



Cultural Intelligence, Social Support, and Work Wellbeing among International Teachers in Thai Universities: The Mediating Effect of Psychological Adaptation

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Article Info

Received: January 05, 2026

Accepted: May 26, 2026

Published: June 16, 2026



10.46303/jcve.2026.35

How to cite

Thongprayoon, T., & Mohan, K. P. (2026). Cultural Intelligence, Social Support, and Work Wellbeing among International Teachers in Thai Universities: The Mediating Effect of Psychological Adaptation. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 9(2), 417-440.

<https://doi.org/10.46303/jcve.2026.35>

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring the wellbeing of international teachers is essential for the success of internationalization in higher education; however, research examining the role of various factors in Thailand remains limited. Grounded in the person – environment (P – E) interactionist theories, this research aimed to examine the mediating role of psychological adaptation (PA) on the relationship between cultural intelligence, social support, and work wellbeing among international teachers in Thai universities. A cross-sectional design was used to examine the hypothesized pathways. Furthermore, qualitative questions were designed to probe issues related to adaptation in Thailand. Snowball sampling was used to collect data from 109 international teachers from 28 countries who had worked for more than 6 months in various Thai universities. The results demonstrated significant positive relationships among the study variables, with the exception of personal support and PA. Furthermore, PA mediated the link between cultural intelligence, partially mediated the link with organizational support, but did not mediate the link with personal support and the outcome of work wellbeing. Additional qualitative analysis of respondents' written answers identified six themes each for adaptation facilitators and challenges in Thailand, clustered according to P-E theory. The findings of this research underscore the critical mechanism of PA for wellbeing of expatriate teachers. Moreover, it is recommended that higher education administrators and policymakers develop targeted strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing cultural intelligence at the individual-level, and strengthening social support at the organizational-level. These could promote adaptation and wellbeing of foreign teachers, and thereby promote sustainable internationalization of higher education.

KEYWORDS

Cultural intelligence; work wellbeing; perceived organizational support; perceived social support; international university teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the key to developing human capital in any context, and the role of teachers is crucial in raising the quality of education. With increasing mobilization of workers in a globalized world, there have been rising numbers of international teachers, who leave their home countries to teach in other countries. While researchers have noted the contributions of international teachers towards the growth in diversity, collaboration, networks, research and cultural awareness, it is also noted that they face several challenges in the process of adaptation (Yip et al., 2024). The process of adapting to their host country, new culture, and work environment often impacts the wellbeing of these teachers. Although previous research has examined some aspects of this phenomenon, there is limited research using theoretical frameworks to examine psychological adaptation and work well-being, specifically in the context of international university teachers in Thailand.

While cross-cultural adaptation has garnered increasing interest in research, there is limited research that examines it from the theoretical perspective of the person – environment (P – E) interaction theories, which posits that behavior is not simply a function of dispositional traits or situational forces in isolation, but rather emerges from the dynamic, reciprocal interaction between the person and the environment (Endler & Magnusson, 1976). A review of existing literature shows that cultural intelligence is an important factor in the cross-cultural adaptation of expatriates (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Morin & Talbot, 2023; Papadopoulou et al., 2022), along with social support, at both organizational and family levels (El Amine & Cascón-Pereira, 2023; Grilo et al., 2025). However, there is no study that examines the role of these two variables chosen from the lens of person – environment theory, on the outcome of wellbeing among international university teachers in Thailand. Thus, given the gaps in research, this research proposes to examine the mediating effect of *psychological adaptation* on the relationships between the person variable (cultural intelligence), environment variables (social support at work and from family) and work wellbeing of international teachers in Thai universities.

Understanding the wellbeing of expatriate teachers could be important for predicting their success (Gai et al., 2021). The outcome of these is meaningful in the development of the quality of education. Developing strategies and interventions from evidence-based research can have empirical and applied value in the behavioral sciences (Mohan et al., 2023). Thus, this research aims to contribute towards developing knowledge through systematic research that could be useful in contribution towards the achievement of United Nations' 17 sustainable development goals or the SDGs (2024), especially SDG 3 (health and wellbeing) and SDG 4 (quality education) when applied in the context of international teachers in Thai universities. The ensuing knowledge from this research could be utilized by administrators and policy makers in higher education in Thailand for enhancing work wellbeing of the international teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides an overview of the context, theoretical framework, variables of this study, and related research studies.

The Research Context

Researchers have noted the problems faced in cross – cultural adaption by teachers who go to foreign countries to teach (King et al., 2022; Morin & Talbot, 2023; Papadopoulou et al., 2022). Many international teachers come to teach in universities in Thailand, however not enough research exists on the impact on their wellbeing during their work tenure. Thus, this research aims to investigate a hypothesized model of the chosen variables of cultural intelligence, social support, psychological adaptation and wellbeing among international university teachers.

