Strategic Drivers of Students' Intention to Work Abroad: Evidence from Vietnamese International Students in Australia

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Abstract

In the era of rapid technological change and rising global uncertainty — where digitalisation, remote work and skills churn reshape organisational strategies — workforce mobility and the readiness of early-career talent constitute a key element of business dynamics in the disruptive economy. This study examines how disaggregated dimensions of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and selected Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) antecedents predict students' intention to work abroad, and whether Multicultural Experience (MCE) moderates these relationships. Motivated by limited attention to current international students and the frequent treatment of CQ as an aggregate construct, we test metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioural CQ alongside subjective norm in a sample of 458 Vietnamese international students in Australia. Results indicate that metacognitive CQ is the strongest predictor of intention to work abroad, followed by behavioural, motivational and cognitive CQ; subjective norm also contributes positively. Crucially, MCE significantly moderates the effects of motivational and behavioural CQ, amplifying their association with intention. Findings suggest that interventions aimed at strengthening reflective cultural awareness and observable behavioural adaptability—combined with structured multicultural exposure—are likely to increase international career intentions among students. By linking these intention patterns to organisational levers for sourcing, developing and deploying globally mobile early-career talent, the study informs workforce strategy in disruptive contexts. The study contributes to TPB research by mapping CQ dimensions onto belief- and control-related antecedents and highlights MCE as an important boundary condition for translating capability into intention.

Research purpose:
This study examines how specific dimensions of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) antecedents shape students' intention to work abroad, and tests whether Multicultural Experience (MCE) moderates these relationships among Vietnamese international students in Australia.

Research motivation:
Prior research has focused on employees or recent graduates and often treats CQ as an aggregate construct or treats MCE as a control variable. We address these gaps by disaggregating CQ into metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioural dimensions, mapping selected dimensions onto TPB constructs, and explicitly testing MCE as a moderator.

Research design, approach, and method:
A cross-sectional survey collected 458 valid responses from Vietnamese students in Australia. Validated scales were adapted for the sample; MCE was operationalised as an exposure/interaction index and reduced to an 8-item scale after EFA. Data were analysed using PLS-SEM (SmartPLS) to assess measurement and structural models, with bootstrapping to test hypotheses.

Main findings:
Metacognitive CQ emerged as the strongest predictor of intention to work abroad, followed by behavioural, motivational and cognitive CQ; subjective norm also had a positive effect. MCE significantly moderated the effects of motivational and behavioural CQ on intention, amplifying these relationships. The full model explained ≈52% of variance in intention ($R^2 \approx 0.52$).

Practical/managerial implications:
Results suggest higher education providers and employers should prioritise metacognitive and behavioural CQ development and foster structured multicultural experiences to enhance students' global career readiness.

Keywords: Cultural intelligence, intention to work abroad, multicultural experience, Theory of Planned Behaviour, international students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalisation, multinational enterprises require a global workforce to foster innovation (Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010), facilitate knowledge transfer (Edström & Galbraith, 1977), and expand relational networks (Parrotta, Pozzoli, & Pytlikova, 2014). However, retaining talent effectively in the dynamic international environment remains a major challenge (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). The international mobility of highly skilled individuals has grown in importance, increasing the relevance of research on overseas employment. Numerous studies have shown that international work experience enhances professional competence (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007), supports personal development (Osland, 2000; Sanchez, Spector, & Cooper, 2000), and broadens career opportunities (Chew & Zhu, 2002). Much prior research has focused on employees or recent graduates, while relatively fewer studies examine the intentions of current students — a group that represents an important pipeline of future global talent (Froese, Jommersbach, & Klautzsch, 2013; Gong & Jia, 2022; Harvey, Napier, & Moeller, 2011). Empirical evidence specifically on Vietnamese international students in Australia is comparatively limited, despite this group being an important population for understanding cross-border career intentions.

Recent shifts - including accelerated digital transformation, remote and hybrid working models, automation, and geopolitical uncertainties — are changing how firms secure and deploy talent. These forces create new business dynamics in which the mobility and cross-cultural readiness of early-career talent (e.g., international students) directly affect firms' capacity to innovate and remain competitive. By investigating cultural intelligence and multicultural experience as drivers of students' intention to work abroad, this study therefore addresses organisational challenges and human-capital strategies arising from these dynamics. Understanding the antecedents of international career intention provides actionable inputs for firms' workforce planning, global staffing, onboarding and mobility policies, with implications for assignment success, innovation capacity and time-to-productivity. In this paper, the term 'strategic drivers' denotes empirical factors that can inform organisational talent decisions and policy design, rather than prescriptive mandates for immediate, firm-wide strategic overhaul.

According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), behavioural intention is shaped by three antecedents: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. While TPB has been widely applied in domains such as consumer behaviour (Emekci, 2019), politics (Gibson, Lamm, Woosnam, & Croom, 2021), and health (Conner, Norman, & Bell, 2002), its integration with intercultural capability constructs in international management remains underdeveloped. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) — the capability to adapt effectively across cultural contexts — has been recognised as a key intercultural capability (Earley & Ang, 2003), but it is often examined as an aggregate construct. Following Ajzen (1991)'s behavioural-belief logic and Ang et al. (2007), we disaggregate CQ into four dimensions and map them onto TPB antecedents: metacognitive and cognitive CQ function as belief- and knowledge-based components that inform evaluative judgments relevant to attitude, whereas motivational and behavioural CQ capture motivational resources and enacted competencies that relate closely to perceived behavioural control. This conceptual mapping also draws on Bandura (1991)'s self-efficacy framework to justify the link between enacted capability (behavioural CQ) and perceived control.

Concretely, metacognitive CQ reflects reflective cultural awareness and the ability to plan and monitor cross-cultural interactions; cognitive CQ denotes culturally relevant knowledge that informs evaluations of international work; motivational CQ indicates the desire and confidence to engage across cultures; and behavioural CQ denotes observable skills and adaptability that underpin enactment. This dimensional approach is particularly relevant to students, who may have limited practical experience but are actively preparing for international careers.

