

## Enhancing Global Leadership Education through English Language Learning Partnerships

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### Abstract

Taking a relational and experiential approach to leadership education, an innovative partnership was developed between an undergraduate global leadership course and an on-campus English Language Learning institute. Instructors conducted a co-curricular global leadership workshop to guide both American and international students' ( $n=18$ ) intercultural interactions into impactful experiences of self-awareness, understanding, and intercultural communication competence. Workshop surveys were distributed to more appropriately evaluate the objectives of the workshop, gain participant insights, and provide recommendations for future workshops. Participants left the workshop with an understanding and valuing of intercultural relationships, how to effectively communicate in intercultural teams, how to successfully adapt in global contexts, and an increased confidence to lead globally. Recommendations of this pilot study provide further insight for future global leadership workshop initiatives, partnerships, and curriculum.

### Introduction

Within the field of leadership studies, an increase in awareness of societal globalization has occurred. Due to this increase of globalization, booming informational technology, international trade and technology, rise in market competition (Goldsmith, Greenberg, Robertons & Hu-Chan, 2003), and the increase of diversity within domestic and business environments (Jokinen, 2005), it has become necessary to critically analyze our previous understandings of leadership development and education. When considering the varying obstacles faced with leaders in the past versus the present context, we can conclude "while thinking globally may have been an *option* for the leader of the past, it will be a *requirement* for the leader of the future" (Goldsmith, et al., 2003, p. 15).

**Global Leadership Education.** Global leadership education stems from fields of international business management, intercultural communication, global human resources,

international studies, and leadership studies (Mendenhall, Osland, Bird, Oddou, & Maznevski, 2013). Although most leadership educators can attest to the importance of developing leaders for the demands of our increasingly globalized world, many are at a loss of how to best equip students. Despite today's "culturally complicated campuses" (p. 46), where our undergraduate students are presented with constant opportunities for intercultural experiences, they are solely engaging in ethnocentric experiences and are usually ill-equipped to act in effective, impactful, and meaningful ways (Bennett & Salonen, 2007). Many times, educators address leadership across cultures in the content of the course itself, but less frequently introduce it through application (Bennett & Salonen, 2007).

Global leadership is foundationally relational. Global competence is more than simply holding general knowledge of the culture, but is more centered on 'relational knowledge' (Baumgratz, 1995). This type of knowledge involves the individual's home environment, their objective knowledge, and personal perception. Within the realm of global interactions, becoming self-aware of who you are and how you respond within these situations is of the utmost importance in leadership development (Goldsmith, et al., 2003).

According to Brown, Whitaker, & Brungardt (2012), a core learning objective of successful global leadership education curriculum is to understand and have a commitment to cultural sensitivity and inclusion, which is "the foundation of interpersonal relationships as it relates to diversity" (p. 217). Such global leadership allows one to reflect on cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions (Brown, et al., 2012). It becomes essential, therefore, to include the opportunity for students to examine the many characteristics of various cultures and how they influence society, systems, politics, and relationships. Such opportunities to interact and engage with others who come from different cultures present the opportunity to develop further self-awareness of attitudes which foster decision-making and action (Brown, et al., 2012).

**Leadership Education and English Language Learners.** In 2004, an estimated 2 million students worldwide studied outside of their home countries, a number that is suggested to increase to over 8 million by 2025 (Altbach, 2004). Over the past decade, American universities specifically have experienced a significant increase in the number of students who have less fluency in the English language and require further academic assistance and resources in order to be successful (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). Such English Language Learners (ELLs) are "those students who are not yet proficient in English and who require instructional support in order to fully access academic content in their classes" (Ballantyne, et al., 2008, p. 2).

A study by the University of South Australia concluded that the way educators use formal and informal curriculum has the potential to encourage and reward successful intercultural engagement between home and international university students (Leask, 2009). Simply bringing intercultural students together in class doesn't necessarily result in meaningful interaction or relationships, valuable perspectives, or increase intercultural communication competency (Leask, 2009). In order to truly gain value from the diverse inclusion of international or ELL students, the efforts and coordination of educators is required to 'internationalize' the curriculum in both formal and informal classroom settings (Leask, 2009).

Sharma and Jung's (1986) study examined the amount of interactions between American and international students among four universities. The study concluded that these cross-cultural interactions were significantly related to acceptance of cultural pluralism, support of internationalism, a cosmopolitan world outlook, and worldmindedness. Other programs that provided opportunities for international students to engage with international students at Purdue University (Stohl, 1986) and University of Kentucky (Wilson, 1993) suggested that similar programs yielded students that were more accepting of diversity, developed a sense of importance of and desire for travel abroad, felt a greater sense of responsibility for foreign visitors (Stohl, 1986), gained substantive knowledge of differing culture, and increased their understanding of the dimensions of a global perspective (Wilson, 1993).