Theoretical Framework

A behavioral science perspective has been applied for this research as it allows for a holistic and systematic understanding of behavior through its interdisciplinary approach (Mohan, 2015; 2016). Researchers have noted that the person – environment (P – E) interaction theories of behavioral science can provide a richer insight into understanding behavior as it considers both person and environment factors that impact human behavior and outcomes (Endler & Magnusson, 1976; Kristof-Brown, 2020). Despite the theoretical relevance of Endler and Magnusson's (1976) person – environment interactionist framework, and despite the growing practical importance of understanding expatriate teacher adaptation and wellbeing, no empirical research has systematically examined how cultural intelligence (as a person variable) and social support (as an environment variable) interact to predict the work wellbeing of expatriate teachers in Thai university contexts. The existing literature is limited by its predominant focus on corporate expatriates and other migrant workers (Bierwiazzonek et al., 2025; Liem et al., 2021), its additive rather than interactionist modeling of predictor variables, its underspecification of social support sources and mechanisms relevant to teachers. This research aims to examine the hypothesized relationships among the variables based on the person – environment theory.

The main research variables in this research are grouped into the dependent variable, the independent variables and the mediator variable. There are two independent variables in this study. The “person” variable is cultural intelligence, and the “environment” variables are perceived social support (measured in two dimensions: work and personal life). The dependent variable is work wellbeing. Psychological adaptation is hypothesized as the mediator variable that mediates the relationship between cultural intelligence and work well-being. Research guiding the selection of these variables is shared.

Cultural Intelligence

The definition of the person variable of “cultural Intelligence” is based on the work of Ang et al. (2007), who developed a scale and measured it in four dimensions - metacognitive, cognitive, motivation, and behavior. Bucker et al. (2016) have tested the measurement of cultural intelligence scale and found it to be robust in expatriates. A growing body of empirical research

has established cultural intelligence (CQ) as a significant and theoretically meaningful antecedent of expatriate adjustment across diverse international contexts. From foundational studies establishing the psychometric validity of CQ and its predictive relationships with adjustment outcomes (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003), to meta-analytic syntheses confirming robust cross-study effects (El Amine & Cascón-Pereira Presbitero, 2024), the evidence consistently supports the position that individuals equipped with greater cultural intelligence navigate the demands of international relocation and cross-cultural functioning more effectively than those with lower CQ. However, a critical examination of this literature reveals that its findings have been generated predominantly from corporate expatriate and student sojourner samples, with international university teachers representing a conspicuously underrepresented population whose unique professional, relational, and institutional demands may substantially qualify the generalizability of existing findings. Thus, this variable was chosen in the research.

Social Support

In a meta-analysis by van der Laken et al. (2019), social support was found to be beneficial for fostering expatriate success and various outcomes. As noted in a recent systematic review by El Amine and Cascón-Pereira (2024), organizational support and family support are crucial for wellbeing of expatriates. University teachers who are international migrants may face many barriers in their cross-cultural adjustment such as lack of social support at work and by peers, which negatively impacts their work-life balance (Quinn & Hartland-Grant, 2026). International migrant academics frequently report inadequate institutional support upon arrival in their host country (Richardson & McKenna, 2002), a deficit that is compounded by the strain that international relocation places on personal relationships as academics navigate the competing demands of professional responsibilities and domestic life in an unfamiliar environment (Mäkelä et al., 2011). Thus, two environmental variables examined in the context of this research are organizational support and perceived personal support.

Psychological Adaptation

In this research, the concept of psychological adaptation is based on the work by Demes and Geeraert (2014), who defined it as the emotional and affective component of cultural adaptation. This concept focuses on an individual's emotional wellbeing in a new environment. It reflects how positively or negatively a person feels about their new culture and is measured through instruments like the *brief psychological adaptation scale* (BPAS, Demes & Geeraert, 2014), which assesses emotions such as feeling out of place or happy with daily life.

The importance of psychological adaptation on mental health and wellbeing of expatriates has been highlighted in a review by Gai et al. (2021). Research suggests meaningful theoretical and empirical links between cultural intelligence (CQ), psychological adaptation, and work wellbeing among internationally mobile professionals, though these connections remain underexplored in international university teacher populations specifically. Research shows linkages between cultural intelligence and psychological adaptation, such as the mediating role

of cultural adaptation between cultural intelligence and academic performance of international students in Thai context (D'Souza et al., 2023) and resilience plays a mediating role in the relationship between cultural intelligence and cross-cultural adaptation among international students in China (Chu & Zhu, 2023). But there is no research, to the best of our knowledge, that examines these linkages among international teachers in Thai universities. Hence, this research proposes its intervening effect as a mediator on the relationship between cultural intelligence/social support and employee wellbeing, in the chosen context of international teachers working at universities in Thailand.

Work Wellbeing

The dependent variable in the research is *work wellbeing*. The concept of wellbeing can be measured in many ways (Mohan, 2023, p.7). As this research takes a behavioral sciences perspective, having an interdisciplinary understanding of wellbeing can be important (Sirgy, 2021 as quoted by Mohan, 2023, p.9); the researchers aim to measure the cognitive, affective, and mental health dimensions, that have shown to predict wellbeing significantly (Mohan et al., 2023). In this research, wellbeing is studied from the context of work.

A multitude of factors can impact the adaptation of expatriates and their work wellbeing. Previous research shows that cultural intelligence (Ang & Dyne, 2008; Solomon & Steyn, 2017) and social support (van der Laken et al., 2019) have positive impacts on adaptation and work wellbeing of foreign workers. In a recent thematic literature review of 35 studies researchers (Murali et al., 2025) found cultural intelligence as one of the key developmental factors influencing expatriate adaptation and highlighted its impact on work wellbeing. In their review of research, Grilo et al. (2025) highlight the importance of organizational support in cultural adaptation and work-life balance of expatriates. However, direct empirical examination of the specific variables chosen in this research and their sequential relationships within international university teacher populations in Thailand remains absent from the literature, representing a significant theoretical and practical gap.

