THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN BUILDING GLOBAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH OF STUDENT EXCHANGE IN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Organizations need global leaders, capable of moving in and through divergent cultural environments. An increasing number of studies in recent years have examined issues related to developing cross-cultural/global leadership. Unfortunately, there are still a lot of university students who do not understand the importance of intercultural communication skills to enhance the leadership competence. Therefore, the main problem identified in this study was intercultural communication among university students. This study was carried out in the form of phenomenological approach. Interviews were taken place in several universities in Jakarta. This study also employed questionnaires to triangulate the instruments. The research is defined into two major aspects namely to know what the purpose of students to participate in student exchange program and to dig deeper how intercultural communication contributes to the global leadership competencies. In-depth interviews were conducted to understand how participants experienced the phenomenon, while questionnaires were distributed to support the data gained by interviews. This study involved 11 university students as participants for in depth interviews. Three students with international student exchange program experience, three students with national student exchange program experience, three students with no exchange experience and 2 Head of Study Programs. Whereas 30 questionnaires were distributed. The research proved that intercultural communication plays a significant role in enhancing leadership competencies.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, global leadership competencies, student exchange.

INTRODUCTION

A leader is a person who can accomplish the tasks and overcome the problems by effective leading, sound planning, monitoring and communicating. Among these mention factors perfect and precise communication is of utmost importance. It is a leader's communication skills which motivate and inspire teammates to work hard and achieve team targets and organizational goals as well. Effective communication act as an advantage of a leader to lead effectively. Generally, the ability to communicate effectively is undeniably a challenge in the global environment. It happens since misunderstandings can still arise when both parties speak the same language because of different cultural backgrounds (Hilton, 2007). What all are the key points leaders have to keep in mind while communicating with their teams and suggestions to improve communication to make leadership more effective. Only an interculturally competent person can be an effective member of a multicultural team, and be able to establish an interpersonal relationship with a foreign national via an exchange of both verbal and nonverbal levels of behavior (Matveev & Milter, 2004).

Although the field of cross-cultural leadership development is in its infancy (Suutari, 2002), an increasing number of studies in recent years have examined issues related to developing cross-cultural/global leadership. Some investigated connections between culture and leadership. There are a lot of research conducted in companies and organizations including government institutions related to it. In a busy workplace, conflict is acknowledged as an unavoidable issue in an organization due to multiple personalities, multiple pressures, or even multiple cultures (Adams, 2009). Cross- cultural factors clearly create the potential for increased communication problems (Robbins, Stephen P., 2005). There is one with straight forward and open communication style. To work effectively with these people, leader/manager will need to understand how their culture, geography, and religion have shaped them, and how to adapt your management style to their differences. (Robbins, Stephen P., 2005). So a leader has to adopt a number of techniques of dealing with culturally diverse work group, e.g. contact, super ordinate goals, and blending of categories and functions. Unfortunately, there are still a lot of university students who do not understand the importance of intercultural communication skills to enhance the leadership competence. Therefore, the main problem identified in this study was intercultural communication among university students.

The fundamental purpose of the study was to explore the role of intercultural communication in enhancing global leadership competencies with a phenomenological approach as Cresswell (2003) stated that a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon; it is an approach that focuses on how life is experienced by those who are involved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship between communication competence and leadership has been found (Flauto 1999; Rouhiainen 2005). The literature recognizes the crucial role of leadership in the multicultural environment of global business (House et al. 2004; Karpin 1995; Sinclair & Wilson 2002). It also argues that new skills are required from today's leaders working in the global economy, because leadership itself became more multicultural (Sinclair & Wilson 2002) and it could be now defined as 'influence across national and cultural boundaries' (Mobley & Dorfman 2003: xiii). Further, it was argued that leadership was 'enacted through communication' (Barge 1994: 21) and communication competence was a prerequisite for effective leadership (Flauto 1999).

Moreover, in the highly diverse global environment, communication competence should become intercultural because people should be able to perceive things from the perspective of culturally different others (Chen & Starosta 1996). Therefore, leaders should develop their intercultural communication competence, which can be broadly defined as involving 'knowledge, motivation and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures' (Wiseman 2003: 192). Culture is defined as an approach to life and worldview shared by individuals and groups in a society (Helman, 2001). Therefore, the ability of a leader to communicate effectively and cross-culturally is definitely unable to be underestimated.

