Assessing the impact of cross-cultural communication competence on expatriate business operations in multinational corporations of a Sub-Saharan African context

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Abstract
This study investigated the impact of cross-cultural communication competence (CCC) on expatriates’ work outcomes in emerging economies. Using a convergent parallel design methodology of data collection comprising an in-depth face-to-face interview with 21 expatriate executives, and a quantitative survey of 204 expatriates in various subsidiaries in Ghana, a structural equation modeling and a content analysis were the basis of data analysis. Findings suggest that host country culture is related to CCC. Additionally, expatriates’ CCC is influenced by multicultural team effectiveness and their interpersonal skills. The work recommends training of expatriates in cross-cultural communication for subsidiary assignments.

Keywords
Cross-cultural communication competence, expatriates, Ghana, host country culture, interpersonal skills, multicultural team

Introduction
The increasing internationalization of business calls for the need to manage multinational operations as well as expatriate staff and their work outcomes in an efficient way. This demand has increased...
the focus on the critical role of cross-cultural communication competence (CCC) in managing
diverse work group and multicultural team development (Bell and Fernández Riol, 2017; Matveev
and Nelson, 2004). In fact, successful cross-cultural interaction between multinational staff has now
been accepted as the most critical management issue in international business both at the individual
and group levels of analysis (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014; Felin et al., 2012), as it can impact
positively on expatriates’ work outcomes in Multinational Corporations (MNCs).

Cross-cultural communication is the interaction or communication between culturally diverse
people who have different value orientations and different communication codes within a com-
munity of work and socialization (Abugre, 2016; Moran et al., 2011). From this definition, cross-
cultural communication can therefore be an emotional process that involves a considerable amount
of uncertainty and a potential for misunderstanding between multicultural team members (Ozcelik
and Paprika, 2010). As a result, competence in cross-cultural communication is the ability to
manage cross-cultural uncertainties with cultural empathy and high interpersonal skills (Matveev
and Nelson, 2004). It is defined as the knowledge, motivation, and skills to communicate effectively
with members of a host culture (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009). CCC enables expatriate managers
and local employees from different cultures to coexist and to coordinate their work activities in a
concerted effort toward the achievement of corporate goals (Abugre, 2016; Nakayama and
Halualani, 2010). Consequently, research suggests that effective interpersonal communication is
critical for expatriate adjustment (Froese et al., 2012), knowledge flows in multinational corpora-
tions (Tippmann et al., 2012), global leadership success (Bird and Mendenhall, 2016), MNCs’
performance (Kuznetsov and Kuznetsova, 2014; Liu et al., 2015), among the many expatriates’
work outcomes. Despite its importance, empirical studies of the impact of cross-cultural commu-
nication on expatriates work outcomes with other critical perspectives are now beginning to be
exploited, and therefore, this gray area is bursting with prospects yet to be realized especially in
emerging economies. Accordingly, Tung (2008) proposes that there is the need to balance cross-
national and cross-cultural investigations in order to truly understand the globalization of the cul-
tural phenomena. The necessity of knowledge extension in unexploited regions has thus called for
more postcolonial investigation in international business particularly in emerging economies (Joy
and Poonamallee, 2013) like those of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Jackson, 2004).

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to investigate the significant contributions of cross-
cultural communication on expatriates work outcomes. Firstly, in terms of theory, our objective is to
investigate the impact of cross-cultural communication on expatriate work outcomes for the creation
and extension of knowledge in cross-cultural communication in international business. The choice
of emerging economies as the location of the investigation is extremely relevant for contemporary
theoretical context for management research that is making waves into the emerging economies and
extends the cross-cultural lens beyond the dominant and oversaturated West/East epistemology.

Second, MNCs have often been described as multilingual organizations (Luo and Shenkar,
2006). This presupposes the importance of expatriates’ interpersonal skills (EIS), their training in
host country culture (THC), and multicultural team effectiveness (MTE) as critical factors of
expatriates’ competence in cross-cultural communication that can facilitate their adaptation and
adjustment in divers and distant subsidiary locations (Abugre, 2016). This work thus seeks to test
these variables to determine whether they can serve as foundations or antecedents of expatriate
CCC. This objective is also in direct response to Lauring and Klitmøller (2015)’s request that
research on the impact of communication and language differences on intra- and interunit com-
munication is still underdeveloped and needs further clarification. Thus, a significant problem in
technical communication for international management is urging expatriates to understand that the communication they send out is accurate, valid, and useful for multinational corporate operations.

The third objective of this work is to make a methodological contribution to pragmatism: mixed methods research comprising both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research also called the “third methodological movement” which has generated interest for the past 20 years (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), and which calls have been made to embrace it as a robust investigation method (Creswell, 2005; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Despite this advocacy, there are relatively few published studies in cross-cultural management with mixed methods. Therefore, we hope that our contribution furthers the cause of intercultural and cross-cultural communication and increases the sensitivity in cultural pluralism and management in international business and cross-cultural management research.

