

Study Abroad Experience: Personal and Professional Aftereffects of Professors from a Public Costa Rican University

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine some frequent personal and professional aftereffects that professors might encounter after a study-abroad experience. The study took place in a public Costa Rican university. The participants were seven English professors who answered a questionnaire, a survey, and an interview. The findings disclose the most common aftereffects that were experienced by the professors after their sojourn. In brief, these common aftereffects were the gain of independence, the competency to contribute to the native country, the feeling of rejection towards Costa Rica's bureaucracy, and the feeling that co-workers feel threatened.

Key words: personal aftereffects, professional aftereffects, professors, study abroad

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es determinar algunos de los cambios personales y profesionales que los y las docentes pueden enfrentar luego de estudiar en el extranjero. El estudio se realizó en una universidad pública costarricense. Los y las participantes fueron siete docentes de inglés, quienes respondieron a un cuestionario, una encuesta y una entrevista. Las conclusiones exponen los principales cambios experimentados por los y las docentes luego de su estadía en el extranjero. En resumen, los cambios más significativos fueron la independencia obtenida, la habilidad de contribuir al país de origen, el sentimiento de rechazo hacia la burocracia costarricense y el sentimiento de que sus compañeros y compañeras de trabajo se sentían amenazados.

Palabras claves: cambios personales, cambios profesionales, profesores, estadía en el extranjero

Introduction

To study abroad is increasingly becoming more popular. Students and professors from a wide range of fields travel abroad for numerous reasons. One of the reasons consists on the financial support that professors receive from institutions that help them accomplish their sojourn. More recent studies state some of the common reasons why people study abroad such as learning educational methods for the teaching and learning processes, obtaining acknowledgement from current or future employers, improving their skills of a foreign language, and broadening their cultural perception, among others (Shank, 1961; Teichler & Steube, 1991). The reasons a person has to study abroad vary from case to case; nevertheless, these experiences attract the attention of many professionals and it is becoming more common to travel abroad for personal and/or professional development.

Although several authors have discussed the topic of studying abroad, research has tended to focus more on the studying abroad experience itself than on the analysis of the aftereffects encountered by returnees, who should be aware of some of the situations they may face during the reintegration process to their home country. The experience of studying abroad carries with it a lot of different adaptations for the person who circulates from one country to another (Salazar, 2003, p. 107); therefore, an approximation to the setting that they may encounter is of great help. The aim of this study is to determine the personal and professional aftereffects that some professors who teach English at a Costa Rican university encountered after studying abroad. This research paper answers three questions that are the main axis of the study:

- What are a group of professors' views on the experience of studying abroad?
- Did the experience benefit them in their personal life?
- Did the experience benefit them in their professional life?

Literature Review

Studying abroad is not a new trend among professionals who want to expand their knowledge in different areas. Every day, the number of travelers increases and with their stay abroad so does increase the amount of people who encounter different aftereffects. These inevitable events after the sojourn can be catalogued as positive or negative, and some returnees may encounter both. This research deals with positive and negative aftereffects as regards to the professional and personal spheres of seven Costa Rican English professors. In the English field, people may find studying abroad captivating because of the language exposure and their increased cultural awareness. For many professors, one of the main goals of studying abroad is to transmit the experience from their sojourn and the knowledge acquired abroad to their students

and the institutions they will work for in the home country. While studying abroad, professors expand their language skills, their cultural awareness, and their teaching techniques and methods. Furthermore, the aftereffects that university professors have experienced in their professional and personal life are mostly uncertain due to the lack of research in the Costa Rican context. Various foreign researchers have investigated about the studying abroad topic, but only a few of them have addressed the by-product of these experiences when the person returns to the home country. Several situations after the sojourn are inevitable and are worth studying as future point of reference for professors who want to work and/or study abroad. For this study, these situations encountered in the personal and professional spheres will be divided into benefits or limitations, depending on the personal experiences of the participants. The methodology used in previous studies present data collection instruments such as observations, questionnaires, interviews, and surveys, which contribute to a qualitative investigation that measures experiences, personal opinions, and beliefs, among others. Yet, people from various places and at different times encounter diverse outcomes of studying-abroad experiences. Therefore, the same conclusions cannot be expected and overgeneralized for every population due to diverse variables such as age, country of origin, culture, time, and others. For the most part, studies show more positive consequences than negative ones, placing the participation in study-abroad programs as one of the most rewarding stages that people might experience in their lives.

When referring to positive outcomes in the personal sphere, most of the studies highlight that participants in different programs abroad experience a change of attitude, personal growth, and cultural awareness. Although cultural awareness is more common to happen because of the exposure to other cultures, the change of attitude and the personal growth in people who study abroad may vary and cannot be overgeneralized. In the study made by Jean and John Gullahorn (1966), the students who claimed a bigger personal development and satisfaction were the youngest students. The authors stated that "Typically, the high scorers on this dimension were represented by younger, unmarried female students..." (p. 51). To put it in another way, for younger students who have not fully developed their personality, an experience abroad might help them identify who they really are and who they want to become. Conversely, professional adults are not in the search of an identity, and they study abroad for other reasons, such as research and professional growth. Furthermore, in the article published by Carmen Salazar (2003, p. 112), the interviews that she administered to six professors from the University of Costa Rica (U.C.R.) after their experience abroad showed that due to the separation from the family, the opportunity to live alone, and the decisions that they had to make, the returnees showed a positive change in their attitude and personal growth. In short, the professors who travel and study abroad get to experience life from a different perspective than the Costa Rican one. When people live abroad, they can compare the home to the host country and these comparisons help the travelers to better understand where they come from. Also, when being abroad, professors need to adapt to different working and studying systems, and

