

Institutional Leaders' Cultural Intelligence and Organisational Climate in Public Primary Schools in Lagos State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between institutional leaders' cultural intelligence (CQ) and organisational climate in public primary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. It examined three CQ indices, intercultural awareness, cultural flexibility, and cultural influence, and their relationships with school climate in a highly diverse urban context like Lagos. The research used a descriptive survey design, sampling 818 teachers from 1,018 public primary schools using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected through a researcher-developed instrument entitled: Cultural Intelligence and School Climate Questionnaire (CQ-SCQ) and analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The study tested three null hypotheses: (1) intercultural awareness has no significant relationship with school climate; (2) cultural flexibility is not significantly correlated with school climate; (3) cultural influence is not significantly related to school climate. Results rejected all three null hypotheses: intercultural awareness ($r = 0.55, P < 0.001$), cultural flexibility ($r = 0.41, P < 0.001$), and cultural influence ($r = 0.39, P < .001$) each showed significant, positive relationships with school climate. The study concluded that school leaders' cultural intelligence highly contributes to an open and engaged school climate. It also reported a significant relationship between leaders' cultural flexibility and public primary schools' climate in Lagos State. Based on the findings, the study recommends periodic CQ training for head-teachers, deliberate cultivation of cultural flexibility, and structured opportunities for leaders to engage across cultural groups to strengthen inclusivity, teacher support, and overall school climate.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Generally, public primary schools in Lagos State operate mostly in a culturally diverse cosmopolitan environment. As Nigeria's commercial epicentre, Lagos is home to families from multiple ethnic and religious backgrounds. This creates school communities that are micro-representations of Nigeria's broader multicultural reality. In this regard, institutional leaders, especially the head-teachers, are confronted with the challenges of managing a school environment where diversity is understood and used as a springboard to supporting learning

and teaching. The ability to navigate these cultural differences may be a major determinant of school organisational climate.

School organisational climate, which encompasses the shared perceptions of general modes of operation and atmosphere within the system, has been identified as a major factor in teacher job performance and student learning outcomes (Adeyanju, 2021, p.290). Implicitly, a positive organisational climate could be associated with teacher motivation, job satisfaction, willingness to collaborate and improved students' learning outcomes. On the other hand, a negative climate dominated by poor communication, weak leadership and mistrust can weaken instructional quality and dampen staff morale.

School climate sets the parameters of acceptable behaviour among all school actors and assigns individual and institutional responsibility for school safety. While curriculum and instruction are crucial, they cannot thrive without a foundation of respect, personal responsibility, and commitment, as well as established standards for communication and conflict management.

According to the National School Climate Council (2007, p.5), school climate is defined as the quality and character of school life, which is reflected in the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, instructional practices, and organisational structures within a school. It is the overall quality and character of life in a school, the shared perceptions of safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the physical and organisational environment. It reflects norms, values, expectations, and everyday interactions among students, staff, and families. A positive school climate may make people feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe and support engagement, learning, and student well-being.

There are four dimensions of school climate, namely, the engaged, disengaged, closed, and open school climate, all referring to interactions among the animate elements of the school system (Reed, 2005, p.76).

An open or engaged work climate is characterised by supportive environments that encourage workers' participation, free and open exchange of information, and constructive conflict resolution (Nordin et al. 2014, p.1049). This type of climate has been recognised as the foundation of successful schools and a strong predictor of students' academic achievement (Van Horn, 2003, p.1010). Conflict happens wherever the climate is closed, resulting in people disengaging from the activities of the organisation or institution, thereby creating cognitive or emotional incompatibility inside or between individuals within the system. Many schools' relationships have broken down as a result of this incompatibility.

The connection between cultural intelligence and organisational climate is especially important in Lagos State. Leaders who understand and respect cultural differences are more likely to foster environments that encourage inclusion, psychological safety, and mutual respect. Such leaders can bridge cultural gaps among teachers, promote collaborative professional cultures, and involve diverse

parents in school activities. Conversely, leaders with low CQ might unintentionally reinforce biases, misinterpret behaviours, or overlook cultural tensions, which can lead to a fragmented or unwelcoming school climate.

