

# **Going Somewhere Else: A Qualitative Exploration of the Experience of Foreign-Born Leadership Educators**

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*Leadership is a discipline influenced by culture. It stands to reason that cultural identities of students and educators of leadership steer their leadership identities. This project investigates the implications of culture on Leadership Educator identity in foreign-born teachers—persons whose national cultural identity is different than the one in which they teach. Using semi-structured interviews of participants from around the world, this qualitative study identifies shared experiences, challenges, and discoveries of foreign-born Leadership Educators. Findings will provide insight for institutions supporting foreign-born leadership faculty, and also inform the development of Leadership Educator identities in individuals planning to teach leadership abroad.*

*Keywords: leadership education, foreign-born faculty*

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

“In Paris, one is always reminded of being a foreigner. If you park your car wrong, it is not the fact that it's on the sidewalk that matters, but the fact that you speak with an accent.”

- Roman Polanski

As globalization becomes more salient in business, politics, and education, the field of Leadership Education has grown and changed to adequately develop competent leaders (Huber, 2002). While the discipline itself remains relatively young, the proliferation of Leadership Education programs on university campuses has rapidly increased since the mid-1990's (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Jenkins, 2019a). One estimate places the current number of Leadership Education programs at more than 2000 (Jenkins, 2019). Its presence and importance as part of academic programs is evidenced by its inclusion in business school curricula as well as in other disciplines (Collinson & Tourish, 2015). Manifestations of Leadership Education delivery and curriculum are different from culture to culture (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018), delivered by thousands of faculty and administrators in a number of venues worldwide (Huber, 2002; Jenkins, 2019a).

Despite the growth of Leadership Education as a valuable academic discipline, the extant literature regarding Leadership Educators has developed at a much slower pace. Recent studies by Harding (2011), Seemiller and Priest (2015), and Jenkins (2019) have concluded that little is known about Leadership Educators. These researchers' efforts have contributed to the emerging body of knowledge concerning

Leadership Educators (Jenkins & Owen, 2016). Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) point out that Leadership Educators arrive at the discipline from a wide variety of contexts, experiences, and disciplines.

The teaching of Leadership has been recognized as different and unique from other academic disciplines. The highly personal nature of assuming a Leadership Educator role, and the connection between the subject matter with the educator's professional identity are unlike the compartmentalization that occurs in other fields of study (Huber, 2002; Seemiller & Priest, 2017). According to Huber (2002), the work of the Leadership Educator is driven by that individual's personal values and assumptions. In teaching Leadership, pedagogical approaches and how the educator identifies with and develops that approach has implications on student learning (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018; Jenkins & Owen, 2016). Leadership Education affords a parallel experience of discovery for educators and students (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). As a result, the concept of Leadership Educator Identity has recently been introduced into the literature to highlight the important process of becoming and being a Leadership Educator (Seemiller & Priest, 2017). This concept, however, and other studies regarding the experiences of Leadership Educators largely overlook the important influence of culture in shaping the Leadership Educator role.

Leadership, and Leadership Education by extension, is not a construct exclusive to western ways of thought, but present and experienced in diverse cultures (Steers, et al., 2012). Further, individual Leadership Educators bring personal values, beliefs, and assumptions about Leadership to the role (Huber, 2002). Each educator's pedagogical and philosophical approach to Leadership content is informed by these fundamental cultural dimensions. Where previous research intended to provide a view of persons who teach Leadership (Jenkins & Owen, 2016), this project is an attempt to explore the ways in which Leadership Educators who identify as foreign-born experience their role in environments where cultural implications may alter or challenge the development of their professional identity.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The authors of this study hope to address the lack of literature and research focusing on Leadership Educators as well as a similar gap in literature regarding foreign-born faculty (Clarke, 2015; Jenkins, 2019a; Seemiller & Priest, 2017). Guthrie and Jenkins (2018, p.28) suggest that identity plays a critical part in defining our roles as Leadership Educators, and "honoring other social identities, how they intersect, and which identities become salient when facilitating Leadership learning for different student populations" guides in achieving optimal student learning and self-development. Previous work has made the call for additional investigation into the multiple roles and identities of Leadership Educators (Jenkins & Owen, 2016; Seemiller & Priest, 2017). This study attempts to answer that call with specific focus on culturally influenced elements of those roles and identities.

### **Research Question**

The current study was guided by the general research question: How do foreign-born Leadership Educators describe their experiences in their transnational role? Further exploration into what common themes influence the experiences of Leadership Educator Identity in foreign-born faculty will allow the study to determine if a pattern exists in the ways these FbLEs identify themselves in their educator roles.

Seemiller and Priest's (2015) Leadership Educator Professional Identity model serves as the primary conceptual framework guiding this research. Moreover, Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) highlight the inextricable link between leadership and culture, positing that "leaders and the people they work with are part of national societies" (p 25). This theory is affirmed by the findings of the GLOBE study, which linked leadership styles to preferences of a culture or society (Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, & House, 2012). It is at the intersection of these theories that the current study seeks to investigate the experiences of foreign-born Leadership Educators.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature regarding Leadership Education has recently grown to include research on the people who facilitate Leadership lessons (Jenkins, 2019b). A review of the literature exposes a significant absence in the consideration of foreign-born faculty in the Leadership Educator role. Literature regarding foreign-born faculty, Leadership Educators and Leadership Educator Identity, as well as relevant studies guided by similar methodologies were considered for this literature review. Articles selected informed the research questions of the current study and were published in English.

