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**Cultural Intelligence and Work Engagement amongst
Employees in MTN Lagos State, Nigeria:
A Cross-Sectional Survey**

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Abstract: This study examined the effect of cultural intelligence on the work engagement of employees in MTN operating in Lagos State. It specifically assessed the influence of cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural cultural intelligence on employee work engagement. A correlational cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 372 employees across MTN service centres in Lagos State, and a census approach was used. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, as well as multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that metacognitive cultural intelligence had the strongest positive influence on work engagement ($\beta = .771$, $p < 0.05$), followed by cognitive cultural intelligence ($\beta = .514$, $p < 0.05$) and behavioural cultural intelligence ($\beta = .313$, $p < 0.05$). However, motivational cultural intelligence showed no significant effect ($\beta = -.132$, $p > 0.05$). The study concludes that developing multiple dimensions of cultural intelligence simultaneously enhances employee work engagement more effectively than focusing on individual dimensions. It recommended that organisations implement comprehensive cultural intelligence training programmes to improve engagement.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence, Work Engagement, Employee Engagement, Nigeria, Cross-Cultural Management

Introduction

Employee work engagement has become a critical determinant of organisational effectiveness, particularly within multinational corporations (MNCs) that operate in culturally diverse environments (Blazi & Awolusi, 2020; S. Y. Chen & Thompson, 2023; Men et al., 2023). Conceptually, work engagement encompasses the emotional, cognitive, and

physical energy an employee invests in their work, typically demonstrated through vigour, dedication, and absorption (Edobor & Akenzua, 2023; Nwachukwu & Osa-Izeko, 2022). Within MNCs, high engagement levels reflect an employee's capacity to contribute meaningfully to team and organisational goals, especially in multicultural settings where adaptability is essential (Min et al., 2023; Presbitero et al., 2025).

However, fostering sustained engagement in culturally diverse contexts remains inherently complex. Employees often encounter differences in communication patterns, work ethics, and cultural expectations, which may lead to misunderstandings, interpersonal tension, and reduced engagement (Li & Yu, 2024; Schmidt et al., 2024). In Nigeria, particularly in Lagos, the country's commercial hub, MNCs such as MTN Nigeria experience these challenges acutely. Employees frequently collaborate with expatriates, navigating a dynamic cultural environment shaped by both intra-national and international diversity. While such diversity presents opportunities for innovation and broader market insight, it can also create barriers that hinder cohesion and weaken engagement. Employees are often required to adjust to varying cultural norms, while expatriates may struggle with local adaptation, further complicating workplace interactions (A. S. Chen et al., 2024; Fu & Charoensukmongkol, 2021).

In such environments, cultural intelligence (CQ) becomes a critical personal capability that enables individuals to function effectively across cultural contexts. CQ comprises four interrelated dimensions: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural. Cognitive CQ supports understanding of cultural systems and norms, thereby aiding interpretation of workplace interactions (Poort et al., 2023). Metacognitive CQ involves higher-order thinking processes such as awareness and reflection, which facilitate adaptive responses to cultural differences (S. Y. Chen & Thompson, 2023; Presbitero et al., 2025). Motivational CQ reflects the willingness and persistence to engage with culturally diverse individuals (Presbitero, 2020), while behavioural CQ represents the ability to exhibit appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions in cross-cultural situations (Min et al., 2023a). These capabilities are particularly important in a context such as Lagos, where the multicultural and fast-paced environment requires both cultural sensitivity and adaptive competence (Lezar & van der Walt, 2023).

At MTN Nigeria, these dimensions of CQ have important implications for employee engagement. Employees often experience challenges such as limited cultural awareness, low reflective capacity, and reduced motivation to interact across cultural boundaries. Issues such as communication breakdowns, cultural fatigue, and stereotypical assumptions can undermine interpersonal relationships and reduce commitment to work (Gabel-Shemueli et al., 2019; Ramalu & Subramaniam, 2019a; Yuan et al., 2023).

Despite the recognised importance of cultural intelligence, existing literature reveals a clear gap in understanding its direct influence on employee work engagement within corporate settings, particularly in developing economies such as Nigeria. While prior studies have examined cultural intelligence in relation to expatriate adjustment and student populations, there remains limited empirical evidence focusing on employees within multinational organisational contexts (Gabel-Shemueli et al., 2019; Ramalu & Subramaniam, 2019a). In addition, most existing studies either treat cultural intelligence as a unidimensional construct or focus on indirect organisational outcomes, with limited attention given to the distinct effects of its four dimensions, namely cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural, on work engagement (Afsar et al., 2021; Bukhari et al., 2025; Shaik et al., 2021).

Furthermore, much of the current research is concentrated in non-African or developed economy contexts, thereby limiting the generalisability of findings to culturally dynamic environments such as Nigeria (Li & Yu, 2024; Men et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024). This lack of context-specific and dimension-based analysis constrains a comprehensive understanding of how cultural intelligence operates in real organisational settings and highlights the need for further empirical investigation within multinational corporations in Lagos State.

This study's novelty contributes meaningfully to both theory and practice by addressing this gap and providing empirical evidence from a multinational organisation in Lagos State. By examining the four dimensions of cultural intelligence, namely cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how each dimension influences employee engagement. It also extends the application of cultural intelligence theory to a developing economy context, thereby enhancing its contextual relevance. In practical terms, the findings are expected to inform human resource practices and support the development of more inclusive, engaged, and high-performing work environments through culturally responsive management approaches (Men et al., 2023; Presbitero et al., 2025).