they are more likely to live alone or with people who are not their family. They undergo a more independent life far away from their loved ones. In most cases, they have to make decisions without help from others, having into consideration that the consequences of a poorly made decision will only affect them and no one else. Moreover, these three personal positive aftereffects may be experienced not only by the opportunity of living independently but also by the interaction with people from the host country. Maha N. Younes and Sylvia M. Asay (2003) mentioned that "Within this theme, members unearthed new personal insights, gained new perspectives on their interactions with others, discovered ethnocentric beliefs, and realized their own competence" (p. 145). Finally, cultural awareness is an important aftereffect that mostly depends on the interaction that returnees had with the people from the host country and other cultures. By interacting with foreigners and comparing one's culture to others, people may feel identified with what their culture means and accept those who think differently. Also, professors have the opportunity to reevaluate themselves and discover how they react in another context. The results mentioned above seem to have enriched professors' perception about themselves and contributed to positive personal outcomes; nevertheless, professionals may also encounter drawbacks after returning from their time abroad without expecting them.

Even though most of the investigations on study-abroad programs show more positive results than negative ones, the negative personal follow-up situations are worth mentioning so that professors are aware of what to expect. Contrary to the three personal benefits described previously, only one negative aftereffect relates to the personal sphere, but it weighs heavily over the returnees. When professors live abroad, they might face a re-entry culture shock that will contribute to the difficulty of re-adapting to the home country and enjoying their arrival. They may experience re-entry culture shock in different situations and moments of their life by feeling rejection towards Costa Rica's bureaucracy, Costa Ricans' attitude, inefficiencies of the system, and the lack of technologies that they may have used in the host country (Salazar, 2003). In addition, returnees may possibly face difficulties accepting personal changes in members of their family and/or friends. In some cases, people might not show as much interest in the professors' experiences abroad and they might feel restricted to share their experience (Salazar, 2003, p. 113). As a result, some professors who encounter re-entry shock do not feel comfortable committing to the home country and their students. Moreover, some professors may even feel so alienated to their own country that they return to their host country, contributing to "the brain drain effect" or "the migration talent" (Flack, 1976; Salazar, 2003). Even though this is not the case for all the professionals who go abroad, "the brain drain effect" refers to those people who decide to stay in the host country or who decide to go back after returning to their home country (Flack, 1976, p. 112). This migration presents a negative effect for society because one of the objectives of study-abroad programs is that professionals return to the home country and apply their recently acquired knowledge. For this study, the brain drain effect will not be taken into consideration as a negative personal outcome since

the negative effects do not fall on returnees per se; nevertheless, it is worth mentioning to avoid it from becoming a bigger issue in the country. Although only one substantial negative personal aftereffect is present in the literature, other findings present significant positive contributions to the professional sphere of the professors who study abroad.

A large percentage of people who study abroad want to obtain a degree, improve their foreign language, or apply their new knowledge and experiences in the classroom. Two of the main commonalities among these positive professional aftereffects are the longing to be acknowledged by the future or present employer and to contribute to the home country. Edward W. Weidner (1966) referred to the reasons why professors go abroad, which are mainly to do research and to learn new teaching techniques, and he mentioned how universities offer help with paperwork, budget, and better positions for those who study abroad (p. 61). Most professors have economic support from the institutions they work for, especially universities, which awakens extrinsic motivation for them to acquire a degree abroad and to go back to the home country to apply their new knowledge. For English professors specifically, second language improvement is one of the main reasons why they might want to travel. Ulrich Teichler and Wolfgang Steube (1991) analyzed the main objectives of different studying abroad programs around the world and pointed out that "Improvement of foreign language proficiency was most often stressed by U.S. programmes..." (p. 332). Therefore, Costa Rican professionals who study in the United States may benefit from the focus of most programs on the improvement of the competent use of English. Also, the constant exposure to the language in daily life situations may help the professor improve the language as well. Finally, professors who study abroad have the opportunity to share their new knowledge with their students, colleagues, and institutions. An advantage of their work as educators is that they can transmit what they learned to their students, enriching their students' academic training (Salazar, 2003, p. 112). Furthermore, professors might also have the opportunity to promote positive changes in academic programs or specific educational areas. Most of the times, when a university sends a professional to obtain training abroad, one of the main goals is for people to apply the knowledge acquired in the area to the institution they work for in the home country. For this reason, the contribution to the country is an important outcome considered in many studies that benefits the institution as well as the returnees. What is more, the professors might even receive a higher salary or a better work position as a result of these positive follow-up situations after their stay abroad. While professors are likely to experience positive outcomes in the professional sphere, they may also face negative results that may interfere with their re-adaptation process.