### **Leadership Educators**

The literature regarding Leadership Educators (LEs) has been noted as sparse (Jenkins, 2019). The growing body of literature is predominantly populated by research teams spearheaded by Jenkins, Priest and Seemiller, and Huber. Much of the published work regarding LEs focuses on technical elements of the role-- course development, defining the term Leadership Educator, identifying where leadership education takes place (Cunliffe, 2009; Jenkins, 2019a; Priest & Seemiller, 2018). Priest and Seemiller (2018) draw contrast between the state of the literature on LEs with the much wider library existing on educators in general. The work of Jenkins and Owen (2019) begins the exploration of the people who arrive at the role of Leadership Educator. Where Collinson and Tourish (2015) discuss pedagogy and methods employed in teaching leadership, a recent study by Bourgeois and Bravo (2019) initiates conversation regarding the practice of experiential learning practices in non-native English-speaking leadership classrooms.

Seemiller and Priest (2018) present an initial definition of the term Leadership Educator. This unique identifier includes a wide variety of roles, professional practices, and academic disciplines. Much of the literature accepts coaches, faculty, teachers, trainers, and student affairs professionals as the primary roles in which Leadership Education is facilitated (Huber, 2002; Seemiller & Priest, 2018; Jenkins, 2019).

Huber (2002, p. 31), among the earliest of works regarding LEs, asserts the Leadership Educators “help people to understand what it means to be a leader,” in addition to introducing the conceptual elements necessary for leaders to affect positive change. This important work is done through the employment of a myriad of teaching methods-- both experiential and otherwise, including retreats, art in the classroom, co-curricular activities, case studies, and group interactions (Bourgeois & Bravo, 2019; Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018).

### **Leadership Educator Identity**

Recent literature has introduced the exploration of Leadership Educator Identity. Well before the term Leadership Educator Identity was first defined, Hickman (1994) proposed the idea that individually held beliefs and values about leadership precede pedagogy and classroom methods in Leadership instruction. These elements of a person’s identity serve as the foundational guidelines in developing content emphasis, as well as an approach and style to the role of Leadership Educator (Hickman, 1994; Priest & Seemiller, 2018). Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) add research and theory to the base from which an individual educator constructs priority to leadership learning objectives. Jenkins (2019) furthers this notion in positing that a Leadership Educator’s experience as a follower predicates the professional experience and development of the educator role.

### **Foreign Born Faculty**

In an effort to address aspirations toward globalization and internationalization in the educational experience, the hiring of foreign-born faculty brings immeasurable benefits to institutions of higher education (Alberts, 2008; Gahungu, 2011). Representing as many as 27% of faculty in the UK, and 38% of STEM field faculty, an exact number foreign-born faculty on campuses (at least in the United States) is undetermined (Clarke, 2015). Benefits to the institutions, as well as to peer faculty, and students add to the value and importance placed on the presence of foreign-born faculty on campus (Albaum, 2011). The literature surrounding this population of educators spans topics relative to their experiences in- and out- of the classroom.

In identifying as a foreign-born faculty, individuals have noted challenges associated with cultural differences in the classroom. Durkin (as cited in Raymond, 2010) proposes that these culturally-based challenges influence the foreign-born faculty's ability to successfully facilitate student learning outcomes. The adaptability and ability to adjust to cultural differences, according to Albaum (2011), is a mutual commitment between students and the foreign instructor, and requires a level of acceptance for culturally accepted behaviors in the classroom.

The perception of cultural difference, and the ability to overcome relative challenges, also influence students' satisfaction with the foreign-born faculty, and the job performance of the foreign faculty educator (Albaum, 2011; Cruz, McDonald, Broadfoot, Chuang, & Ganesh, 2018; Raymond, 2010). The academic experience of foreign-born faculty is further explored with the notion that support from the institution and department is vital to the faculty member's success (Gahungu, 2011).

The gap between learning and teaching styles in classrooms led by foreign-born faculty has been the subject of multiple research studies. Albaum (2011) and Chang, Bai, & Wang (2014) investigate culturally-based expectations and etiquette of students that exacerbate this gap in separate studies of Chinese/Taiwanese classrooms. Both of these studies highlight the implications of cultural differences between western and traditional Chinese educational environments. Here, the interactions between students and instructor are limited by language barriers and mismatched expectations of structured teaching styles and communication grounded in the style of native-born instructors (Albaum, 2011; Chang, et al. 2014). The findings in the literature have led to a call for increased empathy and understanding of the student experience to overcome the culturally-grounded obstacles posed by the teaching/learning style gap (Albaum, 2011; Raymond, 2010).