The broad objective of the study is to examine the effect of cultural intelligence on the work engagement of employees in MTN operating in Lagos State. The specific objectives are to examine the influence of cognitive cultural intelligence on the work engagement levels of employees in MTN in Lagos State, investigate the relationship between metacognitive cultural intelligence and the work engagement of employees working in MTN in Lagos State, determine the effect of motivational cultural intelligence on the work engagement of employees in MTN in Lagos State and ascertain the effect of behavioural cultural intelligence on the work engagement of employees in MTN operating in Lagos State.

Literature Review

Work Engagement

Work engagement is widely regarded as a positive and fulfilling psychological state in which employees are emotionally, cognitively, and physically immersed in their work. Bakker and Demerouti & Bakker (2011) define it as a work-related state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption, noting that engaged employees exhibit energy, mental resilience, and sustained enthusiasm, even in the face of challenges. Hanasha (2015) further describes work engagement as a holistic psychological condition that motivates employees to fully invest themselves in their roles, fostering personal and organisational growth. Nwachukwu and Osa-Izeko (2022) highlight the discretionary and voluntary nature of engagement, seeing it as passionate commitment and psychological investment that enhances job performance. Similarly, Edobor & Akenzua, (2023) conceptualise engagement as a persistent affective-cognitive state that strengthens employees' psychological connection to their work. Recent studies further reinforce this view by demonstrating that work engagement is shaped by organisational context, interpersonal dynamics, and individual capabilities such as cultural intelligence, which enhance employees' adaptability and involvement in diverse work settings (Men et al., 2023; Min et al., 2023a) Despite varying terminologies, these definitions converge on three critical themes: the voluntary and self-driven nature of engagement, its multidimensional components (cognitive, emotional, and behavioural), and its mutual benefit to both employees and organisations. Together, they portray work engagement as a

dynamic, energising force that enhances organisational performance and employee well-being (Presbitero et al., 2025).

According to Schaufeli & Bakker (2004), The three fundamental dimensions of work engagement are vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour refers to an employee's energy, stamina, and perseverance at work. It manifests in a willingness to exert effort, remain resilient under pressure, and engage proactively, especially in multicultural environments where navigating diverse perspectives is key (Bakker et al., 2018). Recent evidence suggests that employees with higher adaptive capabilities, including cultural intelligence, demonstrate stronger vigour in diverse work environments (Lezar & van der Walt, 2023). Vigorous employees are better able to overcome cultural barriers, foster inclusivity, and stimulate innovation (Oltra, Valls & Simo, 2020).

Dedication is characterised by a strong sense of involvement, pride, and significance in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Dedicated employees experience meaning in their roles and are committed to their tasks and the organisation's mission. In diverse workplaces, dedication enhances cohesion, shared purpose, and respect for cultural differences (Ely & Thomas, 2020). Empirical studies also show that inclusive organisational climates and effective diversity management practices further strengthen employees' sense of dedication and engagement (Men et al., 2023).

Absorption refers to deep concentration and immersion in work tasks, often leading to a sense of 'flow' and loss of awareness of time (Demerouti et al., 2015). Absorbed employees are highly focused and productive. While this promotes performance, it can also lead to cultural oversight if employees become too fixated on tasks and ignore broader intercultural dynamics (Gudykunst & Mody, 2016). However, recent research suggests that cultural intelligence can help employees maintain task focus while remaining sensitive to intercultural nuances, thereby balancing absorption with contextual awareness (Li & Yu, 2024; Yuan et al., 2023).

Collectively, these dimensions form the essence of work engagement. As Edobor & Akenzua (2023) affirm, engaged employees are those who demonstrate vigour, dedication, and absorption in their work, leading to enhanced individual performance and organisational effectiveness. Contemporary studies further confirm that engagement plays a central role in improving employee outcomes such as retention, collaboration, and innovation in multicultural organisational contexts (Bukhari et al., 2025; Presbitero et al., 2025).

Cultural Intelligence

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings by understanding, interpreting, and adapting to different cultural norms and behaviours. As described by Poort et al. (2023), CQ encompasses both cognitive awareness of cultural differences and emotional sensitivity, equipping individuals with the capacity to operate successfully in multicultural environments. Their study underlines CQ's role in fostering adaptive behaviours in diverse educational settings, facilitating inclusive learning and collaboration. Similarly, Fu & Charoensukmongkol (2021) conceptualise CQ as a dynamic and learnable competency rather than a static trait. They emphasise that CQ enables individuals to internalise and operationalise cultural information, adjust cognitive frameworks, and perform suitable behaviours in cross-cultural situations, particularly within

the context of expatriate assignments and international business operations. Recent studies further support this view by demonstrating that cultural intelligence enhances employees' adaptability, interpersonal effectiveness, and engagement in multicultural work environments (Men et al., 2023; Min et al., 2023a).

Presbitero (2020) further expands on this perspective by highlighting CQ's multidimensionality. He identifies four core components, metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural, which collectively enable individuals to adapt to complex cross-cultural scenarios. Contemporary evidence reinforces this multidimensional structure, showing that these components interact to influence employee engagement, retention, and performance in global work settings (Y. Chen et al., 2024; Presbitero et al., 2025). His work particularly underscores the contribution of CQ to psychological adjustment and job performance in global work environments.

