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# Global Mindset as a Predictor of Life Satisfaction of Asian International Students: The Mediational Role of Self-Efficacy

MAGDALENA MOSANYA

*Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw,  
Middlesex University Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

## Abstract

The social and economic processes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, related to globalisation, have provoked an increase in the number of multicultural individuals, the children of expatriates on overseas posts. Further, a rise of multicultural societies, like one of the United Arab Emirates without a dominant cultural frame can also be observed. These spur the necessity to seek mechanisms supporting cross-cultural individuals' functioning in an increasingly globalised world. Global mindset, a notion rooted in international leadership studies, has been an evidenced predictor of achievement in a multicultural business environment. Furthermore, self-efficacy has demonstrated a positive impact on organisational and personal success and enhanced self-concept. In the present study, we combine these two variables in one model to explain the mechanism of the global mindset's impact on life satisfaction for international students of Asian origin ( $N=277$ ) with self-efficacy as a mediator of such a relationship. Our model explained 30% of the

variance in life satisfaction with the mediational analysis supporting self-efficacy as a mediator in a positive effect of global mindset on well-being. Our study, therefore, fed into a better understanding of the mechanism of global mindset enhancing the impact on the life satisfaction of cross-cultural individuals and hence contributed to the postmodern psychological knowledge. Accounting for the dynamic characters of self-efficacy and global mindset, we further set a new field of exploration for possible interventions targeting international students' flourishing.

**Keywords:** global mindset, self-efficacy, multiculturalism, globalisation, life-satisfaction

**JEL Classification Code:** I31

## Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the business reality has become exceedingly ambiguous, complex, and interdependent on global collaboration and cross-cultural abilities (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012). The globalisation processes led to new phenomena worldwide, with leadership characterised by cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural managerial skills central focus. Furthermore, such leadership roles might be filled by individuals who possess cross-cultural abilities and a global mindset, so-called third culture kids (TCKs) (Stokke, 2013). TCKs are defined as people who meaningfully interacted with two or more cultural environments during their early years (Pollock et al., 2017; Stokke, 2013). Such culturally diverse experience has multiple advantages: global leadership skills, intercultural sensitivity, cosmopolitanism, multilingualism, and potential for global mindset (Cho, 2009; de Waal, 2020; Fail et al., 2004; Stokke, 2013). Global mindset is essential for international leaders and individuals in multicultural environments (den Dekker, 2013). There is also early evidence of its supportive impact on the well-being of TCKs (Mosanya & Kwiatkowska, 2021).

It might be particularly relevant to the young professionals living in the multicultural environment of the United Arab Emirates. After fast-paced development in recent decades, this Gulf country has turned into a multicultural hub for international business. Within the UAE exist diverse cultural paradigms without a need to assimilate with a dominant culture. Furthermore, the number of inbound tertiary students is nearly five times larger than outbound students, most of whom are of Asian origin. Hence, university graduates are predominantly third culture individuals (Mosanya, 2019). During university years and after graduation, young professionals are expected to exert cross-cultural abilities and sensitivity in their everyday functioning while entering the professional market. The early explorative research of Mosanya and

Kwiatkowska (2021) presented the value of global mindset to the well-being of TCKs living in the UAE. The present study explored further the mechanism behind such a relationship proposing that self-efficacy may act as a mediator.

## The well-being of multicultural individuals

People spend more than half of their lives working (US Department of Labour, 2018); hence their well-being should constitute a central objective of employers, health care providers, and policymakers. It also matters as subjective well-being was shown to be reciprocally connected with productivity (Schwartz, 2013). Optimal performance was evidenced as a characteristic of employees with a higher level of experienced life satisfaction and level of happiness. Further, work satisfaction seems to depend on life satisfaction (Weziak-Bialowolska et al., 2020). Subjective well-being (SWB) is a multidimensional notion, defined as life satisfaction, optimal functioning or happiness (Diener et al., 1999), with life satisfaction reflecting a significant ability to deal with life circumstances (Kostka & Jachimowicz, 2010). SWB can also be extended to the sense of control over one's life, self-efficacy (Huppert, 2009), and a combination of psychological positivity with physiological health (Grob, 1995). Likewise, the work context and environment can have a noticeable impact on the well-being of employees (Giorgi et al., 2018). In a multicultural setting, one might be more stressed if not competent to deal with diversity. And young people have been particularly prone to stress in Arab countries (Fawzy & Hamed, 2017; Mosanya, 2019). Still, their exposure to multicultural paradigms in the UAE multiethnic population may spur their multicultural competencies and skills (Tarique & Takeuchi, 2008).

