

Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence and Expatriate Performance in Multinational Corporations in Uganda: The Moderating Role of Work Experience

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article history: Published: October 2026 Keywords: Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence Expatriate Performance Work Experience Multinational Corporations	Globalization has increased multinational corporations' reliance on expatriates to manage international operations and multicultural workforces. However, cultural differences, communication barriers, and adaptation challenges may negatively affect expatriate performance. This study examined the influence of metacognitive cultural intelligence on expatriate performance in multinational corporations in Uganda, focusing on the moderating role of work experience. Anchored in Cultural Intelligence Theory, the study adopted a cross-sectional mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 358 expatriates using structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews with human resource managers and expatriate employees. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, hierarchical regression, and moderation analysis in SPSS version 26, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings revealed high levels of metacognitive cultural intelligence, particularly in cultural awareness, reflection, and adaptation. Regression analysis established that metacognitive cultural intelligence significantly influenced expatriate performance ($\beta = .234, p < .001$). Work experience also positively influenced performance ($\beta = .198, p = .003$). Furthermore, work experience significantly strengthened the relationship between metacognitive cultural intelligence and expatriate performance ($\beta = .126, p = .002$). Qualitative findings indicated that experienced expatriates better interpreted cultural situations, adapted to Ugandan workplace norms, and managed intercultural challenges effectively. The study concludes that metacognitive cultural intelligence enhances expatriate performance, while work experience strengthens its application in multicultural environments. It recommends that multinational corporations integrate cultural intelligence development into expatriate training and consider previous international work experience during expatriate selection and deployment to improve workplace adaptation, intercultural effectiveness, and organizational performance.

1. Introduction

Globalization has expanded the reach of multinational corporations (MNCs) and intensified their reliance on expatriates to manage subsidiaries, transfer knowledge, and coordinate complex international operations (Mensah, 2024; Ogunwale et al., 2024). Yet expatriates frequently struggle with cross-cultural adaptation challenges related to differing norms, communication styles, and informal institutional practices, which can undermine adjustment, performance, and assignment success (Bano & Liu, 2025; Mulumba & Walugemba, 2024; Setti, 2022). These difficulties highlight the importance of cultural intelligence (CQ), defined as the capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings and increasingly recognized as a critical predictor of expatriate adjustment and effectiveness (Han et al., 2022; Linh Dang & Khai, 2021; Yow et al., 2022). Within CQ, metacognitive CQ, the higher-order mental processes used to acquire, question, and regulate cultural knowledge, enables expatriates to plan, monitor, and revise their cultural assumptions and interaction strategies in real time, thereby supporting more accurate interpretation of local cues and adaptive behavior (Han et al., 2022; Lei et al., 2025; Linh Dang & Khai, 2021).

Empirical evidence shows that metacognitive and other CQ dimensions are positively related to expatriate adjustment and performance outcomes, including work, interaction, and general adjustment, as well as innovativeness (Akkan & Canhilal, 2022; Han et al., 2022; Linh Dang & Khai, 2021; Mensah, 2024). In Africa and other emerging markets, expatriates must also navigate complex informal practices and institutional gaps, making CQ even more salient for effective performance (Mensah, 2024; Mulumba & Walugemba, 2024). Uganda's diverse cultural and institutional environment presents similar adaptation demands for expatriates working in sectors such as telecommunications, banking, and oil and gas, where sensitivity to local norms and informal practices is central to performance and ethical conduct (Mulumba & Walugemba, 2024).