The positive by-products in the professional area also exceed the negative ones. Some of these negative results are more likely to occur if the returnee comes from a developed country (host country) to a developing country (home country). Because of the advantages in technology and materials available that students find in a developed country, the readjustment to the home country

might be more difficult than expected. In the study made by Carmen Salazar (2003), the results showed that some of the negative consequences are the differences in technology and infrastructure, the low salaries in the home country compared to those in the host country, and the job insecurity. These limitations go hand by hand with re-entry shock, and they will contribute to the challenging task of readapting to the home country. Likewise, even though some professors are sent to study abroad by the institution they work for, some other professionals might find an opportunity on their own. In the latter case, job insecurity is an issue because professors do not have a secured job to go back to when they return to the home country, and they do not know if the institution that will hire them is going to recognize the degree they acquired abroad. In addition to job insecurity and technologies available, some research results prove the personal growth to be greater than the professional one. Although this observation cannot be overgeneralized to all study-abroad experiences, to mention it can be valuable for future travelers. Donald J. Shank (1961) in his analysis about why American students go abroad discovered that "Most American students testify that major educational growth abroad is in general education rather than in their subject fields" (p. 108). Shank's research noted an unexpected flaw of the study-abroad experiences since it could be thought that people who study abroad receive preparation only in their field of study. As mentioned previously, the age of the students might be an important variable for Shank's (1961) results because undergraduate students and graduate students go abroad for different reasons. Nevertheless, the negative aftereffects at an academic level are significant to acknowledge regardless of the age of the participants; and even if some of them are more likely to happen, dealing with these situations may benefit the professors. Equally important, some other significant discoveries are exposed by different authors in the field of study-abroad programs that are worth mentioning due to their contradiction to the common beliefs.

Every study abroad experience is different for each person. Variables such as the place where they go to, the age they have, the amount of time they live there, the attitude they have towards the host country and culture, and some others aspects are responsible for the different follow-up events that a person might experience. Contrary to what is expected from a study abroad experience, some authors state that the gain of self-assurance and confidence is not always present as a positive personal aftereffect. Dennison Nash (1976) studied the consequences at a personal level of a group of students who studied abroad for a year and a second group who stayed in the home country. He reported that "As compared with the group at home there was no significant change in the overseas group on this measure during the course of the year (...). Therefore, the hypothesis about increased self-assurance must be rejected" (p. 199). Surprisingly, Nash's (1976) discovery is contradictory to what is expected from a study abroad experience. Accordingly, the gaining of self-assurance, independence, and other personal growth aspects or positive changes on the attitude might not always be the case for people who study abroad. Equally important, an interesting concept proposed is the one of *modern individual* argued by

Schooler, Inkeles, and Smith cited by Dennison Nash (1976). The authors established the following:

This person [the foreign student] will increasingly differentiate himself from his or her surroundings and develop an expanded, more tolerant, and flexible self-structure adjusted to a changing, ambiguous, trans-cultural environment. He or she will be more assured and confident and display a greater objectivity towards his or her self and the world. (p. 195)

Although not every person who studies abroad undergoes a change in personality, the creation of a modern individual with a more open mind to accept cultural differences and to adjust to positive and better changes is mentioned more nowadays. Professors are not the exception to this transformation and as a result, the same study proposes 'change' as a necessary step towards becoming a modern individual without undergoing much change at a self-assurance and confidence level. In brief, professors need to be able to adapt to changes in their surrounding easily to be able to become a modern individual, but this does not mean that they necessarily have to change internally. Despite the fact that not all professors undergo the positive and negative changes mentioned above, further research on the topic will enrich the already existing theory.

In today's globalized world, study-abroad experiences are not foreign to professionals anymore. English professors have various possibilities to complete a study-abroad program, and they are taking advantage of them. Therefore, the information provided allow professors to be informed about what to expect when they come back from their program. Professors should note that the existing literature reveals more positive aftereffects than negative ones, which will serve as a motivating factor for them to keep traveling abroad in search of broader knowledge to apply in their home country. The lack of literature regarding the possible consequences that Costa Rican professors in different fields face when they come back to the country calls for further research on this topic. Most of the existing literature on study abroad programs and experiences is focused on the American students and professors who travel to Europe or Latin America and not the other way around. The main objective of this study is to fill in the gap that exists in documentation about Costa Rica's context itself. Above all, the study of more negative outcomes that professors might face will give a more realistic development to the findings and will help professors place the possible future aftereffects in perspective.

Methodology

This investigation holds as its main purpose to determine common follow-up sentiments and events in the professional and personal spheres that some English professors, who work at the same setting, experienced from different study-abroad programs. Additionally, the research was conducted in a public

Costa Rican university. In regards of the organization, the aftereffects are divided into positive and negative feelings and situations that professors encountered after they returned to the home country.

In the process of collecting the information, seven English professors took part as participants. They had all studied in the United States of America (U.S.A.) and acquired a degree while abroad. The sample included both female and male participants whose ages ranged between 35 and 50. The selection of the participants was based on a convenience sampling. For this investigation, the choice of professors who studied abroad for a year or more was essential because they lived abroad enough time to experience significant changes after their return to the home country. Professors who have studied abroad for less than a year were exempted from participating due to the lack of time exposed. Also, the selection of participants contained only professors who traveled for acquiring a degree or specific purposes related to their career. Those who traveled for personal reasons were exempted as well.