Theoretical background

Cross-cultural communication as a conduit of expatriates’ internalized cultural values and epistemology

The subject of cross-cultural communication is beginning to receive academic attention due to changes in the global workforce, as large percentages of most nations’ workforce come from a variety of cultural backgrounds (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009; Okoro and Washington, 2012). As a result of the differences in cultures, multicultural team members working together in MNCs vary in their communicative behaviors, and this can pose a challenge to effectively understand each other. Thus, prescriptions for effective communication in cross-cultural encounters often suggest adapting one’s behavior to that of the other culture by learning to understand the value systems and communicative behaviors of the local or indigenous people (Abugre, 2016). The explanation is that communicative behaviors of expatriates during cross-cultural encounters demonstrate the internalized cultural values as well as inconsistency-reduction and inconsistency-support behaviors (Pekerti and Thomas, 2003). This is why communicating parties would normally attribute cultural meanings to their experiences and actions which are shaped by the social and political relationship in which they are embedded (Lauring and Klitmøller, 2015). This means that people from different cultures speak differently because of the influence of some cultural norms that are embedded in speech acts (Moalla, 2013). The implication is that individuals from different cultures communicate differently not because they have different linguistic codes, but because these linguistic codes are used differently from their respective cultures (Wierzbicka, 1991). Accordingly, Harzing and Feely (2008) argue that failure to communicate effectively leads to uncertainty, anxiety, and mistrust, which produces misattribution, conflict and cognitive distortion of expatriates in subsidiary locations. Therefore, Welch and Welch (2008) recognizes that communication competence is a moderating or intervening variable to effective knowledge transfer in MNCs. This discovery is consistent with Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman (2005)’s finding that communication and language fluency is a key factor in interunit communication intensity of MNCs.

Thus, an important role of expatriates or global managers is to effectively communicate across cultures in order to produce a well-managed team comprising both expatriates and local or indigenous staff. A multicultural team with a shared character that supersedes problems of individual identity that may impede the team to accomplish the corporate goals is the aim of MNCs. Hence, for expatriates, the reconciliation of conflicting values, practices, and systems between coworkers is a critical challenge, which is often exacerbated when coworkers originate from diverse institutional
environments, such as established market economies (Danis, 2003). For this matter, expatriates themselves admit that they do not understand the way people communicate in distant and complex subsidiaries, and therefore, they have much to learn from local employees in these areas (Engelhard and Nägele, 2003). The lack of cross-cultural skills of the majority of expatriates may be viewed as a further barrier to learning at the individual level.

Thus, as more and more Western multinational corporations continue to search for markets in Africa, there is the need to focus on the surge of diversity and multicultural teamwork. That is expatriates and local staff working harmoniously in this case, the need for effective cross-cultural communication competency at the subsidiary locations will continue to increase in importance. This is why critical International Business (IB) scholars have lately called for more attention to the negotiations and conflicts among multicultural teams and groups and their often divergent motives and interests in MNCs (Blazejewski, 2009).

Conceptualization of study variables

Multinational corporations (MNCs) are highly dependent on effective communication to control and coordinate their distributed operations. This is often carried out by the workforce consisting of both local staff from the location and expatriates from headquarters or other third country nationals. Hence, there are many potential consequences of the work of expatriates in subsidiary locations, as the predictive influence of cultural values in communication has great impact on expatriate behaviors and their subsidiary work operations (Merkin et al., 2014). This study focuses on three basic variants of successful business operations or outcomes: THC, MTE, and EIS. These specific expatriates’ work practices can be the critical requirements of managerial insights into effective subsidiary operations, because they demonstrate both external and internal outcomes of international human resource practices. First, THC is the acquisition of cross-cultural awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation of the host culture (Chen, 2010) for successful business operation which comprises of the value systems and communicative behaviors of indigenes. Since there is great deal of uncertainty in employees’ behaviors in both individualistic and collectivist cultures, there is often considerable potential for conflict that can impede effective business operations in the subsidiary. Cross-cultural competence in interpersonal relationship requires knowledge, motivation, and skills in using verbal and nonverbal codes (Lustig and Koester, 2006), and this calls for EIS acquisition. Second, the dimension of EIS describes the responses, experiences, and competencies which can facilitate expatriates’ adaptation to local cultures and consequently enhance their CCC for successful business operations. EIS are preponderant to their selection criteria for international assignment as they help them to build and value relationship in different cultures (Yamazaki and Kayes, 2004). In fact, interpersonal skills encompass social intelligence that enables expatriates to understand the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in interpersonal situations and to act appropriately on the basis of understanding (Marlowe, 1986) business operations, which is a product of competence of cross-cultural communication. These skills facilitate their MTE. Third, the dimension of multinational team effectiveness refers to the critical skills or ability of an expatriate to understand and clearly communicate team goals, roles, and norms to other members of a multicultural team particularly local staff (Matveev et al., 2001) for effective business operations or outcomes in the subsidiary. The success of working effectively in a multicultural team is a hallmark of expatriates’ achievement in subsidiary or distant location. This success has a direct relation with their communication competence.
Literature and hypotheses

THC and CCC

Most international business writers (Abugre, 2016; Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Tung, 2008) have advocated the importance of training of expatriates in host country culture during assignments. It is particularly critical to examine the cross-cultural differences in communication patterns, as these differences impact cross-cultural communication inversely depending on the backgrounds of expatriates in the local subsidiary (Gudykunst, 2003; Hsu, 2010). Therefore, examining how individuals interpret and handle cross-cultural differences in a host-culture context is very important for corporate success (Berry, 2009; Xu, 2013). Accordingly, Kupka (2015) affirm that there is a certainty of relationship between intercultural training and the development of intercultural communication competence. Equally, Mansour and Wood (2010) indicate that formalized training programs and informal practices such as relating with coworkers, locals, and neighbors are major factors in assisting expatriates’ adjustment and their communications in subsidiary location. Kim (2001) recognizes the importance of competence as a requirement in a range of areas including language and host-culture norms, while Holopainen and Björkman (2005) also emphasize the importance of willingness to get involved with host nationals through effective interactions. Besides, the emerging consensus among international business scholars is that intercultural communication involves the cognitive, affective, and behavioral attributes of expatriates (Bennett, 2009). Therefore, THC will probably increase expatriates’ accuracy in interpreting both verbal and nonverbal emotional expressions of local staff, and so broaden their appreciation and empathy for subsidiary environment and consequently enhance their work outcomes. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H1: Expatriates’ training in host culture is positively related to their CCC that will eventually enhance their business operations or outcomes in SSA.

