



Research Paper

The Diasporan Experience and Work Attitude: A Qualitative Study of Ghanaian Migrants

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Abstract

This study explores how the diasporan experience shapes work attitudes among Ghanaian migrants across the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and the United States. Using a qualitative-led, explanatory design, semi-structured interviews mapped migrants' meaning-making around effort, fairness, commitment, and purpose at work, while a complementary survey (N = 312) tested these narrative-derived associations. The dependent construct, a Work Attitude Index (engagement, satisfaction, affective commitment), was modeled with hierarchical regression. Structural factors—perceived discrimination, credential recognition, and legal-status security—were entered first; job and social resources (autonomy, supervisor support, social support) and transnational dimensions (remittance burden, faith involvement) followed, with a buffering interaction between discrimination and supervisor support. Results show that perceived discrimination is a persistent negative correlate of work attitudes, whereas credential recognition and secure status are positive. Job autonomy and supervisor support exhibit the strongest positive associations; social support outside work contributes additional gains. Remittance burden is a small but significant negative predictor, while faith involvement adds a modest positive effect. The interaction indicates that supportive supervision attenuates the adverse impact of discriminatory climates. The integrated findings suggest that migrants' work attitudes are shaped less by intrinsic "work ethic" than by the alignment of recognition, security, and day-to-day job resources with transnational obligations, pointing to layered organizational and policy interventions that can improve engagement and commitment while advancing equity.

Keywords: Ghanaian migrants, work attitudes, perceived discrimination, supervisor support, credential recognition.

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I. Introduction

Ghanaian migration has accelerated over the past four decades, producing a geographically dispersed diaspora whose everyday experiences are shaped by cross-border ties, racialized labor markets, and shifting regimes of migration governance (Awumbila, 2017; Teye, 2018). Classic and contemporary migration theories suggest that migrants evaluate work and life through a "dual frame of reference," continually comparing opportunities and constraints in the host country with those back home, which can recalibrate motivation, expectations, and perceptions of fairness at work (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Transnationalism further posits that migrants sustain simultaneous social fields that connect origin and destination, rendering work attitudes responsive not only to workplace conditions but also to obligations such as remittances, caregiving, and community projects (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999).

At the same time, labor segmentation, recognition barriers, and status precarity expose many African migrants to overqualification, contingent contracts, and wage penalties that can dampen job satisfaction and organizational commitment even when work centrality remains high (Chiswick & Miller, 2009; Bloch, 2013). In this context, understanding Ghanaian migrants' work attitudes requires linking diasporan experiences—legal status, racialization, social networks, faith communities, and transnational obligations—to established constructs such as work ethic, work engagement, job involvement, and organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). A qualitative design is well suited to surface the meaning-making processes through

which migrants interpret opportunity, risk, and obligation, and how those interpretations shape effort, loyalty, voice, and exit choices at work (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Although Ghana's diaspora is central to national development discourse, most research privileges macro indicators—remittances, return intentions, and skill circulation—while comparatively little work explicates how the lived diasporan experience translates into day-to-day work attitudes and behaviors in host labor markets (Awumbila, 2017; Teye, 2018). The literature documents structural hurdles such as credential devaluation, discriminatory screening, and restricted mobility, yet we lack integrative, Ghana-focused qualitative accounts that connect these conditions to migrants' motivation, commitment, and coping strategies inside organizations (Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Chiswick & Miller, 2009). Absent such evidence, employers and policymakers risk relying on stereotypes—of either exceptional industriousness or chronic disengagement—rather than grounded understandings of how transnational obligations, faith networks, and status insecurities shape effort and attachment to work (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Vertovec, 2009).

This gap is consequential because work attitudes are predictive of performance, retention, and well-being, and because Ghanaian migrants often balance intense financial obligations with fragile employment arrangements that can magnify stress and erode trust when psychological contracts are breached (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979; Rousseau, 1995). Without context-specific insight into how migrants interpret fairness and purpose, interventions risk being misaligned with the realities of racialized workplaces, multijob juggling, and remittance pressures that condition the meaning of commitment and engagement (Portes et al., 1999; Bloch, 2013). There is therefore a need for a qualitative study that centers Ghanaian voices and maps the pathways through which diasporan experiences shape work attitudes across sectors and destinations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how the diasporan experience of Ghanaian migrants—including legal status, social networks, faith-based community life, and transnational obligations—shapes work attitudes such as work ethic, job satisfaction, engagement, and organizational commitment in host-country labor markets (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The study aims to generate an empirically grounded framework that links structural conditions and identity work to workplace motivation and behavior, yielding actionable implications for employers, support organizations, and policymakers (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Specific Objectives

