

# The Relationship between Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and Student Engagement in the Training of Micro and Small Enterprise (MSE) Owners in an Emerging Market

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## Keywords

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Business training;  
Cultural Intelligence (CQ);  
Student engagement;  
Cultural diversity.

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## Abstract

Understanding how culture impacts the engagement of owners of micro and small enterprise (MSE) during training may assist facilitators to remove barriers to engagement, increasing training completion rates. It is not clear from the existing literature what effect culture could have on student engagement in the multicultural context of MSE owner training in South Africa. However, studies have shown a correlation between the profitability and sustainability of MSEs in emerging markets and the success of MSE owner training programmes. In this qualitative exploratory study rich data was collected through semi-structured interviews to explore cultural factors that led to student engagement. The interviewees were ten MSE owners from various cultural backgrounds who had completed business training less than two years prior to the interviews. The findings showed that clear cultural engagement guidelines, cultural conflict preclusion, valued culture, cultural mentoring, cultural contextual storytelling, and a friendly, good-fellowship culture among students contributed to increased MSE owner student engagement. Cultural ignorance, cultural intolerance, an unwillingness to overcome cultural barriers, and a cultural dominance attitude negatively impacted students' engagement.

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1. Background**

In South Africa, micro and small enterprises (MSEs) form an integral part of the socio-economic reform and economic development (Jonck & Nwosu, 2022). Micro enterprises comprise fewer than 10 employees, and small enterprises 11 to 50 (Zulu, 2019). Combined they constituted 22% of South Africa's annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and showed a 12.3% increase in GDP contribution from 2013 to 2019. In 2020, SMEs accounted for 92% of all registered enterprises and represented 16% of jobs in the country (Stats SA, 2020). However, 96.5% of these businesses fail within the first four years of registration (Bowmaker-Falconer & Herrington, 2020).

Recent research showed a strong correlation between the profitability and sustainability of MSEs in South Africa and the successful completion of MSE owner training programmes (Bruwer, 2019). Therefore, the skills MSE owners need to manage sustainable businesses could be mastered (Bratianu et al., 2020). However, the educational context could have an adverse effect on completion of MSE training (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). Research showed culture to be a significant contributor to student engagement (Shah & Arinze, 2020), which could motivate MSE owners to complete training programmes (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

Studies revealed that Cultural Intelligence (CQ) could be used to measure outcome prediction in culturally diverse training environments (Alexandra, 2018; Ang et al., 2019), and therefore, to predict student engagement in MSE training (Ang et al., 2019). Ang et al. (2006) described four CQ capabilities: behaviour, cognition, meta-cognition and motivation.

Previous studies did not adequately capture the cultural factors affecting student engagement in MSE training (Fredricks et al., 2019; Palmer et al., 2017; Salie et al., 2020). The literature indicated that the four-factor CQ model (Ang et al., 2006) could be a suitable measurement model to predict student engagement in MSE owner training. This study aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between CQ and student engagement in this context. Understanding how culture influences student engagement may assist teachers in removing barriers to engagement, thereby increasing the completion rate of MSE owner training (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

## **1.2. Problem Statement**

The literature does not provide sufficient answers regarding the effect of culture on student engagement in the multicultural context of MSE owner training in South Africa. However, recent research revealed a strong correlation between the profitability and sustainability of MSEs in South Africa, and the rate at which MSE owner training programmes are successfully completed (Bruwer, 2019). Therefore, it is critical to recognise that the essential skills to manage businesses can be acquired and mastered by MSE owners (Bratianu et al., 2020). However, the environment in which MSE owner training takes place

may effect learners' course completion rates negatively (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). Additionally, research demonstrated that culture can be leveraged to increase student engagement (Shah & Arinze, 2020), which could ultimately motivate MSE owners to complete training programmes (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). It is therefore proposed that CQ affects student engagement in a multicultural context in MSE training in South Africa.

### **1.3. Research objectives**

The primary research objectives were to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between CQ and MSE owner engagement in training. The secondary research objectives were 1) to identify cultural factors that have a positive relationship with MSE owner engagement in training; and 2) to identify cultural factors that have a negative relationship with MSE owner engagement in training.

## **2. Literature Review**

Numerous studies demonstrated why it is essential for MSE owners to continuously develop themselves through training and how this could lead to economic growth (González-Tejero & Molina, 2022; Hadi & Udin, 2021; Ng et al., 2021). However, the classroom environment, including the teacher, the student, and the training material, influenced training completion rates. A need existed, therefore, to explore the internal and external barriers that prevent student engagement, as well as how they could be mitigated (Fredricks et al., 2019; Moore, 2005).