Contribution to the Research Gaps

While most of the research on international teacher wellbeing has been widely studied in Western contexts, this research provides new insights by focusing on international faculty working in Thai universities. Furthermore, this study contributes uniquely to the field by exploring how psychological adaptation mediates the impact of cultural intelligence and social support on the wellbeing of international teachers in Thailand. Finally, the overarching purpose is to provide both empirical and practical implications for supporting the adjustment and wellbeing of international teachers in higher education settings.

Research Hypotheses and the Conceptual Framework

Based on the review of the theoretical framework and research, five hypotheses were framed for this research:

H1: Cultural intelligence has a positive effect on psychological adaptation.

H2: Social support (organizational and personal) has a positive effect on psychological adaptation.

H3: Psychological adaptation has a positive effect on work wellbeing.

H4: Psychological adaptation mediates the relationship between cultural intelligence and work wellbeing.

H5: Psychological adaptation mediates the relationship between social support (organizational and personal) and work wellbeing.

Furthermore, the researchers aimed to probe more deeply to understand the facilitators and barriers of the adaptation process of the international teachers working in Thailand. Thus, two research questions were designed to allow qualitative/subjective responses:

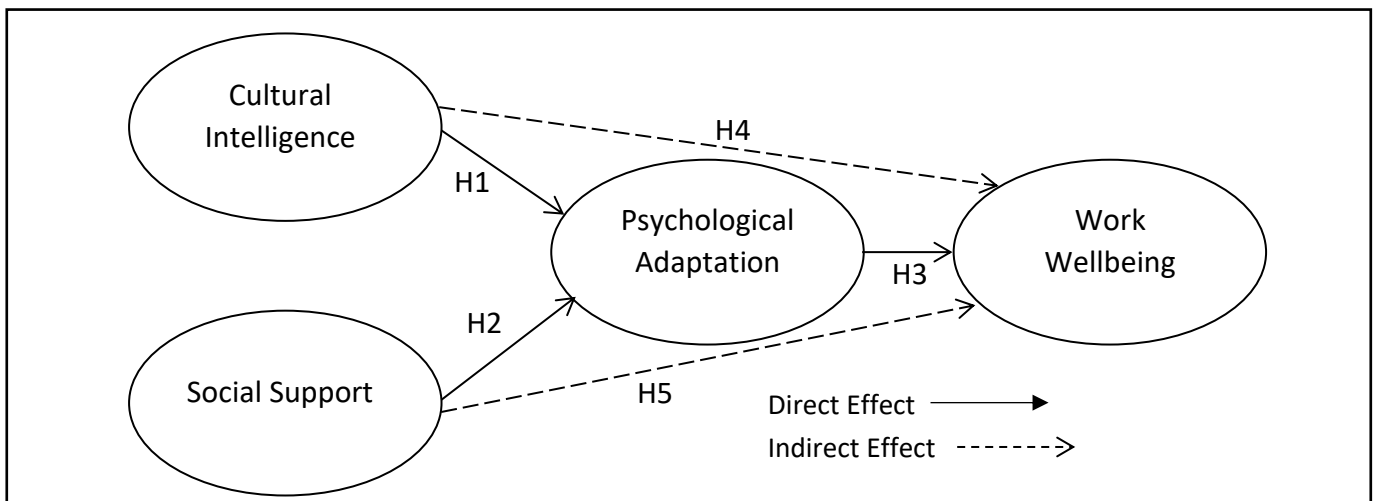
1. What do you like about working in Thailand?

2. What are the difficulties/challenges of working in Thailand?

The proposed conceptual framework of the hypothesized relationship among the study variables is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Proposed Conceptual Framework



Note. H= hypothesis

METHOD

Design of Research

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to examine the relationships between study variables. A cross-sectional design has many benefits, such as cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, and ability to examine multiple variables simultaneously at a single point in time (Wang & Cheng, 2020). This approach is well-suited for exploring relationships among variables in social science research (Spector, 2019).

Data collection was conducted via a self-administered online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The instrument comprised two components: (1) validated psychometric scales measuring key constructs for quantitative analysis, and (2) open-ended items capturing

qualitative data to provide nuanced insights into participant perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants

The population of this study comprised international teachers working in Thai universities; however, exact population figures are unavailable. Following Hair et al. (2019), who recommend a minimum sample-size-to-parameters ratio of 10:1, the study required at least 120 participants, given its 5 latent variables and 7 observed variables (12 parameters in total). Snowball sampling (Noy, 2008) was used to recruit international teachers who had been employed at a Thai university for at least one academic year, were actively engaged in teaching, could communicate in English, and voluntarily agreed to participate. Teachers with less than one year of experience in Thailand, those not currently teaching (including those on sabbatical), or those who declined participation were excluded. These criteria ensured that the sample reflected individuals with sufficient professional and cultural experience in the Thai higher education context. In practice, only 109 international teachers responded to the survey as shown in Table 2, because as the research was conducted during the semester (October 2025) and teachers were busy with work.