Moreover, Gabel-Shemueli et al. (2019) identify CQ as an essential competence for global leadership, arguing that it fosters effective team management, intercultural communication, and inclusive decision-making across diverse organisational contexts. More recent studies extend this argument by demonstrating that cultural intelligence promotes inclusive workplace climates, employee voice, and collaborative behaviour in diverse organisations (Men et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2023). In addition, cultural intelligence has been shown to enhance employee well-being, flourishing, and adaptability in culturally diverse work contexts (Lezar & van der Walt, 2023; Li & Yu, 2024).

Synthesising these perspectives, the dimensions of CQ can be defined as an integrative and adaptive capacity encompassing cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioural competencies that enable individuals to interpret, respond to, and perform effectively across various cultural contexts. It operates at multiple levels, individual, team, and organisational, and contributes to improved cross-cultural communication, reduced conflict, and enhanced work performance in today's interconnected global environments (Bukhari et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2024).

Cognitive Cultural Intelligence

Cognitive CQ reflects an individual's knowledge and understanding of cultural norms, practices, and conventions in different societies. This dimension involves both declarative knowledge (facts about cultures) and procedural knowledge (how to act within cultural contexts). Poort et al. (2023) stress its relevance in educational environments, where it enhances learners' engagement in intercultural collaboration by equipping them to comprehend and respond to cultural variance. Presbitero (2020) points to the significance of cognitive CQ in global virtual teams, highlighting its role in mitigating challenges related to language barriers and cross-cultural ambiguity. He finds that team members with high cognitive CQ are better able to manage intercultural complexities, especially when communication is mediated through digital platforms. Furthermore, Fu & Charoensukmongkol (2021) connect cognitive CQ to expatriate adjustment, noting that individuals with higher cognitive CQ and language proficiency integrate more seamlessly into host cultures. Recent empirical studies further demonstrate that cognitive cultural intelligence enhances employees' adaptability, problem-solving ability, and engagement in multicultural work environments by improving their understanding of diverse perspectives (A. S. Chen et al., 2024; Min et al., 2023a).

In international assignments, cognitive CQ is particularly valuable for processing unfamiliar socio-cultural cues, allowing employees to maintain focus, productivity, and engagement despite cross-cultural challenges (Presbitero, 2020). This dimension empowers individuals to make informed decisions and appropriately adjust their behaviour during intercultural encounters. Moreover, cognitive CQ has been linked to improved collaboration, knowledge sharing, and employee engagement in diverse organisational contexts, as individuals with strong cultural knowledge are better equipped to interpret and respond effectively to culturally nuanced situations (Li & Yu, 2024; Men et al., 2023).

Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence

Metacognitive CQ involves higher-order thinking processes, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's assumptions during intercultural interactions. It enables individuals to be conscious of their own cultural biases and to regulate their mental frameworks for interpreting culturally unfamiliar settings (Ang et al., 2007). S. Y. Chen & Thompson (2023) observe that individuals with strong metacognitive CQ can effectively reassess their cultural assumptions and modify their thinking to align with evolving cross-cultural situations. Patel et al. (2022) elaborate on three mechanisms through which metacognitive CQ enhances workplace engagement: building cross-cultural relationships, navigating ambiguity, and increasing confidence in multicultural interactions. These mechanisms support inclusivity, adaptability, and collaboration, contributing to higher levels of employee engagement. Recent empirical studies further affirm that metacognitive CQ strengthens employees' psychological availability, adaptive capacity, and effectiveness in multicultural work settings, thereby enhancing engagement and work outcomes (A. S. Chen et al., 2024; Presbitero et al., 2025).

Strategically, metacognitive CQ contributes to internationalisation by shaping how organisations craft adaptive global strategies. Yusuff et al. (2024) assert that transnational intelligence, underpinned by metacognitive CQ, strengthens cross-border operational effectiveness. In addition, metacognitive CQ has been linked to improved decision-making, intercultural competence, and collaborative performance in diverse organisational environments, as individuals continuously refine their cultural understanding (Men et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2023). Ultimately, metacognitive CQ fosters resilience, enabling individuals to function effectively despite cultural complexity, thereby enhancing team cohesion and organisational outcomes (S. Y. Chen & Thompson, 2023; Lezar & van der Walt, 2023).

Motivational Cultural Intelligence

Motivational CQ denotes the drive and interest to engage with culturally diverse people and situations. It encompasses intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and persistence in cross-cultural contexts. Gabel-Shemueli et al. (2019) note that motivational CQ propels individuals to actively adapt to cultural differences, making it central to overall CQ and effective multicultural functioning. Ramalu & Subramaniam (2019) find that individuals high in motivational CQ demonstrate greater initiative in seeking cross-cultural experiences and possess higher levels of engagement in multicultural environments. They report that motivational CQ supports satisfaction of psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which in turn influence work engagement positively. Recent empirical studies further confirm that motivational CQ enhances employee engagement,

retention, and adaptability in multicultural teams by strengthening individuals' willingness to participate in cross-cultural interactions (Men et al., 2023; Presbitero et al., 2025).