MTE and CCC

According to Matveev and Nelson (2004), CCC is very much associated with MTE. They contend that competence in cross-cultural communication facilitates expatriate managers’ understanding of team goals, their roles and norms in multinational subsidiary. Thus, a cohesive multicultural team is capable of advancing knowledge among members if the level of interactions among them is effective.

An effective multicultural team enjoys team empowerment which is contingent on the cultural context that team operates, this facilitates knowledge sharing and team performance (Jiang et al., 2016). Consequently, Kappagomtula (2017) suggests that the compositions of cross- or multicultural team projects should take into consideration the sensitivity of the team members to ensure unified execution of large projects with the help of effective communication or face-to-face interactions between the team members. Because verbal and nonverbal communication patterns vary greatly across cultures, multicultural team members from low-context communication and high-context communication would naturally prefer different communication modes which may be threatening to each other and team harmony (Gudykunst, 2003; Yoo et al., 2006). However, competence in cross-cultural communication would enable expatriates from either a low-context or high-context culture appreciate the differences in context-related language thereby encouraging and enhancing group harmony and team effectiveness. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:
**H2:** MTE is positively related to expatriates’ CCC that will eventually enhance their business operations or outcome in SSA.

**Interpersonal skills and CCC of expatriates**

Skills are learned responses which are often resulted from specific training, and which can afford someone the ability to perform a particular task or to achieve a particular goal (Statt, 1999). Thus, an individual expatriate’s responses, experiences, and competencies, which can facilitate his/her adaptation to local cultures and consequently enhance his/her CCC, can be described as interpersonal skill. Studies in international business and culture have demonstrated that cross-cultural skills are important drivers of expatriate success (Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Varma et al., 2009), and that cultural norms are significant to managerial interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills are a key component of what effective managers do (Riggio and Tan, 2013), and they form one of three primary competency dimensions that are integral to managerial task. In fact, interpersonal skills such as coaching and developing others, team building, and the ability to resolve conflicts are among the most relevant skills for managerial work. Thus, EIS may comprise of specific actions or behaviors, including environmental or cultural factors. These personal skills play a major role in the individual expatriate’s commitment and values to learning during international assignment (Kayes, 2002). The interpersonal skills embrace the sociocultural and relational motivation of the individual to enhance his/her social interactions with his colleagues especially the indigenous staff. Therefore, an interpersonal skill is an appropriate term to classify the variety of factors which describe expatriates’ cross-cultural knowledge and understanding of the work of MNCs.

From the foregoing, we suggest that EIS be considered with the dynamic degree of importance by expatriates operating in culturally distant locations. The reason is that expatriates who are equipped with better interpersonal skills can communicate more competently and can work more effectively in a multicultural team (Abugre, 2018; Matveev and Nelson, 2004). Consequently, this study hypothesizes that:

**H3:** EIS is positively related to their CCC that will eventually enhance their business operations or outcomes in SSA.

**Contextual background of Ghana**

Ghana is a sub-Saharan African nation which lies within West Africa. A colony of British rule for a long time, her official language is English which is inherited from the British. However, there are over 100 indigenous language spoken by the citizens. Socially, Ghana is known for her strong sociocultural background. With the numerous tribes and several many indigenous languages, Ghanaians place strong values on the authorities of Chiefs as custodians of the various lands and cultures. Ghanaian cultural principles are strongly respected even within corporate organizations with values oriented strongly toward respect for leadership and the elderly (Abugre, 2013). Politically, Ghana has been acclaimed the most stable nation in SSA and also adjudged global best performer in doing business in West Africa, thereby strengthening the growth in her external investments’ inflows. Industrially, gold dominates the mining sector, and Ghana is Africa’s second most important producer of gold after South Africa, the third largest producer of manganese and aluminum, and an important producer of bauxite and diamonds (Coakley, 1999). In addition, Ghana
produces oil in large quantities for export. Having joined the world nations of oil producers in 2007, the country is in partnership with several many Multinational Corporations (MNCs) to explore and extract its new found oil fields. Some of the MNCs are Tullow Oil PLC, Kosmos Energy, Exxon Mobile, Anadarko Energy, Total SA, Chevron Corp, Royal Dutch Shell Group PLC, BP PLC, Cnooc, ONGC’s Videsh Ltd, just to mention a few. Thus, in addition to the numerous gold mining companies in the country, there is a proliferation of MNCs operating in various businesses in the country. This makes Ghana a hub of MNCs where several expatriates and local staff work together as multicultural team and where expatriates have a lot to learn from cross-cultural management.