The data collection instruments for this research were an interview, a questionnaire, and a survey. Firstly, the interview (see Appendix A) consisted of three basic biographical questions, two main questions, and two concluding questions. The first three queries were related to introductory information about the place that the participants traveled to, the amount of time they lived there, and the degree they acquired while living abroad. Moreover, the two main questions referred specifically to the positive and negative events and sentiments in the personal and professional spheres that they encountered when they returned to the home country. Finally, the two concluding queries consisted on information about topics such as re-adaptation programs and advice for other professors. The interviews lasted between twenty to thirty minutes with each professor. Secondly, the questionnaire (see Appendix B) entailed five open-ended questions about the place where the participants studied, the time they were away, and the degree they acquired. Additionally, a checklist of possible aftereffects was provided at the end of the questionnaire for participants to have a better idea of their meaning and the ones proposed in the literature. The checklist was located at the end so that participants were able to answer the questionnaire without any preconceptions. Lastly, a survey (see Appendix C) was delivered to the participants. The survey contained nine positive and nine negative outcomes statements that people who study abroad might encounter when they return to their home country. Under each statement, a likert scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) was provided for participants to choose the more suitable option for them.

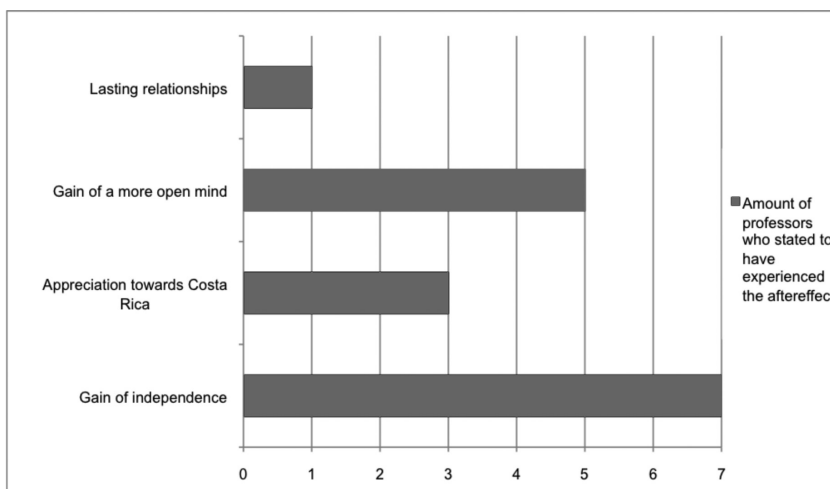
All the information collected provided positive and negative situations and feelings, which professors handled after their participation abroad. The data was classified to find similarities among the circumstances that professors experienced, coming from different places (states and universities) and traveling at different times. The answers were also used to determine which aftereffects, both positive and negative, were the most common or least common to be experienced after studying abroad for one or more years. This information was

gathered mainly from the interviews, and once the data was grouped, the survey and the questionnaire were used to triangulate the information. Also, the two latter instruments were useful to look for inconsistencies that would have affected the study and the results. Finally, the follow-up events were clustered in more detail, separating the professional ones from the personal ones. As a result, they were displayed in four main groups that consisted on the positive personal aftereffects, the positive professional aftereffects, the negative personal aftereffects, and the negative professional ones.

Results and Discussion

This study attempts to determine the common personal and professional outcomes that professors who teach English at a public university encountered after studying abroad. The results achieved to give a balanced analysis of the positive and negative events and sentiments, avoiding an over inclination towards the positive ones. Although some of the participants stated that a study-abroad experience for a person who studies a foreign language is almost a must, by considering the positive and negative consequences, it provides a broader perception of the post-experience to future returnees. The results are organized from the positive results, in both the personal and professional spheres, to the negative ones, contemplating all of them as equally important.

Figure 1
Positive personal aftereffects according to
professors who have studied abroad



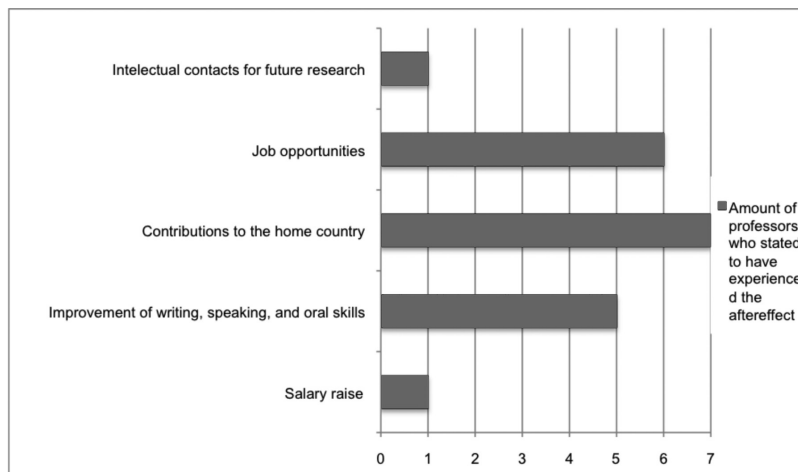
The figure is based on the total of 7 professors, which represent the 100%. The numbers represent the number of professors who said to have experienced the aftereffect.

The positive results at a personal level that returnees might face after their sojourn are very commented on and common to experience. To travel under a student status gives people the opportunity to focus on their main task, achieving a degree or doing research. Therefore, there exists greater opportunity to grow at a personal level. Figure 1 shows the most common positive personal aftereffects experienced by the returnees. As it can be seen, all the participants experienced a sense of gain of independence while living abroad. One of the reasons why this could happen is because in Costa Rica young adults and adults live with their parents due to cultural reasons and the economic situation of the country. When a person lives abroad as a student, they do not only experience living away from their families but also making decisions on their own. Living on their own or with other people who were not their family produced a sentiment of independence for the participants as well as the decision making for important topics, such as their career and daily life situations. Even though the participants of this study are adults with a certain degree of maturity and self-sufficiency, some of them had to go back to their parents' house after living on their own. Therefore, from a positive aspect such as the gain of independence can be derived a negative by-product, which is the lack of privacy and independence when returning to the home country and which will be discussed later.