Instruments

The researchers designed a survey that measured both quantitative responses to the instruments measuring variables (total number of items = 57) in the study and also invited qualitative responses to questions (items = 2) seeking insights about the experiences of working and living in Thailand.

First, all the study instruments were adapted from existing instruments that have good psychometric properties. Permissions were taken from original authors and original English language scales were used for data collection. Some wordings/items were adapted to match the context of the research, such as “in the context of your university life”. A pilot survey ($n = 10$) was conducted along with cognitive interviews ($n = 3$) in order to review the survey questions. Feedback was used to make modifications. All responses were measured on a 7-points Likert scale (where 1 = strongly disagree, and 7 = strongly agree). Demographic questions were developed by the researchers to collect data on 13 different aspects such as age, gender, and others.

An overview of research instruments is presented in the Table 1. It shows the variables, the scale measuring it, the dimensions, number of items and the original authors of the scales. Furthermore, Cronbach’s alpha scores for all study scales were calculated, and showed high levels of internal consistency and reliability ranging from .77 to .96.

There were two open-ended questions at the end of section 1 of the survey, after the demographic questions. They were: 1) “What do you like about working in Thailand? Please explain briefly”; 2) “What are the difficulties/challenges of working in Thailand? Please share some points based on your experience”.

Table 1.*Variables and Instruments in the Research*

Variables	Scale	Dimensions	No. of items	α	Original Author
<i>Independent variable (Person Level)</i> Cultural Intelligence	Cultural intelligence scale	4	20	0.89	Van Dyne et al. (2015).
<i>Independent variable (Environment Level)</i> 1.Organizational support	Perceived organizational support scale	1	9	0.96	Eisenberger et al. (1986).
2.Personal support- family, friends, others	Multidimensional scale of perceived social support	3	12	0.93	Zimet et al. (1988).
<i>Mediator variable</i> Psychological adaptation	Brief psychological adaptation scale	4	10	0.77	Demes and Geeraert (2014)
<i>Dependent variable:</i> Work Wellbeing	Work wellbeing scale	1	6	0.92	Zheng et al. (2015)

Note. α = Cronbach's alpha

Data Collection

The researchers took an official approval letter from the university, and created a poster for the survey with a QR code and link for the Google Survey. We reached out to international teachers working in universities across Thailand during October – November 2025. The study employed snowball sampling (also known as chain-referral sampling) as its participant recruitment strategy. This approach is useful in research to reach targeted participants (Noy, 2008). The researchers leveraged existing contacts and professional networks to engage participants who met the criteria such as being an international teacher who has been working in the university for over 6 months. Data were collected from 109 international teachers, who responded to our survey.

Data Analysis

Appropriate data analysis techniques were employed to test the hypothesized relationships in the model, including mediation analysis, as well as descriptive and correlational analyses. Before testing the hypotheses, Cronbach's alpha (α) was calculated to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the instruments. Tests of normality were also conducted, as mentioned in the results section.

For the qualitative responses for two questions, data were analyzed using Google NotebookLM AI software and organized into themes based on relevant theoretical frameworks

and empirical evidence. The authors then conducted “human cross-checking procedures” to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis.

Ethical Procedures

The researchers obtained ethical approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. The researchers took various ethical measures such as taking informed consent, and providing detailed information about the objectives of this research. All efforts were made to ensuring anonymity of the participants, protect participants' rights, and ensuring their well-being.

RESULTS

The results of this research are presented in four sections, with demographic data, correlation analysis, mediation analysis, and qualitative data analysis.

Demographic Characteristics of the Research Group

Data were collected from international teachers working at various Thai universities ($n = 109$). The demographic profile of the sample showed that most were female (59.6%), aged between 35 to 39 years (23.9%), and held at least a master's degree (60.5%). The teachers came from 28 different countries, with the largest numbers coming from the Philippines (21.1%). The sample worked for a range of years, with most working over 6 years in Thailand (55%), and while a majority worked at universities (77.1%), others worked at institutes linked with universities. The respondents' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 2 (see appendix).

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Means and standard deviations of the sample scores were calculated. Prior to SEM analysis, normality assumptions were examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which is appropriate for the sample size ($N = 109$; Shapiro & Wilk, 1965; Royston, 1992). All variables demonstrated acceptable normality (see Table 2), with skewness and kurtosis values within acceptable ranges ($|\text{skewness}| < 2$, $|\text{kurtosis}| < 7$). However, Shapiro-Wilk test revealed significant departures from normality for all study variables ($W = [0.85 \text{ to } 0.97]$, $p < .01 \text{ to } .05$). To address this violation, we utilized bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for the mediation analysis in JASP, as this method does not assume normality (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the study variables, as shown in Table 3 (see appendix). The results show a significant positive correlation between all variables ranging from .32 to .75; not exceeding the higher levels that indicate multicollinearity (more than .80). The only non-significant relationship was between personal support and psychological adaptation.