### **Intersection of Leadership & Culture**

It is widely noted that Leadership is a culturally-informed social construct, embedded in the diverse cultures where it is exercised, and changes accordingly (Javidan, House, & Dorfman, 2004; Steers, et al., 2012, Cseh, Davis, & Khilji, 2007; Nahavandi, 2008; Northouse, 2019). The GLOBE Study (Javidan, et al., 2004), as one example, identifies cultural values and beliefs regarding Leadership dimensions such as power distance, gender egalitarianism, and assertiveness. National culture also serves as a primary influence in organizational culture and individual behaviors relative to work and leadership (Nahavandi, 2008; Northouse, 2019).

By extension, culture has been identified as a significant contributor to the development of Leadership Educator Identity (Seemiller & Priest, 2018). This was, again, preceded by Hickman (1994) who espoused the individual preferences, values, and definitions regarding Leadership, which are a direct result of cultural identity. In their Leadership Educator Professional Identity Development model, Seemiller and Priest (2017) cite culturally-constructed personal identities such as race, religion, gender, and socioeconomic class as a type of influence on the model. Finally, Andenoro (2013) explains the emphasis placed on culture and intercultural leadership competencies in the National Leadership Education Research Agenda-- a document intended to direct the development of Leadership Studies as a discipline, regarding scholarly research and higher education.

Guthrie and Jenkins (2018) expand this concept in noting that the background of students is also informed by cultural definitions of leadership. In their study, they found that student attitudes, character, and knowledge about leadership were shaped by culturally-specific experiences (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). These findings reflect a parallel to similar research conducted in other academic environments where culture may have influenced access and success to student learning (Albaum, 2011).

### **Definitions**

To ensure consistency in the understanding of terms and concepts discussed as part of the current study, the following definitions have been taken from and informed by the extant literature.

### *Leadership Education*

Leadership Education is the pedagogical practice of facilitating leadership learning in an effort to build human capacity and is informed by leadership theory and research (Jenkins, 2008).

### *Culture*

Culture refers to commonly held values within a group of people, including the set of norms, customs, values, and assumptions guiding the behavior of a group, as well as people's lifestyle and their collective programming (Nahavandi, 2008).

### *Foreign-Born Faculty*

An instructor of a credit-based, university level course, who identifies as native to a culture different from that of the host community and institution in which they teach is referred to as foreign-born faculty.

### **Conclusion**

As previously mentioned, the literature regarding foreign-born Leadership Educators is sparse. There is ample justification for further exploration of Leadership Educators who identify or claim a native culture that is different from the native culture claimed by their students or institution. The themes explored in this brief review inform research of this unique population of Leadership Educators. Additional study will add to the literature and assist in understanding the professional identities and personal experiences of this faculty population. This research may also prove useful in supporting foreign-born faculty through the various stages of their career.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

To investigate personal experiences and highlight individual perspectives, a qualitative research design was selected. Merriam (2009), endorses qualitative inquiry to uncover meaning in a particular experience or phenomena. This follows the practices and endorsements of previously conducted research projects exploring the experiences of Leadership Educators (Seemiller & Priest, 2017; Priest & Seemiller, 2018; Jenkins, 2019), as well as previous research the experiences of educators involved in transnational higher education programs (Clarke, 2015).

It is generally seen in the literature that a qualitative design effectively reveals more robust understanding of the personal stories, situations, and meaning making in the journey of Leadership Educators and the development of their professional identity (Clarke, 2015; Jenkins, 2019a; Jenkins & Owen, 2016; Priest & Seemiller, 2018; Seemiller & Priest, 2017). According to Seemiller and Priest (2018, p. 95) employing a qualitative analysis "not only offers insight into the process of development, but also highlights the reality between educators' beliefs and practices." It is these beliefs and practices that differentiate the experiences and identity of foreign-born faculty.

The current study employs one-hour, individual semi-structured interviews conducted in person, and via zoom—an online video meeting platform. The semi-structured interview format suits this study for a number of reasons. Using this approach, conversations were guided with several predetermined open-ended questions informed by the literature, while allowing the researchers to respond to emerging situations, issues, and concepts (Merriam, 2009). In the event that respondents disclose new information relevant to the purposes of this study, the researchers asked probing and clarifying questions to collect more robust data. To ensure consistency across interviews and analysis, both researchers participated in all interviews.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were a purposeful sample intentionally chosen to include Leadership Educators teaching at the university undergraduate or graduate level, who identify as hailing from a culture that is different than the community in which they teach. The participant sample consists of men and women employed as Leadership Educators in university programs in the United States and abroad. Participants had been Leadership Educators for varying amounts of time and represented a variety of institutions-- from

U.S.-based international branch campus locations in China, to a private school in Mexico City, and a prestigious university in the United States. Some were new in their roles-- completing their first year, others had been teaching Leadership for three to five years, and still others had taught leadership for as many as twenty-five. While some participants also had some online teaching responsibilities, the on-site classroom experience was the focus of interviews for all participants. Refer to Table 1 displays the profiles of each participant in this research. To protect the anonymity of participants, each participant was assigned a number. The corresponding participant number will be used in lieu of the name throughout the report.