The attempt to establish intercultural communication in practice is not a simple issue. There are many potential problems that often occur in it, such as similarity search, withdrawal, anxiety, reduction of uncertainty, stereotypes, prejudice, racism, power, ethnocentrism and culture shock (Samovar, Porter and Mc. Daniel, 2007: 316).An interculturally competent

person demonstrates affective, behavioral, and cognitive abilities, such as openness, empathy, adaptive motivation, perspective taking, behavioral flexibility, and person centered communication. Thus, intercultural competence can be defined as transformation of learning into desired attitudes, and a growth process where an individual's existing knowledge about culture is evolving to intercultural knowledge, attitude, and behavior (Davis, 2005). Intercultural competence requires some specific traits, which make it easier to adapt to another culture and help to survive in a different environment. Alvino E. Fantini (2001) names those traits that are the commonly cited traits of intercultural competence: flexibility, humor, patience, openness, interest, curiosity, empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, and suspending judgments, among others (Fantini, 2001).

The link between leadership and communication appears more pronounced in recently developed leadership models. Hede (2001) in his integrated leadership model includes communication as one of the basic dimensions of leadership behaviour. Communication and leadership can also be found as subject of a number of studies approached from various perspectives. Examples include studies conducted by Schultz (1980) on communication behaviours as predictors of leader emergence, Penley and colleagues (1991) who examined relationship between managers' performance and levels of communication skills. More recently, Gaddis, Connelly and Mumford (2004) studied the impact of leader affect on subordinates when communicating negative feedback and Clifton (2006) showed how conversation analysis can help in improving leadership and communication skills.

Cross-cultural factors clearly create the potential for increased communication problems (Robbins, Stephen P., 2005). A complex, changing, uncertain, and ambiguous global environment escalates challenges to global leaders. Research into cross-cultural leadership suggests that cross-cultural interactions (Zander *et al.,* 2012), language barriers (Schweiger *et al.,* 2003; Ko & Yang, 2011), cultural disparities concerning work values, norms, and attitudes (Miroshnik, 2002; Dickson *et al.,* 2003, Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas & Inkson, 2004; Zander *et al.,* 2012), and cross-cultural uncertainty (Stock & Genisyürek, 2012; Sims & Schraeder, 2004; Lee, 2007) are primary cultural challenges for leaders working in cross-cultural contexts. Other cross-cultural leadership challenges include identity-based conflicts (Chrobot-Mason *et al.,* 2007), managing and motivating culturally diverse teams (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2009), managing diverse cultures (Caligiuri, 2013), developing cross-cultural competencies (Caligiuri, 2013; Caligiuri & Tarique, 2009), and adapting leadership styles (Steers *et al.,* 2012).

A cross-culturally and communicatively competent leader is able to establish an interpersonal relationship with a foreign national through effective exchange at both verbal and nonverbal levels of behavior (Spitzberg, 1983). Past research identified various characteristics that constitute cross-cultural communication competence, including relationship skills, communication skills, and personal traits such as inquisitiveness (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Mendenhall, 2001; Moosmüller, 1995). Cross-cultural communication competence entails not only knowledge of the culture and language, but also affective and behavioral skills such as empathy, human warmth, charisma, and the ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty (Gudykunst, 1998; Spiess, 1996, 1998). Others argue that cross-cultural communication competence requires sufficient knowledge, skilled actions, and suitable motivation to make an individual a competent interactant (Spitzberg, 1991).

National cultures can differ in many ways, for instance team members from different cultures vary in their communication behavior, their motivation for seeking and disclosing

