



### RESEARCH

## Cultural Intelligence, Cross-Cultural Adaptability, and Psychological Resilience: Pathways to Social Inclusion

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### Abstract

Cultural diversity can create challenges for individuals navigating unfamiliar social norms, communication patterns, and interpersonal relationships, potentially affecting psychological resilience and social integration. This study examines the relationships among cultural intelligence, cross-cultural adaptability, and psychological resilience and explores their broader implications for social inclusion in culturally diverse societies. Using a secondary-data approach, the study analysed 20 representative publications identified from major international and Chinese academic databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, CNKI, and Google Scholar. NVivo 14 was employed to systematically organise, code, and thematically analyse the selected literature based on publication characteristics, research contexts, and conceptual relationships among the three constructs. The findings indicate a close and mutually reinforcing relationship among cultural intelligence, cross-cultural adaptability, and psychological resilience. Cultural intelligence provides cognitive, motivational, and behavioural resources for understanding and responding to cultural differences, while cross-cultural adaptability facilitates effective adjustment to unfamiliar social environments. Successful adaptation is further associated with stronger psychological resilience through improved social networks, sense of belonging, and coping capacity. These findings suggest that cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adaptability represent important individual-level capacities underlying psychological resilience in culturally diverse environments. Beyond individual psychological outcomes, these capacities have broader relevance to social inclusion by enabling individuals to participate more effectively, establish supportive relationships, and overcome cultural barriers and social alienation. The study therefore contributes to cross-cultural sustainability research by highlighting how individual adaptive capacities may support more inclusive, cohesive, and socially resilient societies.

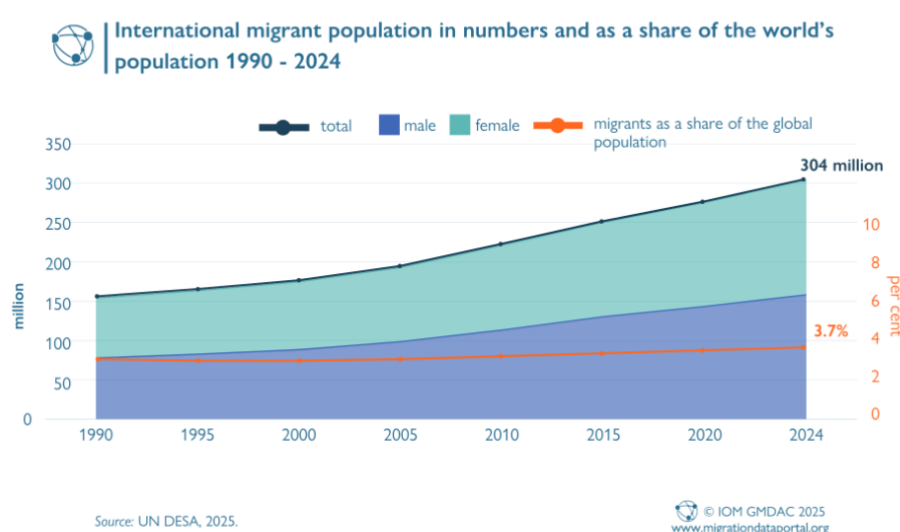
**Keywords:** Cultural Intelligence, Cross-cultural Adaptation, Psychological Resilience Building, Mechanism of Action, Social Inclusion.

## INTRODUCTION

Theoretically, increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse societies require individuals to possess the capacity to understand differences, adapt, and maintain psychological functioning when facing stress (Chao & Oko-Riebau, 2013). Psychological resilience is commonly understood as an individual's capacity to confront adversity and restore psychological balance (M.F., 2023); cultural intelligence (CQ) refers to the ability to understand and respond to cultural differences (Ziada et al., 2021); and cross-cultural adaptability (CCA) describes the process of an individual adjusting to a new cultural environment (Kim, 2012a). While interconnected, these three concepts operate at different levels: CQ can be viewed as a capacity, CCA as an adaptive process, and psychological resilience as a psychological outcome. From a broader perspective, these abilities are also crucial for fostering inclusive social interactions, as individuals capable of understanding and adapting to cultural differences are better positioned to build social relationships, cultivate a sense of belonging, and avoid alienation.

Empirically, increasing cross-cultural mobility, involving multinational corporate employees, international students, international volunteers, and other groups moving or interacting across cultures, frequently exposes individuals to differing values, social norms, communication patterns, and identities. Such conditions do not always yield uniform adaptation experiences. While some individuals successfully develop internal resources and adjust relatively quickly, others experience anxiety, social isolation, culture shock, and difficulties in establishing relationships within the new environment (Cormoş, 2022). The consequences extend beyond psychological well-being, potentially affecting an individual's ability to participate and integrate into diverse social settings. In organizational and educational contexts, for instance, adaptation failures can contribute to challenges in international worker placement, withdrawal behaviors, and a need for more effective adaptation support. This phenomenon must be understood within the context of global demographic shifts that are intensifying encounters between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of International Migrants

