

A STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION AND  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL  
SENSITIVITY OF CATALAN/SPANISH UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS DURING STUDY ABROAD

Iryna Pogorelova

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TESI DOCTORAL UPF / 2016

DIRECTOR DE LA TESI

Dra. Mireia Trenchs-Parera

DEPARTAMENT D'HUMANITATS





I dedicate this thesis to my beloved husband, Andrian Bolilov, for his support and constant encouragement during the writing of this thesis.



## Acknowledgements

I owe my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr Mireia Trenchs-Parera who has been guiding me through all these years. This dissertation would have remained a dream had it not been for her support, patience and invaluable academic guidelines. Also, I would like to thank her for providing me with funding for data collection from GREILI, the UPF-funded research group that she coordinates, and for allowing me to attend GREILI's seminars where I got acquainted with the research methods and concepts used in her research projects funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education (*The Translinguam Project*, FF2014-52663-P) and by Obra Social la Caixa (Recercaixa 2010ACUP 00344).

My sincere thanks go to Dr Tânia Baraúna Teixeira for her useful ideas on how to improve the methodology of my research at the initial stage. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr Carmen Pérez-Vidal for providing me with the models of questionnaires she and her colleagues had used in her research projects.

It gives me great pleasure in acknowledging the support and help of the UPF staff who facilitated the recruitment of the participants and data collection at various stages of this study. My sincere thanks go to the Deans and Mobility Coordinators in the Faculties of Humanities, Health and Life Sciences, Communication, and Political and Social Sciences for their help in contacting outgoing students. I am also grateful to the secretary of the Department of Humanities, Àngels Bertran, who was very helpful with logistic arrangements for data collection. Special thanks are due to the technical staff in UPF's La Factoria for constant technical support and help in creating virtual Moodle classrooms, which acted as a data collection medium in my research. I share the credit of my work with Dr Roberto Molowny-Horas for his useful suggestions and help with statistical analysis.

I gratefully acknowledge my participants who were helpful and provided me with rich data. Finally, my gratitude is extended to my family because without their encouragement and patience this thesis would not have been written.



## **Abstract**

The present dissertation investigates the impact of university study abroad (SA) programmes on intercultural adaptation and intercultural sensitivity of bilingual students from a multilingual and multicultural background. The study also examines their motives for taking part in SA programmes, pre-departure expectations and concerns. This research focuses on a group of twelve bilingual Catalan/Spanish students and employs a longitudinal design with both quantitative and qualitative methods. The results demonstrate how adaptation varied greatly depending on social, linguistic, and academic abilities. The study provides evidence that SA experiences have an overall positive effect on intercultural sensitivity although sojourns may also contribute to the development of cultural stereotypes. Expectations, language fluency, personal and linguistic confidence, and previous SA experiences appear to be factors influencing both adaptation and sensitivity. This dissertation provides recommendations so that higher education institutions organizing SA programmes can cater better for their students' needs and make their cultural transitions smoother.

**Key words:** Study Abroad, stays abroad, academic mobility, intercultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural competence, higher education



## Resum

Aquesta tesi investiga l'impacte de les estades acadèmiques a l'estranger en l'adaptació intercultural i la sensibilitat intercultural d'estudiants bilingües provinents d'un context multilingüe i multicultural. L'estudi també examina els motius per participar en l'estada, les expectatives i les preocupacions prèvies a la partida. Aquesta investigació se centra en dotze estudiants bilingües en català i espanyol i emprà un disseny longitudinal amb mètodes quantitius i qualitius. Els resultats demostren com l'adaptació varia segons les habilitats socials, lingüístiques i acadèmiques. L'estudi evidencia que la mobilitat té un efecte positiu sobre la sensibilitat intercultural encara que també pot contribuir al desenvolupament d'estereotips culturals. Les expectatives, la fluïdesa comunicativa, la confiança lingüística i personal, i les experiències prèvies de mobilitat semblen ser factors que afecten l'adaptació i la sensibilitat. Aquesta tesi proporciona recomanacions perquè les institucions que organitzin programes de mobilitat puguin atendre millor les necessitats dels estudiants i facilitar-los les seves transicions culturals.

