



# Driving Employee Sustainable Performance through Environmental Support, Green Training, and Sustainable Leadership: Does Cultural Intelligence Matter?

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership relate to employee sustainable performance, with cultural intelligence positioned as a mediating mechanism. The research is conducted in Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions (CFCIs) across multiple provinces in China, where dual governance structures, culturally diverse teams, and cross-national educational practices create a complex organizational setting for sustainability-oriented behaviour. Data were collected from 296 academic and administrative employees working in these institutions, and the proposed model was analyzed using SmartPLS. By focusing on multicultural higher education institutions, this study extends sustainability and organizational behaviour research into an underexplored context in which both organizational practices and cross-cultural capabilities are likely to shape employee outcomes. The study offers a framework for understanding how supportive environmental conditions, sustainability-focused training, and leadership can foster employee sustainable performance through the development of cultural intelligence. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for managers and policymakers in CFCIs seeking to strengthen sustainable work practices and improve employee effectiveness in culturally diverse institutional environments.

**Keywords:** Environmental Support, Green Training, Sustainable Leadership, Cultural Intelligence, Employee Sustainable Performance, Chinese-foreign Cooperative Institutions, China

**JEL Classifications:** I23; M12; Q01

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has moved from a peripheral concern to a strategic imperative for contemporary organizations, including higher education institutions. UNESCO's education for sustainable development agenda emphasizes the need to embed sustainability across educational systems and institutional practices (UNESCO, 2025). This expectation is also consistent with the broader global priorities reflected in sustainable development goal 4 on quality education (United Nations, 2025a) and Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production (United Nations, 2025b). Recent scholarship further highlights that higher education institutions are important actors in advancing sustainability through their internal systems, governance, and stakeholder engagement

(Zaléniené and Pereira, 2021). In this context, employee behaviour becomes especially important because institutional sustainability is enacted through the daily actions and decisions of staff rather than through policy statements alone. From this perspective, employee sustainable performance is a particularly relevant outcome because it reflects the enduring achievement of work goals while maintaining satisfactory well-being over time.

Within China, this issue is especially salient in Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions (CFCIs). These institutions operate under the legal and regulatory framework governing Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2003). Recent sector developments also point to renewed expansion and policy momentum, with

the British Council reporting that 285 new joint institutes and programmes were approved in China in 2025 (British Council, 2026). At the institutional level, CFCIs differ from conventional higher education settings because they are shaped by dual partnerships, multiple stakeholders, and complex governance arrangements (Si and Rayner, 2025). Recent research further suggests that Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools often reflects a form of loose coupling between foreign and Chinese partners, requiring continuous negotiation between imported and local practices (Zhang et al., 2024). Other studies show that intercultural communication remains a lived challenge in internationalized staffrooms (Zhang, 2024), while global competence is increasingly emphasized within Sino-foreign cooperative universities (Zhuang et al., 2024). These features make CFCIs a highly suitable context for examining how sustainability-oriented organizational practices and cross-cultural capabilities shape employee outcomes.

Although the literature has increasingly examined sustainability-related employee outcomes, the evidence remains fragmented. Research indicates that environmental support and perceived organizational support toward environmental goals are associated with more positive employee outcomes, including stronger green behaviour and engagement (Karatepe et al., 2022). In higher education settings, green HRM practices and knowledge sharing have also been linked to environmental performance through employee commitment to the environment (Ahmad et al., 2023). Likewise, green training has been recognized as an important mechanism for developing employees' environmental competencies and motivation, thereby improving environmental performance (Yafi et al., 2021). In parallel, sustainable leadership has emerged as an important leadership approach because it emphasizes the long-term integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives (Iqbal et al., 2020). Recent review work also shows that sustainable leadership is among the most frequently discussed leadership styles in the sustainable performance literature (Piwowar-Sulej and Iqbal, 2023). At a broader level, Aman et al. (2022) emphasize that sustainability-oriented initiatives depend on coordinated institutional arrangements and clear developmental agendas, which reinforces the need to examine these predictors together rather than in isolation. However, much of this work has focused on commercial or non-educational sectors, has often examined these predictors separately, and has paid less attention to employee sustainable performance in multicultural higher education settings.

To address this gap, the present study introduces cultural intelligence as a central explanatory mechanism. Cultural intelligence refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings (Ang et al., 2007). Meta-analytic evidence shows that cultural intelligence is positively associated with a range of work-related outcomes (Schlaegel et al., 2021). Research also suggests that individuals with higher cultural intelligence are more likely to perceive inclusion in culturally diverse workgroups (Alexandra et al., 2021), while evidence from academic settings indicates that cultural intelligence is positively related to job performance (Masrek et al., 2021). Importantly, cultural intelligence is not merely a fixed trait; it can be developed

through cross-cultural learning, intercultural exposure, and situated experience (Teixeira and Zanela Klein, 2024). Recent higher education research likewise emphasizes the value of cultural intelligence for inclusion and global collaboration (Sousa, 2025). Related evidence further shows that cultural intelligence can support sustainable innovation behaviour in culturally diverse organizational settings (Li et al., 2021). Taken together, these insights suggest that in CFCIs, environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership may enhance employee sustainable performance partly by strengthening employees' cultural intelligence.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it integrates environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership into a single framework rather than examining them in isolation. Second, it positions cultural intelligence as a mediating mechanism that helps explain how these organizational factors translate into stronger employee sustainable performance in culturally diverse settings. Third, the study is grounded in Job Demands-Resources theory, whereby environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership can be understood as organizational resources, while cultural intelligence represents a valuable personal resource that supports effective functioning in complex work environments (Demerouti et al., 2001). Finally, by focusing on Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions, the study extends sustainability and organizational behaviour research into an underexplored yet increasingly important higher education context.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1. Theoretical Underpinning