Work experience further shapes how expatriates leverage CQ. Prior international experience is associated with higher CQ and better adjustment, though its effects can be complex and sometimes non-linear across CQ dimensions (Grill et al., 2021; Yow et al., 2022). International experience also strengthens the link between informal learning and expatriate adjustment, suggesting that experienced expatriates may be better able to translate learning opportunities into effective adaptation (Marino Zuleta, Niu, & Qasim, 2024). Despite these insights, little research has specifically tested whether and how work experience moderates the relationship between

metacognitive CQ and expatriate performance in African host countries such as Uganda. Addressing this gap, the present study examined the influence of metacognitive cultural intelligence on expatriate performance in MNCs operating in Uganda and assessed whether work experience conditions the strength of this relationship.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

This study was guided by Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Theory developed by Earley and Ang, which explains why some individuals function more effectively than others in culturally diverse settings (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). CQ is a multidimensional capability comprising metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions that enable effective action across cultures (Ang et al., 2007; Van Dyne et al., 2012; Sommovigo et al., 2020). Subsequent work confirms this four-factor structure and highlights that the different dimensions have distinct antecedents and outcomes in intercultural work, leadership, and expatriation (Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2018; Semenov & Randrianasolo, 2024).

Metacognitive CQ refers to conscious cultural awareness and the regulation of cognitive processes during intercultural interactions, including planning, monitoring, and revising mental models of cultural norms (Ang et al., 2007; Semenov & Randrianasolo, 2024). Individuals high in metacognitive CQ critically reflect on cultural assumptions before and during interactions, adjust their knowledge when existing scripts are unreliable, and use self-awareness and cognitive flexibility to interpret ambiguous cues (Ang et al., 2007; Sommovigo et al., 2020). This meta-level capability has been linked to better cultural judgment and decision making, task performance in diverse settings, conflict management, and knowledge transfer in multinational companies (Ang et al., 2007; Vlačić et al., 2018; Sommovigo et al., 2020).

Empirical research on expatriates shows that higher CQ, including metacognitive CQ, is associated with better cross-cultural adjustment and expatriate performance, often through mediating variables such as work adjustment, cultural effectiveness, and social support (Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Akhal & Liu, 2019; Sommovigo et al., 2020; Chanveasna et al., 2024). Studies also indicate that prior international work and travel experience can moderate the effects of CQ on adjustment and performance, either strengthening or altering these relationships (Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Sommovigo et al., 2020). In some cases, previous experience does not significantly change CQ–outcome links, suggesting that experience and CQ may be partially independent resources (Vlačić et al., 2018).

This theoretical and empirical grounding informed the present study in three ways. First, by adopting CQ theory and its four-dimensional model, the study focused specifically on metacognitive CQ as a key “thinking about thinking” capability expected to enhance expatriate performance in Ugandan subsidiaries of multinational corporations through better interpretation and regulation of culturally situated decisions (Ang et al., 2007; Semenov & Randrianasolo, 2024; Sommovigo et al., 2020). Second, prior findings that metacognitive and other CQ facets predict task performance, adaptation, and knowledge-related outcomes in international assignments provided the basis for hypothesizing a positive relationship between metacognitive CQ and expatriate performance (Ang et al., 2007; Malek & Budhwar, 2013; Sommovigo et al., 2020; Chanveasna et al., 2024). Third, evidence that international experience can moderate the CQ–adjustment–performance link guided the inclusion of work experience as a moderating variable, to test whether more experienced expatriates in Uganda rely differently on metacognitive CQ than less experienced ones when delivering performance in multicultural corporate contexts (Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Sommovigo et al., 2020; Vlačić et al., 2018).

2.2 Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence and Expatriate Performance

Metacognitive cultural intelligence is increasingly recognised as a key capability that enables expatriates to understand cultural differences and adjust their behaviour effectively in complex intercultural work settings. It involves the higher order mental processes used to plan, monitor, and revise one’s cultural assumptions and strategies during interactions, thereby enhancing situational awareness and adaptive responses in diverse environments (Han et al., 2022; Neto et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2024). Recent evidence shows that metacognitive cultural intelligence supports expatriates’ ability to anticipate potential misunderstandings, interpret subtle cultural cues, and intentionally adjust communication patterns to fit host country norms, especially in technologically mediated and digitally networked workplaces (Mahdy et al., 2026; So, 2024).