**Paraules clau:** estudis a l'estranger, estades a l'estranger, mobilitat acadèmica, adaptació intercultural, sensibilitat intercultural, competència intercultural, educació superior



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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, increased migration flows have transformed the world into multicultural societies. As we have to communicate and interact with people from different cultures, Intercultural Competence (IC) (knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to communicate effectively and behave appropriately in an intercultural context) has become a very important ability. The access to multiple technologies also contributes to the creation of what Lustig and Koester (2010) call “the global village,” a virtual intercultural space where people from different cultures meet, communicate, and maintain cultural ties, which makes IC even more important. Many scholars note that just being able to speak the language of people from a different culture is not enough for successful communication. We should know social and cultural aspects as well, and develop “the ability to recognize, respect, value and use productively – in oneself and others – cultural conditions and determinants in perceiving, judging, feeling and acting with the aim of creating mutual adaptation...” (Thomas, 2003, quoted in Larrea, Raigón, and Gómez, 2011). One of the ways to develop these skills is to increase communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. To achieve this goal for their students, higher institutions organize study abroad (SA) programmes. The general idea of these programmes is that this experience may help students not only improve their foreign language skills and intercultural awareness, but also develop the ability to adjust their own communication and learn how to interact and work with other people in spite of cultural differences.

Fifteen years ago, when I was a student at the University of Foreign Languages in Ukraine, I could not have even dreamt of such an opportunity. Studying in European, American or other universities outside of the countries of the former USSR was an unaffordable luxury for the majority of post-Soviet youth. We could not have even thought that we could compete for government grants or undergraduate scholarships to study abroad. At that time, they did not exist. Those lucky ones who had studied abroad were always gazed at with admiration. When asked to share their experiences upon return, they displayed a variety of impressions about their sojourn. For some, the SA experience was life-changing at a personal level. Some were proud of their foreign language improvements and nothing more. Some expressed the desire to return to their

host country upon graduation. Some behaved as if they had returned from an expensive holiday resort and mostly talked about places of interest they had visited. Others, on the contrary, were dissatisfied with their SA and claimed that our academic system was better. Already at that time, I wondered why people who had stayed in the same country returned differently impacted and what vital experiences had had an influence on their adjustment to a new setting while abroad.

However, fifteen years since my graduation, these issues seem more relevant than ever. Today, I live in Spain, which is a member of the European Union (EU), where mobility is at the core of the EU policy. The reduction of border-crossing formalities, the enhancement of foreign language learning, and the labour legislation reform have promoted free mobility of European citizens not only between other member states, but also far beyond the EU borders (Coleman, 1998). SA programmes have become increasingly popular and, which is also important, much more accessible to students. More and more European universities establish the period of stay abroad as a compulsory part of university studies. Nowadays, it is difficult to find an undergraduate student in Europe who has not heard of the ERASMUS programme. The European news headlines often feature the ERASMUS as a life-changing experience. For instance, the newspaper *Independent* has recently published a study under the title “EU's Erasmus study abroad programme is responsible for one million babies”, in which journalists claim that over one quarter of former Erasmus students meet their life partners during their Erasmus sojourns.<sup>1</sup> Most recently, another European newspaper announced that Italian professor Sofia Corradi, the founder of the ERASMUS programme, was awarded the Charles V prize in Spain. The newspaper highlights that “thanks to her, a former professor of Permanent Education at the University of Roma Tre, who taught until 2004, four million university students from 4,000 universities were able to travel.”<sup>2</sup>

In an attempt to help students make the best of their residence abroad at either an academic or cultural level, universities organize different pre-departure courses (Camiciottoli, 2010), employ social networks to support students while abroad (Lee,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/eus-erasmus-study-abroad-programme-responsible-for-1m-babies-9751749.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/nations/spain/2016/05/10/charles-v-prize-to-italian-professor-who-invented-erasmus\\_6ffb270-d90e-430d-a6ed-fcd52877a114.html](http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/nations/spain/2016/05/10/charles-v-prize-to-italian-professor-who-invented-erasmus_6ffb270-d90e-430d-a6ed-fcd52877a114.html)

Kim and Kim, 2010; Lee, Kim, Lee and Kim, 2012) as well as virtual environments to develop IC (Davis and Cho, 2005), and prepare orientation modules to guide students during the whole stay abroad period (Pérez–Vidal and Beattie, 2004). It is not surprising that professors and researchers seek to find out whether these preparation courses, orientation modules, and study abroad, in particular, are effective.

When I enrolled in the doctorate programme in Humanities at the University Pompeu Fabra (UPF) in Barcelona, I wondered whether the Faculty organized any pre-departure activities for outgoing students. I found out that the UPF Office of International Affairs organized a basic pre-departure orientation session for those UPF students who were going to the US and Canada. The session was conducted in the form of a facilitated brainstorming. During the session, students were split into small groups and were given sample situations they might encounter abroad so that they could discuss ways to overcome them. Then, students presented the results to each other. Finally, US students currently studying at the UPF joined the session to meet them and answer specific questions about their home universities. Unfortunately, no study was carried out by the Office of International Affairs to investigate the effect of such a pre-departure orientation and study abroad in general on the UPF students' intercultural development.

I also found out that students who were going to other destinations did not have such pre-departure orientation sessions. Instead, the Faculty organizes general information sessions for all outgoing students with the purpose of notifying them of the UPF and host university regulations, academic formalities, and housing.