From an organisational culture standpoint, Quy (2018) and Patel et al. (2022) highlight how firms that nurture supportive and inclusive environments tend to amplify the benefits of motivational CQ. In such settings, culturally intelligent employees thrive and contribute to improved team dynamics and organisational innovation. Contemporary evidence also suggests that motivational CQ plays a critical role in fostering employee voice, collaboration, and proactive work behaviours in diverse organisations (Bukhari et al., 2025; Yuan et al., 2023). As shown by Gabel-Shemueli et al. (2019), organisational adaptability serves as a moderator, enhancing the impact of motivational CQ on engagement. These findings demonstrate the synergistic relationship between individual drive and supportive organisational cultures in boosting cross-cultural performance.

Behavioural Cultural Intelligence

Behavioural CQ reflects an individual's ability to exhibit culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviours in interactions with people from different backgrounds. This dimension is the visible expression of CQ and plays a crucial role in translating cultural knowledge and motivation into action. Min et al. (2023) describe behavioural CQ as the observable manifestation of cultural understanding, including adjustments in communication style, body language, and etiquette to fit the cultural expectations of diverse counterparts. In international project settings, Y. Chen et al. (2024) find that expatriates with high behavioural CQ perform better and are less likely to return prematurely. Their ability to align their behaviour with local norms enhances both task completion and interpersonal relationships. Similarly, Shaik et al. (2021) argue that behavioural CQ fosters team trust by reducing misunderstandings and facilitating smooth collaboration in multicultural teams. Recent empirical evidence further shows that behavioural CQ enhances employee engagement, interpersonal effectiveness, and service quality by enabling employees to respond appropriately in culturally diverse interactions (Men et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2023).

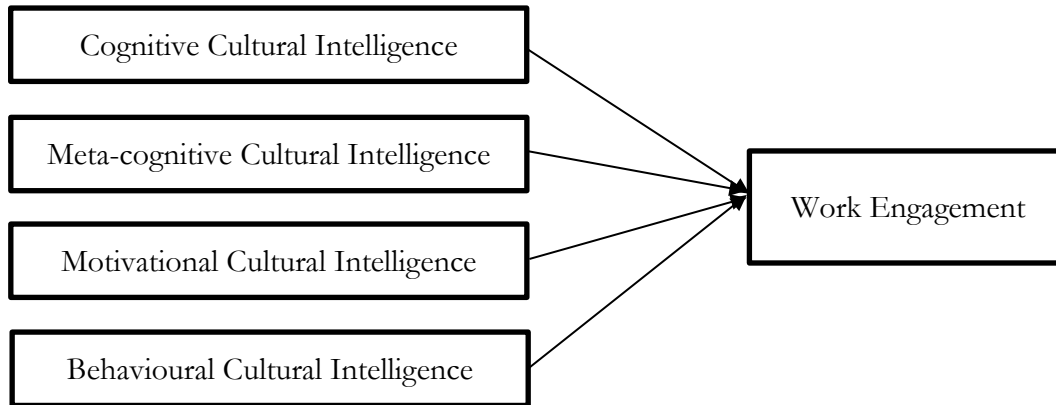
Evidence from Nigerian multinational corporations also underscores its importance. Udegbe (2012) shows that culturally adaptive behaviour among employees improves customer satisfaction and drives organisational performance. Furthermore, Min et al. (2023) reveal that behavioural CQ reduces burnout and improves employee well-being in service-oriented roles that involve frequent intercultural encounters. Contemporary studies also indicate that behavioural CQ contributes to proactive work behaviours and organisational innovation by facilitating effective cross-cultural collaboration (Bukhari et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2024). In sum, behavioural CQ links internal cultural awareness with external expression, contributing to better interpersonal interactions, team cohesion, and service outcomes. It is particularly vital in roles that require sustained interpersonal engagement across cultures.

Conceptual Model

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between cultural intelligence and work engagement. Cultural intelligence is treated as the independent variable, operationalised through four dimensions: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural cultural intelligence, while work engagement is the dependent variable. The framework proposes that each dimension of cultural intelligence influences employee work engagement by enhancing

understanding, adaptability, motivation, and appropriate behaviour in diverse cultural settings.

Figure 1. **Conceptual Framework**



Source: Researchers' construction (2025)

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical frameworks: the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model. The Conservation of Resources Theory, developed by Hobfoll (1989), is particularly suited for explaining the role of cultural intelligence as a psychological resource in multicultural work environments. The theory posits that individuals strive to acquire, preserve, and protect valuable resources to manage stress and maintain performance. In the context of cultural intelligence, COR Theory elucidates how employees draw upon cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural cultural competencies to cope with cross-cultural demands, reduce strain, and sustain workplace engagement. These cultural competencies function as key personal resources that buffer against the stressors associated with working in culturally diverse settings, such as those found in multinational corporations. Complementing this, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) provides a dynamic framework for understanding employee engagement. It argues that while job demands can lead to strain, job and personal resources, such as cultural intelligence, enhance motivation and drive engagement. The model accommodates the interplay between organisational characteristics and individual factors, making it highly relevant for examining how culturally intelligent employees remain engaged despite high demands in multicultural workplaces. Cultural intelligence, as a personal resource, plays a dual role: mitigating the negative effects of cross-cultural job demands and enhancing engagement through its motivational and behavioural capacities. Together, COR Theory and the JD-R Model offer a robust, integrated framework. The COR Theory explains the acquisition and deployment of cultural intelligence as a stress-mitigating resource, while the JD-R Model clarifies how this resource influences work engagement. Their convergence provides a comprehensive theoretical basis for understanding how employees in multinational corporations such as MTN Nigeria use cultural intelligence to sustain engagement in culturally diverse environments.

