CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR IN PREDICTING WORK-ABROAD INTENTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM VIETNAMESE STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract - This study integrates Cultural Intelligence (CQ) - specifically motivational and behavioral dimensions - with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to examine the intention to work abroad among Vietnamese students in Australia. Using data from 361 participants, analysis was conducted through SPSS 26 and SmartPLS 4.0 under a PLS-SEM framework. Results show that both TPB constructs and CQ components significantly influence work-abroad intention. Multicultural experience (MCE) significantly moderates the relationship between CQ and intention. Additionally, CQ moderates the effects of attitude and perceived behavioral control but not subjective norm. The study contributes theoretically by combining TPB and CQ into a unified model. Practical implications are proposed to support educational institutions and workforce development programs in preparing young talent for global employment.

Key words - Cultural Intelligence; Theory of Planned Behavior; Work-abroad Intention; Multicultural Experience; Vietnamese International Students

1. Introduction

In the context of increasingly deep globalization, business organizations - particularly firms operating in international business - need an international workforce to foster creativity [1], strengthen knowledge transfer flows [2], and expand companies' networks [3]. However, attracting, developing, and retaining human resources capable of working effectively in a dynamic international environment remains a challenge [4]. In addition, the growing global operations of firms imply that the international mobility of highly qualified individuals plays an increasingly pivotal role [5]. Post-study work programs and expanded visa policies are creating more favorable opportunities for overseas employment. Numerous studies have shown that working abroad not only enhances job-related competencies [6] and personal development [7, 8], but also expands individuals' career advancement opportunities [9]. Nevertheless, most studies have focused on current employees [10-22] or on pre-employment groups, namely recent graduates and applicants [23-27], whereas only a limited number of studies have examined students' willingness or intentions to work abroad - despite their potential to become high-quality talent [28, 29].

Amid the rise in Vietnam's education-related migration, Vietnamese international students in Australia constitute a sizable group with stable growth and are among the top five source countries of international students in Australia. This indicates both the presence and representativeness of the sample within the local education and employment ecosystem. Moreover, post-graduation visa policies allow international students to remain and work after graduation, facilitating observation of job-search behaviors and career decision-making during the transition period. At the same time, the multicultural environment characteristic of Australian educational institutions and labor markets provides an appropriate context to test the roles of multicultural experience and cultural intelligence within the Theory of Planned Behavior framework. From a global perspective, the number of Vietnamese international students is estimated to exceed 250,000, underscoring the practical significance of selecting Australia - one of the key destinations for Vietnamese students - as the research context [30-32].

On the other hand, intentions to work abroad do not emerge randomly; rather, they are influenced by multiple factors. According to Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) [33], behavioral intention is predicted by three main components: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. This theory has been applied in numerous domains such as consumption [34], politics [35], and health [36]. However, in international business management - specifically in the context of examining intentions to work abroad - TPB has not yet been exploited fully and systematically [37, 38]. In particular, TPB components, including attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, have also not been examined in depth in this domain.

Cultural intelligence (CQ), developed by Ang and colleagues [39], is understood as the capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts. Prior studies have largely relied on an overall CQ index comprising four dimensions (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral), making it difficult to identify the unique contribution of each dimension to specific outcomes [40]. Guided by TPB's emphasis on proximal antecedents of intention, this study focuses on motivational CQ (the degree of readiness and persistence in intercultural interactions) and behavioral CQ (the ability to enact behaviors appropriate to the cultural context), because these two dimensions are more closely tied to intended behavior than metacognitive and cognitive CQ [41, 42]. Theoretical reviews and meta-analytic evidence indicate that motivational CQ is often

strongly associated with proximal behavioral outcomes such as intercultural adjustment and effectiveness in multicultural contexts; behavioral CQ is also expected to play an important role in proximal behavioral outcomes, although empirical evidence is inconsistent across measures. Regarding international career intentions specifically, available evidence suggests a more prominent role for motivational CQ than for behavioral CQ [42, 43]. On this basis, emphasizing these two action-oriented dimensions helps focus on mechanisms closer to intention and reduces conceptual overlap with TPB components (especially attitude and perceived behavioral control).

In addition, multicultural experience (MCE) - an alternative approach to measuring international experience in a deeper and broader manner - was proposed by Aytug and colleagues in 2018 [44]. However, due to its novelty, MCE has been applied only to a limited extent, and most MCE studies to date have treated it as an independent variable or a control variable in research models [44-46].

Based on the literature review, this study clarifies three novel contributions. First, it focuses on Vietnamese international students in Australia - a group outside the formal workforce that has rarely been examined systematically - thereby adding empirical evidence to the stream of research on intentions to work abroad [5, 33]. Second, unlike the tendency to treat cultural intelligence as a composite index or to emphasize primarily cognitive components, this study disaggregates and tests separately two action-oriented dimensions - motivational cultural intelligence and behavioral cultural intelligence - to clarify their incremental value alongside TPB components in explaining intentions to work abroad. This approach is consistent with recommendations from recent reviews and meta-analyses that CQ dimensions exert differential effects [38, 43, 47]. Third, this study introduces multicultural experience as a moderating variable to identify when and under what circumstances the effect of cultural intelligence on intentions to work abroad becomes stronger or weaker, thereby extending an approach that has mainly viewed this variable as an independent or control variable [48].

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Theory of planned behavior (TPB)

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior is a theoretical foundation widely adopted to analyze behavior-related decisions grounded in cognition [33]. At a general level, the theory posits that the intention to perform a behavior is influenced by three primary cognitive components: attitude toward the behavior (ATT), subjective norm (SN), and perceived behavioral control (PBC). Attitude represents an individual's subjective evaluation of the expected benefits–costs and consequences of performing a behavior; subjective norm reflects perceived expectations or pressure from important others; whereas perceived behavioral control indicates beliefs about one's capability and the resources required to act [33, 49]. Recent meta-analyses show that attitude and perceived behavioral control tend to be stable predictors of intention, whereas the effect of subjective norm is more likely to vary across cultural contexts, behavior types, and research methodologies [49, 50].