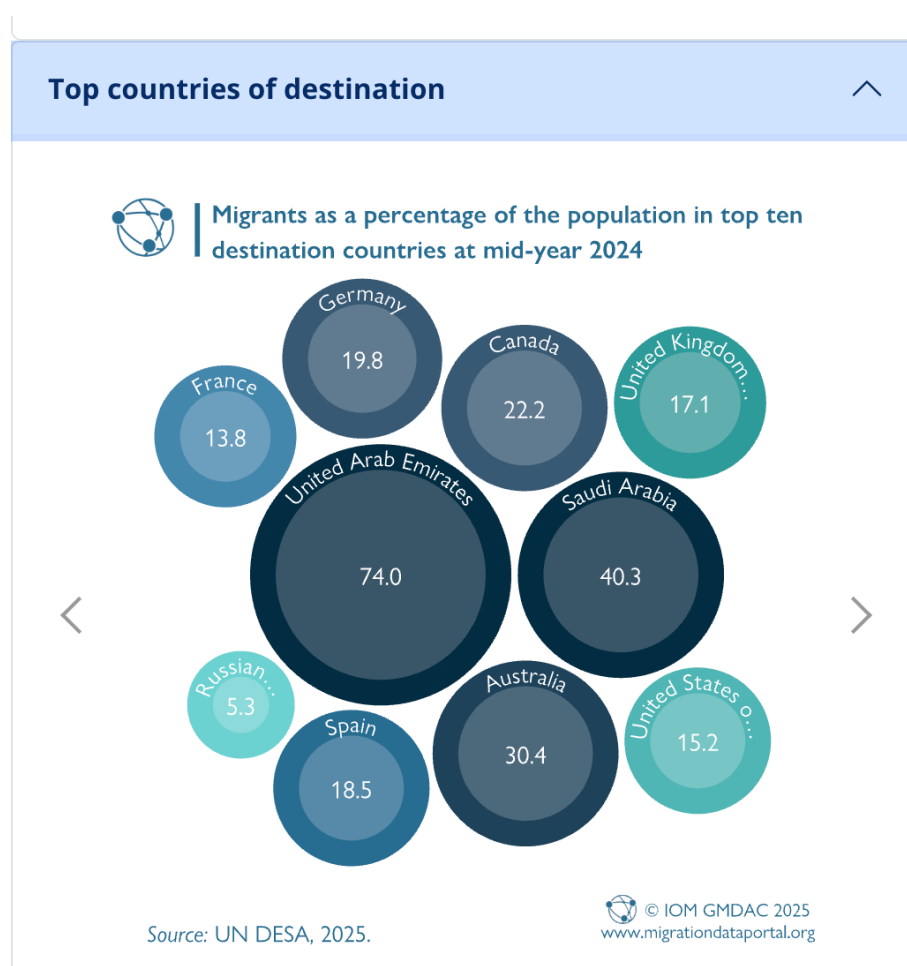


Source : (UN DESA, 2025).

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Based on Figure 1, the international migrant population has consistently increased from approximately 160 million in 1990 to 304 million in 2024, with growth observed among both male and female migrant groups. Although the absolute number of migrants has risen significantly, their proportion of the global population has remained relatively stable, reaching 3.7 percent in 2024, an increase of only about 0.8 percentage points compared to 1990 (UN DESA, 2025). This pattern indicates that international migration has become a relatively constant feature of global demographic dynamics, rather than merely a phenomenon driven by the rise in the absolute number of migrants. Consequently, cross-border mobility creates expanding spaces for social interaction among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds; thus, the capacity to understand, negotiate, and respond to cultural differences has become increasingly relevant in social, educational, and organizational contexts. Furthermore, the intensity of cross-cultural encounters is reflected in the concentration of migrants in specific destination countries, where the presence of migrant populations shapes social environments characterized by relatively high levels of cultural diversity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. The top five destination countries for international migrants



Source : (UN DESA, 2025).

Figure 2 illustrates the variation in the proportion of international migrants relative to the total population across ten major destination countries as of mid-2024. The United Arab Emirates exhibits the highest proportion at 74.0 percent, followed by Saudi Arabia (40.3 percent) and Australia (30.4 percent), while Canada, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, France, and the

Russian Federation show a more varied range of proportions, spanning from 5.3 to 22.2 percent (UN DESA, 2025). This variation indicates that migration contexts are not uniform; in some nations, migration constitutes a highly dominant element of the demographic structure, whereas in others, its presence remains significant yet occurs at more moderate proportions. These differing demographic contexts influence the intensity and complexity of the cross-cultural interactions individuals encounter; consequently, success in living, studying, and working within a multicultural environment depends not only on the availability of mobility opportunities but also on an individual's capacity to understand differences, manage the demands of adaptation, and maintain psychological balance during such interactions.

Previous research has devoted considerable attention to cultural intelligence as the capacity to understand and respond to cultural differences. CQ generally encompasses metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions that enable individuals to process cultural information and adjust their responses during cross-cultural interactions (W. Chen et al., 2026). Concurrently, research on cross-cultural adaptation has increasingly shifted from merely examining adaptation outcomes toward understanding the dynamic process by which individuals establish psychological and social equilibrium within a new cultural environment. Prior studies have also demonstrated a relationship between cultural intelligence, cross-cultural adaptation, and psychological resilience (Xue & Kaur Mehar Singh, 2025; Yang & Gao, 2025a). However, most research still addresses these three concepts in isolation or emphasizes individual psychological outcomes.

Consequently, a conceptual and integrative gap remains regarding how these three concepts interconnect within a single mechanism. Specifically, there is limited research systematically explaining whether cultural intelligence serves as a foundational capacity enabling individuals to undergo cross-cultural adaptation, and how this adaptation process relates to the development of psychological resilience. Furthermore, this relationship is rarely situated within the broader context of social inclusion. Yet, the ability to understand cultural differences, adapt to new social environments, build relationships, and maintain psychological resilience can significantly impact an individual's capacity to participate in and feel a sense of belonging within diverse environments. Therefore, a synthesis is needed to integrate these three concepts within a capability–process–outcome framework, while also elucidating their relevance to a more inclusive and resilient society. Addressing this gap, this study proposes three research questions: (1) how does cultural intelligence contribute to the development of psychological resilience in a cross-cultural context? (2) how does cross-cultural adaptability contribute to the development of psychological resilience in culturally diverse environments? and (3) how do cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adaptability interact to shape psychological resilience in a cross-cultural context?

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Cultural Intelligence**

Cultural intelligence (CQ) refers to an individual's capability to understand, interpret, and appropriately respond to cultural differences when interacting with people from unfamiliar cultural backgrounds. Originally introduced by (Earley & Ang, 2003), CQ is conceptualised as a multidimensional capability comprising metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural dimensions. Metacognitive CQ concerns an individual's ability to monitor and adjust cultural assumptions during intercultural encounters; cognitive CQ concerns knowledge of cultural norms,

values, practices, and social systems; motivational CQ reflects the interest, confidence, and willingness to engage with culturally unfamiliar situations; and behavioural CQ concerns the capacity to modify verbal and non-verbal behaviour appropriately across cultural contexts. Conceptually, CQ therefore provides individuals with the cognitive, motivational, and behavioural resources required to make sense of cultural differences rather than simply reacting to them. This capability is particularly relevant to the present study because cross-cultural environments involve uncertainty, unfamiliar social expectations, and potential interpersonal misunderstandings, all of which require individuals to interpret and regulate their responses. Previous research has linked CQ with more effective intercultural interaction, communication, leadership, and adaptation (Davidaviciene & Al Majzoub, 2022; Tripathi et al., 2024). Accordingly, CQ is positioned in this study as an initial individual-level capability that may enable individuals to navigate cultural differences and develop more effective adaptive responses, making it an important starting point for understanding subsequent cross-cultural adaptability and psychological resilience.