Culture, psychology, and business are interrelated (den Dekker, 2013; Markus & Conner, 2013), and commitments to the socio-cultural environment influence identity, thinking patterns, intelligence, and self-concept (Bandura, 1977). Culture can be further explained as a way of living and relating with others, consisting of values, beliefs, meanings, conventions, and artefacts (Kitayama & Park, 2010). There have been many studies on cross-cultural effectiveness and abilities (Smith & Bond, 1999; Thomas, 2002), suggesting that multicultural individuals might possess abilities to interact better within culturally diverse contexts (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012). At the same time, little is known about the mechanism explaining such a positive impact of cross-cultural abilities and sensitivity incorporated in a notion of global mindset on the well-being of multicultural individuals. The literature has not concluded on the factors that stimulated by global mindset might feed into a better functioning and flourishing of cross-cultural professionals. Thus the present study proposes that self-efficacy (SE), a variable derived from the social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura,

1989), which is a subjective perception of an individual's own abilities in performing a particular task, may individually mediate the impact of global mindset on the subjectively experienced well-being for multicultural individuals (Bandura, 1977).

## Global mindset

One of the attributes enabling international interactions and successful management of cultural diversity is global mindset. This concept constitutes an essential subject within the leadership and cross-cultural management literature (French, 2016). Global mindset can be defined as a critical quality in a globalised business environment (Levy et al., 2007), a predictor of international success (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002) and an essential factor related to the functioning of international individuals (den Dekker, 2013; Stokke, 2013; Mosanya & Kwiatkowska, 2021).

Historically, Perlmutter's (1969 as cited in Levy et al. 2007) geocentric orientation has set the field for developing the notion of global mindset. Perlmutter described three perspectives that individuals could take in international encounters: ethnocentric (home country-focused), polycentric (host country-focused), and geocentric (globally-focused). Geocentric orientation referred to what is now understood as a global perspective, an inclusive mindset based on universalistic values (Story, 2011). French's (2016) revision of global mindset definitions concluded that they are often conceptualised via their dissimilarity to domestic orientation. Since then, there have been continuous conceptual ambiguities related to the notion of global mindset, and hence Levy and colleagues (2007) attempted systematisation of its definition. They pointed out that there are two underlying themes behind each perspective on global mindset, namely cosmopolitanism and cognitive complexity. The authors proposed further a more comprehensive definition of global mindset as a highly complex cognitive process of perception characterised by an openness to multiple cultural and strategic realities on both international and local levels and the cognitive ability to integrate these diversities (p. 27).

Alternatively, most authors understand global mindset as cross-cultural abilities, close to cultural intelligence, including knowledge and appreciation of foreign cultures (Adler & Bartholomew, 1992), an ability to adapt to cultural standards (Estienne, 1997). French (2016) criticised such a perspective by pointing out that the biggest weakness in studies on global mindset was the lack of focus on the cognitive part to it, with inflated emphasis on the behavioural and attitudinal aspects. He further conceptualised global mindset as a cognitive filter or knowledge structure. The research has brought a similar perspective on global mindset by den Dekker (2013). In his quest towards the empirically-based conceptualisation of global mindset,

den Dekker explained it as a “set of cognitive attitudes that are positively related to globalisation processes” (p. 24). A similar perspective on global mindset has also been adopted by Gupta & Govindarajan (2002), who also proposed a conceptual framework distinguished between organisational and individual global mindsets. From a corporate perspective, the central value of global mindset was accurate and quick decision making in response to culturally new markets. On the individual level, global mindset reflected beliefs in equality of all people from different cultures, openness to a novel cultural situation, excitement versus anxiety in dealing with cultural diversity, and ‘hybridity’ of value systems (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). Hence, global mindset could appear as the alternative to negative attitudes towards ‘others’ due to positive assessment of culturally different individuals and enabled abilities to perceive similarities within diversity.

Kefalas (1998), early on in the discussion on global mindset, suggested that it is an acquired attribute, not an innate quality. Out of the factors that might influence the development of global mindset, den Dekker (2013) pointed out personality traits (openness to experience), national characteristics (individualism, low power distance), and demographic factors (early exposure to diversity). Cross-cultural interactions and curiosity about other cultures are two fundamental aspects of global mindset, according to Gupta and Govindarajan (2002), and has also been seen as characteristics of third culture kids (Stokke, 2013). Den Dekker (2013) also pointed out cross-cultural knowledge as a necessary (if not crucial) constituent of global mindset.