The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ) was conceived by Earley (2002, p.28) as a way to measure an individual's capability to muster their cultural knowledge and competencies to adjust in interactions with another individual from a different race, religion, ethnicity, or cultural affiliation. Cultural intelligence can also be referred to as a leader's capability to effectively navigate and manage cultural diversity within their organisation or community. It can be a critical construct in education, emphasising a school leader's proficiency in understanding and managing cultural diversity within school settings. Cultural intelligence refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse situations. It encompasses cognitive, motivational, behavioural, and metacognitive dimensions that enable leaders to interpret cultural cues, adapt their behaviour, and foster inclusive environments. In school contexts, leaders with high CQ are better positioned to build trust among staff, engage parents from varied backgrounds, and mediate conflicts arising from cultural misunderstandings. Given the heterogeneity of Lagos classrooms, where pupils and teachers often differ in language, values, and social norms, culturally intelligent leadership is not merely desirable but essential.

Within the context of leadership, cultural intelligence may be referred to as a leader's capability to effectively navigate and manage cultural diversity within their organisation or community. It can be a critical construct in education, emphasising a school leader's proficiency in understanding and managing cultural diversity within school settings. The indices of leadership cultural intelligence, which are intercultural awareness, cultural flexibility, and cultural influence, further define the extent to which leaders possess and utilise their culturally related abilities in appropriately responding to cultural differences and in intrapersonal and interpersonal situations.

The foundational aspect, which is intercultural awareness, involves a school leader's in-depth knowledge and cognitive ability to understand diverse cultural norms, values, and behaviours within the school community. This is the cognitive and metacognitive aspect of cultural intelligence. Innumerable problems in communicating and understanding the intentions of others may be linked to a lack of cultural awareness. It may result in misjudging people and creating a barrier in relating to other stakeholders. Blatant bigotry or explicit bias can also be tamed when a school leader or head-teacher is fully aware of the cultures and cultural diversity within and around the school community. Culturally aware school administrators actively seek to enhance their understanding of different cultural backgrounds among students, parents, and staff, fostering mutual respect and collaborative synergy.

In primary education, cultural intelligence in leadership is also characterised by cultural flexibility and adaptability (Ang and Van Dyne, 2008, p.8). This covers the behavioural and motivational aspects of cultural intelligence. This flexibility may enable administrators to navigate cultural nuances, adapt and adjust to changes, modify communication strategies, build relationships, resolve conflicts, and leadership approaches to promote cohesion and trust across multicultural school communities. Culturally flexible school leaders harness the power of cultural variety to drive creativity and resilience in their schools. They enable flexible strategies to address educational obstacles and seize opportunities in multicultural environments. Livermore (2015, p.26) describes adaptability as being able to adjust one's emotional responses, behaviour, and communication style to meet the needs of specific cultural contexts. This adaptability is closely tied to emotional intelligence and self-regulation.

Critics argue that cultural intelligence and emotional, social, or interpersonal intelligence share some things in common. Leadership cultural intelligence, though, has gained traction over the past few years, especially in research in various multinational companies and multicultural institutions; it is still relatively underexplored in the study of intelligence. Managers with a high cultural intelligence were perceived as effective leaders in the initial studies on managers in multinational companies from different parts of the world (Steyn and Solomon, 2017, p.71). Likewise, in an academic setting, Keung (2013, p.844) noted that international school leaders who reported high cultural intelligence also manifested attributes associated with effective leadership.