Furthermore, Multicultural Experience (MCE) provides a framework for assessing past international exposure that may condition how CQ translates into intention. We model MCE as a moderator: individuals with greater multicultural experience are expected to convert CQ more effectively into concrete intentions because such experience supplies contextual practice, reduces uncertainty about cross-cultural work, and increases perceived feasibility of working abroad. Prior research has more commonly treated MCE as an independent predictor or control variable rather than explicitly testing its moderating role.

Based on these considerations, this study examines the strategic drivers of students' intention to work abroad by integrating CQ dimensions within the TPB framework and testing MCE as a moderator. Focusing on Vietnamese international students in Australia, the study has three objectives: (1) to examine how CQ dimensions and TPB antecedents predict intention to work abroad among current students; (2) to unpack CQ at the dimensional level within the TPB framework; and (3) to test whether multicultural experience strengthens the effects of CQ on intention. In so doing, the paper aims to contribute to theory — by linking dimensional CQ and TPB — and to practice, by informing policies and programmes that enhance international career readiness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour, developed by Ajzen (1991), emphasises that intention is the most immediate determinant of behaviour. TPB suggests that the intention to perform a behaviour — such as working abroad — can be explained by attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2020).

Attitude (ATT) refers to the extent to which an individual evaluates a specific behaviour positively or negatively. Attitudes are shaped by beliefs about possible outcomes and their evaluations, which may vary across different groups (Remhof, Gunkel, & Schlaegel, 2014). Subjective norm (SN) reflects social pressure from significant others. Although some studies argue that SN is a weak predictor (Boies & Rothstein, 2002), other evidence supports its influence on intention (Donald, Cooper, & Conchie, 2014; Lee, Chiang, Hwang, Chi, & Lin, 2016; Muzaffar, Chapman-Novakofski, Castelli, & Scherer, 2014; Vabø & Hansen, 2016). Remhof et al. (2014) note that when a person's social environment views international assignments positively and the individual is motivated to comply, the likelihood of stronger intentions to work abroad increases. Finally, perceived behavioural control (PBC) reflects beliefs about one's capability to perform a behaviour (Van der Velde, Bossink, & Jansen, 2005). As Ajzen (2002) notes, "a high level of perceived behavioural control will strengthen a person's intention to perform a behaviour and increase effort and persistence." When individuals believe they can manage situational factors, they are more likely to form stronger intentions to perform a specific behaviour; conversely, lack of perceived control may weaken such intentions (Nguyen, 2017).

2.1.2. Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Cultural Intelligence was defined by Earley & Ang (2003) as an individual's capability to successfully adapt to new cultural contexts — that is, unfamiliar situations shaped by cultural factors. Ang et al. (2007) argued that CQ can be measured through four components: metacognitive CQ (MC), cognitive CQ (COG), motivational CQ (MOT), and behavioural CQ (BEH).

According to Ang et al. (2007), "Metacognitive CQ reflects the mental processes individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge." Individuals with high metacognitive CQ are capable of planning, monitoring, and mentally adjusting to cultural norms across nations. Cognitive CQ, on the other hand, reflects knowledge of norms, practices, and conventions in different cultures, acquired through education and personal experience (Ang et al., 2007). Moreover, motivational CQ is defined as an individual's capability to direct attention and energy towards learning and functioning in culturally diverse situations (Rockstuhl, Seiler, Ang, Van Dyne, & Annen, 2011). Finally, behavioural CQ refers to the capability to demonstrate appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviours when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds (Van Dyne, Ang, & Livermore, 2010). Thomas (2006) also emphasised that the ability to interact effectively with multicultural individuals and to regulate or avoid inappropriate behaviours is an essential aspect of behavioural CQ.

2.1.3. Multicultural Experiences (MCE)

Multicultural experience consists of two main forms: multicultural exposure and multicultural interactions. First, multicultural exposure refers to situations in which an individual observes elements or members of different cultures without direct interaction — for example, watching people from different cultures, trying diverse cuisines, watching foreign films or videos, listening to people speaking another language, or admiring foreign architecture. Second, multicultural interactions describe all experiences involving verbal or non-verbal communication, actions, or reciprocal influence between an individual and members of a foreign culture (Aytug, Kern, & Dilchert, 2018). Both forms of experience help individuals build contextual knowledge and practice, which can in turn support the development of the motivational and behavioural aspects of CQ (Hu, Gu, Liu, & Huang, 2017).

2.1.4. Intention to work abroad (IWA)

Following Remhof et al. (2014), the intention to work abroad is defined as the extent to which an individual plans or intends to pursue employment overseas. Lundstrom, White, & Schuster (1996) argue that potential employers often prefer candidates who have direct experience living in another culture, as such individuals tend to show greater tolerance for ambiguity and cultural differences. Toncar & Cudmore (2000) further add that these individuals are more open-minded, adaptable, and skilled at handling situations in multicultural environments. Together, these findings suggest that IWA can foster personal development and deliver value to organisations operating in global contexts.

2.2. Hypothesis development

2.2.1. The relationship between attitude towards behaviour and intention to work abroad

Ajzen (1991) noted that attitudes towards behaviour arise from behavioural beliefs — individuals' subjective evaluations of the positive or negative outcomes of a behaviour. Accordingly, this study measures attitude-related beliefs through relevant CQ dimensions rather than via a broad attitude scale. Metacognitive cultural intelligence reflects the belief in one's ability to monitor and adjust thinking, while cognitive cultural intelligence captures knowledge of cultural norms

and conventions, enabling effective responses in multicultural contexts (Van Dyne et al., 2010). Consistent with Ajzen (2002)'s view that attitudes may be assessed indirectly via behavioural beliefs, we employ MC and COG as proxies for attitude because they capture the belief- and knowledge-based evaluations that inform favourable or unfavourable judgments about working abroad. This proxy approach is particularly appropriate for student samples who may lack extensive prior work experience but hold culturally informed beliefs and knowledge that shape their intentions.