This study draws on job demands-resources (JD-R) theory to explain how organizational and personal resources shape employee outcomes. JD-R theory argues that employee functioning depends on the balance between work demands and the resources available to meet those demands, achieve work goals, and sustain motivation and well-being (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). This perspective is also useful for leadership-based research because leadership can influence the availability and quality of job resources in the workplace (Tummers and Bakker, 2021). The framework is particularly relevant to employee sustainable performance, because sustainable performance concerns not merely short-term output but the enduring achievement of work goals while maintaining satisfactory well-being over time (Ji et al., 2021). Cross-cultural evidence also points in this direction: Aman et al. (2023) show that work engagement helps explain performance and turnover links across China and Pakistan, while Rafiq et al. (2022) demonstrate that employee embeddedness and related work attitudes may vary across national settings. In this sense, sustainable performance is inherently resource dependent.

The present model fits this logic well. Environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership can be conceptualized as organizational resources because they provide employees with encouragement, knowledge, guidance, and structural support for

sustainability-oriented work (Karatepe et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2020; Iqbal et al., 2020). Cultural intelligence can be positioned as a personal resource because it reflects an individual capability that helps employees interpret unfamiliar cultural cues, adapt their behaviour, and function effectively in culturally diverse settings (Ang et al., 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). This argument is especially relevant in Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions (CFCIs), where employees operate within complex governance arrangements and work across Chinese and international academic norms (Si and Rayner, 2025; Zhang et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024). Accordingly, JD-R theory provides a suitable foundation for explaining both the direct effects of organizational resources on employee sustainable performance and the indirect effects that may unfold through cultural intelligence, which has been linked to stronger work-related outcomes across diverse settings (Schlaegel et al., 2021).

## 2.2. Environmental Support and Employee Sustainable Performance

Environmental support refers to employees' perceptions that their institution values, encourages, and facilitates environmentally responsible practices. Existing research indicates that such support matters for employee behaviour. When organizations demonstrate genuine concern for environmental goals, employees are more likely to engage in green behaviour and show stronger task-related environmental performance (Karatepe et al., 2022). Related studies also suggest that supportive green climates strengthen positive employee responses by signaling that environmental responsibility is part of legitimate work conduct rather than an optional extra. In this sense, environmental support helps create a work setting in which sustainability is taken seriously.

From the perspective of JD-R theory, environmental support acts as a contextual resource that reduces ambiguity and gives employees confidence that sustainability-related efforts are institutionally valued. This is important in CFCIs, where employees may face competing priorities arising from local regulations, international standards, and diverse expectations from colleagues and management. Under such conditions, institutional support for environmental action can help employees align their daily work with broader sustainability goals in a more stable manner. It also makes sustainability-related effort easier to maintain, because employees do not have to rely solely on personal motivation. As a result, employees who perceive stronger environmental support should be better able to sustain effective performance over time.

H<sub>1</sub>: Environmental support is positively and significantly related to employee sustainable performance.

## 2.3. Green Training and Employee Sustainable Performance

Green training refers to formal organizational efforts to build employees' sustainability-related knowledge, practical skills, and environmental awareness. Prior studies have shown that green training improves employee green performance by helping staff understand environmental responsibilities and apply relevant practices in their work (Pham et al., 2020). Training also helps employees respond more effectively to sustainability-related

problems because it provides clearer procedures, stronger technical understanding, and greater confidence in implementation. In this way, green training is not just an awareness-building exercise; it is a capability-building mechanism.

Its contribution to employee sustainable performance can be understood through JD-R theory as well. Training expands employees' resource base by improving competence and reducing uncertainty about how to perform tasks properly. In CFCIs, this is particularly valuable because employees often come from different educational, professional, and cultural backgrounds, which can create uneven understandings of sustainability-related work. Green training can narrow these differences by creating a shared operational language around sustainability. When employees know what to do, how to do it, and why it matters, they are more likely to perform effectively in a consistent and enduring way. For that reason, green training should strengthen employee sustainable performance.

H<sub>2</sub>: Green training is positively and significantly related to employee sustainable performance.

## 2.4. Sustainable Leadership and Employee Sustainable Performance

Sustainable leadership has attracted increasing attention because it emphasizes long-term value creation, responsible decision-making, and the balancing of social, environmental, and economic concerns. Empirical studies have linked sustainable leadership to positive employee and organizational outcomes, including stronger engagement, sustainability-related behaviour, and long-term performance (Liao, 2022). In higher education and other knowledge-intensive settings, leadership is especially influential because employees often interpret institutional priorities through the signals given by leaders. When sustainability is consistently reinforced by leadership, it becomes embedded in the way work is organized and evaluated. This broader expectation is consistent with green leadership research, as Zhang and Rafiq (2024) show that participative green leadership can strengthen pro-environmental behavior, while Rafiq and Duan (2025) demonstrate that green inclusive leadership can help translate leadership orientation into stronger environmental outcomes.