When transferring this framework to the context of "intentions to work abroad," these components need to be interpreted in a focused manner. Attitude here reflects individuals' perceptions of career benefits, prospects for professional development, living conditions, and risks associated with working in another country; a favorable attitude typically increases the desire to pursue overseas career mobility [37]. Subjective norm may exert a strong influence in family and community environments where career decisions are profoundly shaped by social expectations; in highly collectivistic cultures, social pressure can be a decisive factor in choosing to work abroad [51, 52]. Perceived behavioral control reflects a practical assessment of one's ability to carry out the behavior - for example, language skills, knowledge of the labor market, and immigration procedures - thus, when perceived behavioral control is high, individuals tend to have greater confidence in translating intention into concrete action [49, 53].

Although many prior studies have documented positive relationships between TPB components and intention in occupational and migration contexts, there are three compelling reasons to re-test these hypotheses in the present study. First, the magnitude and significance of each TPB factor are not invariant but depend on the cultural–institutional context; findings from one population cannot be uncritically generalized to another without re-validation [51, 54]. Second, heterogeneity in measurement approaches, sampling choices, and analytical strategies across prior studies creates risks for generalizability; therefore, re-examination helps ensure the reliability of conclusions when applying the current methods and sample [49]. Third, the emergence of new variables, such as multicultural experience or cultural intelligence, may alter the strength of the relationships between TPB components and intention; testing allows clarification of whether these variables merely change relationship magnitudes or also modify underlying mechanisms [43, 54]. These reasons highlight the necessity of re-testing in the context of Vietnamese international students in Australia, to ensure that conclusions are both internally valid and appropriately generalizable to the study context.

Based on the theoretical rationale and empirical evidence above, the study proposes three hypotheses for Vietnamese international students in Australia:

H1a. Attitude toward working abroad has a positive effect on intentions to work abroad.

H1b. Subjective norm has a positive effect on intentions to work abroad.

H1c. Perceived behavioral control has a positive effect on intentions to work abroad.

2.2. Cultural intelligence (CQ)

Cultural intelligence is defined by Earley and Ang [39] as the capability to adapt effectively in multicultural environments. CQ comprises four dimensions; within the scope of this study, the focus is placed on motivational CQ and behavioral CQ. Motivational CQ reflects individuals'

readiness and persistence in intercultural interactions [55]; behavioral CQ relates to the ability to adjust behavioral expressions to fit the context [41]. The metacognitive and cognitive CQ dimensions are not included in the main model in order to avoid conceptual overlap with TPB components (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control) and to maintain analytical focus on factors more proximal to behavior [33, 38].

In the research model, CQ is considered in two complementary roles. The first is a direct effect on intention. The second is a moderating role in the relationships between attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and intention. This framing aligns with TPB's background-factor approach, whereby individual capability characteristics can both directly influence intention and alter the strength of the paths from attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control to intention [33]. Studies integrating TPB with CQ have also used certain CQ dimensions as moderators when predicting intentions to work abroad [38].

The moderating role of CQ within the TPB framework

Regarding the relationship between attitude and intention, the mechanism through which motivational CQ operates is to create an action-oriented tendency. When an individual holds a positive attitude toward working abroad, that attitude leads to a clearer intention only if the person has sufficient motivation to translate evaluations into concrete steps. Motivational CQ encourages individuals to proactively gather information, develop plans, and persist in overcoming initial obstacles such as language differences, procedural barriers, or adaptation costs. Through these preparatory behaviors, a positive attitude is more likely to become a feasible intention and remain more stable over time [56, 57]. Behavioral CQ complements this mechanism by equipping individuals with context-appropriate behavioral repertoires. When behavioral CQ is high, individuals can adjust language use, tone, communication style, and work practices to be compatible with the host culture. As a result, a favorable attitude becomes less abstract and more actionable, because individuals can envisage specific actions required and how to execute them, while also perceiving reduced implementation risk [42, 58].

For subjective norm, the moderating mechanism requires clarification because this norm is social in nature and depends on how individuals interpret and decode others' expectations. High motivational CQ enables individuals not only to recognize expectations but also to actively respond by investing necessary resources - for example, learning a foreign language, exploring the labor market, or expanding support networks. When such preparatory actions are present, the effect of subjective norm on intention is strengthened because social expectations are translated into practical tasks that can be accomplished [52, 59]. Behavioral CQ affects this relationship through a complementary pathway. When prospective movers possess intercultural behavioral capabilities, they can demonstrate fit to evaluators through communication, self-presentation of competencies, and collaboration in new environments. Such demonstrations reduce the risk of being perceived as maladaptive and increase the credibility of social expectations; therefore, subjective norm is more likely to translate into action-oriented pressure [43, 59].

The moderating mechanism for perceived behavioral control also needs to be articulated clearly. Perceived behavioral control refers to beliefs about one's capabilities and resources to complete the behavior. Motivational CQ increases the willingness to deploy resources and plan systematically, thereby strengthening beliefs about capability into concrete action steps. Behavioral CQ reduces anxiety during implementation by providing behavioral skills to utilize those resources effectively in intercultural contexts. When both factors are present, perceived behavioral control is no longer an abstract belief but a foundation for observable behaviors, and thus the relationship between perceived behavioral control and intention is reinforced [37, 49, 57].

Overall, motivational CQ operates primarily by motivating resource investment and persistence, whereas behavioral CQ operates primarily by providing behavioral strategies and reducing implementation risk. These mechanisms are distinct yet mutually reinforcing in converting cognitive evaluations and social pressures into feasible intentions. Based on the mechanisms above, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2a. Motivational CQ moderates the relationship between attitude and intentions to work abroad.

H2b. Motivational CQ moderates the relationship between subjective norm and intentions to work abroad.

H2c. Motivational CQ moderates the relationship between perceived behavioral control and intentions to work abroad.

H3a. Behavioral CQ moderates the relationship between attitude and intentions to work abroad.

H3b. Behavioral CQ moderates the relationship between subjective norm and intentions to work abroad.

H3c. Behavioral CQ moderates the relationship between perceived behavioral control and intentions to work abroad.

The direct effect of CQ on intentions to work abroad

Within the TPB framework, background factors are understood as individual characteristics or life experiences that can change how individuals evaluate a behavior while reducing the psychological costs of performing it. Accordingly, an appropriate background factor not only increases the perceived cognitive attractiveness of the behavior but also makes feasibility clearer and less risky, thereby directly influencing intention [33, 49]. In intercultural contexts, cultural intelligence - specifically motivational CQ and behavioral CQ - is considered a foundational capability that can serve this function.