Despite the growing numbers of cross-cultural students, there still remains a sincere lack of literature (if not almost entirely nonexistent) to better understand the leadership development or education of ELLs in US universities. The benefits of engaging leadership students in intercultural experiences and the value of diverse perspectives are currently left untapped. It becomes the responsibility, therefore, of leadership educators and researchers to take advantage of these existing trends by engaging both ELLs and leadership students in order to address the many opportunities and challenges that exist in working among intercultural teams in a global environment.

### **Description of the Application**

Taking the relational, personal, and experiential nature of global leadership into account, the purpose of this study was to develop a sustainable partnership between an undergraduate Global Leadership course and an on-campus English Language Learning (ELL) institute in order to guide students' intercultural interactions into impactful, relational experiences that enhance self-awareness and intercultural communication competence.

**Methods.** We conducted a co-curricular, participatory global leadership workshop for undergraduate students enrolled in a Global Leadership course ( $n=5$ ) and participants from an ELL institute ( $n=13$ ) at a Land-grant university in the southeast region of the United States. The mid-day, two-hour long workshop was conducted during the middle of the week, towards the end of the spring 2016 semester. The demographics of the Global Leadership students included both male ( $n=2$ ) and female ( $n=3$ ) students in their third and fourth years. Four of the five students were from rural southeast regions of the United States, while one was an international student from Japan (who had never interacted with the language institute). The ELL demographics included male ( $n=7$ ) and female ( $n=6$ ) participants, ranging in language fluency, with a majority of participants from the Middle East.

The three educators who conducted the workshop included the Instructor of the Global Leadership course, Instructor of the institute's Business English course, and a bridging partner with the language institute. This final individual was not only a volunteer conversation partner of the ELL institute, but was also a graduate student in the department that housed the Global Leadership course.

At the conclusion of the workshop, satisfaction surveys were distributed in order for us to best evaluate the objectives of the workshop, gain insight from participants, and provide further recommendations for similar formal or informal workshops in the future. The one-page survey consisted of six open-ended questions and four Likert style questions. The six open-ended questions underwent a thematic analysis, which revealed patterns of reoccurring themes. The four Likert style questions were analyzed through descriptive statistics, including frequencies and descriptive statistics.

**Description of the Workshop.** The workshop addressed the following constructs, in accordance with previous global leadership literature: comparative (cross-cultural) leadership (Mendenhall, Osland, Oddou, Maznevski, Stevens, & Stahl, 2013); identification of personal values (Stanford-Blair & Dickmann, 2005); intercultural communication competence (Moran, Abramson, & Moran, 2014); inclusiveness in intercultural groups (Goldsmith, et al., 2003); and engagement in constructive dialogue in global issues (Brown, et al., 2012). Through these core constructs, we sought to achieve the following objectives: (1) develop intercultural relationships and enhance intercultural communication, (2) personally define dimensions of global leadership, (3) gain an enhanced global perspective of international issues, and (4) identify team strategies for addressing challenges in global leadership.

Goal One was achieved through the interactive, relational dynamics of the workshop, as well as the experiential learning activities. Goal Two was achieved through two exercises. Participants first self-selected into small groups of mixed participants in accordance to which international leadership quote they most identified with. Next, participants drew their responses and discussed what leadership looks like in our organizations, community, and globally – first individually (one group of Global Leadership students and one group of ELL students), then collectively (two groups of mixed student participants). Goal Three was achieved through a Case Study analysis and group discussion based on a current international issue of water security in New Dehli that addressed concepts of ethics, values, and community leadership. Goal Four was achieved through a mixed team building activity, accompanied by a short, informative lecture on adaptive leadership. Following this final exercise included a discussion for personal application of utilizing adaptive leadership to address challenges in our organizations, communities, and world. For more information on the curriculum content and pedagogical approaches used, please contact the authors.

## Outcomes

**Thematic Analysis.** Following thematic analysis of the open-ended questions on the workshop survey, alongside ELL reflection papers, the following themes, competencies, and deeper understandings emerged upon completion of the global leadership workshop: an understanding of the other is essential in establishing relationships; how to develop effective intercultural teams; development of intercultural relationships now and in the future; enhanced essential leadership skills (effective communication and adaptive leadership); and the many dimensions of global leadership.

The first identified theme that emerged from the data was an understanding of the other was an essential prerequisite in creating and establishing intercultural relationships. Instead of

“...judg[ing] other cultures and people without knowing their circumstances” (ELI1), participants felt, upon completion of the workshop, that it was important to understand others’ differing perspectives and opinions. Multiple students addressed their acknowledgement, understanding, and value of the importance of differing perspectives upon completion of the global leadership workshop. One ELL student even voiced the unknown commonalities shared with global leadership students, despite differing perspectives; “*surprisingly, we had many points in common regarding global leadership, but also could add different perspectives*” (ELI8). Multiple students conveyed the fact that, despite differences of values, opinions, and beliefs, the other can still be an effective leader.