2.2.1.1. The relationship between metacognitive cultural intelligence and intention to work abroad

Metacognitive CQ involves an individual's strategic thinking about cultural differences. A high level of metacognitive CQ enables individuals to recognise the importance of preparation and planning for intercultural interactions when living and working abroad. Such preparation (e.g., planning, cultural sense-making) supports confidence and perceived benefits of international work, which prior studies link to stronger intentions to pursue overseas employment (Ang et al., 2007; Remhof, Gunkel, & Schlägel, 2013). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. *Metacognitive cultural intelligence positively influences international students' intention to work abroad.*

2.2.1.2. The relationship between cognitive cultural intelligence and intention to work abroad

When living and working abroad, individuals enter a national context where cultural norms and values may differ significantly from those of their home country (Remhof et al., 2014). Cognitive CQ — knowledge of norms, practices, and conventions acquired from education and experience — provides a basis for anticipating and evaluating cross-cultural situations. Hence, individuals with higher cognitive CQ are expected to form more positive evaluations regarding the feasibility and desirability of working abroad, increasing their intention to do so. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. *Cognitive cultural intelligence positively influences international students' intention to work abroad.*

2.2.2. The relationship between subjective norms and intention to work abroad

Subjective norm (SN) refers to an individual's normative belief about what important others think regarding a particular behaviour, as well as the extent to which the individual is motivated to comply with these perceptions (Ajzen, 1991). For some researchers, subjective norm is considered the weakest predictor of intention (Liñán, Nabi, & Krueger, 2013). However, prior studies have likewise shown SN's influence on behavioural intentions in career and mobility contexts (Donald et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2016; Muzaffar et al., 2014; Vabø & Hansen, 2016). In the context of working abroad, the attitudes of family members, peers and role models can shape perceived social support and approval, which in turn affect individuals' inclination to pursue international assignments (Otto & Dalbert, 2012; Remhof et al., 2014). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. *Subjective norm positively influences international students' intention to work abroad.*

2.2.3. The relationship between perceived behavioural control and intention to work abroad

Perceived behavioural control (PBC) reflects an individual's perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform a given behaviour and is assumed to capture both past experiences and anticipated obstacles (Ajzen & Driver, 1992). In this study, we represent perceived control over international work behaviour using two CQ dimensions — motivational CQ (MOT) and behavioural CQ (BEH), because these dimensions reflect, respectively, the motivational resources (desire, confidence to engage) and enacted capabilities (skills to perform) that closely map onto self-efficacy and control beliefs in TPB. Together, these two variables capture perceptions of proactive motivation and adaptive competence relevant to managing overseas work contexts. We acknowledge that using CQ dimensions as proxies for PBC departs from measuring PBC directly; this choice is theory-driven and justified by the alignment between Ajzen (1991)'s behavioural-belief logic, Bandura (1991)'s self-efficacy concept, and Ang et al. (2007)'s dimensionalisation of CQ. We note as a limitation that alternative operationalizations (direct ATT/PBC scales) are not tested in this study and recommend future research to compare these approaches.

2.2.3.1. The relationship between motivational cultural intelligence and intention to work abroad

The motivational component of CQ reflects the extent and direction of effort that an individual applies to learning and functioning effectively in cross-cultural situations (Ang et al., 2007). Templer, Tay, & Chandrasekar (2006) and other studies report positive links between motivational CQ and psychological adjustment in intercultural settings (Ang et al., 2007; Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh, & Tangirala, 2010). Individuals with higher motivational CQ tend to have greater confidence and willingness to engage abroad, which increases perceived feasibility and strengthens intentions to work overseas (Remhof et al., 2014).

H4. *Motivational cultural intelligence has a positive effect on international students' intention to work abroad.*

2.2.3.2. The relationship between behavioural cultural intelligence and intention to work abroad

The behavioural component of CQ encompasses adjustments in both verbal and non-verbal actions to meet the demands of cross-cultural interactions (Van Dyne et al., 2010). High behavioural CQ equips individuals with observable skills that increase efficacy in intercultural contexts, thereby enhancing perceived control and intention to pursue international work (Remhof et al., 2013). Thus, behavioural adaptability and enacted competence are expected to positively relate to IWA.

H5. *Behavioural cultural intelligence has a positive effect on international students' intention to work abroad.*

2.2.4. The moderating role of multicultural experience in the relationship between cultural intelligence and intention to work abroad

An individual can become familiar with another culture through various means, such as traveling, studying, reading books, or watching television programmes, and through interpersonal interactions (Crowne, 2008). These experiences help transform observations into practical understanding (Hu et al., 2017). Multicultural experiences, including both exposure and interaction, allow individuals to "learn how to select and apply appropriate tools, adjusting them when necessary" (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006). By providing contextual practice and reducing uncertainty, MCE helps translate CQ into concrete intentions by increasing perceived feasibility. Hu et al. (2017) and Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu (2008) suggest that such experiences deepen cultural knowledge, increase adaptive self-awareness, and build resilience; empirical work also indicates that higher MCE is associated with greater motivational regulation and behavioural flexibility in new cultural environments (Iskhakova & Kosheleva, 2023).

We adopt established criteria for moderator variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986) to justify the conditional role of MCE. MCE is conceptually distinct from CQ, shows meaningful inter-individual variation, and is linked to mechanisms that can alter the strength of CQ-intention relationships. CQ comprises metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioural facets (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003), whereas MCE denotes accumulated exposure to and interaction with diverse cultural contexts; this conceptual separateness supports MCE as a conditioning variable. From a social-cognitive perspective, repeated multicultural exposure provides mastery and vicarious experiences that enhance domain-specific self-efficacy and perceived behavioural control (Bandura, 1977), increasing the likelihood that motivational CQ will be translated into behavioural intention. From an experiential-learning perspective, concrete multicultural encounters followed by reflection and active experimentation consolidate procedural knowledge and adaptive routines (Kolb, 2014), facilitating the translation of behavioural CQ into intention. Evidence from the transfer-of-training literature and recent empirical studies further indicates that contextual practice and feedback improve the generalisability of learned skills and promote motivational regulation and behavioural flexibility in novel cultural settings (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Hu et al., 2017; Leung et al., 2008). Because these proximal mechanisms, uncertainty reduction and greater proceduralisation and transferability of adaptive skills, map most directly onto motivational and behavioural facets of CQ (the resources that convert readiness into enacted responses), MCE is most plausibly expected to condition the relationship between motivational CQ and intention and the relationship between behavioural CQ and intention. By contrast, metacognitive and cognitive CQ primarily index reflective planning and stored cultural knowledge that shape evaluative judgments and can be developed through instruction, study, or reflective practice even without extensive direct intercultural exposure (Ajzen, 1991; Ang et al., 2007; Hu et al., 2017). Consequently, within the cross-sectional student context of the present study we focus moderation hypotheses on motivational and behavioural CQ while leaving potential interactions between MCE and the metacognitive or cognitive facets for future longitudinal or intervention research.