Motivational CQ reflects an individual's level of interest, commitment, and persistence when engaging in intercultural interactions. Individuals with high motivational CQ not only perceive the career benefits of working abroad but also proactively invest time, enhance skills, and develop action plans. Studies indicate that

intrinsic motivation drives practical preparatory behaviors (information seeking, language learning, and network expansion), thereby increasing perceived feasibility as well as commitment to enact the behavior [56, 57]. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that CQ can be enhanced through structured training programs or international experience, and increases in CQ are often associated with greater proactive pursuit of international opportunities [60, 61]. Therefore, motivational CQ is theoretically grounded to directly affect intentions to work abroad through two pathways: strengthening perceived feasibility and increasing implementation commitment.

Behavioral CQ reflects the capability to adjust behavioral expressions to fit cultural contexts, including communication practices, professional conduct, and interaction norms. When behavioral CQ is high, individuals can more clearly envisage implementation steps and reduce uncertainty when approaching a new environment. As a result, initial intentions are no longer merely abstract evaluations but are equipped with concrete action modalities, increasing the likelihood of moving from intention to actual enactment [42, 58]. Recent syntheses also indicate that behavioral CQ is directly associated with career outcomes and adaptation in international environments, which further supports the argument for a direct effect on intention [43].

It should be noted that the direct effects of motivational CQ and behavioral CQ are not self-evident in all contexts. The strength of these effects depends on how CQ is formed (through training or experience), on the stability of CQ over time, and on surrounding institutional conditions (e.g., visa policies, job opportunities, and the level of social support in the host country). Research indicates that different training programs and international experiences produce different levels of CQ and thereby lead to variation in effects on intention and behavior [60, 62, 63]. In addition, institutional context may weaken or amplify such effects [37, 49]. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed to test the stability of these relationships among Vietnamese international students in Australia:

H4. Motivational CQ has a positive effect on intentions to work abroad.

H5. Behavioral CQ has a positive effect on intentions to work abroad.

2.3. Multicultural experiences (MCE)

Multicultural experiences include both indirect forms of exposure such as information acquisition and observation, and direct forms of interaction such as communicating, studying, and working with individuals from other cultures. These experiences help individuals broaden their understanding of diverse values and norms while enhancing their ability to identify appropriate behavioral approaches. Therefore, MCE is considered an experiential resource that can change how intercultural capability is translated into behavioral intention, and thus may function as a moderating variable within the TPB framework [64, 65].

First, consider the link between MCE and motivational CQ. Motivational CQ reflects individuals' level of interest and determination when encountering multicultural environments. When people have extensive multicultural experiences, they have often tried various preparation approaches and received real-world feedback about their effectiveness. Such feedback makes preparatory behaviors more practical - for example, acquiring additional language skills, learning professional conventions, or establishing supportive relationships. In this way, practical experience enhances the credibility of behaviors initiated by motivational CQ. Thus, in groups with high MCE, motivational CQ is more likely to exert a stronger influence on intentions to work abroad, because motivational CQ is no longer merely theoretical but has been, to some extent, tested and demonstrated as useful [56, 61].

Second, consider the link between MCE and behavioral CQ. Behavioral CQ refers to the ability to adjust speech, gestures, and interaction styles to fit different cultural contexts. As individuals accumulate diverse communication situations, they gradually develop approaches that have been validated in practice. Consequently, uncertainty about implementing behavior in a new environment decreases because individuals already possess applicable strategies. Hence, MCE may strengthen the effect of behavioral CQ on intention, because behavioral CQ in experience-rich contexts becomes easier to apply and generates a sense that the behavior can be successfully carried out [42, 58].

Beyond these two pathways, MCE also operates by expanding support networks and increasing access to tangible resources. Relationships acquired from prior experiences can reduce transition costs and provide assistance when individuals decide to work abroad. Therefore, when CQ (whether motivational or behavioral) is combined with rich MCE, the likelihood of translating intention into actual action increases, because the environment and supporting resources are more favorable [43, 66]. Based on these arguments, the study proposes two hypotheses:

H6. Multicultural experiences moderate the relationship between motivational CQ and intentions to work abroad.

H7. Multicultural experiences moderate the relationship between behavioral CQ and intentions to work abroad.

2.4. Research model

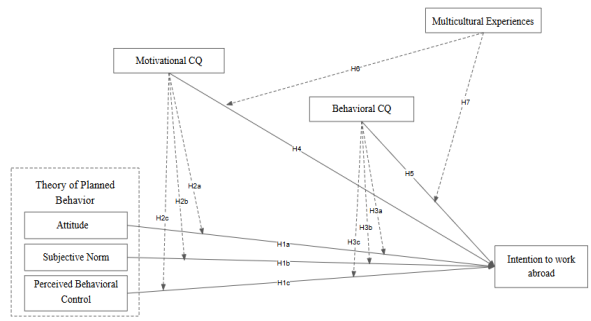

Figure 1. *Proposed research model*

Figure 1 presents the proposed research model integrating TPB with two dimensions of cultural

intelligence - motivational CQ and behavioral CQ - and MCE. Attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control are hypothesized to directly influence intention to work abroad. Motivational CQ and behavioral CQ are modeled as both direct predictors and moderators of TPB relationships, while MCE moderates the effects of CQ on intention.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Measures and questionnaire

This study employed a quantitative approach using an online survey questionnaire and Likert-type scales to measure the study variables. The research process comprised: (1) identifying the research problem and objectives, (2) reviewing the literature, (3) developing the model and measurement scales, (4) conducting a pilot survey, (5) collecting the main data, and (6) analyzing the data using statistical tools.

The questionnaire included 36 observed items intended to measure seven research constructs (see sources and descriptions in Table 2). CQ and TPB were measured using five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). In contrast, MCE was measured using a six-point Likert scale reflecting the frequency of interaction with multicultural environments, with scores from 1 to 6 corresponding to: never; once a year or less; 2–11 times per year; 1–3 times per month; 1–6 days per week; and every day or multiple times per day.