### **Cross-Cultural Adaptability**

Cross-cultural adaptability (CCA) refers to the capacity to adjust thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and everyday social practices in response to unfamiliar cultural environments. It differs from cultural intelligence because CQ primarily concerns the capability to understand and respond to cultural differences, whereas CCA represents the ongoing process through which that capability is enacted in a particular social environment. Building on the foundations of culture shock theory (Oberg, 1960) and subsequent work distinguishing psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1999), CCA can be understood as a dynamic process involving both psychological adjustment and the acquisition of social competencies necessary for effective functioning in a new cultural context. Psychological adaptation concerns emotional stability, well-being, and the management of stress, whereas sociocultural adaptation involves learning appropriate social behaviours, communicating effectively, developing relationships, and managing everyday interactions. This concept is central to the present study because exposure to cultural differences does not automatically produce successful adjustment; individuals must continuously interpret environmental demands and modify their responses. Research has highlighted the roles of language proficiency, cultural distance, previous intercultural experience, and social support in shaping adaptation outcomes (Bano & Liu, 2025; Young et al., 2013). Importantly, successful adaptation can also facilitate access to social networks, strengthen belonging, and reduce isolation or cultural alienation. CCA is therefore positioned as the process dimension of the framework through which individual capabilities are translated into effective engagement with culturally diverse environments.

### **Psychological Resilience**

Psychological resilience refers to the capacity and dynamic process through which individuals maintain or regain psychological functioning when confronted with adversity, stress, uncertainty, or significant environmental challenges. Rather than being understood solely as a fixed personality trait, contemporary perspectives conceptualise resilience as a dynamic interaction between individual resources and environmental conditions, reflected in the ability to recover, adapt, and continue functioning under pressure. Early longitudinal research, including Werner's work on children exposed to high-risk environments, established resilience as an important protective process, while later perspectives have distinguished trait-, process-, and outcome-oriented understandings of resilience

(Werner, 1993). Empirical research has associated psychological resilience with emotion regulation, self-efficacy, psychological well-being, and social support (Liu & Huang, 2021). In the context of cross-cultural encounters, resilience is particularly relevant because cultural transitions may expose individuals to uncertainty, identity challenges, communication difficulties, social rejection, and prolonged adjustment demands. Individuals who can maintain psychological stability while negotiating these pressures are more likely to sustain constructive engagement with their surrounding environment. Thus, psychological resilience is positioned in this study as the outcome dimension through which the psychological consequences of cross-cultural capability and adaptation can be understood. It captures not merely the absence of distress but the capacity to maintain functioning and recover while navigating culturally unfamiliar and potentially stressful environments.

### **Interconnectedness of Cultural Intelligence, Cross-Cultural Adaptability, and Psychological Resilience**

The three concepts are interconnected through a capability–process–outcome logic. Cultural intelligence provides the individual with cognitive, motivational, and behavioural resources for recognising and interpreting cultural differences; cross-cultural adaptability represents the process through which these resources are applied and adjusted in response to the demands of an unfamiliar social environment; and psychological resilience reflects the capacity to maintain or restore psychological functioning while experiencing such demands. From this perspective, higher cultural intelligence may facilitate more effective cross-cultural adaptation because individuals are better equipped to recognise cultural cues, reconsider assumptions, regulate their motivation, and modify their behaviour. Effective adaptation may subsequently reduce prolonged uncertainty and social disconnection while strengthening social networks, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging, thereby supporting psychological resilience. At the same time, resilience may enable individuals to remain engaged with challenging intercultural situations and continue adapting rather than withdrawing from them, suggesting that the relationship may also be dynamic and mutually reinforcing. The framework therefore does not assume a simple linear causal relationship; rather, it conceptualises CQ, CCA, and psychological resilience as interconnected dimensions of cross-cultural functioning. This integrated perspective also provides a broader connection to social inclusion, as the ability to understand cultural differences, adapt to diverse social environments, establish supportive relationships, and maintain psychological functioning may enhance individuals' capacity to participate and experience belonging within culturally diverse societies. Although social inclusion is not directly measured in the present study, it represents an important broader implication of the interconnected mechanism examined here.

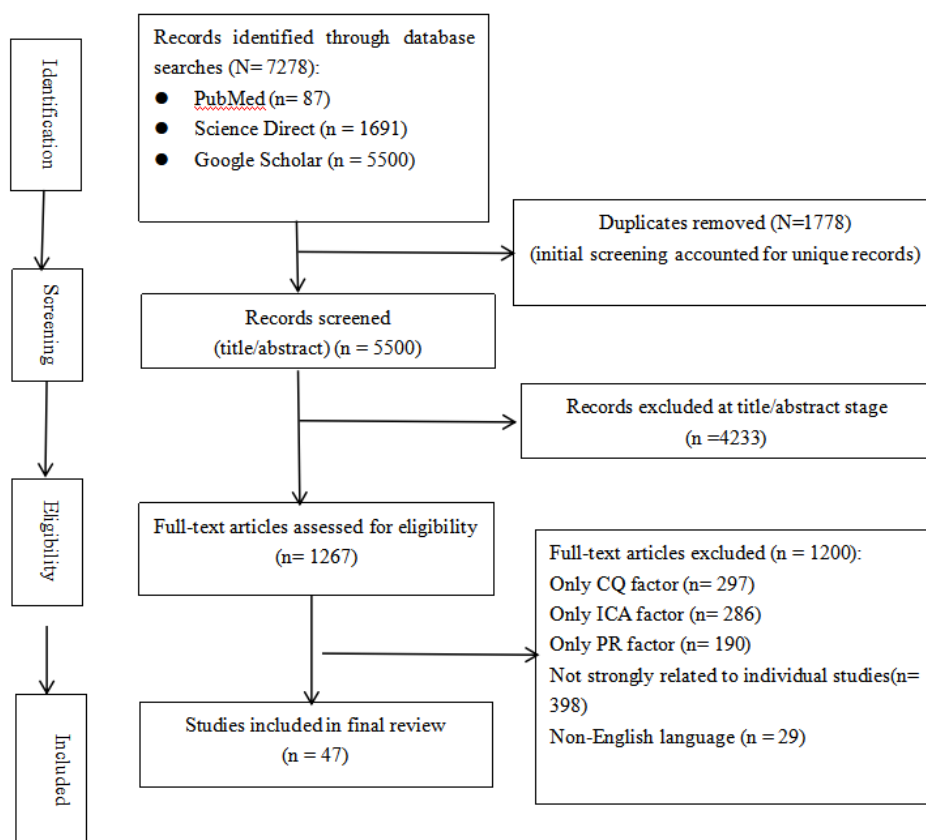
## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Research design and Subject study**