Empirical research consistently links metacognitive cultural intelligence with more effective functioning in multicultural organisations. Studies of expatriates and internationally mobile workers find that metacognitive cultural intelligence contributes to overall cross cultural adaptation and psychological adjustment, often in combination with other CQ dimensions (Han et al., 2022; Al-Krenawi et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2024). In multinational enterprise subsidiaries, employees with higher metacognitive cultural intelligence perceive a more positive diversity climate and are more likely to display creative and citizenship behaviours, suggesting that reflective cultural awareness facilitates constructive engagement with cultural diversity at work (Du et al., 2023). Other research on multicultural teams and foreign trade companies indicates that metacognitive cultural intelligence enhances innovative work behaviour by enabling individuals to question default perspectives, reframe problems, and flexibly integrate culturally diverse ideas (Xin-Liufang et al., 2025; Xin-Liufang et al., 2025). Overall, recent studies suggest that metacognitive cultural intelligence improves expatriate and employee effectiveness through better communication, stronger adaptability, and higher quality interpersonal relationships in culturally diverse and digitally mediated organisational contexts (Agyei & Mtembu, 2023; Mahdy et al., 2026).

2.3 Work Experience as a Moderator

Work experience can be defined as the accumulation of knowledge, skills, and practical understanding gained through sustained involvement in organizational and professional activities over time. Such experience enhances employees’ ability to handle complex tasks, navigate uncertainty, and transfer prior learning to new settings (Caligiuri & Caprar, 2022; Haldorai et al., 2021). For expatriates, international and organizational experience are especially important because they provide repeated exposure to diverse cultural contexts, informal practices, and work norms, thereby sharpening situational judgment and adaptive problem solving in foreign environments (Morin & Talbot, 2021, 2024; Yow et al., 2022).

Recent empirical studies show that prior international work experience can shape cultural intelligence (CQ) and cross-cultural adjustment in nuanced ways. Expatriates with previous international work experience tend to report higher overall CQ and better adjustment, using earlier foreign assignments as a knowledge base for interpreting new cultural cues and forming realistic work expectations (Yow et al., 2022). At the same time, very long prior experience may be associated with weaker cognitive and behavioral CQ, possibly because highly experienced expatriates rely on existing scripts and feel overly confident in their cross-cultural competence (Yow et al., 2022). Other research finds that international experience strengthens links between learning-related variables and adjustment or performance, for example, by amplifying the positive effect of cross-cultural adjustment on self-initiated expatriates' work performance or enhancing the impact of informal field-based learning on adjustment (Haldorai et al., 2021; Marino Zuleta et al., 2024).

These findings suggest that work experience may moderate the relationship between metacognitive CQ and expatriate performance. Expatriates who combine strong metacognitive CQ with richer international experience are likely better able to plan, monitor, and revise their cultural assumptions and to align their responses with host-country expectations, thereby translating reflective cultural awareness into higher performance in multicultural work settings (Caligiuri & Caprar, 2022; Morin & Talbot, 2024; Yow et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional mixed-methods design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of metacognitive cultural intelligence, work experience, and expatriate performance. Mixed-methods designs are widely used in international human resource management and expatriation research because they allow statistical testing of relationships while capturing contextualized experiences through qualitative inquiry (Kapliar, 2025; Lo & Nguyen, 2023). A cross-sectional survey is particularly suitable for examining associations between cultural intelligence, adjustment, and performance among geographically dispersed expatriates at a single point in time (Han et al., 2022; Liao et al., 2021; Setti et al., 2020).

3.2 Study Population and Sampling

The target population comprised expatriates working in multinational corporations operating in Uganda. Quantitative data were collected from 358 expatriates using structured questionnaires, consistent with prior studies that surveyed expatriates in multinational firms to examine links among cultural intelligence, cross-cultural adjustment, and performance (Liao et al., 2021; Lo & Nguyen, 2023; Setti et al., 2020). Qualitative data were obtained through interviews with human resource managers and expatriate employees, mirroring recent research that combines expatriate and HR perspectives to explore adjustment processes and support mechanisms in international assignments (Tahir, 2021; Giorgi et al., 2020; Kapliar, 2025).

