

# Intercultural leadership development: Study and discourse analysis through innovative digital teaching techniques

Tolika Maria<sup>1</sup>, Karapiperis Dimitrios<sup>2</sup>, Verykios Vassilios S.<sup>2</sup>  
[mtolika@omnesintervenant.com](mailto:mtolika@omnesintervenant.com), [dkarapiperis@eap.gr](mailto:dkarapiperis@eap.gr), [verykios@eap.gr](mailto:verykios@eap.gr)

<sup>1</sup> ESCE International Business School

<sup>2</sup> Hellenic Open University

## Abstract

Today more than ever, the concept of the interaction between different cultures is becoming stronger. The effects and consequences of the pandemic and the war between Russia and Ukraine are global and are breaking the barriers of each individual group at any level. In this broader socio-economic framework, Ecole Supérieure du Commerce Extérieur International Business School in Paris created the course with the title "Intercultural Leadership Development" (ILD) aimed at preparing future political and financial executives. The course is dedicated to developing intercultural and leadership competencies of students referring to transformative development theories. Through interactive activities and role play to support a global society and a global market characterised by tolerance for diversity, intercultural communication and inclusion. This course's conceptualization of intercultural leadership development (ILD hereafter) is grounded in two transformative developmental theories. With this conceptual framework, ILD challenges the mindsets of students and fosters a culturally responsive leader identity. Literature shows that developmental programming is impacted by the context of students' lived experiences prior to their collegiate careers. This indicates that ILD educators should take into consideration the level of intercultural and leadership competence at which students, now, and business executives later, begin in order to develop curricula that are appropriate to their developmental levels. Our study aims to analyse the data collected through innovative teaching methods and to draw conclusions about how students with different identities and backgrounds define and learn about leadership. Furthermore, we attempt to correlate the participation in multicultural collegialities with their potential career as managerial executives.

**Keywords:** Intercultural leadership development, sentiment analysis.

## Introduction

Literature shows that developmental programming is impacted by the context of students' lived experiences prior to their collegiate careers. This indicates that ILD educators should take into consideration the level of intercultural and leadership competence at which students, now, and business executives later, begin in order to develop curricula that are appropriate to their developmental levels. The course is dedicated to developing intercultural and leadership competencies of students referring to transformative development theories. Half sessions demand physical presence and the rest are on line. The first sessions are focused on theoretical background on Intercultural Leadership and Leadership identity and the next sessions are focused on self-assessment on cultural identity, strengths, leadership identity, bridging cultural gaps and adjusting to change. Institutions of higher education can better serve their students by developing leadership skills and identity in an intercultural context (Sugiyama, Cavanagh, van Esch, Bilimoria, & Brown, 2016). This can be done by blending intercultural development with leadership identity development in order to facilitate student growth related to competence in intercultural leadership. The conceptual and pedagogical

framework for our concept of ILD more in detail is based on intercultural development, leadership identity development, and culturally relevant leadership learning.

A model that is widely used to measure intercultural competence is the intercultural development continuum (IDC). It is grounded in the concept that increased complexity in one's understanding of cultural commonalities and differences (through constant and intentional effort) leads to increased competence in navigating these. This model consists of five developmental orientations, which can be divided into three overarching worldviews, or mindsets: monocultural, transitional, and intercultural.

According to Hammer et al. (2003), people who operate from a monocultural mindset are only able to see the world from their own cultural lens and lack understanding of people who are culturally different. It is in the transitional mindset of minimization that individuals first begin to see other cultures from a non-threatening, non-judgmental perspective.

Typically, this will manifest in the highlighting of cultural commonalities, which often obscures cultural differences (Hammer, 2003). From an intercultural mindset, individuals are able to conceptualise multiple truths and understand and appreciate both their own culture(s) and those of cultural others (Hammer, 2003). People who have an intercultural mindset intentionally seek out and eventually learn how to effectively bridge across cultural differences.