The study has two specific objectives. First, to examine how migration trajectories, status and recognition, racialization, and transnational responsibilities shape Ghanaian migrants' interpretations of work and their ensuing attitudes in diverse sectors and destinations (Portes et al., 1999; Chiswick & Miller, 2009). Second, to identify organizational practices and community supports that enable positive work attitudes and reduce disengagement or turnover intentions among Ghanaian migrants, translating qualitative insights into context-appropriate recommendations (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

II. Literature Review

Conceptualizing the diasporan experience requires integrating transnational, acculturation, and segmented assimilation perspectives. Transnationalism highlights sustained cross-border social fields in which migrants invest economically and emotionally, producing obligations that can heighten work centrality while also intensifying stress when jobs are precarious (Glick Schiller et al., 1995; Portes et al., 1999). Acculturation frameworks suggest that host-society adaptation strategies—assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization—shape identity and relational resources, with implications for job involvement and organizational attachment (Berry, 1997; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Segmented assimilation emphasizes that pathways are stratified by race, class, and legal status, predicting divergent labor market outcomes that condition attitudes toward employers and institutions (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Alba & Nee, 2003).

Work attitudes themselves are multifaceted. Organizational commitment differentiates affective attachment, continuance costs, and normative obligations, each responsive to opportunity structures and social expectations, including remittance duties and church-based moral communities common among Ghanaian migrants (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Arthur, 2008). Work engagement, defined by vigor, dedication, and absorption, responds to job resources such as autonomy, social support, and feedback, which may be constrained in segmented, low-discretion roles often occupied by immigrants (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Work ethic and work centrality are shaped by cultural narratives and life histories; for diasporans, the “dual frame of reference” may amplify persistence and frugality but also sharpen sensitivity to perceived injustice, influencing voice or exit (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; England & Harpaz, 1990).

Structural barriers interact with identity to produce distinctive meaning-making. Credential devaluation forces many African migrants into lower-status jobs despite high human capital, which can depress job satisfaction even as migrants sustain high effort to fulfill transnational obligations (Chiswick & Miller, 2009; Bloch, 2013). Racialized hiring and workplace surveillance shape the psychological contract by signaling distrust, thereby weakening affective commitment and heightening turnover intentions (Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Rousseau, 1995). Conversely, ethnic networks and faith communities provide instrumental and emotional resources that bolster engagement and embed a normative sense of duty at work, partially offsetting structural headwinds (Arthur, 2008; Vertovec, 2009).

Within Ghana-specific scholarship, studies trace migration to the United Kingdom, continental Europe, North America, and the Gulf, emphasizing the interplay of opportunity, household strategies, and obligations to kin and hometown associations (Awumbila, 2017; Teye, 2018). This corpus links diaspora practices to development, yet often stops short of probing how those same practices shape workplace attitudes and behaviors in situ. A synthesis of these traditions suggests a conceptual pathway: diasporan conditions influence identity work and resource access, which in turn shape perceptions of fairness, efficacy, and purpose at work, culminating in observable attitudes such as engagement, commitment, and intent to stay or leave (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Empirical Review

Research on African and Ghanaian migrants documents pervasive overeducation and occupational downgrading, with associated declines in job satisfaction and organizational attachment, although high work centrality frequently persists due to remittance obligations and aspirations for upward mobility (Chiswick & Miller, 2009; Awumbila, 2017). Qualitative studies show that migrants often reinterpret precarious roles as stepping stones, sustaining motivation through faith, community recognition, and transnational goals; however, when expectations meet persistent blocked mobility or discrimination, disengagement and rapid job turnover can follow (Arthur, 2008; Bloch, 2013). Evidence from organizational settings indicates that supportive supervision, fair scheduling, and recognition practices significantly elevate engagement among immigrant workers, suggesting that relatively small managerial shifts can counterbalance structural disadvantages (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Studies of racialized labor markets in Europe and North America reveal persistent callback gaps and differential task assignments by race and immigrant status, which erode trust and narrow perceived return on effort, particularly in frontline service and logistics sectors where many Ghanaian migrants are concentrated (Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Alba & Nee, 2003). At the same time, community and church networks supply information, referrals, and psychosocial support that enhance resilience and buffer stress spillovers into the workplace, partly explaining why some migrants report strong engagement despite adverse conditions (Arthur, 2008; Vertovec, 2009). Research on transnationalism underscores that remittances and obligations can both motivate and strain, increasing persistence while producing guilt or anxiety that may manifest as presenteeism or risk-taking at work to meet financial targets (Portes et al., 1999; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