Hypotheses Testing Results

A parallel mediation analysis was conducted using JASP (version 0.96) to examine whether psychological adaptation mediated the relationships between three independent predictors (cultural intelligence, organizational support, and personal support) and work wellbeing. All

three predictors were entered simultaneously into the model. Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals were calculated using 5,000 bootstrap samples. Indirect effects were considered significant if the 95% confidence interval (CI) did not include zero. Bootstrapping is generally more powerful with smaller sample sizes where normal distribution assumptions fail (Chernick, 2008). The results of the hypotheses testing for direct, indirect and total effects are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.*Hypotheses Testing Results*

Path	Effect	Estimate	Std. error	z-value	p	95% CI		Interpretation
						Lower	Upper	
CI→PA	Direct	0.24	0.1	2.39	0.02	0.04	0.44	H1 supported
CI→WWB	Direct	-0.04	0.07	-0.63	0.53	-0.18	0.09	
CI→PA→WWB	Indirect	0.06	0.03	1.98	0.05	0.01	0.14	
	<i>Total</i>	0.02	0.08	0.22	0.83	-0.14	0.18	H4: full mediation
OS→PA	Direct	0.46	0.08	5.82	< .01	0.28	0.6	H2a supported
OS→WWB	Direct	0.57	0.08	7.03	< .01	0.39	0.7	
OS→PA→WWB	Indirect	0.12	0.04	2.92	< .01	0.05	0.2	H5a: partial mediation
	<i>Total</i>	0.69	0.07	9.61	< .01	0.53	0.81	
PS→PA	Direct	0.22	0.08	2.72	< .01	0.06	0.38	H2b supported
PS→WWB	Direct	0.22	0.08	2.72	< .01	0.06	0.38	
PS→PA→WWB	Indirect	-0.04	0.03	-1.19	0.23	-0.11	0.01	H5b not supported
	<i>Total</i>	0.18	0.09	2.04	0.04	-85.4	0.34	
PA→WWB	Direct	0.25	0.07	3.87	< .01	0.13	0.38	H3 supported

Note: CI= Cultural intelligence, OS= organizational support, PS= Personal support, PA= Psychological adaptation, WWB= Work wellbeing.

Results showed that while cultural intelligence had significant indirect effect on work wellbeing (WWB) through psychological adaptation (PA) ($b = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.13]), it did not have a significant direct on WWB. Hence there is a full mediation effect, PA fully mediates the relationship between CI and WWB.

For social support, there were two dimensions tested: organization and personal support. Results for organizational support showed that it had significant direct, indirect ($b = 0.12$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.20]) and total effect on work wellbeing through PA. Thus, it had a partial mediation effect, meaning higher organizational support increased wellbeing both directly and by boosting PA.

Results for personal support showed that while it had a significant direct effect, the indirect effect was not significant ($b = -0.04$, 95% CI [-0.11, 0.01]). Interestingly, personal support predicts work wellbeing but does not significantly influence WWB through PA in the context of this sample.

Additionally, PA had a direct significant effect on work wellbeing, supporting the hypothesis 5.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

In addition to the quantitative survey, two qualitative questions were asked to understand the reasons that helped (facilitators) and the challenges (barriers) of the adaptation process of the international teachers. These were: “What do you like about working in Thailand?” and “What are the difficulties/challenges of working in Thailand?” All 109 respondents responded to the qualitative questions; data were synthesized using Google NotebookLM AI software and sorted into themes based on theoretical framework of the person – environment theories and previous research evidence with the human cross-checking procedures. The qualitative data were initially coded by the first author, and then reviewed by the second author to verify interpretive accuracy and consistency (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis of the qualitative data is summarized in Tables 5 and 6 (see appendix) as themes, sub-themes and emerging implications.

As presented in Table 5, the international teachers’ responses regarding what they appreciated about working in Thailand were organized into six emerging themes with several sub-themes. These themes can be grouped into three overarching clusters based on person–environment (P–E) interaction theories. The first cluster concerns the workplace context and encompasses three key themes: i) the kind of workplace and professional environment; ii) supervisory/co-worker support; and iii) teaching and student dynamics.

The second cluster relates to the person – environment fit, where the personal needs, likes and interests of the respondents seem to be matched by their experiences in Thailand, leading to, i) their experiences of a better quality of work/life; and ii) reported satisfaction with the infrastructure and conveniences.

The third cluster of *positive cultural and interpersonal dynamics* emerged through an appreciation of the various aspects of Thai culture and positive socio-cultural exchange positive cultural and interpersonal dynamics.

For the second question, about the difficulties and challenges for the international teachers working in Thailand, the responses are synthesized into six emerging themes, with many sub-themes, and emerging implications as shown in Table 6. The first theme, most reported, was about language and communication barriers. It was followed by the second source of challenge due to visa, work permits, contracts, and bureaucracy. The third was about experiences arising from workplace issues and cultural differences. The fourth theme was related to problems in the education system and student-related challenges. The fifth theme related to the perception of employment, growth opportunities, and salary affordability. The

sixth theme emerged from challenges in personal and cultural adaptation. Implications are identified at national policy level, and university/department levels.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion of Main Results

The distinct contribution of this research was integrating cultural intelligence and social support within the framework of person–environment interactionism to examine work well-being, with psychological adaptation (PA) as a mediator. The main findings of this research confirmed that PA mediates the links between the two predictors of cultural intelligence and organizational support with the outcome of work well-being. However, PA did not mediate the relationships between personal support and work wellbeing.