Besides the general objectives the course also aims to promote teamwork and collaboration. In the digital age we live in today, communication and collaboration can become extremely challenging. At the same time, young students enjoy the opportunity to achieve communicational skills combined with administrative knowledge that will enable them to understand the world, develop into future leaders capable of communicating and implementing artistic and social programs for the common good. Critical thinking and active listening aim to create inspired characters and types of active young leaders, who strive to create a better community based on peace, acceptance, and respect for diversity. This will be the answer to whatever global shifts mean for governments, nations, communities and individuals. In this paper, we analyse the opinions of the students about how they understand leadership and active social participation. The data used were collected in November 2021.

## Research statement

Research often emphasises the experiences of those already in power while driving the experiences of others further into the margins. As a result, leaders are likely to utilise these generalised theories without further consideration for who is and is not represented.

The first research question is about the teaching technique and tools we will utilise for teaching qualitative research methods remotely and simultaneously encourage students to participate, show interest and get involved in the teaching experience. We take under consideration that our students consist of an audience that comes from all over the world and aims to be the future management executives in France's biggest companies. To reach this goal we used the platform Klaxoon which allows interaction and provides a variety of educational tools (videos, presentation) and tests not only about the evaluation of knowledge, but to reveal students' attitude and mood towards the course. Additionally, we created different groups and separate "rooms" in the Teams platform for each group. Each group had to think of a topic about qualitative research, create the main framework and present it in the classroom so the others would make comments according to the theory.

The second main research question refers to the way this certain audience understands the correlation between sports and active social participation. Thus, their perception over this topic is very important, given the fact that our students will be the future executives who will

organise big athletic events and have a close relationship with children and young people who practice sports. The course aims to assist students in deepening their understanding on active participation in political matters through sports. Most specifically, this course focuses on the preparation of individuals to develop skills of moderators in local societies between different actors (political leaders, stakeholders, cultural operators, athletes, citizens, immigrants, refugees etc.) dealing with the perspective of multicultural societies in the midst of social, political and economic upheaval that portend significant transformations across the globe. To address this research question, we utilised a google form questionnaire with open questions. The data were qualitatively processed and analysed.

We summarise the goals of our study in the following research questions:

RQ1: How do students understand leadership in an intercultural environment? What teaching methods can we utilise to keep students active?

RQ2: How do students understand the correlation between participation in multicultural collegialities with their potential career as managerial executives?

## Related work

Our world is more diverse than ever, with all signs indicating that diversity will continue to grow in the coming decades (Jones et al, 2016). They described that leaders of educational institutions have a responsibility to address the increasing diversity of their students in their approaches to supporting academic excellence. They explained that educators will need to rethink traditional methods of supporting students from historically minoritized backgrounds (e.g., students of colour). Essentially, if colleges and universities want to not only survive but also thrive in the United States' increasingly diverse society, educational leaders must find culturally responsive ways to support and develop students from all backgrounds. In terms of student leadership development, this same restructuring must occur, not only to be more inclusive of historically minoritized populations but also to encourage culturally responsive leadership development for students from all backgrounds. Jones et al. (2016) explained that "understanding how students with different identities define and learn about leadership helps educators appreciate the critical connections of leadership and diversity.

In order to be successful, emerging leaders will need strong intercultural competence, which Hammer (2003) defined as the ability to "shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behaviour to cultural differences and commonalities". The development of interculturally competent leaders will help foster greater diversity and inclusion on college campuses, helping students from diverse backgrounds feel more valued and accepted in their educational communities. According to Cho, Harrist, Steele, and Murn (2015), a primary tenet of higher education is "to educate future leaders who are motivated to bring disparate people together to solve critical, complex challenges facing our society" (p. 32).