This study employed a qualitative research design based on secondary data to develop an integrative understanding of the relationships among cultural intelligence (CQ), cross-cultural adaptability (CCA), psychological resilience (PR), and their implications for social inclusion. The literature was treated as the primary source of secondary data, with relevant publications identified through a structured search using combinations of the keywords “Cultural Intelligence,” “Cross-Cultural Adaptability,” “Psychological Resilience,” and “Social Inclusion.” The selection of studies was guided by academic

relevance, conceptual alignment with the research questions, empirical or theoretical contribution, and representation of diverse cultural and social contexts. Rather than examining the three constructs as isolated variables, the selected literature was comparatively analysed to identify recurring relationships, explanatory mechanisms, and differences across studies involving international students, expatriate employees, migrants, transnational professionals, and other populations experiencing cross-cultural encounters. The analysis followed a qualitative thematic synthesis in which findings were coded and grouped into three analytical dimensions: capability, process, and outcome. The capability dimension captured cultural intelligence as an individual capacity to recognise, interpret, and respond to cultural differences; the process dimension examined cross-cultural adaptability as the mechanism through which individuals negotiate and adjust to new cultural and social environments; and the outcome dimension focused on psychological resilience as the capacity to maintain or restore psychological functioning in the face of cross-cultural challenges. The comparative synthesis was subsequently used to examine how CQ may provide an initial capability for adaptation, how CCA operates as a mediating process, and how both dimensions contribute to the development of psychological resilience. This design enables the study to move beyond the fragmented treatment of CQ, CCA, and PR in previous scholarship and to construct an integrative capability–process–outcome framework that directly addresses the three research questions and extends the discussion toward social inclusion.

Figure 3. Literature identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and study inclusion process



Source: Researcher, 2026.

Based on Figure 3, The screening process resulted in the final selection of studies that met the predefined inclusion criteria and were considered sufficiently relevant to the research questions. The included studies provided the basis for the subsequent qualitative thematic synthesis, through which evidence on cultural intelligence (CQ), cross-cultural adaptability (CCA), and psychological resilience

(PR) was systematically compared and organised according to the capability–process–outcome framework. This process enabled the review to identify recurring patterns, relationships, and explanatory mechanisms across different cross-cultural populations and contexts.

### Research Tools and Data Collection

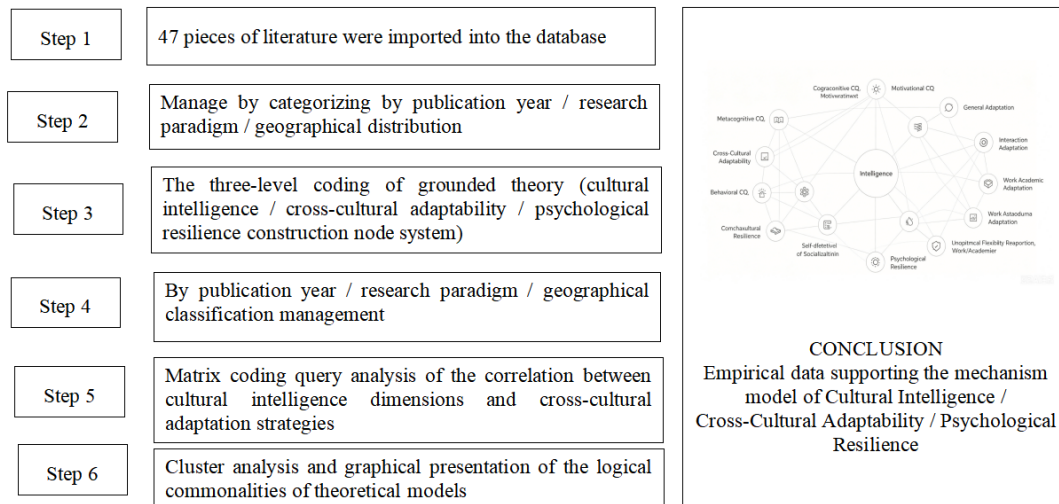
This study employed a structured secondary-data collection and qualitative analysis procedure to develop an integrative understanding of the relationships among cultural intelligence (CQ), cross-cultural adaptability (CCA), psychological resilience (PR), and their implications for social inclusion. The literature served as the primary source of data and was identified through structured searches of relevant academic databases using combinations of the keywords “Cultural Intelligence,” “Cross-Cultural Adaptability,” “Psychological Resilience,” and “Social Inclusion.” The identification, screening, and eligibility assessment processes resulted in 47 publications that met the established relevance and inclusion criteria. These publications constituted the final body of literature analysed in the study.

The selected publications were imported into NVivo 14, which was used as the primary qualitative data-management and analysis tool. The use of NVivo facilitated the systematic organisation, coding, comparison, and visualisation of the selected literature. In the first stage, the 47 publications were entered into the NVivo database and categorised according to publication year, research paradigm, and geographical distribution. This categorisation provided an initial overview of the characteristics and contextual diversity of the literature included in the review.

In the second and third stages, the literature was subjected to systematic thematic and three-level coding based on the conceptual logic of the study. The coding process was structured around the three core dimensions of the proposed framework: capability, process, and outcome. Cultural intelligence was coded primarily as a capability that enables individuals to recognise, interpret, and respond appropriately to cultural differences. Cross-cultural adaptability was coded as a process through which individuals adjust to unfamiliar cultural and social environments, while psychological resilience was examined as an outcome reflecting the capacity to maintain or restore psychological functioning when facing cross-cultural challenges. Relevant references to social inclusion were also coded to examine how these three constructs may contribute to individuals’ participation, belonging, and adjustment within culturally diverse social environments.