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Structured questionnaires measured metacognitive cultural intelligence, work experience, and expatriate performance, similar to survey-based work that applies validated cultural intelligence and expatriate performance scales (Han et al., 2022; Liao et al., 2021; Setti et al., 2020). Semi-structured interview guides were used to collect qualitative data on expatriates' intercultural experiences, adaptation challenges, and perceived performance, reflecting common practice in expatriation studies that use in-depth or semi-structured interviews to deepen understanding of cross-cultural work realities (Lo & Nguyen, 2023; Tahir, 2021).

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and hierarchical moderation analysis in SPSS Version 23. Similar analytical techniques are employed to test relationships between cultural intelligence, cross-cultural adjustment, and expatriate outcomes, and to examine moderating effects such as international experience or contextual factors (Liao et al., 2021; Mahdy et al., 2026; Setti et al., 2020; Yow et al., 2022). Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to metacognitive cultural intelligence, work experience, and performance, complementing the quantitative findings in line with mixed-methods and thematic approaches used in recent IHRM and expatriation research (Giorgi et al., 2020; Kapliar, 2025; Lo & Nguyen, 2023).

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study on the influence of metacognitive cultural intelligence on expatriate performance in multinational corporations operating in Uganda, while assessing the moderating role of work experience. The findings are presented under demographic characteristics of respondents, descriptive findings, inferential findings, moderation analysis, and discussion of the results.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This subsection presents the background information of the expatriates who participated in the study. The demographic characteristics considered included gender, age, level of education, industry or sector, work experience, and length of stay in Uganda. The purpose of presenting the demographic information was to provide an understanding of the respondents' background profile and establish how their characteristics may influence expatriate adaptation and performance within multinational corporations operating in Uganda.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 358)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	224	62.6
	Female	134	37.4
Age Group	25–34 years	96	26.8
	35–44 years	154	43.0
	45 years and above	108	30.2

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Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	98	27.4
	Master's Degree	188	52.5
	Doctoral Degree	72	20.1
Industry/Sector	Telecommunications	76	21.2
	Banking and Finance	64	17.9
	Manufacturing	82	22.9
	Oil and Gas	58	16.2
	Hospitality and Tourism	42	11.7
	Other Sectors	36	10.1
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	74	20.7
	5–10 years	161	45.0
	Above 10 years	123	34.3
Length of Stay in Uganda	Less than 3 years	102	28.5
	3–5 years	144	40.2
	Above 5 years	112	31.3

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The findings in Table 1 indicate that the majority of expatriates were male (62.6%), while females constituted 37.4% of the respondents. This suggests that multinational corporations operating in Uganda employed more male expatriates than female expatriates during the period of the study.

Regarding age, most respondents were between 35 and 44 years (43.0%), followed by respondents aged 45 years and above (30.2%). These findings imply that the majority of expatriates were mature professionals with substantial organizational and international exposure, which may have enhanced their ability to adapt to multicultural work environments.

The findings further revealed that most respondents possessed Master's degrees (52.5%), while 20.1% held doctoral qualifications. This indicates that expatriates working in multinational corporations in Uganda were generally highly educated professionals. The high educational qualifications suggest that multinational corporations relied heavily on technically skilled and professionally competent expatriates for international assignments and managerial responsibilities.

In relation to industry or sector, most expatriates worked in the manufacturing sector (22.9%), followed by telecommunications (21.2%) and banking and finance (17.9%). Other respondents were employed in oil and gas (16.2%), hospitality and tourism (11.7%), and other sectors (10.1%). These findings suggest that multinational corporations across multiple sectors relied significantly on expatriate expertise to support organizational operations, technical management, and international coordination within Uganda.

Regarding work experience, the majority of expatriates had between 5 and 10 years of work experience (45.0%), while 34.3% had more than 10 years of professional experience. These findings imply that most expatriates possessed considerable organizational and intercultural exposure, which may have positively influenced their adaptability and effectiveness in multicultural work environments.