MSEs are also referred to as small and micro enterprises (SMEs). However, the term SME is used by some scholars to refer to small and medium enterprises with 51 to 250 employees and a much higher turnover (Chaşovschi et al., 2021; Khoase et al., 2018; Rethwan & Mansor, 2020). The term SME may lead readers to believe that larger enterprises are included in the study, and therefore the abbreviation MSE is used.

### **2.1. MSE owner training and student engagement**

MSE owner training is the process of providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and ability to identify and capitalise on commercial opportunities. The simplest and most commonly cited definition is to teach business owners how to create customers (Hague & Drucker, 1975).

Student engagement refers to the level of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion demonstrated by learners while being taught. Academics agree that a minimum level of engagement consists of participatory behaviour (Fredricks et al., 2019). Student engagement is defined by Corso et al. (2013) as the sum of multidimensional causal functions: the relevance of the learning material to the student, the teacher's competence to articulate the content, and the relationship between the teacher and the students

Papadakis (2018) defined barriers to student engagement as elements in training that negatively affect student learning and performance. Most educational scholars agree that barriers to student engagement can be divided into internal and external factors (Pennacchia et al., 2018). External barriers, over which students have very little control, include training course format and a distracting environment as environmental barriers, and peer pressure and lack of social community as socio-cultural barriers (Palmer et al., 2017). Internal factors are made up of the students' own reactions to life's events (Mkhuma et al., 2014). Because these reactions occur within the student, they have the ability to change them (Palmer et al., 2017). Such internal barriers include fear of failure and lack of self-esteem as emotional barriers, and lack of purpose and lack of measurable goals as motivational barriers (Fredricks et al., 2019). In order for these barriers to be mitigated (Palmer et al., 2017), also in MSE owner training in South Africa (Salie et al., 2020), they must be accurately and timeously identified and addressed (Otterborn et al., 2019; Pennacchia et al., 2018).

## **2.2. Culture and Cultural Intelligence (CQ)**

Culture is commonly defined as a particular people or society's ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, customs, and social behaviour (Bin Ahmad, 2022). Some argue that culture refers to a society's distinctive thought process, feelings and actions through which its social environment is perceived (Roffia et al., 2021) and therefore, culture extends beyond ethnicity or a set of inherited beliefs and values, and includes the concept of a paradigm through which the world is interpreted (Dangelico et al., 2020). Most scholars agree that the individual's perception and experience of the world is influenced by culture (Dangelico et al., 2020; Lee & Peterson, 2000). Hofstede (1994, p. 211) defined culture as "the collective planning of mind or process that distinguishes members of a group or class from other people".

Various models to measure culture have been developed to better understand the meaning of culture (Dangelico et al., 2020). Some of the most popular models from the literature include the 6-dimensional Hofstede Model, the 7-dimensional Trompenaars Model, the 9-dimensional Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) Model, the 7-dimensional Schwartz Model, and the 2-dimensional Inglehart's Model (Carolina, 2019). However, some academics stated that these models had limited use in measuring the cultural competency of individuals to function effectively in diverse teams (Alexandra, 2018; Nosratabadi et al., 2020). Furthermore, there has been debate among scholars regarding the degree to which individuals can influence their own culture (Dangelico et al., 2020; Dhir, 2019). In response to this need, Earley and Ang (2003) developed the theoretically derived four-factor comprehensive measurement framework construct of Cultural Intelligence (CQ). In academic literature, the terms "cultural intelligence" and "culture quotient" are used interchangeably and they are commonly abbreviated as CQ. In this study "cultural intelligence" is used, as this term is dominant in the literature (Nosratabadi et al., 2020). Earley (2002) defined CQ as "an individual's ability to operate in culturally diverse environments" (p. 13). Earley and Ang (2003) developed the cultural intelligence (CQ) construct, drawing on theories of behavioural learning (Morris, 1984), theories of intelligence

(Sternberg & Detterman, 1987), cross-cultural awareness theory (Triandis et al., 1988), cross-cultural competence theory (Deci et al., 2001), as well as business theory on cultural influence (Brislin, 1970), culture in teaching and learning theory (Hofstede, 1986), and cultural distance theory (Shenkar, 2001).