The fourth stage involved further classification and management of the coded material according to publication year, research paradigm, and geographical context. This stage enabled comparisons across different research settings and populations and helped identify recurring patterns and contextual differences in the relationships among CQ, CCA, and PR. The fifth stage employed NVivo’s Matrix Coding Query to examine the intersections among the coded dimensions. Rather than treating the constructs as isolated variables, the matrix analysis was used to identify recurring conceptual relationships, particularly the ways in which cultural intelligence may facilitate cross-cultural adaptability and how adaptability may, in turn, contribute to psychological resilience and social inclusion. In the sixth stage, cluster analysis and graphical visualisation were used to identify broader conceptual groupings and relationships across the selected literature. The resulting visual representation helped clarify the logical connections among the major themes and supported the development of the study’s integrative capability–process–outcome framework. The complete sequence of data organisation, coding, matrix analysis, and visualisation is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Data collection and qualitative analysis procedure using NVivo 14.



Source : Researcher, 2026.

Based on Figure 4, the analytical procedure progressed from the organisation of the 47 selected publications to categorical classification, three-level coding, matrix-based comparison, and cluster visualisation. This sequential process enabled the study to move from descriptive organisation of the literature toward an integrated interpretation of the relationships among cultural intelligence, cross-cultural adaptability, and psychological resilience. The resulting conceptual map was subsequently used to address the research questions and to explain how CQ may function as a capability, CCA as an adaptive process, and PR as an important psychological outcome within cross-cultural contexts.

### Data analysis

The selected literature was analysed using a qualitative thematic synthesis to identify and integrate the conceptual relationships among cultural intelligence (CQ), cross-cultural adaptability (CCA), and psychological resilience (PR) in cross-cultural contexts. The analysis was guided by the capability–process–outcome framework, in which CQ was examined as an initial capability that enables individuals to recognise, interpret, and respond effectively to cultural differences; CCA was analysed as the adaptive process through which individuals negotiate unfamiliar cultural and social environments; and PR was examined as an outcome reflecting the capacity to maintain or restore psychological functioning when facing cross-cultural challenges. The analysis proceeded through systematic coding and comparison of findings across the 47 selected publications using NVivo 14. First, relevant statements, findings, and conceptual arguments concerning CQ, CCA, PR, and social inclusion were coded and grouped into thematic categories. Second, matrix coding was used to examine recurring intersections between CQ and PR, CCA and PR, and CQ and CCA, thereby identifying patterns that could explain how cultural intelligence may contribute to resilience directly and indirectly through adaptive processes. Third, the coded findings were comparatively examined across different populations, geographical contexts, and research paradigms to determine whether the identified relationships were consistent or context-dependent. Particular attention was given to evidence describing how individuals' ability to understand cultural differences facilitates adaptation, how successful adaptation supports psychological adjustment and resilience, and how these capabilities and processes may influence individuals' participation, belonging, and ability to remain engaged within culturally diverse environments. The final stage involved cluster analysis and conceptual mapping to integrate the recurring relationships into a coherent explanatory model. Through this analytical procedure, the study did not treat CQ, CCA, and PR as isolated constructs, but synthesised them as interconnected dimensions within a capability–process–outcome mechanism. The analysis

therefore directly addressed the three research questions by examining (1) how CQ contributes to the development of PR in cross-cultural contexts, (2) how CCA contributes to PR in culturally diverse environments, and (3) how CQ and CCA interact conceptually in shaping PR, while also extending the interpretation of these relationships toward their potential implications for social inclusion.

## RESULTS

### Cultural Intelligence and Psychological Resilience

The analysis of the selected literature indicates a consistent relationship between cultural intelligence (CQ) and psychological resilience in cross-cultural contexts. The cluster analysis identified the four dimensions of CQ metacognition, cognition, motivation, and behaviour, as distinct but complementary resources that can support individuals when dealing with culturally unfamiliar environments. Rather than functioning as a single and undifferentiated capability, CQ appears to operate through several forms of cognitive, motivational, and behavioural resources that help individuals interpret cultural differences and respond to associated challenges.

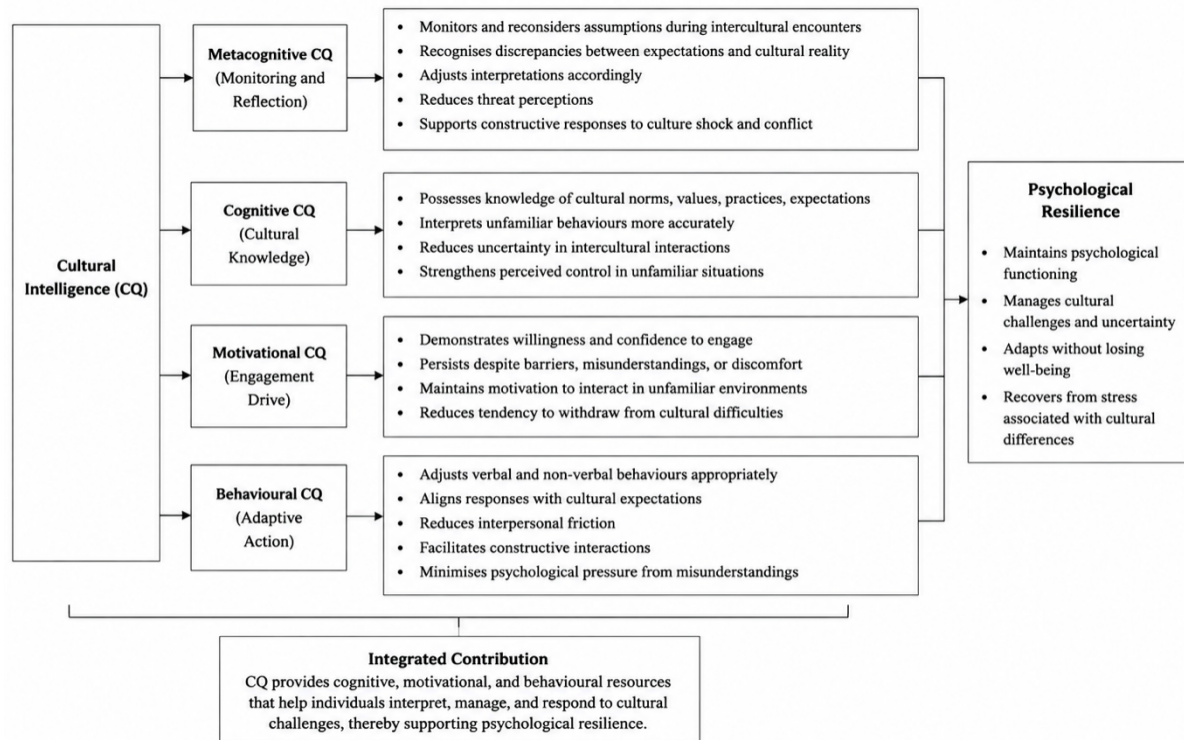
The metacognitive dimension was frequently associated with individuals' ability to monitor and reconsider their assumptions during intercultural encounters (Lane, 2009). This capacity enables individuals to recognise discrepancies between their expectations and the cultural environment and to adjust their interpretations accordingly. Such monitoring may reduce the tendency to interpret unfamiliar cultural experiences as threatening and may therefore support more constructive responses to culture shock and cultural conflict. Cognitive CQ, in contrast, provides knowledge concerning cultural norms, values, social practices, and expectations (Brancu & Benhida, 2020). The literature suggests that this knowledge helps individuals interpret unfamiliar behaviours more accurately and reduces uncertainty in intercultural interactions. Greater understanding of the surrounding cultural environment may consequently strengthen individuals' perceived control when facing unfamiliar situations.