Methodology and research design

To sufficiently meet the study objectives, this work used a mixed methodology procedure of gathering and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study (Creswell, 2005; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). The significance of triangulating both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single research work is to sufficiently capture the trends and details of complex issues emanating from the communicative behaviors of expatriates in subsidiary locations. Accordingly, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data gathering complement each other to provide a more rigorous and complete picture of the research problem (Johnson and Turner, 2003). Thus, this study used a convergent parallel design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) in which both quantitative and qualitative strands of data are gathered and analyzed independently, and then both results are synthesized for interpretation. This is because, to understand the world better, we need both numbers and words to appreciate our complex context (Miles et al., 2014). Consequently, the survey was administered directly to expatriates through the Human resource managers of the studied MNCs. Initial letter requesting permission to undertake the study was sent (with a sample interview guide and questionnaire attached) to the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC)—this is the regulatory body in-charge of all MNCs in Ghana. The GIPC then selected 23 MNCs that had a number of active expatriates in operations. A supportive or cover letter from the GIPC was then attached to our initial letter requesting permission to undertake the study to the respective HR managers of the selected MNCs. The letter specifically stated that only expatriates were meant to complete the questionnaires, and also demanded an interview schedule with either the HR manager or the managing director if they were expatriates. Hence, the target population in this study was all expatriates working in Ghana in the selected (by GIPC) MNC subsidiaries.

Therefore, the questionnaires were given to the HR managers of the various MNC subsidiaries in Ghana, who then distributed the questionnaires to their expatriates to which the researcher was to come back in 2 months time for collection of the completed questionnaires. This is one of the most effective way to get the right participants to provide information for any study as all HR managers get involved in the distribution of the survey instruments to their employees supported by the regulator (GIPC). Consequently, some of the expatriates in off-shore operations and the mines demanded a soft copy of the questionnaire and the researcher’s e-mail address to which they mailed their completed questionnaires to him directly. Thus, from 250 expected potential expatriates participants, 204 responded (direct collection and through e-mail), which constituted a response rate of 81.6 percent. Reliability and validity of the survey scales and items were established, using descriptive statistics, discriminant validity test, and internal consistency reliability indexes, including factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, Cronbach’s $\alpha$, composite reliability (C.R), and item-total correlation.
Quantitative phase

Data collection and measurement of scales

First, the quantitative phase involved a cross-sectional survey design with an adopted instrument for participants to self-complete. The core survey items formed a seven-point Likert-type scale. The measures related to CCC, THC, multinational team effectiveness, and interpersonal skills. Table 1 presents the survey items that measured each variable, as well as reliability indexes for each sub-scale. The first part measured nine items on expatriates’ CCC. The second part measured 12 items on EIS. The items were loosely modeled on those presented by Matveev et al. (2001)’s CCC questionnaire (response format: 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The third part measured nine items on a combination of the importance of THC and previous knowledge adapted from predeparture knowledge scale by Black (1990) (response format: 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The fourth part measured 10 items on team effectiveness between expatriates and local staff, these were also adapted and modified from Matveev et al. (2001)’s team effectiveness in the CCC model questionnaire (response format: 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree).

Control variables. Three control variables (gender, accompanied by family, and assignment years which is explained as the number of years spent in the current post/subsidiary) were included in the analyses in an attempt to cater for alternative explanations for significant relationships. The control variables were measured as follows: gender (coded 0 = female, 1 = male), accompanied by family (1 = yes, 2 = no), and number of years worked in current post was measured in numerical strength.

### Table 1. Measurement items, factor loadings, Cronbach’s α, and goodness-of-fit indices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Loading</th>
<th>T-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expatriates’ interpersonal skills (α = 0.86, C.R = 0.82, AVE = 0.60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to deal with minor misunderstandings during communication</td>
<td>0.789***</td>
<td>7.608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My ability to communicate with local staff enables me to obtain the goals I need</td>
<td>0.778</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my communication with local staff motivates them to work</td>
<td>0.756***</td>
<td>9.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in host culture (α = 0.88, C.R = 0.87, AVE = 0.68)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in Ghanaian cultural values will facilitate my interpersonal skills</td>
<td>0.861</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in Ghanaian values will reduce my misconceptions and prejudices</td>
<td>0.775***</td>
<td>5.848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in Ghanaian cultural values will help me interact effectively with local staff</td>
<td>0.842***</td>
<td>7.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-cult communication competence (α = 0.61, C.R = 0.71, AVE = 0.60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am willing to be opened to the cultural differences in this company</td>
<td>0.674</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am ready to tolerate the uncertainty arising from cultural differences</td>
<td>0.576***</td>
<td>6.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase interaction with local staff enables me to understand better their culture</td>
<td>0.537***</td>
<td>5.909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multinational team effectiveness (α = 0.62, C.R = 0.86, AVE = 0.68)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel accepted by the local staff</td>
<td>0.828</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust the local staff in this company</td>
<td>0.825***</td>
<td>7.734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local staff trust me</td>
<td>0.819***</td>
<td>8.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness-of-fit statistics: CMIN/df = 1.632; GFI = 0.980; PCLOSE = 0.375</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CFI = 0.950; IFI = 0.955; SRMR = 0.058; RMSEA = 0.056; TLI = 0.883</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: C.R: composite reliability; AVE: average variance explained; CFI: comparative fit index; GFI: goodness-of-fit index; SRMR: standard root mean residual; TLI: tucker–lewis index; IFI: incremental fit indices; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation *** = 0.001.
Quantitative data analysis

We used both univariate and multivariate statistical procedures to analyze our survey data. Specifically, the use of structural equation modeling (SEM) to determine how the individual factors predicted the observed variables of the study. First, before testing the hypotheses, both factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted on our dependent and independent variables. The dependent or outcome variable is CCC, while our independent or predictive variables are THC, EIS, and MTE. Table 1 presents the results of the confirmatory factor analyses of the observed variables. The use of Cronbach’s $a$, C.R, and average variance explained (AVE) were employed to examine the reliability and validity of the scales. Results indicated that the Cronbach’s $a$ and construct reliability coefficients were above 0.60, whereas AVE were within the 0.5 acceptable thresholds. Thus, the reliability of the scale was confirmed. Additionally, construct validity was achieved by making sure that only items loaded well on the scales were allowed, while discriminant validity was tested by comparing the square root of the AVE coefficients with the highest correlation of specific constructs (see Table 1). The results also show the number of items retained under each construct thus making sure common method bias was taken care of.