JD-R theory helps explain why this leadership style should matter for employee sustainable performance. Leaders are important carriers of resources because they shape meaning, priorities, and access to support. Sustainable leaders do more than encourage employees; they connect present actions with long-term institutional purpose and help employees see sustainability as part of effective work rather than a competing demand. In CFCIs, where employees operate across multiple cultural and organizational expectations, this kind of leadership can provide continuity and direction. It helps employees stay focused, coordinate their efforts, and manage competing demands without losing sight of long-term responsibilities. Such conditions are likely to improve employee sustainable performance.

H<sub>3</sub>: Sustainable leadership is positively and significantly related to employee sustainable performance.

## 2.5. Environmental Support and Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence refers to an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings (Ang et al., 2007). Although it is often treated as an individual characteristic, previous research suggests that it can also be shaped by the surrounding environment. Supportive institutional settings encourage interaction, learning, and adjustment, all of which are important for developing intercultural capability. Studies in multicultural and international contexts have shown that organizational support facilitates adaptation and strengthens employees' ability to deal with cultural diversity more effectively. This indicates that cultural intelligence is influenced not only by who employees are, but also by the conditions in which they work.

In the context of JD-R theory, environmental support can be seen as a social resource that encourages participation and reduces the psychological risk of engaging across differences. This is particularly relevant in CFCIs, where environmental initiatives often involve cooperation among domestic and foreign staff as well as coordination across academic and administrative units. When employees perceive that the institution actively supports environmental values, they are more likely to participate in shared discussions, initiatives, and routines that expose them to different viewpoints and working styles. Over time, these repeated interactions can strengthen their ability to interpret cultural signals, adjust behaviour, and work effectively across boundaries. In this way, environmental support should contribute to higher cultural intelligence.

H<sub>4</sub>: Environmental support is positively and significantly related to cultural intelligence.

## 2.6. Green Training and Cultural Intelligence

Training has long been recognized as an important mechanism for developing intercultural competence. Research on cross-cultural training shows that structured learning interventions can strengthen cultural intelligence by increasing awareness, reflection, and adaptive capability. Meta-analytic evidence further suggests that training improves both cultural intelligence and work-related outcomes in multicultural contexts. Although most of this work does not focus specifically on green training, it provides a useful basis for arguing that learning-oriented organizational practices can also shape employees' intercultural capability.

The role of green training in CFCIs may be particularly meaningful because sustainability-related training is unlikely to be purely technical. Employees often need to discuss institutional responsibilities, interpret shared values, and translate sustainability principles into coordinated practices with colleagues from different backgrounds. JD-R theory views such training as a developmental resource because it provides not only information, but also interpretive tools that employees can use in complex work settings. As employees learn how sustainability should be understood and enacted in a multicultural workplace, they are likely to become more attentive to different assumptions, communication styles, and expectations. This deeper awareness can enhance their ability to function effectively across cultures. On that basis, green training should positively influence cultural intelligence.

H<sub>5</sub>: Green training is positively and significantly related to cultural intelligence.

## 2.7. Sustainable Leadership and Cultural Intelligence

Leadership is central in shaping how employees make sense of cultural diversity at work. Existing research shows that culturally sensitive and inclusive leadership can improve collaboration, adjustment, and effectiveness in diverse teams. Leaders influence not only what employees do, but how they interpret organizational values and how they respond to differences in communication, norms, and expectations. In multicultural institutions, leadership therefore becomes an important channel through which intercultural learning and adaptation take place. This broader leadership literature provides a strong basis for connecting sustainable leadership with cultural intelligence.

From a JD-R perspective, leaders provide social and motivational resources by creating the climate in which employees work and learn. In CFCIs, sustainable leaders are likely to encourage responsible dialogue, inclusive coordination, and long-term problem solving across domestic and international perspectives. Employees observe how such leaders integrate different viewpoints, manage institutional complexity, and respond to culturally diverse stakeholders. These repeated observations can gradually shape employees' own ways of interpreting and handling cultural differences. Rather than learning only through formal training, employees may also develop cultural intelligence through everyday exposure to leadership practices that model openness, respect, and integration. Therefore, sustainable leadership is expected to foster cultural intelligence.

H<sub>6</sub>: Sustainable leadership is positively and significantly related to cultural intelligence.

## 2.8. Cultural Intelligence and Employee Sustainable Performance

A substantial body of research supports the value of cultural intelligence for workplace outcomes. Employees with higher cultural intelligence tend to perform better in diverse environments because they can understand unfamiliar cues, adjust their communication, and build productive working relationships across cultural boundaries. Meta-analytic findings likewise show that cultural intelligence is associated with job performance, while studies in higher education and international settings suggest that it contributes to collaboration, adjustment, and inclusion (Schlaegel et al., 2021). These findings are highly relevant for institutions such as CFCIs, where work is embedded in cultural diversity rather than occasional exposure to it.

JD-R theory helps clarify why cultural intelligence should matter for employee sustainable performance. As a personal resource, cultural intelligence allows employees to navigate complexity more effectively without becoming overly strained by misunderstanding or conflict. In CFCIs, academic and administrative employees often need to coordinate with colleagues, students, and stakeholders whose communication styles and assumptions may differ considerably. Employees who possess stronger cultural intelligence are more likely to maintain smooth

interactions and adapt to changing interpersonal demands. This interpretation is also compatible with cross-cultural management evidence; as Rafiq and Wu (2017) argue, trust-related managerial outlooks can differ across China and Pakistan, shaping how workplace relationships are understood and managed. This helps employees over time, which is central to the idea of sustainable performance. Accordingly, higher cultural intelligence should be associated with stronger employee sustainable performance.

