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ACADEMIC CHALLENGES THAT STUDENTS OF THE LANGUAGES SCHOOL OF UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA Y TECNOLÓGICA DE COLOMBIA FACE AFTER RETURNING FROM AN EXCHANGE PROGRAM OVERSEAS

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Abstract

This research was carried out at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, namely in the Faculty of Sciences of Education, languages school. Situations lived by some of the university partners once they returned from an exchange program and our own experience led us to investigate on a condition that is happening in the Languages School. In this way, students and teachers may be aware of the problem, do something about it and make of this process an experience easier to deal with. Once the data analysis is concluded, this project illustrates the challenges that students might face when returning to the academic life at the university after returning from an exchange program.

Key words: Challenges, Academic area, Exchange Program.

Resumen

Esta investigación se desarrolló en la Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, específicamente en la Facultad de Educación, Escuela de Idiomas. Las situaciones vividas por algunos compañeros de la universidad y la experiencia propia, nos motivaron a indagar y describir una problemática que se está presentando en la Escuela de Idiomas. De esta manera, tanto estudiantes como profesores podrían tener en cuenta este problema para así tomar cartas en el asunto y hacer de este proceso una experiencia más llevadera. Una vez

concluido el análisis de los datos recolectados, este proyecto muestra los retos que los estudiantes podrían afrontar al retomar la vida académica después de un intercambio.

Palabras clave: Retos, área académica, Programa de intercambio

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Introduction

This project is based on the different challenges students of the Languages School of Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC) have faced when returning to the academic life at the university after an exchange program. The research was carried out in order to provide current and future members of the Languages School with important information about different situations students will face while getting used to the educational life process. Based on surveys and interviews we could identify some of the issues needed to be addressed. Therefore, it is necessary to help students become aware of unusual circumstances they may find and at the same time help teachers become aware of these struggles, so that they both may be better prepared to adapt their practices in the classroom. To achieve these goals, we have taken into account the concept of academic challenges and their functions. Moreover, we explain the reason that led us to develop this research and the process we followed to complete it.

It is important to keep in mind that students who have had the opportunity to travel and study abroad for a year or more end up getting used to a new lifestyle and culture. This can often lead to a change of their priorities and most notably, a loss of determination in their studies. It is pertinent to take into account that most of the students who participated in this research project have been studying consistently throughout their educational carriers and their participation in an exchange program has been the first interruption of their studies in Colombia.

When we combined the aforementioned circumstances with surveys taken by students who had studied abroad, we decided to investigate the different ways in which they may be struggling with regular academic life once they returned to Colombia, specifically to the (UPTC) classrooms. In order to achieve the research objectives, we collected data using different instruments and techniques such as surveys, interviews, and students' documents.

This research paper is designed to help students to become more aware of the different conditions they might face when returning to their domestic academic life. The current investigation has helped us to profit beyond the exchange program itself, since it has proven to be one of the best ways for students to improve a foreign language, along with providing a pedagogical view of this process in which culture, habits and priorities affect the participant´s life. This research is a path to understand something that seems to be a problematic issue, Seliger&Shohamy (1990).

This article is structured as follows, the introduction, which states the life issue to be addressed. The statement of the problem, the research questions and the objectives, and the rationale, where the discussion of the implications is presented. Additionally, the main theoretical constructs that frame this study are discussed, as well as the design of this investigation. Finally, the data analysis, the findings, the conclusions, the limitations, future research suggestions, references, some annexes, and the pedagogical implications are presented.

Literature review

For a better understanding of this project, we are going to make clear three of its foundations: First **challenge**, its nearest concepts concerning our investigation. Second **academic area,** we will provide details of its role in this study and the relationship with challenge, and third **exchange program**, illustrating the programs in which the participants have participated. It is important to have in mind that we create the concepts of **challenge** and **academic area**, and the concept of **exchange program** is based on theoretical information.

Challenge

Based on information that we found before about "challenge", we decided to construct our own meaning of a challenge. For us challenge has everything to do with the obstacles or difficulties we find along the way of our lives. It is like a competition where people are able to show their abilities and to show what they are really good at, in this case in the (academic area). In this respect, Ramsey, S.&Schaetti, B. (1999) state, that "the central tenet of an individual's reentry challenge is psychological. The word "reentry" implies going back, returning to something that is known from prior experience. But to what? Perhaps to the broad fabric of one's home country, the actual home or neighborhood one lived in before the international assignment or the

lives of friends and family, or a school system".

In that concern, students need to prove to themselves that they are good at languages. For that reason after being abroad, students discover new situations in which they have to demonstrate that they are able to deal with all the requirements that the school of Languages is asking for in its curriculum.