The reviewed empirical studies provide a multifaceted view of how different dimensions of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) influence work engagement in diverse organisational contexts.

The review below highlights these findings in terms of author contributions, study focus, and outcomes.

Presbitero (2020) explored the role of cognitive cultural intelligence within global virtual teams by linking foreign language skills, anxiety, and task performance. His study applied theories from cognitive neuroscience and intelligence to demonstrate that low language skills and high anxiety reduced individual performance, while CQ buffered these negative effects. This highlights cognitive CQ as essential in virtual, multicultural settings. Similarly, Fu & Charoensukmongkol (2021) investigated Chinese expatriates in Thailand and found that host language proficiency, closely tied to cognitive CQ, directly improved work engagement and that support from host country nationals partially mediated this relationship. These findings underscore the importance of both language and social integration in culturally distant work environments.

Poort et al. (2023) reinforced the centrality of cognitive CQ, finding it to be one of the strongest predictors of students' cognitive engagement in international group work. In contrast, Blazi and Awolusi (2020), examining expatriates in UNAMID (Sudan), reported no significant quantitative relationship between socio-cultural factors and job commitment, though qualitative insights acknowledged both positive and negative effects of international postings. This divergence may be attributed to contextual factors, such as mission settings, and highlights the need for methodological triangulation.

On motivational CQ, Quy (2018) found that supportive and innovative organisational cultures significantly predicted job satisfaction and performance in both local and foreign firms in Vietnam. Gabel-Shemueli et al. (2019) linked CQ to work engagement, moderated by organisational culture and individual orientation (idiocentrism–allocentrism), suggesting that motivational CQ can flourish under adaptable cultural settings. Ramalu & Subramaniam (2019) confirmed this by showing that psychological need satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between CQ and engagement among Malaysian expatriates, highlighting an internal psychological mechanism through which CQ drives engagement.

Metacognitive CQ also emerged as a robust predictor. S. Y. Chen & Thompson (2023) showed that higher levels of cultural metacognition correlated with greater work engagement, particularly in diverse teams, and that conflict resolution partially mediated this relationship. Patel et al. (2022) found that participants who improved their metacognitive CQ through training experienced a 24% rise in engagement, facilitated by improved relationship-building and cultural navigation. Schmidt et al. (2024) added that this relationship is context-sensitive, becoming stronger in knowledge-intensive sectors and environments with high cultural distance. Yusuff et al. (2024), however, found a weak effect of metacognitive CQ on internationalisation strategies in Nigerian bottling firms, implying that strategic outcomes may involve other overriding variables.

Behavioural CQ was examined by Udegbe (2012), who found that culture influenced organisational performance and customer satisfaction in Nigerian MNCs. Shaik et al. (2021) emphasised trust as the mediating factor in the CQ–engagement link within global virtual teams. Y. Chen et al. (2024) showed that work engagement fully mediated the relationship between behavioural CQ and expatriate retention, while Min et al. (2023) confirmed its impact on reducing burnout and enhancing satisfaction in culturally diverse hospitality settings.

Overall, these findings consistently affirm that the four dimensions of CQ, especially cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational, positively influence employee engagement. However, effects vary by context, and future research should address underexplored African corporate settings like Nigeria using multidimensional CQ models.

Despite the growing body of literature on cultural intelligence (CQ) and work engagement, significant empirical gaps persist, particularly within the context of multinational corporations (MNCs) in Lagos State. Most existing studies, such as Poort et al. (2023) and Fu & Charoensukmongkol (2021), have focused on student populations or expatriates outside Nigeria, neglecting the unique cultural dynamics of Lagos, a city characterised by its multicultural workforce. Consequently, the relationship between cognitive CQ and work engagement remains underexplored within Lagos-based MNCs such as MTN. Furthermore, while metacognitive CQ has been studied globally (S. Y. Chen & Thompson, 2023; Schmidt et al., 2024), there is limited understanding of how local employees in Lagos apply metacognitive processes like cultural reflection and adaptation in their daily work, especially within MTN. This lack of context-specific research hinders the development of tailored strategies to enhance engagement in Nigeria's multicultural corporate environment. Motivational CQ, which drives an individual's interest and confidence in engaging with diverse cultures, has also been overlooked. Studies such as Quy (2018) and Gabel-Shemueli et al. (2019) touched on culture and CQ broadly but failed to examine motivational CQ in the Lagos context, where cultural adaptability is vital for employee engagement. Lastly, the behavioural dimension of CQ, crucial for modifying communication styles across cultures, has not been adequately studied in Nigerian MNCs. Although Udegbe (2012) and Min et al., (2023) acknowledged its relevance internationally, its specific influence on engagement within Lagos remains unknown. Thus, a focused study on MTN Nigeria is essential to address these cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural CQ gaps and to understand their impact on work engagement in Lagos-based multinational environments.

Research Hypotheses

1. Cognitive cultural intelligence does not significantly influence the work engagement levels of employees in MTN in Lagos State;
2. Metacognitive cultural intelligence has no significant relationship with the work engagement of employees working in MTN in Lagos State;
3. Motivational cultural intelligence does not significantly affect the work engagement of employees in MTN in Lagos State; and
4. Behavioural cultural intelligence does not significantly affect the work engagement of employees in MTN operating in Lagos State.