Secondly, upon completion of the workshop, participants voiced an increased understanding, confidence, and noted creativity in how to effectively interact with and lead intercultural teams. Specifically, a majority of participants discussed the necessity of identifying the strengths of the team, as well as valuing their individual contribution, skills, characteristics, personality, and roles. When considering effective intercultural teams, both strengths and weaknesses must be considered; “*I realized how important it is to work in groups because if a member has a flaw, others will help him resolving that flaw*” (ELI5). One student acknowledged the power of collective work versus the work solely of individual; “*working in teams is better than working individually*” (ELI5).

Thirdly, due to their participation in the workshop, multiple students voiced their development of intercultural relationships with other participants, as well as expressed interest in developing relationships with others from differing cultures and backgrounds in the future. Drawing from the literature, recognizing that global leadership is relational at the core, the development of relationships and future desire for further intercultural relationships is a significant objective participants perceived to have met in this study. Such relationships allowed for the “*confidence*” to work with and engage with others from different cultures in the future.

*“I consider that this workshop was really helpful for the development of our relationship skills, because we were been able to work in teams with people we did not even know. I’m definitely more confident now in starting relationships with people from other cultures in the future” (ELI1).*

An additional theme that emerged from the data included the necessity of harnessing leadership skills such as effective communication and adaptive leadership to develop global solutions and address intercultural challenges. Multiple students acknowledged how effective communication is necessary for successful intercultural groups and teams; “*...working alone not always gives good results, I learned that communicating and trying to find a solution is better than just making problems*” (ELI2). As aforementioned, during the workshop, adaptive leadership theory (Northouse, 2015) concepts and application were addressed, due to the necessity of global leaders to maintain a flexibility of self, others, and circumstances (Tyler, 1987). Several participants suggested an enhanced understanding of this flexibility; one student noted that the effective “*... global leader has to apply adaptive leadership to address challenges because each country has a different culture and paradigm*” (ELI7). Participants took the theoretical elements of adaptive leadership and provided personal responses to the theory that allowed participants to apply the concept to their experience in the workshop, as well as future

real-world scenarios. For example, one participant acknowledged that leaders “...use these differences [in team members] to achieve the team’s collective common goal while dynamically adapting to any new changes to the situations and taking all feedback and using it to reach the goal” (ELI3).

Lastly, the final theme that emerged from the data included the multifaceted dimensions of global leadership, achieving Goal Two of this study. Students drew from the workshop exercise and voiced the dimensions of the leader in one’s organization, community, and world previously unknown to participants. Students were able to “... describe the essential characteristics of leadership in a company and leadership in a community. [Students] never thought about this perspective, there are similarities, but a lot of differences” (ELI6).

**Descriptive Statistics.** The one-page survey consisted of 4 Likert style questions, ranging in responses from very well (1) to not very well (4), that were analyzed through descriptive statistics. The four questions provided insight into the evaluation of the original objectives of the workshop. The following Table 1-1 demonstrates the frequencies, means, and descriptive statistics of the Global Leadership and ELL students upon completion of the workshop.

*Table 1-1. Global leadership (n=5) and ELI (n=13) students post-workshop objective means*

Question	Leadership students ( <i>M</i> )	ELL students ( <i>M</i> )	Total ( <i>M</i> )
Develop intercultural relationships	2.50	1.58	1.71
Personally define global leadership	1.00	1.83	1.71
Discuss global issues of leadership	1.00	1.92	1.79
Understand and apply adaptive leadership to address challenges in your life	1.00	2.08	1.93
<b>Total</b>			<b>1.79</b>

These results concluded that leadership students perceived to have effectively developed the following capacities more than ELL students: personally define global leadership ( $M=1.00$ ), discuss global issues ( $M=1.00$ ), and understand and apply adaptive leadership to address challenges in their lives ( $M=1.00$ ). However, ELL students perceived to have effectively developed intercultural relationships ( $M=1.58$ ) upon conclusion of the workshop more than leadership students ( $M=2.50$ ). The least developed capacity between student groups was intercultural relationships by leadership students ( $M=2.50$ ). The least developed capacity among both groups was the understanding and application of adaptive leadership in order to address life challenges ( $M=1.93$ ).