Together with the gain of independence, a common positive aftereffect among the participants was the gain of a more open mind. While living abroad, students interact with people from all over the world who decide to go to other countries for similar reasons. This interaction with people from different cultures and backgrounds encourages acceptance and tolerance among the students. Most of the participants expressed that by gaining tolerance and patience they learned to respect others' beliefs and actions even if they did not agree with them. The new cultural perception that students acquire helps them not only to create stronger relationships in the host country but also to face the transition process that they experience when they return. At some point when they return, they will need to make use of their new acquired empathy to deal with people in the home country. For instance, one participant stated that it was this patience that she developed while studying abroad that helped her dealing with her overwhelming family when she came back, whereas other participants took advantage of the gain of tolerance and patience to empathize with the ticos' attitudes and Costa Rica's bureaucracy. Furthermore, from the different interactions that students have they may create lasting relationships and intellectual contacts for future research. Although this result was not common in most of the participants, a participant whose return to the home country happened near the date in which the research was conducted pointed it out. Therefore, it can be understood that relationships are an immediate situation that can vanish over the years. Another participant revealed that keeping in touch with people from the host country makes the transition easier to undergo than just bringing to an end all the communication as if they had never met. Finally, the participants stated that they had the opportunity to see Costa Rica from different perspective, which gave them a critical view towards their own country. Most students who live

abroad discover some of the advantages and disadvantages of their home country and eventually come to accept them. One of the participants stated that it is not that one place is better or worse than the other: they are just different. As a result, the positive personal aftereffects, mainly on personal growth, are common to be experienced after a study-abroad program, and the students gain new perspectives and traits that accompany them in their personal and professional life. Continuously, when professors return to their home country, not only their personal sphere is affected positively but also their professional one, bringing certain advantages to the returnees in different areas.

Figure 2
Positive professional aftereffects according to
professors who have studied abroad



The figure is based on the total of 7 professors, which represent the 100%. The numbers represent the number of professors who said to have experienced the aftereffect.

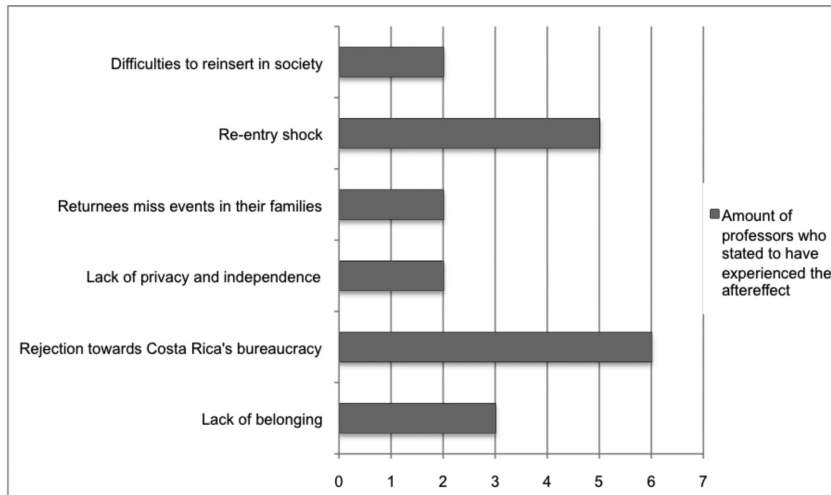
Related to the positive personal events and sentiments are the ones in the professional sphere. All the participants who studied abroad acquired a degree. This shows that one of the main purposes to study abroad is a professional one. Also, specialization in a specific area to contribute later to the native country is a reason that cannot be set aside. Figure 2 reveals the most common positive professional aftereffects that the returnees experienced. As shown in this figure, all the participants agreed on contributing to the home country after their stay abroad as a positive by-product. Some of the participants were sent by the institutions they were working with so that they could learn about a specific area that needed improvement, such as the restructuring of the curriculum and courses of the English major, research on particular areas, and innovative teaching techniques. These contributions of professors who have studied abroad enrich Costa Rican culture, society, and in this specific case education as well.

Furthermore, the majority agreed on the fact that they had more job opportunities after their period abroad. Although two of the participants were not working with this institution before their study-abroad experience, they indicated that they were offered a job right after they returned. Other participants indicated that they have been offered other jobs or even tenure after their return. Consequently, as it would be expected, a study-abroad experience offers a larger range of work opportunities for the returnees. However, to have a salary raise is not a common situation to encounter. Only one participant mentioned a salary raise while other participants stated that people should be more open minded when it comes to compare salaries from a developed country to a developing one and not to let the amount of money threaten their performance in the home country. Although one of the main results expected from a study-abroad experience is language acquisition and the improvement of other skills related to it, not all the participants agreed on this point. Several participants stated that because they were graduated students, the improvement of their language skills was not as striking as it would have been for an undergraduate student. Most people who go abroad with an English B.A. are expected to have a high level of the language and to live abroad does not make a huge difference in terms of improving. In this specific case, other variables such as age and the level of education of the students need to be taken into consideration for more generalized results. Nevertheless, the participants stated feeling more confident when speaking the language and teaching it after their return. Finally, from the interactions that students have abroad, they might create intellectual contacts for future research and/or recommendation letters. Although only one participant pointed out this situation, the connections that students might have will depend more on their interest of creating a network than the study-abroad experience itself. Nonetheless, these connections are significantly important and it is a great recommendation for future traveling professors to have in mind. Although the positive results from a studying abroad are greatly beneficial, there are some negative situations after the sojourn that professors may be exposed to in the home country.