However, other factors, like self-efficacy, also play a significant role in developing the global orientation (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). While the exposure to diversity and cultural knowledge are usually present in the experience of international students, the active component of the process, the conscious activation of the global frame of reference, might depend on other factors. Passive exposure to diversity does not seem to suffice to assure the growth of global mindset (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). Lovvorn and Chen (2011) argued further that international experience was not a determinant of global mindset. They suggested that cultural intelligence is moderating if the international experience, for example, exposure to cross-cultural interactions, will transform into global mindset. Tarique & Weisboard (2013) added the importance of openness to experience to the development of intercultural competencies for third culture individuals. Besides, some factors can block its development, namely strong national identity (Cogin & Fish, 2010), power distance, and collectivism (Srinivas, 1995 as cited in den Dekker, 2013).

The research highlighted a higher latency for global mindset among multicultural individuals, with them being also more flexible, adaptable, curious, and more likely to welcome change (Stokke, 2013). This is in line with other studies, as an early

and more frequent exposure to different norms and values was correlated with global mindset in the research of den Dekker (2013) and with predispositions for a metacognitive cultural intelligence (Tarique & Takeuchi, 2008). Although cultural intelligence is not identical to global mindset, possessing a higher level of cultural intelligence is associated with an increased global mindset (Lovvorn & Chen, 2011). Both concepts can have a profound impact on TCKs' sense of multicultural competencies in the form of cross-cultural self-efficacy (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002)

## Self-efficacy

Drawing upon the social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1989), self-efficacy (SE) is a central construct from which the notion of self-concept is derived. SE is defined as personal beliefs over one's competencies. Thus, self-efficacy is quantified as a trust in one's ability to carry out specific tasks and reach expected performance levels. The concept of self-efficacy is believed to be influenced by experiences, social models and social persuasion and to impact behaviour, mood states and experienced well-being (Bandura, 1991).

Self-efficacy feeds into self-concept (a subjective way one perceives themselves), and any distortions in self-concept and its constituents, i.e., self-efficacy, result in a significant weakening in self-perception (Tafarodi & Swan, 2001). Self-efficacy is further a contributing factor to success, including organisational and academic performance (Judge et al., 2011; Sharma & Nasa, 2014). Furthermore, self-efficacy is associated positively with achievement, cognitive effectiveness and persistence (Honicke & Broadbent, 2015; Shonali, 2010; Yokoyama 2019) for Western cultures. Similar results have also been seen among collectivist cultures, where self-efficacy improves self-esteem and social functioning (Afari et al., 2012) and decreases depressive symptoms (Mosanya & Petkari, 2017). Reversely, a high level of perceived self-efficacy is seen as positively supporting self-evaluation and functioning (Milam et al., 2019).

There are two types of SE, namely generalised and specific. While generalised self-efficacy reflects awareness of one's capabilities to perform across a variety of conditions (Judge et al., 1998), specific SE relates to a particular task. Global mindset could reflect the unique self-efficacy regarding multicultural competencies. Bennett's (1986) Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (MIS) could set a framework for such understating of the role of self-efficacy in building global mindset. MIS emphasised that an increase in intercultural experiences might lead to intercultural effectiveness and, ultimately, integration of all cultural paradigms that a person is exposed to (Bennett, 2004). Furthermore, a high level of the global mindset could

strengthen the sense of cognitive and behavioural abilities to thrive in a multicultural environment. Such an uplift to self-efficacy might, in turn, stimulate the self-concept, leading to enhanced well-being.

## Aims and hypotheses

The present study, drawing upon theories of global mindset (den Dekker, 2013) and the social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989), aimed to find out the mechanism explaining the causal relationships between global mindset and life satisfaction for multicultural non-Western individuals. We first hypothesised (H1) that global mindset positively predicts life satisfaction. Secondly, we postulated (H2) that self-efficacy positively affects life satisfaction. Thirdly, we aimed to explore if self-efficacy plays an intermediary role in the life-satisfaction enhancement effect caused by global mindset. Hence, it was hypothesised (H3) that the relationship between global mindset and life satisfaction was mediated by self-efficacy.

## Methods

### Design

We have incorporated a cross-sectional, questionnaire-based design for our study. To test our hypotheses, a mediational model was proposed. In psychology, the theoretical articulation of mediation has been long present (Barron & Kenny, 1989; Rozeboom, 1956), allowing for exploration of the intermediary processes underlying causal relationships. Statistics were performed in SPSS v. 25 with Hayes macro.

### Participants

Our participants ( $N=277$ ) were international students of Asian origin (females 74%), with the majority coming from India (83.3%) and Pakistan (8%). Their mean age was 20.1 ( $SD=2.22$ , Mode=19, Range 18–36). They spoke on average 2.78 ( $SD=.98$ ) languages (Mode=3, Range 1–6). All participants studied in the United Arab Emirates and considered themselves third culture individuals.