Additionally, Earley and Ang (2003) built their four-factor CQ model on the interconnected models of individual-level intelligence – namely metacognitive intelligence, cognitive intelligence, motivational intelligence, and behavioural intelligence – which Sternberg and Detterman (1987) had previously synthesised from the disparate and disconnected views on intelligence. Cognition and metacognition are mental abilities that reflect an individual's cognitive functioning. Motivation is a separate mental capability and a significant source of intelligence which recognises the cognitive processes of drive and choice. In contrast to metacognitive, cognitive, and motivational intelligence, which all involve mental functioning, behavioural intelligence refers to various individuals' verbal and nonverbal behaviours (Sternberg & Detterman, 1987). Furthermore, Ang et al. (2012) refined the conceptualisation by introducing subdimensions for each of the four CQ factors. By defining 11 subdimensions as an expanded conceptualisation of the original four-factor model, a second-order model is created in which the subdimensions are nested hierarchically beneath the primary factors:

- *Metacognitive CQ* is a measure of a person's mental capacity for acquiring and evaluating cultural knowledge. It focuses on cognitive awareness and monitoring. The subdimensions are planning, awareness and checking.
- *Cognitive CQ* reflects general knowledge and knowledge structures about cultures and cultural distinctions. The subdimensions are general cultural knowledge and context-specific knowledge.
- *Motivational CQ* is a mental capacity for directing and maintaining energy toward functioning and performing in cross-cultural situations. The subdimensions are intrinsic interest, extrinsic interest and self-efficacy to adjust.
- *Behavioural CQ* is a measure of an individual's ability to adapt behaviours to different cultural contexts. It is concerned with the capacity to demonstrate outward manifestations or overt actions which are conducive to putting others at ease during intercultural interactions. The subdimensions are verbal behaviour, non-verbal behaviour and speech acts.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study aimed to answer the research question using an exploratory qualitative research design, which enables researchers to investigate human experiences in natural social settings (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and to collect rich data from research participants (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). An exploratory qualitative research approach can aid researchers in elucidating and comprehending people's feelings, thoughts, perspectives and subjective beliefs, how people behave in their natural social settings, and why they behave in a certain way (Kalu, 2017). This exploratory qualitative research approach enabled

the researcher to uncover previously unknown relationship factors between CQ and MSE owner training engagement in order to address the research question. According to a review of the literature, previous quantitative studies on cultural factors that influence student engagement did not fully capture the common factors that affect student engagement in MSE owner training (Fredricks et al., 2019; Palmer et al., 2017; Salie et al., 2020).

The researcher made use of a non-random, purposeful snowball sampling technique, where selected research participants emanating from the researchers personal network were asked to identify additional participants within their social circles (Woodley & Lockard, 2016). The sample for this qualitative exploratory study consisted of 10 research participants. MSE owners were selected, meeting the following inclusion criteria: a) South African business owners, b) with fewer than 50 employees, c) who had been working actively in their business for at least two years, and d) who had attended business training in the two years prior to the interviews. This sample size was sufficient to achieve saturation, according to Shanmugam (2020). Male and female participants from various industries, age groups, ethnic groups, and regions in South Africa were included in the sample.

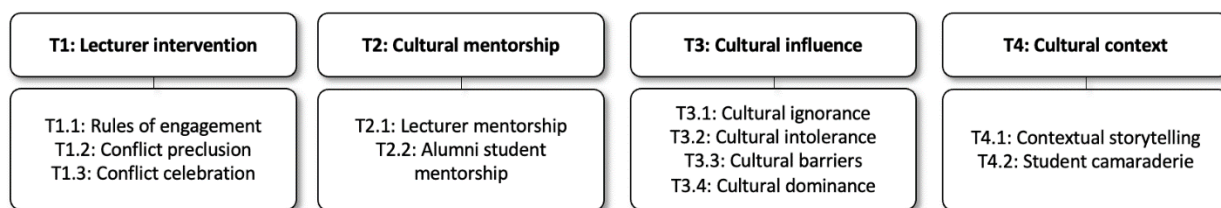
Primary data was collected, using ten in-depth, open-ended, one-on-one semi-structured interviews via the Zoom platform. The data was analysed using Atlas.ti software (Percy et al., 2015). A codebook was used to track the evolution of emerging codes, patterns, and themes, as suggested by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), and to achieve code and meaning saturation (Hennink et al., 2017; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Code saturation was achieved at 78% in Interviews 1 and 2, and 100% in Interview 3. Five of the six emerging themes were discovered in Interviews 1 and 2, and the remaining theme and subthemes in Interview 3. The researcher achieved 75% meaning saturation during Interview 6, 85% during Interview 8, and 100% during Interview 10, which was in line with the meaning saturation range proposed by Hennink et al. (2017). As recommended by Candela (2019), the researcher organised the dataset using parent nodes (themes) and nodes (subthemes), after which the scope of each emerging theme and subtheme were described in detail. The researcher supplemented each emerging pattern with supporting quotes to ensure meaningful patterns in the dataset.

### **3.3. Ethics**

This study was approved by the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee of Stellenbosch Business School (USB DESC) with reference number USB-2020-22771.

