive in diverse cultural settings. Defined as the ability to understand, adapt, and function successfully in multicultural environments (Younis & Hussein, 2020), CQ facilitates smoother adaptation by reducing stress and improving interactions, particularly in academic and work settings (Abdul Ghani & Al-Rabie, 2024). Rooted in Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, cultural intelligence highlights an individual's ability to communicate and adapt to different cultural contexts, first introduced by Earley and Ang (2013) and further emphasized as a mechanism for effective engagement and performance in culturally diverse environments (Al-Battoush & Al-Sarayrah, 2024).

High cultural intelligence supports adaptability through flexibility, respectful interaction, and enhanced task performance, all of which contribute to smoother cultural integration (Al-Shammari, 2023). Research highlights its significant impact on the psychological adaptation state of emotional stability and effective problem-solving, essential for meeting personal and societal goals (Younis & Hussein, 2020; D'souza et al., 2023). With increased CQ, individuals can better manage psychological pressures, build meaningful social connections, and maintain behavior aligned with societal values, thereby contributing positively to social development. D'souza et al. (2023) demonstrated that CQ and

academic performance are strongly linked, with CQ fostering sociocultural adaptation as a key mediator.

In addition to CQ, personal orientations—core elements of an individual's personality—shape how people interact with others and engage with their surroundings. People may seek fulfillment through external achievements or foster connections to achieve shared goals, which influence mental health and well-being (Younis & Hussein, 2020). Adham and Nassif (2022) noted that effective psychological adaptation requires recognizing one's strengths and limitations, promoting realistic expectations and developing coping mechanisms. Increased interactions with local communities have also been shown to reduce psychological stress and enhance cognitive adaptability, as expatriate students learn to navigate cultural differences (Nunes et al., 2017). By enhancing adaptability, CQ mitigates the risk of psychological strain, such as depression and anxiety, while low CQ has been linked to feelings of isolation and academic or social difficulties (Gebregergis et al., 2019; Al-Shalahi & Al-Khader, 2022).

Cultural intelligence, personal orientations, and psychological adaptation

Cultural intelligence comprises four main dimensions—behavioral, cognitive, motivational, and metacognitive—each representing skills that foster effective cultural engagement (Al-Rashidi, 2023). For example, the motivational component encourages a desire to learn and engage with diverse cultures, whereas the behavioral component supports appropriate verbal and nonverbal interactions. Personal orientations further shape behaviors, as identified by Fromm's framework (1978), which includes receptivity, exploitation, hoarding, marketing, and productivity as key orientations influenced by cultural values.

Psychological adaptation, essential for successful cultural transition, enables individuals to maintain emotional stability by balancing personal and environmental demands (Adham & Nassif, 2022; Farhat, 2024). Expatriates with strong CQ and adaptive personal orientations are often better equipped to manage new cultural and social demands, leading to improved well-being and a more positive cultural adjustment experience.

This study examines the relationships among cultural intelligence, personal orientation, and psychological adaptation among expatriate students, focusing on the predictive role of CQ and personal orientation in enhancing coping strategies and adaptation to new environments. This study seeks to identify the skills and factors critical for improving expatriates' quality of life and well-being in multicultural settings by investigating these connections.

METHOD

As a quantitative survey method, expatriate students were recruited at the University of Jordan via email announcements during the 2023-2024 academic year. In this study, 93 students participated, comprising 124 females and 69 males from various academic disciplines, as summarized in Table 1. The study utilized a correlational descriptive approach through the measures adopted to assess the

relationships among cultural intelligence, orientation, and psychological adaptation.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Details

Category	Details
Total Participants	193 students
Age Range	18 to 22 years, average age: 20.4 years
Gender	Males: 69, Females: 124
Countries	Malaysia: 23, Kuwait: 11, Saudi Arabia: 19, South Korea: 12, Turkey: 19, Singapore: 9, Uzbekistan: 5, Kazakhstan: 4, Russia: 32, Chechnya: 10, Brunei: 6, Iraq: 26, China: 17
Fields of Study	Scientific majors: 108 students, Humanities majors: 85 students

Research instruments

Cultural Intelligence Scale. The Cultural Intelligence Scale developed by Ang et al. (2007) was translated and validated into Arabic by Al-Dosari (2016). This 20-item scale measures four core dimensions of cultural intelligence: behavioral, cognitive, motivational, and metacognitive. Each dimension is essential for evaluating an individual's ability to function effectively in multicultural contexts. To capture responses, a three-point Likert scale was utilized, where participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement (agree, somewhat agree, disagree). Responses were scored with three points for "agree," two points for "somewhat agree," and one point for "disagree." The total score ranges from 20 to 60, with higher scores signifying a greater degree of cultural intelligence. This scale has demonstrated robust validity and reliability in previous studies, making it a reliable tool for assessing cultural adaptability among diverse populations.