information, and their need to engage in self-categorization (Gudykunst, 1997). The elements that are shared among various intercultural communication competence models are also related to leadership in existing studies. Empathy, openness, role flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity were already perceived as desired features of managers working in cultures different from their own twenty years ago (Harris & Moran 1987). Empathy was found to be one of the desired mental characteristics of global leader (Jokinen 2005) and one of the key competencies for leaders working within culturally diverse teams (Iles & Hayers 1997). Yukl (2002) recognized empathy to be necessary for adjusting influence strategy to different people. Building trust was also advocated for as one of the requisites of transformational leadership and its importance recognized by various authors (Casimir, Waldman, Bartram, & Yang 2006; Connell, Cross, & Parry 2002; Ferres, Travaglione, & Connell 2002; Gillespie & Mann 2004; Rubin, Munz, & Bommer 2005). Openness to new perspectives was found to be among the key competencies needed for cross-cultural leaders managing diversity in the organization (Manning 2003). Transformational leaders also were argued to be intellectually open (Bass 1985; Kouzes & Posner 1987). Flexibility appears to constitute one of the most crucial factors in today's leadership (Barge 1994; Caligiuri & Di Santo 2001; Sinclair & Wilson 2002; Yukl & Lepsinger 2004) in various ways from adjusting the performed style (Hede 2001) to flexibility in strategic leading of the whole organization (Hitt et al. 2003). Flexibility was also found to be indispensable for work and the successful leading of multicultural teams (Iles & Hayers 1997).

House et al. (1999) used the concept of culturally endorsed implicit leadership theories to list the leadership behaviors and attributes which are "universally endorsed as contributing to effective leadership, and the extent to which attributes and behaviors are linked to cultural characteristics" (House et al., 1999, p. 182). Six global leadership dimensions were used to create the profiles for six cultural clusters: charismatic/value based, team oriented, participatory, humane oriented, autonomous, and self-protective.

METHODOLOGY

This study used semi-structured interviews, because it allowed me the opportunity to direct the interview more closely, to have a pre-determined set of questions while simultaneously allowing the interviewees sufficient flexibility to shape the flow of information given (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003). According to May (2001) the semi-structured interview gives the interviewer the freedom to probe beyond the answers in a manner which would appear prejudicial to the aims of standardization and comparability. It is also adaptable, flexible, and relatively unstructured and open ended. The interviewer can ask more questions, if the answer does not come up to expectations (Robson, 2002). In addition, Robson (2002) also says that it is appropriate to use the interview when the individual perceptions of processes within a social unit are to be studied.

The participants for in depth interview consists of three students with international exchange program experience. The purpose to choose the alumni of international student exchange program is to gain information about their experiences on intercultural communication and what benefit they got by taking part in the exchange program. Three students with national (interprovinces) exchange program experience also become the participants of this study. The purposes are to obtain their experience on intercultural communication with students from different provinces and whether it can support the leadership competencies. Three students without any exchange experience to gain information on how their perspective on intercultural awareness and their understanding on the global leadership competencies, and

two head of study programs to obtain information about what policies taken by the universities to support the intercultural communication skills of the students and how the intercultural communication can support students to have global leadership competencies. The total number of participants for in depth interview is 11 people.

In order to increase validity in this study, triangulation was employed. Beside in depth interview, this study also employed self-completion questionnaires as the instrument of data collection and were distributed to 30 students from different universities. It is a form of survey which involves written questioning in which it is delivered to the respondents by mail or handed to them personally by the researcher in their homes, at work, school or any other place according to Robson (2002) and Sarantakos (2005). The participants fill in the answers by themselves, and the questionnaire is returned to the researcher after completion. Self-completion questionnaire is employed as one of the research instruments because of its advantages to this particular research. Questionnaire was designed in a semi-standardized one which contains a moderate structure and cut down open-ended questions to a minimum as well as Wisker (2001) suggested to put the most simple and obvious questions at the beginning and make them more complicated since this will keep the participants with us and not make them confused at the start.

Before the distribution of questionnaires, they were piloted to two students and two lecturers, requesting their opinion and modifications were made accordingly. From the piloting process, it was known that the open ended questions should be limited before distributing the questionnaires to prevent misunderstanding of the meaning of each terminology. Finally, the method of 'triangulation', whereby the authors obtained the information not only from the questionnaires was employed in this study. The above factors are to extent and ensure the validity of the study.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The technique of analysis used in this study is an interactive analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1984). In this analytical model, the three components of the analysis of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion or verification activities conducted in an interactive form with the data collection process as an ongoing process, repetitive, and continuously to form a cycle. Furthermore, researchers only move between the three components of the analysis, thus forming a cyclic pattern. Data reduction can be defined as the process of selecting, focusing on simplification, abstraction, and transformation of dummy data that emerged from the written record in the field. Thus the data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, classify, direct, dispose of unnecessary and organizing data in a way such that its final conclusions can be drawn and verified (Patton, 1990).