I also realized that the Faculty did not conduct post-study abroad sessions with students to investigate the perceptions of their linguistic and intercultural development as a result of the sojourn, what difficulties students went through while abroad, and what vital experiences triggered turning points in their stays. These observations gave me the idea to explore the impact of study abroad programmes on the development of university students' intercultural skills, namely intercultural adaptation and intercultural sensitivity.

## 1.1 Statement of the problem and significance of the study

Study abroad is not a new field of investigation and attracts a lot of interest from various disciplines, such as education, language acquisition, psychology, sociology, and communication. A huge body of research has been conducted to investigate the effect of study abroad programmes on the development of various elements of IC at higher education (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton and Paige, 2009; Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012; Olson and Kroeger, 2001; Penbek, Yukdakul and Cerit, 2009; Braskamp, Braskamp and Merrill, 2009; Williams, 2005; Savicki, 2010, Gilliland, Attridge, Attridge, Maize, and McNeill, 2016). A review of these studies reveals that most of them are in essence quantitative and restricted to the US or Asian populations, whose profiles differ from those of European students. Although there are a few qualitative studies where the population represents students of various European nationalities (Beaven, 2012), the participants are generally monolingual students. Very few studies have been conducted to explore the impact of study abroad on IC with a focus on bilingual students (Pérez-Vidal and others, 2014). When abroad, these students are required to speak a foreign language, which is the third for bilinguals or even the fourth for those of immigrant origin who are actually melting in a supposedly bilingual society. Another important factor that should be pointed out is that this bilingual population comes from superdiverse environments and is often surrounded by mates from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds while studying in primary, secondary or high school. As in the case of Catalonia, which is one of the examples of a superdiverse society where Catalan/Spanish youth are exposed to different cultures from their childhood.

The term *super-diversity* was firstly introduced by Vertovec (2006) who studied immigration and multiculturalism in Britain. He defined this phenomenon as “diversification of diversity” which should not be interpreted in terms of multiculturalism, “the presence of multiple cultures in one society alone” (Jørgensen and Juffermans, 2011, n.p). Superdiversity is characterized by the two main factors:

1. Increased influx of migrants of different nationalities and ethnicity, speaking different languages and practising various religions in the last decade, as well as

shifts in “motives, patterns and itineraries of migration, processes of insertion into the labour and housing markets of the host societies” (Vertovec 2010, as cited in Blommaert and Rampton, 2011, p.1).

2. Digital revolution and technologies, which have changed people’s way of communication, have given them the possibility to stay in touch across long distances and have provided them with a broad range of learning aids and linguistic resources.

This cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity that surrounds their daily lives and also technological developments, such as social networks that cross borders (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and so on), lead to unpredictability in terms of their “sociocultural features” (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011) and preferences. In their article, Jørgensen and Juffermans (2011) eloquently describe this modern tendency:

A consequence of this superdiversity is an increasingly important lack of predictability. A few decades ago it would be possible to predict with some degree of certainty what a 14-year old grade school student in, for instance, Berlin would be like - looks, mother tongue, religious affiliation, cultural preferences, musical taste, and in other ways. The range of resources available to and employed by 14-year old grade school students in Germany was limited compared to what we observe today - none of this can today be predicted with any substantial degree of certainty.

(Jørgensen and Juffermans, 2011, n.p)

All this suggests that nowadays students are not as they used to be. In view of all the aforementioned, much more research needs to be done on the effect of study abroad programmes on such bilingual students’ intercultural adaptation and the development of intercultural sensitivity. This study therefore seeks to investigate how these students adapt to a new cultural environment and to various intercultural communication and behavioural styles, and what vital experiences influence their adjustment and communication. The results can be of a particular interest to study abroad professionals and instructors who organize mobility and cross-cultural training programmes.

## **1.2 Research context**

With the launch of the Bologna process and further creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) aimed at promoting academic exchange and international cooperation, competence in several languages and international mobility came to the fore. In order to encourage the learning of other languages and to foster internationalization, European universities undertook a series of long-term strategic initiatives to fulfill these objectives. One such initiative was establishing institutional multilingual language policies, which in practice meant creating “study programmes, fully or in part, in two languages (German and French, Spanish and Catalan or Basque, Finnish and Swedish, Italian and German, to mention but a few cases), integrating English as a further language of instruction and, what is more, carrying out their daily organizational and administrative activities in two or three of these languages” (Veronesi and Nickenig, 2009, p.1).

For this study, I chose Catalonia as a research context because it represents a bilingual society, but which is de facto multilingual due to recent international immigration. Catalan universities have been at the forefront in promoting SA programmes for local students and in welcoming international students, as well as in establishing multilingual language policies.