H<sub>7</sub>: Cultural intelligence is positively and significantly related to employee sustainable performance.

### 2.9. The Mediating Role of Cultural Intelligence in the Relationship between Environmental Support and Employee Sustainable Performance

The preceding arguments indicate that environmental support can help shape cultural intelligence, while cultural intelligence itself enhances employee sustainable performance. Taken together, these relationships point to an indirect pathway. In culturally diverse institutions, environmental support may influence employee sustainable performance not only by directly encouraging sustainability-oriented conduct, but also by helping employees build the intercultural capability needed to work effectively in such settings. This possibility is particularly relevant in CFCIs, where sustainability-related initiatives often require coordination among employees with different cultural and professional backgrounds.

JD-R theory provides a useful explanation for this process. Organizational resources often have their strongest influence when they activate or strengthen personal resources, which then help employees function more effectively. In the present study, environmental support represents the institutional condition that encourages engagement in shared sustainability-related practices, while cultural intelligence represents the personal capability that allows employees to use those experiences productively in a multicultural workplace. When employees become more culturally intelligent, they are better able to translate supportive environmental conditions into stable and effective performance. Therefore, cultural intelligence is expected to mediate the relationship between environmental support and employee sustainable performance.

H<sub>8</sub>: Cultural intelligence mediates the relationship between environmental support and employee sustainable performance.

### 2.10. The Mediating Role of Cultural Intelligence in the Relationship between Green Training and Employee Sustainable Performance

Green training has already been linked to stronger employee performance, and training-based interventions have also been shown to improve cultural intelligence. When considered together, these findings suggest that one reason green training improves sustainable performance may be that it develops employees' ability to apply sustainability-related knowledge across culturally diverse work situations. This is especially plausible in CFCIs, where sustainability practices are not implemented in a socially uniform environment. Employees must often transfer what they learn into interactions shaped by different assumptions, norms, and communication styles.

This mediating pathway can be understood clearly within JD-R theory. Green training supplies a developmental resource, but training alone does not guarantee effective use of new knowledge in complex workplaces. Employees must also convert learning into a usable personal capability. In this study, that capability is cultural intelligence. When green training strengthens employees' ability to understand different perspectives and adapt their behaviour accordingly, the benefits of training should extend further into day-to-day performance. In other words, green training becomes more consequential for sustainable performance when it also enhances cultural intelligence. For this reason, cultural intelligence is expected to mediate the relationship between green training and employee sustainable performance.

H<sub>9</sub>: Cultural intelligence mediates the relationship between green training and employee sustainable performance.

### 2.11. The Mediating Role of Cultural Intelligence in the Relationship between Sustainable Leadership and Employee Sustainable Performance

Research on sustainable leadership increasingly suggests that its influence on employee outcomes is often indirect. Leaders shape employee behaviour not only through direct guidance, but also by developing attitudes, capabilities, and interpretive frameworks that employees carry into their work. In multicultural settings, leadership is especially important because employees often rely on leaders to understand how diverse perspectives should be managed and integrated. Since cultural intelligence is also linked to stronger workplace functioning, it is reasonable to expect that sustainable leadership may contribute to employee sustainable performance partly through this personal capability.

This expectation also aligns with JD-R theory. Sustainable leadership provides employees with direction, meaning, and a long-term orientation, but employees still need the personal ability to enact those cues effectively in a culturally diverse environment. In CFCIs, cultural intelligence can serve as that mechanism. Employees who develop stronger cultural intelligence under sustainable leadership are more likely to understand different viewpoints, coordinate more effectively across boundaries, and maintain constructive working relationships. These qualities enable them to convert leadership guidance into enduring performance rather than only immediate compliance. Therefore, cultural intelligence is expected to mediate the relationship between sustainable leadership and employee sustainable performance.

H<sub>10</sub>: Cultural intelligence mediates the relationship between sustainable leadership and employee sustainable performance.

Figure 1 presents the research framework of the study.

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1. Sample and Procedures

This study focuses on Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions (CFCIs) in China, a distinctive segment of the higher education sector characterized by dual governance arrangements, multicultural work environments, and the integration of Chinese

and international educational systems. This setting is appropriate for the present research because academic and administrative employees in CFCIs operate within culturally diverse institutional contexts where sustainability-related practices, leadership, and employee capability are likely to interact in meaningful ways. Given the variation in institutional missions, staffing structures, and disciplinary compositions across CFCIs, a purposive sampling approach was adopted to ensure representation from employees with different functional roles, academic fields, and national backgrounds.

Data were collected from academic and administrative employees working in CFCIs located across multiple provinces in China. The questionnaire was distributed in an online format through institutional contacts and professional networks. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that the study was conducted solely for academic purposes. To encourage candid responses, anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and respondents were informed that there were no right or wrong answers. After screening the returned questionnaires for completeness and usability, 296 valid responses were retained for the final analysis. This sample size is considered adequate for PLS-SEM, particularly for a model that includes multiple direct and indirect relationships among latent constructs (Hair et al., 2022).

### 3.2. Measures

The study measurements were adapted from established scales in the existing literature to ensure content validity and conceptual consistency. The questionnaire was initially prepared in English and then translated into Chinese using the translation and back-translation approach, which is widely recommended in cross-cultural research to ensure linguistic accuracy and conceptual equivalence. Bilingual research assistants compared the English and Chinese versions iteratively and made minor wording refinements where necessary to improve clarity and contextual fit for employees working in CFCIs.