The motivational dimension represents another important component identified across the literature. Individuals with stronger motivational CQ tend to demonstrate greater willingness and confidence to engage with culturally unfamiliar situations (X.-P. Chen et al., 2012). This willingness is particularly relevant when adaptation requires sustained interaction despite cultural barriers, misunderstandings, or initial discomfort. The literature indicates that maintaining motivation to engage with unfamiliar environments may help individuals persist rather than withdraw when confronted with cultural difficulties. Behavioural CQ complements these cognitive and motivational resources by enabling individuals to adjust verbal and non-verbal behaviours according to different cultural expectations (Kidd & Nolan, 2024). Appropriate behavioural responses may reduce interpersonal friction and facilitate more constructive interactions, thereby limiting some of the psychological pressures associated with cultural misunderstanding.

Taken together, the findings indicate that CQ provides individuals with a set of resources for interpreting, managing, and responding to culturally challenging situations. Metacognition supports the monitoring of cultural assumptions, cognition reduces uncertainty through cultural knowledge, motivation sustains engagement, and behaviour facilitates appropriate interaction. The evidence therefore suggests that cultural intelligence is closely associated with psychological resilience by

providing individuals with resources that may help them maintain psychological functioning when confronted with cultural differences and uncertainty (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Dimensions of Cultural Intelligence and Their Contribution to Psychological Resilience



Source : Researcher, 2026.

Based on figure 5, Taken together, the findings show that the contribution of cultural intelligence to psychological resilience lies in the combination of cognitive, motivational, and behavioural resources that enable individuals to respond more effectively to culturally challenging situations. Rather than representing resilience as a direct consequence of a single CQ dimension, the reviewed literature points to a broader pattern in which culturally informed interpretation, sustained engagement, and behavioural flexibility collectively provide resources for maintaining psychological functioning under conditions of cultural uncertainty and interpersonal challenge. These findings establish cultural intelligence as an important capability associated with resilience and provide the empirical basis for examining, in the subsequent analysis, how this capability may become connected with the adaptive processes through which individuals navigate culturally diverse environments.

### Cross-Cultural Adaptability and Psychological Resilience

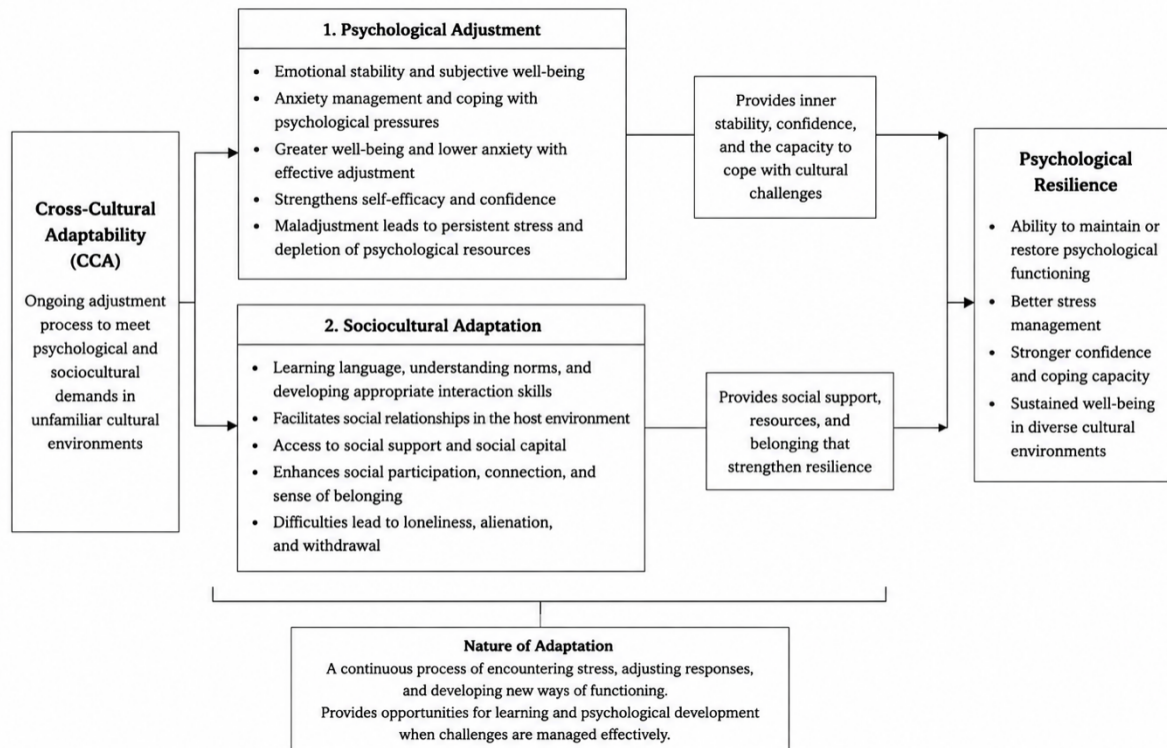
The second pattern identified in the literature concerns the relationship between cross-cultural adaptability (CCA) and psychological resilience. The findings indicate that CCA is closely associated with individuals' ability to maintain psychological functioning while adjusting to unfamiliar cultural environments (Kim, 2012b). In contrast to cultural intelligence, which represents an individual capability for recognising and responding to cultural differences, CCA reflects the ongoing adjustment process through which individuals modify their psychological and sociocultural responses to environmental demands.

