

International student experience in Indonesia and public diplomacy consequences: Governance of Darmasiswa program

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ABSTRACT

This study discussed Darmasiswa program as Indonesia's public diplomacy effort in the educational fields conducted by the Republic Indonesia Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud RI). Despite its vast opportunities, Indonesia still has difficulties attracting international students compared to various neighboring countries. By analyzing the seven pillars of public diplomacy, supported by international communication and industry 4.0 concept, this study showed that Kemendikbud has considered the seven pillars in public diplomacy in conducting public diplomacy efforts. It is found that Darmasiswa is a state-directed effort designed to enhance favorable international relations through the student movement's positive experience. The strategy is formed by uses various types of communication channels that support each other's. The message is also processed by involving policy and rationality by prioritizing consistent, truthful, and credible as part of the main elements. Besides, they form strategies by maximizing cooperation with various parties. In Kemendikbud, the program undertakes audience research and actors from 1st and 2nd track diplomacy as part of its tactics. The program also found that public diplomacy in Darmasiswa program has acknowledged changes in the 4.0 era through new media usage. However, there are still many challenges encountered in the performance of the seven pillars.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Competition in the higher education sector has increased [1]. Global competition related to education services has spread out from only just a few countries that mostly speak English to new and developing countries [2]–[6]. According to Urbanovič *et al.* [7], a small countries are also currently facing challenges to play a role in the international student market. This condition becomes even more crucial because of the significant changes caused by industry 4.0, among them is the presence of new information and communication technologies that were being unavoidably used in various aspects of life [8]. Thus, educational institutions must maintain their competitive advantage, and their role has expanded by involving national governments to become one of the leading countries in the world of international education. Other research also disclosed that higher education had been used as soft power elements and public diplomacy efforts to increase people's interest in country values and norms [9], [10]. Where to do that, the role of government, higher education, institutions, and international students determines the strategy's success.

Previous research, state of the art, has discussed education as one of the main instruments in public diplomacy through various countries' approaches. International educational exchanges, according to Lima [11], are crucial to public diplomacy because they allow parties from different countries to interact in person, which can help lessen stereotypes and improve communication between nations. He stated that international students performed as culture carriers in educational exchanges. Additionally, Pan [12] noted that for the past 50 years, China's political, diplomatic, and economic objectives have all included the recruitment of international students. According to Pan's research, China's strategy is a state-directed initiative intended to strengthen positive international political and scholarly connections. While the nation has made important contributions to the creation of a global network for the delivery of cross-border education services. In order to draw in foreign students, the Chinese method often involves offering financial aid, highlighting the value of the Chinese language, and utilizing both domestic and foreign higher education resources.

Besides in China, Byrne and Hall [13] also analyzed education as a public diplomacy instrument adopted by Australian strategy. They hold that a nation's reputation and capacity to have an impact on regional or global results can both be enhanced by the positive experiences of the student movement. Additionally, Australia's foreign policy aims and interests, notably its soft power profile, are best served through international education [14]. Public diplomacy is an essential component of Australia's foreign policy since it addresses the subjective component of international relations.

Likewise, Trisni [15] also discussed how South Korea conducts public diplomacy through the King Sejong Institute Center Indonesia (KSIC). His research shows that in a short period, KSIC Indonesia has successfully carried out its duties as an official representative of South Korea by attracting Indonesian attention towards their culture and education. This effort is also carried out by another country such as Malaysia and Hong Kong which focusing their message on the cultural heritage and colonial legacy, and Singapore who is more eager to attract foreign students through their knowledge and economy [16], [17].

Additionally, Bettie [18] evaluated the Fulbright program as one of America's educational public diplomacy initiatives in her research. She thought that in the context of public diplomacy, educational interchange is carried out under the assumption that regular citizens can become an accurate and competent representation of the state. Fokin *et al.* [19] added by explaining how United States public diplomacy is used as part of the strategy that is considered as important as the potential of the military and economic as a tool to shape the unipolar world.