Within the Ghanaian context, recent work highlights gendered experiences, with women more likely to encounter care-work segmentation and moral scrutiny, which shape access to stable jobs and perceptions of fairness and respect at work (Awumbila, 2017; Teye, 2018). Country-specific case studies—such as Ghanaian communities in the UK, Italy, Germany, and the U.S.—reveal heterogeneity in regularization pathways and credential recognition regimes, with corresponding variation in satisfaction and commitment (Arthur, 2008; Nieswand, 2011). Taken together, the empirical record points to a consistent pattern: structure matters, but meaning-making and resources mediate outcomes, implying that thick, context-sensitive qualitative inquiry is needed to connect diasporan conditions to workplace attitudes in ways that can inform employer practice and policy design (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In sum, existing evidence establishes the importance of transnational obligations, racialized opportunity structures, and community resources in shaping migrant work attitudes, but leaves a Ghana-specific explanatory gap regarding how these forces are interpreted and negotiated in everyday organizational life. By centering Ghanaian migrant narratives across destinations and sectors, the present qualitative study seeks to articulate a grounded framework linking diasporan experience to work ethic, engagement, commitment, and voice, with the goal of informing interventions that are both culturally resonant and organizationally feasible (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed an explanatory, multi-sited design that was qualitative-led but integrated a complementary quantitative strand to test associations suggested by the narratives. The qualitative core consisted of semi-structured interviews with Ghanaian migrants working in host labor markets across the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and the United States. Participants were recruited through diaspora associations, faith

communities, and professional networks to capture variation in sector, legal status trajectory, gender, education, and years since migration. Interviews explored migration histories, credential recognition and workplace experiences, perceived fairness and discrimination, remittance obligations, community ties, and the meanings migrants attach to work effort, loyalty, and advancement. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and coded in an iterative process using a hybrid deductive–inductive approach. An initial codebook grounded in transnationalism, segmented assimilation, and job demands–resources theory guided first-cycle coding; axial coding then connected conditions, mechanisms, and outcomes, yielding thematic matrices that linked diasporan experiences to work attitudes.

To quantify relationships observed in the narratives, a cross-sectional survey was fielded to a separate but overlapping pool of Ghanaian migrants in the same destinations. The dependent variable was a Work Attitude Index constructed as the standardized average of work engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption), job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment (each measured with brief, validated subscales; 5-point Likert response options). Independent variables operationalized key diasporan conditions and resources: perceived discrimination (mean of five items capturing every day and workplace unfair treatment), credential recognition (0 = none, 1 = partial or full recognition), legal status security (three-item scale reflecting security of stay and work authorization), remittance burden (share of income remitted and perceived pressure), job resources (autonomy and supervisor support), social support outside work (family, community, faith), and faith community involvement. Controls included age, gender, education, years since migration, sector, country of residence, employment status, and contract type. Reliability targets for multi-item scales were $\alpha \geq .70$; confirmatory factor analysis supported convergent and discriminant validity; variance inflation factors were below conventional thresholds.

The analytical logic was sequential and integrative. Interview themes informed model specification and the selection of interaction terms in the regression (for example, the qualitative suggestion that supportive supervision buffers the demotivating effects of discrimination). Quantitative analysis used hierarchical multiple regression with robust standard errors. Model 1 entered controls; Model 2 added structural/positional factors (discrimination, credential recognition, legal status); Model 3 added job and social resources (autonomy, supervisor support, social support); Model 4 added transnational variables (remittance burden, faith involvement) and a theoretically motivated interaction between discrimination and supervisor support. Assumptions of linearity, normality of residuals, and homoscedasticity were acceptable; Cook’s distances were well below 1.0.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS (REGRESSION ANALYSIS)

A total of 312 valid survey responses were analyzed after listwise deletion of incomplete cases below the imputation threshold. The Work Attitude Index exhibited good internal consistency ($\alpha = .83$) and an approximately normal distribution (skew = -0.21 , kurtosis = -0.14). Pairwise correlations aligned with expectations from the qualitative themes: perceived discrimination correlated negatively with the index, while autonomy, supervisor support, and social support were positively associated. Years since migration and credential recognition showed modest positive relationships, suggesting that adaptation and recognition modestly lift attitudes.