## Discussion and Recommendations

Results of the open-ended responses on the workshop satisfaction survey as well as the ELL reflections confirmed that participants left the workshop with an understanding of the other

in their development and valuing of intercultural relationships, how to effectively interact and communicate in intercultural teams, an enhanced understanding of adaptability in global contexts, and an overall increased confidence to exercise effective global leadership. Specifically, ELL students voiced their gratitude for the experience, promoting not only their increased understanding of global leadership, but also the novelty of interacting with American students:

*“As an English language student, it is very important to have as many opportunities to interact with native speakers as we can. The Global Leadership workshop was a great opportunity to have such interaction; in addition, it allowed us to understand and exchange different perspectives regarding Global Leadership, which is a very important subject” (ELI8)*

Ultimately, the workshop provided participants with the opportunity to explore, discuss, and develop global leadership capacities with the hopes to confidently practice such competencies in the future. *“At some point in the future, some situation will remind me of one of the activities we today had, and it will be extremely helpful to win through the situation” (ELI10).*

Although results in this study have suggested that the workshop successful, the satisfaction survey provided further insight into possible recommendations for future global leadership workshop initiatives. In considering future global leadership curriculum, the following recommendations were voiced by participants:

- Allow for ample, lengthy time for discussion;
- Provide a fairly equal distribution of global leadership students to ELL students to provide balanced conversation;
- Take extra care to thoroughly explain through activities, steps, and context of activities to ensure adequate understanding by ELLs; and
- Provide experiential exercises that allow both groups to truly experience global leadership capacities.

The second recommendation voiced by participants (“Provide a fairly equal distribution of global leadership students to ELL students to provide balanced conversation”) can be clearly drawn from the study’s sample. Due to the fact that there was more than double the amount of participants from the ELL institute ( $n=13$ ) versus those from the Global Leadership course ( $n=5$ ), significant limitations arise. Moreover, due to the overall small sample size, the results of this study cannot be generalized or transferred to similar populations; therefore, this study must be treated as a pilot study for future leadership education research. When addressing the quantitative data, due to the small sample size of each group of participants in the study, no further statistical analysis can be generated beyond the presentation of the frequencies alone. Future research would benefit from a larger sample size that took into account equal numbers of group sizes to maintain balanced responses. When analyzing the qualitative data, it is important to note that the authors were surprised to see, despite the unequal sizes of participant groups, that similar themes emerged across both student groups. Ultimately, however, the results of this study should be viewed as a pilot study for future research among ELL students at the university level,

as well as provide tangible recommendation for instructors to develop innovative partnerships for global leadership education.

Additionally, when considering the study's sample, further limitations exist due to the demographics of the sample. As previously identified, three of the four Global Leadership students in the study were from the rural, southeastern region of the United States, while the remaining student was an international student from Japan. These specific demographics may have impacted the relationships formed with the ELL students, potentially differently than alternative demographics. Therefore, as aforementioned, the results of this study are not generalizable to similar populations and must be acknowledged as its own separate study.

From the descriptive statistics results, further recommendations for future global leadership workshops can be drawn. First, it is important to both address and further explore how American students perceive meaningful intercultural relationships, considering that the ELL students perceived a heightened development of intercultural relationships. Secondly, it is important to further elaborate on any leadership theory or concepts used in the workshop to ELL students. This becomes further voiced in an ELL student reflection: *"the various concepts of leadership, like global and adaptive... it was unclear"* (ELI8). It is possible that unfamiliar concepts may have been confusing or not entirely understood by ELLs, especially considering that leadership students have been academically immersed in leadership theory. Ultimately, however, the global leadership workshop objectives proved to be successfully met, since all participants ( $n=18$ ) perceived to have developed all measured capacities well ( $M=1.79$ ).

## Conclusion

Participants left the workshop with an understanding of the other in their development and valuing of intercultural relationships, how to effectively interact and communicate in intercultural teams, and an overall increased confidence to exercise effective global leadership; *"What I gained from the workshop is confident, I knew that I have to be sure that what I'm doing is good, but at the end it refers to the leader"* (ELI4).

This pilot study presents a framework for an innovative and collaborative approach to global leadership education. In order to successfully guide today's leadership students to approach intercultural situations with critical depth of thought, self-awareness, empathy, and effective communication tools, they must have the opportunity to apply the material in a relational, tangible context. Such opportunities for relational, cross-cultural interactions have the potential for beneficial global experiences without going abroad. Similar to aforementioned research that engaged American and international students in academic programming, leadership educators should be "encouraged to develop programs that offer cross-cultural experiences on campus, as well as overseas" (Wilson, 1993, p. 24). Additionally, if universities have a lack of ELL students on campus, future research should be conducted in order to understand how similar curriculum could potentially create experiential, relational global learning opportunities with diverse members of the community.

Global leadership educators must address leadership development through an innovative, multi-dimensional approach of examination, education, experience, and exposure (Cohen, 2010)

in order to truly facilitate effective intercultural interactions. Such university experiences proved to reach beyond the classroom, providing students with “an experience for life” (ELI2). By engaging in similar programs, we can begin to develop leaders with global mindsets, beginning to see our globalized, interdependent world in a relational and personal way.

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