H6. *Multicultural experiences positively moderate the relationship between motivational CQ and international students' intention to work abroad.*

H7. *Multicultural experiences positively moderate the relationship between behavioural CQ and international students' intention to work abroad.*

Based on the above hypotheses, we propose the following model:

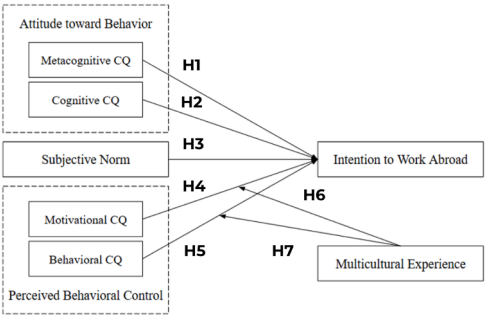

Fig. 1. Proposed Research Model

3. METHODOLOGY

A Likert scale was employed to measure the variables. A five-point Likert scale was used (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). The research procedure consisted of six steps: (1) identifying the research problem and objectives, (2) conducting a literature review, (3) developing the research model and measurement scales, (4) conducting a pilot survey, (5) collecting the main data, and (6) analysing the data using statistical tools. The target population comprised Vietnamese international students in Australia, who were reached through convenience sampling on social media platforms and student communities. The study adopted validated scales, including the subjective norm (SN) scale developed by Ajzen (1991) and the CQ scale developed by Ang et al. (2007). IWA items were presented as probabilistic choices (20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, 100%) and were coded 1–5 for analysis (1 = 20%, 2 = 40%, 3 = 60%, 4 = 80%, 5 = 100%). MCE was measured using an exposure instrument adapted from Aytug et al. (2018): items capture both 'multicultural exposure' (e.g., watching foreign films, listening to foreign music, admiring foreign architecture) and 'multicultural interaction' (e.g., talking with or socialising with people from other cultures). The MCE items in the questionnaire used a frequency/exposure response format with values ranging from 1 to 6.

The questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese and refined following a pilot test with 10 respondents, which led to minor wording edits and confirmed face validity. Data were processed using SPSS 26 and SmartPLS 4.0, following the analytical procedure proposed by Hair Jr et al. (2021), to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. Data screening steps included checks for missing values, outliers and response patterns. The analyses included scale validation, structural model assessment, and hypothesis testing. Measurement and structural analyses were conducted using SmartPLS 4.0 and SPSS 26. Measurement model assessment and structural model testing followed standard PLS-SEM procedures.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1. Descriptive Statistics

The survey yielded 458 valid responses out of 535 returned questionnaires (validity rate = 85.6%). Sample characteristics are summarised in Table 1: the sample was slightly female-dominant (50.4% female), primarily young (78.2% aged 18–23) and mostly undergraduate students (85.6% holding or studying for a bachelor's degree). Respondents were concentrated in major Australian cities, notably Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra (Table 1). Descriptive statistics for all measurement items and constructs are reported in Appendix 1.

Table 1. Demographic Description

Category	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	215	46.9%
	Female	231	50.4%
	Other	12	2.6%

Age	18 – 23 years old	358	78.2%
	24 – 28 years old	87	19.0%
	Over 28 years old	13	2.8%
Education level	College	66	14.4%
	Bachelor's degree	392	85.6%
City of residence	Adelaide	61	13.3%
	Brisbane	64	14.0%
	Canberra	98	21.4%
	Melbourne	110	24.0%
	Perth	5	1.1%
	Sydney	120	26.2%

4.1.2 Assessment of the Measurement Model

As multicultural experience is a newly explored factor in this study, conducting an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) first was necessary to examine the underlying structure and the appropriateness of the scale. EFA indicated that removing two items (MCE9 and MCE10) improved the measurement quality, and the remaining items (MCE1–MCE8) were treated as a unidimensional scale for subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Assessment of the Measurement Model

Structure	Outer loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR (rho_c)	AVE
MC1	0.871	0.868	0.909	0.714
MC2	0.851			
MC3	0.826			
MC4	0.833			
COG1	0.755	0.887	0.914	0.639
COG2	0.787			
COG3	0.773			
COG4	0.850			
COG5	0.832			
COG6	0.796			
MOT1	0.746	0.861	0.898	0.639
MOT2	0.808			
MOT3	0.869			
MOT4	0.782			
MOT5	0.788			
BEH1	0.822	0.874	0.906	0.659
BEH2	0.828			
BEH3	0.729			
BEH4	0.877			
BEH5	0.794			
SN1	0.857	0.797	0.881	0.711
SN2	0.851			
SN3	0.822			
MCE1	0.822	0.945	0.953	0.719
MCE2	0.859			
MCE3	0.832			
MCE4	0.844			

MCE5	0.887			
MCE6	0.853			
MCE7	0.810			
MCE8	0.874			
IWA1	0.834	0.840	0.893	0.675
IWA2	0.831			
IWA3	0.802			
IWA4	0.819			

➢ **Evaluation of Indicator Reliability:** According to Hair Jr et al. (2021), the quality of observed variables can be assessed by running the PLS-SEM algorithm to obtain outer loadings. It is recommended that an indicator loading of 0.7 or higher indicates good reliability. After performing the analysis, all outer loadings met the acceptable threshold, as shown in Table 2.

