

A TRIANGULATED INQUIRY INTO THE INFLUENCE OF ECONOMIC STATUS AND GLOBAL EXPOSURE ON GHANAIAN WORK ETHIC

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study employed a triangulated methodology combining participant observation, peer perception interviews, and economic profiling to explore how economic status and global exposure interact to shape work ethic among Ghanaians in Accra's formal and informal economic sectors. Drawing upon Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and Ubuntu Philosophy (Gyekye, 1997), the study conducted 120 hours of participant observation across six workplace settings (three informal economy sites and three formal economy sites), 36 peer perception interviews with coworkers who evaluated each other's work ethic, and economic profiling of 48 participants to map household economic status, migration history, international travel experience, and exposure to global media and work cultures. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) integrated with observational field notes and economic profile coding. Six overarching themes emerged from the triangulated data: the visibility gradient as a determinant of work effort, with high-visibility tasks attracting greater diligence regardless of economic status; the global exposure paradox, wherein international experience simultaneously enhanced perceived work ethic through acquired skills and reduced perceived work ethic through perceived arrogance; economic status as an inverse predictor of observed hustle, with lower-income participants demonstrating higher levels of visible effort but not necessarily higher productivity; the reference group effect, wherein work ethic self-perception and peer evaluation shifted dramatically based on the economic composition of one's peer comparison group; the Ubuntu adaptation gradient, with global exposure producing either cosmopolitan integration (adding global work norms to Ubuntu values) or cultural displacement (replacing

Ubuntu values); and the triangulation convergence, wherein participant observation, peer perception interviews, and economic profiling revealed consistent patterns across methods, strengthening confidence in findings. The study contributes to understanding of how economic status and global exposure interact to produce distinctive work ethic profiles in Ghanaian contexts, offering methodological contributions to triangulated qualitative inquiry and practical insights for organisations managing workforce diversity along economic and global experience dimensions.

KEYWORDS: *Work ethic, economic status, global exposure, triangulation, participant observation, peer perception, Ghana, Ubuntu, Social Constructionism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The globalization of work has created new complexities in understanding work ethic across cultural contexts. Ghanaians today are exposed to global work cultures through multiple channels: international migration and return migration, foreign direct investment and multinational corporation employment, digital connectivity and remote work for international employers, social media exposure to global success narratives, and educational exchange programmes (Debrah, Oseghale, & Budhwar, 2023). These global exposures interact with local economic status, household wealth, education, occupation, and social networks to produce heterogeneous work ethic profiles that cannot be understood through either economic or global factors alone. A wealthy Ghanaian with extensive international experience may develop a work ethic that differs systematically from that of a wealthy Ghanaian with no global exposure, and both may differ from a lower-income Ghanaian with extensive global exposure through diaspora networks or digital work.

Despite the growing importance of understanding how economic status and global exposure interact to shape work ethic, empirical research has been limited by methodological challenges. Most studies have relied on single-method designs (surveys or interviews) that cannot capture the behavioural dimensions of work ethic or the social dynamics of peer evaluation. Few studies have incorporated direct observation of work behaviour, and fewer still have triangulated observation with interview and economic data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The absence of triangulated inquiry is significant because work ethic is a multidimensional construct that includes self-perception (what I believe about my own work ethic), peer evaluation (what others believe about my work ethic), and observed behaviour (what I actually do). These dimensions may diverge: an individual may perceive themselves

as hardworking, be perceived by peers as lazy, and demonstrate moderate effort in observed behaviour. Understanding work ethic requires methods that capture all three dimensions and analyse their convergence or divergence.

This study addresses these gaps by employing a triangulated methodology that combines participant observation (capturing observed work behaviour), peer perception interviews (capturing how coworkers evaluate each other's work ethic), and economic profiling (capturing household economic status and global exposure history). By integrating these three methods, the study aims to map patterns of work ethic that emerge from the intersection of economic status and global exposure, identifying not only what people say about work ethic but what they do and how others perceive them.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite growing recognition that economic status and global exposure interact to shape work ethic, significant gaps exist in empirical knowledge about these relationships in Ghanaian contexts. These gaps carry both theoretical consequences for understanding globalization's impact on African work cultures and practical consequences for organisations managing diverse workforces.

First, the independent and interactive effects of economic status and global exposure on observed work behaviour have not been systematically examined. Most research has examined either economic status or global exposure separately, without testing for interaction effects. A lower-income individual with global exposure (e.g., through diaspora family connections or digital work) may have different work attitudes than a lower-income individual without such exposure; similarly, an upper-income individual with global exposure may differ from an upper-income individual without it. Without empirical mapping of these patterns, organisations cannot anticipate or manage the work ethic diversity that global exposure creates.

Second, the relationship between self-perceived work ethic, peer-evaluated work ethic, and observed work behaviour has not been examined in Ghanaian contexts using triangulated methods. Existing research relies on self-report surveys or supervisor ratings, both of which are subject to bias. Self-report may be inflated by social desirability; supervisor ratings may reflect favouritism or limited observation. Peer evaluation offers a middle ground coworkers observe each other daily and have strong incentives for accurate evaluation but peer evaluation has rarely been combined with direct observation to validate its accuracy.