In that respect there is a study related to the challenges students have to assume in terms of psychological, social, and cultural aspects considering that these are unanticipated. It was conducted by LaBrack, B.(). (1995)T*en top immediate re-entry challenges. As rated by university students.* The objective was to identify the ten immediate reentry challenges face by university students. Results established the following issues: boredom; a frustrating inability to explain experiences to those not having similar travel backgrounds; a kind of "reverse homesickness" for the people and places one has left behind; being misunderstood when using behaviors, such as humor, that are now out-of-place; the "no one wants to hear" syndrome; feelings of alienation that can arise in seeing faults in other's situations that were never noticed; a lack of opportunity to apply new knowledge or skills; and concern that the positive effects of the international experience will be lost. These results gave us lights to go deep in the academic aspects that surround exchange students reentry.

Regarding to the academic life that returnees have to resume, here, there is a study that provide us strong arguments for developing our research. On one hand, it demonstrates that there is a lack of research in this topic at the regional, as well as, in the national context. On the other hand, the exchanging students become a disadvantaged population when coming back to their academic context. In that respect, it is highly important to describe how this disadvantage must be faced. The study

was completed by Hisli, N. (1990). The research was entitled as: *Reentry and the academic and psychological problems of the second generation.* The chief purpose of this study was to compare the re-entering second generation of Turkish migrants and their "resident" peers in terms of academic and psychological adjustment. Academic adjustment was defined as receiving passing grades on courses chosen for this study (social studies, science, math, Turkish, foreign language). Psychological adjustment was defined as receiving scores within the range of one standard deviation. The subjects were 800 "returnee" students and 599 "resident" students. Outcomes from this research showed that in general, the returnee students showed less achievement compared to resident peers and they scored significantly higher on depression and anxiety measures.

Bearing in mind what is stated above, students who return from an exchange program to the university live different situations while getting used to their academic life. That is why they start struggling with the **academic area,** which refers to what a people need to accomplish in an educational institution in the pedagogical field, in order to personally evolve themselves as desired educators in their field of choice (elementary school, high school, college, university). In this case, we focus on the university level, since the aim of this investigation is to determine the challenges faced by students of the languages school in the academic area, after an exchange program.

Therefore, it is important to take into account that students go through challenges in the academic area because they have to resume their studies at the university after an exchange program. An **exchange program** is a program in which the main goal is to allow the participant to live, learn, and experience another language and culture in a foreign country.

Nowadays, there are various programs in which

people can travel and work, such as Amity, Au Pair and Travels, Cultural Care Au Pair among others. We are going to provide more information about those exchange programs since they are the most usual students chose to go abroad with.

Amity[1]

The Intern Teacher Program provides volunteer teaching assistants to serve as models of language and culture in US schools at all levels, from preschool through university. Interns can be assigned to a school for up to 12 months. Interns assist in the classroom for up to 25 hours per week, take Personal Study Classes and live with American host families. Interns are there to bring their languages and cultures to life, to engage and motivate students and leave them with new confidence in their ability to communicate across borders.

Interns inform and inspire, helping students better understand other parts of the world. The interns will shape the local community's perspective on their country, along with its culture and people. Interns also learn about US culture and gain a deeper understanding of their own. The final goal is that Interns return home and share what they have learned and experienced with their own communities.

Entry Requirements

In order to qualify as an Amity Intern Teacher all applicants must be:

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1   http://www.amity.org/intern.html

- 20 or older

- Currently enrolled in college/university or post secondary institute

- Or have graduated within 12 months prior to program begin

- Career goal in education

- Conversational English skills

This program is well known in the languages school, since part of the students choose to apply for it. However, there are two more common exchange programs that are part of the list.

Au Pair And Travels[2]

The au pair program is specially directed to young women that want to improve or to learn a second language while they work, taking care of the children of the family in which they live with. The participant will learn the culture of the country of choice, improving the language and having an unforgettable experience.

As an Au Pair, the participant is assured to feel like a new member of the family from the very first day she/he arrives. The participant will generally be a welcomed guest in a new home and be surrounded by new friends eager to help her to speak the language with the same care and determination that will be provided in the language classes she/he will be attending.

Every family must go through their own exhaustive examination in addition to receiving a visit from the agents who check whether the home meets the essential requirements an Au Pair needs in order to lodge there.

The agency selects families that treat his/her au pair as if he/she were one more member of the family, from the first day he/she will feel like in house. The requirements for our au pair program in Colombia are:

- To be between 18 and 26 years of age.