Environmental support was measured using items adapted from the perceived organizational support toward the environment scale developed by Lamm et al. (2015). Green training was assessed using items adapted from the green training dimension of the green human resource management scale developed by Tang et al. (2018). Sustainable leadership was measured using items derived from the sustainable leadership questionnaire developed by McCann and Holt (2011). Cultural intelligence was assessed using the widely used cultural intelligence scale developed by Ang et al. (2007), while employee sustainable performance was measured using the E-SuPer scale developed by Ji et al. (2021). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

### 3.3. Common Method Bias Testing

Because the study relied on self-reported questionnaire data collected from a single source, the possibility of common method bias (CMB) could not be ignored. To reduce this concern, both procedural and statistical remedies were employed. Procedurally, the questionnaire used simple and unambiguous wording,

respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and the survey instructions emphasized that there were no correct or incorrect responses. These steps help minimize evaluation apprehension and reduce the likelihood that respondents answer in a socially desirable or mechanically consistent manner (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

In addition, Harman's single-factor test was treated as a supplementary diagnostic in line with prior methodological guidance (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Fuller et al., 2016). Because the main emphasis of this study is on hypothesis testing, the discussion places greater weight on the procedural remedies described above.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The study employed partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS to test the proposed research model. PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate for studies that aim to predict key target constructs, estimate complex models with multiple relationships, and examine mediation effects among latent variables. Compared with covariance-based SEM, PLS-SEM is also more flexible when the primary objective is variance explanation rather than strict model fit confirmation. Given that the present study examines both direct and indirect effects among environmental support, green training, sustainable leadership, cultural intelligence, and employee sustainable performance, PLS-SEM was deemed suitable for the analytical purpose of the study (Hair et al., 2022).

Following the standard PLS-SEM procedure, the analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model was assessed by examining indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted to establish internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was then evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio. Second, the structural model was assessed by examining collinearity, path coefficients, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), and the significance of direct and indirect relationships through bootstrapping. This analytical procedure provides a robust basis for testing the proposed hypotheses and evaluating the explanatory power of the model (Hair et al., 2022).

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Respondents Profile

The respondent profile indicates that females constituted the majority of the sample, accounting for 62.3% of the respondents, while males represented 37.7%. In terms of age, most participants were between 31 and 40 years old (63.0%), followed by those aged 42-50 (25.7%), suggesting that the sample was largely composed of employees in their middle working years. Only 4.7% of the respondents were under 30, whereas 6.7% were aged 51 and above. With regard to educational attainment, the sample was highly educated, with 54.3% holding a PhD or above and 38.3% possessing a master's degree, while only 7.3% had an undergraduate qualification. Regarding position, administrative staff formed the largest group (46.7%), followed by teaching staff (32.3%) and teaching assistants (21.0%). Overall, this

demographic profile suggests that the sample was predominantly female, professionally mature, highly educated, and drawn from a diverse mix of academic and administrative roles within Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions.

### 4.2. Descriptive Analysis of the Variables

Table 1 presents the inter-correlations among the study variables. As shown, sustainable leadership is positively correlated with employee sustainable performance ( $r = 0.176$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) and cultural intelligence ( $r = 0.314$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). Environmental support is also positively associated with employee sustainable performance

**Table 1: Correlational analysis**

	SL	ESP	ES	CI	GI
SL	1				
ESP	0.176**	1			
ES	-0.042	0.159**	1		
CI	0.314**	0.354**	0.206**	1	
GT	-0.062	0.297**	0.016	0.301**	1

n=296. SL: Sustainable leadership, ESP: Employee sustainable performance, ES: Environmental support, CI: Cultural intelligence, GT: Green training. \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Table 2: Measurement model assessment**

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Employee sustainable performance	ESP1	0.744	0.907	0.922	0.543
	ESP2	0.718			
	ESP3	0.738			
	ESP4	0.775			
	ESP5	0.712			
	ESP6	0.728			
	ESP7	0.715			
	ESP8	0.788			
	ESP9	0.724			
	ESP10	0.724			
Cultural intelligence	CQ1	0.828	0.928	0.939	0.608
	CQ2	0.760			
	CQ3	0.849			
	CQ4	0.864			
	CQ5	0.724			
	CQ6	0.847			
	CQ7	0.723			
	CQ8	0.740			
	CQ9	0.721			
	CQ10	0.721			
Environmental support	ES1	0.723	0.856	0.896	0.633
	ES2	0.712			
	ES3	0.803			
	ES4	0.872			
	ES5	0.856			
Green training	GT1	0.814	0.874	0.905	0.615
	GT2	0.707			
	GT3	0.715			
	GT4	0.844			
	GT5	0.846			
	GT6	0.767			
Sustainable leadership	SL1	0.854	0.86	0.904	0.704
	SL2	0.85			
	SL3	0.902			
	SL4	0.74			

n=296. ESP: Employee sustainable performance, CQ: Cultural intelligence, ES: Environmental support, GT: Green training, SL: Sustainable leadership

( $r = 0.159$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) and cultural intelligence ( $r = 0.206$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). Similarly, green training shows positive correlations with employee sustainable performance ( $r = 0.297$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) and cultural intelligence ( $r = 0.301$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). In addition, cultural intelligence is positively correlated with employee sustainable performance ( $r = 0.354$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). These significant correlations are in the expected direction and provide preliminary support for the proposed direct relationships in the study.