Returnees from study-abroad experiences are not exempted of experiencing negative outcomes after their time in other countries and these situations are worth mentioning and analyzing.

When students are absent from their home country for a considerable amount of time, the possibilities of facing downward experiences increase. Most of the literature regarding studying abroad focuses on the benefits that result from these travels. But, portraying the negative aspects is equally important for future returnees. Figure 3 displays the most frequently mentioned negative personal aftereffects experienced by the participants of this study. As revealed in the figure, the rejection towards Costa Rica's bureaucracy is the most common negative personal aftereffect that the professors experienced. This result is understandable because, as described on the section related to positive personal results, students develop a different perception of their country. What they used to consider normal before might be considered inefficient later on. Consequently, the participants considered their reinsertion to society a difficult process that

Figure 3
Negative personal aftereffects according to
professors who have studied abroad



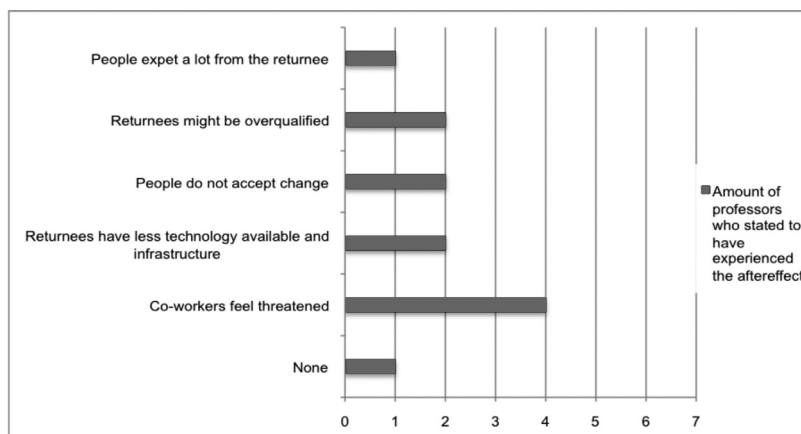
The figure is based on the total of 7 professors, which represent the 100%. The numbers represent the number of professors who said to have experienced the aftereffect.

they had to undergo when they returned to the home country. For example, some participants pointed out the slow and tedious processes of opening bank accounts, obtaining credit cards, identification cards, and other paperwork necessary for a successful reinsertion. As explained on the previous section, returnees expressed that they have to be patient and tolerant towards their own culture as well. All the participants agreed on the idea of having a re-adaptation program to ease reinsertion for returnees. Some suggested the creation and distribution of booklets that can guide them through the process of reinsertion. Others mentioned having meetings with people who have had similar experiences. Finally, some referred to the usefulness of post-training or coaching that could be offered either by the institution or the entities that sponsor the programs.

Furthermore, while most participants stated that re-entry shock is inevitable, for two of them this was not the case. Re-entry shock is a common process that can be faced differently by people and for different reasons. While for some it might be mild, for some others it might be heavy and difficult to overcome. Returnees have to take into consideration that they might have changed and also their family and friends. Although some of these internal changes may elicit a culture shock towards the country and the people around, some of the participants expressed sadness when referring to other external changes, such as events, that happened in their families and that they could not attend. For example, some mentioned births, deaths, birthdays, weddings, and other important activities that they missed. One of the participants pointed out that being abroad and not being able to presence these events is a high price to pay in ex-

change of the experience that they gain. Continuously, when people are under a re-entry culture shock, some might experience a feeling of lack of belonging. People who go back to their home country after being abroad might feel that they do not belong neither to the host country nor the home country. Some participants described that they felt alienated from their own culture, especially while they underwent the reinsertion process. For this reason, a re-adaptation program or booklets with valuable information for the professors would be helpful and useful. Finally, even though the participants of this research are adults, some of them went back to their parents' house when they returned. Going back to live with their parents contributed to a more difficult re-adaptation process. After gaining a sense of independence while they were abroad, some encountered a hard time getting used to live with their parents again. Therefore, the loss of privacy and independence previously possessed may be a negative follow-up event faced by future returnees, depending on the situation they have to face when returning to the home country. As seen before, the aftereffects exist not only in the personal sphere but also in the professional one, and the latter sphere is not exempted of negative outcomes either.

Figure 4
Negative professional aftereffects according to professors who have studied abroad



The figure is based on the total of 7 professors, which represent the 100%. The numbers represent the number of professors who said to have experienced the aftereffect.