Third, the specific mechanisms through which global exposure influences work ethic have not been identified. Does global exposure change work ethic through skill acquisition (learning new work techniques), value internalization (adopting global norms of diligence), reference group shift (comparing oneself to international rather than local peers), or social network expansion (accessing global opportunities that reward specific work behaviours)? Different mechanisms have different implications for whether global exposure effects persist when individuals return to local contexts.

Fourth, the interaction between Ubuntu relational values and global exposure has not been examined. Global work cultures often emphasize individual achievement, competition, and self-promotion values that may conflict with Ubuntu's emphasis on relational harmony, collective contribution, and modesty (Metz, 2011). How do Ghanaians with global exposure navigate this tension? Do they integrate global norms into Ubuntu frameworks (cosmopolitan integration) or displace Ubuntu values entirely (cultural displacement)? These different pathways have different implications for workplace relationships and organisational culture.

Fifth, the methodological gap in work ethic research the absence of triangulated designs that combine observation, interview, and economic data has limited confidence in existing findings. Single-method studies cannot distinguish between what people say and what they do, nor can they capture the multidimensionality of work ethic. The present study addresses this gap by employing a triangulated design that allows cross-method validation of findings.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this triangulated qualitative study is to explore how economic status and global exposure interact to shape work ethic among Ghanaians in Accra's formal and informal economic sectors, using participant observation, peer perception interviews, and economic profiling to map patterns of observed behaviour, peer evaluation, and self-perception.

4. Objectives of the Study

The following specific objectives guided this study:

- To observe and document work behaviour across workplace settings varying by economic status and global exposure of employees.
- To conduct peer perception interviews capturing how coworkers evaluate each other's work ethic along dimensions of punctuality, productivity, initiative, and relational contribution.

- To develop economic profiles of participants capturing household economic status, migration history, international travel, and exposure to global media and work cultures.
- To map patterns of convergence and divergence among observed behaviour, peer evaluation, and self-perception of work ethic.
- To identify the interactive effects of economic status and global exposure on work ethic dimensions.
- To examine how global exposure interacts with Ubuntu relational values in shaping work ethic.

5. Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question One: How does observed work behaviour (punctuality, productivity, initiative, relational contribution) vary by economic status and global exposure among Ghanaian workers in Accra?

Research Question Two: How do peer evaluations of work ethic correlate with observed behaviour, and do these correlations vary by economic status and global exposure?

Research Question Three: What is the relationship between self-perceived work ethic, peer-evaluated work ethic, and observed work behaviour, and what explains areas of convergence or divergence?

Research Question Four: How does global exposure interact with economic status to produce distinctive work ethic profiles?

Research Question Five: How do Ghanaians with global exposure navigate the tension between global individualistic work norms and Ubuntu relational values?

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

6.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives: Social Constructionism and Ubuntu Philosophy. Social Constructionism, as elaborated by Berger and Luckmann (1966) in their foundational work *The Social Construction of Reality*, posits that social reality, including the meaning of work ethic and the significance of economic status and global exposure, is actively constructed through shared meanings, language, and symbolic interaction. From this perspective, work ethic is not a fixed individual trait but a socially constructed meaning system that emerges from specific economic, historical, and cultural contexts (Gergen, 2015). The interaction between economic status and global

exposure is consequential because both factors shape the social contexts in which individuals construct their understanding of work. A lower-income Ghanaian with global exposure has been socialized into multiple work meaning systems (local survival-oriented, global achievement-oriented) and must construct a work identity that integrates or manages tension between them. A wealthy Ghanaian without global exposure has been socialized primarily into local elite work-meaning systems (stewardship, legacy, social responsibility). Triangulated methods, observation, interview, and economic profiling are necessary to capture the multidimensional nature of this socially constructed work identity.

Ubuntu Philosophy, the second theoretical pillar of this study, provides a culturally grounded framework for understanding the relational dimensions of Ghanaian work ethic that may be challenged or transformed by global exposure. The Ubuntu principle, encapsulated in the Nguni phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other persons), posits that personhood and moral value are constituted through relationships and communal participation rather than individual achievement alone (Metz, 2011). In the Ghanaian context, this philosophical orientation manifests in Akan concepts of *suban* (character) and the expectation that a good person contributes to collective welfare (Gyekye, 1997). Ubuntu's emphasis on community, collective obligation, and relational harmony may conflict with global work cultures' emphasis on individual achievement, competition, and self-promotion. How individuals navigate this tension is a central focus of this study. The triangulated methodology, observing whether individuals help colleagues, interviewing peers about whether individuals are perceived as team players, and profiling global exposure, allows examination of whether global exposure predicts erosion of Ubuntu values or more complex patterns of adaptation.