To conclude, in the practice of diplomacy, many countries have tried to expand their national interests through education [20]. Where education plays a central role for a long time, from the era of colonialism to the post-colonial. It plays an essential role in advancing national influence and is considered an ideal tool for soft power. It is used to disseminate information and knowledge about their foreign policy, language, cultural traditions, and way of life in order to strengthen their economy, get worldwide recognition, and forge cultural ties among the larger society [12], [21]–[23].

However, Indonesian still have difficulties in attracting international students. The data by ICEF [24] showed the number of international students in Indonesia is still small. There were less than 7.000 study permits issued by the government in 2016, which is quite disappointing, considering that Indonesia has a huge opportunity to increase the number of international students significantly. Based on QS world rankings version, Indonesian universities become parts of the best university [25], with University of Indonesia at the highest-ranked at 57th. Besides just education benefits, Indonesia also offered many other things, which include its natural beauty, a multiethnic nation made up of more than 300 islands. In addition, Indonesia has the largest economy in Southeast Asia, the fourth-largest population in the world, one of the most active democracies in the East Asia Pacific, and a low cost of living, it is also a young country and many more that could be a supporting element to attract foreign students [26], [27].

Compared to various neighboring countries, such as Malaysia as one of the examples, Indonesia has lagged far behind, where the number of international students in Malaysia based on Ministry of Education Malaysia [28] in 2014 has penetrated more than 108.000 with a target of 250.000 in 2025. Indonesia is ranked number 5 in educational fields in Southeast Asia, under Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore [29]. There are several reasons Indonesia has difficulties attracting international students. Previous research [30] described two of them that Indonesian higher institutions have not been widely known abroad and limited access to promotion. So, Indonesia needs to cultivate the nation's cultural wealth that is not possessed by others. Moreover, Indonesia's difficulties in attracting international students are also due to its country's international image. Indonesian higher education has not been fully recognized yet and is closely related to developing countries that are unsafe due to many previous incidents such as terrorism, demonstrations, and crime [31]. This becomes important because according to several previous studies, country destination images and perceptions of risk are become a major concern for foreign students [32]–[35]. Thus, communication strategies used to create mutual understanding, eliminate misconceptions, and build a positive image related to Indonesia to attract international students in the 4.0 era have become important.

One of Indonesia's responses regarding this is the Darmasiswa scholarship program. In Indonesia, Darmasiswa is one of the prime programs formed by the Republic Indonesia Ministry of Education and Culture to support public diplomacy efforts in the education field [36]. Create to bring international students through a scholarship to promote and increase their interest in the Indonesian language and culture through the learning experience and, at the same time, create their understanding of Indonesia through direct experience. It is "a scholarship program offered to all foreign students from countries which have diplomatic relationship with Indonesia to study language, art, and culture. Participants can choose one of the selected universities located in different cities in Indonesia" [36].

The program was formed to bring international students representatives who have been selected to study in Indonesia for one year. The program allows students to live in the position of Indonesian citizens who are considered to indirectly absorb Indonesian core values in their daily activities, creating their way to think, believe, evaluate, and understand [36]. At the end of the program, it is expected that students' attitudes towards Indonesia society will create based on reality rather than existing stereotypes. They can become ambassadors who spread the message to the people they know in their home country. The program could then trigger mutual understanding, image improvement, stronger relationships, and efforts to attract more international students. This program is organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud RI) as part of the government that was responsible for managing international students, including creating some efforts to attract and increase the number.

Thus, based on the explanation, the researchers notices that it is essential to know further about public diplomacy strategies through education sectors that a state could do to attract international students by considering industry 4.0 as one of the primary strategy. The author is interested in further exploring the public diplomacy strategies employed by the Republic Indonesia Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology through the Darmasiswa program to attract international students in the 4.0 era, the challenges faced and how to overcome them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Public diplomacy

The term public diplomacy was first introduced in 1965 by researcher and career diplomat [37]. The term was first described as "... influence public attitudes in the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy ... (including) the formation of governments, of public opinion in other countries; interaction between private interest groups from different countries; inform the population on international affairs and their influence on domestic policy; communication between those whose function is communication even, as well as diplomats and foreign journalists; (and) the process of intercultural communication."