IWA was measured as a percentage-based likelihood of intending to work abroad, with response options of 20%, 40%, 60%, 80%, and 100%, coded from 1 to 5, respectively. Within the TPB framework, intention is often measured by indicators reflecting readiness to perform a future behavior; probability scales are a recognized alternative to Likert scales [69, 70]. Subjective probability questioning (e.g., 20%–100%) directly captures action readiness at different time points and has been applied in studies of intentions to work abroad [71]. In this study, probability values were categorized into five levels (1–5) to facilitate respondent completion and to ensure internal consistency of the IWA scale. The representativeness and reliability of the IWA scale were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, CR, AVE, and discriminant validity among IWA items.

Survey questions were translated into Vietnamese to enable the target participants to understand and respond accurately. Structurally, the survey was divided into four main sections (introduction, questionnaire items, demographic information, and acknowledgements), and all questions across the four sections were mandatory. To build trust and encourage honest disclosure, the introduction provided brief information clarifying the study's objectives and topic, assured confidentiality of personal information, and emphasized that collected data would be used solely for academic research purposes through the consent prompt: "Please tick the box below to continue: I agree to participate in this study and I confirm that I have understood the purpose, risks, and methods of the study." Contact information was also provided in case of issues requiring follow-up.

Before the main study was implemented, a preliminary questionnaire was developed and used as a pilot survey with 10 Vietnamese international students in Australia to ensure clarity and comprehensibility. Pilot data were collected via an online survey on Google Forms and were then subjected to preliminary statistical analyses to assess measurement validity and reliability. Following pilot testing, the measures for CQ, MCE, IWA, and TPB components were refined and adjusted to better fit the study population.

3.2. Sample and data collection

Data were collected using a self-administered online questionnaire via Google Forms to reach geographically dispersed respondents across Australian cities and to assess multiple factors simultaneously. Because a probability sampling frame was not used, findings are interpreted at the survey-sample level. The distribution and screening procedures were designed to minimize selection bias and enhance data quality: the survey was anonymous; the invitation content was neutral; after submission, the editing link was disabled; and respondents were asked to confirm that they participated only once. In addition, the study applied data-quality screening rules, including an attention-check item, exclusion of cases with abnormally short completion times, and detection of straight-lining response patterns.

The study population comprised Vietnamese international students studying in Australia. Participants were approached using convenience sampling through social media platforms and international student communities. The research team reached respondents via personal networks (friends, students at the same institutions, and former classmates) and posted the survey link in community groups for Vietnamese international students in Australia; several education consulting centers were also contacted to broaden outreach to eligible respondents.

Table 1. *Sample Information*

Characteristics		n	%
Gender	Male	162	44.9
	Female	188	52.1
	Other	11	3
Age	18 - 23 years	285	78.9
	24 - 28 years	67	18.6
	Over 28 years	9	2.5
Education Level	Associate Degree	53	14.7
	Bachelor's Degree	308	85.3
City of Residence	Adelaide	44	12.2
	Brisbane	52	14.4
	Canberra	74	20.5
	Melbourne	86	23.8
	Perth	5	1.4
	Sydney	100	27.7

To ensure response quality, the questionnaire included two screening questions and clear exclusion criteria. The first screening question established eligibility: respondents had to be enrolled in a college, undergraduate, or postgraduate program (master's or doctoral) in Australia; responses not meeting this criterion were removed. The

second screening question served as an attention check; responses failing this check were excluded from the analytical dataset. After screening, 361 of 438 responses were valid (82.4%). The questionnaire also collected several descriptive variables (education level, state of residence, field of study, and gender) to compare sample structure with publicly available statistics on international students in Australia, thereby considering representativeness across key characteristics [30, 31]. Sample information is presented in Table 1.

3.3. Data analysis

In this study, the collected data were coded prior to being entered into IBM SPSS 26 and SmartPLS 4 for statistical analyses. These tools were used to ensure accuracy and objectivity in data processing. Specifically, Excel was used for data cleaning and coding. SPSS 26 was used to assess scale reliability and to compute descriptive statistics. To test the research model and relationships among variables, SmartPLS 4.0 was used to estimate the PLS-SEM model, and Power BI was used for data visualization.

To minimize the possibility that differences in scale levels (MCE measured on a six-point scale whereas other indicators used five-point scales) could bias analysis and conclusions, the study conducted the following preprocessing and sensitivity checks. After data cleaning and missing-value handling, all observed variables were processed under three independent specifications: (i) original coding; (ii) min–max normalization; and (iii) z-score standardization. For each specification, the model was estimated using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4.0, with bootstrapping of 5,000 resamples to obtain path estimates, t-values, and R^2 coefficients; this procedure is consistent with practical guidelines for PLS-SEM [72, 73, 74].

Alongside model estimation, we report measurement quality and convergent validity indices, including composite reliability, AVE, and Cronbach's alpha; we also conducted discriminant validity assessments using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio to evaluate whether standardization altered the measurement structure [73, 75]. The selection of the two normalization approaches (min–max and z-score) was based on common data-preprocessing practices aimed at creating comparable value ranges and facilitating comparison/estimation [76, 77]. To control for potential bias from common method variance and multicollinearity, the study additionally performed Harman's single-factor test and assessed full collinearity (VIF) following recommendations for PLS-SEM [78, 79].

Sensitivity comparisons across the three specifications indicated very high similarity within the study sample: measurement indices and path coefficients showed no empirically meaningful changes, with agreement up to three decimal places. Therefore, the main results presented in this paper are based on the original coding for ease of interpretation, while four summary comparison tables are provided in the supplementary materials to enhance transparency [74, 80].

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model assessment

Because multicultural experience is a relatively new factor in this research stream, conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) beforehand was necessary to examine the latent structure and the appropriateness of the measurement scale. The results indicate that removing MCE9 and MCE10 (outer loadings of 0.002 and 0.030, respectively) was appropriate and improved measurement quality. The research team also determined that the MCE scale should be treated as a unidimensional construct, and a one-factor model was adopted to test the stability and measurement validity after adjustment.

4.1.1. Assessment of indicator quality

After removing SN3, MCE9, and MCE10, all remaining indicators exhibited standardized loadings ≥ 0.70, consistent with practical recommendations for measurement models [81].

4.1.2. Cronbach's alpha reliability results

All scales had Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.70, meeting the recommended reliability threshold for applied research [81]. Composite reliability (CR) values were also ≥ 0.70, consistent with criteria for evaluating scales in structural models [82].