- To have finished the secondary education

- To have a clean criminal background

- Be ready to be 12 months in another country

http://www.aupair-travels.com/

Cultural Care Au Pair

Cultural Care Au Pair is an exchange program that gives participants the opportunity to work and study in the United States. Through this program, the participants get international work experience while they improve their foreign language (English) and enjoy the country. To be part of this program, the applicant needs to be eighteen to twenty six years old; s/he must be part of an educational institution; s/he must have experience taking care of children and a basic conversational English level.

Having in mind the foundations of this research, **challenge, academic area,** and **exchange program,** it is highly important to know what steps we took into account to answer our research question. For that reason, in the coming section the reader will find the research design deeply explained.

[1] (http://www.culturalcare.com.co/)

(Endnotes)

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2   http://www.aupair-travels.com/

Research design

In this section, we will present the process in which the research was carried out step by step, keeping in mind all the notable features such as: research type, population and instruments used in the data collection, as well as, the data analysis process. Every one of those aspects will be explained via their application throughout the research development.

Type Of Research

The paradigm of our research was qualitative since we "provide descriptions of phenomena that occur naturally. Qualitative research is a field of inquiry that crosscuts disciplines and subject matters. Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern this behavior" (Lerma, 2004;72-74). This was our approach when investigating matters related to our research regarding, the situations that face students who retake their studies after an exchange program, which is a new feasible subject of research in the Foreign Languages school of the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC).

Additionally, the inquiry of this research starts with a "what"; and "qualitative research discipline investigates the why and what of decision making, not just how, where and when. Furthermore, the qualitative research studies the human behaviors in real life in which the role of the researcher would not affect the normal behavior of the subjects."(Lerma, 2004; 72-74).

This research project falls under the class of a descriptive case study since based on Seliger&Shohamy (1990:129) this sort of research "provides descriptions of naturally occurring phenomena connected with languages development and processing." Also, it has to do with the study of a single group, event, or population. In this case, our investigation relates to the descriptive case study because we describe the challenges that a group of students (some of the ones who belonged to an exchange program and make part of the Languages School) faced when they retook their studies at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC).

Setting And Population

Based on the population and the purposes of this project, it is appropriate to say that this is an educational investigation. This research is developed inside Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, which is located in Tunja Boyacá. The participants were 15 student-teachers (male and female) belonging to the Faculty of Education, Languages School, Modern and Foreign Languages Programs. The ages of the participants are between 21 and 27 years old. Moreover, those 15 student-teachers are some of the ones who have belonged to an exchange program and have come back to Colombia in order to continue their academic goals; this includes retaking their studies to finish their degrees. It is important to keep in mind that the participants belong to the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth semester of both languages programs. According to the status of the university, the economic situation of the participants could be categorized in the medium social stratum.

We chose those students for our sample since they have been abroad and have experienced almost the same difficulties when returning to their daily academic routine at the university. This sample provided substantial understanding of the challenges they faced to re-acclimate to their student life after an exchange program. In addition, we thought that having students from different semesters could allowed us to study the main point of our research question, since the participants were in different levels of Foreign or Modern Languages program. It also allowed us to contrast the students´ challenges related to our research.

Instruments For Data Collection

In order to collect data for the diagnosis process eight surveys were implemented (see annex A). According to (McIntyre: 1999, p.74): "Surveys are capable of obtaining information from large samples of the population. They are also well suited to gathering demographic data that describe the composition of the sample". For this phase of the study, survey was used to explore the different issues faced by students after coming back from an exchange program to their academic area.

With the purpose of getting the key objective of this investigation, three instruments were used: interviews, surveys, and the study of students' documents (essays). In terms of the first one, Twenty-five Semi structured interviews were implemented, which according to McNamara (1999): "are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. Interviews might be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, e.g., to further investigate their responses". Fifteen of these were answered by the students involved in the exchange programs, (See annex B), and the other ten were directed to the teachers from the school of Languages who interact with these students once they come back to retake their studies, (See annex C). The main purpose was to establish how student-teachers fit to their academic area after coming from an exchange program.

In relation to the second instrument, thirty surveys were developed. Fifteen of these were directed to the students who got involved in exchange programs, (See annex D), and the other half were answered by the students who interacted with those students in class, (See annex E). The main objective of the survey was to characterize the personal and academic experience of students abroad before, during and after their process.

Finally, the third instrument implemented was the study of student's documents. Alder-Egg (1993) states that these are "documents that provide information and are used to consult, to prove or to study specific issues" For this research, the documents were fifteen students' essays. The purpose was to collect and analyze those essays for enriching the data come from the primary instruments.