➢ **Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Analysis:** As presented in Table 2, all measurement scales met the required threshold, with Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7 and Composite Reliability (CR) values also exceeding 0.7. This demonstrates that the observed variables within each construct are internally consistent and effectively represent their corresponding latent variables, ensuring sufficient reliability for further analysis.

➢ **Convergent Validity Assessment:** To assess convergent validity, the research team used the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to Fornell & Larcker (1981), an AVE value of 0.5 or higher indicates adequate convergent validity, meaning that the latent variable explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. Results in Appendix 1 show that all AVE values exceed 0.5.

➢ **Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA):** Both independent and dependent variables were tested through Exploratory Factor Analysis to ensure reliability and validity. For the independent variables - including Metacognitive CQ (MC), Cognitive CQ (COG), Behavioural CQ (BEH), Motivational CQ (MOT) and Subjective Norm (SN) - the EFA results show a KMO value of 0.824, Bartlett's Test significance level of 0.000, total variance explained of 67.803%, and Eigenvalue of 1.888. The items were grouped into five factors, all with loadings greater than 0.5, indicating satisfactory measurement. For the dependent variable, Intention to Work Abroad (IWA), the results show KMO = 0.818, Sig. = 0.001, total variance explained = 67.554%, and Eigenvalue = 2.702. All items had factor loadings above 0.5, confirming the appropriateness of the measurement.

➢ **Discriminant Validity Assessment:** Discriminant validity was evaluated using the HTMT ratio and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The results in Table 3 showed that all constructs met the required thresholds, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 3. Results of Discriminant Validity Assessment of the Measurement Model

Fornell-Larcker criterion

Square root of AVE/R	BEH	COG	IWA	MC	MCE	MOT	SN
BEH	**0.812**						
COG	0.253	**0.799**					
IWA	0.427	0.393	**0.822**				
MC	0.264	0.214	0.502	**0.845**			
MCE	0.131	0.032	0.191	0.099	**0.848**		
MOT	0.188	0.131	0.340	0.196	0.121	**0.800**	
SN	0.155	0.165	0.386	0.218	0.144	0.184	**0.843**

HTMT ratio							
	BEH	COG	IWA	MC	MCE	MOT	SN
BEH							
COG	0.277						
IWA	0.472	0.443					
MC	0.272	0.238	0.575				
MCE	0.151	0.063	0.202	0.098			
MOT	0.204	0.150	0.381	0.221	0.143		
SN	0.186	0.191	0.468	0.260	0.166	0.207	

4.1.3 Evaluation of the Structural Model

➢ **Assessment of Multicollinearity (VIF Test):** VIF diagnostics indicate no severe multicollinearity; all VIFs <5 (highest VIF = 4.043 for MCE8), though several items exceed 3.0 as shown in Table 4. Given that values remain below the conservative threshold of 5 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019), multicollinearity does not appear to threaten the structural estimates; nonetheless, items with VIF >3 were inspected for redundancy and retained for theoretical completeness.

Table 4: Multicollinearity Test Results (VIF)

	VIF		VIF		VIF
BEH1	2.128	IWA2	1.837	MCE6	2.878
BEH2	3.055	IWA3	1.764	MCE7	2.250
BEH3	2.645	IWA4	1.868	MCE8	4.043
BEH4	3.026	MC1	2.719	MOT1	1.765
BEH5	3.912	MC2	1.923	MOT2	1.966
COG1	1.964	MC3	1.844	MOT3	2.078
COG2	2.016	MC4	2.273	MOT4	1.839
COG3	1.784	MCE1	2.640	MOT5	1.849
COG4	2.347	MCE2	2.800	SN1	1.789
COG5	2.440	MCE3	2.999	SN2	1.751
COG6	1.955	MCE4	3.201	SN3	1.587
IWA1	1.857	MCE5	3.501		

➢ **Evaluation of Path Relationships:** According to Hair et al. (2019), within the SEM/PLS framework, the condition for hypothesis acceptance requires a t-value greater than 1.96 at the 5% significance level and a p-value below 0.05. The results presented in Table 5 fully meet these criteria; therefore, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, and H7 are all supported.

Table 5. Evaluation of Structural Paths

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	T-value	P-value	f-square	Result
H1	MC → IWA	0.285	7.809	0.000	0.143	Accepted

H2	COG →IWA	0.182	5.265	0.000	0.060	Accepted
H3	SN → IWA	0.184	5.059	0.000	0.063	Accepted
H4	BEH → IWA	0.223	5.734	0.000	0.089	Accepted
H5	MOT → IWA	0.189	4.850	0.000	0.066	Accepted
H6	MCE x BEH → IWA	0.089	2.082	0.037	0.016	Accepted
H7	MCE x MOT → IWA	0.128	3.107	0.002	0.036	Accepted

➢ **Model Explanatory Power (R^2)**: The R^2 value reflects the extent to which the independent variables explain the variance in the dependent variable. In this study, Table 6 shows that the R^2 is 0.521 and the adjusted R^2 is 0.513, indicating that approximately 51.3–52.1% of the variance in the intention to work abroad is explained by the model (Hair, 2014).

➢ **Assessment of Predictive Power (Q^2)**: According to Table 6, the model yields a Q^2_predict value of 0.495, indicating strong predictive relevance, while the RMSE and MAE error indices remain within acceptable thresholds (Hair, 2014).