**TABLE 1  
PARTICIPANT PROFILES**

| Participant Number | Native Culture | Culture of LE Experience | Number of Years as LE |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1                  | Costa Rica     | Mexico/Canada            | 3                     |
| 2                  | USA            | China                    | 5                     |
| 3                  | USA            | China                    | 2                     |
| 4                  | USA            | China                    | 1                     |
| 5                  | Iran           | USA                      | 2                     |
| 6                  | USA            | China                    | 6                     |
| 7                  | USA            | Mexico                   | 3                     |
| 8                  | Iran           | USA                      | 25                    |
| 9                  | USA            | China                    | 3                     |
| 10                 | India          | USA                      | 16                    |
| 11                 | Venezuela      | USA                      | 5                     |
| 12                 | India          | USA                      | 5                     |
| 13                 | Netherlands    | USA                      | 16                    |
| 14                 | Armenia        | USA                      | 12                    |
| 15                 | New Zealand    | USA                      | 6                     |
| 16                 | Spain          | USA                      | 6                     |
| 17                 | Zimbabwe       | USA                      | 8                     |

**Data Analysis**

All interviews were recorded, then transcribed. Transcripts were reviewed, read, analyzed, and coded by each of the researchers. Both authors met regularly to discuss these codes and to clarify relationships between codes, to group codes and to develop new codes to account for alternative interpretations. These discussions led to the joint development of a coding framework, which was used by both authors to code the entire dataset. Additionally, the authors used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo Version 12

(QSR International Pty Ltd, Doncaster, VIC, Australia) for management and additional data analysis. The researchers also used the NVivo Collaboration Cloud function to ensure consistent and constant access to all coding and analysis information. Coding and analyzing qualitative data using Nvivo reveal common themes across participant experiences, perspectives, and demographics.

## FINDINGS

This section presents our findings, which also includes quotes from interviews. Three categories were identified that are linked with the experiences and perspectives of foreign-born Leadership Educators: *Recognize, Reflect, and Relate*.

### Recognize

The interview findings suggest that Foreign-born Leadership Educators enter and begin their roles with acknowledging-- to self and to others, their FbLE identity in the environments in which they present themselves. We define *recognize* as the motivational and aspirational elements of the cross-cultural Leadership Educator experience. It encompasses the element of *intention* such as spaces of those with specific plans to be a Leadership Educator to “be in touch with the next generation of leaders” (5), or simply to experience a different culture (4).

#### *Intention*

Recognize refers, in part, to the extent to which participants prescribe such intention to live and teach leadership in a foreign country. The findings revealed that *intention* ranged from using the FbLE position as a means to an end: “I had to teach to get my PhD” (16), to “I’m teaching (leadership) because I believe in the power of teaching to change people’s lives” (15), and one participant who targeted an opportunity to teach leadership in the United States, acknowledging that “most of the knowledge and the literature of leadership comes from the U.S.” (11). Where one participant saw the FbLE opportunity to change or continue a career (6, 13), others suggested they wanted the foreigner experience (4)-- with one participant ruling out any alternative environments in which to teach leadership, claiming “I only want to teach in a Chinese university” (3) for the environment and cultural perspectives relative to the foreign-born educator role.

While there appears to be no prescribed or common pathway leading to the role of a Foreign-born Leadership Educator, our findings did reveal shared experiences in the global business arena. One participant “worked for 35 years with big multinational companies in C-level positions” (11), and another had a history “I was running a company. I was the regional manager for a stock exchange company in New Zealand, Australia” (16). Additionally, many participants shared passions for teaching (12,15), social justice (5) and embracing the excitement of personal challenge (14); “Going somewhere else, being in a completely different environment where your knowledge is fresh and their knowledge is fresh and combining that is...exciting and interesting to me” (2).

#### *Introduction*

The current exploration into the experience of FbLEs reveals a wide variety of ways in which these educators announce their cultural identity to their students. The foreign-born leadership educator’s introduction refers to the style and preferred level of structure with which they articulate and acknowledge their cultural identity in the face of their students. At one end of the spectrum of formality are participants who do not make mention of their identity, “I don’t really formally announce anything” (5, 11, 12). Conversely, other participants explained a structured lecture or discussion to open the course: “I have an introductory (PowerPoint) slide where I show them pictures of my country,” as example (1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 16). Interestingly, those participants whose cultural identity becomes salient with their foreign names or the visible way in which they present themselves, there is a sense of obligation (9, 12, 15). “I don’t have a choice because my name is not English, and so there’s that initial awkward encounter of having the non-practiced name” (17).

Interestingly, multiple participants had indicated that they, intentionally or otherwise, do not give attention to their cultural identity. One FbLE admitted he does not think about his identity (15), another teased, “I give them some background about myself, but I don't necessarily try to wear my Indian identity on my sleeve” (12), and still another chose to claim a different cultural identity because of racial perceptions, “Sometimes it's It's an easier fight to win if that makes sense” (9).

One final revelation in the interview findings was in the number of participants who defined themselves as a combination of multiple cultural identities. These participants had taken some forms of abundance from each culture in which they had lived or worked. During the interviews, they referred to themselves as a “hybrid” (8) or a “mess” (10) when describing their identities. While they celebrated a primary cultural background, for or these participants, their cultural identity had been shaped and defined through experiences gathered during their formative years (16), or during their adult and professional lives (8, 10, 13, 14, 17).