Goodness-of-fit indices

Apart from presenting the confirmatory factor analysis including reliability and validity checks for the variables used in the study, Table 1 also presents the goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement model. Given the general recommended fit indices in the acceptable application of SEM, our study model in Table 1 presents a perfectly good fit for analysis using Hu and Bentler’s (1999) threshold indices. Additionally, Table 2 presents the correlation results of the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among variables of the study. It can be seen that expatriate’s CCC correlates positively with THC ($r = 0.40$), with MTE ($r = 0.37$), and with interpersonal skills ($r = 0.36$)

Results of the quantitative strand

We used three approaches to analyze the quantitative data. First, we used exploratory factor analysis to determine the construct validity of the instrument and to identify the unique factors present in the data. In identifying the factors to extract for the model, the percentage of variance explained and the individual factor loadings were considered. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling
adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity were performed to assess the appropriateness of using factor analysis on our data, and all the figures met the threshold. Thus, CCC has a KMO of 0.791, Bartlett’s test = 0.000, and cumulative variance explained (CVE) of 77.247 percent. Also, EIS has a KMO value of 0.876, Bartlett’s test = 0.000, and CVE of 57.627 percent. MTE has a KMO of 0.813, Bartlett’s test = 0.000, and CVE of 59.51 percent. Finally, training in host cultural values has a KMO of 0.892, Bartlett’s test = 0.000, and CVE of 69.612 percent (see Table 1A). These tests are significant, suggesting that an exploratory factor analysis is appropriate for determining our construct items.

Second, we used SEM to test both the structural and measurement models of our study variables. The benefits of using SEM are that it reduces measurement errors by subjecting all variables to a fitness test until a good fit model is obtained. Third, we used multiple regression to complement the SEM in testing the predictive effects of our hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3). Therefore, we tested our study hypotheses, that is, “H1: Expatriates’ THC is positively related to their CCC that will eventually enhance their business operations in subsidiary locations”; “H2: MTE is positively related to expatriates’ CCC that will eventually enhance their business operations in subsidiary locations”; and “H3: EIS is positively related to their CCC that will eventually enhance their business operations in subsidiary locations.” The test results in Table 3 show that THC is found to be positively related to expatriates’ CCC ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 5.05$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, MTE is found to be positively related to expatriates’ CCC ($\beta = 0.24$, $t = 3.81$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, interpersonal skills are found to be positively related to expatriates’ CCC ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 4.15$, $p < 0.001$). Accordingly, our hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 are all supported and accepted by the data.

### Qualitative phase

#### Qualitative research design and sample

The qualitative strand involved an in-depth face-to-face interview with 21 senior expatriate executives working in 17 MNC subsidiaries in Ghana. The collected interview data constitute a fundamental segment of this work and took into account a wide array of contextual factors inherent in CCC of expatriates. The choice of the senior expatriate executives for interviews was to understand the impact of organizational level control as senior executive formulate and implement most corporate policies. Hence, participants for the interview were mainly very senior-level expatriate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Estimates ($\beta$)</th>
<th>T-values</th>
<th>$P$</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$R$ adj.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td>0.559</td>
<td>0.313</td>
<td>0.292</td>
<td>5.339</td>
<td>14.945</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>-0.122</td>
<td>0.903</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accompanied</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>-0.254</td>
<td>0.800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>1.796</td>
<td>0.074</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIS</td>
<td>0.261***</td>
<td>4.149</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>THC</td>
<td>0.308***</td>
<td>5.048</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MTE</td>
<td>0.241***</td>
<td>3.814</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: EIS: expatriates’ interpersonal skills; THC: training in host culture; MTE: multinational team effectiveness; MS: mean square.

**0.01, ***0.001 level (two-tailed).
executives in MNCs in Ghana. The empirical data were accessed through the experiences and interactions narrated by all participants and recorded using a semi-structured interview guide. The demographic characteristics of participants are given in Table 4.

### Interview protocol development

As the aim of the qualitative phase was to explore and elaborate on the results of the statistical tests (Creswell et al., 2003), our goal was to understand how CCC impacts our main study outcomes (THC, MTE, and cross-cultural differences). Hence, a total of six open-ended questions explored the influence of expatriates’ CCC in an SSA business environment. The explored questions included the significance of cross-cultural communication to expatriate operations/work in SSA, CCC and MTE for successful business operations of expatriates, host country communication competence and MTE, host country culture and competence in expatriate’s cross-cultural communication for successful business operations, the importance of training in cross-cultural communication, and host cultural values.