## Measures

*General Self Efficacy Scale* (GESES, Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) was used to determine participants' self-efficacy, incorporating rating on a 7-point Likert scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*exactly*). It was a 10-item questionnaire ( $\alpha = .88$ ) with the item sample: "Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations."

*Global Mindset Scale* (den Dekker, 2013) consisted of four items scored on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The item sample was: "I am a world citizen" ( $\alpha = .64$ ).

*The Berne Questionnaire of Subjective Well-Being* (Grob, 1995) assessed subjective well-being, rated on a 7-point Likert scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*exactly*). The scale consisted of subscales, and we have used only items related to *life satisfaction*, indicating a positive attitude toward life, joy in life and absence of depressive mood (17 items,  $\alpha = .91$ ). The item sample: "I am content with the way my life plans are being realised."

## Procedures

The Ethics Research Committee of Middlesex University Dubai approved the study. The data was collected online using the Google Forms platform via sites for international students or expatriates living in the UAE. The participants were informed about their rights and voluntary participation. They all had to sign the consent form before filling the questionnaires.

## Results

### Descriptive statistics and correlations

Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation analyses for all the scales have been presented in Table 1. All the variables demonstrated significant correlations pairwise. Global mindset showed weak positive relationships with self-efficacy and life satisfaction. Self-efficacy and life satisfaction have also been positively associated at the moderate level (Table 1).

**Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of global mindset, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction**

Variables (N=243)	M (SD)	1	2	3
1. Global Mindset (GL)	5.43 (.91)	-	.23**	.15*
2. Self-Efficacy	5.13 (.99)		-	.54**
3. Life Satisfaction	4.55 (1.06)			-

\*p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01

Source: own work

### Analysis of mediation

*(H1) Global mindset positively predicts life satisfaction.*

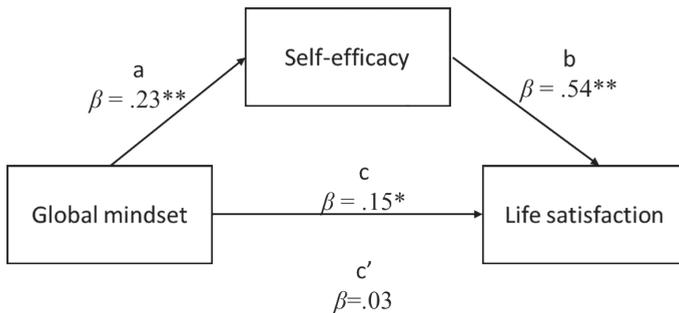
Analysis of mediation (Figure 1) revealed a direct effect of global mindset on life satisfaction (path c) ( $\beta = .15, p = .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [.043, .314]$ ). Furthermore, there was a direct effect (path a) of global mindset on self-efficacy ( $\beta = .23, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.127, .373]$ ).

*(H2) Self-efficacy positively affects life satisfaction.*

Self-efficacy was significantly predicting life satisfaction (path b) ( $\beta = .54, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [.487, .702]$ ). Hence, the prerequisites for the mediation model were fulfilled (Baron & Kenny, 1989).

*(H3) The relationship between global mindset and life satisfaction was mediated by self-efficacy.*

**Figure 1. The model presenting self-efficacy as a mediator of the impact of global mindset on life satisfaction**



Source: own work

After the SE mediator was included in the model of regression, which was of a good fit ( $F(2,275) = 58.83, p < .001$ ) and explained 30% of the variance in LS; the *c* path became non-significant (path *c'*) with global mindset not being a significant predictor of LS any more ( $\beta = .03, p = .59, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.087, .150]$ ). The indirect effect of self-efficacy ( $IE = .15$ ) was positive and statistically significant 95% CI (.0791, .2041). Hence, the hypothesis was positively evaluated, with self-efficacy as a mediator of the impact of global mindset on well-being.

## Discussion

Our study has presented multiple findings. Firstly, we have confirmed that global mindset has a positive impact on the well-being of international students. Therefore, we have extended preliminary suggestions by Mosanya & Kwiatkowska (2021) in their explorative study on multicultural females that global mindset is beneficial to the functioning of multicultural individuals in the cross-cultural context. Also, previous studies limited global mindset's power to the business environment success (den Dekker, 2013) and we have expanded its impact to life satisfaction.