### 4.3. Measurement Model Assessment

Table 2 presents the results of the measurement model assessment. The factor loadings for all items ranged from 0.707 to 0.902, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, which indicates satisfactory indicator reliability. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.856 to 0.928, while the composite reliability (rho\_c) values ranged from 0.896 to 0.939. Since all of these values are above the recommended cut-off of 0.70, the constructs demonstrate adequate internal consistency reliability. Convergent validity was further supported, as the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.543 to 0.704, all of which exceed the threshold of 0.50.

Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), as shown in Table 3. The diagonal values, representing the square root of AVE, were greater than the inter-construct correlations, thereby satisfying the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Likewise, all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.85, ranging from 0.068 to 0.368. These results confirm that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another and that discriminant validity is established.

### 4.4. Structural Model Assessment

Table 4 reports the results of the structural model assessment. The findings show that all proposed direct relationships are positive and statistically significant. Specifically, environmental support has a significant positive effect on employee sustainable performance ( $\beta = 0.118$ ,  $t = 2.052$ ,  $P = 0.040$ ), supporting  $H_1$ . Similarly, green training is positively related to employee sustainable performance ( $\beta = 0.239$ ,  $t = 4.457$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), supporting  $H_2$ , while sustainable leadership also has a significant positive effect on employee sustainable performance ( $\beta = 0.128$ ,  $t = 2.180$ ,  $P = 0.029$ ), supporting  $H_3$ .

The results further indicate that all three antecedent variables significantly predict cultural intelligence. Environmental support positively affects cultural intelligence ( $\beta = 0.215$ ,  $t = 4.453$ ,

**Table 3: Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT criterion**

	ESP	CQ	ES	GT	SL
ESP	0.737	0.368	0.183	0.320	0.193
CQ	0.357	0.780	0.234	0.322	0.346
ES	0.168	0.216	0.796	0.068	0.069
GT	0.300	0.302	0.029	0.784	0.085
SL	0.180	0.322	-0.026	-0.063	0.839

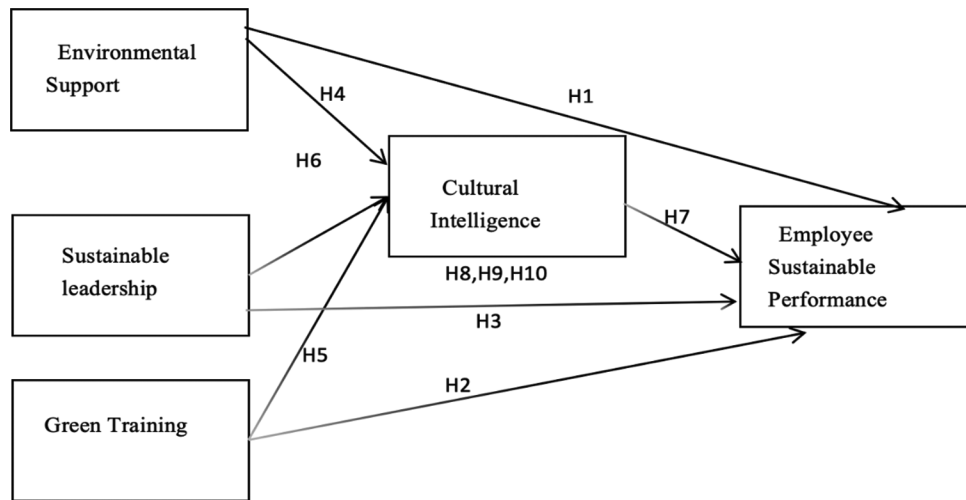
Note: n = 296. ESP: Employee sustainable performance; CQ: Cultural intelligence; ES: Environmental support; GT: Green training; SL: Sustainable leadership. Diagonal values represent the square roots of AVE; values below the diagonal represent inter-construct correlations, and values above the diagonal represent HTMT ratios.

**Table 4: Structural model results**

Hypotheses	Relationship	$\beta$	SE	T-values	P-values	Decision
H <sub>1</sub>	ES -> ESP	0.118	0.057	2.052	0.04	Supported
H <sub>2</sub>	GT -> ESP	0.239	0.054	4.457	<0.001	Supported
H <sub>3</sub>	SL -> ESP	0.128	0.059	2.180	0.029	Supported
H <sub>4</sub>	ES -> CQ	0.215	0.048	4.453	<0.001	Supported
H <sub>5</sub>	GT -> CQ	0.318	0.048	6.684	<0.001	Supported
H <sub>6</sub>	SL -> CQ	0.348	0.047	7.470	<0.001	Supported
H <sub>7</sub>	CQ -> ESP	0.218	0.063	3.454	0.001	Supported
H <sub>8</sub>	ES -> CQ -> ESP	0.047	0.018	2.543	0.011	Supported
H <sub>9</sub>	GT -> CQ -> ESP	0.069	0.021	3.226	0.001	Supported
H <sub>10</sub>	SL -> CQ -> ESP	0.076	0.026	2.967	0.003	Supported

n=296. ESP: Employee sustainable performance, CQ: Cultural intelligence, ES: Environmental support, GT: Green training, SL: Sustainable leadership

**Figure 1: Research framework**



$P < 0.001$ ), thereby supporting H<sub>4</sub>. In the same way, green training has a positive and significant effect on cultural intelligence ( $\beta = 0.318, t = 6.684, P < 0.001$ ), supporting H<sub>5</sub>, and sustainable leadership also positively influences cultural intelligence ( $\beta = 0.348, t = 7.470, P < 0.001$ ), supporting H<sub>6</sub>. In addition, cultural intelligence is positively associated with employee sustainable performance ( $\beta = 0.218, t = 3.454, P = 0.001$ ), which supports H<sub>7</sub>.