## **Relate**

Relationships lie at the core of each participant's experience as a FbLE. The ways in which they *relate* to and with their peers, their students, the environment, and the leadership curriculum they teach define the FbLE experience more than any other factor.

### *Interaction*

Our interview findings suggest that much of the experience of foreign-born leadership educators is dependent upon the substantive relational experiences in- and out- of- the-classroom. Grounded in cultural norms, expectations, and perceptions, interpersonal interactions with colleagues and superiors, students, as well as social networks built with fellow community members were extremely important to FbLEs. Through the data analysis emerged several key relationships. While some participants shared stories of personal adventures in the greater community off campus: “when I first arrived, I had a conversation with a taxi driver who advised me ‘don't lose your flavor,’ and that has been something I've try to hold on to” (7), our findings highlight the relationships these educators have in their professional roles.

### *Students in the Classroom*

Within the boundaries of class time and space, FbLEs reported relationships with students that were seen as different from what they had experienced in their own cultures. A number of FbLEs noted a different level of respect students shown toward instructors (1, 3, 12, 14, 17). This difference manifested in daily situations: “Students (arrive) to class late-- even the first day of class, and look at me and say, ‘hey!’ That's not the respect I would get back home” (14), or at the end of the term in expressing dissatisfaction with a grade, “Students (in my culture) would never challenge their grade or would never sort of call out their teacher in any way in a public setting” (17). One FbLE (3) teaching at a U.S. International Branch Campus in China gave weight to the Chinese concept of *guanxi* in the ways in which students present in class as well as in the definitions of leadership they bring to the respective leadership course. Chinese students, products of a strong face culture, were viewed as less likely to engage with the FbLE and more hesitant to speak in class for fear of embarrassing themselves with an incorrect or inaccurate contribution.

One common theme throughout participant interviews was the perception of students' competencies and their ability-- or inability-- to comprehend the material or the method in which it was taught. Students of the host culture were perceived as unable to think critically (3, 6, 12), or engage in self-reflection (1, 5). In describing students' work, “it's not really personal, you know, internalizing it and then thinking about it and putting the pieces together, and then putting something brand new out there” (2).

Further, a number of participants had raised the idea of liability and misinterpretations of personal conduct as top reasons for adjusting their classroom presence. One participant (11) recounted a situation in which teaching in a foreign language led to a particular misunderstanding during which a group of graduate students took offense to certain elements of nonverbal communication. Those students brought their concerns to school administration, and the FbLE was subsequently reprimanded and removed from the course. A number of other participants echoed this notion of heightened sensitivity and “political



correctness” in the classroom (8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15), citing it as a reason for them to approach students with greater caution, and withhold part of themselves in the classroom. One participant shared, “I have had to take certain steps to ensure (students) don’t misinterpret my... style as a threat to their sense of identity or sense of well-being” (12), and another, “I’ve adopted a very strategic and carefully curated persona that I adopt in the classroom for my own protection” (17).

### *Students Outside the Classroom*

Spending time with students outside of class was generally avoided by the participants in this study. Time and again, FbLEs discussed the complexities in crossing the boundary from student-teacher to a more relaxed, casual relationship. “a lot definitely a blurred line between friends in students and the professional relationship and how that works” (4). Again, accepted cultural practices on the part of students was enough for some FbLEs to actively disregard any out-of-class interactions with students. Whether there existed a perceived opportunity to curry favor with the FbLE, “there’s always going to be in the back of their mind, ‘what can I say that’s going to improve my grade?’” (3), or clashing views of cultural expectations, FbLEs generally adopted a strategy to maintain strict boundaries with their students, “I have to be really careful and strategic and how I interact with students” (17).

### *Peers and Other Faculty*

The findings in this category revealed different dimensions of the peer support and its impact on the experiences of foreign-born faculty. The participants mentioned different kinds of peer support depending on their location. For example, participants recognized the importance of peer support in navigating the challenges of living and working in a foreign country (3, 17). Participants also talked about how hearing about other faculty facing the same kind of challenges helped him realize he is not alone, “I have more colleagues that are also foreign visiting professors... I’m not alone” (1). This sentiment was echoed by another participant (17), “I found community and support with other international faculty and that’s when we’re able to create our own community of support.”

The nature of peer support was described in a different way by the foreign-born faculty teaching the U.S. For instance, some participants talked about lack of peer support from fellow faculty members in the same department. Some of the statements from the participants reveal a lack of understanding of cultural differences among faculty. For instance, a foreign-born faculty member who identified as Latin American reflected on how daily interactions with fellow faculty members and in meetings highlight the need for cultural competency training at the departmental and institutional level. “(When) you walk into the room, nobody says hello. you just get into the boardroom and sit, and the meeting begins... I feel incredibly uncomfortable with that, so I do it, and I do it on purpose” (11). Lastly, the idea of building a community of peers was a common theme among the participants who identified as a person with a collectivist heritage (11, 15, 17). The desire to build a community of peers was strong among participants in our findings with one participant lamenting the concept of working lunches. “I think it’s important that during lunch you create another type of relationship. If you do something like that in Latin America or in southern Europe people will come and say, ‘well, why are you doing this?’ I see that this socialization process which is important to me (but) it is very different in the U.S. than it is in many other parts of the world” (11).