### Procedure and data analysis of the qualitative interview

Participants in this project were very senior expatriate executives working in the various subsidiary MNCs in Ghana in supervisory roles who interacted with both expatriate and local staffs. The interviewees in this study required the description of their day-to-day experiences of working with the indigenous staff in the various subsidiaries relative to cross-cultural interactions and the host

---

**Table 4. Demographic characteristics of interviewed respondents.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Job position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years worked in Ghana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RESP 1</td>
<td>Vice-President-HRM</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 2</td>
<td>V.P. Transformation</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 3</td>
<td>Group Director-HRM</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 4</td>
<td>Director HRM and Operations</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 5</td>
<td>Vice-President-HRM</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 6</td>
<td>Regional Manager-HR</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 7</td>
<td>Director-Finance and Admin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 8</td>
<td>Plant Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 9</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 10</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 11</td>
<td>Regional Policy Advisor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 12</td>
<td>Regional Economist</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 13</td>
<td>BOC Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 14</td>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 15</td>
<td>Reg. Commercial Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 16</td>
<td>Head of Credit</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>RESP 17</td>
<td>Head of Business Support</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>RESP 18</td>
<td>Head of Income Trading</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 19</td>
<td>Senior Operations Officer</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 20</td>
<td>Brands Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESP 21</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: BOC: Business Operations centre manager; RESP: respondent.*
country cultural norms in their workplaces in as much thorough as they desired to share with the researcher. Thus, the interviewees shared their lived experiences with the interviewer through audio interviews. Each taped interview lasted between 30 min to 1 h 20 min. A benefit of the audio-taped interview is that it enables the researcher to engage in long conversations and concentrate on listening and analyzing what was being said without having to worry about taking notes (Sacks, 1992). The taped interviews were transcribed one-by-one from each of the 21 subjects, and the significant statements extracted from these transcriptions became the raw data for analysis. From the transcriptions, meanings were formulated as codes from these significant statements. The formulated meanings were arrived at by reading, rereading, and reflecting upon the significant statements in the original transcriptions in order to get the honest meaning of the interviewees’ statements. The aggregated formulated meanings were then organized into categories of themes which emerged from and were common to all of the subjects’ descriptions. These are the influence of THC on CCC, the role of CCC in MTE, and the significance of expatriates’ CCC in EIS.

Validation of the qualitative data

The categories were referred back to the original descriptions in order to validate them. A further validation of the categorized data was undertaken by contacting some of the participant-interviewees since it was very difficult to contact all of them again. Seven of the participants were revisited, while the other eight were contacted through telephone (telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of participants were collected by the interviewer during the interviews). This was done to facilitate feedback if the descriptions formulated validated their initial experiences in which they agreed.

Findings from the qualitative strand

From the 21 interviews, several many significant statements were extracted as codes for the study. The analysis of these significant statements revealed three major clusters of themes that captured the research question on the impact of cross-cultural communication on expatriate operations or work outcomes in MNC subsidiaries in Ghana as follows:

The influence of THC on expatriates’ CCC for successful business operations

All respondents in the study agreed that THC contributes significantly to successful cross-cultural communication skills of expatriates in their operations abroad. According to them, given the strategic importance of international assignments and its cost to the MNC headquarters, expatriates need to be trained in the host country culture in order to be more productive in subsidiary matters. Thus, the field results copiously affirmed cross-cultural training as a response to successful cross-cultural communication of expatriates in Ghana. In the course of the international assignment, what is really significant is for expatriates to understand the application of the English language in the local context. In addition, the requirement of expatriates to have THC in order to improve their relationship with not only the local Staff, but also with people from the local communities where they reside and work will give them an added advantage to work successfully in the subsidiary. This is brilliantly explained by Respondent 7:

I strongly believe that expatriates should be trained in the host cultural behaviors if they want to be successful in their operations abroad. I’ve gone to countries before, where we had this cultural training class and it was very effective because, you didn’t spend weeks or months trying to figure out why I’m being less
productive at work than I think I ought to be, and why am I so frustrated every day, or how come I don’t understand why people here do things the way they do. The truth is that some people honestly hit the ground because they think things are the same everywhere. I’ve travelled overseas for 20+ years, and I’ve worked in many different places so cultural diversity is something I embrace. Do I always understand it? No, and could I benefit by two days internship or training? Yes I do.

**CCC as a facilitator of MTE for successful business operations**

The interview results showed that competence in cross-cultural communication facilitates MTE for successful business operations in Ghana. Most respondents recommended that when expatriates understand team attitudes to diversity, expatriates are then encouraged to explore and appreciate the local staff behaviors that strengthen the bond of MTE for successful business and work outcomes in the MNC. The analysis of the results showed that in general, there are differences in points of references, expectations, and approaches to work between expatriates and indigenous staff. These differences are mostly due to misinterpretations and misunderstanding of the communicative behaviors of the local staff. However, a good appreciation of these behaviors from the side of expatriates enhances the bond between them and increases team trust leading to an efficient team that would operate effectively. The following excerpt from the interviews illustrates these points.

Well, the Ghanaian culture is unique as is everybody’s culture. So, when you come here as an expatriate as I did, you have to learn the customary ways of doing things. You need to understand the local staff and work with them to relish your differences. But more than anything, I think it’s an understanding and expectation, and appreciation for a culture that makes the most difference in acknowledging one another’s strengths and weaknesses and working with each other in harmony. You have to be able to embrace the differences and accept them as genuine right of norm for effective cohabitation, and for successful work operations. (Respondent 4)

Experience has shown that expatriates may have all the technical knowledge and skills for a particular role but they are not always successful in their business operations. Usually, when they come into the new environment, they typically find their performance slump in the initial stages and either they come out of the slump and become extremely positive contributors, or they remain in the trough. It is not because they don’t know their jobs, it’s because they are unable to adapt to the environment and the local staff as an effective team. The first thing is the correct selection of expatriates, and how easily do they adapt to new circumstances, new environment and therefore work harmoniously with the local staff in a cohesive team effort to succeed in their operations. (Respondent 16)