The hierarchical regression results are presented in Table 1. Model 1 (controls) explained 11.8% of the variance in the Work Attitude Index, with years since migration and education contributing small positive effects. Adding structural factors in Model 2 increased explained variance to 30.9%; perceived discrimination emerged as a sizable negative predictor, while credential recognition and legal status security were positive. Model 3—adding job and social resources—raised R^2 to 51.6%, with autonomy and supervisor support producing strong positive coefficients and social support adding an independent, smaller gain; the absolute size of the discrimination coefficient attenuated but remained significant, consistent with partial mediation by resources. Model 4 added transnational conditions and the buffering interaction, nudging R^2 to 57.8%; remittance burden was a small negative predictor and faith involvement a small positive predictor, while the discrimination \times supervisor support interaction was positive and significant, indicating that supportive supervision dampens the harm of discriminatory climates.

Table 1. Hierarchical regression predicting Work Attitude Index (standardized coefficients, robust SE in parentheses; N = 312)

Predictor	Model 1 β (SE)	p	Model 2 β (SE)	p	Model 3 β (SE)	P	Model 4 β (SE)	p
Constant	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Age (years)	0.04 (0.04)	.297	0.03 (0.04)	.420	0.02 (0.03)	.520	0.02 (0.03)	.539
Gender (female = 1)	0.05 (0.04)	.212	0.04 (0.04)	.298	0.03 (0.03)	.402	0.03 (0.03)	.415
Education (years)	0.09 (0.04)	.031	0.07 (0.04)	.070	0.05 (0.03)	.121	0.05 (0.03)	.128
Years since migration	0.12 (0.04)	.006	0.08 (0.04)	.045	0.05 (0.03)	.118	0.05 (0.03)	.132
Formal employment (1 = yes)	0.06 (0.04)	.144	0.05 (0.04)	.214	0.04 (0.03)	.278	0.04 (0.03)	.300
Sector fixed effects	Included	—	Included	—	Included	—	Included	—
Country fixed effects	Included	—	Included	—	Included	—	Included	—
Perceived discrimination	—	—	-0.24 (0.04)	<.001	-0.16 (0.04)	<.001	-0.15 (0.04)	<.001

Predictor	Model 1 β (SE)	p	Model 2 β (SE)	p	Model 3 β (SE)	P	Model 4 β (SE)	p
Credential recognition (0/1)	—	—	0.18 (0.04)	<.001	0.12 (0.04)	.004	0.11 (0.04)	.006
Legal status security	—	—	0.12 (0.04)	.006	0.08 (0.04)	.039	0.08 (0.04)	.041
Job autonomy	—	—	—	—	0.22 (0.04)	<.001	0.21 (0.04)	<.001
Supervisor support	—	—	—	—	0.19 (0.04)	<.001	0.17 (0.04)	<.001
Social support (outside work)	—	—	—	—	0.13 (0.04)	.009	0.12 (0.04)	.012
Remittance burden	—	—	—	—	—	—	−0.09 (0.04)	.031
Faith community involvement	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.08 (0.04)	.048
Discrimination × Supervisor support	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.10 (0.04)	.015
R ²	.118	—	.309	—	.516	—	.578	—
ΔR^2	—	—	+.191	<.001	+.207	<.001	+.062	<.001
VIF range	1.05–1.42	—	1.06–1.88	—	1.07–2.14	—	1.08–2.22	—

The pattern in Table 1 coheres with the qualitative accounts. Structural headwinds, especially perceived discrimination, degrade work attitudes, while positional footholds such as credential recognition and secure status lift them. Yet job-embedded resources and relational scaffolding exert the largest positive effects, and supportive supervision in particular moderates the harm of discriminatory climates. Transnational obligations exert a small, independent drag on attitudes via remittance burden, whereas belonging to a faith community contributes a slight positive offset.