Relationships and interactions with faculty were seen as important beyond the individual and interpersonal realms. As part of the institutional and department culture, official meetings and collaborations offer opportunities for participants of this study to establish networks with members of the faculty ranks. Participant 11 shared his perception on challenges faced during faculty meetings and networking with other faculty members. “you walk into the room and nobody says hello-- (I) just get into the room, I sit and the meeting begins... and I feel, I feel incredibly uncomfortable with that.” Similarly, participant 15 recognized that, while leadership departments tend to be more emotionally intelligent, but that his colleagues are “not aware, they forget” about his foreign identity. The notion of being forgotten or overlooked was echoed in participant 17’s interview when she told us, “My colleagues weren’t really interested in knowing about my culture ... it was frustrating because it hindered the types of relationship that we could form beyond just the professional.”

### *Family*

A cornerstone relationship for nearly all of the participants was their connection to family. For some participants, their partners and immediate family accompanied them in the foreign culture (1, 3, 2, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16). The presence of their family frequently translated into an increased sense of comfort and confidence off campus, affording them more energy and perspective in the transition into the differences on campus and in the classroom. Even for those whose families were not immediately present, the influence of family played a key role in their life as an educator. Lessons from parents (6, 8, 10, 14, 16) permeated their individual philosophies and approaches to classroom teaching. “My dad and my mother were really giving people, and I think some of that translates into who I am” (10). Pedagogical and classroom management techniques were also founded on concepts of compassion, resourcefulness, accountability, and commitment instilled in the FbLEs by their parents (6, 8, 10, 16).

### *Engagement*

The interview findings revealed that leadership educators who identify as foreign-born bring different perspectives and values to the leadership curriculum. Their interaction with the material-- their *engagement* with theory, concepts, and models of leadership is very much influenced by their cultural identity. And understanding that they have arrived at a different understanding of leadership influences their facilitation of their students’ learning. “How you send the message changes, and you need to learn about the students-- how are they going to get the message, you can be motivated, or you can do it in a more subtle way” (15). One participant uses his foreign identity to “convey a different perspective or a different way” (13).

Interview participants acknowledged the differences in their perceptions of leadership, noting that some of the differences were a result of students’ youth and lack of exposure to leadership education. “They come to the class viewing leadership in very narrow terms and that is probably attributed to whatever popular reading they may have done about leadership or it could be popular culture, in terms of movies” (12). “It’s much more about positional leadership for sure” (10). Regardless of from where the difference originates, most of the participants are mindful to maintain balance the use of examples and concepts from the host culture with personal stories to increase the utility of the material (3, 9), as well as to stay clear of any potential misconceptions of academic colonialism (6, 4). A number of participants mentioned an agenda that seeks to avoid negative experiences for students, which might drive them to feel “bad” (9), “like a fool” (12), or cause them to “shut down” (15).

### *Infusion*

Inevitably, the cultural identity of the FbLE appears in the leadership lessons they teach. As noted by many participants, this was intentional on the part of their respective universities, who had recruited them with the goal of increasing the global identity of their faculty and curriculum (1, 15, 17). Whether through the use of culturally relevant examples (8, 11, 13), or in the ways in which the curriculum was delivered (1, 5, 14, 16), the FbLEs were aware of how their cultural identities shaped their professional roles. For some, the *infusion* of their cultural identity was an attempt to overcome other challenges in their educator roles, as noted by participant prior, who told the researchers, “you have to be adaptable; you have to be resourceful” Participant 17 shared her idea on the necessity in infusing personal culture into the leadership curriculum, “if we are to be making a case for leadership education as an important part of undergraduate learning and an undergraduate experience, then this is where leadership education can really make a difference when we prioritize intercultural competence and learning.”

### *Support*

The findings from our interviews pointed to support as a common, important relationship for Foreign-born Leadership Educators. Not only must FbLEs navigate challenges of a foreign national culture, but they must also maneuver an additional layer of adjustment to a new and different institutional culture as well. The assistance, guidance, and encouragement they receive during their FbLE journey emanates from multiple sources-- professionally, and personally. Participants acknowledged the significance of support for technical aspects of their experience (9, 3, 11, 12, 17), to situations with further-reaching implications

regarding their roles as educators (11). Most important to note, here, is the revelation of the gap in formal support mechanisms at the institutional and departmental levels (1, 7, 11, 13, 12, 14, 15, 17).

### *Departmental Support*

Almost all participants talked about the importance of departmental support for a smooth transition, but very few described the nature of such support received from their institution. The elements of such support varied in terms of the location of the institution. For the faculty teaching outside the U.S, communication of departmental expectations, student academic level, and institutional culture and living conditions were among the most important elements of support. Some faculty mentioned that their academic department played a small role in supporting them to acclimate to the new academic environment (9). Some participants noted the importance of departmental orientation and onboarding for the new faculty to prepare for their transition.