**EIS and expatriates’ CCC**

The interview results showed that expatriates with high interpersonal skills are those with the capabilities of communicating effectively in subsidiary operations. Most of the interviewees revealed that learning the differences in cultural applications and background of people is the best interpersonal skill to be acquired by an expatriate which is prerequisite in expatriates’ proficiency in cross-cultural communication. The interview results indicated that soft skills or interpersonal skills are the strategic factors in facilitating expatriates’ CCC for successful business or work operations. The reason is that interpersonal skills acquisition makes the expatriate more matured in the subsidiary location to better understand the meaning and sensitivity to diversity which embraces flexibility, honesty, respect, and trust. These skills therefore become the outcome of effectively communicating and understanding intercultural and cross-cultural communication. Expatriates in
subsidiary locations need special soft skills to enable them understand not only the local staff, but the whole culture of the business setup in the host country. For example, expatriates in sales business would succeed if they can learn an aspect of the local language usage through cross-cultural skills training in communication behavior, as they find themselves in the field of business transactions. This is highlighted by Respondent 15:

In fact, before I came to Ghana, I did go on a short programme to familiarise myself with some of the customs, language and geography of Ghana. Although I had been on two previous expatriate assignments, it’s the first time I did something like this, and I found it enormously beneficial in business operations here. Because, these are soft skills that you learn not from the classroom or by reading but by opening yourself up and experiencing what you can do to succeed in the interactions between you and the indigenous people. So I think basic language training is always matched with when people are greeted in their own language. It’s a little difficult when you are dealing with an environment like Ghana where multiple local languages are spoken. So expatriates need to be aware of these things that will help them operate effectively in different cultures.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study was to assess the impact of CCC of expatriates on their business operations and work outcomes in multinational subsidiaries in Ghana. Using both quantitative and qualitative data analyses, it was established that when expatriates develop their skills in cross-cultural communication, their business or work operations are improved through effective interaction with local staff in MNCs abroad. In the first place, our findings indicated that THC is significant and positively related to CCC ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 5.05$, $p < 0.001$) of expatriates which is necessary for their successful business operations. The qualitative findings support these results and further explain that host country culture is responsible for successful cross-cultural communication of expatriates in their business operations abroad. This is because THC enables expatriates to be skillful in applying the English language to the local context to ease understanding. Hence, the need for expatriates to be trained in host country culture in order to facilitate their interactions with both the local staff and the communities where they reside and work. Second, our quantitative findings showed that MTE is significant and positively related to CCC ($\beta = 0.24$, $t = 3.81$, $p < 0.001$). This finding is complemented by the qualitative results which explained further and in more detailed manner that CCC of expatriates is very instrumental in promoting MTE for successful business operations of expatriates abroad. Through competence in cross-cultural communication, expatriates are able to understand the language skills of the local staff which helps them to appreciate the local staff behaviors thereby building and reinforcing team unity and strength for effective operations or work outcomes in the subsidiary.

Third, our findings also indicate that EIS are linked to their competence in cross-cultural communication in subsidiary locations. Our quantitative results revealed a strong and positive relationship between EIS and their CCC ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 4.15$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, our qualitative results complemented these findings by emphasizing the critical nature of EIS in acquiring competence in cross-cultural communication for successful business operations in the subsidiary. The interview results further elaborated that since Ghanaians are people centered in which the local staff emphasize deep human relations and respect for superiors and coworkers, it takes foreigners with high interpersonal skills to develop deep interpersonal relations with the indigenous people through CCC.

In sum, the critical insight derived from this empirical work are the following:

First, the significant effect of knowledge in host country culture on CCC of expatriates. By this, our results provide an interesting awareness and knowledge of social and cultural context as skills
necessary for effective communication in international business operations. Hence, this research builds on prior studies and explores the unique contribution of host country in communication quality and knowledge as evidence of competence in cross-cultural communication. Second, the link between MTE and CCC is significant in cross-cultural management and operations. The reason is that an effective multicultural team deepens effective interpersonal relations between expatriates and local staff working together in which cross-cultural communication becomes the glue that binds them. Third, the acquisition of high interpersonal skills by expatriates is a sine qua non for expatriates’ proficiency in cross-cultural communication that quickens their successful business operations abroad.

Theoretical contribution and relevance

First, the theoretical contribution of this work is the impact of THC on CCC of expatriates. This finding reinforces the cultural impact of language and communication. Culture shapes our worldview and since culture and language are intertwined, effective communication is bonded in the traditional interpretation of the people. By this, the findings of this work illustrate the significance of quality and not quantity in communication and interactions between expatriates and local staff in multinational subsidiaries. The reason is that there is bound to be meaning differentials between expatriates and local staff who are from different cultures. In most cases, expatriate executive dwell too much on instructive communication which is more of quantitatively sending out messages rather than paying attention to the ingredients of the communication of the context that yield quality and understanding. Communication is supposed to be contextualized in order to bring out the real meaning to the receiver. Therefore, host country culture significantly plays a preponderant role in contextualizing communication and interaction in international business. The findings of this work validate the importance of THC (Abugre, 2016; Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Tung, 2008), but go further to illustrate the importance of understanding the communicative behaviors of the context that will enrich corporate success of MNC subsidiaries. THC results in increase expatriates’ cultural awareness, knowledge, and communication skills so that they are better able to deal with possible multiple interpretation of communication.