Furthermore, we have evidenced the relationships of global mindset with self-efficacy for third culture individuals. Such findings align with the literature, as self-efficacy and discipline have been evidenced to play a significant role in developing the global orientation (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). Such a relationship can be further explained by the fact that a central constituent of the global mindset's notion, a passion for diversity (Stokke, 2013), can lead to an increased belief in one's competencies in dealing with the multicultural environment. Likewise, enhanced cross-cultural aptitudes further lead to increased general efficacy. Furthermore, self-efficacy has been linked to professional success and job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2011). Hence, we suggest that, indirectly, via its support to efficacy, global mindset can support the professional growth of individuals who internalise multiple cultural paradigms, but more research is needed.

Moreover, this study presented an attempt to understand the intermediary role of self-efficacy in the relationships between global mindset and life satisfaction for third culture individuals. Our findings confirmed the hypothesis of self-efficacy as a mediator of global mindset's positive impact on life satisfaction. Such outcomes tap on the idea that global mindset assists in integrating cultural diversity, which leads to increased capabilities in dealing with a cross-cultural environment (Bennett, 1986; Den Dekker, 2013). Such capabilities benefit the sense of self-efficacy in dealing with a globalising and culturally complex world. Reversely, a low level of global mindset could weaken self-efficacy leading to confusion and decreased beliefs

in one's resourcefulness, impairing at the same time self-concept and related well-being (Milam et al., 2019).

Besides, self-efficacy beliefs are usually determined and modified by a few factors with personal accomplishments and vicarious experiences, as some most important (Van Vianen, 1999). Hence, successful dealings with cross-cultural issues and thriving in the international environment are significant to self-efficacy establishment. Global mindset plays a crucial role in such a process with its fundamental aspects, i.e. cross-cultural interactions and curiosity about other cultures, stimulating positive experiences related to cross-cultural encounters (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). Further, these factors increase a sense of competency for multicultural individuals in dealing with diversity at work and in daily life. Therefore, active participation in diversity as a competent contributor can be predictive of TCKs' life satisfaction. Judge et al. (2011) have evidenced the prominent role of self-efficacy in positive self-concept, and global mindset could be supportive to self-concept via increased competencies related to multicultural abilities for multicultural individuals.

Additionally, passive exposure to diversity does not seem to suffice to assure the growth of global mindset (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). Lovvorn and Chen (2011) argued that international experience was not a determinant of global mindset. They suggested that cultural intelligence is moderating if the international experience, for example, exposure to cross-cultural interactions, transforms into global mindset. Furthermore, global mindset is a dynamic concept (den Dekker, 2013) that might be stimulated. Our research findings promote the use of global mindset in interventions designed to enhance the well-being of third culture individuals. Such interventions could incorporate factors supporting the global mindset development, namely cross-cultural sensitivity, knowledge on global matters, inclusiveness, and active engagement in others' perspective-taking. It might reciprocally enhance self-efficacy and well-being for international students and hence positively reflect on their functioning in the multicultural environment of the UAE at the entry stage of their careers.

## Limitations

A few shortcomings need to be taken into consideration while interpreting our outcome. Firstly, the mediation model is highly dependent on the initial hypothesis, and hence, its power to infer the true causality is limited. Also, the sample was representative of only the specific, multicultural environment of the UAE, with the majority of Asian individuals; hence the findings may lack generalisability. Furthermore, the gender distribution was unequal, and this may have also impacted our results.

The cross-sectional model and self-reported measures could have also biased our results due to social desirability processes. We suggest that further research employ longitudinal designs to evaluate our hypothesis with other multicultural samples.

## Conclusion

Summing it up, our research has confirmed a prominent role of global mindset in supporting not only organisational success within a global context but also the well-being of individuals with multicultural identities. Furthermore, we have provided the first attempt to explain the mechanism of such an impact. Our findings highlighted a positive influence global mindset has on the level of general self-efficacy of TCKs, which in turn may boost their life satisfaction. Therefore, the present research fed into a better understanding of the mechanism of global mindset enhancing the well-being of cross-cultural individuals and hence donated to the postmodern psychological knowledge. In the global era, TCK individuals may constitute a population of the future; thus, accounting for the dynamic character of self-efficacy and global mindset, we further set a new field of exploration for possible interventions targeting TCKs' flourishing.

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## **Magdalena Mosanya**

Faculty Adjunct at the Psychology Department of Middlesex University and Murdoch University in Dubai, UAE. She is a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and holds several master degrees in Psychology, Cultural Anthropology, and International Relations. She has been working in the multicultural environment of the United Arab Emirates for 12 years. Her research interests include cross-cultural communication, the well-being of multicultural individuals, and women empowerment.

e-mail:m.mosanya@mdx.ac.ae

ORCID 0000-0002-1131-3956