Table 6: Explanatory Power (R^2) and Predictive Power (Q^2)

	Q^2 predict	**RMSE**	**MAE**	**R^2**	**Adjusted R^2**
IWA	0.495	0.714	0.570	0.521	0.513

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. The Impact of Metacognitive CQ on the Intention to Work Abroad

Metacognitive CQ had the largest standardised direct effect on IWA ($\beta = 0.285$; $t = 7.809$; $p < 0.001$) and a substantive effect size ($f^2 = 0.143$), indicating that reflective cultural awareness and monitoring are key predictors of students' intentions to work abroad. This result aligns with Earley & Ang (2003), who conceptualise metacognitive CQ as a higher-order capability that supports adaptive decision-making in intercultural settings. It is also consistent with the evaluative–planning pathway in the TPB, where informed appraisal and forethought underpin intention (Ajzen, 1991), and with prior evidence that CQ, particularly metacognitive processes, supports cross-cultural judgment and performance (Ang et al., 2007; Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

4.2.2. The Impact of Cognitive CQ on the Intention to Work Abroad

Cognitive CQ positively predicts students' intention to work abroad ($\beta = 0.182$, $t = 5.265$, $p < 0.001$) and shows a moderate effect size ($f^2 = 0.060$), indicating a meaningful contribution to IWA relative to other predictors (Table 6). Students who possess extensive knowledge of cultural systems, values, social norms, and diverse customs are often better able to recognise cultural differences and gain a clearer understanding of international work environments. As a result, they are better prepared and able to develop their career plans. This finding is also consistent with the assertion of Ang et al. (2007) that cognitive CQ serves as an important knowledge foundation that enables individuals to understand cultural similarities and differences, thereby supporting decision-making and helping them cope with ambiguous situations. The magnitude observed here is in line with prior empirical research showing that cultural knowledge contributes positively, though often less strongly than metacognitive or behavioural facets, to adaptation and effectiveness (Ang et al., 2007).

4.2.3. The Impact of Subjective Norms on the Intention to Work Abroad

Subjective norms exert a positive influence on the intention to work abroad among Vietnamese students studying in Australia. This provides empirical evidence that expectations and influences from family, friends, and the broader community play a significant role in shaping international career intentions among overseas students. The result aligns with the TPB (Ajzen, 1991), in which subjective norms are identified as one of the three key determinants of behavioural intention, particularly in career-related decisions within an international context. The standardised coefficient for SN was $\beta = 0.184$ ($t = 5.059$; $p < 0.001$) with an effect size $f^2 = 0.063$. These results indicate a meaningful social influence on

IWA in this sample, although the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. The pattern also mirrors TPB-based studies in education and career domains that document significant normative pressures on students' intentions (Ajzen, 1991).

4.2.4. The Impact of Behavioural CQ on the Intention to Work Abroad

Behavioural CQ had a positive and significant effect on IWA ($\beta = 0.223$; $t = 5.734$; $p < 0.001$), with an effect size $f^2 = 0.089$ — the second-largest effect after metacognitive CQ. This implies that enacted adaptability in communication and non-verbal behaviour meaningfully supports students' readiness to pursue work abroad. This finding is consistent with Ang et al. (2007), who emphasised that behavioural CQ is a critical factor in strengthening self-confidence and facilitating successful integration in multicultural environments. It is further compatible with evidence from workplace samples showing that CQ, particularly the ability to enact adaptive behaviours, relates to leadership effectiveness and performance across borders (Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

4.2.5. The Impact of Motivational CQ on the Intention to Work Abroad

Motivational CQ has a positive effect on the intention to work abroad ($\beta = 0.189$; $t = 4.850$; $p < 0.001$). The standardised coefficient for MOT was $\beta = 0.189$ ($t = 4.850$; $p < 0.001$) with an effect size $f^2 = 0.066$, indicating a modest but statistically significant contribution to IWA. Students with high motivation to learn and experience new cultures are often more enthusiastic, persistent, and confident in pursuing international career opportunities. This result is consistent with the description of Earley & Ang (2003), who state that motivational CQ reflects the level of interest, self-confidence, and drive that encourage individuals to engage in and sustain their efforts in multicultural contexts. This accords with social-cognitive accounts in which motivational resources and efficacy beliefs form key components of control-related pathways to intention (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 1977), and with empirical findings that CQ predicts cross-cultural adjustment and task outcomes (Ang et al., 2007).

4.2.6. The Moderating Effect of Multicultural Experience on the Relationship between Behavioural CQ and the Intention to Work Abroad

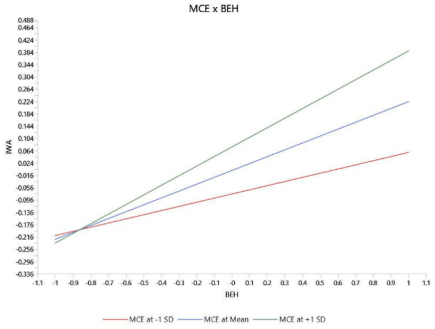

Fig 2. MCE Moderation of the BEH–IWA Relationship

Figure 2 illustrates the interaction between behavioural CQ and multicultural experience in predicting the intention to work abroad. All three regression lines corresponding to low, medium, and high levels of MCE display upward trends, indicating a positive moderating effect of MCE on the relationship between behavioural CQ and the intention to work abroad across all levels of experience. At high levels of MCE, the association between behavioural CQ and intention to work abroad becomes stronger, as reflected in the steeper slope of the regression line: greater multicultural experience amplifies the effect of behavioural CQ on the intention to work abroad.

However, when behavioural CQ is low, even a high level of MCE does not lead to higher intention to work abroad compared to the group with both low behavioural CQ and low MCE. This suggests a conditional interplay between behavioural CQ and multicultural experience. Multicultural experience becomes meaningful only when accompanied by the capability to adapt behaviourally. These findings reinforce the perspectives of Leung et al. (2008) and Crisp (2011), emphasizing that multicultural experiences truly yield value only when individuals possess the behavioural competencies to leverage and transform such experiences into advantages in global environments. This moderating pattern is theoretically coherent with experiential-learning mechanisms, practice and reflection consolidating procedural knowledge (Kolb, 2014), and with transfer-of-training arguments that contextual practice improves the generalisability of adaptive skills (Baldwin & Ford, 1988).