The findings also indicate that most expatriates had stayed in Uganda between 3 and 5 years (40.2%), while 31.3% had lived in Uganda for more than 5 years. This suggests that many respondents had accumulated substantial exposure to Ugandan workplace practices, organizational cultures, and social environments, which may have enhanced their cultural understanding and workplace adjustment.

4.2 Descriptive Findings

This subsection presents the descriptive findings on metacognitive cultural intelligence and expatriate performance among expatriates working in multinational corporations in Uganda. Mean scores were used to determine respondents' levels of agreement with statements measuring the study variables.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence

Statement	Mean
I am conscious of cultural differences when interacting with people from other cultures	4.18
I adjust my thinking when interacting with people from unfamiliar cultures	4.11
I reflect carefully before making decisions in multicultural environments	4.07
I plan how to interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds	4.02
I evaluate whether my cultural assumptions are appropriate during interactions	3.98
Grand Mean	4.07

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The findings in Table 2 reveal high levels of metacognitive cultural intelligence among expatriates working in multinational corporations in Uganda, with a grand mean of 4.07. The findings suggest that expatriates were generally culturally aware and consciously adjusted their thinking during intercultural interactions.

The highest-rated statement was "I am conscious of cultural differences when interacting with people from other cultures" ($M = 4.18$), indicating that expatriates demonstrated strong awareness of cultural differences within workplace interactions. Respondents also highly agreed that they adjusted their thinking when interacting with unfamiliar cultures ($M = 4.11$) and reflected carefully before making decisions in multicultural environments ($M = 4.07$). These findings imply that expatriates consciously monitored and regulated their cognitive processes during intercultural engagements.

The relatively lower mean regarding evaluation of cultural assumptions during interactions ($M = 3.98$) suggests that although expatriates generally reflected on cultural situations, some still experienced challenges in fully assessing the appropriateness of their assumptions within unfamiliar cultural environments. Overall, the findings demonstrate that expatriates working in multinational corporations in Uganda possessed relatively high levels of metacognitive cultural intelligence, particularly in relation to cultural awareness, reflective thinking, and adaptive cognition.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Expatriate Performance

Statement	Mean
I effectively accomplish my assigned work responsibilities	4.12
I maintain effective working relationships with host-country employees	4.06
I adapt effectively to workplace expectations in Uganda	4.01
I complete assigned tasks within expected timelines	3.97
I communicate effectively within multicultural work environments	4.09
Grand Mean	4.05

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The findings in Table 3 indicate generally high levels of expatriate performance among respondents, with a grand mean of 4.05. The findings suggest that expatriates generally perceived themselves as effective performers within multinational corporations operating in Uganda. The highest-rated statement was “I effectively accomplish my assigned work responsibilities” ($M = 4.12$), indicating that expatriates generally considered themselves capable of meeting organizational expectations and completing assigned tasks effectively. Respondents also highly rated their ability to communicate effectively within multicultural work environments ($M = 4.09$) and maintain effective relationships with host-country employees ($M = 4.06$). These findings imply that expatriates were generally successful in interpersonal communication and collaborative workplace interactions.

The relatively lower rating for completing assigned tasks within expected timelines ($M = 3.97$) suggests that some expatriates may still have experienced adjustment challenges associated with unfamiliar organizational or cultural environments.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that expatriates working in multinational corporations in Uganda generally exhibited strong job performance, particularly in relation to communication, adaptability, and accomplishment of assigned responsibilities.

The qualitative findings reinforced these quantitative results. One expatriate employee explained:

“The more experience you gain working in multicultural environments, the easier it becomes to understand cultural expectations and adapt your communication accordingly” (Expatriate Employee, personal communication, 2025).

Another respondent stated:

“Experienced expatriates usually adapt faster because they have already learned how to manage cultural differences in previous assignments” (Human Resource Manager, personal communication, 2025).