Statement of the Problem: The cosmopolitan nature of Lagos State presents a myriad of challenges to institutional leaders. This is because the schools operate within highly diverse cultural environments, with varying approaches by institutional leaders in dealing with this diversity. However, some institutional leaders are not always conscious of these realities, leading to the creation of a toxic school climate and infringement on the fundamental rights of both members of staff and pupils. Lagos State's public primary schools serve highly heterogeneous communities where teachers, pupils, and parents represent multiple ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. In such settings, head-teachers' capacity to recognise cultural differences, adapt behaviour, and translate awareness into inclusive practices is likely to shape everyday interactions, trust, communication, and teacher engagement. Yet many schools continue to report strained staff relationships, communication breakdowns, low morale, and inconsistent collaboration, problems commonly linked to leadership that does not adequately recognise or respond to cultural diversity.

This gap in evidence constrains policymakers and education stakeholders: without clear, context-specific data on how leaders' cultural intelligence (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural CQ) relates to school climate, leadership preparation, in-service training, and policy interventions remain generic and may

fail to address the cultural dynamics that undermine school effectiveness and staff well-being. Moreover, unresolved issues such as violations of pupils' rights and litigation further complicate administration and may be exacerbated by culturally insensitive leadership practices.

Therefore, the study addresses the urgent need to empirically determine the nature and strength of the relationship between institutional leaders' cultural intelligence and organisational climate in Lagos State public primary schools, so that leadership development, resource allocation, and policy can be targeted to foster inclusive, supportive, and high-performing school environments.

Theoretical Framework: This study is anchored on the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Theory proposed by Earley and Ang (2003). This theory focuses on the ability of individuals and organisations to function effectively in culturally diverse environments. CQ goes beyond traditional notions of intelligence and emphasises the importance of cultural awareness, understanding, and adaptation in navigating diverse cultural contexts.

The Cultural Intelligence Theory posits that individuals and organisations can develop cultural intelligence through learning, adaptation, and experience. It consists of three key components: intercultural awareness, cultural flexibility, and cultural influence.

Intercultural awareness, defined as a leader's depth of knowledge of diverse cultural norms, values, and social structures, enables leaders to interpret unfamiliar cultural cues accurately, reducing bias and improving decision-making within a multicultural institution. By contrast, cultural flexibility is the capacity to adapt verbal and non-verbal behaviours to suit different cultural contexts. The theory holds that leaders with high flexibility can pivot their management style to meet the expectations of a diverse workforce, ensuring all members feel engaged. Similarly, cultural influence refers to a leader's ability to leverage their CQ to shape the organisational climate. Invariably, leaders with high CQ foster a climate of trust, psychological safety, and collaboration, which directly enhances organisational performance and reduces friction during cultural transitions (Nosratabadi et al., 2020, p.8). Together, these indicators enable institutional leaders to move beyond simple recognition of differences towards creating a cohesive, high-performing organisational climate.

The theory suggests that individuals with high CQ are better equipped to succeed in multicultural environments, as they can effectively navigate cultural differences, communicate across cultural boundaries, and build positive relationships with people from diverse backgrounds. Moreover, organisations with high levels of cultural intelligence are more likely to foster innovation, creativity, and collaboration among their employees, leading to improved performance and competitiveness in the global marketplace. In essence, the

Cultural Intelligence theory highlights the importance of cultural competence as a key driver of success in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world.

The Cultural Intelligence (CQ) theoretical framework is particularly relevant to this study in the sense that primary schools increasingly serve diverse student populations, and leaders must navigate complex cultural contexts while fostering positive relationships and effective stakeholder communication. Cultural Intelligence theory provides a comprehensive lens for understanding how leaders can develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to engage with diverse cultural backgrounds within the school community.