## **4. Findings**

When the exploratory qualitative research interview transcripts were analysed, the researcher discovered four main themes: 1) **Lecturer intervention**, 2) **Cultural mentorship**, 3) **Cultural influence**, and 4) **Cultural context**. Figure 1 depicts a summary of the four main themes with the eleven subthemes.



**Figure 1: Four main themes with eleven subthemes from the research**

Source: Authors' own construction.

**Lecturer intervention (T1):** The data analysis determined that this major theme had a significant content value rather than prevalence value (Hennink et al., 2017). The participants acknowledged that lecturer intervention had a positive effect on how cultural factors influenced their engagement as students in MSE training. The statements of participants exemplified the meaning behind this theme. In addition, three subthemes were identified under this main theme, namely rules of engagement, conflict mitigation and cultural celebration.

Rules of engagement (T1.1) was the most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of **Cultural context (T4)**. Seven of the 10 participants (70%) mentioned this subtheme. This subtheme emerged from three codes: setting boundaries, lecturer mediation, and classroom rules and discipline. Participant 3 described lecturer intervention by means of setting rules of engagement as: *“I think that what is important, a mediator or a teacher has to define the rules of the activity and not only define it, also get your group to buy into it and agree to it. It’s no use having a one-sided approach.”*

This subtheme led to the first important finding: **Clear cultural engagement rules enhanced MSE owner student engagement (F1)**.

Conflict preclusion (T1.2) was the second most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of **Cultural context (T4)**. Six of the 10 participants (60%) mentioned this subtheme. This subtheme emerged from three codes: classroom discussions, online learning, and lecturer mitigation. Participant 7 mentioned conflict preclusion lecturer intervention: *“When the lecturer can accurately interpret the culture, they can just switch lanes. And they can change their teaching tactic to a tactic that works with cultures that are for example not inquisitive. And what happens in those cultures, just to give you an example of what works, is when you do break-outs for people to discuss things and make the group smaller.”*

This subtheme led to the second finding: **Cultural classroom conflict preclusion enhanced MSE owner student engagement (F2)**.

Cultural celebration (T1.3) was the third most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of cultural class context. Four of the 10 participants (40%) mentioned this subtheme. This subtheme emerged from two codes: value of diversity and benefits of multiculturalism. Participant 9 described cultural celebration as follows: *“You learn the value of diversity and you can only do that in group work*

*in the training environment, which emphasises the importance of group work in business training, but also to do group work in business training in diverse crowds.”*

This subtheme led to the third finding: **Cultural celebration enhanced MSE owner student engagement (F3).**

The **Cultural mentorship (T2)** theme exemplifies participant acknowledgement that positive, interrelated and culturally experienced advisor behaviour encourages student engagement in MSE owner training. This theme contains two subthemes that emerged from the inductive data analysis: lecturer mentorship and alumnus-student mentorship.

Lecturer mentorship (T2.1) was the second most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of **Cultural mentorship (T2)**. Three of the 10 participants (30%) mentioned this subtheme. This subtheme emerged from two codes: Personal attention and Lecturer assistance. Participant 7 described the relevance of lecturer mentorship: *“So, this is where lecturer mentorship comes in. And if you’ve got good, trained mentors who have the patience and understanding to take someone on a journey ... Because all of us want to improve, all of us want to be better. And that’s precious, you know. That’s a cultural thing.”* Participant 3 added: *“Mentorship is critical. You know, we’d be in a completely different situation politically, industrially speaking, if mentorship was utilised to its full extent. And I’m not talking business coaching, that’s a separate issue. I’m talking about teacher mentorship.”*

This subtheme led to the fourth finding: **Cultural mentoring from lecturers enhanced MSE owner student engagement (F4).**

Alumnus-student mentorship (T2.2) was the most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of **Cultural mentorship (T2)**. Seven of the 10 participants (70%) mentioned this subtheme. This subtheme emerged from four codes: alumni and students, interclass knowledge sharing, intergenerational support, and sustainable education. Participant 6 described the relevance of alumnus-student mentorship in terms of his engagement as a student: *“I think, the willingness for alumni students to share knowledge. If one student got a good, say, mentor that helped him and if he learnt to share that with the rest of the class members, because that’s what happened in my instance.”*

This subtheme led to the fifth finding: **Cultural awareness mentoring from alumni enhanced MSE owner student engagement (F5).**

Cultural ignorance (T3.1) was the most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of **Cultural influence (T3)**. Eight of the 10 participants (80%) mentioned this subtheme. This subtheme emerged from three codes: cultural obliviousness, knee-jerk reactions, and poor cultural knowledge. In describing cultural ignorance in relation to cultural influence, Participant 5 said: *“Because they might say it lightly, but it might be taken as very offensive or disrespectful. And there you have to be cautious of what you say. Not cautious of not saying anything, I think just the way that you [say it].”*