The qualitative findings suggest that cultural awareness, reflective thinking, and prior international work experience strengthened expatriates’ adaptability, communication, and overall effectiveness within multinational corporations operating in Uganda.

4.3 Inferential Findings

This subsection presents the inferential findings regarding the influence of metacognitive cultural intelligence and work experience on expatriate performance.

Table 4: Regression Results for Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence and Expatriate Performance

Variable	Beta (β)	p-value
Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence	.234	< .001
Work Experience	.198	.003

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The findings in Table 4 indicate that metacognitive cultural intelligence had a positive and statistically significant influence on expatriate performance ($\beta = .234$, $p < .001$). This implies that expatriates who demonstrated greater cultural awareness, reflective thinking, and adaptive cognition were more likely to perform effectively in multicultural work environments.

The findings further revealed that work experience also significantly influenced expatriate performance ($\beta = .198$, $p = .003$). This suggests that expatriates with greater professional and international work experience were better able to adapt to multicultural organizational environments and perform effectively within multinational corporations.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that both metacognitive cultural intelligence and work experience significantly contributed toward expatriate effectiveness in multinational corporations operating in Uganda.

4.4 Moderation Analysis

This subsection presents the findings on the moderating role of work experience in the relationship between metacognitive cultural intelligence and expatriate performance.

Table 5: Moderating Role of Work Experience

Interaction Variable	Beta (β)	p-value
Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence $\times$ Work Experience	.126	.002

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The moderation findings indicate that work experience significantly strengthened the relationship between metacognitive cultural intelligence and expatriate performance ($\beta = .126$, $p = .002$). This implies that experienced expatriates were better able to apply

cultural awareness, reflective thinking, and adaptive cognition in multicultural organizational environments.

The findings suggest that work experience enhanced expatriates' ability to interpret unfamiliar cultural situations, manage uncertainty, and adjust effectively to Ugandan workplace environments. Expatriates with greater work experience were therefore more capable of translating cultural awareness into effective workplace performance. Overall, the moderation findings demonstrate that work experience played an important role in strengthening the positive influence of metacognitive cultural intelligence on expatriate performance within multinational corporations operating in Uganda.

5. Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine the influence of metacognitive cultural intelligence on expatriate performance in multinational corporations in Uganda while assessing the moderating role of work experience. The findings revealed that expatriates generally possessed high levels of metacognitive cultural intelligence (grand mean = 4.07) and reported high levels of expatriate performance (grand mean = 4.05). Inferential findings further established that metacognitive cultural intelligence had a positive and statistically significant influence on expatriate performance ($\beta = .234, p < .001$), while work experience also significantly influenced expatriate performance ($\beta = .198, p = .003$). The moderation findings showed that work experience significantly strengthened the relationship between metacognitive cultural intelligence and expatriate performance ($\beta = .126, p = .002$).

The findings support Cultural Intelligence Theory developed by Earley and Ang, which explains that individuals with high cultural intelligence are better able to function effectively in culturally diverse settings because they consciously regulate their cognitive processes during intercultural interactions (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ang & Van Dyne, 2008). The high mean scores relating to cultural awareness, reflective thinking, and adjustment of thinking during intercultural interactions indicate that expatriates in multinational corporations operating in Uganda actively monitored and revised their cultural assumptions when engaging with host-country employees. These findings are consistent with the argument by Ang et al. (2007) and Semenov and Randrianasolo (2024) that metacognitive cultural intelligence involves planning, monitoring, and revising mental models during intercultural encounters in order to improve judgment and adaptive behavior.