4.1.3. Convergent validity

According to Fornell and Larcker [75] and Bagozzi and Yi [82], AVE ≥ 0.50 indicates adequate convergent validity. The results show that all AVE values were ≥ 0.50. These findings also support the representativeness of the probability-based measurement of IWA within the TPB framework, aligning with intention measurement guidance and prior applications in research on intentions to work abroad [5, 70].

4.1.4. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Both independent and dependent variables were examined using EFA to ensure reliability and validity. For the independent variables - motivational CQ (MOT), behavioral CQ (BEH), attitude (ATT), subjective norm (SN), and perceived behavioral control (PBC) - the EFA results showed KMO = 0.780 and a significant Bartlett's test (Sig. < 0.05), confirming suitability for EFA [81, 83, 84]. Total variance explained was 68.763% (> 50%), and the smallest eigenvalue was > 1 (1.431), satisfying Kaiser's criterion [83, 84]. Factor loadings ≥ 0.50 met the practical threshold [81]. For the dependent variable (IWA), KMO = 0.814, Bartlett's test was significant (Sig. < 0.05), total variance explained was 66.756% (> 50%), and the eigenvalue was > 1 (2.670), meeting Kaiser's criterion [83, 84]; all loadings were ≥ 0.50 based on the practical threshold [81].

4.1.5. Discriminant validity

Under the Fornell–Larcker criterion, the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds its highest correlation with other constructs [75]. In addition, HTMT < 0.85 (strict threshold; < 0.90 depending on the field) provides evidence of discriminant validity [73, 85].

Table 2. *Evaluation of the Measurement Model*

Construct	Outer Loadings	Cronbach 's Alpha	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Motivational CQ (MOT) Adapted from Ang (2007) [41]				
MOT1: I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.	0.760	0.860	0.898	0.639
MOT2: I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.	0.800			
MOT3: I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me.	0.869			
MOT4: I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me.	0.792			
MOT5: I am confident that I can get accustomed to the shopping conditions in a different culture.	0.770			
Behavioral CQ (BEH) Adapted from Ang [41]				
BEH1: I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.	0.813	0.851	0.891	0.621
BEH2: I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.	0.821			
BEH3: I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it.	0.720			
BEH4: I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it.	0.829			
BEH5: I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.	0.752			
Attitude toward the behavior (ATT) Adapted from Taylor and Todd [58]				
ATT1: The intention to work abroad is a good idea.	0.861	0.862	0.906	0.706
ATT2: The intention to work abroad is a wise idea.	0.840			
ATT3: I like the idea of working abroad.	0.828			
ATT4: The intention to work abroad would be pleasant.	0.830			
Subjective norm (SN) Adapted from Choe [59]				
SN1: Most people who are important to me think I should work abroad.	0.860	0.730	0.880	0.786
SN2: Most people who are important to me would want me to work abroad.	0.912			
Perceived behavioral control (PBC) Adapted from Taylor and Todd [58]				
PBC1: I would be able to work abroad.	0.849	0.798	0.881	0.712
PBC2: Working abroad is entirely within my control.	0.858			
PBC3: I have the resources, the knowledge, and the ability to work abroad.	0.824			
Multicultural experience (MCE) Adapted from Aytug et al. [44]				
MCE1: Watching movies that take place in different cultures.	0.813	0.933	0.943	0.674
MCE2: Reading books about foreign people.	0.850			
MCE3: Listening to music of foreign cultures.	0.794			
MCE4: Watching foreign TV channels.	0.814			
MCE5: Watching different cultures' celebrations (e.g., festivals, parades) on TV.	0.850			
MCE6: Seeing art (e.g., plays, opera, architecture, sculpture, paintings) of foreign cultures.	0.843			
MCE7: Talking to people from different cultures.	0.811			
MCE8: Socializing with people from different cultures.	0.794			
Intention to work abroad (IWA) Adapted from Remhof et al. [5]				
IWA1: With a probability of …%, I will live and work in another country than Vietnam in the course of my life. (Options: 20/40/60/80/100)	0.819	0.834	0.889	0.667
IWA2: With a probability of …%, I will live and work in another country than Vietnam within the first 5 years after having finished my studies. (Options: 20/40/60/80/100)	0.819			
IWA3: With a probability of …%, I will live and work in another country than Vietnam within the first 2 years after having finished my studies. (Options: 20/40/60/80/100)	0.809			
IWA4: With a probability of …%, I will live and work in another country than Vietnam within the first 6 months after having finished my studies. (Options: 20/40/60/80/100)	0.821			

Table 3. *Results of the Discriminant Validity Test for the Measurement Model*

Fornell-Larcker Criteria							
Square Root of AVE/ R	ATT	BEH	IWA	MCE	MOT	PBC	SN
ATT	**0.840**						
BEH	0.263	**0.788**					
IWA	0.487	0.419	**0.817**				
MCE	0.128	0.090	0.200	**0.821**			
MOT	0.193	0.156	0.333	0.110	**0.799**		
PBC	0.226	0.132	0.401	0.139	0.194	**0.844**	
SN	0.192	0.186	0.367	0.085	0.089	0.136	**0.886**
HTMT Correlation Indicators							
Constructs	ATT	BEH	IWA	MCE	MOT	PBC	SN
ATT							
BEH	0.283						
IWA	0.561	0.475					
MCE	0.132	0.102	0.205				
MOT	0.220	0.174	0.374	0.137			
PBC	0.271	0.159	0.488	0.151	0.217		
SN	0.238	0.225	0.462	0.099	0.104	0.185	

4.2. Structural model assessment (PLS-SEM)

4.2.1. Multicollinearity assessment (VIF)

All VIF values were < 3, meeting a stringent threshold and below the commonly used cutoff of < 5 for multicollinearity [81]. Moreover, VIF < 3.3 is also considered evidence against common method bias in PLS-SEM [79], indicating no substantial multicollinearity in estimating the relationships.