This subtheme led to the sixth finding: **Perceived cultural ignorance from students and lecturers restricted MSE owner student engagement (F6).**

Cultural intolerance (T3.2) was the second most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of **Cultural influence (T3)**. Seven of the 10 participants (70%) mentioned this subtheme. This subtheme emerged from three codes: cultural disrespect, counterculture, and cultural prejudice. On cultural intolerance, Participant 4 reflected: *“If you ignore the differences and want things to happen your way all the time, there’s going to be division.”*

This subtheme led to the seventh finding: **Cultural intolerance among training participants restricted MSE owner student engagement (F7).**

Cultural barriers (T3.3) was the third most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of **Cultural influence (T3)**. Six of the ten participants (60%) mentioned this subtheme. This subtheme emerged from five codes: behaviour to unlearn, stereotypes, cultural tolerance, low collaboration expectations, and misinterpreted humour. Participant 3 mentioned how cultural influence can form engagement barriers: *“Yes, there is culture. Our own cultures are preventing us from knowing the other people. It’s basically ... it’s to unlearn the stuff that we learned or were taught to be the truth and the way, when it’s not necessarily true.”*

This subtheme led to the eighth finding: **Unwillingness to overcome cultural barriers by training participants restricted MSE owner student engagement (F8).**

Cultural dominance (T3.4) was the fourth most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of **Cultural influence (T3)**. Four of the 10 participants (40%) mentioned this subtheme. This subtheme emerged from three codes: culture and personality, dominant behaviour, and overpowering attitude. Participant 4 expressed his thoughts on cultural dominance by stating: *“The mentality of entitlement allows certain cultures to dominate the class where certain students will feel that they’re entitled to certain benefits or to certain things in the training environment. I hate it. You’re not entitled to anything in life. You’re going to have to work for everything in life. It’s more common in our black African culture where we feel that we are entitled to big pardons for doing wrong because of being previously disadvantaged.”*

This subtheme led to the ninth finding: **Cultural dominance behaviour from training participants restricted MSE owner student engagement (F9).**

Contextual storytelling (T4.1) was the most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of **Cultural context (T4)**. All 10 participants (100%) mentioned this subtheme. This subtheme emerged from four codes: contextualisation, practical examples, good communication, and common ground. Participant 10 described storytelling by saying: *“So, it’s almost as if the knowledge becomes alive. It is*

*no longer just the story you are reading in a book. It is now a physical person who has a real business, who has a real challenge, and you solve that real challenge.”*

This subtheme led to the tenth finding: **Cultural contextual storytelling enhanced MSE owner student engagement (F10).**

Student camaraderie (T4.2) was the second most frequently mentioned subtheme for the major theme of **Cultural context (T4)**. Six of the 10 participants (60%) mentioned this subtheme, that emerged from four codes: value of diversity, synergy, trust, ubuntu, and networking. The participants gave statements that exemplified the meaning of this subtheme. Participant 1: *“The first part is that the fellow student helped me to accept the reality that the lecturer failed to make the contents of the course relevant to your life. But because a fellow student managed to help me, I was able to finish in time.”* Participant 5 added: *“But I think also what helped me was the groups, like the study groups, because we were always in groups.”*

This subtheme led to the eleventh finding: **Friendly good-fellowship spirit among students established a culture of knowledge sharing which enhanced MSE owner student engagement (F11).**

Furthermore, **five distinct conclusions** can be made based on the eleven findings that emerged from the four cultural factor main themes with eleven cultural factor subthemes. Table 1 depicts these conclusions and also illustrates how these conclusions relate to the research findings and research themes.

**Table 1: The conclusions correlated with the research findings and research themes**

Conclusions	Relating research findings	Relating research themes
<b>C1:</b> Contextual storytelling has the potential to act as a conflict prevention mechanism in order to overcome MSE owner students' unwillingness to overcome cultural barriers to student engagement in business training	<b>F2:</b> Cultural conflict preclusion enhanced MSE owner student engagement	<b>T1.2:</b> Students and lecturer share mutual agency to prevent cultural barriers and to achieve mutual goals
	<b>F8:</b> Unwillingness to overcome cultural barriers by training participants restricted MSE owner student engagement	<b>T3.3:</b> Challenges that constrain clear, cross-cultural communication
	<b>F10:</b> Cultural contextual storytelling enhanced MSE owner student engagement	<b>T4.1:</b> Relating lessons through contextual stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights
<b>C2:</b> Cultural dominance, cultural difference ignorance, and cultural difference intolerance as potential barriers to MSE owner student engagement can very likely be successfully mitigated when lecturers establish clear and culturally unbiased engagement rules	<b>F1:</b> Clear cultural engagement rules enhanced MSE owner student engagement	<b>T1.1:</b> Lecturer sets clear, unbiased rules of student engagement in class
	<b>F6:</b> Perceived cultural ignorance from students and lecturers restricted MSE owner student engagement	<b>T3.1:</b> Lack of knowledge or information of your own cultural assumptions
	<b>F7:</b> Cultural intolerance among training participants restricted MSE owner student engagement	<b>T 3.2:</b> Unwillingness to accept cultural views, beliefs, or behaviour that are different from your own
	<b>F9:</b> Cultural dominance behaviour from	<b>T3.4:</b> Behaviour intended to force your