V. Discussion Of Results

The integrated results underscore that work attitudes among Ghanaian migrants are shaped by the intersection of structural conditions in host labor markets, job-level resources, and transnational–community dynamics. Perceived discrimination emerges as a durable negative correlate even after extensive controls, consistent with interviewees’ descriptions of unequal task assignment, glass partitions around promotion paths, and surveillance cultures in certain sectors. The partial attenuation of its coefficient after adding autonomy and supervisor support indicates that resource-rich workplaces do not eliminate discrimination’s harm but can help migrants sustain vigor and commitment by restoring a sense of control, voice, and recognition. This aligns with narratives of managers who provide schedule flexibility, constructive feedback, and advocacy in credential evaluation, thereby reframing work as a platform for advancement rather than a holding pattern.

Credential recognition and legal status security matter not merely as legal or bureaucratic endpoints but as psychological assurances. Interview participants repeatedly linked recognition and secure stay to a willingness to invest extra effort, volunteer for stretch assignments, and remain with employers who signal long-term reciprocity. The regression’s positive coefficients for these variables mirror that meaning structure: when migrants believe that their qualifications count and their presence is secure, they interpret hard work as instrumentally and morally worthwhile, strengthening satisfaction and attachment.

Job autonomy and supervisor support show the largest positive coefficients in the full model, echoing thematic evidence that discretion over task sequencing, micro-choices about how to meet standards, and relational trust with immediate supervisors are the most proximate levers of engagement. Migrants described how even in routinized roles, small pockets of discretion and supportive check-ins transformed daily effort from compliance to commitment. The significant interaction between discrimination and supervisor support suggests a buffering mechanism: where climates feel unfair, the line manager who listens, problem-solves, and advocates becomes a counter-weight that preserves motivation and reduces intentions to exit.

Social support beyond the workplace contributes additional lift to attitudes, albeit more modestly, by offering instrumental help, referrals, and emotional anchoring. This is consistent with interview accounts of church communities and hometown associations providing job leads, childcare swaps, and moral encouragement that keep migrants engaged despite multiple stressors. The small but significant positive coefficient for faith involvement captures a slice of that generative role of belonging; participants frequently framed work effort as stewardship before God and community, which infused routine tasks with purpose.

Remittance burden’s negative association with the Work Attitude Index is small but meaningful and was foreshadowed in narratives describing the tension between pride in supporting kin and the anxiety of unrelenting financial claims. Several participants reported working while unwell or accepting overtime under unsafe pace because “there is no room to breathe” financially. The result does not imply that remitting diminishes work ethic; rather, it indicates that sustained high pressure can erode satisfaction and affective attachment, particularly when advancement stalls or when employers appear indifferent to well-being.

Cross-sectional limitations apply. Causality cannot be asserted, and unobserved heterogeneity may persist despite controls and fixed effects. Nonetheless, the quantitative pattern tracks the qualitative mechanisms with striking fidelity: recognition and status form the platform; day-to-day job resources and supervisory

relationships supply the immediate experience of dignity and growth; community belonging energizes purpose; and discrimination and heavy transnational pressure sap the reservoir. The synthesis points toward layered, practicable interventions in organizations and communities that can materially improve migrant work attitudes while advancing equity.

VI. Conclusion And Recommendation

The study concludes that Ghanaian migrants' work attitudes are not a simple function of cultural work ethic or individual resilience but are produced at the nexus of host-country structures, job-level resources, supervisory practice, and transnational commitments. The most powerful positive correlates of engagement, satisfaction, and affective commitment are job autonomy and supportive supervision, while perceived discrimination is the principal negative correlate that persists across specifications. Credential recognition and secure legal status reliably lift attitudes by aligning effort with credible advancement opportunities. Community belonging provides a smaller but consistent boost, and remittance burden modestly depresses attitudes through sustained pressure.

These findings carry straightforward implications for employers, support organizations, and policymakers. Employers should invest in frontline supervisory capability, emphasizing fair task allocation, feedback that grows competence, transparent advancement criteria, and proactive advocacy for credential evaluation. Designing roles with modest pockets of autonomy, even in standardized environments, can substantially elevate engagement and commitment. Organizations should also monitor climates for discriminatory practices and micro-inequities, coupling clear policies with safe reporting channels and data-driven reviews of assignment and promotion patterns. Diaspora-facing NGOs and faith communities can complement these efforts by sustaining job clubs, mentorship, and practical supports that reduce the friction of balancing work with transnational obligations. Policymakers and credentialing bodies can accelerate recognition pathways and provide clear, affordable routes to secure status, thereby multiplying the returns to migrants' effort. Taken together, these layered actions move beyond exhortations to work harder and instead reshape the settings in which Ghanaian migrants' labor becomes dignified, meaningful, and mutually beneficial.

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