Likewise, Metzgar [38] defines public diplomacy as "a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies." It is defined by Melissen [39] as a tool for building soft power. Whereas, according to Gilboa [40], public diplomacy is placed as a tool to create a positive relationship in international relations jointly. In the context of Darmasiswa program itself, the United States Government, especially the State Department, introduced the definition of public diplomacy as "... government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries. Its chief instruments are scholarships, publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio, and television." From these various definitions, it could conclude that public diplomacy is a people-centric activity aimed to convey positive aspects of a country. It is part of the government's communication activities or each individual to achieve a goal set in the international context. Three significant transformations differ public diplomacy from the traditional one [41].

First, public diplomacy has expanded its targets by added foreign publics, which previously only targeted foreign governments. Traditionally, governments have tried to persuade only those at the highest political level in the target country. Still, they have begun to recognize the value of influencing the people rather than just the government. Second, in public diplomacy, the government starts to recognize soft power. Soft power is considered an essential asset, especially for middle countries that do not have enough hard power to achieve their political and economic goals. Third, public diplomacy involves government and non-government stakeholders, such as civilians, private companies, and non-governmental organizations. This change does not imply that the role of government is becoming less important. The researchers point out that diplomacy cannot be carried out efficiently without government direction, where the government needs to coordinate stakeholders, promote related activities, and provide advice [41], [42]. To conclude, the fact that public diplomacy covers a wider range of persons, interests, and strategies from both the communicator's and the communicant's point of view distinguishes it from the idea of traditional diplomacy [39].

The pillars that serve as the base or cornerstone of international communication aimed at the foreign public in order to accomplish a specific goal are another crucial component of public diplomacy. Related to this, Ross [43] identified seven pillars or principles of public diplomacy. The study explained that this pillar was being used to achieve the public diplomacy objectives, which are to inform, engage, and influence foreign publics. Ross believes that by applying these pillars a country can advance not only its national interests but also its universal values that they want to share with the world. This pillar consist of: public advocacy (ensuring that the target audience for foreign policy is understood in its actual form, not as others perceive it), reasons and rationale (the need for policy explaining, demonstrating, and justifying the rationality of its core values), constant, truthful, and credible (submission of consistent calls, truthful and persuading the international community); specific audiences (ability to adapt calls to the target audience, whose constituents are constantly studied); communication channels (carrying out activities not only on narrow target segments but also through mass media print and broadcast aimed at the broad masses); alliances and partnerships (working with various partners to include new representatives of the target audience); dialogue and exchange (communication and active international exchange programs).

2.2. The 4.0 revolution industry

The 4.0 industry revolution itself was officially born in 2011 [44], defined as “the integration of complex physical machinery and devices with networked sensors and software, used to predict, control and plan for better business and societal outcomes” [8]. It is a period where the main element that exists is the connection between the real and the virtual world [45]. Similar to that, industry 4.0 is the integration of digital and internet technologies to alter every area of production [46]. It is a time that emphasizes the availability of information quickly [47]. So, based on the statement, it can be concluded that industry 4.0 is a series of changes in human life built on the availability of broad digital technology.

One of the characteristics of industrial revolution 4.0 is information and communication technology [48]. It has then resulted in changes in the way humans think, live, and interact with each other. This era disrupted various human activities in various fields, both political, economic, social, and others. In the social domain, the interaction between individuals and groups becomes unlimited because of the presence of internet access and technology. One of the changes that must be a concern in the development of industry 4.0 is the presence and increase in the use of new media or digital media. Besides, in this era, innovation skills are become more important [49]. As an addition, Hashim [50] stated that the use of technology in a progress of living during this era become a necessity.

The term of new media refers to the development of networks utilizing digital, computer, or information and communication technologies in the latter half of the 20th century [51]. A sort of convergence or merging of traditional media with digital media is known as new media. It is a sort of media whose information is sent via the internet system and consists of a mix of data, text, voice, and different kinds of digitally recorded images. The natural evolution of new media or the Internet has shifted communication from one-to-many to many-to-many, which supports a variety of involvement orientations and the heterogeneity of communicational practices and material [52]. In Indonesia, new media development has reached social and political issues, offering not only useful new media but also more creativity and engagement than traditional media channels, as well as low-risk social mobilization strategies [46].