Methods

Survey research design was adopted for this study to enable the objective observation and measurement of the relationship between cultural intelligence and work engagement among employees. This design was deemed appropriate because it allowed the researchers to examine associations among variables at a specific point in time and also aligns with previous studies that explored similar constructs (Ang et al., 2007; S. Y. Chen & Thompson, 2023). The study focused on MTN Nigeria, with emphasis on employees working at the organisation's service centres across Lagos State. A total of twenty (20) MTN service centres in Lagos were purposively selected and had a total of 372 employees. Given the manageable size of the population, the total population sampling technique, which is a variant of the

census method, was employed, thus making the sample size equal to the population. The information on the employees was sourced directly from the administrative records of MTN Nigeria. Table 1 below presents the distribution of the selected service centres in Lagos State.

Table 1. **Distribution of Employees across MTN Service Centres in Lagos State**

S/N	MTN Service Centre	Address	Employees
01	Yhello City	1267 Adeola Odeku, Victoria Island, Lagos	30
02	Ikeja	1 Opebi Road, Ikeja, Lagos	25
03	Ikoyi	4 Aromire Road, Off Kingsway Rd, Ikoyi	20
04	Matori	16 Fatai Atere Way, Oshodi	18
05	Marina	45/47 Marina Street, Lagos Island	22
06	Surulere	81 Bode Thomas, Surulere	20
07	Shomolu	58 St. Finbars Road, Akoka	15
08	Ogba	57 Yaya Abatan Street, Ogba	18
09	Ikorodu	69 Lagos Road, Haruna Bus-Stop, Ikorodu	17
10	Isolo	28 Ire Akari Estate Road, Isolo	16
11	Ketu	4 Owode Oyelaja Drive, Ketu	14
12	Oyingbo	173 Herbert Macaulay Way, Oyingbo	13
13	Ojodu	16 Ogunnusi Road, Ojodu Berger	15
14	Moloney	32 Moloney Street, Obalende	12
15	Mega Plaza	14 Idowu Martins Street, Victoria Island	20
16	Palms	Unit 6 Entrance 2, Palms Mall, Lekki	18
17	Lekki	26 Admiralty Way, Lekki Phase 1	22
18	Apapa	Maritime House, Oshodi-Apapa Expressway	19
19	Festac	72, Community 1B, 23 Road, Festac	21
20	Alimosho	160 Akowonjo Road, Egbeda	17
Total			372

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork and Administrative Desk of MTN Service Centres (2025)

The conceptual framework of the study was expressed using a multiple regression model, estimated via the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) technique. The model posits that work engagement among employees is a function of the four dimensions of cultural intelligence: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural, as follows:

$$WEG = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CCQ + \beta_2 MTCQ + \beta_3 MCQ + \beta_4 BCQ + e \quad (1)$$

Where:

WEG = Work Engagement
 CCQ = Cognitive Cultural Intelligence
 MTCQ = Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence
 MCQ = Motivational Cultural Intelligence
 BCQ = Behavioural Cultural Intelligence

β_0 = Constant
 $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ = Coefficients of the various independent variables
 e = Error term

The Apriori Expectations are:

$$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4 > 0 \quad (2)$$

Primary data were collected through the administration of a structured questionnaire, designed in two sections. Section A focused on the demographic characteristics of respondents, while Section B captured data on the study variables using a five-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* (5) to *Strongly Disagree* (1). All questionnaire items were presented in a positively framed manner to ensure uniform interpretation by respondents. The cultural intelligence items were adapted from the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) developed by Ang et al. (2007), while the work engagement items were drawn from the scale adapted by S. Y. Chen & Thompson (2023), grounded in the work of Schaufeli et al. (2006).

Validity and Reliability of the Study

To establish the face and content validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by the senior colleagues and other experts in field of business and human resources management. Based on the feedback received, the instrument was revised and refined before administration. For reliability testing, a pilot study was conducted involving twenty (20) employees drawn from other multinational organisations in Lagos. The Cronbach alpha reliability test was applied using SPSS, and all constructs recorded values above the recommended threshold of 0.70. The reliability results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. **Reliability of Research Instrument**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Cognitive Cultural Intelligence (CCQ)	0.722
2	Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence (MTCQ)	0.779
3	Motivational Cultural Intelligence (MCQ)	0.728
4	Behavioural Cultural Intelligence (BCQ)	0.733
5	Work Engagement (WEG)	0.761

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork (2025)

As shown in Table 2, all constructs returned Cronbach alpha values greater than 0.7, which confirms that the instrument is reliable for the study.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to summarise demographic characteristics and response trends. Multiple regression analysis was employed to test the influence of cultural intelligence dimensions on work engagement, in line with the research hypotheses. All statistical tests were carried out at a 5% level of significance using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25.

Findings

This section presents the findings obtained from the completed and retrieved copies of the questionnaire administered to employees of MTN in Lagos State, Nigeria. The analysis was conducted to provide empirical answers to the research questions and achieve the specific objectives of the study. The results are organised and interpreted under distinct sub-headings, including collinearity diagnostic test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), regression coefficients, hypotheses testing, and discussion of findings.

Table 3 presents the results of a collinearity diagnostic test, which assesses the level of correlation among the predictor variables in the regression model. It also shows the results of the regression of perceived organisational support (proxied by cognitive, motivational, behavioural, and meta-cognitive. It summarises the results in the model summary, coefficients and ANOVA.