Even though there are positive professional aftereffects for professors who study abroad, the negative ones might be present after their return as well. These negative situations related to their career do not diminish the validity of the study-abroad experience; on the contrary, they can be seen as another step in the professionals' personal development. Figure 4 reveals the common negative professional aftereffects that the participants of this study experienced. In

this particular research, one participant stated not having faced any negative professional aftereffects. This result cannot be overgeneralized because it will depend on the participants' personality and context where they return to, but it is important to draw attention to this point since it goes against what is expected from these experiences. The most recurring situation after the return is that co-workers might feel threatened by the returnees. Some participants suggested that to avoid this threatening feeling the returning professors may offer their time to do partnership research with people who have not studied abroad and suggest to share knowledge. Also, participants mentioned that it is vital to respect the co-workers' views and not to forget that the person who is returning to the home country does not hold the truth for everything. In this case, patience, tolerance, and humbleness are key traits for both groups of people (the returnees and the people who stayed) to prevent misunderstandings. Not all the co-workers might feel threatened by the returnees, but some of them might react negatively towards change. Most of the participants stated that it is difficult to return to the home country with new ideas and knowledge to apply and not being able to do so because of people's resistance to change. However, most of the participants stated to have achieved meaningful changes in the university, and they expressed that, again, patience and empathy are key factors when dealing with people. While some people will not agree to some proposals, some others carry really high expectations for the returning professors. Some returnees might not be able to manage all the pressure imposed over them, and they might lower their performance or find it even harder to reinsert in the system. Another disadvantage that can be experienced is that professionals might find themselves to be overqualified. To avoid this, one participant expressed that the degree that professors pursue has to be useful in an area of the institution where they work so that professors do not face problems when being placed. If a professor studies a specific area that is not applicable in Costa Rican context, they might encounter issues finding either a job or an employer who can economically recognize their studies abroad. Another participant stated that returnees should have an open mind when dealing with the difference in salaries because this might affect their reinsertion as well. As mentioned before, it is not realistic to compare the salary from a developed country to the one of a developing country. Most of the times, returnees will need to lower their expectations to be able to accomplish a successfully reinsertion in society. Finally, the material and technology available in the host country can make the transition even more complicated. Professors may not have the same opportunities in the home country, and this causes either a delay in the progress that they want to achieve or a change in attitude towards the country. Once more, the brain drain effect, which refers to people who decide to return and stay in the host country, can affect the home country and the institutions that are in need of those trained professionals. As previously mentioned, although returnees might face some or all of these aftereffects, it does not mean that their experience will be negative; on the contrary, they might as well learn from difficult situations while overcoming.

Conclusion

Due to the high demand that studies abroad have nowadays, it is important for future travelers to consider the aftereffects that they might encounter when they return to the home country. Most of the entities that promote study-abroad programs help the students to prepare before their sojourn. In most cases, travelers tend to have an orientation week before the academic year begins, but they receive little or none help when they have to readapt to their own country. It is assumed that the re-adaptation process will be flawless and smooth because students are going back to what they already know; nevertheless, this situation is not the norm. This research revealed some of the most common personal and professional outcomes that a group of English professors from a public Costa Rican university experienced after their sojourns. Even though returnees might or might not experience the sentiments and events exposed in this study, all the participants agreed on the idea that living abroad is a life changing experience and worth the challenges they faced throughout its completion and afterwards. The professors' sojourns helped them in their personal and professional spheres from many different perspectives, and they all agreed that they experienced more advantages than disadvantage. When analyzing the personal benefits that the participants experienced after returning to the home country, the consulted literature showed similarities with what the participants shared, stating that even though the results cannot be overgeneralized, some are common in different contexts and at different times.

Living abroad and far away from close family and friends affects the person in the personal sphere. It is important to take into consideration variables such as the education level and the age because the changes might be less obvious. In general, study-abroad programs allow students to gain a more open mind and independence. Returnees tend to view their own culture from an outsider perspective, which allows them to be critical about behaviors and situations around them such as the Costa Rican's actions and the country's bureaucracy. Being able to compare one's culture to others allows people to differentiate what they agree with and what they disagree with from their own culture, country, and other places and peoples. As a result, people tend to adopt empathy as an important trait to deal with and understand others. However, negative outcomes such as re-entry culture shock, changes in the family, and the difficulty to reinsert in society might be present as well. Having into consideration both sources, the literature reviewed and the participants' information, these negative by-products that returnees might encounter are not as negative as they may sound. Future returnees should take into consideration that these changes in their attitude and personal sphere will help them deal with cultural re-entry shock and the derivative experiences that come with it. Although study-abroad experiences vary from person to person and from context to context, the consideration of these possible aftereffects will prepare the returnees to encounter them, making the re-adaptation process milder. Nonetheless, returnees are not only affected on the personal sphere. The changes they might experience in their professional careers are life changing as well.

It is worth noting that most of the returnees might contribute greatly to the home country and might receive better job opportunities thanks to their study-abroad experience. All the participants of the study encountered a major change when it comes to their educational level since they all obtained a degree while being abroad. Notwithstanding, in contrast to the personal sphere, the results gathered for the professional sphere mismatch with some of the literature consulted. On the one hand, returnees need to have in mind that high salaries cannot be the norm when coming from a developed country back to a developing country. Some professors who study abroad might be overqualified and this situation will make it difficult for an employer to pay a high salary or even place them in a position. On the other hand, the foreign language is not always going to be improved as an inevitable outcome of being exposed to it. There are different factors that contribute to the improvement of the language and even the students' personality can affect the interaction with others. However, as a common result, the intellectual contacts for future research and the new teaching techniques and methods learned are present. Most professors are sent abroad to acquire another degree and to keep them updated with new theories and procedures that are being used abroad. Institutions are providing a better education to their students by keeping their professors' training constantly changing since education itself is not static, but it regularly evolves. The initiative of sending professors abroad to broaden their knowledge is great, but it presents a small flaw when it comes to the re-adaptation programs that are being offered.