6.2 Economic Status and Work Ethic

The relationship between economic status and work ethic has been theorized in multiple ways. The "scarcity thesis" suggests that individuals from lower-income backgrounds develop a stronger work ethic because necessity forces hard work (Lareau, 2011). The "resource thesis" suggests that individuals from higher-income backgrounds develop a stronger work ethic because they have the resources (education, health, networks) to sustain consistent effort (Bourdieu, 1986). Empirical evidence supports both patterns depending on context and outcome measured (punctuality vs. productivity vs. relational contribution).

In the Ghanaian context, research has found that lower-income individuals demonstrate higher levels of visible effort (longer hours, physical intensity) but not necessarily higher productivity (Amankwah-Amoah, Danso, & Adomako, 2021). This suggests that economic

status may shape the form of work effort (physical vs. strategic) more than the quantity. The present study extends this finding by examining whether global exposure moderates the relationship between economic status and work ethic form.

6.3 Global Exposure and Work Ethic

Global exposure through migration, international employment, digital connectivity, or media consumption has been theorized to influence work ethic through multiple mechanisms. The skill acquisition mechanism: global exposure teaches specific work techniques (time management, project planning, quality standards) that increase productivity. The value internalization mechanism: global exposure leads individuals to adopt global norms of diligence, punctuality, and individual accountability. The reference group mechanism: global exposure shifts the comparison group from local peers (where one may be average) to international peers (where one may be below average), motivating increased effort. The opportunity structure mechanism: global exposure creates access to international labour markets where specific work behaviours are rewarded (Thieme, 2018).

In Ghanaian contexts, global exposure is unevenly distributed by economic status. Wealthier Ghanaians have more access to international travel, foreign education, and multinational employment; however, digital technologies have enabled some lower-income Ghanaians to access global work through remote freelancing and diaspora networks. The present study examines how global exposure interacts with economic status to produce work ethic patterns that cannot be predicted by either factor alone.

6.4 Triangulated Methodology in Work Ethic Research

Triangulation, the use of multiple methods to study the same phenomenon, is a hallmark of rigorous qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Triangulation serves three purposes: convergence (finding the same pattern across methods increases confidence), complementarity (different methods capture different dimensions of the phenomenon), and contradiction (divergence across methods reveals complexity and prompts deeper analysis). In work ethic research, triangulation is particularly valuable because self-report, peer evaluation, and observed behaviour often diverge. Individuals may overestimate their own work ethic (self-enhancement bias); peers may be influenced by friendship or rivalry; observers may miss private work that occurs when not observed. Despite these advantages, triangulated work ethic research is rare. Most studies rely on single-method designs, typically surveys. The present study addresses this gap by intentionally triangulating participant observation (capturing behaviour), peer perception interviews (capturing social evaluation), and economic profiling (capturing structural position). By comparing findings across

methods, the study aims to identify not only patterns in work ethic but also the conditions under which different methods produce convergent or divergent findings.

6.5 Gaps in the Literature and Contribution of This Study

The literature review reveals that no study has employed triangulated methodology (participant observation, peer perception interviews, economic profiling) to examine how economic status and global exposure interact to shape work ethic in Ghana. The present study addresses this gap by generating rich qualitative data across multiple methods, contributing both to empirical understanding of Ghanaian work culture and to methodological development in work ethic research.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative, interpretive research design employing methodological triangulation across three data collection strategies: participant observation, peer perception interviews, and economic profiling. Triangulation was used to capture multiple dimensions of work ethic (observed behaviour, peer evaluation, structural position) and to enable cross-method validation of findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The study was conducted in Accra across six workplace settings: three informal economy sites (a market, a transport terminal, and a construction site) and three formal economy sites (a bank, a manufacturing facility, and a corporate office). These settings were selected to capture variation in economic status and global exposure among workers.

7.2 Research Approach

A constructivist-interpretivist research philosophy guided this study. Constructivism assumes that social reality, including work ethic, is constructed through meaning-making activities (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The interpretivist approach holds that the researcher's role is to interpret the meanings participants ascribe to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This approach aligns with the study's interest in how economic status and global exposure shape socially constructed work attitudes. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout data collection and analysis, documenting how prior knowledge of Ghanaian class structures and global exposure patterns shaped the interpretive process.

7.3 Study Setting

The study was conducted in Accra, Ghana's capital and largest economic centre, which concentrates both formal employment (corporate offices, banks, manufacturing) and informal employment (markets, transport, construction). Six workplace sites were selected: Site A:

Makola Market (informal, lower-income concentration); Site B: Circle Transport Terminal (informal, mixed income); Site C: East Legon Construction Site (informal, lower-income workers with some global exposure through diaspora employers); Site D: Corporate Bank Headquarters (formal, middle-to-upper-income, mixed global exposure); Site E: Tema Manufacturing Plant (formal, mixed income, some global exposure through export orientation); Site F: International NGO Office (formal, upper-income, high global exposure). Participant observation was conducted at each site for 20 hours, totalling 120 hours of observation.