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Type of the study

A descriptive qualitative approach is adopted in this study. This qualitative study can give an overview of ideas and layouts that can be used to provide in-depth knowledge about research issues [53]. Use for evaluation reasons and to have a deeper understanding of the current problems. With a case study, which Farquhar [54] defines as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context is not clearly evident,” this qualitative descriptive structure is used. It concentrates on a certain unit, making the analysis and research findings more specialized or in-depth [55].

3.2. Research focus

The problem in a qualitative study rest on the research focus, where this focus is another important element in a study. The purpose of setting focus is to limit the study so that the material or discussion is not too narrow or broad and meet the research objective. The focus of this research itself is the pillars in public diplomacy according to Ross [43] that includes public advocacy; reasons and rationale; consistent, truthful, and credible; specific audiences; communication channels; alliances and partnership; dialogue and exchanges. The approach using this is considered following the existing topic because it could give in-depth

information about how Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology attract international students facing the 4.0 era by using communication as one of the key elements.

3.3. Data collection method

Data collection techniques are activities that aim to collect the data to studying someone or something [56]. The data collected by the author is divided into two. First, primary data, obtained directly from related people by going directly to the field. To collect primary data the author uses interview techniques. Interviews were conducted with a total of 14 informants, which include two Indonesia Ministry of Education and Culture representative, one Indonesia Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative, three experts, and eight Darmasiswa alumni (among them are Australian, Ukraine, European, Philippines, and Chinese), which were digitally recorded with permission. Second, is the secondary data, obtained from various sources that already exist, both in the form of books, journals, theses, newspapers, magazines, internet, and others. This secondary data is used to strengthen and complement the information obtained from the results of the interview.

3.4. Data analysis method

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana [57] discussed how qualitative research is analyzed. It was explained that the analysis of qualitative research data was divided into three stages, which took place in cycles, from stages one to three and returned to stage one. Following are the stages of qualitative research [57]: first, data codification, is the data coding stage, in here, the author rewrites the notes that have been found in the field, whether in the form of recordings. After being rewritten, the author reread and marked information that was deemed important. Then an interpretation of the information conveyed by the informant is carried out and different codes are given according to the theme. Second, data presentation, in this stage, the author presents the findings in the form of categories or groupings. It could serve by using metrics, tables, or diagrams. Intended to find patterns in the interview results. Third, conclusion withdrawal, drawing conclusions from the existing findings, this is obtained from the author's understanding of the interview. These three steps continue to be carried out and repeated every time there is new data.

3.5. Reliability test method

To determine the validity of the data, trust checking techniques are required. To conduct a trust check there are several techniques could be used, and in this research, the authors used a data source triangulation, by seeing the information from various perspectives obtained from the interviews, which is the communicator (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology and Ministry of Foreign Affairs), communicants (Darmasiswa alumni), and third parties (experts).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data obtained through interviews, and the literature study conducted, it is found that public diplomacy is defined as people-centric, aimed at the foreign public, often described as a one-way flow of communication, and intended to convey positive aspects about a country. It is part of the government's communication activities or each individual to achieve a goal set in an international context. What distinguishes it from traditional forms of diplomacy is the reality that public diplomacy involves a broader set of people, interests, and strategies, both from the communicator's and communicant's point of view [39]. The transformation that occurred in the 4.0 era eventually also created a shift in the communication form and process in many activities, including public diplomacy [58]. It has created a global arena for disseminating information more quickly and interactively.

This research found that various sectors can be used as public diplomacy elements, including the education sector. Here, education has been used as soft power elements and public diplomacy efforts to increase people's interest in Indonesian values and norms. It plays an essential role in advancing national influence and is considered an ideal tool for soft power. It is used to deliver knowledge and information, either related to the language, cultural traditions, ways of life, and foreign policy, to foster international recognition, eliminate misconception, and build connections in the global community, that finally used to attract more international students. The Darmasiswa program then became one of the prime programs that was formed to support Indonesia public diplomacy efforts in the education field [36].