	training participants restricted MSE owner student engagement	own cultural beliefs onto others
<b>C3:</b> Celebrating cultural differences provides an opportunity for MSE owner training facilitators and students to coordinate their efforts by connecting different cultural strengths	<b>F3:</b> Cultural celebration enhanced MSE owner student engagement	<b>T1.3:</b> Students and lecturer coordinate their efforts by interconnecting different cultural strengths
<b>C4:</b> Cultural mentorship appears to be an important factor in increasing MSE owner student engagement in business training by encouraging students to participate more in classroom discussions and teaching them how to contribute to groupwork more effectively.	<b>F4:</b> Cultural mentoring from lecturers enhanced MSE owner student engagement	<b>T2.1:</b> The lecturer holds positive formal and informal individual cultural behaviour conversations
	<b>F5:</b> Cultural mentoring from alumni enhanced MSE owner student engagement	<b>T2.2:</b> Alumni and current students have positive formal and informal individual cultural behaviour conversations
	<b>F11:</b> Friendly good-fellowship spirit among students established a culture of knowledge sharing which enhanced MSE owner student engagement	<b>T4.2:</b> A spirit of friendly, good fellowship among students

Source: Own compilation

## 5. Managerial Implications

Based on the research findings four recommendations are made for managerial implementation.

**R1: MSE owner training module designers and facilitators could create and use culturally relevant contextual stories to help students relate to business training content.**

This first recommendation is based on research conclusion C1, which explained how contextual storytelling could act as a conflict prevention mechanism to overcome MSE owner students' unwillingness to overcome cultural barriers to student engagement in business training.

Contextual storytelling may help create a culturally neutral environment that aids students in comprehending training material that may lay outside their cultural frame of reference. Contextual storytelling can be incorporated into MSE owner training by training module developers via culturally relevant case studies or by training facilitators as a teaching mechanism.

**R2: MSE owner training module designers and facilitators could create and implement clear and culturally unbiased engagement rules that could be clearly communicated at the start of business training programs to mitigate cultural dominance, cultural difference ignorance, and cultural difference intolerance as potential barriers to MSE owner student engagement.**

This recommendation is based on research conclusion C2, which explained how cultural dominance, ignorance of cultural differences, and intolerance, as potential barriers to MSE owner student engagement, can be successfully mitigated when lecturers establish clear and culturally unbiased engagement rules.

Clear engagement rules could level the playing field to maximize group learning opportunities for students in the MSE owner classroom environment, resulting in equal opportunity for all attending

students to learn through participation. Training facilitators can present clear rules of engagement in the form of a mandatory agreement that students must sign before being admitted to training.

**R3: Designers and facilitators of MSE owner business training modules could incorporate cultural difference celebration opportunities into training modules to encourage and empower students to celebrate cultural differences and benefit from the benefits of cultural diversity in groupwork.**

This recommendation is based on research conclusion C3, which stated that Celebrating cultural differences allows MES owner students and training facilitators to coordinate their efforts by connecting different cultural strengths.