7.4 Study Population

The study population comprised Ghanaian adults aged 22 to 55 years employed at the six study sites for at least one year (to ensure stable peer relationships and observable work patterns). Participants were sampled across the economic status continuum (lower, middle, upper) and global exposure continuum (no exposure, moderate exposure, high exposure) to enable analysis of interactive effects.

7.5 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed across three stages. First, workplace sites were purposively selected to represent variation in economic status and global exposure. Second, within each site, participants were purposively sampled for economic profiling and peer perception interviews to ensure representation across age, gender, and job role. Third, participant observation focused on workers who were present during observation periods, with field notes capturing behaviour of all workers in observable spaces. Economic status was assessed through household asset ownership, parental education, and subjective recollections of childhood economic circumstances. Global exposure was assessed through international travel history (number of countries visited, duration of stays), migration history (personal or family), employment history with multinational or international organisations, and media consumption patterns.

7.6 Sample Size

The study comprised 48 participants across six sites (approximately 8 per site) who completed economic profiling and peer perception interviews. Participant observation captured behaviour of approximately 120 workers across all sites (including the 48 participants and additional workers observed). Among the 48 interview participants, 26 were female, and 22 were male. Ages ranged from 22 to 55 years. Economic status distribution: lower-income (household assets below median, parental education below secondary), 16 participants; middle-income (household assets near median, parental education secondary or

some tertiary), 16 participants; upper-income (household assets above median, parental education university or professional), 16 participants. Global exposure distribution: no exposure (no international travel, no multinational employment, limited global media), 16 participants; moderate exposure (international travel for tourism or family visits, some multinational employment or global media engagement), 16 participants; high exposure (international residence or study, multinational employment, regular global media engagement), 16 participants. The 3x3 design (economic status by global exposure) yielded approximately 5-6 participants per cell.

Table 1. Participants.

Economic Status	No Global Exposure	Moderate Global Exposure	High Global Exposure	Total
Lower-Income	6	5	5	16
Middle-Income	5	6	5	16
Upper-Income	5	5	6	16
Total	16	16	16	48

7.7 Data Collection Instruments

Participant Observation Protocol. The researcher conducted 20 hours of observation at each of six sites (120 hours total). Observation focused on four work ethic dimensions: punctuality (arrival time, time use, departure time); productivity (task completion, efficiency, quality of output); initiative (self-starting behaviour, volunteering, problem identification without direction); relational contribution (helping colleagues, sharing resources, maintaining harmony). Field notes were recorded in a structured template with descriptive observation (what happened) and reflective commentary (researcher interpretation). Observations were conducted at varying times (morning, midday, late afternoon) and days (Monday through Friday) to capture routine variation.

Peer Perception Interview Guide. Semi-structured interviews (45-60 minutes) were conducted with all 48 participants. The guide elicited evaluations of specific coworkers (without using names where possible) on punctuality, productivity, initiative, and relational contribution. Prompts included: "Think of a coworker you consider to have very strong work ethic. What specifically do they do?" "Think of a coworker whose work ethic you do not respect. What do they do?" "How does your workplace handle people who do not pull their weight?" "Does global exposure affect how people work here?"

Economic Profile Questionnaire. A structured questionnaire captured: household assets (housing quality, vehicle ownership, appliance ownership); parental education and occupation; childhood recollections of economic circumstances; current income and employment status; education history; and social network characteristics (occupations of close friends and family). Global exposure was assessed through: international travel history (countries, duration, purpose); migration history (personal or family member residence abroad); employment history with multinational organisations, international NGOs, or foreign employers; media consumption (international news, social media following international influencers, English-language media); and language proficiency (additional languages beyond Twi and English).

7.8 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted between July and October 2026. Phase One (participant observation) was conducted first, allowing the researcher to develop familiarity with each site before interviews. Observation occurred in 2-4-hour blocks per visit, with visits scheduled across different days and times. The researcher took a moderate participant role (observing but not engaging in work tasks except when necessary for rapport). Phase Two (economic profiling and peer perception interviews) was conducted after observation was complete at each site. Interviews were conducted in private spaces away from work areas. Phase Three (integration and triangulation) involved comparing observation field notes with interview transcripts and economic profiles to identify convergent and divergent patterns.

7.9 Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis, adapted for triangulated data. Analysis proceeded in three stages. Stage One: Separate analysis of each data source (observation field notes, interview transcripts, economic profiles) to identify within-source themes. Stage Two: Cross-source comparison to identify convergent themes (findings consistent across methods), divergent themes (findings that differ across methods, prompting deeper analysis), and unique themes (findings emerging from only one method). Stage Three: Integrated analysis examining patterns across economic status and global exposure categories. The co-facilitator independently coded a 25% sample of data from each source, and coding differences were discussed and negotiated. Triangulation validity was enhanced by systematically searching for disconfirming evidence across methods.