4.2.2. Assessment of path relationships

Table 4. *Evaluation of the Impact Relationships*

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path coefficient	T-value	P-value	Results
H1a	ATT → IWA	0.246	5.771	0.000	Accepted
H1b	SN → IWA	0.169	4.176	0.000	Accepted
H1c	PBC → IWA	0.221	5.575	0.000	Accepted
H2a	MOTxATT → IWA	0.103	2.238	0.025	Accepted
H2b	MOTxSN → IWA	-0.062	1.379	0.168	Rejected
H2c	MOTxPBC → IWA	-0.099	2.171	0.030	Accepted
H3a	BEHxATT → IWA	-0.120	2.671	0.008	Accepted
H3b	BEHxSN → IWA	-0.027	0.614	0.540	Rejected
H3c	BEHxPBC → IWA	0.114	2.342	0.019	Accepted
H4	MOT → IWA	0.183	4.372	0.000	Accepted
H5	BEH → IWA	0.230	5.408	0.000	Accepted
H6	MCExMOT → IWA	0.105	2.159	0.031	Accepted
H7	MCExBEH → IWA	0.119	2.277	0.023	Accepted

Hypotheses H1a, H1b, H1c, H2a, H2c, H3a, H3c, H4, H5, H6, and H7 all had p-values < 0.05 and t-values > 1.96 and were therefore supported. In contrast, hypotheses H2b and H3b had p-values > 0.05 and were not statistically significant, and thus were rejected. The interaction coefficients were small in magnitude (e.g., H2a $\beta = 0.103$; H2c $\beta = -0.099$), reflecting small effect sizes in line with conventions in behavioral research. Accordingly, the moderating effects are interpreted as conditions that shape the strength of the effects of ATT, SN, and PBC on intention rather than as primary levers of intention [86-88].

4.3. Explanatory power of the model (R^2)

R^2 indicates the extent to which the independent variables explain the dependent variable. In this study, R^2 was 0.556 and the adjusted R^2 was 0.538, meaning that approximately 53.8%–55.6% of the variance in intentions to work abroad was explained by the model.

4.3.1. Predictive relevance (Q^2)

The model yielded Q^2_predict = 0.496, indicating good predictive performance; RMSE and MAE error metrics were also within acceptable ranges.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Discussion

5.1.1. Effects of TPB components on intentions to work abroad

The TPB model indicates that all three factors - attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control - positively affect Vietnamese international students' intentions to work abroad in Australia. Among these, a positive attitude toward an international career is the strongest factor. Social norms from family and friends also shape behavioral orientation, particularly in an East Asian cultural context. Finally, confidence in one's capabilities and external enabling conditions such as visa arrangements and language proficiency further reinforce the intention to pursue an international career.

5.1.2. Direct effects of motivational CQ and behavioral CQ on intentions to work abroad

The findings show that both motivational CQ and behavioral CQ positively influence Vietnamese international students' intentions to work abroad in Australia, with behavioral CQ exerting a stronger effect. Motivational CQ helps individuals proactively overcome psychological barriers and accept challenges. However, behavioral CQ - i.e., the ability to adjust one's behaviors appropriately to different cultural contexts - appears to be the key factor enabling individuals to adapt and sustain intentions to work internationally.

5.1.3. Moderating effects of motivational CQ and behavioral CQ on the relationships between TPB components and intentions to work abroad

Figure 2 shows that motivational CQ positively moderates, with a small effect size, the relationship between attitude and intentions to work abroad. When motivational CQ is high, the effect of a positive attitude on

intention increases slightly; conversely, when motivational CQ is low, intentions may not be high even if attitudes are favorable. This result aligns with TPB's background-factor approach, suggesting that individual capability characteristics such as CQ can condition the strength of the attitude–intention link [41, 42, 89, 90]. Practically, motivational CQ should be viewed as a supportive factor that helps translate favorable attitudes into intention, rather than as a primary lever of intention [86, 88].

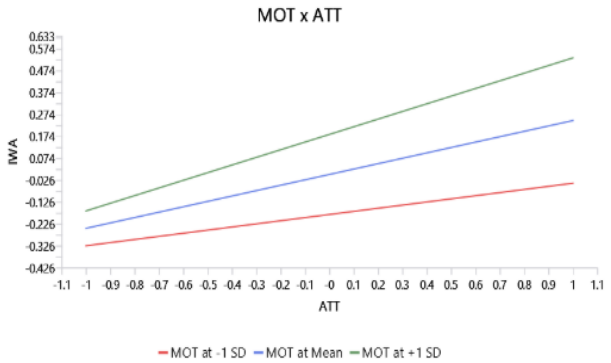

Figure 2. *Relationship between Attitude (ATT) and Intention to Work Abroad (IWA), with Motivational CQ (MOT) as a moderator*

Figure 3 shows that behavioral CQ negatively moderates, with a small effect size, the relationship between attitude and intentions to work abroad. When behavioral CQ is high, the effect of attitude on intention decreases slightly; in contrast, when behavioral CQ is low, intention depends more strongly on attitude. This pattern is consistent with the argument by Thomas and colleagues [91] that the capability to enact context-appropriate behaviors leads individuals to rely more on behavioral skills than on initial affective evaluations. Therefore, the negative sign is interpreted as a conditioning effect of behavioral CQ on the attitude–intention path; it does not negate the overall positive role of attitude in TPB. The small effect size also suggests that its applied implications are supportive rather than decisive [86, 88].

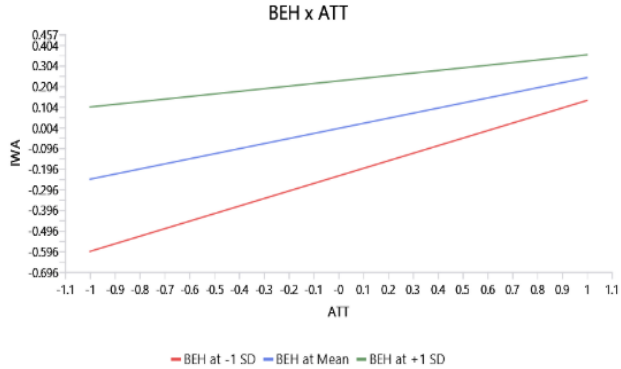

Figure 3. *Relationship between Attitude (ATT) and Intention to Work Abroad (IWA), with Behavioral CQ (BEH) as a moderator*

Figure 4 indicates a similar resource-compensation mechanism for motivational CQ in the relationship between perceived behavioral control and intention: when motivational CQ is high, the effect of PBC on intention decreases slightly; when motivational CQ is low, intention relies more strongly on perceived control. In line with TPB's background-factor approach, readiness and persistence in intercultural interactions may partly offset the need to rely on PBC when forming intentions [36, 90]. Given the small effect size, this finding should be interpreted as a conditioning effect of motivational CQ rather than as diminishing the central role of PBC in predicting intention [86, 88].