4.2.7. The Moderating Effect of Multicultural Experience on the Relationship between Motivational CQ and the Intention to Work Abroad

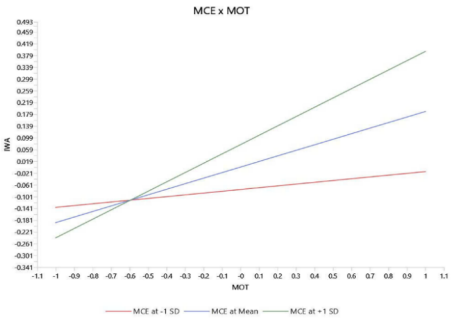

Fig 3. MCE Moderation of the MOH–IWA Relationship

Figure 3 illustrates that MCE plays a positive moderating role in the relationship between motivational CQ and the intention to work abroad. When motivational CQ is low, the differences across levels of MCE are negligible, as the motivational foundation for forming intentions is lacking. However, as motivational CQ increases, the effect of MCE becomes more evident: individuals with high MCE show a stronger intention to work abroad, while low MCE weakens this effect. The findings highlight that internal motivation only truly manifests when accompanied by practical experiences, and this combination creates a "dual catalyst" that strengthens confidence, enhances self-efficacy, and shapes a clearer international career orientation. From a theoretical perspective, this result reinforces the view that foundational factors such as practical experiences can amplify the effect of individual characteristics in shaping international career intentions (Van Dyne et al., 2012). This is consistent with social-cognitive theory, which posits that mastery and vicarious experiences increase self-efficacy and perceived control (Bandura, 1977), thereby strengthening the pathway from motivational resources to intention; related work shows that multicultural exposure enhances flexible cognition and the application of adaptive strategies (Crisp, 2011; Leung et al., 2008).

4.2.8. The Role of CQ (MC, COG) in Shaping Attitude (ATT) towards the Intention to Work Abroad

According to the TPB, attitude towards behaviour is one of the key determinants shaping intention (Ajzen, 1991). Research indicates that MC and COG are fundamental beliefs that foster a positive attitude towards working abroad. MC reflects the ability to plan, monitor, and adjust cognition in intercultural contexts, whereas COG represents knowledge of cultural norms and practices (Ang et al., 2007). Both competencies enable individuals to evaluate international work as feasible, beneficial, and worthwhile, thereby cultivating a favourable attitude towards global career choices (Remhof et al., 2013; Van Dyne et al., 2012).

The results for MC ($\beta = 0.285$; $p < 0.001$) and COG ($\beta = 0.182$; $p < 0.001$) reinforce this argument, clearly demonstrating that both have significant positive effects on the intention to work abroad. For clarity, MC and COG are treated here as theoretical antecedents aligned with attitude-related beliefs in TPB; attitude per se was not measured as a separate construct in this study. MC ($\beta = 0.285$; $f^2 = 0.143$) exerts a stronger effect than COG ($\beta = 0.182$; $f^2 = 0.060$), suggesting that reflective awareness matters more than factual cultural knowledge for forming IWA in this sample. Notably, the stronger impact of MC implies that reflective thinking and strategic planning matter more than merely possessing cultural knowledge. Therefore, in encouraging international students to pursue cross-border career opportunities, it is essential to not only enhance cultural knowledge but also to strengthen reflective capacity and strategic preparation for the global environment (Earley & Ang, 2003). This interpretation is consistent with prior CQ research in which metacognitive processes guide evaluation and action selection in intercultural tasks (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003).

4.2.9. The Role of CQ (MOT, BEH) in shaping perceived behavioural control (PBC) towards the Intention to Work Abroad

We conceptualised motivational and behavioural CQ as dimensions that align theoretically with perceived behavioural control (PBC) in the TPB framework. However, PBC was not operationalised as a separate latent construct in our model; instead, MOT and BEH were included as direct antecedents of IWA. Regression results show MOT ($\beta = 0.189$; $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.066$) and BEH ($\beta = 0.223$; $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.089$) exert positive direct effects on IWA. This pattern is consistent with Bandura's (1991) emphasis on self-efficacy: intrinsic motivation supports personal readiness, while enacted behavioural skills (BEH) provide concrete capabilities that facilitate international career intentions. The finding also mirrors TPB's

control pathway, in which capability beliefs and perceived control contribute to intention, and aligns with prior evidence that CQ predicts adaptation and effectiveness in cross-cultural tasks (Ajzen, 1991; Ang et al., 2007; Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

Considered in aggregate, variation in intention to work abroad signals the near-term supply of globally mobile entry-level talent. Because metacognitive and behavioural CQ show the strongest links to intention—and these links are amplified by multicultural experience—firms can translate the findings into recruiting screens and development pathways that prioritise reflective cultural awareness, enacted adaptability and structured exposure. Such alignment is expected to reduce ramp-up time in global teams and lower assignment risk.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study makes three primary theoretical contributions. First, by integrating Cultural Intelligence (CQ) dimensions into a Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)-informed model of intention to work abroad, the findings demonstrate that specific CQ dimensions provide additional explanatory power for students' international career intentions. In particular, metacognitive CQ exhibited the largest standardised direct effect on intention to work abroad ($\beta = 0.285$; $f^2 = 0.143$), followed by behavioural CQ ($\beta = 0.223$; $f^2 = 0.089$). The model explains approximately 52% of the variance in intention to work abroad ($R^2 \approx 0.52$), indicating that CQ dimensions meaningfully complement conventional TPB antecedents in the international-career context.

Second, the results support a dimensional (micro-level) treatment of CQ rather than an aggregate score. Cognitive CQ and motivational CQ contributed positively but to a lesser extent (COG: $\beta = 0.182$; $f^2 = 0.060$; MOT: $\beta = 0.189$; $f^2 = 0.066$), which suggests that different CQ dimensions operate via distinct mechanisms and magnitudes. Treating CQ at the dimensional level therefore yields finer theoretical insight into how knowledge-based, reflective, motivational, and enacted components differentially shape career intentions in cross-cultural settings.

Third, the role of Multicultural Experience (MCE) emerged as an important boundary condition in the model. Multicultural experience significantly strengthened the relationships between (a) motivational CQ and intention to work abroad (interaction $\beta = 0.128$) and (b) behavioural CQ and intention to work abroad (interaction $\beta = 0.089$). These interaction effects indicate that experiential exposure functions as a contextual amplifier: students with greater multicultural experience are more likely to convert motivational resources and enacted behavioural skills into concrete intentions to pursue employment abroad.