Data Analysis And Findings

With the objective of answering the research question of this study, Grounded Theory, Strauss and Corbin (1990), was the methodology conducted. As it was mentioned before, the foundation of this principle is about coding procedures. This characteristic provides legitimacy to the research process in the sense that allows researchers going through information gathered in deep ways.

With the idea of getting the objective for this project, personal interviews were implemented as primary instruments of the data gathering during the second step of the research process. With the purpose of strengthen such information that responded directly to the research question, surveys and the study of students' documents (Essays) were adopted as the secondary instruments considering that these provided information that supported the facts stated by the primary one.

Both primary and secondary instruments followed different objectives appealing to the phases of the project. In relation to the diagnosis stage, the main purpose was to explore the possible issues student-teachers face when they come back from exchange programs to their academic life. In respects to the data gathering step, the aim was to establish and characterize how student-teachers fit to their academic area after coming from an exchange program.

When applying the instruments, a systematic process was followed. On one hand, at the diagnosis stage, eight surveys were applied to a group of eight student-teachers who had been abroad in an exchange program. On the other hand, twenty-five surveys were implemented in the following way. Ten of them were directed to the teachers of the School of Languages, who interact with the participants of this study. And the other fifteen questionnaires were answered by the students coming from an exchange program. At the same time, thirty surveys were applied. Half of these were answered by the students involved in an exchange program and the other half were answered by the students who have not traveled abroad but interacted in class with them. The purpose of having students, who have not been abroad, answering the surveys, was to have a wider idea of the whole returning process of exchanging students. Additionally, the student- teachers' documents (essays) of the fifteen students were collected and analyzed.

After gathering all the completed data, the work was brought into line with grounded theory. This methodology led us to re-read the information several times for discovering similar patterns. (Freeman, 1990).

The process started by making the transcription of the interviews and looking at these in order to establish how students fit to their academic area after coming from an exchange program. Then, color coding was implemented for establishing some common patterns. To validate what was discovered in the interviews, the process continued by examining the student-teachers' surveys (from the ones who have been abroad), and the student-teachers' documents. Along with this process, the information was continuously contrasted.

In order to validate the results gotten from the instruments, two data triangulation processes were used. The first one was the investigator triangulation. It is defined by Cohen and Manion

(1995) like "the use of several different researchers or evaluators". In that respect, each one of us analyzed the information in an individual way and then we compared the results for enriching the process. The second was the methodological triangulation, which is "the use of a variety of data sources in a study" (Denzin&Janesick, 1998: 46). Those data sources in our particular study included surveys, interviews and student-teachers' documents.

Additionally it is important to mention that we followed codes to exemplify the evidence: (SI= Students' Interviews, TI= Teachers' Interviews, ES=Exchanged Students' Survey, NES= Non Exchanged Students' Survey, SD=Students' Documents). Similarly, fictional names were given to the participants in order to respect their image.

Outlined in the foundations of grounded theory, here are the categories and subcategories that came up after following the process mentioned above.

In that respect, the first category was: *Reentry To Beginning: Indoors' Classroom Defies*. This category has to do with the challenges students face once they come back from abroad to retake their academic life in the particular context of their FL classroom. Those can be separated in two groups as the two faces of a coin and consequently materialize the spinal cord subcategories of this study. Those are: The Student's Routine Resuming and The Interaction Game. The first group refers to the students' necessity to get accustomed to their FL classroom life again. In relation to the second group, it appears as the negotiation returnees establish with the members of their teaching and learning environment. In both cases, returnees deal with a set of concerns that are going to be discussed in the coming chapter.

Concerning the second category, it was settled as: *Reentry To Beginning: Outdoors' Classroom*. It refers to the trials returnees deal with when retaking their academic life, a process that implies going beyond classroom context and embedding broader spaces at the university. Those environments are the source of the two emerging subcategories of this broader concept: Visibility of the New Acquired Skills and Example for the Others' projection. Turning to the first issue, it implies the need for returnees to print in their academic context the new knowledge they have gained while being abroad. In terms of the second fact, it is characterized by the concerns students may have in mind when traveling to another country in order to be prepared for their reentry process. It becomes the profile example that an applicant can adopt or adapt to their academic life when coming back.

Categories and Subcategories

The answer to our research question is stated below through the characterization and argumentation of the categories and subcategories that came up after a process of analysis and data discrimination.

Reentry to beginning: Indoors' classroom defies.