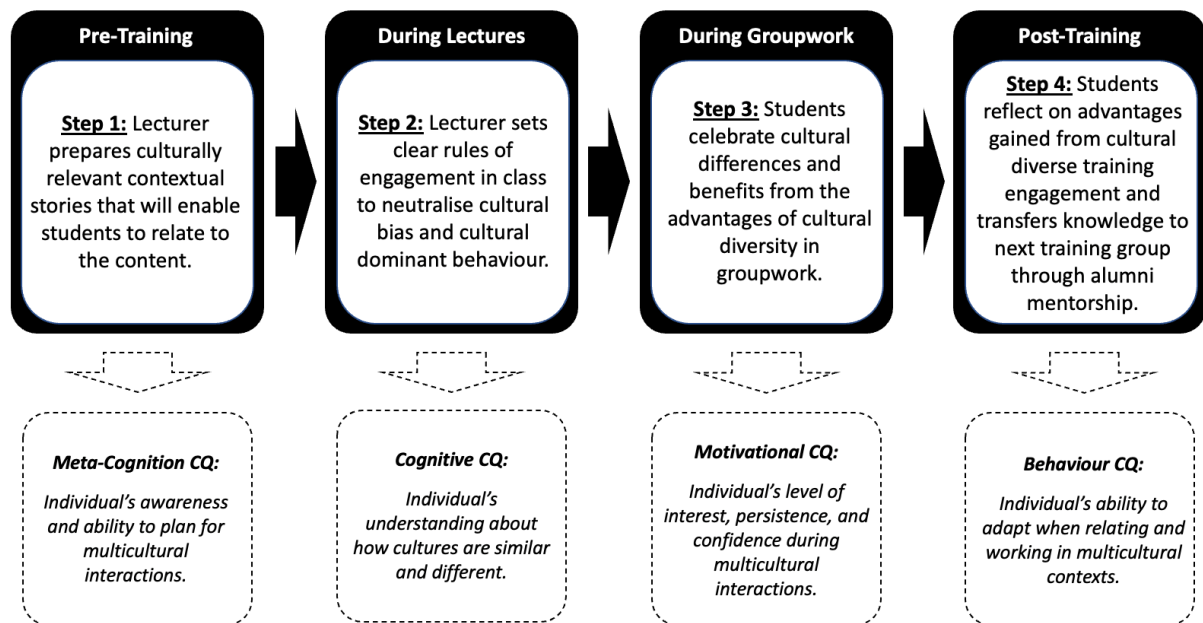
By creating cultural celebration opportunities, students could feel valued when their cultures are being showcased, making them less defensive and more open to engaging with other students and more accepting of training content. Training facilitators can also emphasize the value of cultural diversity by rewarding group work with culturally rich content in graded deliverables.

**R4: Cultural mentorship could be incorporated into the design of business training modules to increase MSE owner student engagement in training, encouraging students to participate more in classroom discussions and teaching them how to contribute more effectively to groupwork.**

This recommendation is based on the research conclusion C4, which explained how cultural mentorship appears to be an important factor in increasing MSE owner student engagement in business training by encouraging students to participate more in classroom discussions and teaching them how to contribute more effectively to groupwork.

By matching each MSE owner student with an alumni mentor who has successfully completed the training course, alumni can share their perspectives on how cultural diversity in the training environment impacted their learning experience. Additionally, such mentors could draw on their own experiences to assist new students in navigating groupwork difficulties caused by cultural differences.

Based on the findings, conclusions and recommendations, the **four-step framework** depicted in Figure 2 is proposed, which MSE owner training developers and facilitators can use to improve existing training modules by incorporating the four Cultural Intelligence (CQ) factors presented by Ang et al. (2012) into existing training modules to mitigate barriers that impede student engagement, and to leverage culture that enhances student engagement.