In the context of Darmasiswa, the United States Government, especially the State Department, introduced the definition of public diplomacy as "... government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries. Its chief instruments are scholarships, publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio, and television." It is found that Darmasiswa is a state-directed effort designed to enhance favorable international relations through positive experience of the student movement. Create to build mutual understanding and eliminate misconceptions related to Indonesia as an effort to attract

international students through learning experiences. The seven pillars in public diplomacy that become the focus of the research [43].

4.1. Public advocacy

The first pillar discussed by Ross [43] is public advocacy. This pillar confirms that the most important thing to consider in conducting public diplomacy is ensuring that foreign audiences can understand the relevant foreign policy. Discuss how various activities of individuals and groups can influence or support a nation's particular cause or policy. The main policies that become the main goal in this program itself are stated in Republic of Indonesia Law Number 24 of 2009 Article 44 about Indonesia ideals to improving the function of Indonesia language into an international language; and Republic of Indonesia Law Number 5 of 2017 concerning the advancement of Indonesian culture amid of world civilization. This program gives full tuition fees specifically to only international students in the Indonesian Language Program for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) and Culture major, so it is considered that this program is to create as a form of strategy to build international students understanding and love towards Indonesia culture and language through education as an effort to support the mentioned policy.

Furthermore, several policies are needed to be understood by international students in Darmasiswa program. This program includes making student visas, Darmasiswa program procedures, and general regulations such as local traditions, customs, laws, and religions that apply. The authors notice that Kemendikbud RI has considered public diplomacy's first pillar through information provision about the existing policies. Besides, the Kemendikbud RI has regarded digital developments using its website as part of the communication channel for delivering the policy. However, it cannot be denied that the efforts made for public diplomacy are still considered a minimum, where there are still some deficiencies found such as incomplete information, language barriers, and uneven distribution of information.

4.2. Reasons and rationale

The next pillar discussed by Ross [43] is still in the context of message conveyed to the audience. The research described that the message delivered must have the ability to explain the existing policy, and at the same time could demonstrate and justify the rationality of its fundamental values [43]. The research also explained that in public diplomacy; the message must explain the reasons for specific foreign policy. To fulfill this pillar, the explanation of program reasons and rationale; and introduction of Pancasila as the principles of Indonesia's underlying policy has become part of the plan presented to the participants. Kemendikbud tried to implement this pillar on various communication channels through the indirect and general approach. Moreover, the participants had received and understood the message associated with this element. However, it is unfortunate that Pancasila itself has not been a part of the compulsory material delivered by universities in this program. The imperative is in line with the Kemendikbud policy, which provides freedom of autonomy and learning material to each university. The understanding gained by international students regarding this pillar is still considered to be at a primary stage.

4.3. Consistent, truthful, and credibility

The third pillar discusses how messages conveyed on an international scale must be consistent, honest, and credible to create trust and build a good relationship with the international public. These three elements have been attempted to be conveyed by Darmasiswa through several approaches, including by showing that they are willing to be open about everything and adopting a transparent culture which is described by monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on the implementation of the program; provide information and news through existing communication channels related to an exclusive peek into the number of foreign and state students participating in the program each year, government budget costs for this program, details of the costs given to participants, organizing related meetings and their results; procurement of testimonials in the series of messages by created a 'what students say' section to provide reviews to other Darmasiswa participants, whether through writing, drawing or video. Even so, the effort is still considered minimum and not sufficient, both from government, experts, and participants point of view.

4.4. Specific audiences

The fourth pillar discusses the recipient of the message. This pillar becomes essential considering that different targets will require different approaches Kemendikbud has made research efforts with data processing on student visa applications from international students every year to achieve the appropriate target. Through this data, Kemendikbud then narrows the audience based on their geography (location) and demographics (age, gender, and education level). To learn more about the target audience itself, other efforts made are by utilizing the use of questionnaires conducted before and after the program. These questions then

help Kemendikbud to narrowing their audience based on the psychographics, specifically based on their attitudes or opinions related to the existing topic.