This category entails the challenges returnees face when coming back from an exchange program to their academic life. It does not require the end of a cycle in the exchanged student's life. On the contrary, it implies the returning to his/her own acculturation process. It means that even though returnees have been members of their particular society, when coming back they experience a normal shock, because things change. They are different, so with their academic context (teachers, students, relationships, routines, etc.) has happened the same. Then this is the moment when those students have to start fronting certain issues as part of their re integration processing their FL classroom context.

On one hand, they have to pick up on a routine of attending to classes, being sat for one or two hours, presenting assignments, express their selves in another language, getting good grades among others. On the other hand, they have to become part of a negotiation sharing within the classroom with their participants. It is a game characterized by the all members' attitude and the returnee's place there.

The above statements portray the two subcategories in which the challenges students' challenges are characterized in the context of the FL classroom.

Student routine resuming

This subcategory represents need for returnees to take up again their normal academic life. In this particular case, it is directly connected with their FL classroom. There are a dual group of issues that come up: the communication in a foreign language; and the discipline when attending classes. In regards to the first set, students have to deal with the level of language proficiency required at the class they are in. It means to be able to communicate in the four skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing) of the foreign language studied in their classes.

At this point, it is important to say, that this challenge was really hard for most of the participants in this study. They highlight the communication through speaking and writing, as the most difficult ones. In terms of speaking they experienced language interference, and they found it difficult to put their ideas in a logical sequence when writing. Here the students', as well as, their teachers' voices come together to support this situation:

*Un factor que hizo de mi proceso de adaptación a la vida académica un poco difícil fue la parte **fonética** del francés ya que me dedique al inglés y olvide un poco el francés. (SI,2)*

Fue difícil la parte de retomar el nivel de francés

*sin que el **inglés interfiriera** (SI, 8)*

*Yo estaba muy bien preparado en la parte oral pero en la parte **escrita** del inglés fue duro. (SI, 9)*

In relation to the aspect of discipline when fulfilling classroom routine, it has to do with the willingness to attention paying, punctuality and the assignments submission. Inrelationtothisfact,our participantsstated:

Había perdido la costumbre de estar en el aula de clase, hacer trabajos, y lo más importante había dejado de lado el francés, idioma que es de igual importancia en mi carrera. (SI, 1)

Al volver me costó adaptarme a la vida universitaria y hablar en otros idiomas ejemplo: lengua materna (ortografía, un poco) y francés. (SI, 3)

El hecho de regresar a cumplir con labores académicas es duro. También, yo tuve que hacer un curso extra clases de francés para poder retomarlo. Y por último, es aúnmás difícil porque uno llega a otro semestre, con otros profesores, con otras exigencias y en resumen, un poco perdido y con las materias en desorden. (SI, 7)

According to what students stated above, it is important to mention that the fact of getting back responsibilitiesat the university was not taken as a challenge, since they were studying in the United States and they were supposed to do assignments and studying with unknown teachers and people; but the fact of **accepting** that they were once again in their natural context was the real challenge.

Following the line of challenges faced by students in their immediate academic context, here is the second subcategory.

The interaction Game

This subcategory represents defies returnees experienced in their FL classroom context in terms of the relationship they established when becoming a member of that community. It is a process where the returnee's, and the group's attitudes, start to negotiate. At the same time, the exchanging student's role in the class starts to play, too. It is important to say that the **attitude** assumed by all the members of the FL classroom community constitute the air for recreating a comfortable atmosphere for knowledge exchange. In this concern, the participants and teachers affirmed:

*Adaptarse de nuevo es una **decisión muy personal**. En cada uno está la voluntad y decisión de hacer de su regreso algo mejor. Compañeros fue el mejor apoyo que pude tener. Regresar y no conocer a nadie puede ser bastante abrumador para cualquiera, pero todo salió muy bien. (SI,4)*

Como a todos los estudiantes, ósea, yo los recibo a todos como los estudiantes que vienen de estar en un país de habla inglesa no los puedo integrar de otra manera diferente a lo que sería un estudiante corriente que llega a una clase de francés. (TI,2)

*Cuando comparto con estudiantes de intercambio siento un **apoyo** ya que seguramente ese estudiante tiene más claro muchas cosas del idioma, sabe más expresiones, vocabulario etc., entonces siento que puedo contar con ellos para mejorar.(NES,1)*

*Hay algunos estudiantes que llegan de intercambio y son **colaboradores** en la clase, como hay unos que llegan muy **agrandados** y creen que porque estuvieron uno o dos años no necesitan tomar clases de inglés.(NES, 4)*

*Pues cuando se habla de interacción, la mayoría de ellos se preocupan por compartir con compañeros y profesores las habilidades adquiridas, especialmente a **nivel oral** y de cultura del país en el que estuvieron. (NES,5)*