The mediation results also provide support for the proposed indirect relationships. The indirect effect of environmental support on employee sustainable performance through cultural intelligence is significant ( $\beta = 0.047, t = 2.543, P = 0.011$ ), supporting H<sub>8</sub>. Likewise, the indirect effect of green training on employee sustainable performance through cultural intelligence is significant ( $\beta = 0.069, t = 3.226, P = 0.001$ ), supporting H<sub>9</sub>. Finally, cultural intelligence significantly mediates the relationship between sustainable leadership and employee sustainable performance ( $\beta = 0.076, t = 2.967, P = 0.003$ ), thereby supporting H<sub>10</sub>. Since both the direct and indirect effects are significant, the findings suggest that cultural intelligence plays a partial mediating role in the relationships between environmental support, green training, sustainable leadership, and employee sustainable performance.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### 5.1. Overview of the Findings

This study examined how environmental support, green training,

and sustainable leadership influence employee sustainable performance in Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions (CFCIs), with cultural intelligence as a mediating mechanism. The findings provide full support for the proposed model. All direct hypotheses were supported, indicating that environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership each have a positive relationship with employee sustainable performance. The results also show that these three antecedents significantly enhance cultural intelligence, while cultural intelligence itself contributes positively to employee sustainable performance. In addition, the indirect effects were all significant, confirming that cultural intelligence partially mediates the effects of environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership on employee sustainable performance. Taken together, these findings suggest that sustainability-oriented organizational resources are important in multicultural higher education settings, but their value becomes stronger when employees also possess the intercultural capability needed to translate those resources into effective day-to-day performance. This is particularly relevant in CFCIs, where academic and administrative employees work across different institutional logics, communication styles, and cultural expectations.

### 5.2. Direct Effects on Employee Sustainable Performance

The positive effect of environmental support on employee sustainable performance indicates that employees perform more sustainably when they perceive that their institution genuinely

values and supports environmental responsibility. This result is consistent with previous research showing that perceived organizational support for the environment promotes task-related pro-environmental behaviour and other positive employee outcomes. In the present study, this relationship appears to extend beyond narrow environmental actions to a broader form of work performance that combines effectiveness with continuity over time. In CFCIs, where employees often balance local and international expectations, environmental support may reduce ambiguity and make sustainability-related action feel legitimate and worthwhile.

Green training also showed a significant positive relationship with employee sustainable performance. This finding suggests that sustainability-oriented training is not merely informational; it helps employees develop the knowledge and practical capability needed to carry out work in a more effective and enduring manner. In a culturally diverse setting such as CFCIs, training may also create a shared understanding of sustainability expectations across employees with different professional and cultural backgrounds. This finding aligns with earlier work showing that training-related interventions strengthen both job performance and sustainability-related competencies.

The significant effect of sustainable leadership on employee sustainable performance further reinforces the importance of leadership in shaping long-term employee outcomes. Sustainable leaders help employees connect immediate work tasks with broader social and environmental goals, which may be particularly important in complex institutions such as CFCIs. When leaders consistently model responsibility, continuity, and future orientation, employees are more likely to sustain effective performance rather than focus only on short-term output. This result is in line with recent research suggesting that sustainable leadership strengthens employee engagement and performance and is increasingly relevant in organizational and higher education contexts.

### 5.3. Antecedents of Cultural Intelligence

Another important finding of this study is that environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership all positively influence cultural intelligence. This pattern suggests that cultural intelligence should not be viewed only as a fixed personal trait; it can also be shaped by organizational conditions and experiences. The positive effect of environmental support on cultural intelligence suggests that supportive institutional climates may encourage more interaction, participation, and adjustment across culturally diverse groups. In CFCIs, sustainability-related activities often require cooperation between domestic and foreign staff, as well as collaboration across academic and administrative functions. When employees perceive strong institutional support for environmental goals, they may be more willing to engage in these shared practices, and such repeated engagement can improve their ability to interpret and manage cultural differences.

The positive relationship between green training and cultural intelligence is also meaningful. Prior meta-analytic evidence shows that cross-cultural training improves cultural intelligence and job performance. Although the present study focuses on green training rather than cross-cultural training specifically, the

result suggests that sustainability-related training in multicultural institutions may also function as a developmental space in which employees learn to understand different perspectives, communicate across boundaries, and adapt behaviour in culturally diverse work settings.

Similarly, the significant effect of sustainable leadership on cultural intelligence highlights the role of leaders as social and interpretive guides in multicultural workplaces. In CFCIs, leaders often occupy a bridging position between Chinese and international systems. By modeling inclusive communication, respectful coordination, and long-term thinking, sustainable leaders may gradually help employees become more culturally adaptive in their own work. This finding strengthens the view that leadership contributes not only to performance outcomes directly, but also to the development of intercultural capability among employees.