I shall further describe the language policy and actions undertaken to promote internationalization by the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF). I chose UPF among other Catalan universities for several reasons but mainly because 1) most of the undergraduate students are Catalans who have command of both the Catalan and Spanish languages; 2) UPF has had the multilingual policy since 2008; 3) all the undergraduate degrees include courses in three languages; and 4) UPF has been ranked as one of the best universities in Europe.

### **1.2.1 Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF)**

UPF is a high-quality public university situated in the Catalanian Autonomous Community of Spain. It was founded in 1990 and was named after the Spanish linguist Pompeu Fabra who is known for having established the modern rules (normative) for

the Catalan language. In just twenty-five years, UPF has gained a reputation for being one of the best universities in Europe. It has been honored with an International Excellence Campus label by the Spanish Ministry of Education and has been listed in different international rankings, “Times Higher Education ranking (2015), Shanghai University ranking (2015), and El Mundo ranking (2015)”, often in prominent positions.

In order to conform to the European reform process, UPF developed the *Plan of Action for Multilingualism*<sup>3</sup> (PAM) with a purpose to create necessary preconditions for a more multilingual ambience within the university. Although the plan was intended for the 2007-2013 period, its key principles and provisions still remain in effect and are currently under revision. After its approval, UPF, where Catalan and Spanish had been the only languages of instruction, set a course for creating a trilingual environment by opening up opportunities for teaching and learning also in English, the lingua franca of international communication. The main idea was to foster the use of these three languages in academic, administrative and institutional spheres. In order to preserve Catalan as an institutional language, UPF established “linguistic security” regulations according to which the language of instruction for a course had to be determined by the university before its start and could not be changed under any circumstances. In case the language for a subject had not been set up by curriculum or the department when creating an offer, a professor was entitled to determine it based upon academic necessities. The information concerning the language in which classes of a particular subject would be taught had to be made publicly available through various sources, such as the official university website, teaching plan for the subject and course information before enrollment. Teaching and learning materials were not limited to the language mentioned in the syllabus and could be given in Catalan, Spanish or English. Assignments and evaluation exams were also allowed to be submitted in any of the three languages, unless language skills in one specific language had to be assessed in the course.

As for other foreign languages beside English, the university also actively promoted the extracurricular learning of French, German and Italian (three other foreign languages students can take in secondary education and in standardized university entry tests in

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<sup>3</sup> Full document is available at this website: [http://www.upf.edu/llengues/2\\_politica/pam.html](http://www.upf.edu/llengues/2_politica/pam.html)

Catalonia) as well as of several languages of the most common migrant communities in Catalonia (e.g. Chinese, Arabian or Russian) through a language programme called “Programa d’ensenyament d’idiomes – PEI” (now Idiomes UPF).

Since 2014 the Catalan Government has put a new normative standard according to which “students who begin a Bachelor's degree programme at a Catalan university during the 2014-2015 academic year or later must certify, upon completing their studies, knowledge of one of the foreign languages included in the tests for university entrance (PAU), with a level equivalent to B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) of the Council of Europe, in accordance with the Article 211 of Law 2/2014 of 27 January on the knowledge of a third language, published in the DOGC no. 6551 of 30 January 2014” ([https://www.upf.edu/llengues/en/2\\_politica/acreditacio.html](https://www.upf.edu/llengues/en/2_politica/acreditacio.html)). So as to help students in their first year to determine their level of foreign language competences, the UPF has introduced the Language Diagnostic Tests. At the same time, for those students who want to improve their language skills and to obtain accreditation of language competences according to the Common European Framework of References, the university proper and affiliated centers offer a large number of language courses. UPF’s language service, *Idiomes UPF*, also offers standardized accreditation tests.

With regard to internationalization, strategic initiatives were also taken in this field. The actions encompassed a range of activities aimed at increasing international mobility, improving the university profile so as to attract qualified international staff, establishing strategic partnerships with universities from around the world and participating in cooperation projects. In 2012, for example, UPF launched the Global Network Initiative project and became a member of Europaeum, a network of prestigious high-quality universities within Europe. Under this project, UPF ran the European Summer School on Human Rights in 2013. As for cooperation outside Europe, UPF successfully developed and implemented several projects together with universities from the USA. As a result of such cooperation, the Global Cities international summer school and several joint degree programmes were launched. Particular attention must be paid to the A-U4 international project, which seeks to deepen strategic relationships with Turkey and the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