As our world becomes increasingly diverse, interculturally competent leaders will be needed to bridge cultural gaps. Seemiller and Grace (2016) highlighted this need in the civic leadership competency of student leadership development, which includes increasing knowledge, ability, value, and behaviours in areas of diversity, inclusion, and social justice. Sessa (2017) explained that "developing a leader identity is one of the most important leadership learning outcomes'. Literature suggested that colleges and universities should create programming to develop leadership identity in students so that they move from a hierarchical view of leadership to understanding it as a dimension of their identity that can be cultivated across organisations and across social contexts. This is especially important

because Christlip, Arensdorf, Steffensmeier, and Tolar (2016) explained that “successfully exercising leadership means responding appropriately to the context in which it takes place”.

A major difficulty in conducting research on leadership, according to Dickson et al. (2003), is the lack of a universally accepted definition of leadership in and of itself. While there are several unique and one-dimensional conceptualizations of leadership, Day and Harrison (2007) explained that “leadership cannot mean only one thing because it can and does take on multiple meanings and appearances”. The complexity of this term is further complicated by the concept of defining and developing it in a culturally responsive manner. This was highlighted by Renard and Eastwood (2003) who explained that theorists tend to make oversimplified generalisations in their research.

Current literature asserts that it is important to understand the diversity perspective, or orientation, of individuals and groups because this perspective impacts both the self-efficacy of individuals within an organisation and how an organisation operates collectively (Ely & Thomas, 2001). The constructive nature of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) – the tool used to measure the IDC – provides greater insight into the progression through stages of intercultural competence. Hammer (2015) explained that prior work with intercultural learning merely highlighted the “static, personal characteristics” of the cognitive/affective/ behavioural (CAB) paradigm, meaning that intercultural educators focused more on the placement on the model rather than the progression through it. Similar to intercultural development, leadership identity development encourages increased awareness of self by considering leadership not only as a skillset but also as a dimension of identity (Day & Harrison, 2007). Komives, Owen, Longersbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) offered a stage-based framework for leadership identity development. The researchers grounded their theory in Chickering’s psychosocial development and Baxter-Magolda’s concept of self-authorship.

Exploring the connection between culture and leadership is important because our world is more diverse than ever, and the number of historically minority people will continue to grow in the coming decades (Jones, Guthrie, & Osteen, 2016). In order to meet the needs of a more diverse student body, literature emphasised the need for educators to cultivate more culturally competent leaders. Successful educators in this arena must recognize the complexity of culture (Ryan, 2006). They will also need to acknowledge the historical context of education in the U.S. and EU, while in parallel to understand how this history impacts the experiences of those for whom the system was not created (Smith- Maddox, 2000). Finally, they should make intentional efforts to foster intercultural competence on campus and in their students (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). This includes developing culturally relevant practices for providing and promoting student support and development services. Smith-Maddox (1998) argued that, without intentional inclusive intercultural practices, the educational system in the United States in particular, will continue to perpetuate an unequal environment that values the dominant culture of the U.S. and suppresses all others. This is particularly important for diversity and inclusion efforts at institutions of higher education because current literature suggests that the inclusion of culturally responsive curriculum as a means of bridging cultural gaps is a particularly effective method of improving the collegiate experiences for all students on campus (Ashby et al, 1996).

## Methodology

This study was based on primary research that constitutes its originality and contribution. The main structure of the course was through the Klaxoon platform. Through this we presented the theoretical framework. This was followed by a script which the students read

and answered a series of comprehension questions. In between there were questions about how students feel during the course, if they have any wishes or suggestions and more generally interactive activities. The students were then divided into groups and separate rooms per group. Each group presented their own proposal for quality research related to sports issues and then presented it to the whole class accepting comments and answering questions. At the end there was a quiz that included comprehension questions from the entire content of the course and an anonymous Google form questionnaire. The primary research was conducted in the answers through the Klaxoon platform and a Google form questionnaire with open questions to all students. The students answered the questionnaire in two phases, at the beginning of the course and after the last session. The purpose was to record the opinions and assessments of students about the value of this course and the teaching techniques. The answers were then grouped and the results of the questions under investigation were presented in order to draw conclusions about the main research question. The combination of the above methods and techniques that constitute the methodology of empirical research was necessary for the integrated approach and research of the basic working hypotheses, as mentioned in a previous section.