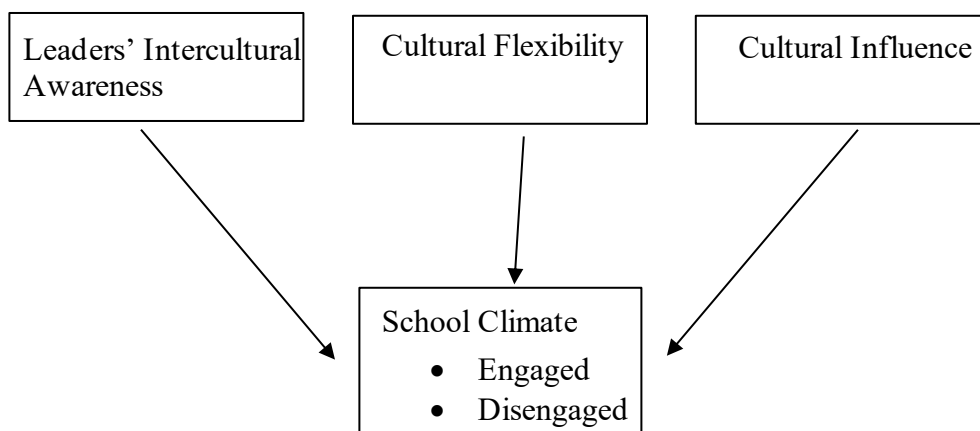


Figure 1. Conceptual Model for Institutional Leaders' Cultural Intelligence and Organisational Climate. This conceptual model was derived from the theoretical framework.

The conceptual model shows the relationship between the independent variables (intercultural awareness, cultural flexibility, and cultural influence) and the dependent variable (school climate). The three leader-level independent variables each exert a direct, positive effect on the dependent variable. Intercultural Awareness supplies the cognitive and metacognitive foundation: leaders who understand cultural norms and reflect on cultural cues reduce misunderstandings and set inclusive norms. Cultural Flexibility is behavioural and motivational; it enables leaders to adapt communication, conflict-resolution, and routines to diverse staff and pupil needs, which increases trust and engagement. Cultural Influence captures how leaders' values and culturally shaped practices shape policies, expectations, and relational tone across the school. Together, these predictors operate both independently (each contributes unique variance) and interactively (awareness guides flexible responses; influence amplifies adaptive

practices), producing a more open, engaged school climate characterised by collaboration, psychological safety, and improved teacher morale.

The general objectives of this study were to examine the leaders' cultural intelligence and organisational climate of public primary schools in Lagos State. More specifically, we aimed to i) ascertain the relationship between school leaders' intercultural awareness and public primary schools' climate in Lagos State, ii) examine the correlation between school leaders' cultural flexibility and public primary schools' climate; and iii) determine the relationship existing between school leaders' cultural influence and public primary schools' climate.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the study: i) School leaders' intercultural awareness has no significant relationship with the public primary schools' climate in Lagos State. ii) There is no significant correlation between school leaders' cultural flexibility and public primary schools' climate. iii) School leaders' cultural influence is not significantly related to public primary schools' climate.

Research design and data collection This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the relationship between cultural intelligence and school climate. The choice of a descriptive survey was informed by its capacity to facilitate the collection of detailed, factual information that describes existing phenomena as they occur in the field. This design is particularly suited for this study as it allows for the systematic gathering of data from a large population to identify patterns and relationships without the manipulation of variables.

The participants for this study consisted of 8,177 teachers currently serving in 1,018 public primary schools across the various administrative divisions of Lagos State, according to data from the Lagos State Bureau of Statistics (2022). To ensure the study remained statistically significant yet manageable, a sample size of 818 teachers was determined by applying Sharma's 10% rule of thumb for descriptive research.

To achieve a representative sample from this population, a rigorous multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted. In the first stage, cluster sampling was used to divide the 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Lagos State into four distinct clusters based on geographical proximity and administrative boundaries. In the second stage, a purposive sampling technique was applied to select the two most culturally diverse LGAs within each of the four clusters. This resulted in the selection of eight Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) that reflected the cosmopolitan nature of the state.

In the third stage, a proportionate sampling technique was utilised to determine the specific number of teachers to be drawn from each selected LGEA, ensuring that the sample size from each area was relative to its actual teacher population. Finally, a simple random sampling technique was used to select the individual participants, giving every teacher in the selected areas an equal and independent chance of being included in the study.

The primary instrument for data collection was a researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Cultural Intelligence and School Climate Questionnaire (CQ-SCQ)". The instrument was structured into two distinct sections:

- **Section A:** Focused on the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, capturing essential variables such as sex, years of teaching experience, and indigenous languages spoken.