When there is a **positive attitude** towards changes, as well as, to the outcomes, there is

an opened door for the returnee's roles to come in. In that respect, these roles are mainly divided in: small groups' monitorand information sharer. In relation to the first role, the students (returnees) are postulated by their professors to monitor their partners' small group work. Here, the monitor is an enhancer of the abilities of his colleges. The student becomes an information sharer within the context of the FL classroom, when he/she brings to any topic discussion valid contributions, arguments, and ideasregarding his/her previous experiences. In order to support this idea, the teachers, non-exchanging students and returnees coincided to say:

*Bueno yo le doy una mayor participación en el aula, no en sentido de que sea el más perfecto sino que de pronto él pueda **ayudar** a los compañeros a tener un mejor desenvolvimiento en las actividades que se hagan o se programen para el área. (TI, 1)*

Uno lo que hace es aprovechar la presencia de ellos, sin que eso haga que los demás se sientan que por no haber ido a Francia están por debajo porque realmente no es cierto. (TI, 2)

*Dependiendo del nivel de los estudiantes que llegan, se nombran como **monitores o tutores** de grupos pequeños de estudiantes. En un semestre donde tuve cinco chicos que llegaron de Ammity, cada uno de ellos se encargó de cuatro estudiantes y el trabajo que ellos hicieron fue ayudarlos con la pronunciación dentro de la clase, monitorear las tareas que yo les organizaba y estructuraba dentro de un cronograma, entonces ellos nos ayudaban como monitores dentro de la clase.(TI.5)*

Los profesores tratan de ser muy imparciales para no incurrir en favoritismos, sin embargo, aprovechan las capacidades de estos estudiantes para que contribuyan al avance y mejora de los demás compañeros. También lo usaban como motivación para que los demás se animaran a viajar. (NES, 5)

*Dentro de los roles están el de monitorear la habilidad de speaking en los compañeros, el de dirigir grupos en actividades dentro del aula, y el de proponer actividades en las cuales ellos **compartan** su experiencia. (NES, 7)*

Reentry to beginning: outdoors' classroom dares.

This category shows the challenges that exchanging students face when coming back from abroad to their academic context. In this case, the issues are beyond the FL classroom doors. It means to deal with trials in broader spaces at the university like the Languages School environment. Those defies have to do with the need for returnees to share and make a positive change on reality by applying their acquired knowledge. It needs to be a benefit for a larger population of that found in a classroom. At the same time, returnees have the challenges of becoming a source of reference for those students who want to follow their steps. This population requires then exchanged students´ extension work. There is no doubt that these two dares are part of the re- integration process the returnees are part of. These result in a faster and meaningful re-adaptation way.

The previous assertions display the two subcategories in which the challenges student-teachers' challenges are characterized beyond the FL classroom context.

Visibility of new acquired knowledge

This subcategory portrays the dare that returnees face during their reintegration process to their academic life. Finding ways to actively integrate the new knowledge, interests and skills into the university experience becomes a key forstudents' academic re-integration. The main characteristic of this is the service sharing that students offer to their classmates or other members of the university community to become more competent or proficient in a particular area

of knowledge. This service can be materialized through the returnees' engagement in tutoring, monitoring, clubs formation, publications, among other activities. In regards to this defy, the context of this research shows that returnees are required and most of them are willing to be transformers of their academic community at the time that become again part of it. Here are some of thosevoices:

*Bueno yo sí, diría que una de las cosas sería que esos becarios hicieran una intervención de esos intercambios, contar la experiencia a los estudiantes y a las personas que están interesadas quizás a través de una invitación en un horario especifico y quizá los que estén interesados pues tengan un mayor conocimiento de que se trata el programa cualquiera que sea, mmm para que se vinculen a la parte universitaria quisiera que de pronto ellos, desarrollaran **talleres** o que fomenten la parte **oral**. (TI, 1)*

*Los becarios de cualquier programa de inglés o de francés incluso de alemán… deberían tener como una **reciprocidad** al llegar a la escuela, como crear un club de tutores, club de conversación, talleres de gramática; como que lo que ellos aprendieron no se quede solo en beneficio de ellos mismos, individual, sino que pueda beneficiar a los otros estudiantes, eso sin duda dispararía de alguna manera competencias lingüísticas. (TI,2)*

Muchos hacen intercambio y llegan a la vida normal sin aportar nada, entonces al contrario que ellos sobresalgan, que ellos den y cuenten qué fue lo que hicieron que fue productivo para ellos qué nuevo les pueden aportar al grupo al área, a la comunidad a la escuela. (TI, 3)