We analysed the answers to the questions posed using natural language processing techniques, and more specifically sentiment analysis (Liu, 2010), which is the process of detecting positive or negative sentiment in text. Sentiment analysis is one of the most important and commonly used natural language processing features. Sentiment is the classification of emotions extracted from a piece of text, speech, or document. While we typically analyse emotions to capture feelings, such as anger, sadness, joy, or fear, sentiment is a higher-level classifier that divides the spectrum of emotions into positive, negative, and neutral. There are a variety of use cases that need natural language processing to extract key insights and determine key business decisions.

## Results and Discussion

In this section, we analyse the answers provided to the questions posed. Moreover, we perform a sentiment analysis (a) to identify the most important entities annotated by sentiment scores, and (b) to detect the emotions conveyed by the corresponding answers.

### *Analysis of the Answers*

Among the first questions at the first session, arose the question as to why the students chose this particular course, their expectations and how they define the terms "intercultural", "leadership" and "intercultural leadership development" and their willingness to expatriate for professional reasons. The majority of our students chose this course because they expect to gain the knowledge to interact successfully in a multicultural environment. "It will potentially help my professional development", is a very common answer. Most of the students define "intercultural" as the situation when "different people with different backgrounds come from different countries" or "the link between several cultures" and ILD as the "process of enhancing my capabilities in terms of gestation of people of different cultures" or "the way you manage a group of different people and how you can develop them". Almost all the answers refer to the willingness to face the challenge of expatriation, under certain circumstances, which include the career status, the income and the family situation at the moment. The students face the challenge of expatriation positively and with enthusiasm and through this course they hope to acquire the knowledge to interact with people from different backgrounds effectively and manage difficult situations within the

professional environment. "I have no problem living abroad, I like meeting new cultures and countries", "After being graduated, I wish I could expatriate for at least 5 years, the time I really learn how to live like the people's country, understanding deeper their culture, meeting new people and living new experiences on a rather long-term. I'd like to do it as soon as possible as I'm young, I'm flexible, I'm only responsible for myself and I can open my mind and try to understand a little more how the world is working. There is not one vision of our reality, there are so many, and the only way is to go out of your comfort zone and make the effort", are some characteristic answers.

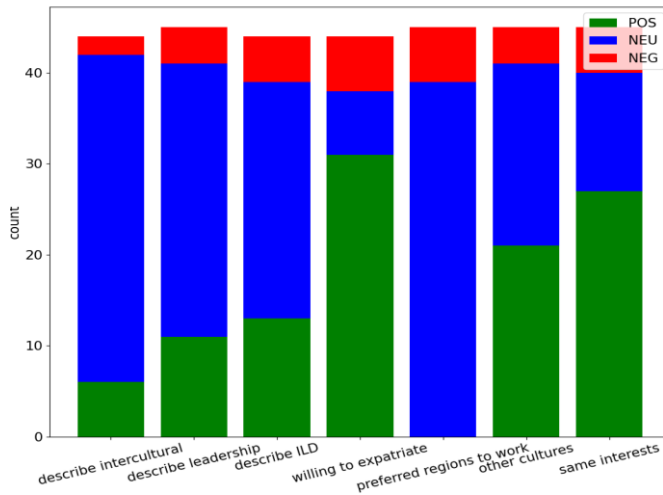
Subsequently, we posed a question about the feelings that arise when the students participate in intercultural backgrounds with people, they meet for the first time and they have to coexist or co-operate on a project. The answers to the first questionnaire showed a balance between enthusiasm and caution. There were feelings such as fear in 25%. The analysis of the responses of the second questionnaire showed that this percentage was reduced to 3%. The female students showed greater joy and from their answers showed greater self-confidence in intercultural situations on the one hand, on a personal and on the other hand, on a work level.