### *Institutional Support*

The interview findings showed there is a gross lack of alignment between institutions' aspirations for creating a globally diverse, inclusive environment and the existing institutional efforts in integrating cross-cultural training into the framework of the university. While the institutions put efforts into hiring faculty from diverse cultural backgrounds, our participants reported there is inconsistent effort expended for creating an environment conducive to smooth and successful integration of foreign-born faculty into the institution (1, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17). The need for formal guidance and assistance at the department and institutional level was undeniable among our participants. "If institutions are going to say they want to be global, and they want global engagement, and they hire international faculty, it's their responsibility to provide the support structures" (17). "It's actually very important... I had to learn things the hard way" (11). This was one area in which participant 17 was outspoken about how her support network of foreign-born faculty in other academic departments became crucially important: "any support we received was only because we had requested it."

The faculty participants posted to a U.S. international branch campus were able to speak of organized institutional onboarding and training but pointed out the training is inadequate and voluntary (2, 3, 4, 6, 9).

Additionally, there is an inadequate effort at all the institutions represented to prepare students for the global academic environment and broadening their cross-cultural perspectives while being successful in classrooms being facilitated by foreign-born educators. As FbLEs play a key role in the facilitation of students' leadership development and education, conversations with the participants of this study reveal that students at every level are ill-prepared to understand cultural differences in instructor communication, methods, and expectations.

### **Reflect**

As foreign-born leadership educators progress in their roles and professional development, their ability to *reflect* and make meaning of their experiences, relationships, and discoveries proved to be an important dimension of their identity. Reconciling the challenges and celebrating individual victories guides them to a better understanding of their place as leadership educators. The interview findings also reveal that individual's social identities beyond their cultural identity also has meaning in their overall experience. As one participant who now teaches in the United States described it, "since moving to the US., I've learned a lot about myself... sometimes voluntarily, sometimes involuntarily" (17).

Teaching leadership in the context of a foreign culture involves learning some of the histories, traditions, and deeply rooted issues of that culture. Participant 11 shared that it took some time and effort through research and questioning to come to an understanding of how slavery fits in the conversations of a U.S. leadership classroom, saying, "I'm beginning to understand what it means in this country." Similarly, another participant commented on the social climate regarding sexual identity, "values don't translate very well... gay in the Netherlands is different than the United States... I am slightly more careful" (13). Foreign-born Leadership Educators arrived at realizations like these as the result of introspective processes during their professional journeys.

### *Compromises*

Recognizing that the role of a foreign-born Leadership Educator requires one to adjust their style, technique, or suspend their personal values was a shared phenomenon among interview participants. Researchers were told that compromise is inevitable, “and when you don’t make those compromises, there is a price you pay” (8). Some attempted to hold on to their cultural identity in the face of challenges (8, 9), and others view compromise as part of the terrain in their new environment, “from the (the foreign leadership educator) colleagues I talk to, many of them feel conflicted that we are not teaching to the same standards we would expect back home” (6).

The ways in which compromise manifests itself in the FbLE experience was very individual. Participants cited language and cultural differences in education as cause for compromise in trying to facilitate critical thinking or reflection exercises (1, 3, 4, 5). Because of these differences, adjustments made by FbLEs included the omission of higher-level learning and content from the curriculum, “instead of allowing to be nuanced and complex. You have to make it really simple and easy to understand” (4). Other participants echoed a need to “limit” or “simplify the content” (1, 3, 4, 6, 15). Unsurprisingly, those participants from the IBC in China also discussed ways in which several leadership environments, such as politics, were viewed as taboo and absent in their class.

### *Opportunities*

Not every cultural difference in the classroom was viewed as a compromise. For some participants, teaching in a foreign culture presented new opportunities for class discussion or interactions not possible in their native culture. Foreign-born leadership faculty celebrated how teaching in the United States allows them to be outspoken about certain issues and social contexts, such as politics (5, 16, 10). Other participants adopted a similar perspective in the “fascination” of sharing in student discoveries. Bringing new ideas relative to leadership and introducing new concepts such as social justice were celebrated as “rewarding,” and a “true opportunity” (3, 4, 10, 15).

### *Considering Other Identities*

The ways in which foreign-born leadership educators present extends far beyond their cultural identity. Each of the participants pointed to other parts of their identity that influenced their experience as a leadership educator as much, or more, than their cultural identity.

For participants who identified as black or brown, racial identities were a salient part of their daily lives and interactions, and also shaped the ways in which they perceived their world (6, 10). Our interviews included excerpts that included stories of discrimination and mistreatment on the basis of racial identity. Participant 9 shared a perspective that her Chinese students’ responses to her might be explained by a lack of exposure to African Americans. Another black participant (6) makes attempts to include parts of his African American experience in his lecture, as a way in which he can change how “many Chinese people tend to think that black people are dangerous, or criminally involved.” For each of the persons of color in the participant sample, racial identity in a foreign context was a constant and necessary negotiation. Participant 17 shared her thoughts, “the body that I show up in as a black woman is going to impact my experience as an educator, but also in academe itself, and I am well aware that my racial identity plays into how students and colleagues view me.”