*Una de mis expectativas al llegar aquí era participar de un club para **ayudar** a mis compañeros. (SI,3)*

Es importante que vengan y lo compartan también o hagan mini prácticas hagan cosas con los

mismos compañeros o con la mismo institución, me parece que es algo que enriquece entonces de esa forma estarían contribuyendo tanto a su vida académica. (TI, 5)

*En realidad se necesita bastante ese tipo de ayuda externa, uno en el salón de clase hace lo que puede y se bate en duelo con ellos, pero no alcanza a rasguñar lo que en realidad uno quisiera enseñar, entonces ellos serían un gran **apoyo** si se pudiesen integrar, si pudiesen realizar un club, si se unen con las asistentes no sé, mira a mí me paso esto o aquello no sé, cosas así serían muy positivas para la escuela. (TI, 7)*

As part of the reintegration, as well as, the transformation process followed by exchanging students, they appear as a point of reference for other students to follow. In that respect, the coming subcategory sustains the main characteristics of this figure.

Example for others' projection:

This subcategory represents the dare for returnees when becoming accustomed to their academic life again. In that respect, as exchanging students, they constituted a key population to motivate other potential groups to follow their steps and become **transformers** of their community, too.

The root of their challenges is on their **experience sharing**. This is based on the do's and the don'ts students must take into consideration when traveling abroad and returning back to their academic context. In terms of the do's, it is important to bear in mind, the academic development while one is abroad. It implies taking courses in areas connected to those students have before leaving. Equally important is to get the initial objectives and motivation to get engaged in an exchanged program. In that respect, some participants of this project stated that while being abroad, they studied and always had their

returning, career and subjects in mind. Here is an evidence of that:

*Sería muy bueno si estas personas que regresan se involucraran con alguna especie de **tutoría** alguna especie de asesoría con los estudiantes que no lo han hecho, que sirvan también de antecedente para poder decir venga yo quiero viajar, este ya viajó, a ver yo le pregunto, ¿cómo es eso? ¿Cómo le fue? (TI,4)*

***compartir** la experiencia, abrir un espacio donde ellos hablaran de su experiencia y compartir precisamente los retos, los desafíos que tuvieron allá, las ventajas, desventajas como que ilustraran un poquito más acerca de, para los chicos que quieren y desean poder aplicar a este tipo de programas entonces conocer la experiencia seria pues algo muy enriquecedor e igual yo sé que los estudiantes que tienen la oportunidad de viajar con este tipo de programas pueden elaborar un informe o un proyecto entonces como que estructurarse o pensarlo bien desde acá tener una idea de lo que se podría desarrollar en ese contexto y aprovechar la experiencia para poder desarrollar investigación y que a su regreso pues eso les sirva.(TI,5)*

However, some others settled that they just got there to enjoy, have fun, and forget all about their previous academic life. So they never attempted to be prepared for their reentry. They did not take any course to keep their knowledge or abilities updated. These assertions portray the don'ts an exchange student must avoid to follow considering the fatal consequences in their academic life. Here are pieces of evidence regarding to those outcomes:

Realmente, no. Sabía que tenía que regresar a terminar la carrera pero quería solo mejorar el inglés, pasarla rico y ahorrar plata. (SI, 1)

*Fue un poco difícil retomar la lengua francesa ya que duré un año **sin practicar**.(SI.11)*

Hay grupos que llegan tal cual, un grupo muy reducido pero llegan como se fueron. (TI,2)

*A nivel académico, pues bueno la percepción mía en cuanto a nivel académico, algunos de ellos efectivamente sí logran mejorar su nivel de lengua, algunos otros llegan como en iguales condiciones, y pues se debe a muchos factores, ¿no? puede ser la misma **actitud** que los estudiantes asuman cuando viajan al exterior, las mismas habilidades que tengan, las mismas oportunidades que ellos busquen para precisamente mejorar su nivel de lengua (TI,4)*

Conclusions

A great adventure has ended. Students should be encouraged to recognize that they are once again entering to their cultural and physical environment, thus they just need to assume the role they used to one or two years ago. Therefore, students cannot be let alone during their adaptation process, since this is their culture and they should find in it the support they need to be proud of what they did abroad, in this way they might feel more comfortable at the moment of contribute to their country.

In order to make possible what is stated above, students must keep in mind the academic challenges they might face when returning from an exchange program:

- Attitude: it is important to accept that you are back; in this sense your attitude towards the academic life would be the one you had before you left. Moreover although your teachers and your classmates are not the same, it is the same process you lived abroad with people you did not know. Otherwise, you will find your adaptation to the academic life process harder than it can actually be.