- **Section B:** Elicited relevant information regarding the core constructs of the study, specifically focusing on school climate, cultural awareness, cultural flexibility, and cultural influence.

The instrument underwent a validation process involving face and content validity by Lecturers in the Department of Educational Management to ensure the items were appropriate for the study's objectives. To establish reliability, the Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistic was used, and a reliability coefficient of 0.76 was gotten, indicating that the tool was reliable for field administration.

Data analysis

The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistic was further used to test the formulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance, allowing for the determination of the strength and direction of the relationship between the study variables.

3. RESULTS

The data collected were statistically analysed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation statistical tool. The results are presented as follows:

Test of Research Hypotheses

Ho1: School leaders' intercultural awareness has no significant relationship with public primary school climate.

Table 1. Intercultural Awareness and School Climate

	Mean	SD	N	df	r	P-value
Intercultural Awareness	20.70	2.89				
			691	689	0.55	0.000
School Climate	40.37	4.69				

Table 1 shows the rejection of our hypothesis based on values of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation ($r = 0.55, P = 0.001$). This implies a significant relationship between school leaders' intercultural awareness and public primary school climate in Lagos State.

Ho2: There is no significant correlation between leaders' cultural flexibility and public primary schools' climate.

Table 2. Cultural Flexibility and School Climate

	Mean	SD	N	df	r	P-value
Cultural Flexibility	18.88	3.27				
			691	689	0.41	0.000
School Climate	40.37	4.69				

Table 2 presents the results of the analysis of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation statistics, which forced to reject our hypothesis ($r = 0.41$, $P = 0.000$). Moreover, a significant relationship exists between leaders' cultural flexibility and public primary schools' climate in Lagos State.

Ho3: Leaders' cultural influence is not significantly related to public primary schools' climate.

Similar to the previous two rejections of the hypothesis, we found a significantly positive relationship between school leaders' cultural influence and public primary schools' climate in Lagos State ($r = 0.93$, $P = 0.000$). Therefore, our null hypothesis was not accepted.

Table 3. Cultural Influence and School Climate

	Mean	SD	N	df	r	P-value
Cultural Influence	18.69	3.28				
			691	689	0.93	0.000
School Climate	40.37	4.69				

3. DISCUSSION

The first finding of the study showed that leaders' intercultural awareness was, to a great extent, significantly related to school climate. Implicitly, this showed that intercultural awareness is not just a peripheral skill but a crucial component of effective school leadership in a diverse, cosmopolitan and multicultural city like Lagos. This corroborates the findings of Brislin et al. (2006, p.47) that people who have greater levels of cultural awareness have the ability to understand and distinguish between the similarities and differences across different cultures, hence breeding a positive organisational climate. It also supports the position of Navita et al. (2014, p.98), who discovered that teachers' cultural awareness and the school's organisational climate reinforce one another. They maintained that inclusive policies and events strengthen awareness, while culturally aware teachers help sustain a positive climate. Invariably, leaders who possess intercultural awareness skills are likely better equipped to foster inclusivity, manage cultural nuances among members of staff, students and the general community surrounding the school. This will, in turn, create a harmonious environment conducive to learning. Similarly, leaders who are culturally aware can perceive, interpret, and respond to cultural differences and commonalities among members of staff, students, and community members; this sensitivity reduces misunderstandings, models respectful behaviour, and signals that diversity is valued rather than merely tolerated.