Conceptually, this mapping is grounded in Ajzen's (1991) behavioural-belief logic and Bandura's (1991) self-efficacy framework; Ang et al. (2007) further support the distinction between reflective/knowledge components (metacognitive and cognitive CQ) and motivational/enacted components (motivational and behavioural CQ). On this basis, metacognitive and cognitive CQ are theorised to align with attitude-related belief structures, while motivational and behavioural CQ correspond to the motivational and capability elements that underpin perceived behavioural control in TPB. The empirical pattern observed here provides initial support for this theoretically informed mapping in a student sample.

5.2. Practical Implications

Findings connect clearly to contemporary business dynamics in disruptive contexts, where rapid technological adoption and labour-market volatility affect how organisations source, develop and deploy talent. At the organisational level, the results inform workforce planning, global staffing, onboarding and mobility policies by identifying which capabilities (metacognitive and behavioural CQ) and experiences (multicultural exposure) most reliably signal readiness for global roles and faster time-to-productivity. Evidence-proportionate recommendations follow.

The strongest direct association with intention to work abroad was observed for metacognitive cultural intelligence, while multicultural experience significantly strengthened the effects of motivational and behavioural cultural intelligence. Priority should therefore be given to interventions that develop reflective cultural awareness and practical adaptive skills, delivered through guided reflection workshops, scenario-based training, simulated intercultural tasks and structured assessment exercises that encourage planning and sense-making prior to cross-cultural engagement. These activities are best introduced as pilots with simple pre–post measures of CQ dimensions and intention, so that resource allocation can be adjusted according to observed benefits. In parallel, structured and repeated multicultural exposures, for example short-term study exchanges, supervised internships, cross-cultural volunteering and industry visits paired with guided reflection, should be integrated with CQ training because the moderation results indicate such exposures improve the transfer of motivational and enacted skills into concrete international intentions.

Career services and early-career recruiters can enhance advice and selection practices by incorporating validated indicators of MCE and situational or behavioural assessments of adaptability, using standardised instruments and

structured exercises rather than informal impressions. A staged implementation approach - pilot, evaluate, scale - aligns recommendations with the study's observed effect sizes and model explanatory power, and reduces the risk of premature or disproportionate organisational commitments. These implications are grounded in the study's empirical results and are intended to be practicable for both institutional and organisational uptake.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations qualify the findings. The sample is limited to Vietnamese international students in Australia and was drawn via convenience sampling, which constrains generalisability. The cross-sectional survey design prevents strong causal inference. In addition, the present model conceptually maps MOT and BEH onto perceived behavioural control (PBC) in the TPB framework but does not measure PBC as a separate latent construct; future work should operationalise PBC directly and test mediation pathways formally. Important control or mediator variables (e.g., language proficiency, objective measures of cultural distance, labour-market conditions, or personality traits) were not included and could explain additional variance beyond the current $R^2 \approx 0.52$. Future research should replicate the model in different national contexts, employ longitudinal or panel designs to test change and prediction over time, and incorporate multi-source or behavioural measures (e.g., performance in intercultural tasks) to reduce common-method bias.

5.4. Recommendations

The empirical pattern observed in this study—notably the relatively large effects of metacognitive and behavioural cultural intelligence and the amplifying role of multicultural experience—suggests a set of targeted, evidence-based actions for higher-education institutions, career services, and employers. Universities should incorporate dedicated CQ curricula that balance reflective exercises (e.g., structured planning, perspective-taking and post-activity debriefs) with repeated behavioural practice (e.g., role-plays, simulated intercultural tasks and communication laboratories), and these coursework elements should be explicitly linked to externally situated experiences (short exchanges, cross-cultural internships, industry visits) so that students can rehearse and consolidate adaptive behaviours in realistic contexts. Career services ought to formalise partnerships with employers to create staged experiential pathways—comprising preparatory training, supervised multicultural placements, and reflective assessment—that deliberately build both motivational readiness and enacted skills; advising practices should therefore move beyond generic CV support to include guidance on how to sequence experiences that strengthen international employability. Employers and recruiters, for their part, would benefit from integrating indicators of prior multicultural exposure and observable behavioural adaptability into early-career selection and development processes, recognising that such markers increase the likelihood that intrinsic motivation and CQ training will translate into sustained intentions to work internationally. For firms, embedding these capability indicators into early-career pipelines and pairing offers with structured multicultural exposure provides actionable levers within workforce planning, global staffing and mobility policy, and is expected to improve global team effectiveness, shorten time-to-productivity and lower assignment risk. Collectively, these measures are proportional to the study's findings and are practicable at institutional scale, offering a coherent route from pedagogical design to measurable improvements in students' readiness for global careers.

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APPENDIX 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
MCE1	458	3.30	1.395
MCE2	458	3.34	1.358
MCE3	458	3.31	1.363
MCE4	458	3.40	1.412
MCE5	458	3.40	1.385
MCE6	458	3.41	1.407
MCE7	458	3.17	1.464
MCE8	458	3.41	1.401
MCE9	458	3.31	1.217
MCE10	458	3.21	1.199
COG1	458	3.30	1.231
COG2	458	3.33	1.167
COG3	458	3.37	1.206
COG4	458	3.29	1.196
COG5	458	3.40	1.210
COG6	458	3.38	1.178
MC1	458	3.16	1.406
MC2	458	3.31	1.191
MC3	458	3.16	1.180
MC4	458	3.17	1.345
MOT1	458	3.23	1.191
MOT2	458	3.18	1.204
MOT3	458	3.19	1.173
MOT4	458	3.22	1.279
MOT5	458	3.09	1.132
BEH1	458	3.34	1.154
BEH2	458	3.32	1.221
BEH3	458	3.34	1.182
BEH4	458	3.33	1.232
BEH5	458	3.35	1.163
SN1	458	3.17	1.155
SN2	458	3.21	1.185
SN3	458	3.17	1.155
IWA1	458	3.42	1.272
IWA2	458	3.32	1.222
IWA3	458	3.30	1.214
IWA4	458	3.26	1.192
Valid N	**458**		

Source: Author's compilation