Table 3. Regression Results

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t-Statistics	Probability Value	Collinearity Statistics		Hypotheses
	B	Standard Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF	
(Constant)	14.779	1.186		12.457	.000			
CCQ	.514	.108	.265	4.776	.000	.433	2.309	Significant
MTCQ	.771	.192	.398	4.016	.000	.321	3.115	Significant
MCQ	-.132	.121	-.084	-1.088	.277	.307	3.258	Insignificant
BCQ	.313	.117	.181	2.680	.008	.406	2.463	Significant

R = .791a; R-square = .626; Adj. R-square = .611; F = 56.232, Prob (Sig.) = 0.000; Dependent Variable: work engagement; Predictors: cognitive cultural intelligence, meta-cognitive cultural intelligence, motivational cultural intelligence, behavioural cultural intelligence; N = 321

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork (2025)

Table 3 shows that the tolerance values are close to 1 and this indicates that the predictor variables are not explained by the other predictor variables. This is further confirmed by the VIF values which are between 1 and 5. Hence there is low collinearity in the regression model.

Furthermore, when the cultural intelligence variables were regressed on work engagement of the employees, a correlation represented by R-value of 0.791 resulted. This indicated that the cultural intelligence variables had 79.1% relationship with work engagement. Given the value of the R^2 of 0.626, it indicated that the independent variables jointly explain 62.6% of the variation in the dependent variable, while 37.4% accounted for other factors not captured in the model. The F statistic ($F = 56.232$; $p = 0.000$) showed the significance of the combined effect of cultural intelligence on work engagement.

As Table 3 reveals, cognitive cultural intelligence significantly influence the work engagement levels of employees ($\beta = .514$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Since the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level (0.05), we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, cognitive cultural intelligence significantly influences work engagement levels of employees in MTN Lagos State.

As Table 3 reveals, metacognitive cultural intelligence has significant relationship with the work engagement of employees working ($\beta = .771, p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Since p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level (0.05), we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, metacognitive cultural intelligence has a significant relationship with work engagement of employees in MTN Lagos State.

As Table 3 reveals, motivational cultural intelligence does not significantly affects the work engagement of employees ($\beta = -.132, p = 0.277 > 0.05$). Since p-value (0.277) is greater than the significance level (0.05), we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, motivational cultural intelligence does not significantly affect work engagement of employees in MTN Lagos State.

As Table 3 reveals, behavioural cultural intelligence not significantly affects the work engagement of employees ($\beta = 0.313, p = .008 < 0.05$). Since p-value (0.008) is less than the significance level (0.05), we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, behavioural cultural intelligence significantly affects work engagement of employees in MTN Lagos State.

The study examined the effect of cultural intelligence (proxy by cognitive cultural intelligence, metacognitive cultural intelligence, motivational cultural intelligence, and behavioural cultural intelligence) on the work engagement of employees in MTN operating in Lagos State.

First, it was found that cognitive cultural intelligence significantly influenced work engagement. This finding suggests that employees with higher cognitive cultural intelligence those who better understand cultural norms, values, and practices demonstrate higher levels of work engagement. This could be because their cultural knowledge helps them navigate the diverse workplace more effectively, leading to better engagement. This aligns with Fu & Charoensukmongkol (2021) who found that being proficient with language positively influenced work engagement among multinational corporation employees. Similarly, Poort et al. (2023) demonstrated that when individuals develop high cognitive cultural intelligence, there will be increased work engagement due to their better understanding of cultural contexts.

Second, metacognitive cultural intelligence showed the strongest positive relationship with work engagement. This strong relationship suggests that employees who can effectively plan, monitor, and adjust their cultural understanding and interactions are more likely to be engaged at work. The high beta value indicates that metacognitive cultural intelligence is the most influential predictor of work engagement among all dimensions studied. This finding is supported by S. Y. Chen & Thompson (2023) who found that metacognitive cultural intelligence was a strong predictor of work engagement in multinational teams. Additionally, Patel et al. (2022) demonstrated that employees with high metacognitive cultural intelligence showed superior work engagement levels due to their ability to adapt their cultural strategies.

Third, motivational cultural intelligence did not show a statistically significant relationship with work engagement. This unexpected finding suggests that an employee's intrinsic motivation to engage with different cultures does not significantly impact their work engagement. This could indicate that in the context of MTN Lagos, other factors may be more important in driving work engagement than motivational cultural intelligence. This contrasts with studies like Quy (2018) who found positive relationships between motivational

cultural intelligence and work engagement. However, it aligns with Ramalu & Subramaniam, (2019) who found that interest on culture has no direct impact on work done in certain organisational contexts.

Finally, it was revealed that behavioural cultural intelligence significantly influenced work engagement. This finding suggests that employees who can appropriately modify their verbal and non-verbal behaviours in cross-cultural situations tend to be more engaged at work. While significant, the impact is moderate compared to cognitive and metacognitive dimensions. This aligns with research by Udegbe (2012) who found that behavioural cultural intelligence positively influenced work engagement through improved cross-cultural interactions. Similarly, Y. Chen et al. (2024) demonstrated that employees with higher behavioural cultural intelligence showed increased work engagement due to better cultural adaptation capabilities.

The findings of this study provide significant theoretical implications for the conservation of resources (COR) theory and the job-demands resources (JD-R) model. Firstly, the strong positive influence of metacognitive cultural intelligence on work engagement suggests that employees' ability to plan and adjust their cultural interactions is a crucial resource for maintaining and expanding their work engagement. This finding supports the COR theory, which posits that individuals strive to acquire, conserve, and protect their resources. In this context, metacognitive cultural intelligence serves as a valuable resource that enables employees to navigate complex cultural environments and maintain their work engagement.