Character Orientation Scale. The character orientation scale, rooted in Fromm's theory, was designed to assess five key orientations: receptive, exploitative, hoarding, marketing, and productive. The participants responded by marking their agreement level on a four-point Likert scale (always, sometimes, rarely, never). Positive items are scored from 5 to 1 (higher to lower agreement), whereas negative items are reverse scored from 1 to 5. The scale includes 35 items, with total scores ranging from 35 to 175, where higher scores indicate stronger character orientation.

The scale's validity was confirmed by a panel of experts in educational and psychological sciences, with item revisions agreed upon by at least 80% of the reviewers. The scale's discriminatory power was verified via a 27% criterion for high and low scorers, confirming that all the items were distinctive through t-tests, with calculated t-values surpassing the critical value of 1.96 at the 0.05 significance level.

Reliability was established through internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.80 to 0.83 across subscales and a total reliability coefficient of 0.81. Test-retest reliability was also high, with coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.81, supporting the consistency of participants' responses over time.

Psychological Adaptation Scale. The Adham (2022) Psychological Adaptation Scale, adapted for this study, consists of 30 items spanning five dimensions and measures psychological adaptation levels among participants. Scores range from 30--150, with a hypothetical mean of 90. The scale was statistically validated through SPSS (v26), which has comprehensive reliability and validity checks. Expert review confirmed content validity, with over 80% agreement on item modifications.

RESULTS

This study provides comprehensive insights into the levels of cultural intelligence, personal orientation, and psychological adaptation among expatriate students, highlighting distinctive patterns across multiple dimensions. Through rigorous statistical analysis, key areas of strength and vulnerability in these traits were identified, offering a nuanced understanding of students' intercultural and intrapersonal competencies. Analysis was conducted via RStudio version 4.3.2 (RStudio, 2024). The correlation matrix between all scales and subscales was explored. The overall scale correlation is shown in Table 2. The correlations between the subscale dimensions are shown in Figure 1.

Table 2: Overall correlational analysis via the Pearson equation for overall scores on cultural intelligence, character orientation, and psychological adaptation.

	Cultural Intelligence	Character Orientation	Psychological Adaptation
Cultural Intelligence	1.000	0.883	0.966
Character Orientation	0.883	1.000	0.893
Psychological Adaptation	0.966	0.893	1.000

Correlation Matrices

Three correlation matrices were generated for the cultural intelligence (CI) subscales, character orientation, and psychological adaptation. These matrices help identify the relationships between the different dimensions. The correlation matrix for CI revealed high positive correlations among the subdimensions. Notably, the meta-cognition and cognition dimensions were strongly correlated at 0.961. The motivation and cognition dimensions were correlated at 0.974, indicating a strong positive relationship. The behavioral and meta-cognition

dimensions also showed a strong correlation of 0.961. For the character orientation subscales, the matrix showed varying correlation strengths. Receptive orientation was weakly correlated with other subdimensions, such as Orientation Exploitative (0.236) and Hoarding Orientation (0.246). Marketing and productive orientation showed strong positive correlations, with values of 0.902 and 0.915, respectively. The productive orientation was highly correlated with the hoarding orientation (0.930). Finally, for the psychological adaptation subscales, the matrix showed strong positive correlations across most subscales. Social adaptation to e-learning and adaptation to cognitive horizons were highly correlated (0.964). Adaptation to psychological flexibility had an interesting, perfect correlation of 1.000 with adaptation to cognitive horizons and social adaptation to e-learning.

Table 3: Summary of Gender Comparisons

Scale	Subscale	Gender	Test Statistic	*P Value*
Cultural Intelligence	Metacognition Intelligence	Both	7.9756	5.75
Cultural Intelligence	Cognition Intelligence	Both	5.9173	2.51
Cultural Intelligence	Motivation Intelligence	Both	4.1338	6.19
Cultural Intelligence	Behavioral Intelligence	Both	6.3744	2.79
Character Orientation	Receptive Orientation	Both	0.8316	.40
Character Orientation	Orientation Exploitative	Both	5.7406	5.98
Character Orientation	Hoarding Orientation	Both	6.8713	2.26
Character Orientation	Marketing Orientation	Both	3.8912	1.59
Character Orientation	Productive Orientation	Both	4.9008	2.74
Psychological Adaptation	Self-Adaptation	Both	5.9778	2.01
Psychological Adaptation	Adaptation to VR environment	Both	5.1996	7.31
Psychological Adaptation	Social adaptation to e-learning	Both	6.5427	1.27
Psychological Adaptation	Adaptation to Cognitive Horizons	Both	6.3617	3.64
Psychological Adaptation	Adaptation to psychological flexibility	Both	6.3617	3.64

Gender Differences in the Subdimensions

T-tests were performed to assess gender differences in each subdimension of the three scales. The results indicate several statistically significant differences, as summarized in Table 3. All the results were highly significant ($p < 0.001$), except for the receptive orientation subscale of the character orientation scale.