None of the participants of this study was offered a re-adaptation guide or program from the institutions. The re-adaptation process is as important as the adaptation one that students undergo in the foreign country and even before they leave. Being abroad for more than a year might contribute to the loss of perspective of their own country and culture and this may lead to experience re-entry culture shock when being back. Even though a re-adaptation program will imply some sort of financial inversion, by working with professors and avoiding difficulties with their reinsertion to society, the brain drain effect and negative feelings against the own culture could be avoided. For future research, a strong recommendation is to create low cost re-adaptation procedures that will help the university professors who return to the Costa Rican context specifically since these programs will be worth the effort.

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Appendix A

PROFESSORS' BELIEFS ABOUT PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL AFTEREFFECTS OF STUDYING ABROAD

The information that you disclose in this interview will be used to investigate the beliefs that professors, who have studied abroad, have about the personal and professional aftereffects of studying abroad. Your answers to this interview will be anonymous and confidential. Thank you so much for your help.

1. Basic biographical questions:

- Where did you study abroad (country [state] and university)?
- When did you study abroad and for how long were you there?
- Did you acquire a degree while studying abroad? If yes, please specify.

2. Body of the interview:

After spending one or more years studying abroad, students that come back to Costa Rica might or might not encounter positive aftereffects in their personal and professional life. Did you face positive aftereffects when you returned to Costa Rica? If yes, please specify. Explain.

- If yes, how have these aftereffects affected your personal life
- and professional life as an English professor.

Students might also or might also not encounter negative aftereffects. Did you face negative aftereffects when you returned to Costa Rica? If yes, please specify. Explain.

- If yes, how have these aftereffects affected your personal life
- and professional life as an English professor.

Do you consider that all the students that study abroad encounter either negative or positive aftereffects after coming back to Costa Rica?

- If yes, what kind of aftereffects might a student face after coming back to Costa Rica that you did not have to encounter?

3. Concluding questions:

- Do you consider that the different entities who help students to study abroad should offer re-adaptation programs and booklets for the professors who come back from their study abroad experience?
- What kind of advice would you give to a student who just came back from his/her study abroad experience?
- I really appreciate the time you allotted to this interview. I have all the information that I need, but I would like to ask you if there is something else you would like to add to this interview, or if there is something you would like to broaden about what you said earlier?

Again, thank you so much for your cooperation. This interview will be of great help for the investigation I am conducting. Have a nice day.

Appendix B

PROFESSORS' BELIEFS ABOUT PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL AFTEREFFECTS OF STUDYING ABROAD

The information that you disclose in this questionnaire will be used to investigate the beliefs that professors, who have studied abroad, have about the personal and professional aftereffects of studying abroad. Your answers to this questionnaire will be anonymous and confidential. Thank you so much for your help.

When did you study abroad?

For how long did you study abroad?

Did you acquire a degree while studying abroad? If yes, please specify.

Did you encounter any aftereffect when you came back to Costa Rica? If so, which were related to your personal life and which were related to your professional life? Please explain.

Have you experienced any personal and academic aftereffects from your stay abroad specifically as an English professor? If so, please explain.

Please check the box of the aftereffects that you might have encountered in your re-adaptation to Costa Rica after your stay abroad, and that impacted your personal and professional life as an English professor.

Positive	Negative
Development of writing skills	Reentry shock or reverse culture shock
Development of oral skills	Job rejections
Development of listening skills	Regret of studying abroad
Personal development	Regret of coming back to Costa Rica
Gain of independence	Lack of belonging to a group
Gain of a global perspective	Loneliness
Contributions to the country as an exchange student	Problems with family and friends
Job offers	Rejection towards the ticos' attitude and bureaucracy.
Cultural acceptance	Displeasure towards lower salaries
Gain of a more open mind	

Again, thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix C

PROFESSORS' BELIEFS ABOUT PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL AFTEREFFECTS OF STUDYING ABROAD

The information that you disclose in this survey will be used to investigate the beliefs that professors who have studied abroad have about the personal and

professional aftereffects of studying abroad. Your answers to this survey will be anonymous and confidential. Thank you so much for your help.

Instructions: please answer the following questions according to your beliefs about personal and professional aftereffects that students who study abroad might face.

Regarding positive aftereffects a student might face:

1. A considerable improvement in their writing skills
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
2. A considerable improvement in their oral skills and self-reliability to communicate
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
3. A considerable improvement in their listening skills
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
4. A personal development in attitude and personality
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
5. A gain of independence and self sufficiency
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
6. Contributions to the native country as an exchange student, for example: the creation of programs, a bridge of knowledge between students-professor relationships, beneficial changes in university courses, lectures, among others
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
7. Gain of a global perspective and the desire to discover and travel around the world
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
8. More and better job offers than before studying abroad
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
9. A gain of a more open mind with cultural acceptance and intercultural communication
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()

Regarding negative aftereffects a student might face:

1. Reentry shock or reverse culture shock
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
2. Job rejections after studying abroad
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
3. Regret of studying abroad
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
4. Regret of coming back to Costa Rica
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
5. Lack of belonging to a group. They might feel alienated to the Costa Rican culture and they do not feel part of their host culture either
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
6. A feeling of loneliness
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
7. Problems in relationships with family and friends
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
8. Rejection towards the tico's attitude and bureaucracy of the country
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()
9. Displeasure towards lower salaries in comparison to their host country
strongly agree () agree () disagree () strongly disagree ()

Again, thank you for your cooperation.