The findings also provide insights into the JD-R model, which proposes that job demands and resources interact to influence employee outcomes. The study's results indicate that cognitive, metacognitive, and Behavioural cultural intelligence dimensions serve as resources that enhance work engagement, while motivational cultural intelligence does not have a significant impact. This suggests that employees' cultural intelligence resources play a critical role in mitigating the negative effects of job demands and fostering work engagement. By recognising the importance of cultural intelligence as a resource, organisations can develop targeted interventions to enhance employee cultural intelligence and promote work engagement.

The study's findings also underscore the importance of considering the multi-dimensional nature of cultural intelligence in theoretical frameworks. By examining the distinct effects of cognitive, metacognitive, behavioural, and motivational cultural intelligence on work engagement, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between cultural intelligence, work engagement, and employee outcomes. Future research can build on these findings to develop more comprehensive theories of cultural intelligence and its role in shaping employee experiences and outcomes.

The findings highlight the critical role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in enhancing work engagement within multinational companies like MTN. The combined dimensions of cultural intelligence explained 62.6% of the variance in work engagement ($R = 0.791$), demonstrating the overall importance of cultural intelligence in a multinational context. MTN should adopt a holistic approach by integrating cultural intelligence development into its organisational culture and HR policies. By investing in cultural intelligence at all levels, MTN can build a more engaged, adaptable, and collaborative workforce, ultimately enhancing its competitive advantage in the global market.

Also, given that metacognitive cultural intelligence had the strongest positive influence on work engagement ($\beta = .771$), MTN should prioritise developing employees' ability to plan, monitor, and adjust their cultural interactions. This can be achieved through targeted training programs focused on cultural reflection, awareness, and adaptive strategies, equipping employees to navigate diverse cultural environments more effectively. This, in turn, will foster higher levels of engagement and productivity across MTN's multicultural workforce.

Cognitive cultural intelligence's strong positive effect on work engagement ($\beta = .514$) underscores the importance of employees' knowledge of cultural norms and practices. MTN can enhance this by providing comprehensive cross-cultural education that covers global business practices, cultural etiquette, and the social customs of the countries where MTN operates. By building this cultural knowledge base, employees can better understand and respect their colleagues' and clients' perspectives, leading to more effective collaboration and stronger engagement.

Behavioural cultural intelligence's moderate impact ($\beta = 0.313$) suggests that employees' ability to adapt their verbal and non-verbal behaviours in multicultural interactions also plays a key role in work engagement. MTN should promote cultural adaptability by offering role-playing exercises, communication workshops, and cultural immersion experiences. Encouraging flexible communication styles and respectful behaviour adjustment will help employees interact more seamlessly across diverse cultural settings.

The lack of a significant effect of motivational cultural intelligence ($\beta = -.132, p > 0.05$) on work engagement indicates that intrinsic motivation alone is insufficient to drive engagement. Therefore, MTN should complement motivational efforts with practical support, such as mentorship programs and opportunities for cultural exchange. Creating environments where employees feel supported in their cultural interactions can reinforce motivation and improve overall engagement.

Conclusions

This study examined the effect of cultural intelligence on work engagement among employees of MTN in Lagos State, focusing on cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural dimensions. The findings indicate that cognitive, metacognitive, and behavioural cultural intelligence significantly enhance work engagement, with metacognitive cultural intelligence emerging as the strongest predictor. This suggests that employees' ability to plan, monitor, and adapt their cultural interactions, alongside their knowledge of cultural norms, plays a critical role in fostering engagement in multicultural organisational settings.

In contrast, motivational cultural intelligence did not show a significant relationship with work engagement, indicating that intrinsic interest in cross-cultural interactions alone may be insufficient to drive engagement within this context. This highlights the importance of practical and cognitive capabilities over mere willingness in culturally diverse work environments.

These findings underscore the need for organisations to adopt structured and capability-driven approaches to cultural intelligence development. To enhance employee engagement, the following actionable recommendations are proposed: Structured cultural awareness programmes: Organisations should implement regular cultural awareness workshops, such

as quarterly training sessions and onboarding modules, to strengthen cognitive cultural intelligence. These programmes should include case studies, cultural simulations, and access to digital learning resources to improve employees' understanding of diverse cultural norms and practices. Targeted development of metacognitive cultural intelligence: Given its strong influence, organisations should prioritise metacognitive cultural intelligence through training focused on cultural reflection, self-awareness, and adaptive thinking. This can be implemented through facilitated reflection sessions, coaching programmes, and mentorship schemes where experienced employees guide others in managing cross-cultural interactions. Institutionalisation of supportive organisational practices: Organisations should embed cultural intelligence into HR systems by integrating it into performance management, leadership development, and team collaboration structures. Establishing diversity and inclusion policies, recognising culturally adaptive behaviours, and supporting cross-functional and cross-cultural teams will enhance engagement outcomes. Practical enhancement of behavioural cultural intelligence: To strengthen behavioural cultural intelligence, organisations should provide hands-on learning opportunities such as role-playing exercises, communication workshops, and multicultural team assignments. Continuous feedback mechanisms should also be introduced to help employees refine their behaviour in cross-cultural contexts.

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