The findings revealed significant direct effects of cultural intelligence on both psychological adaptation and indirectly on work well-being with PA as a mediating mechanism. This finding is consistent with prior research demonstrating that culturally intelligent individuals possess the cognitive, motivational, and behavioral capacities to navigate diverse environments more effectively, thereby directly enhancing their work well-being (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003). The direct effect of cultural intelligence on psychological adaptation further aligns with studies suggesting that individuals with higher cultural intelligence are better equipped to adjust psychologically to new and culturally diverse workplace demands (Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Molinsky, 2007). These findings align with another study in the Thai context, wherein, D'Souza (2022) found that cultural intelligence explains up to 15.1. % variance in cultural adaptation of expatriates in Thailand, and confirms the mediating role of adaptation. Another study by Liu et al. (2025) confirmed the mediating role of cross-cultural adaptation on the association between cultural intelligence and linguistic confidence among international students

The influence of social support varied depending on its source, with organizational and personal support demonstrating distinct effects. Notably, psychological adaptation mediated the relationship between organizational support and work well-being, whereas no such mediating effect was observed for personal support. These findings are supported by recent research, wherein a meta-analysis conducted by van der Laken et al. (2019) demonstrated that social support plays a beneficial role in promoting expatriate success and a range of positive outcomes. Similarly, a recent systematic review by El Amine and Cascón-Pereira (2023) highlighted the critical importance of both organizational and family support for the wellbeing of expatriates. In their review of research, Grilo et al. (2025) also highlight the importance of organizational support in cultural adaptation and work-life balance of expatriates. However, in this research the personal support did not significantly impact work wellbeing through the mediating mechanism of PA. This suggests that personal support influences work wellbeing directly rather than through changes in psychological adaptation; feeling supported personally

may directly enhance wellbeing in the workplace without necessarily requiring individuals to first adapt psychologically (Taylor, 2011).

The qualitative themes regarding the reasons international teachers liked working in Thailand have been synthesized into 3 clusters of 6 themes, which can be identified as the *facilitators* of the adaptation process. The first cluster consists of the type of workplace and professional environment, supervisory/co-worker support and teaching and student dynamics. The second cluster is identified as perceptions of a better quality of work/life, and satisfaction with the infrastructure and conveniences in the country. The third and final cluster was identification of positive cultural and interpersonal dynamics, which emerged through an appreciation of various aspects of Thai culture and meaningful socio-cultural exchange. This has been recently confirmed in research by Yip et al. (2024) who reiterated that the performance of international academics in a university can be predicted by various factors, such as organizational infrastructure and support by the host universities, along with policies made to support their integration into the culturally different work environment.

The six qualitative themes about the *challenges* reported by the international teachers began with the most reported theme about language and communication barriers. It was followed by the second theme of challenges due to the complex and bureaucratic processing of visas, work permits, and work contracts. The third challenge related to cross-cultural differences that complicated work. The fourth theme was related to difficulties in the educational system and student behavior. The fifth theme related to the perception of lack of growth opportunities and salary affordability. The sixth theme emerged from challenges in personal and cultural adaptation.

Hofstede's (2011) seminal work on six cultural dimensions could provide a valuable background for understanding the impact of cultural values on the adaptation and experiences of international teachers in Thailand. In their recent systematic review, Ouyang et al. (2025), highlight the impact of various cultural values in educational settings and mention that there is limited application in practice in education. As seen from the qualitative analysis about challenges in Thailand, cultural themes of *power-distance* have both positive impacts, such as students being respectful in the classrooms, which researchers explain are evident in high power-distance cultures where teachers are seen as authority figures (Wang, 2023). Interestingly, as Thailand is a *collectivist* culture, the results show that students seem less motivated to compete and excel in contrast to *individualistic* cultures prioritizing autonomy and performance (Tinmaz & Ozturk, 2022).

Limitations

Though this study was an original initiative in the Thai higher education context, it has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research had a relatively small sample size, due to high workload of teachers during an active semester, and so it may not be representative of the wider population. Second, the study relied exclusively on survey methodology for data collection. It may be better to use other research designs such as

qualitative studies to capture the depth and complexity of participants' experiences or attitudes. Future research would benefit from expanding the sample size and incorporating additional methods, such as qualitative interviews or longitudinal studies, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Implications

This study contributes to the existing literature by deepening the theoretical understanding of how cultural intelligence and social support function as critical resources in facilitating psychological adaptation and enhancing work-related wellbeing of international teachers in cross-cultural work environments. The findings highlight the dynamic interaction between individual (cultural intelligence) and environmental (social support) factors, offering a more holistic perspective on adaptation and wellbeing in culturally diverse settings.

These findings have valuable implications for organizational practices and public policy in higher education in Thailand. For universities that employ a culturally diverse workforce, developing cultural intelligence and fostering strong support systems can be strategic tools for enhancing employee adjustment, satisfaction, and performance. Researchers have highlighted the importance of developing intercultural competence through promoting empathy towards people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Gazioğlu & Güner, 2021) and even integrating intercultural awareness in curriculum (Rudik, et al., 2025). This underlines the importance of on-boarding/socialization training programs, mentorship programs, and inclusive workplace practices that support intercultural work culture and social integration. Management in higher educational institutions need to appreciate and understand how Thai cultural values influence teaching practices, learning processes, and institutional management.