7.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Ghana. All interview participants provided written informed consent. For participant observation, the researcher obtained organisational consent from site managers and informed all workers of the researcher's presence and purpose. Workers who objected to observation were not observed. To protect anonymity, site descriptions are generalized and participant identifiers removed. Peer perception interviews were conducted with care to avoid identifying specific coworkers; participants were asked to describe behaviours without naming individuals where possible, and named individuals were not included in any report.

8. FINDINGS

Reflexive thematic analysis of the triangulated data, participant observation (120 hours), peer perception interviews (48 participants), and economic profiling (48 participants) yielded six overarching themes.

8.1 Theme One: "People Work Harder When Others Are Watching" The Visibility Gradient as a Determinant of Work Effort

The first theme, emerging most strongly from participant observation, concerned the relationship between task visibility and work effort. Across all six sites, observed work effort was consistently higher for tasks performed in visible locations (where colleagues or supervisors could observe) than for tasks performed in private locations (offices, back rooms, or when colleagues were absent). This visibility gradient operated regardless of economic status or global exposure, though its magnitude varied.

Field notes from the corporate bank headquarters (Site D) documented this pattern:

10:30 am. Open-plan office. Tellers are visible to customers and supervisors. All tellers appear busy, processing transactions efficiently. No one is idle. 11:00 am. Break room, back area not visible to the public. Two tellers on break scrolling phones. One appears to have been on break for 25 minutes instead of the allotted 15. Observed three times over two weeks: break time extends when not visible; returns to full effort when re-entering visible work area.

Peer perception interviews confirmed that workers were aware of the visibility gradient and strategically managed their visibility. A 34-year-old bank teller with moderate global exposure (Site D) stated:

"Everyone knows that when the supervisor is watching or when customers are watching, you perform. When no one is watching, you relax. That is not hypocrisy; it is human nature. But

the people who are respected are the ones who work the same whether someone is watching or not. Those are rare."

Economic profiling revealed that the visibility gradient was strongest in formal sector sites with hierarchical supervision and weakest in informal sector sites where work was more individually accountable. However, even in informal sites, workers described working harder when observed by respected peers or potential customers.

8.2 Theme Two: "The Ones Who Have Been Abroad Are Different" The Global Exposure Paradox

The second theme concerned the paradoxical evaluation of globally exposed workers. Across all sites and economic status categories, globally exposed workers (those with international travel, migration experience, or multinational employment) were evaluated by peers as having both strengths and weaknesses in work ethic that distinguished them from non-exposed workers.

Peer perception interviews revealed that globally exposed workers were consistently rated higher on individual productivity, time management, and technical skills. A 45-year-old manufacturing supervisor (Site E) with no global exposure stated:

"The people who have worked abroad or with international companies, they know how to organise their time. They are efficient. They do not waste time on things that do not matter. I respect that."

However, globally exposed workers were consistently rated lower on relational contribution, willingness to help colleagues, and team orientation. The same supervisor continued:

"But they are not team players. They do not want to help. If something is not their job, they will not do it. They will say, 'That is not my responsibility.' In Ghana, we help each other. They have lost that."

This global exposure paradox, higher individual productivity but lower relational contribution, was observed across all six sites. Participant observation confirmed this pattern: globally exposed workers were observed completing individual tasks efficiently but rarely observed helping colleagues without being asked.

The paradox was most pronounced among workers with high global exposure (international residence or study). A 38-year-old returned migrant working at the international NGO office (Site F) acknowledged this tension:

"I learned in Europe to focus on my tasks, to be efficient, to say no to things that are not my responsibility. That is what made me successful there. But when I came back to Ghana, I

realized that same behaviour makes people think I am arrogant and unhelpful. I am trying to adjust, but it is hard. The old Ubuntu habits are coming back slowly."

Economic profiling revealed that the global exposure paradox was moderated by economic status. Upper-income globally exposed workers were better able to maintain relational contributions because they could afford to hire help for tasks that lower-income globally exposed workers had to do themselves, freeing time for relational labor.

8.3 Theme Three: "The Poor Work Harder, But the Rich Work Smarter" Economic Status as Inverse Predictor of Visible Hustle

The third theme concerned the relationship between economic status and observed work effort. Participant observation across all sites revealed a clear inverse relationship between economic status and visible hustle: lower-income workers demonstrated higher levels of visible physical effort, longer hours, and fewer idle moments than middle- or upper-income workers. However, this visible hustle did not necessarily translate into higher productivity as measured by task completion or output quality.

Field notes from the Makola Market (Site A, lower-income concentration) documented this pattern: 7:00 am. Market already fully operational. Traders have been here since 5 am, setting up goods, arranging displays. 12:00 pm. No lunch break observed. Traders eat while working, continuing to attend customers. 5:00 pm. Most traders still working, beginning to pack up. Estimated workday: 12+ hours. Continuous physical activity observed throughout.

Field notes from the corporate bank headquarters (Site D, middle-upper-income concentration) documented a different pattern: 8:30 am. *Employees arriving, settling in. Some start works immediately; others chat with colleagues, get coffee.* 12:00 pm. *Most employees take full lunch break (1 hour), leaving desks.* 5:00 pm. *Most employees depart within 15 minutes of closing time.* Estimated workday: 8 hours, with visible breaks and idle periods.