Regarding the research question about the evaluation of our teaching techniques, our students' answers proved that all our students were satisfied by these distance learning techniques and this was reflected in their answers. "It was a unique learning experience, very interactive and interesting. I really enjoyed it.", "It was a very communicative teaching session and it helped me understand and concentrate through the whole lesson", were some of the answers.

### **Sentiment Analysis**

We performed sentiment analysis using TextBlob, which is a Python library for processing textual data. It provides a simple API for performing common natural language processing tasks such as part-of-speech tagging, noun phrase extraction, sentiment analysis, classification, and translation. For each piece of text provided, TextBlob returns its polarity and subjectivity. Polarity lies between  $[-1,1]$ , where -1, 0, and 1 define a negative, a neutral and a positive sentiment, respectively. Subjectivity quantifies the amount of personal opinion and factual information contained in the text. It lies between  $[0,1]$ , where as subjectivity tends to 1, the corresponding text contains personal opinion rather than factual information.

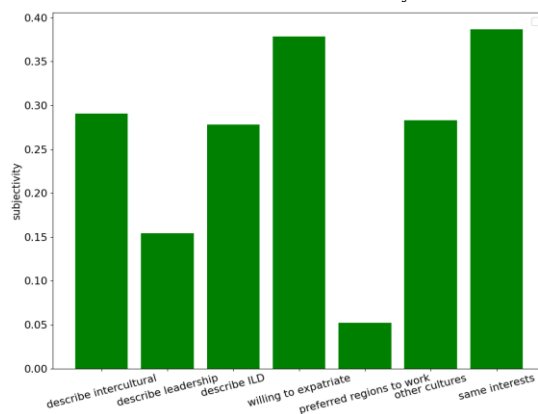
Figure 2 illustrates the polarity conveyed by the answers of each question in terms of the count of POSitive, NEUtral, and NEGative answers. We observe that the neutral sentiment (in blue colour) dominates the answers. We also observe that the positive sentiment has taken the lead in two questions, namely "willing to expatriate" and "same interests". The negative sentiment exhibits a uniform distribution among the questions, where its peaks lie in two particular questions: "willing to expatriate" and "preferred regions to work". This shows some negativity of some students towards the endeavour of seeking a job abroad or to certain geographic regions.



**Figure 2. The polarity conveyed by the answers of each question.**

Figure 3 shows the subjectivity of the answers of each question. Most of the answers lie between approximately 0.30 and 0.35, which shows that most of the answers exhibit low subjectivity. The personal opinions of the students show some increase only in the questions “willing to expatriate” and “same interests”.

We used RAKE (Rose et al. 2010), which is a shorthand for “Rapid Automatic Keyword Extraction” algorithm, to extract keywords from the answers. RAKE is a domain independent keyword extraction algorithm, which tries to determine key phrases in a body of text by analysing the frequency of word appearance and its co-occurrence with other words in the text. The top keywords extracted are shown in Figure 4, where we observe that “world”, “people”, and “cultures” dominate over the rest of the keywords.



**Figure 3. The subjectivity conveyed by the answers of each question.**



Figure 4. The word cloud generated by RAKE.

## Conclusions and Future Work

In this study we focused on researching students' views on some innovative digital teaching techniques and on their opinions about leadership in an intercultural environment. The answers to our research questions proved that the combination of classroom and distance learning, with techniques such as role-playing, presentations, interviews with managerial executives, and storytelling were fruitful and kept the students active and interested, made them realise the importance of the specific course to their future career as managers and presented the real circumstances of a professional intercultural environment.

Furthermore, we aim to perform a more detailed sentiment analysis on students, who reside and study in geographically different countries and use these platforms. Our target university will be the Hellenic Open University.

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