The interview findings also revealed that foreign-born leadership educators are keenly aware of the influence of gender identity. Whether male, female, or transgender, participant responses pointed to differences in cultural gender roles as an important dimension of their experiences abroad (1, 3, 5, 9, 10, 11). The concept of a glass ceiling was present for many of the leadership educators who identify as women. “I can feel that I sometimes need to prove myself more often to have the validation and credit to share my comments or to be who I am” (5). Another participant (10) shared this feeling of gender inequality, “as someone who has over and over and over seen how there is a glass ceiling for women that affects my perception of the world.” The only openly transgender participant (1) revealed that he is required to declare a gender identity for employment purposes, but he has not disclosed to his students. “I do not like that

human resources knows that I am trans, but my students do not... however that definitely impacts my teaching of leadership.”

## **DISCUSSION**

The present study aimed to explore the experiences of leadership educators who identify as foreign-born. The findings have shown that those educators who cross national and cultural borders experience their positions differently than if they had chosen to become a leadership educator in their native land. The findings have shown that these foreign-born leadership educators develop strategies, techniques, and adjust personal tolerances and styles to strike a balance in their cultural and professional identities. Through acknowledging their backgrounds to themselves, FbLEs recognize the differences in their educator roles. The most important factor of a foreign-born Leadership Educator’s experience is establishing relationships with their students, the curriculum, and with other members of their faculty communities. Foreign-born Leadership Educators experience different interactions with students, maintaining clear boundaries to avoid misinterpretation or misperception. Foreigners teaching leadership also perceive their students’ abilities and adjust the ways in which they engage the leadership curriculum. FbLEs also make it a priority to infuse lessons of culture-- theirs and their students’, to provide a more robust learning discussion. Departmental and institutional support for this population of Leadership Educators is currently inadequate, leaving FbLEs to develop their own strategies for navigating the unique challenges they face.

As leadership departments seek to adopt a more global approach to the curriculum and increase global diversity in their faculty, foreign-born leadership educators become an increasingly important asset. FbLEs add a lived global perspective to the curriculum and create an inclusive environment in which students and faculty develop cultural competencies in- and out-of-the-classroom. These foreign teachers of leadership develop a professional identity based on their cultural backgrounds and individual professional development. Where the extant literature has proclaimed the influence of culture on the ways in which leadership is practiced, perceived, and learned, these findings suggest that culture also has implications on the ways in which leadership education is facilitated.

As leadership studies programs continue to have a more global reach (Bourgeois & Bravo, 2018), these findings will be useful in understanding more about the Foreign-born Leadership Educator role and experience. Where other research has mapped the identity and development of Leadership Educators in a general sense (Seemiller & Priest, 2018; Jenkins & Owen, 2016), these findings begin to address the implications of culture and cultural identity on the academic role.

## **LIMITATIONS**

As with any study, this project is not void of limitations. Because the research followed a qualitative design, analysis of the data collected is subject to personal interpretation when coding according to emergent themes. Further, the current study only includes the experiences and perspectives of classroom educators. It neglects the value and insight of Leadership Educators who serve in extra-curricular, professional, community-based, or other capacities. Because data collection relied on single interview conversations, it is reasonable to expect that participants overlooked, omitted, or failed to recall important data for the study during their interviews.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Future research regarding foreign-born Leadership Educators could include those educators who facilitate Leadership Development in environments outside of the classroom. Further, as suggested by Seemiller and Priest (2018), the authors of the current study encourage a longitudinal research design to produce a more comprehensive set of data relative to FbLE development. Given the frequency with which participants spoke of salient social factors such as gender, race, and faith, the authors also recommend

meaningful exploration of the influence of socially constructed identities on an individual's Leadership Educator experience and identity.

Recommendations for future research may also include measurement of Cultural Intelligence (CQ). Previous studies have suggested that professional negotiators with high CQ levels are better equipped to navigate the difficulties and nuances of a cross-cultural context (Groves et al., 2015). Given the parallel of many themes and patterns of the FbLE experience and identity with the dimensions of Cultural Intelligence (Earley & Mosakowski, 2003; Van Dyne et al., 2012), the same principles may apply to Leadership Educators.

This research uncovers a glaring absence of support for foreign-born Leadership Educators. Overwhelmingly, participants communicated a lack of formalized assistance as they navigated the transition into their new, foreign surroundings. Institutions and academic departments may find these results useful to inform their selection and support agendas for foreign-born faculty. This support may arrive as cultural coaching and counseling, language training, as well as potential mentoring opportunities with other faculty members—both native and foreign-born. Beyond the institutional-level mechanisms of support that might be created, the authors endorse the creation of interest groups or communities within the international associations that espouse to support Leadership Educators.

The findings for the current study may also be used in the construction of a model of professional identity development for FbLEs. Such a model would serve as a guide throughout the foreigner's role of Leadership Educator, normalizing and supporting a successful progression in their development. The themes and patterns identified in our findings may help to map the experience from intention to reconciliation for prospective FbLEs, as well as those tasked with supporting them.

Finally, student awareness and preparation should not be overlooked. Creating opportunities for students to adjust expectations and purge preconceived stereotypes that might inhibit successful learning. It is not unreasonable to suggest learning modules, activities, and conversations to prepare students to engage in classrooms facilitated by a foreigner to assist those students with a greater understanding of the differences in perspectives, communication, and approaches created in the classroom of a foreign-born Leadership educator. Not only would these valuable skills and competencies serve them well in their individual journeys as students, but these would also benefit them in their lives and careers long after graduation.

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