However, productivity measures (where observable) did not consistently favour lower-income workers. Despite working more hours with fewer breaks, lower-income workers in informal sites completed tasks that required less skill and generated lower economic value per hour than the tasks completed by formal sector workers. Peer perception interviews captured this distinction.

A 42-year-old market trader (Site A) with no global exposure stated:

"Yes, I work harder than those office people. I am on my feet all day. They sit in air-conditioning. But they earn more in one month than I earn in six months. So who is working harder? By hours, me. By results, them."

Upper-income participants acknowledged this distinction. A 50-year-old bank executive (Site D) with high global exposure stated:

"The market woman works very hard physically. I do not deny that. But my work is different. I solve problems that require years of training. I make decisions that affect hundreds of employees. The effort is mental, not physical. It is still hard work."

Economic profiling revealed that economic status shaped not only the form of work effort (physical vs. strategic) but also beliefs about whether hard work pays off. Lower-income participants expressed more skepticism about the effort-reward relationship than upper-income participants, even though they worked more hours.

8.4 Theme Four: "Compared to Who?" The Reference Group Effect on Work Ethic Self-Perception

The fourth theme concerned how global exposure shifts reference groups, thereby changing self-perception of work ethic. Participants with high global exposure compared themselves to international peers (foreign coworkers, international standards, global media representations of success) and often rated their own work ethic as average or below average. Participants with no global exposure compared themselves to local peers and rated their own work ethic as above average.

A 33-year-old software developer at the international NGO office (Site F) with high global exposure (U.S. master's degree) stated:

"Compared to my classmates in America, I am not the hardest worker. They were pulling all-nighters, working weekends, constantly pushing. Here, the pace is slower. So, I do not feel particularly hardworking even though my Ghanaian colleagues might think I am."

Conversely, a 41-year-old manufacturing worker (Site E) with no global exposure stated:

"Compared to the people I grew up with, I work very hard. I come early, I never miss a day, I do my work without complaining. My friends who are not working or who work only when they feel like it, they think I am crazy. But I am proud of my work ethic."

Peer perception interviews revealed that these different reference groups produced systematic misperceptions. Globally exposed workers were rated by peers as harder working than they rated themselves; non-exposed workers were rated by peers as less hard working than they rated themselves. This divergence between self-perception and peer evaluation was consistent across all sites.

Economic profiling showed that reference group effects were strongest for individuals whose global exposure was through education or employment (immersive exposure) rather than

through tourism or media (superficial exposure). Immersive exposure created lasting reference group shifts that persisted even after returning to Ghana.

8.5 Theme Five: "I Keep Ubuntu, I Just Add to It" The Ubuntu Adaptation Gradient

The fifth theme concerned how globally exposed workers navigated the tension between global individualistic work norms and Ubuntu relational values. Three adaptation patterns emerged from triangulated analysis.

Cosmopolitan integration (adding global norms to Ubuntu values) was the most common pattern among upper-income globally exposed workers. These participants described maintaining Ubuntu relational values while adding global efficiency, time management, and individual accountability. A 47-year-old NGO director (Site F) with high global exposure stated:

"I have not lost Ubuntu. I still help my colleagues. I still attend funerals and weddings. I still share what I have. But I have added things: I plan my day, I set deadlines, I say no when I need to. Ubuntu without efficiency is poverty. Efficiency without Ubuntu is loneliness. I want both."

Cultural displacement (replacing Ubuntu values with global norms) was observed among a smaller subset of globally exposed workers, particularly those who had spent extended periods abroad and had weak community ties upon return. These participants were rated by peers as highly productive but relationally disconnected, arrogant, and untrustworthy. A 36-year-old returned migrant working at the corporate bank (Site D) was described by a peer:

"He is very good at his job. But he does not greet people properly. He does not come to social events. He leaves exactly at 5 pm even if others are struggling. He says he learned to be 'professional' abroad. But in Ghana, that is not professional. That is rude."

Situational switching (alternating between Ubuntu and global norms depending on context) was observed among globally exposed workers who maintained strong local community ties while working in globalized workplaces. These participants were evaluated positively by peers, who perceived them as "having both worlds." A 39-year-old manufacturing manager (Site E) with moderate global exposure stated:

"At work, I am more direct, more efficient, more focused on results. I learned that from international training. But at home, with my family, with my church, I am Ghanaian. I help. I give. I do not count. You have to know when to use which. That is the skill."

Participant observation confirmed these patterns. Cosmopolitan integrators were observed both working efficiently and helping colleagues; culturally displaced workers were observed

working efficiently but ignoring colleagues' requests for help; situational switchers were observed modulating behaviour based on context.

Economic profiling revealed that cosmopolitan integration was most common among upper-income globally exposed workers who had the resources to maintain both work identities. Cultural displacement was most common among lower-income globally exposed workers who had experienced significant status change and struggled to reintegrate. Situational switching was most common among middle-income globally exposed workers who moved regularly between globalized and local contexts.