Our second theoretical contribution is that by examining the influence of CCC on MTE, we extend the knowledge in international business as a critical success factor of globalization. Given the importance of mobility and the heterogeneity of societies in interpersonal encounters and interactions, an efficient multicultural team is a panacea for effective globalization of businesses. Our findings illuminate the significance of considering the sensitivity of team members in order to ensure a cohesive team project success. Effective multicultural team can be a source of innovation if there is proper understanding and integration of the team diversity. Effective cross-cultural communication supports a climate of integration and innovation of multicultural team members in the subsidiary. Hence, our result explains that expatriates must learn to embrace the differences in order to understand and appreciate the context of local staff. This would create a strong bond of cohabitation among team members in order to realize their work goals. Thus, the degree of expatriates’ CCC relates to a strong expatriates and local employees’ relationship particularly in distant locations. Competence in cross-cultural communication builds the prospects for personal contact that promotes positive attitudes toward multicultural team members. This finding authenticates Tannen (1984)’s proposition that the best ways of communicating meanings are learnt in a particular speech community or culture, especially by communicating and identifying with the indigenous people.
Our third contribution to theory is in the area of communication and culture, a scarcely studied domain in cross-cultural literature. Culture and communication are complicatedly connected. Thus, expatriates and local staff cannot understand each other without first appreciating their differences through their respective social and cultural contexts. Our findings illustrate that competence in cross-cultural communication endures the differences that are precipitous to conflict situations in MNCs. Conflict in multicultural teams would normally result from misunderstanding and miscommunication due to differences in cultural behaviors of team members. For example, low-context and high-context variations in communication (Gudykunst, 2003). This work theorizes that understanding the communicative behaviors of team members through cross-cultural learning can minimize these conflicts. This is possible through the acquisition of relational skills that enables expatriates to communicate openly and supportively with local staff and by listening actively and non-evaluatively with them during work.

Finally, the geographic focus of this study—Ghana, an emerging country—contributes significantly to the global strategy of multinational institutions in SSA economies. The fact that most international studies focus on the Western context at the neglect of SSA and other scarce areas is at odds with global cultural knowledge and awareness (Tung, 2008) and provokes the debate on the neglected region of management scholarship (Walsh, 2015). As “context matters in global strategy” especially in settings that have received limited attention in the past (Mol et al., 2017: 3). This study undoubtedly contributes to multinational business in the area of cross-cultural communication and offers diverse insights to cross-cultural management theory.

Managerial relevance

Practically, MNCs are highly dependent on effective communication to control and coordinate their distributed operations. This is often carried out by the workforce consisting of both local staff from the location and expatriates from headquarters or other third-country nationals. Thus, MNCs and their subsidiary operations must orient their managers to adopt company values and behaviors that promote effective interactions through social gatherings and community socialization that enable expatriates to learn some cultural norms.

Second, our findings provide support for MTE and cross-cultural communication. Cultures prescribe the protocols through which foreigners and locals alike can relate with each other. When expatriates learn all these cultural protocols, they are able to live in harmony with the indigenous people. Effective multicultural team improves workers’ responsiveness to organization thereby accelerating productivity. It also shapes individual perception and reasoning thereby stimulating learning and behavior since MNCs’ tasks require collaboration. Thus, effective multicultural team would benefit positive work outcomes in the location.

Third, this study provides the significant role of CCC in the operations of multinational subsidiaries particularly in complex and multicultural environment. Most often, multinational subsidiaries take for granted the value systems and cultural behaviors of the local people. Especially MNCs from the West operating in developing countries sometimes believe in their cultural superiority over that of the subsidiary location, and this can create serious conflict and differences in the MNC. Our findings suggest, however, the positive impact of interpersonal skills on cross-cultural competence in communication. This presupposes that management of multinational subsidiaries ought to intensify contextual cross-cultural training of expatriates in order to enhance their interpersonal skills for better operations in the subsidiaries. Interpersonal skills would enable
expatriates to tolerate and cultivate good relationship between expatriates and local staff through effective communication in order to improve their work output.

**Limitations and future research**

Despite these contributions and implications, the study has few limitations that can be corrected in future. First, responses from the study could have been overstated due to social desirability effects. Social desirability can easily occur in cultural studies like this very one when participants give a culturally acceptable response rather than describing exactly what the topic really says. Nonetheless, the control mechanisms associated with questionnaire, such as self-administration of the instrument and the assurance of confidentiality, are some of the actions to assuage the effect of social desirability. Additionally, the use of mixed method in this study renders the data robust due the triangulations of the two different methods.

Second, this is a single national culture study focused on expatriates in MNCs in Ghana. While a single national culture study is good because of its ability to reduce extraneous variations resulting from different country/nationalities, it is possible that some of the findings may be unique to the MNCs in Ghana and not to other countries thereby limiting generalizability. Future research can apply a multinational data collection for improvement. Albeit these limitations, this study makes a strong contribution to the international HR literature through a mixed method approach. The weakness of a single method analysis has been offset by the multiple data gathering analysis.

**Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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**References**


### Appendix 1

**Table 1A. Exploratory factor analysis, KMO, Bartlett’s test, and CVE results.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>KMO</th>
<th>Bartlett’s test</th>
<th>CVE</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EIS</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THC</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTE</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Threshold: CVE: cumulative variance explained, >50 percent; KMO: Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin, minimum value >0.6; Bartlett’s test of sphericity (p-value < 0.05); EIS: expatriates’ interpersonal skills; THC: training in host culture; CCC: cross-cultural communication competence; MTE: multinational team effectiveness.