For policymakers, particularly in sectors such as international education, migration, and labor mobility, the results highlight the need to create supportive environments that promote ease of rules and regulations. Investments in cultural orientation programs, mental health resources, and community engagement initiatives can facilitate smoother psychological adaptation and better work-life outcomes for international teachers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study makes a distinct and meaningful contribution by integrating cultural intelligence and social support within the person–environment interactionism framework to examine work well-being, with psychological adaptation (PA) as a mediating mechanism. The findings reveal that PA is a mechanism that significantly mediates the relationship between cultural intelligence (full mediation) and organizational support (partial mediation) with work well-being; however, this mediating effect was not supported when personal support served as a predictor. This differential pattern underscores the nuanced and context-dependent nature of how varying support sources and individual capacities influence psychological adaptation in the workplace, suggesting that formal organizational support may play a more decisive and proximal role in shaping employees' adaptive responses and, ultimately, their work well-being.

These findings further highlight that cultural intelligence serves as a critical internal resource that facilitates psychological adaptation, reinforcing the importance of fostering culturally intelligent workforces in increasingly diverse organizational environments. Future research should explore these differential effects across diverse organizational and cultural contexts to further unpack the complex interplay between support sources, cultural intelligence, and psychological adaptation in promoting sustainable workplace wellbeing.

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APPENDIX

Table 2.

The Respondents' Profile (n=109)

Measure	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	41	37.6
	Female	65	59.6
	Other	3	2.8
Age	20-24	1	0.9
	25-29	11	10.1
	30-34	17	15.6
	35-39	26	23.9
	40-44	16	14.7
	45-49	11	10.1
	50-54	14	12.8
	55-59	2	1.8
	60 and above	11	10.1
Nationality	Filipino	23	21.1
	British	14	12.8
	American	9	8.3
	Chinese	9	8.3
	Australian	7	6.4
	Others	47	43.1
Educational Background	Bachelor's	29	26.6
	Master's	66	60.6
	PhD (doctoral)	14	12.8
Worked in Thailand	1-2 years	17	15.6
	3-4 years	17	15.6
	5-6 years	15	13.8
	> 6 years	60	55.0

Measure	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Marital Status	Single	52	47.7
	Married	40	36.7
	Divorced	4	3.7
	Significant partner/ relationship	13	11.9

Table 3.*Descriptive Statistics and Correlation among the Study Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	W	p
1 Cultural Intelligence	-					5.89	0.6	-0.14	-0.56	0.97	< .01
2 Organizational support	.40***	-				5.39	1.37	-0.77	-0.18	0.92	< .01
3 Personal support	.47***	.32***	-			5.94	1.01	-1.6	3.3	0.85	< .01
4 Psychological adaptation	.35***	.51***	0.12	-		5.18	0.66	-0.3	-0.53	0.98	0.05
5 Work Wellbeing	.38***	.75***	.41***	.55***	-	6.05	0.89	-0.86	0.26	0.9	< .01

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. M= mean; SD= standard deviation. W= Shapiro-Wilk test, p = p -value of Shapiro-Wilk

Table 5.*Qualitative Findings about the Facilitators of Working in Thailand*

Themes	Sub-themes	Implications
1 Workplace and professional environment	Reasonable workload and expectations	<i>Environment level:</i> Positive work culture
	Low stress and relaxed atmosphere	
	Flexibility and independence in working	
2 Co-worker support	Sense of community, "family bond" at work	<i>Environment level:</i> Supervisor and co-worker support
	Acceptance and open-mindedness among co-workers	
	Supportive colleagues and seniors	
3 Teaching and student dynamics	Polite and respectful students	<i>Environment level:</i> Work-related (teaching) and cultural
	Eager and hardworking, few behavioral problems	
	Freedom in teaching	

4	Quality of work/life	<hr/> Work-life balance <hr/> Affordable cost of living <hr/> Comfortable climate	<i>Person level:</i> Enhanced quality of work/life
5	Infrastructure and conveniences	<hr/> Excellent food and cuisine <hr/> Personal safety <hr/> Ease of travel (within and from out of Thailand) <hr/> Conveniences and infrastructure - such as BTS/MRT, internet and good Wi-Fi <hr/> Travel opportunities	<i>Environment – Personal level “fit:</i> Opportunities that match personal needs, likes, and interests
6	Positive cultural and interpersonal dynamics	<hr/> Thai emphasis on harmony and community <hr/> Kindness and friendliness of Thai people <hr/> Respect and hospitality <hr/> Opportunities for cultural exchange and personal growth <hr/> Relaxed pace of life (“ <i>sabai-sabai</i> ” or take it easy)	<i>Environment level:</i> Appreciation of Thai culture and socio-cultural exchange

Table 6.*Qualitative Findings about the Difficulties/Challenges of Working in Thailand*