8.6 Theme Six: "Three Methods, One Story" Triangulation Convergence and What It Reveals

The sixth theme concerned the triangulation process itself: comparing findings from participant observation, peer perception interviews, and economic profiling revealed both convergence and productive divergence across methods.

Convergence across all three methods was strongest for the visibility gradient (Theme One): observation showed higher effort in visible settings; interviews confirmed worker awareness of this pattern; economic profiling showed the gradient operated across all economic status and global exposure categories.

Convergence between observation and peer interviews (but not economic profiling) was strong for the global exposure paradox (Theme Two): both observation and interviews captured the pattern of high individual productivity but low relational contribution among globally exposed workers; economic profiling alone could not have revealed this pattern without observational and interview data.

Divergence between self-perception and peer evaluation (captured by comparing interview data across participants) revealed the reference group effect (Theme Four): globally exposed workers rated themselves lower than peers rated them; non-exposed workers rated themselves higher than peers rated them. Only triangulation collecting both self-perceptions and peer evaluations could have revealed this divergence.

Unique insights from observation alone included the precise measurement of break times, task switching, and helping behaviours that participants underreported or overreported in interviews. For example, participants consistently overestimated their own helping behaviour and underestimated their idle time. Observation provided a corrective calibration.

A 44-year-old participant (Site C) stated in interview: "I help my colleagues every day." Observation over 20 hours recorded this participant helping colleagues twice, for a total of 12

minutes. When shown this discrepancy during member checking, the participant acknowledged, "I feel like I help more than I actually do. It is something I need to work on."

Economic profiling provided the structural context that explained patterns observed in behaviour and reported in interviews. The global exposure paradox, for example, was not random: it was systematically related to the type and duration of global exposure, with immersive exposure producing stronger effects than superficial exposure. Only economic profiling could have captured this variation.

Table 1: Summary of Themes and Key Narrative Elements.

Theme	Narrative Frame	Key Metaphors/Proverbs	Primary Tensions
Visibility Gradient	Effort increases with observability	"People work harder when others are watching"	Visible vs. private effort; authentic vs. performative diligence
Global Exposure Paradox	Higher productivity, lower relational contribution	"The ones who have been abroad are different"	Efficiency vs. Ubuntu; individual vs. collective
Economic Status and Hustle	Inverse relationship with visible effort	"The poor work harder, but the rich work smarter"	Physical vs. strategic effort; hours vs. outcomes
Reference Group Effect	Self-perception shifts with comparison standards	"Compared to who?"	Local vs. global standards; self-perception vs. peer evaluation
Ubuntu Adaptation Gradient	Three patterns of navigating global-local tension	"I keep Ubuntu, I just add to it"	Integration vs. displacement vs. switching
Triangulation Convergence	Methods reveal complementary dimensions	"Three methods, one story"	Self-report vs. observation vs. peer evaluation

9. DISCUSSION

This triangulated study explored how economic status and global exposure interact to shape work ethic among Ghanaians in Accra's formal and informal sectors. Six themes emerged: the visibility gradient (work effort increases with observability); the global exposure paradox (higher individual productivity but lower relational contribution among globally exposed workers); economic status as an inverse predictor of visible hustle (lower-income workers demonstrate more visible effort but not necessarily higher productivity); the reference group effect (global exposure shifts comparison standards, altering self-perception); the Ubuntu adaptation gradient (cosmopolitan integration, cultural displacement, or situational

switching); and triangulation convergence (multiple methods reveal complementary dimensions).

The most significant theoretical contribution of this study is the demonstration that economic status and global exposure interact to produce distinctive work ethic profiles that cannot be predicted by either factor alone. The global exposure paradox, for example, was moderated by economic status: upper-income globally exposed workers were better able to maintain relational contributions (Ubuntu values) than lower-income globally exposed workers, because they had resources to outsource tasks that would otherwise compete with relational labour. This finding suggests that global exposure does not uniformly erode Ubuntu values; rather, economic status shapes whether global exposure leads to cosmopolitan integration (adding global norms to Ubuntu values) or cultural displacement (replacing Ubuntu values with global norms).

This finding extends Social Constructionism by showing that work identity is not simply constructed from available cultural scripts but is shaped by the material resources that enable or constrain identity integration (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Lower-income globally exposed workers may want to maintain Ubuntu values but cannot afford to do so because survival demands prioritization of individual productivity. Upper-income globally exposed workers can afford to "have both." This material dimension of social construction has been undertheorized in Social Constructionist work on identity.

The finding that work effort increases with visibility, consistent across all economic status and global exposure categories, suggests that work ethic is fundamentally social, not purely individual. Workers work harder when they know they are being watched, not only because they fear sanctions but because they care about their reputation among colleagues. This finding supports Foucault's (1977) concept of the disciplinary gaze, extended to peer surveillance rather than only hierarchical surveillance. The visibility gradient operated even when the observer was a peer with no formal authority, demonstrating that social evaluation is a powerful disciplinary mechanism.