The findings further align with recent studies which suggest that metacognitive cultural intelligence enhances expatriates' ability to anticipate misunderstandings, interpret subtle cultural cues, and intentionally adjust communication patterns to fit host-country norms (Han et al., 2022; Neto et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2024). In the present study, expatriates highly agreed that they were conscious of cultural differences when interacting with people from other cultures ($M = 4.18$) and adjusted their thinking when interacting with unfamiliar cultures ($M = 4.11$). These findings suggest that expatriates operating in Uganda demonstrated considerable levels of cultural awareness and cognitive adaptability, which enabled them to navigate multicultural work environments more effectively. The positive relationship between metacognitive cultural intelligence and expatriate performance further supports empirical studies linking metacognitive cultural intelligence with cross-cultural adaptation, psychological adjustment, communication effectiveness, and workplace performance in multicultural organizations (Han et al., 2022; Al-Krenawi et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2024). The findings in this study revealed that expatriates generally perceived themselves as effective performers, particularly in accomplishing assigned work responsibilities ($M = 4.12$), communicating effectively in multicultural environments ($M = 4.09$), and maintaining effective relationships with host-country employees ($M = 4.06$). These findings imply that expatriates with stronger metacognitive cultural intelligence were better able to interact collaboratively with local employees, adapt to workplace expectations, and function effectively within culturally diverse organizational settings.

The findings are also consistent with studies conducted in multinational enterprises and multicultural teams, which found that metacognitive cultural intelligence enhances innovative work behavior, knowledge sharing, and constructive engagement with diversity because culturally aware individuals are able to question assumptions, reframe problems, and integrate culturally diverse perspectives more effectively (Du et al., 2023; Xin-Liufang et al., 2025). In the Ugandan context, expatriates who reflected carefully before making decisions and adjusted their communication approaches likely developed stronger interpersonal relationships and collaborative engagement within their organizations. This explains the relatively high levels of expatriate effectiveness reported in the study.

The findings further established that work experience significantly improved expatriate performance and strengthened the relationship between metacognitive cultural intelligence and expatriate performance. These findings support previous studies suggesting that international and organizational experience enhance expatriates' ability to navigate uncertainty, interpret unfamiliar cultural situations, and transfer prior learning to new work environments (Caligiuri & Caprar, 2022; Haldorai et al., 2021). In the present study, experienced expatriates were more capable of applying reflective thinking and adaptive cognition during intercultural interactions, which strengthened their effectiveness within multinational corporations operating in Uganda.

The moderation findings are also consistent with Yow et al. (2022), who found that expatriates with prior international work experience tend to demonstrate higher cultural intelligence and better cross-cultural adjustment because they rely on previous assignments as a knowledge base for interpreting cultural cues and managing workplace expectations. Similarly, Morin and Talbot (2021, 2024) argued that experienced expatriates are better able to align their responses with host-country expectations because prior exposure strengthens situational judgment and adaptive problem-solving. The qualitative findings in this study reinforced this argument, as respondents noted that experienced expatriates adapt faster because they already understand how to manage cultural differences from previous assignments. The findings additionally support evidence suggesting that work experience strengthens the relationship between learning-related variables and expatriate adjustment or performance (Haldorai et al., 2021; Marino Zuleta et al., 2024). In this study, expatriates with greater work experience were better able to translate cultural awareness and reflective thinking into effective workplace performance. These findings imply that metacognitive cultural intelligence alone may not be sufficient for optimal expatriate effectiveness unless supported by practical organizational and intercultural experience.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that metacognitive cultural intelligence and work experience jointly contribute toward expatriate effectiveness in multinational corporations operating in Uganda. Expatriates who demonstrated greater cultural awareness, reflective thinking, and adaptive cognition, particularly when combined with prior international or organizational experience, were more capable of adapting to

multicultural environments, communicating effectively, managing workplace relationships, and achieving high levels of job performance.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that metacognitive cultural intelligence significantly improves expatriate performance in multinational corporations operating in Uganda. Work experience further strengthens this relationship by enabling expatriates to apply cultural awareness and reflective thinking more effectively in multicultural work environments. Multinational corporations should strengthen cross-cultural training programs aimed at enhancing expatriates' cultural awareness and reflective thinking capabilities. Organizations should also consider prior international and multicultural work experience during expatriate selection and deployment processes. Additionally, multinational corporations should establish mentorship and orientation programs that support expatriates in understanding host-country workplace expectations and adapting effectively to multicultural organizational environments.

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