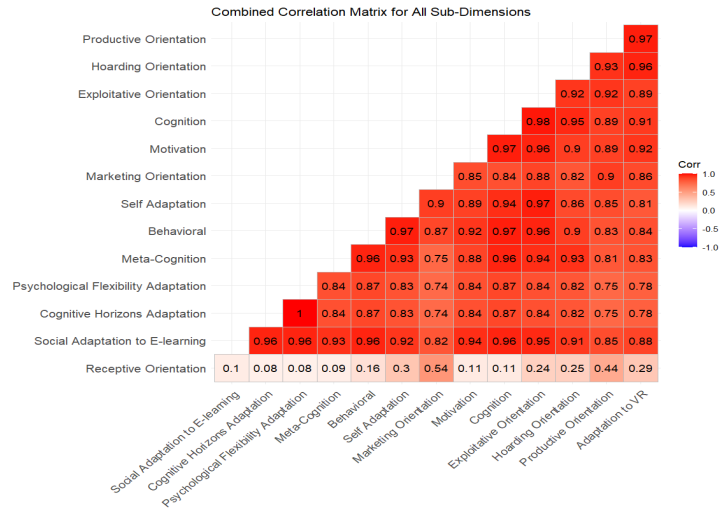

Figure. 1: Correlation Matrix between the cultural intelligence, character orientation, psychological adaptation subdimensions

The analysis revealed that the cultural intelligence of the expatriate students was moderate, with an arithmetic mean of 33.84% and a percentage score of 56.4%. The scale's highest and lowest scores were 43 and 25, respectively, with a variance of 10.47 and a standard deviation of 3.24. Among the cultural intelligence dimensions, motivation ranked first (mean = 9.64, 64.2%), followed by cognitive (mean = 9.17, 50.5%), behavioral (mean = 8.90, 59.3%), and metacognitive (mean = 6.13, 51.2%) motivation, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Detailed results of the dimensions of the CQ scale

Axis	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Percentage	Performance Degree	Rank
Metacognitive	6.13	1.34	1.78	51.2%	Medium	3
Cognitive	9.17	1.76	3.10	50.5%	Low	4
Motivation	9.64	1.84	3.37	64.2%	Medium	1
Behavioral	8.90	1.79	3.22	59.3%	Medium	2

For the personal orientation levels of expatriates, the data analysis indicated varying arithmetic means across categories. Notably, productive orientation ranked highest (mean = 22.530), followed by catalog (mean = 22.132), receptor (mean = 22.172), savings (mean = 21.750), and independence (mean = 21.390).

For the ability of cultural intelligence to predict psychological adaptation, a multiple progressive regression analysis was conducted, as shown in Table 6. The analysis tested the regression model's significance to determine how cultural intelligence dimensions contribute to predicting psychological adaptation levels among expatriate students.

In Table 5, the F value for the regression model was 180.337, which was statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This result confirms that the regression model reliably predicts psychological adaptation based on cultural intelligence dimensions.

Table 5: Variance analysis for regression on cultural intelligence and psychological adaptation.

Contrast Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	Sig
Regression	17,531.842	2	8,765.921	180.337	< 0.001	Statistically significant
Residual	627.492	189	3.319			At the 0.01 level
Total	18,159.334	191				

The study also explored the ability of cultural intelligence to predict psychological adaptation. Regression analysis indicated that the motivational dimension predicts 62.5% of psychological adaptation, with an increased prediction to 73.2% when the meta-cognitive dimension is included, as detailed in Table 6.

Table 6: Regression analysis for the ability of cultural intelligence to predict psychological adaptation

Predictor Variable	*R*	*R²*	*%*			*Beta*	*t*	*p*
				SD	*B*			
Motivation				22.901	5.866		3.904	< 0.001
Impulse	0.795	0.625	62.5 %	2.554	0.880	0.440	8.873	< 0.001
Meta-cognitive	0.858	0.732	73.2 %	2.375	0.332	0.420	1.145	< 0.001

Finally, personal orientation demonstrates a strong predictive power for psychological adaptation, explaining 52.1% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.521$, $p < 0.001$). The regression analysis reveals a significant contribution ($\beta = 0.722$, t = 23.381, $p < 0.001$), with an overall model fit (F = 542.00, $p < 0.001$), indicating a robust relationship between personal orientation and psychological adaptation.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the predictive relationships among cultural intelligence (CQ), personal orientation, and psychological adaptation among expatriate

students at the University of Jordan. The findings significantly contribute to understanding how individual traits and capabilities influence adaptation in multicultural environments.