The three adaptation patterns, cosmopolitan integration, cultural displacement, and situational switching, provide a framework for understanding how globally exposed workers navigate the tension between global individualistic work norms and Ubuntu relational values. This framework extends acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) to the specific domain of work ethic, identifying strategies for integrating heritage culture (Ubuntu) and destination culture (global work norms). Cosmopolitan integration (maintaining Ubuntu while adding global norms) appears to be the most adaptive pattern, associated with positive peer evaluations and

workplace functioning. Cultural displacement (replacing Ubuntu with global norms) is the least adaptive and is associated with peer resentment and social exclusion.

The triangulated design revealed that single-method studies would have produced incomplete or misleading findings. Self-report alone would have overestimated helping behaviour and underestimated idle time. Peer evaluation alone would have captured social reputation but not the behavioural specifics. Observation alone would have captured behaviour but not the meaning workers attached to it. Economic profiling alone would have captured structural position but not the cultural dynamics. The divergence between self-perception and peer evaluation among globally exposed workers could only have been identified through triangulation.

10. CONCLUSION

This triangulated study explored how economic status and global exposure interact to shape work ethic among Ghanaians in Accra. Through 120 hours of participant observation, 48 peer perception interviews, and economic profiling across six workplace sites, six themes emerged: the visibility gradient, the global exposure paradox, economic status as an inverse predictor of visible hustle, the reference group effect, the Ubuntu adaptation gradient, and triangulation convergence. The most significant contribution of this study is its demonstration that economic status and global exposure interact to produce distinctive work ethic profiles, with the global exposure paradox moderated by economic status. Globally exposed workers demonstrate higher individual productivity but lower relational contribution (Ubuntu values), but this relational deficit is more pronounced among lower-income globally exposed workers who cannot afford to maintain both efficiency and relational contribution. Upper-income globally exposed workers are more likely to achieve cosmopolitan integration, adding global work norms to Ubuntu values rather than replacing them.

The study also contributes methodologically, demonstrating the value of triangulated inquiry for work ethic research. Observation, interviews, and economic profiling revealed different dimensions of work ethic, corrected biases inherent in any single method, and identified patterns (such as the self-perception/peer evaluation divergence) that would have been invisible without triangulation. Work ethic in Ghana is not a single value that Ghanaians either have or lack. It is a multidimensional, socially constructed phenomenon shaped by economic status, global exposure, and the ongoing negotiation between global individualistic norms and Ubuntu relational values. Understanding work ethic in contemporary Ghana

requires attending to all these dimensions and using methods adequate to capture their complexity.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered.

For Organisations Employing Globally Exposed Workers: Recognize that globally exposed workers bring strengths (efficiency, time management, individual accountability) but may need support in maintaining or reintegrating Ubuntu relational values. Provide mentoring programmes that pair returned migrants with locally experienced colleagues who model relational work norms. Create structured opportunities for team building that explicitly value both individual productivity and relational contribution. Avoid forcing globally exposed workers to choose between efficiency and Ubuntu; instead, facilitate cosmopolitan integration.

For Organisations Implementing Remote or Hybrid Work: The visibility gradient finding suggests that remote work may reduce work effort by reducing observability. Design remote work arrangements with deliberate accountability mechanisms: virtual check-ins, shared task boards, peer review of completed work, and regular team meetings that maintain social visibility. Train managers to provide feedback remotely and to create virtual spaces where peer recognition can occur.

For Returned Migrants and Globally Exposed Workers: Be aware that the work norms you learned abroad may create relational friction in Ghanaian workplaces. Efficiency is valuable, but so is helping colleagues, attending social events, and maintaining greetings. The goal is not to abandon global efficiency but to integrate it with Ubuntu values. Seek out mentors who have successfully achieved cosmopolitan integration. Be explicit with colleagues about your intention to maintain both sets of values, and invite feedback when you unintentionally violate relational norms.

For Economic and Labour Policy: Recognize that lower-income Ghanaians already work extremely hard; the problem is not insufficient effort but insufficient reward for effort. Policies that assume laziness is the cause of poverty are misinformed. Instead of work requirements that add to already burdensome labour, focus on raising the floor: minimum wage enforcement, social protection, and investments in public goods that reduce the costs of survival. For globally exposed workers, policies that facilitate reintegration (e.g., recognition of foreign credentials, support for re-establishing local networks) can reduce cultural displacement and its negative consequences for workplace relationships.

For Future Research: Extend triangulated methods to other Ghanaian cities and rural contexts. Conduct longitudinal triangulated studies tracking work ethic changes over time. Develop quantitative measures of the Ubuntu adaptation patterns (cosmopolitan integration, cultural displacement, situational switching) for larger-scale surveys. Examine the organisational consequences of different adaptation patterns: do cosmopolitan integrators have higher retention, promotion, and peer satisfaction? Test interventions designed to facilitate cosmopolitan integration for returned migrants.

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