Students with international exchange program experience data

The research suggests that the motivation of student exchange program alumni join this program is to search for new experiences which were not found in Indonesia. By visiting other countries, students will gain new insight, and also acquire intercultural experience that can change the mindset, character, as well as the process of maturation itself. From the interview conducted on 3 students, all three agreed that intercultural communication skills can hinder us from ethnocentrism, considering our culture is better thanthose of others. By doing so, we can become more empathy and flexible as said by Jokinen (2005) "Empathy was found to be one of the desired mental characteristics of a global leader," as well as what

Barge (1994) et.al state that Flexibility appears to constitute one of the most crucial factors in today's leadership (Barge 1994; Caligiuri & Di Santo 2001; Sinclair & Wilson 2002; Yukl & Lepsinger 2004)

"A valuable lesson that I got when following the student exchange program is when I helped a child who could not buy clothes and food to celebrate Christmas. This gave me experience the extraordinary life because it can help other people of different cultures and beliefs, which made me become more empathy and tolerant. "Another participant recounted his experience when doing a focus group discussion. "It was my first experience being a leader in a group whose members consist of students from foreign countries. Discussing with people of different cultural backgrounds, language, religion made me become more open, trying to adapt to, and try to understand their perspectives. "This response is in accordance with what Bass (1985)said ; Kouzes and Posner (1987) "Transformational leaders also were argued to be intellectually open." This is also in line with the statement of Manning (2003) that "Openness to new perspectives was found to be among the key competencies needed for cross-cultural leaders managing diversity in the organization. "

All the three participants who attended student exchange program say that the "Intercultural communication can avoid us from the character of ethnocentrism, also can eliminate negative cultures like stereotypes, prejudice and Racism as revealed by Samovar, Porter and Mc. Daniel (2007: 316) "There are many potential problems that often occur in it, such as similarity search, withdrawal, anxiety, reduction of uncertainty, stereotypes, prejudice, racism, power, ethnocentrism and culture shock." With the ability of intercultural communication one can appreciate the differences and one day when one become a leader either in companies, organizations, foundations, community, or even in the country, one will be a leader who has a global leadership competencies such as the statement of Wiseman (2003, 192) "Therefore, leaders should develop their intercultural communication competence that can be broadly defined as involving knowledge, motivation and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures. "

Students with national (interprovinces) exchange program experience data

From the interviews with the graduates of the Inter-provinces Exchange Program, I found that intercultural communication can foster a more flexible behavior to others. "Through this program we meet, discuss, collaborate with students from different provinces of different ethnics, cultures and religions, so that a sense of trust and openness can be awakened." It is also in accordance with what was said by Harris and Moran (1987) "empathy, openness, role flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity were already perceived as desired features of managers working in cultures different from their own twenty years ago. "Two participants say the same thing about the importance of intercultural communication in building a leadership skill. Intercultural communication competencies must be owned by all students of Indonesia since Indonesia consists of more than 17,000 islands, more than 700 local languages and over 300 etnics and 6 religions so as to maintain the integrity of the nation requires awareness of the importance of intercultural communication among the university students because students are our future leaders. Today we still find leaders with no intercultural communication competencies, among others they do not have a flexibility in leading. This is in line with the statement of Barge (1994), Caligiuri & Di Santo (2001), Sinclair & Wilson (2002), Yukl & Lepsinger (2004) stating that flexibility appears to constitute one of the most crucial factors in today's leadership.

From this interview, I was also informed that intercultural communication should be studied not only if we are dealing with people of different countries but also people of the same background. Misunderstandings can still arise when both parties speak the same language because of different cultural backgrounds (Hilton, 2007). Sometimes we feel there is someone who speak straightforward and open, but people may find uncomfortable and threatening this approach. By having the ability to cross-cultural communication, we become more empathy to others, so as to understand how to communicate that does not offend the other person.