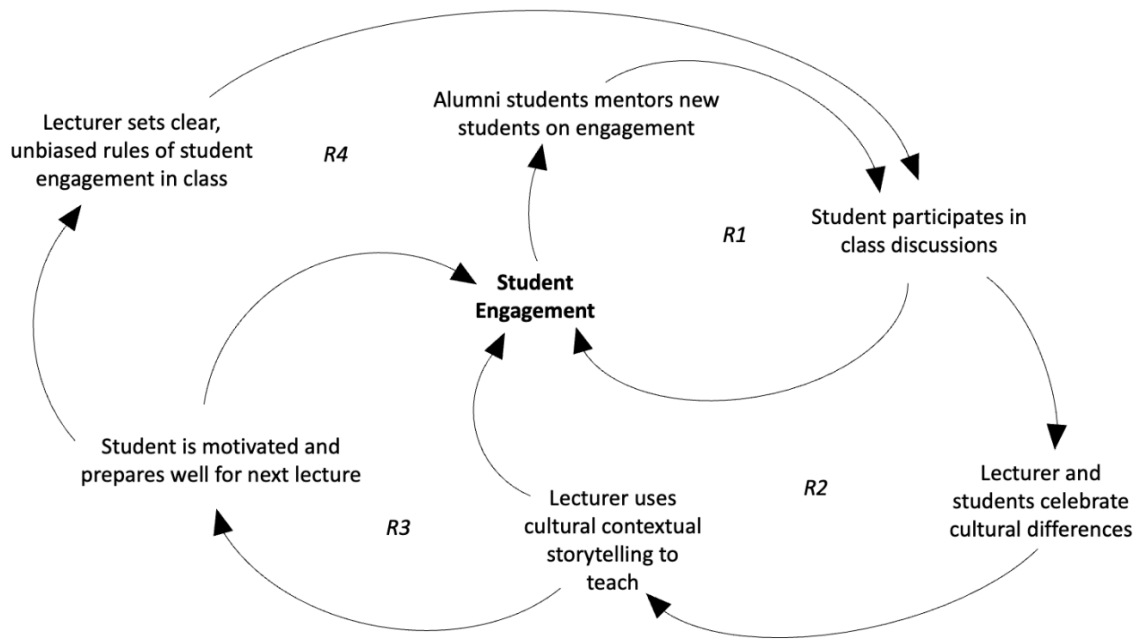


**Figure 2: Four-step Cultural Intelligence (CQ) framework for MSE owner student engagement**  
Source: Authors' own construction.

This model is intended to supplement existing training modules through cultural leverage, rather than replace existing MSE owner training modules. The four-step model begins with the lecturer preparing culturally relevant contextual stories to help students relate to the content. Following that, the lecturer establishes clear rules of engagement in class to counteract cultural bias and culturally dominant behaviour. This leads to students celebrating cultural differences while learning how cultural diversity improves the outcomes of their group work. Finally, students reflect on the advantages of working in culturally diverse teams, and they consider becoming alumni mentors themselves.

This model provides an opportunity for training module developers to ensure that MSE owner students will relate to the module content in order to achieve learning objectives. This model provides guidelines for training facilitators to improve student engagement during both training sessions and group assignment work. This model can help MSE owner students to engage with the training content and with their peers, as well as learn the value of cultural diversity. This model provides alumni with the opportunity to give back to society, stay updated on training content development, and build a strong network with other MSE business owners.

Figure 3 illustrates how the proposed framework will become a self-sustaining and continuously improving sequence of multiple reinforcing loops. In the first reinforcing loop (R1), the MSE owner student engages with the training as a result of alumnus-student mentorship. In the second reinforcing loop (R2), the MSE owner student engages with the training as a result of the lecturer's cultural contextual storytelling.



**Figure 3: Effect of proposed framework on MSE owner student engagement**

Source: Authors' own construction.

In the third reinforcing loop (R3), the MSE owner student engages because they were able to identify with the context of the training and are now motivated to prepare themselves well for future training sessions. In the fourth reinforcing loop (R4), the MSE owner student is well prepared for class attendance and is comfortable to actively participate in structured dialogue in class. The student then becomes an alumni mentor for the next student group.

## 6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

Understanding how culture influences or inhibits student engagement may help teachers remove barriers to student engagement, resulting in higher MSE owner training completion rates (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). This has the potential to increase the profitability and viability of MSEs in South Africa.

The purpose of this study was to investigate and answer the research question using an exploratory qualitative research design, methods, and procedures to address the research question by elucidating previously unknown relationship factors between CQ and MSE owner engagement in training. The findings indicated that clear cultural engagement rules, cultural conflict preclusion by facilitators, valued culture, cultural mentoring from lecturers and alumni, cultural contextual storytelling, and a friendly good-fellowship culture among students enhanced MSE owner student engagement. Furthermore, cultural ignorance, cultural intolerance, unwillingness to overcome cultural barriers, and cultural dominance had a negative impact on student engagement.

The strong contextual interconnectedness of the findings from the themes and subthemes extracted from data analysis suggests that cultural intolerance and cultural dominance, as potential barriers to MSE owner student engagement, can potentially be successfully mitigated when lecturers establish clear and culturally neutral engagement rules. Additionally, the importance of mentorship by alumni was reaffirmed as participants increasingly want to engage with the MSE owner training programme. When combined with the other subthemes from the data, contextual storytelling was the most frequently occurring subtheme, demonstrating the critical role of contextual storytelling in retaining participants' interest in business training content while enrolled as MSE owner students.

Furthermore, four distinct conclusions were drawn, based on the 11 findings that emerged from four cultural factor main themes with 11 cultural factor subthemes: 1. Contextual storytelling has the potential to act as a conflict prevention mechanism in order to overcome MSE owner students' unwillingness to overcome cultural barriers to student engagement in business training. 2. Cultural dominance, cultural difference ignorance, and cultural difference intolerance as potential barriers to MSE owner student engagement can very likely be successfully mitigated when lecturers establish clear and culturally unbiased engagement rules. 3. Celebrating cultural differences provides an opportunity for MSE owner training facilitators and students to coordinate their efforts by connecting different cultural strengths. 4. Cultural mentorship appears to be an important factor in increasing MSE owner student engagement in business training by encouraging students to participate more in classroom discussions and teaching them how to contribute to groupwork more effectively.

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