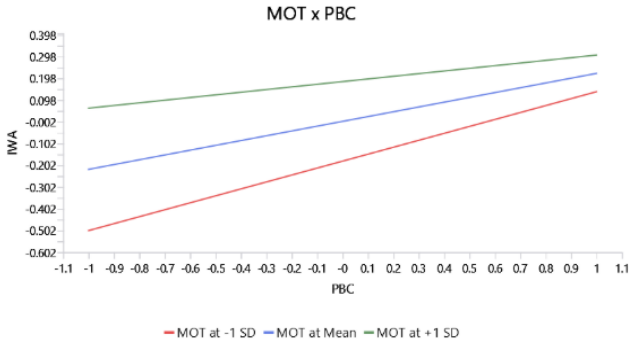

Figure 4. *Relationship between Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) and Intention to Work Abroad (IWA), with Motivational CQ (MOT) as a moderator*

Figure 5 shows that behavioral CQ positively moderates, with a small effect size, the relationship between PBC and intentions to work abroad. When behavioral CQ is high, the effect of PBC on intention increases slightly; conversely, when behavioral CQ is low, the effect of PBC weakens. Interpreted through TPB's background-factor approach, the ability to adjust behavior and apply context-appropriate behavioral scripts helps individuals translate perceived control into clearer action plans [36, 90]. Because the effect size is small, behavioral CQ should be regarded as a supportive factor that works in combination with interventions aimed at enhancing PBC (e.g., procedural information, job-search skills, internship experience), rather than as a standalone lever producing large changes [86, 88].

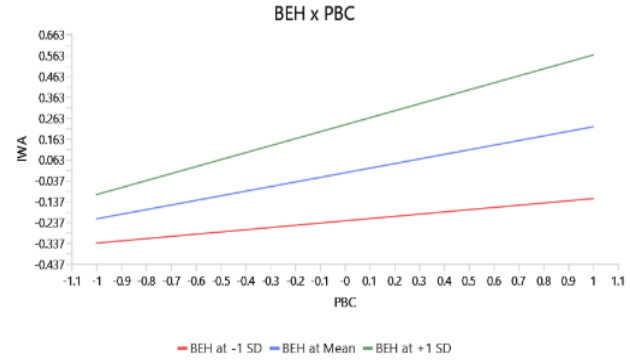

Figure 5. *Relationship between Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) and Intention to Work Abroad (IWA), with Behavioral CQ (BEH) as a moderator*

Some moderating effects with negative signs should be understood through a resource-substitution mechanism: when individuals already possess strong intercultural behavioral capability or strong intercultural motivation, they may rely less on baseline psychological cues such as attitude or perceived control when forming intentions. The multicultural training and employment context in Australia, together with readily available career-support services, may lead high-CQ individuals to rely more on

behavioral skills and established goals, slightly weakening the incremental roles of attitude or control in converting into intention. These results reflect the conditioning role of individual characteristics within TPB and do not contradict the overall positive effects of attitude and perceived control.

5.1.4. Moderating effects of multicultural experience on the relationship between motivational CQ, behavioral CQ, and intentions to work abroad

Figure 6 shows that multicultural experience positively moderates the relationship between motivational CQ and intentions to work abroad. As motivational CQ increases, individuals with high MCE demonstrate stronger intentions. When motivational CQ is low, MCE makes little difference; however, when motivational CQ is high, MCE plays a clear amplifying role. This suggests that MCE is an important condition for motivational CQ to be translated effectively. Accordingly, CQ development should be linked to real-world experiences such as student exchanges or cultural engagement activities to promote international career orientation.

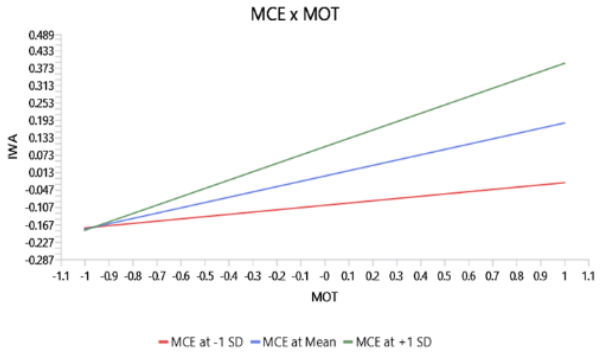

Figure 6. *Relationship between Motivational CQ (MOT) and Intention to Work Abroad (IWA), with Multicultural Experience (MCE) as a moderator*

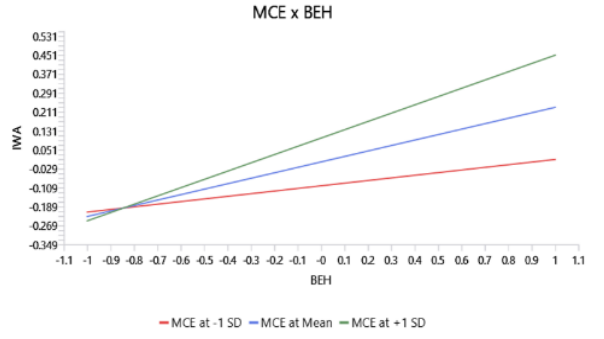

Figure 7. *Relationship between Behavioral CQ (BEH) and Intention to Work Abroad (IWA), with Multicultural Experience (MCE) as a moderator*

Figure 7 indicates that multicultural experience strengthens the effect of behavioral CQ on intentions to work abroad, particularly when BEH is high. However, when BEH is low, MCE does not create a clear difference and may even be counterproductive. This implies that MCE is effective only when individuals possess sufficient context-appropriate behavioral skills. A lack of either factor - behavioral CQ or practical experience - limits intentions to work internationally. Therefore, both skills and experience need to be combined to promote global career behavior.

Overall, multicultural experience moderates the relationship between behavioral CQ and intentions to work abroad more strongly than it moderates the relationship between motivational CQ and intention. Behavioral CQ enables individuals to adapt flexibly to new cultures and enhances communication, teamwork, and conflict-management skills. By contrast, motivational CQ reflects readiness and commitment; yet without adaptive behavioral capability, motivation is less likely to translate into concrete actions. The results indicate that the combination of high behavioral CQ and rich MCE provides a solid foundation for forming clear and sustainable international career intentions.