The same thing was also tried to be achieved through interviews conducted in the selection process conducted at each country's embassies, both online and offline. It was found that there were several countries with the highest number of participants during the implementation of the Darmasiswa program from 1986-2019, where Japan with 676 students, Thailand with 667 students, and China with 504 students occupied the highest position. The largest number of participants also came from other Asian countries, including South Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Australia, Russia, and Timor Leste. In the context of Darmasiswa itself, the target audience then narrowed to only address foreign nationals aged 18-27 years and completed secondary education or its equivalent as part of the registration requirements. To put it in general, generation Z becomes the target audience of the Darmasiswa program for now.

4.5. Communication channels

The next pillar discusses the use of communication channels. The choice of communication channels becomes more critical, especially in the digital age, where the message conveyed must be accurate and fast [43]. In here, Darmasiswa uses communication channels consisting of new media (website, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter), and interpersonal communication (before, during, and after the implementation of the program). Regarding the use of new media, the Darmasiswa website is becoming the primary source of new media information. Facebook has become Darmasiswa social media which has the highest interactivity. On the other hand, even though we are in the 4.0 era, interpersonal communication has still become the main communication channel used by Kemendikbud in the Darmasiswa program. There are several obstacles found in the utilization of new media by Darmasiswa, including inconsistency in uploading content, ignorance of some features, and the slow response in answering many questions.

4.6. Alliances and partnership

This sixth pillar discusses the need for international alliances, both from the government organizations, private sectors, and non-profits, to be able to reach a specific audience. The cooperation carried out by Kemendikbud in this program itself is done with various parties, both inside and outside the country, including with 135 countries that have cooperative relations in this program, cooperation with the Ministry of Education in each local government, foreign universities, Indonesian foreign ministry, and 72 Indonesia universities. Moreover, it would be helpful that the cooperation for implementing public diplomacy efforts in the education field can expand by involving more stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations, communities, private companies, experts, and others who have a connection in the Darmasiswa program.

4.7. Dialogue and exchanges

The last pillar discussed how communicators must build trust and mutual understanding through a sincere commitment to dialogue. This pillar explains that communicators must show their side of equality in international communication efforts. Stress that the most dominant element in achieving effective communication is the communicator, since they are the one who carries out all forms of the pillars. In the Darmasiswa program, the one that held the role of the communicator itself is diverse. However, the Ministry of Education and Culture has a position as a leader in implementing the program. To implement this pillar, Indonesia involves actors from the 1st track diplomacy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and public universities), and it has also reached actors from the 2nd track diplomacy (private universities and alumni) as several representatives who act as communicators to build a foundation of trust and mutual understanding through dialogue. Besides, other efforts undertaken to create a sincere commitment to dialogue in this program are to utilize questionnaires carried out before and after conducting the program to obtain feedback. That feedback is expected to help build public diplomacy efforts. The improvement will become evident that they listen to the people who can increase their understanding and interest in Indonesia. In implementing this pillar, we also suggest maximizing its achievements to form a positive image of Indonesia in the target country by involving more actors from the 2nd track diplomacy such as the international media and celebrity.

5. CONCLUSION

In this study, it is found that Indonesia had tried to implement the seven pillars of public diplomacy through various approaches by considering the development of industry 4.0 at the same time. However, many challenges need to be encountered in implementing the seven pillars, especially for achieving purposes that Indonesia is a reliable partner through the education process. In this study, one of the challenges found regarding Indonesia public diplomacy in the field of education was its minimum effort and attention given, therefore the study results suggest making more research related to similar efforts, both in terms of

communication, social, economic, and other sectors as an encouragement to the Indonesian government regarding the importance of this effort. In addition, further research needs to be done when the COVID-19 period has ended, bearing in mind that the implementation of the Darmasiswa program for this year has been temporarily suspended, so that it can be further analyzed related to how this phenomenon in the future encourages Indonesia, especially the Darmasiswa program, to continue to achieve its existing goals by using the advantages offered in 4.0 era. The academic advice is also aimed to minimizing the limitations of this research and create further awareness and understanding from the world community regarding the importance of education as part of public diplomacy.

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