From the moment the reform process was put into motion, UPF has experienced significant changes. Guided by new European recommendations, the university has implemented a gradual incorporation of English as a language of instruction practically in all degrees. In order to improve the quality of education, the Centre for Teaching Quality and Innovation (CQUID)<sup>4</sup>, now Centre for Learning Innovation and Knowledge (CLIK), has been created so that the teaching staff can familiarize themselves with up-to-date and innovative methodological approaches necessary for teaching subjects in general. As part of its formative actions, the center provides courses aimed at improving English-medium instruction as a methodology. As a result, the number of non-native professors teaching in English as well as courses taught in this language has increased. In a 2013-2014 academic year, for instance, of all courses offered at the undergraduate level 54% were taught in Catalan, 27% in Spanish and 16% in English. At the Master's level, on the contrary, 42% of all courses were taught in English, 34% in Spanish and 24% in Catalan. As for doctorate level, 60% of all doctoral theses were read in English. It is worth noting that in master and especially doctorate programmes, English has also become an administrative language. As part of the Centre's goals, the university has also created the position of the multilingualism coordinator who has the responsibility to ensure linguistic security within UPF and promote UPF's language policies.

Accreditation of foreign language knowledge before graduation has become an obligatory requirement for students who begin a Bachelor's degree programme in Catalan universities. It should be also mentioned that language accreditation has also become a necessary requirement for some postgraduate programmes to be enrolled in at UPF. In a 2014-2015 academic year, for instance, thirteen of twenty-six master programmes offered by UPF required accreditation of the English level for entrance. As for doctorate studies, English accreditation is mandatory for the four of nine currently existing programmes.

One word needs to be said about the university staff. One of the founding policies of UPF twenty-five years ago was attracting the best researchers in various fields including young staff who had had the postgraduate studies abroad. Nowadays, this staff ensures the possibility of English-medium instruction by non-natives. In addition, the number of

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<sup>4</sup> More information can be found at <http://www.upf.edu/cquid/en/>

international teaching and research staff has increased in recent years. Pérez-Vidal, Lorenzo-Galés and Trenchs-Parera (2016) in their article on internationalization of education in Catalonia give several reasons for this increase at the university level, among others: 1) substantive changes made in Catalan universities with regards to recruitment procedures and selection criteria have facilitated access of international professionals; and 2) the Catalan Institute of Research and Advanced Studies (ICREA), which hires researchers and professors from all over the world, also has actively contributed to this influx.

With regard to international mobility, UPF nowadays offers a variety of practical internships and SA programmes for both incoming and outgoing students. The ERASMUS programme and bilateral agreements are two commonly used frameworks for academic exchange. Besides, the Global Cities international summer school, joint and double degree programmes also gain popularity.

Foreign exchange students coming to UPF have a vast choice of courses tailored to their specific interests and professional needs. As for UPF students, they also have plenty of options to complement their studies with international experience. It is noteworthy that the number of students willing to spend some time abroad during their university studies is on the rise from year to year. For the 2015-2016 academic year, the UPF received and processed 1.064 applications for participation in SA programmes under the Erasmus and bilateral agreements scheme, 20% more than the previous year. The highest number of applications came mainly from the Faculty of Economic and Business Science (363), followed by the Faculties of Translation and Interpretation (255), Law (136) and Communication (129) (<http://www.upf.edu/estudiarfora/actualitat/0422.html>). Out of 1.064 applications, 897 were accepted, which represents almost 10% of all undergraduate students at the UPF. The most popular destinations remain European countries, followed by the USA and Canada, Latin America, Asia, New Zealand and Australia.

### 1.2.2 Study Abroad programmes at UPF

It is relevant to briefly review the specific SA exchange programmes through which the participants of the current study stayed at their host universities. These are the

ERASMUS programme, the Bilateral Agreements and the Global Cities programme. Four of the twelve participants went abroad through the ERASMUS, seven through the Bilateral Agreements and one student through the Global Cities programme.

The ERASMUS programme (the acronym is also read as European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University students) is one of the largest and most successful SA programmes that exists so far. It was named after the Dutch humanist and theologian Erasmus of Rotterdam, who travelled throughout Europe and gave lectures in European universities. The programme was founded in 1987 “with a view to increasing significantly the mobility of university students and promoting greater cooperation between universities...” (Commission of the European Communities, 1989, p.2). Under the impulse of the Bologna process, international mobility became a key feature of the EU agenda in the field of Higher Education. Since the signing of the Bologna declaration in 1999, the ERASMUS has been gradually becoming one of the most popular SA programmes among students and universities’ staff around the EU. It was agreed to create a unified education structure so that Higher Education Institutions could easily accredit degrees between different member states. A common two-cycled degree system, according to which undergraduate and postgraduate studies were split into Bachelors (BA) and Masters (MA), was further transformed to include a doctoral level (PhD) as a third cycle. To facilitate the academic recognition of qualifications and studies carried out in another member state, a number of recognition tools (Diploma Supplement, Europass, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) - just to name a few) were developed.

After the launch of the Lifelong Learning programme (LLP)<sup>5</sup> in 2007, students and institution staff were able not only to study and train within the Erasmus programme, but also to take part in traineeships in companies abroad and participate in European and International cooperation projects.