5.2. Conclusion

5.2.1. Theoretical implications

This study makes an important contribution to the global talent and international human resource management literature by integrating cultural intelligence components and the Theory of Planned Behavior to analyze Vietnamese international students' intentions to work abroad in Australia. The study focuses on the moderating role of multicultural experience, offering a novel perspective on how multicultural interactions influence career decision-making under contemporary globalization. In particular, the study highlights the effects of two CQ dimensions - motivational CQ and behavioral CQ - which have often been examined only as an overall CQ index in prior research. The results suggest that students scoring higher on these two dimensions tend to consider international career opportunities more carefully, despite language barriers and differences in work environments. Moreover, the study identifies novel moderating roles of CQ dimensions in the relationships between TPB factors and intentions to work abroad, thereby reinforcing the value of CQ for analyzing labor-migration behavior and providing policy-relevant insights for international workforce development.

The findings further indicate that students with richer multicultural experiences tend to develop stronger adaptive capacity and therefore are more inclined to consider staying and working long-term in an international environment. In addition, this study extends TPB to the labor-migration context by explaining how attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control shape international students' career decisions. As international education continues to expand - particularly given strong Vietnam–Australia educational cooperation through scholarships, student exchanges, and joint training programs - this study provides an important basis for understanding Vietnamese international students' tendencies and motivations to work abroad.

Furthermore, the study examines intentions to work abroad across different time horizons (short-, medium-, and long-term), thereby providing a comprehensive view of students' post-graduation career planning. The findings

also help clarify that choosing to work internationally does not necessarily lead to "brain drain"; rather, it can be viewed as an opportunity for students to accumulate global experience and knowledge, ultimately becoming high-quality human capital for both international and domestic labor markets. These findings have not only academic value but also practical relevance for policymakers in education and human resource development, particularly in strengthening Vietnam–Australia educational cooperation and designing more effective support programs for international students.

5.2.2. Practical implications

This study not only extends the theoretical base on cultural intelligence, TPB, and multicultural experience but also offers actionable policy and managerial implications. Based on the quantitative results: attitude and perceived behavioral control have clearer positive effects than subjective norm; behavioral CQ has a stronger direct effect than motivational CQ; the moderating effects of the two CQ dimensions are small and at times directionally opposite; and multicultural experience amplifies the effects of both CQ dimensions. Given the small magnitude of moderation effects, the recommendations below should be interpreted as complementary: strengthening attitude and perceived behavioral control should be combined with developing motivational and behavioral CQ; priority may be given to groups with higher baseline levels; and evaluation should focus on relative change, coverage, and program repeatability.

First, for students: learners should prioritize strengthening positive attitudes toward international work (clarifying career benefits and setting realistic expectations) and enhancing perceived behavioral control (job-search capability, procedural information, and access to support resources). At the same time, learners should develop behavioral CQ (practicing adaptive communication and situation handling) and motivational CQ (goal setting and persistence in multicultural environments). An effective approach is to combine both intervention types rather than expecting large changes from a single activity.

Second, for educational institutions and advisory providers: institutions should design integrated programs combining employability skills modules with structured multicultural experiences (internships, intercultural projects, and cross-cultural mentoring), given that multicultural experience amplifies the effect of cultural intelligence. Support activities should be evaluated using pre–post measures of attitude, perceived behavioral control, behavioral CQ, and motivational CQ, and support can be segmented for learners with higher baseline levels - where marginal effects may be more visible.

Third, for firms: companies should screen and develop talent based on intercultural behavioral capabilities and multicultural experience, and organize onboarding and on-the-job training that focuses on intercultural behavioral skills while providing mentoring networks and procedural guidance to enhance perceived behavioral control. The results suggest that cultural intelligence primarily supports the translation of attitude and control into intention; therefore, firms should combine interventions targeting both sets of factors.

Fourth, for government agencies and policymakers: agencies should expand supervised multicultural experience opportunities (exchange programs, firm-linked internships, and community projects) to amplify the effectiveness of cultural intelligence, while strengthening services that enhance perceived behavioral control for international students (labor-market information, procedural support, and career counseling). Policy evaluation should emphasize relative change, coverage, and repeatability, because small effects can accumulate into meaningful impacts when implemented broadly and continuously.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This study focused only on Vietnamese international students in Australia; thus, it does not capture cultural diversity or educational systems in other countries. In addition, the data were collected cross-sectionally, so causal relationships over time cannot be validated. Moreover, demographic factors such as gender and age were not examined, although prior studies have shown that certain demographic factors may significantly affect international work intentions. In addition, mediators or control variables such as language proficiency or cultural distance between the home and host country may play important roles in shaping cultural intelligence development, but they were not included in the present study.

Regarding sampling, the use of convenience sampling based on voluntary participation in a web survey entails potential selection bias and limits representativeness. Although neutral messaging, anonymity, screening questions, and abnormal-record filtering were applied, results should be interpreted at the survey-sample level. Because the survey was anonymous and not account-bound, the risk of duplicate responses may still exist; future research should consider probability sampling.

In addition, regarding measurement, coding the probability-based intention scale from 20%–100% into five levels (1–5) may reduce granularity relative to using continuous probability values. The study did not conduct a sensitivity check replacing the 1–5 coding with continuous probability values (0–100; normalized to 0–1); therefore, future studies should test the robustness of findings under alternative measurement specifications.

Accordingly, future research could expand to additional countries and employ longitudinal designs to examine how behavioral intentions change as individuals accumulate real-world experience. Future studies may also extend the model by incorporating demographic characteristics and/or mediators such as cultural distance, or control variables such as participants' language proficiency. These factors may better explain differences in cultural adaptation and CQ development across groups. Adding such variables would allow the research model to reflect reality more accurately and clarify how international experience contributes to cultural intelligence development.

5.4. Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study proposes several policy solutions to strengthen Vietnamese students' intentions to work abroad. First, educational institutions should further integrate cultural intelligence training into curricula, combined with international exchange activities, multicultural internships, and field-based experiences in multinational environments. From a policymaking perspective, policies should be strengthened to help students access global employment opportunities, while encouraging firms to cooperate in building young workers' cultural integration capabilities. These measures would contribute to developing a highly adaptable workforce that is ready to participate in an increasingly competitive and volatile international labor market.

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