The literature identifies two closely related dimensions of cross-cultural adaptation: psychological adjustment and sociocultural adaptation. Psychological adjustment concerns emotional stability, subjective well-being, anxiety management, and the individual's ability to cope with psychological pressures arising from cultural transition (Bethel et al., 2020). The reviewed studies indicate that individuals who adjust more effectively tend to experience greater psychological well-being and lower levels of anxiety in culturally unfamiliar environments. Successful adjustment experiences may also strengthen self-efficacy, as individuals develop greater confidence in their ability to manage subsequent challenges. Conversely, prolonged maladjustment may expose individuals to persistent stress and gradually exhaust psychological resources, potentially undermining their ability to cope with further cultural challenges.

Sociocultural adaptation represents a complementary dimension of the adaptation process. The literature indicates that learning the local language, understanding social norms, and developing culturally appropriate interaction skills can facilitate the formation of social relationships within the host environment (Buivydienė et al., 2026; Queirós et al., 2025). These relationships provide access to social support and social capital, which are relevant to psychological resilience because they provide both emotional and practical resources during periods of difficulty. Successful sociocultural adaptation is therefore associated not only with functional adjustment but also with greater opportunities for social participation, interpersonal connection, and a sense of belonging. Conversely, difficulties in establishing social relationships may increase loneliness, alienation, and withdrawal, creating additional psychological pressures during cultural transition.

The reviewed literature also indicates that adaptation should not be understood simply as the elimination of cultural stress (Kim, 2017). Cross-cultural adaptation may involve a continuing process in which individuals encounter stress, adjust their responses, and develop new ways of functioning within the surrounding environment. In this sense, adaptation can provide opportunities for learning and psychological development when individuals are able to manage cultural challenges effectively. The findings consequently indicate that CCA is closely connected with psychological resilience through both psychological adjustment and sociocultural engagement. Effective adaptation may help individuals manage stress while simultaneously strengthening the social resources, confidence, and sense of belonging that support continued psychological functioning in culturally diverse environments (see figure 6).

Figure 6. Cross-Cultural Adaptability and Its Contribution to Psychological Resilience



Source : Researcher, 2026.

Based on Figure 6, the contribution of cross-cultural adaptability to psychological resilience extends beyond the ability to function effectively in a new cultural setting. The reviewed literature points to adaptation as a process through which individuals gradually develop greater psychological stability, confidence, and access to interpersonal resources while responding to changing cultural demands. This pattern positions CCA as an important process through which individuals can preserve and strengthen their capacity to cope with cross-cultural challenges, providing the basis for examining how this adaptive process may be connected with cultural intelligence in the broader capability–process–outcome relationship.

## DISCUSSION

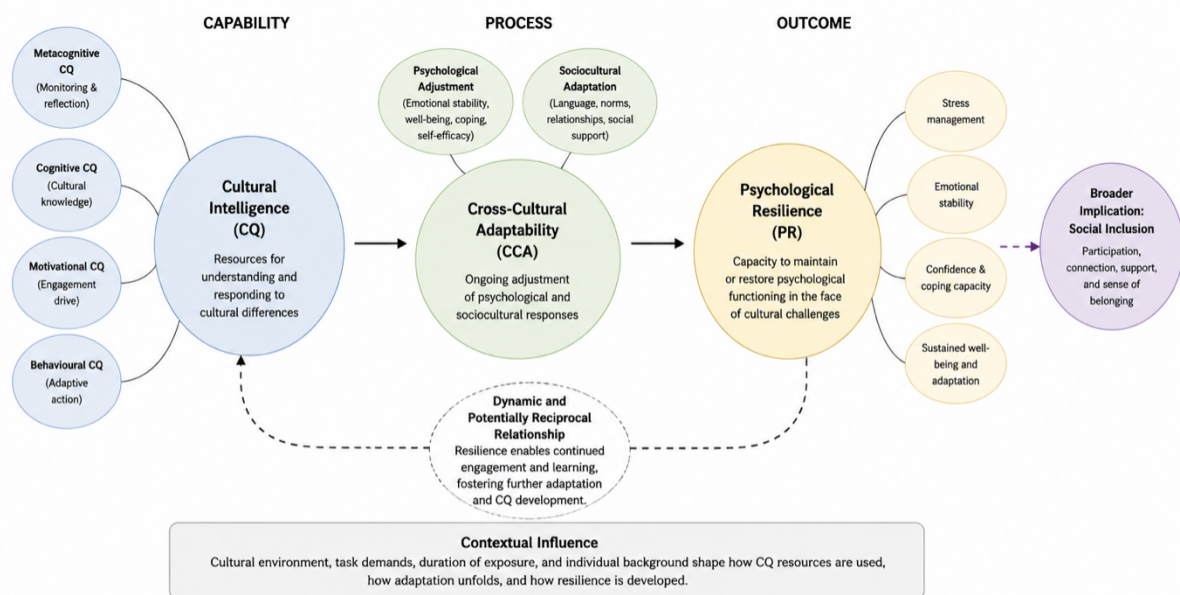
### Integrating Cultural Intelligence, Cross-Cultural Adaptability, and Psychological Resilience

The findings from RQ1 and RQ2 provide a basis for understanding how cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adaptability may be interconnected in the development of psychological resilience. While cultural intelligence represents an individual capability for recognising and interpreting cultural differences, cross-cultural adaptability represents the process through which individuals respond to and adjust to those differences. Psychological resilience subsequently reflects the capacity to maintain or restore psychological functioning while navigating the demands associated with cultural transition. Viewed together, these relationships suggest a capability–process–outcome configuration rather than three independent constructs.

Cultural intelligence can be understood as the initial resource that equips individuals to make sense of culturally unfamiliar situations (Meyers & Green, 2026). Metacognitive and cognitive CQ help individuals recognise cultural differences and reconsider existing assumptions (Phelan, 2021), while motivational and behavioural CQ support continued engagement and appropriate responses during intercultural interaction (Ward et al., 2011). However, possessing cultural intelligence does not necessarily guarantee successful adjustment. The resources provided by CQ need to be translated into actual responses to the social and psychological demands of a new environment. This is where cross-cultural adaptability becomes important. CCA represents the process through which individuals apply, modify, and develop their responses as they interact with unfamiliar cultural contexts.