Head of Study Courses data

Research shows that all heads of study courses in universities agree that students should have the ability of intercultural communication because it will make them open-minded leader who have high empathy and tolerance. "Especially in this campus we accept students from diverse backgrounds. Not only those of coming from different cultures but also religion. Even the last 5 years our campus also accepts students from other countries. "When asked how to apply the intercultural communication to students, they said that periodically the campus holds a seminar with the theme of the importance of understanding the global intercultural communication in order to have the leadership competencies. Even periodically also campus organizes outbound or 'leadership training camp' with the aim that all students, comprising of various backgrounds, regions, cultures, languages and religions, without exception can work together in an activity in which they implement intercultural communication. "Every year we organize a program of academic visit to partner universities abroad. Although not all students are able to speak English fluently, but at least, they've had the courage to interact with students from other countries. "

From this interview, it is known that the universities have also invited more international students to attend a series of activities on the campuses. " The presence of foreign students in our campus will spur us to motivate students learn English and improve their self-confidence. Besides, their insight will be broader since they are encouraged to read and collect information on a variety of things so that they can conduct a smooth discussion with international students. "When asked if there is a difference between students who attended the exchange program with students who have never participated in the program, both said that there a very big difference. Students who have completed the exchange program in general have a better understanding of intercultural communication, more tolerant, have a good leadership, more accountable and more easily adapt to the new environment. It is a great asset for students so that they are generally get better life than students without experience in exchange program who in general become more individualist, less able to appreciate the differences, as well as less flexible. Those characteristics are brought to the place of work and become they character in the real life.

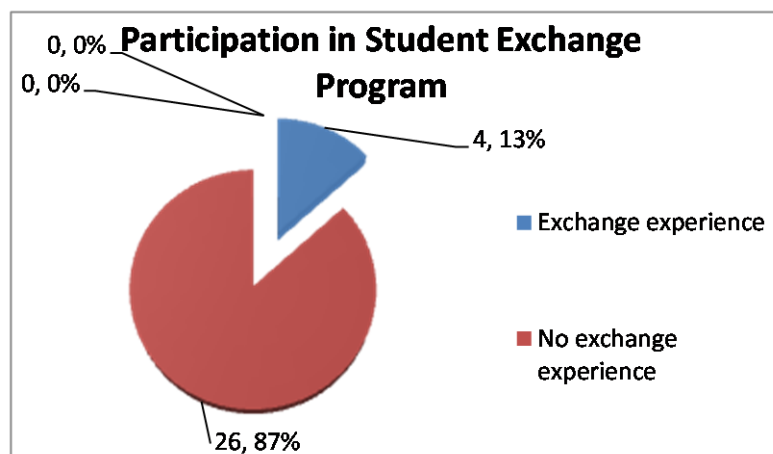## Students with no experience in Exchange Program data

In this study, interviews were also conducted with three students who have no experience in participating in a student exchange program. This is done to obtain information how their perspectives to such program. From the interviews conducted, it turned out that all the three said that they had a desire to go abroad to gain new experiences. But when asked if they are interested to participate in a student exchange program, all said that they were not so keen on following it. "First, because the program is less clear, usually just a voluntarily program with a duration of approximately one to two months. I think this is less effective. To learn English

is too short. To gain new knowledge is not a lot, so, I think if I go abroad, it is better to take the postgraduates rather than following such exchange program." When asked if they see any benefit of the student exchange program, both said that such programs do not contribute a lot to our study or career. "We have to leave at least one semester and do not get anything." Even when asked about the intercultural communication skills which can support the global leadership competencies, all of them said that "intercultural communication does not contribute a lot to the leadership competencies." From the above answers we know that not all university students have intercultural awareness.
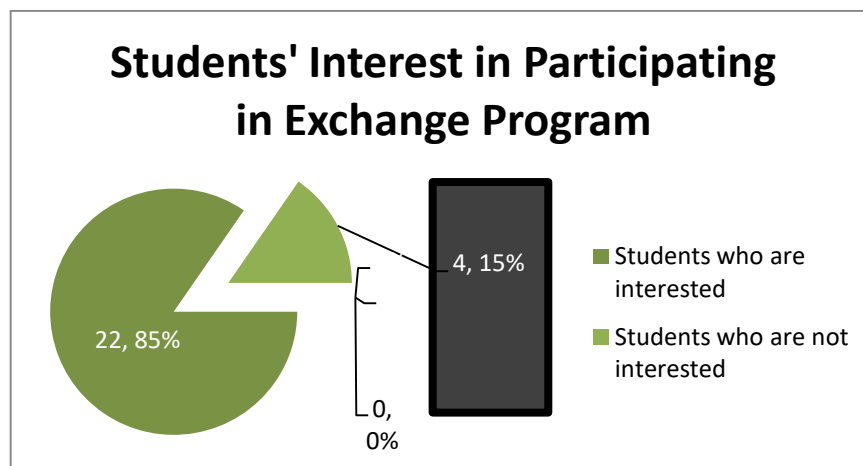
Questionnaires data