The study also found that there is a significant relationship between cultural awareness and public primary schools. This aligns with the findings of Velarde et

al. (2020, p.182) in a study titled *Towards a healthy school climate: The mediating effect of transformational leadership on cultural intelligence and organisational health*. The study confirmed a significant direct influence of cultural awareness on both transformational leadership and organisational health. The results also underscore the need to integrate cultural awareness development into leadership preparation programmes and to embed culturally responsive leadership expectations within organisational development policies for multicultural school settings. This was also emphasised in the work of Levchenko and Forostiuk (2020, p.249), which investigated the cultural awareness of academic and teaching staff within a lifelong learning context by interviewing 50 educators from 10 higher education institutions in Kyiv. Their findings indicated that the intercultural dimension of cultural awareness among staff is shown by strong interests in acquiring new cultural experiences, engaging in international communication, pursuing self-development, and broadening professional horizons, therefore implying a significant relationship with. Despite these positive dispositions, the study showed a low level of actual application of cultural awareness in instructional practice. The findings imply that while cultural awareness among academic staff may be increasing, its limited integration into teaching and leadership practices constrains its potential contribution to a positive school climate.

The last finding of this study showed that leaders' cultural influence has a positive correlation with primary school climate. Leaders' cultural influence has earlier been defined as an array of factors that shape the educational experiences, practices and outcomes within a given society. Implicitly, this shows that an institutional leader's way of life is related to the nature of the climate in an educational institution. This finding is synonymous with the earlier findings of Testa (2009, p.81), Haney-Brown (2017, p.50), and Jalal (2017, p.6), who reported a predictive correlation between ethnic identity and leadership style. For example, a leader who has a reservation for social party affairs due to his religious or strongly entrenched notion about social activities is likely not to approve any request on party matters. This, then, may become an integral component of the organisational climate.

Conclusion: This study showed that institutional leaders' cultural intelligence is significantly related to organisational climate in public primary schools. Practically, these results imply that targeted professional development in CQ, deliberate policies that reward culturally responsive practices, and structured opportunities for cross-cultural engagement should be central to leadership preparation and in-service training. Enhancing intercultural awareness equips headteachers to interpret cultural cues and reduce misunderstandings; cultivating cultural flexibility enables adaptive behaviours that sustain teacher morale and collaboration; and leveraging cultural influence helps align school norms with inclusive values. Collectively, these capacities foster psychological safety, clearer

communication, and stronger teacher support systems. By embedding cultural intelligence into leadership frameworks, Lagos State Ministry of Education can strengthen school climates that promote equity, teacher retention, and improved student outcomes.

Implications of the Findings for School Administration: The findings of this study suggest that school administrators in diverse urban centres, such as Lagos, must give priority to intercultural awareness to foster a healthy school climate. This is because head teachers who possess deep knowledge of varying cultural norms are better equipped to build trust among staff and parents from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. With this, leaders can proactively mitigate misunderstandings that often lead to communication barriers, low staff morale and organizational conflicts. Consequently, integrating cultural awareness into leadership practices becomes imperative for creating inclusive environments where teachers and students feel socially and emotionally safe.

Furthermore, the significant relationship between cultural flexibility and school climate implies that administrators must be highly adaptable in their leadership approaches. School leaders who can modify their communication styles and behavioural responses to meet specific cultural contexts are more likely to promote cohesion and constructive conflict resolution. This flexibility allows administrators to navigate the "closed" climates that often result in teacher disengagement and emotional incompatibility.

Finally, the positive relationship between cultural influence and school climate highlights that a leader's personal values and traditions greatly shape a school's operational atmosphere. Since a headteacher's lifestyle and beliefs directly affect decision-making and interpersonal interactions, they must be aware of how their cultural background influences school management. Structured CQ training and deliberate opportunities for cross-cultural engagement thus become essential. These measures help leaders turn cultural intelligence into inclusive practices, like culturally sensitive conflict resolution and policy adjustments, which are vital for maintaining an open, engaged, and high-performing educational environment.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Safiyah Taiwo led the conceptualisation of the study title, ensuring that the research focus was clearly defined and aligned with the study objectives. **Jacob Adeyanju** coordinated the design of the conceptual framework, providing the structural foundation that guided the investigation. **Ngozi Uzoka** led the discussion of findings, linking the outcomes to existing scholarship and highlighting their implications. All authors collaboratively reviewed the final manuscript and approved its submission, each bringing valuable insights that strengthened the overall quality of the study.

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