- Academic field: as you were practicing a foreign language for a year or two, you will have troubles concerning phonetic aspects of other languages like: French or German.

In that respect, it is important to take time to work on the subjects you need to; moreover it is highly important to be in touch with your teachers, they need to know that you will probably need more time to get back in track thus teachers will be part of your adaptation to the academic life process.

- In terms of the language you were improving, make sure to focus on the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) since it is well known that students improve their speaking and listening, but as the aim of the Foreign and Modern Languages programs is to prepare students to become TEACHERS, reading and writing are part of the whole acquisition process. Thus, you won´t have hard times when writing academic papers, doing homework's or even reading an article.

- In the classroom: students who have not been abroad and teachers are expecting good things from you, you can be a transformer of the academic community. Instead of feeling rejected by the students, take advantage of your knowledge, share your experience, and work with your teachers. In that way, you will find your experience worthy and interesting. The challenge here is to prove yourself you can help and contribute to the Languages school.

Finally, the student routine resuming, the interaction game, the visibility of new acquired skills and the example for others' projection are the materialization of the dares returnees faced as part of the acculturation cycle that they are completing. Through the statement of these, exchanging students, non-exchanging students and teachers can establish and generate meaningful improvements in and out the FL classroom. There is no doubt that this population represents a potential source of knowledge that cannot be ignored.

Pedagogical Implications

Throughout the development of this project, we noticed that there are some pedagogical implications to be taken into account. It is well known that students of the foreign languages school have the opportunity to travel abroad since they are involved with the educational and languages area, which gives them priority in the exchange programs. However, in the surveys applied to the group of fifteen students that belonged to an exchange program, the results showed that in most of the cases, students do not keep in mind what they should do before returning from an exchange program, and what they could do after their participation in an exchange program, which led them to think and to be more conscious about their tasks abroad and once they are back at the university.

Besides, based on the interviews made to the group of ten teachers and the surveys applied to the students who have not participated in an exchange program, the outcomes were that exchange students could have done more when they returned to the academic life to the university, and they could do better if their attitude were different, since it seems like most of the times students' attitudes were the root of their challenges.

Bearing in mind of what is stated above, exchange students noticed that besides improving the language of the country they were occupying, they should have taken into account the language in the four skills (reading, writing, and not only listening and speaking), because most of them stated they went through difficulties expressing ideas when reading and writing. Moreover, when it came to the development of a regular class at the university, exchange students affirmed that they have lost the habit of studying regularly, which means that there was a lack of preparation and consciousness when resuming their studies at the UPTC.

Additionally after being part of this research process, participants (exchange students and teachers) stated that there must be a process when they come back as there is one when they leave the country. In that sense, the adaptation to the academic life would be easier and exchange students ´participation would be more notable in the languages school. In that respect, students who travel would be more committed to the school of languages and with the improvement of their partners´ language, which implies a better quality of English as a second language in the future.

Furthermore, Teachers ´perceptions are taken as pedagogical implications. They stated that along with the assistants, exchange students can create a club in which they advice students who have not been abroad about the things they should have taken into account if they decide to apply for an exchange program, so they would be aware of their coming back to the academic life process, as well exchange students can contribute to the increase of English oral production of the students from the first semesters.

Finally, it is essential to recommend some further studies that could appear from this research. First of all, it would be important to identify how students overcome challenges once they retake their studies at the university. In that sense there would be more information about the whole coming back process after an exchange program, and in the same way it would be important to explore what are the exchange students´ possible weaknesses and strengths in terms of the language of the country they were occupying after an exchange program.

Limitations

The development of this research has been accomplished in a good manner. Nonetheless, there were numerous factors that made the project's progression tough and sometimes frustrating. It was quite hard to gather the par-ticipants because they were chosen at random; they belonged to different semesters and many times their schedule was totally opposite to ours. Therefore, the data collection process took us long time.

In addition, we have some inconvenient with the interviews since most of the participants were on vacations or they were doing their final social practicum out of Tunja then it was a bit difficult to get quick access to the data.

Finally, it is important to mention that it was quite difficult to find literature about our project concerning its foundations (challenge, academic area, and exchange program). In this respect, we had to build up some of the meanings based on what we knew and on what it was closer to our approach. Besides, we have to say that despite the inconvenience, the research project came up to a great and successful end. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware about the role of the research project in the foreign languages career since its students do not have enough training and sources in this area thus it was hard for us to conduct our investigation.

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