To be able to dig deeper information related to the perspective of students to the student exchange program, authors distributed 30 questionnaires. Triangulation is done to get a better picture on student competence in intercultural communication. Of the 30 questionnaires distributed, 26 are research participants who do not have experience in student exchange programs and 4 participants are those who have participated in student exchange programs to Europe, America, Japan and the ASEAN region.

**Figure 1: Participation in Student Exchange Program**

Out of the 26 students who have not joined student exchange program or youth exchange turns entirely to say that they have a desire to go abroad for seeking new experience. But when asked if interested to participate in a student exchange program, only 22 people expressed a desire to participate and 4 others say that they are not since the program does not really give a significant benefit, should leave college, and some even said that a the certificate of exchange program is not beneficial to apply for jobs.

Figure 2: Students' interest in joining the Exchange Program

Of the 30 questionnaires distributed, the authors also get data that 26 students understand that the intercultural communication skills are very important for them since it can foster a sense of leadership and a high tolerance for others. While 2 others say that intercultural communication only gives a little contribution in fostering leadership and 2 other students even say that culture has nothing to do with leadership. It is totally different from the answers of students who have joined the exchange program. All four are answering that student or youth exchange programs immense influence on the growth of leadership. The program trains participants to become responsible as human beings, care for others, respect for differences, have an attitude of empathy and tolerance and all of these are significant assests for a leader.

Figure 3: Intercultural Communication in enhancing the leadership competencies
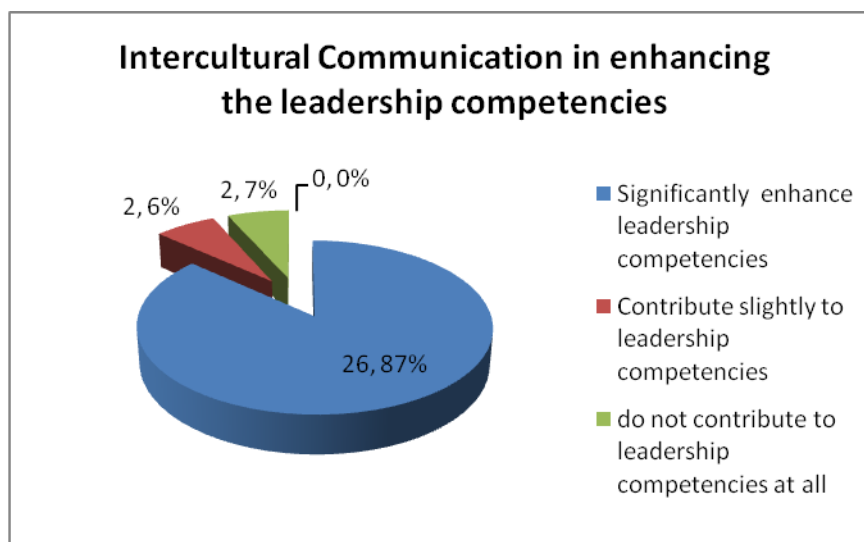
CONCLUSION

From the research results described above , it can be concluded that the ability of Intercultural Communication is very important for students because it can build the global leadership competencies. Students will become more responsible, respect the differences, and have a high sense of empathy. All that is necessary for a leader in today's global era. If all students have the ability in implementing the intercultural communication, then when they become leaders, either in the enterprise, organization, or government, they will be the leaders of who

are more responsible and able to appreciate the values of diversity and give priority to the creation of peace. Therefore, the authors suggested that universities provide opportunities for students to participate in exchange programs and also invited international students to interact with the local students. Universities are recommended tp provide intercultural communication as a compulsory subject that should be given to all students.

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