### 5.4. The Role of Cultural Intelligence in Employee Sustainable Performance

The results show that cultural intelligence has a significant positive effect on employee sustainable performance. This means that employees who are better able to understand, interpret, and adapt to cultural differences are also more likely to maintain effective performance over time. This finding is highly relevant to the CFCI context, where employees frequently interact with colleagues and stakeholders from different national, institutional, and professional backgrounds.

This result is consistent with meta-analytic evidence showing that cultural intelligence is positively associated with work-related outcomes, including job performance. In the present study, the relevance of cultural intelligence appears even broader because the outcome is not general performance alone, but sustainable performance, which emphasizes endurance and well-being alongside effectiveness. Employees with high cultural intelligence are likely to experience fewer misunderstandings, smoother collaboration, and greater adaptability, all of which support more stable and sustainable functioning in multicultural institutions.

### 5.5. Mediating Role of Cultural Intelligence

The mediation findings offer one of the most important contributions of this study. Cultural intelligence significantly mediated the relationships between environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership and employee sustainable performance. This suggests that the benefits of these organizational factors do not operate only in a direct way. Instead, part of their influence is transmitted through employees' ability to function effectively across cultural boundaries. The indirect effect was evident for all three predictors, indicating that cultural intelligence is a meaningful explanatory mechanism in multicultural higher education institutions. In practical terms, this means that environmental support, training, and leadership become more effective when they strengthen the intercultural capability of employees. Among the three indirect paths, the mediating effect was strongest for sustainable leadership, followed by green training and environmental support. This pattern suggests that leadership may be particularly powerful in shaping the intercultural conditions under which employees perform, while training plays

a strong developmental role and environmental support provides the broader institutional context.

These mediation results are also theoretically meaningful because they align with the JD-R view that organizational resources often influence outcomes by activating or strengthening personal resources. In this study, cultural intelligence serves as that personal resource. It helps employees transform sustainability-related support, learning, and leadership into sustainable performance in a culturally complex workplace. This extends prior cultural intelligence research, which has mostly emphasized direct work-related outcomes, by demonstrating its mediating role in a sustainability-oriented model.

### 5.6. Theoretical Implications

This study offers several theoretical contributions. First, it extends the literature on employee sustainable performance by showing that environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership can be integrated into a single explanatory framework. Rather than examining these antecedents in isolation, the study demonstrates that they jointly contribute to sustainable employee outcomes in multicultural institutions. Second, the study enriches JD-R theory by showing that organizational resources and personal resources work together in explaining employee sustainable performance. Environmental support, green training, and sustainable leadership represent organizational resources, while cultural intelligence functions as a personal resource that enables employees to use those organizational conditions more effectively. This also helps explain why the same institutional practices may produce stronger outcomes under different personal and contextual conditions, a point that is consistent with evidence on career-stage differences (Rafiq, 2019) and contextual moderation effects (Ren et al., 2019).

Third, the study contributes to cultural intelligence research by positioning cultural intelligence as a mediating mechanism rather than only a direct predictor of work outcomes. This is important because it shows that cultural intelligence is not simply an individual competency with isolated performance benefits; it can also serve as the process through which sustainability-oriented organizational conditions are translated into stronger and more enduring employee performance. Finally, the study extends the literature into the underexplored context of CFCIs, where sustainability and cross-cultural complexity coexist in ways that are rarely addressed together in prior research.

### 5.7. Practical Implications

The findings have several practical implications for managers and policymakers in CFCIs. First, institutions should create a visible and credible environmental support system. Sustainability goals need to be embedded in policies, communication, and daily routines so that employees perceive environmental responsibility as an integral part of legitimate work behaviour rather than an optional activity. Second, CFCIs should invest in well-designed green training. Such training should not only focus on technical sustainability practices but also encourage shared learning, dialogue, and application across culturally diverse staff groups. In multicultural institutions, training can serve as both a capability-building and coordination-building tool, and this role may become

even stronger when supported by digitally enabled HR systems and immersive learning approaches discussed in the AI-HRM and XR literature (Rafiq et al., 2024; Dastane et al., 2024).

Third, institutions should pay serious attention to sustainable leadership development. Leaders in CFCIs need to provide more than administrative direction; they should model long-term responsibility, inclusive communication, and cross-cultural coordination. Because the indirect effect through cultural intelligence was strongest for sustainable leadership, leadership development programs may be especially valuable for strengthening sustainable employee outcomes.

Finally, the findings suggest that cultural intelligence should be treated as a strategic capability in multicultural higher education institutions. CFCIs may benefit from creating cross-cultural learning opportunities, joint projects, collaborative work platforms, and leadership practices that encourage interaction across domestic and international staff groups. Doing so may help improve both interpersonal functioning and sustainable performance.

### 5.8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the research design is cross-sectional, so strong causal conclusions should be drawn with caution. Second, the study relies on self-reported survey data, which may introduce common method concerns despite the procedural and statistical remedies applied. Third, the data were collected only from CFCIs in China, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other institutional or national contexts. Future research could address these limitations by using longitudinal designs, multi-source data, or comparative studies across different higher education systems. It would also be useful to examine additional mediators, such as work engagement, meaningfulness, or organizational commitment, as well as potential moderators such as international exposure, institutional climate, or role category. Future scholarship may also benefit from bibliometric mapping and structured research-agenda building, because such approaches can clarify how interdisciplinary fields evolve and where their most promising gaps remain (Bhutta et al., 2021; Xue et al., 2023). Such extensions would help clarify under what conditions sustainability-oriented organizational resources are most effective in promoting employee sustainable performance in multicultural work environments.

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