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<sup>5</sup> The LLP was established for the period 2007 – 2013 and combined four SA programmes for all levels of education (higher education – ERASMUS, vocational education - Leonardo da Vinci, adult education– Grundtvig, and school exchanges – Comenius). In addition, other international Higher Education programmes, such as Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink, and bilateral programmes, as well as the Jean Monnet and the Youth in Action programmes began to form part of the LLP 2007-2013.

In 2014, the European Commission ran the ERASMUS+ programme<sup>6</sup> for education, training, youth and sport covering the period 2014-2020. In light of the financial and economic crisis that has seriously affected European stability, it is assumed that “education, training, youth and sport can make a major contribution to help tackle socio-economic changes, the key challenges that Europe will be facing until the end of the decade and to support the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion” (European Commission, 2014, p. 9). The key challenges that Europe is facing now are the loss of competitiveness of some sectors in the European economy, high unemployment rate (especially among youth), lack of digital literacy skills (mainly among adults) and lack of qualifications required by today’s labor market. Recent figures presented by statisticians speak for themselves: “almost 6 million young people are unemployed in the EU, yet 36% of employers have difficulty finding people with the skills they need. The skills gap in Europe is alarming, with nearly 20% of 15 year olds lacking sufficient skills in reading and 73 million adults with low (or no) education qualifications” (European Commission, 2013, p.5). For economic reasons, the need for low-skilled work is becoming limited. According to some estimates, a highly-specialized labour force will be in great demand as the number of high-skills jobs is likely to increase by 2020. Therefore, the Europe 2020 strategy defines the two primary objectives in the field of education: 1) to decrease the percentage of drop-outs from current 15% to less than 10%; and 2) to increase the percentage of people with completed higher education from present 31% up to 40%.

Higher Education Institutions willing to take part in the ERASMUS+ programme must be awarded the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education by the European Commission. According to its official website<sup>7</sup>, the Erasmus University Charter establishes “the general framework for the European co-operation activities a higher education institution (HEI) may carry out within the Erasmus programme.” Under the University Charter, a sending university assumes responsibility “to organise student mobility and teaching and other staff mobility, to carry out Erasmus intensive language courses and

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<sup>6</sup> The revisited programme includes current LLPs and one integrated ERASMUS+ programme that sets out three main key actions: “learning mobility for individuals,” “cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices,” “support for policy reform;” and two specific actions: Jean Monnet and Sport (European Commission, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Consult the European Commission website for more information:  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/lp/erasmus/erasmus\\_university\\_charter\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/lp/erasmus/erasmus_university_charter_en.php)

intensive programmes, and to apply for multilateral projects, networks, accompanying measures and to organise preparatory visits.” Bilateral agreements between a sending and receiving university become one more indispensable prerequisite.

As before, the duration of the programme varies from a minimum of 3 months to a maximum of 12 months. The admission requirements are normally as follows: 1) students willing to participate in the ERASMUS+ must possess a nationality of one of the participants member states or have a valid permit of residence; 2) they must be enrolled in a degree or official master programme; 3) they must be at least in their second year at the university; and 4) they must meet language requirements so as to be able to attend courses in a host university. Along with students, professors and universities’ staff can take part in the programme. Before departing for a host country, participants sign a “learning/training agreement” in which all details (e.g. courses to be learnt, credits to be obtained, recognition of the studies, etc.) are specified. Erasmus+ participants are exempt from the payment of all fees during their studies in a host university. All participants have the possibility to apply for the Erasmus+ grant, which may not exceed the period of 12 months. At the end of the SA period, the host university issues a “transcript of records” to every participant so that s/he can present it in the home university. This document provides a record of all grades and credits obtained during the SA. In case of successful completion of all courses, students receive full recognition of all studies carried out abroad from their home university.

In comparison to the ERASMUS that was initially conceived as a scheme under which participants could study in European universities, the Bilateral Agreements programme aimed at giving the possibility to study in any university from all over the world with which a home university had signed an exchange agreement. Since 2014-2015 the Bilateral Agreements programme has been included in the ERASMUS+ scheme.

Under this framework, European Higher Education institutions nowadays exchange places with partner universities around the world. For instance, the UPF has currently signed exchange agreements with more than 250 universities. Among the host destinations are the USA and Canada, Latin America, Asia, New Zealand and Australia. Tuition and examination fees are normally paid at a home university. As for

requirements for participation, they can vary from institution to institution, but what is always obligatory is accreditation of the language level required by a host university.

At the present moment, UPF has also signed more specific collaboration agreements with 40 universities, which are “ranked among the world's Top 100 according to the Times Higher Education 2012-13 ranking” (<http://www.upf.edu/international/>) for students from both universities, in order to design special exchange programmes tailored to the needs of each partner. As a result of close cooperation, many outstanding international projects have been brought to life. A good example of such joint efforts is the Global Cities summer school programme.