Themes	Sub-themes/ Explanations	Implications
1 Language and communication barriers	<hr/> <i>Language barrier:</i> most pervasive and frequently cited difficulty, affecting professional, academic, and administrative life <hr/> <i>Lack of access to information:</i> since most documents and key policies are conducted, circulated, or translated only in Thai language <hr/> <i>Administrative difficulties:</i> due to the limited English proficiency of administrative support staff, doing basic administrative tasks and resolving issues are very challenging <hr/> <i>Teaching challenges:</i> as language issues impact the classroom, especially since many students have low English proficiency <hr/> Limits understanding of important communication sent over social media apps such as Line.	<i>University policy/ management level:</i> Internationalization of information systems; Developing options to access information in English language; Enhancing English language proficiency of staff

Themes	Sub-themes/ Explanations	Implications
	<i>Difficulty in learning/usage of Thai language:</i> The Thai language itself is noted as hard to learn, particularly the tones, speaking, and writing for beginners, requiring significant time investment	
2	<p>Visa, work permits, contracts, and bureaucracy</p> <p><i>Contract terms:</i> mostly only one-year contracts are given, so administrative follow-ups take personal time and efforts</p> <p><i>Visa/work permit renewal annually:</i> stress due to the tedious processes for renewing the work contract and visa annually. Expat teachers have to follow-up by themselves about the changes in work visa/ work permit rules, make it a significant challenge</p> <p><i>Overwhelming bureaucracy for foreign teachers:</i> foreign workers face overwhelming bureaucracy and excessive paperwork that must be done for getting/ renewing visa and work permit each year. Mandatory requirements like “90-days reporting” are cited as pointless bureaucracy.</p> <p><i>Lack of university support:</i> there is often a lack of advice or guidance from HR in universities on how to complete these complex processes of visa and work permit renewals</p> <p><i>Long time at immigration office/ labor department:</i> Waiting for a long time at immigration office to renew visa, often without HR support, is very stressful and wastes a lot of time.</p>	<p><i>National policy level:</i> Easing up bureaucratic systems of immigration (visa) and work permit rules</p> <p><i>University policy/ management level:</i> Providing HR support at universities</p>
3	<p>Workplace issues and cultural differences</p> <p><i>Organizational issues:</i> challenges include the lack of organization/previously developed infrastructures or effective forward planning, resulting in tasks being assigned suddenly or with very limited time to prepare.</p> <p><i>Workplace hierarchy:</i> The hierarchy is described as "very old fashion". This hierarchical decision-making can slow down decision-making and limit</p>	<p><i>University/ department level:</i> Workplace socialization activities for both Thai and foreign teachers to develop</p>

Themes	Sub-themes/ Explanations	Implications
	<p>open dialogue compared to more direct Western styles</p> <hr/> <p><i>Thai social practice/ cultural value of Krengjai (to be considerate) and indirect communication:</i> Communication styles are a specific challenge. The concept of <i>Krengjai</i> is cited as "messing up all working communication relationships"</p> <hr/> <p>"Saving face" is cited as a cultural factor that makes deciding the right thing to say and do in the workplace very difficult for foreigners, and can be exhausting</p> <hr/> <p><i>Accountability and punctuality:</i> There are reports of a lack of accountability (e.g., failing to follow through on checking visa documents, leading to errors). Additionally, there can be differing expectations around punctuality, and limited attention given to detail or deadlines.</p> <hr/> <p><i>Cultural differences and adaptation:</i> general cultural and customs differences require constant adaptation</p>	<p>interpersonal relationships;</p> <p>Ensuring a "buddy" support system</p>
<p>4 Education system and student-related challenges</p>	<p><i>Education system issues:</i> challenges include students having low expectations overall, that are set by the Thai education system as a whole</p> <hr/> <p><i>Student motivation and quality:</i> most students are too lazy, seeking good grades without effort, and make a strict teacher appear "wicked".</p> <hr/> <p><i>Learning culture:</i> There is difficulty adjusting to the Thai education system, where students may be "wired to complete something even if the quality of their work is not satisfactory," prioritizing submission over quality.</p> <hr/> <p><i>Curriculum issues:</i> include inadequate curriculum and a lack of creative and critical thought</p> <hr/> <p><i>Resources:</i> There is sometimes limited access to academic resources compared to international standards</p>	<p><i>National / university policy level:</i></p> <p>Educational system reforms;</p> <p>curriculum changes</p>

Themes	Sub-themes/ Explanations	Implications
5 Employment, growth opportunities, and salary affordability	<p><i>Discrimination:</i> Non-native English speakers may face unequal treatment, receiving fewer opportunities or lower pay, despite having the competency and experience of native speakers.</p> <hr/> <p><i>Lack of opportunity:</i> There are limited/no opportunities for foreign staff to apply for tenure positions compared to other universities</p> <hr/> <p><i>Financial issues:</i> Salaries are sometimes noted as lower than in many other countries</p>	<p><i>National / university policy level:</i></p> <p>Policies for salary, equal opportunities and growth</p>
6 Personal and cultural adaptation	<p><i>Feelings of social isolation</i> due to language and cultural barriers: Thai people often only talk in Thai language</p> <hr/> <p><i>Lack of community:</i> Challenges include finding community (such as for expat or a Muslim), feeling isolated and lonely, and adapting to specific cultural demands</p> <hr/> <p><i>Climate and environmental factors:</i> challenges include hot weather and PM 2.5 air quality, traffic and driving practices.</p>	<p><i>University/ department level:</i></p> <p>Organize social get togethers that are inclusive</p>