The results confirmed that CQ strongly predicts psychological adaptation, with motivation being the most influential dimension. Motivation, which reflects an individual's drive and willingness to engage with culturally diverse environments, explained 62.5% of the variance in psychological adaptation, and this predictive power increased to 73.2% when combined with post-cognitive dimensions. These findings highlight the centrality of motivation as a driver of cultural engagement, which facilitates emotional resilience and the ability to navigate cultural differences. This aligns with previous research indicating that motivational CQ plays a key role in overcoming cultural barriers and maintaining psychological stability in unfamiliar environments (D'souza et al., 2023; Nunes et al., 2017).

In contrast, the cognitive dimension of CQ, which involves knowledge about other cultures, ranked lowest among the CQ dimensions. This suggests that while knowledge of cultural norms is important, its impact on adaptation may be less significant than that of motivation and behavioral adaptability. These findings challenge the traditional assumption that cognitive understanding is the foundation of successful intercultural adaptation (Al-Shammari, 2023). Instead, it suggests that dynamic, action-oriented components of CQ—such as motivation and behavioral flexibility—are more critical in managing the immediate challenges of cross-cultural transitions.

The role of personal orientation in predicting psychological adaptation was similarly significant, with productive and marketing orientations emerging as the strongest contributors. These orientations emphasize creativity, flexibility, and proactive engagement, which are essential traits for individuals adapting to dynamic and culturally diverse settings. These findings support Fromm's (1978) framework, which posits that adaptive orientations are associated with psychological well-being and success in navigating complex environments. However, the lack of a significant relationship between CQ and personal orientation raises questions about the interplay between these constructs. While both contribute to psychological adaptation, their independence suggests that they may operate through distinct pathways. This finding diverges from studies such as Al-Battoush and Al-Sarayrah (2024), who posited a synergistic relationship, emphasizing the need for further exploration of moderating factors such as prior intercultural exposure or social support systems.

The observed gender differences provide further nuance to the findings. Females exhibited higher levels of CQ and psychological adaptation, a result that is consistent with studies that highlight women's greater emotional awareness and interpersonal sensitivity in multicultural interactions (Gebregergis et al., 2019). This could be attributed to gendered socialization practices that encourage empathy and relationship building, both critical in navigating cultural transitions. However, these differences also point to potential vulnerabilities among male expatriates, suggesting the need for tailored support programs to address their specific challenges.

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, they advance the understanding of CQ and personal orientation as independent yet complementary predictors of psychological adaptation. This underscores the need for a more integrative framework incorporating both constructs while accounting for their distinct contributions. Practically, the study highlights the importance of fostering motivational and behavioral CQ through targeted interventions, such as intercultural training and experiential learning programs. These initiatives can enhance expatriates' readiness to engage with diverse environments, reduce stress and promote successful adaptation. Furthermore, educational institutions can design orientation programs that strengthen productive personal orientations by cultivating resilience, adaptability, and proactive problem-solving skills.

Organizations hosting expatriates should also consider incorporating CQ assessments into their selection and training processes. Organizations can optimize the success of cross-cultural assignments by identifying individuals with high motivational and behavioral CQ. Additionally, gender-specific support mechanisms may help address the unique challenges faced by male expatriates, ensuring equitable adaptation outcomes.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the reliance on self-reported measures may have introduced social desirability and response biases, potentially overestimating or underestimating the relationships between variables. Second, the sample was drawn exclusively from expatriate students at a single university, limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader expatriate populations, such as working professionals or nonacademic migrants. Future studies should expand the sample to include diverse demographic and cultural groups to increase the external validity of the results.

Additionally, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between CQ, personal orientations, and psychological adaptation. Longitudinal studies tracking expatriates over time would provide deeper insights into how these constructs evolve and interact during the adaptation process. Another limitation is the study's focus on CQ and personal orientation while excluding contextual factors such as cultural distance, language proficiency, and social support. Incorporating these variables in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the adaptation process.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical roles of cultural intelligence and personal orientation in shaping psychological adaptation among expatriates. By identifying motivational CQ and productive personal orientations as key predictors, the findings offer valuable insights for interventions to improve expatriates' well-being in multicultural settings. Future research should address the identified limitations and explore additional contextual variables to build a more nuanced understanding of intercultural adaptation dynamics.

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