The Global Cities programme is a joint project of the UPF and the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Its aim is to provide “a comparative perspective on a variety of topics pertaining to the Humanities, Political Science and Communication Studies,” as well as on those “knowledge fields that reflect the creativity, the industries and the social, political and cultural background of the host cities: Barcelona and Los Angeles” (<http://www.upf.edu/internationalsummerschool/>). The programme lasts twelve weeks and includes two modules. The first module comprises a number of courses that are carried out at the UPF from June 25 to August 2. Having completed the first module, participants go to the UCLA so as to start the second module whose courses are scheduled from August 5 to September 14. The courses of the two modules are regular at both universities, which allows any local or international undergraduate student to enroll for the course s/he is interested in and to study together with European, North American and other international students. Students willing to take part in this joint programme must be in their third or fourth year at the university, have an outstanding academic record, and meet language requirements. The programme annually establishes a scholarship that covers tuition fees or travel expenses.

After having described the problem statement, significance and context of this research, I will then outline the structure of the present thesis.

### **1.3 Organization of the present study**

The current thesis contains seven chapters. This Chapter serves as an introduction to the following six chapters and describes the statement of the problem, significance and

research context of the study. Chapter II, which follows the present one, provides an overview of the literature on Intercultural Competence (IC) and its conceptualization in previous research. In this chapter, I will also analyse in detail two key IC components, namely intercultural adaptation and intercultural sensitivity, providing the review of main approaches that guide research on culture contact and adaptation, and some prominent frameworks that conceptualise intercultural sensitivity. Apart from this theoretical review, I will present recent findings of those studies that have been concerned primarily with the adaptation process of university students and the development of their intercultural sensitivity in the context of international mobility. I will finish this chapter by presenting the research questions which guide the present study. Chapter III is dedicated to the description of the methodological approach and design of the current study, the instruments used for collecting data, its data collection and analysis procedures. Chapters IV, V, and VI are devoted to the description of the data collected during three stages of the study and the results of its analysis: pre-departure, during the stay, and after the sojourn. In Chapter IV, I will be examining the participants' motives for taking part in the university SA program, their pre-departure expectations regarding their SA gains, and their main concerns. In Chapter V, I will be exploring the participants' experiences abroad and the turning points of their sojourns. First, I will provide a general overview of the group's adaptation process. After that, I will focus upon each of the participants and provide an overview of their individual adaptation processes. In order to better understand what kind of vital experiences influenced their adaptation, I will examine the narratives which the students provided while abroad. Finally, I will focus on the case of a single participant, Ares, and describe vital experiences that triggered turning points in her stay. In Chapter VI, I will be analyzing the participants' perceptions of achieved outcomes, the fulfillment of their pre-departure expectations, and factors and conditions that helped them adjust better to their new environment. I will also provide the statistical and qualitative findings of their intercultural sensitivity development as a result of the SA. Finally, Chapter VII offers a discussion of the results and concluding remarks, as well as recommendations for further research and for university SA programmes.



## CHAPTER II. INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND A FIELD OF INVESTIGATION

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the literature on Intercultural Competence (IC) and its conceptualization in previous research. In order to better understand this concept, I will provide a definition of culture for the present research and will briefly review theoretical models describing IC and its components. After that, I will discuss key competences and abilities in relation to IC that the Council of Europe has recommended in education in the European Union. Further, I will analyze in detail two IC elements, namely intercultural adaptation and intercultural sensitivity. To that end, I will describe three main approaches that guide research on cross-cultural transitions and adaptation and also will present some frameworks that conceptualize intercultural sensitivity. In addition to this theoretical review, I will describe recent research findings of those studies that have been concerned primarily with the adaptation process of university students and the development of their intercultural sensitivity in the context of international mobility. Finally, in view of the existing research, I will present the research questions that will guide the present study.

### **2.1 Culture and Intercultural Competence**

Culture is the key term for understanding the concept of IC. Many scholars interpret culture in a variety of ways, but the idea that all these interpretations have in common is that culture affects the way people think, behave, communicate, express their attitudes, and make decisions. For instance, Spencer-Oatey (2008) (as cited in Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p.2) interprets culture as “a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.” A simplified definition comes from Lustig and Koester (2010) who define culture as “a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms and social practices, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people” (p.25). In other words, these shared interpretations determine a “way of life” people follow within a culture group.

According to the authors, shared beliefs are referred to as a general understanding of one's own culture as well as that of other cultures. Values are viewed as cultural assumptions about "good" or "bad" (ibid, p. 27), which distinguish one group of people from another. Values are a powerful force which can determine communication patterns because people can establish, re-examine and reorder their priorities based upon these values. Norms are rules according to which people behave under various circumstances, while social practices are the behavioural patterns which are derived from beliefs, values and norms.