The relationship between CQ and CCA identified in the literature therefore provides an important link between individual capability and adaptive outcomes. Individuals who are better able to recognise cultural cues, interpret unfamiliar behaviours, maintain motivation, and modify their interaction strategies may be better positioned to navigate the adaptation process. In turn, successful adaptation can provide experiences of competence, social connection, and environmental familiarity that support psychological resilience. This interpretation extends the findings beyond a simple assumption that CQ independently produces resilience. Instead, the literature suggests that part of the relevance of CQ for resilience may lie in its capacity to facilitate more effective adaptation to culturally diverse environments (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Integrative Capability–Process–Outcome Framework Linking Cultural Intelligence, Cross-Cultural Adaptability, and Psychological Resilience



Source : Researcher, 2026.

The relationship presented in the framework may also be dynamic rather than strictly unidirectional. Psychological resilience can help individuals remain engaged when cultural adjustment becomes difficult, allowing them to continue learning from intercultural experiences and developing their adaptive capacities (Yang & Gao, 2025b). This suggests a potentially reinforcing relationship in which cultural intelligence facilitates adaptation, adaptation supports resilience, and resilience enables continued engagement with subsequent cultural challenges. However, because the present study is

based on a synthesis of existing literature rather than longitudinal empirical testing, this reciprocal relationship should be understood as a theoretically supported interpretation rather than a confirmed causal pathway. The integrated framework also helps explain why individuals exposed to similar cross-cultural environments may experience different adaptation outcomes. Although cultural conditions provide the external context, individuals differ in their ability to interpret cultural information, sustain motivation, modify behaviour, establish social relationships, and regulate psychological responses. CQ and CCA therefore represent complementary dimensions of cross-cultural functioning: CQ provides resources for understanding and responding to cultural differences, whereas CCA reflects the practical and psychological adjustment of these resources within a particular environment. Psychological resilience, in turn, represents the capacity to maintain functioning despite the challenges associated with cross-cultural experiences.

Beyond psychological functioning, the integrated mechanism has broader implications for social inclusion. Cultural intelligence may enable individuals to recognise and navigate cultural differences, while cross-cultural adaptability facilitates appropriate psychological and sociocultural responses within diverse environments. When these capabilities and adaptive processes are accompanied by psychological resilience, individuals may be better positioned to sustain social participation, develop interpersonal relationships, and maintain a sense of belonging despite cultural differences or challenges. Social inclusion can therefore be understood as a broader contextual implication of the capability–process–outcome relationship rather than as a direct outcome empirically tested in the present review. This distinction is important because the reviewed literature primarily addresses CQ, CCA, and PR, while the connection to social inclusion emerges through recurring themes of participation, social connection, support, and belonging.

## IMPLICATIONS

The integrated findings also have implications beyond individual psychological functioning, particularly for social inclusion in culturally diverse environments. The results of RQ2 indicate that cross-cultural adaptation is associated with the development of social networks, social capital, interpersonal connection, and a sense of belonging. These processes are relevant to social inclusion because inclusion involves more than physical presence within a social environment; it also concerns individuals' ability to participate, establish meaningful relationships, and experience a sense of belonging. From this perspective, cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adaptability may represent micro-level capacities that support more inclusive social interactions by reducing cultural misunderstanding and enabling individuals to engage more effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds.

This implication is particularly relevant in increasingly mobile and culturally diverse societies, where individuals may simultaneously encounter differences in language, social norms, values, and communication practices. Individuals who are unable to interpret or adapt to these differences may be more vulnerable to social isolation, alienation, and withdrawal. Conversely, the capacity to understand cultural differences, adjust behaviour, maintain psychological functioning, and develop supportive relationships may create conditions that

facilitate participation and belonging. Thus, the significance of CQ and CCA extends from individual adaptation to the broader social environment in which adaptation takes place.

From a sustainability perspective, these findings suggest that resilient societies depend not only on institutional or material capacities but also on individuals' ability to negotiate diversity and maintain constructive social relationships. Strengthening cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adaptability may therefore complement broader efforts to foster socially inclusive and cohesive environments. Nevertheless, social inclusion and community-level resilience were not directly measured in the present study. Their role should consequently be interpreted as a broader theoretical and practical implication of the findings rather than as a directly demonstrated outcome.

## CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study examined the relationships among cultural intelligence, cross-cultural adaptability, and psychological resilience through a qualitative synthesis of 20 representative publications. The findings indicate that cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adaptability are closely associated with psychological resilience, while performing different functions within the process of cross-cultural adjustment. Cultural intelligence provides cognitive, motivational, and behavioural resources that enable individuals to recognise, interpret, and respond to cultural differences. Cross-cultural adaptability represents the subsequent process through which individuals adjust their psychological responses and sociocultural behaviours to unfamiliar environments. Psychological resilience, in turn, reflects the capacity to maintain or restore psychological functioning when confronted with cultural stress, uncertainty, and adaptation challenges. The integration of the findings supports a capability–process–outcome perspective in which cultural intelligence may facilitate cross-cultural adaptability, while effective adaptation may contribute to psychological resilience through improved psychological adjustment, social connection, self-efficacy, and access to social support. The findings further suggest that these relationships may be dynamic and mutually reinforcing, as psychological resilience can enable individuals to remain engaged with challenging intercultural experiences and continue developing their adaptive capacities. However, this interpretation should not be understood as evidence of a definitive causal sequence. Rather, it represents an integrated interpretation emerging from the patterns identified across the reviewed literature.

The study also highlights the broader relevance of these relationships to social inclusion. The capacity to understand cultural differences, adapt to unfamiliar social environments, establish supportive relationships, and maintain psychological functioning may facilitate participation and a sense of belonging in culturally diverse settings. Cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adaptability can therefore be understood as potentially important micro-level capacities that contribute to more inclusive and socially resilient environments. Nevertheless, social inclusion and community-level resilience were not directly measured in this study. Their relevance should consequently be interpreted as a broader implication of the findings rather than as a directly established empirical outcome.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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