Interestingly, culture is not innate and people are not born with inherent values, beliefs, norms, and behavioural patterns, but rather they acquire and learn them through interaction (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Parents and educational establishments teach children language skills, the norms of behaviour, proper attire, and the morals of that particular culture. The process continues as children develop from primary education to adulthood. All of the people surrounding the individuals as they mature influence and contribute to their identity construction (Beaven, 2012). Nowadays, due to the increasing cultural diversity within one society, cultural worldviews about what is appropriate and important may vary significantly. Thus, IC becomes one of the key priorities in this globalized world because it makes for harmonious coexistence in which people understand that there are many other beliefs, values, and norms that are worth respecting.

A lot of definitions are used interchangeably in the research when discussing the concept of IC, among which are global competence, cross-cultural awareness, plurilingualism, and cross-cultural adaptation (Chen and Starosta, 2005). This plethora of definitions is happening because there is still no exact articulation of what is meant by the term (Deardorff, 2006). Barrett (2012) hypothesizes that it may be because scholars tend to describe its various components and do not explain clearly the term "intercultural," which is based on understanding the concept of culture.

Barrett describes culture as a complex constantly changing process and distinguishes three constituents of culture: material culture, social culture and subjective culture. Material culture embodies food, housing, goods, and other daily necessities. Such social distinctions of cultural groups as language, laws, and religion can be referred to as

social culture, whereas values, beliefs, conventions and attitudes characterize subjective culture. This trichotomy suggests that people within one group, regardless of size, can have different preferences in terms of material, social or subjective aspects of culture. Consequently, they can belong to multiple cultures simultaneously. For instance, families, universities and labour organizations can have their own cultures and which culture dominates depends on the context.

Following such logic, it may be assumed that every one of our interpersonal interactions can be considered intercultural as we live within a multicultural society. Barrett, however, specifies that interpersonal interaction becomes intercultural only if the person himself perceives or realizes that his cultural background is different from his interlocutor's. In other words, intercultural interaction takes place when cultural conventions are noticeable by the communicators. Consequently, intercultural interaction may occur not only between people from different cultures, but also between people of different lifestyles, social class, and sexual orientation. In such interactions, IC is required in order to communicate effectively. This raises a question of what competences an interculturally competent individual should possess.

For many years, scholars have been debating the constituents of IC. In an attempt to better understand the concept, dozens of models describing various abilities and skills have been proposed (Byram, 1997; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Chen and Starosta, 2000). Based on the literature, all IC components can be grouped into three extensive domains: affective, cognitive, and behavioural. The affective domain deals with people's emotions and attitudes towards cultural differences, openness to various opinions, and flexibility within a new social and cultural environment. The cognitive domain is interpreted as knowledge of values, beliefs, norms, and other aspects of intercultural interaction of a particular cultural group. The behavioural domain involves skills necessary to communicate effectively and appropriately in unfamiliar surroundings, such as anxiety management, communication adaptability, and ambiguity tolerance (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009).

A great number of models use the framework mentioned above. For instance, Davis and Cho (2005), based on a review of the literature, summarized key competences and described an interculturally competent individual as a person who "shows affective,

behavioral, and cognitive abilities, such as openness, empathy, adaptive motivation, perspective taking, behavioral flexibility, and person-centered communication” (p. 4). Geritson (1990, as cited in Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012) has also summarized various intercultural components within the model of cognitive, affective, and conative aspects. According to the author, cognitive aspects of IC include general knowledge of cultural values, standards, convictions, and communication styles. Affective aspects deal with people’s positions regarding different cultures, and respect for and acceptance of cultural differences. Conative aspects encompass skills of non-verbal communication and the ability to adapt to different communication patterns.

Another model of IC following the same framework has been proposed by Chen and Starosta (2000). In their model, the scholars have put a strong emphasis on communication competence. They have criticized the previous models for using abstract terms to describe the concept of communication competence and for lacking detailed explanation of its components (Fritz, Möllenberg and Chen, 2002). The authors assert that the assessment of the degree of intercultural communication competence (ICC) often causes confusion and leads to invalid results as the term has not been defined clearly. Their model of ICC involves three domains, each of which includes its respective skills:

- Intercultural awareness, which is cognitive in nature, includes such elements as self- and cultural awareness, that is, the consciousness of one’s own culture and others’ cultures, as well as the ability to distinguish between cultural similarities and differences;
- Intercultural sensitivity, which is affective in nature, deals with the ability to develop positive attitudes towards cultural differences and involves personal traits, such as “self-esteem, selfmonitoring, empathy, open-mindedness, nonjudgmental, and social relaxation;”
- Intercultural adroitness, which is behavioural in nature, deals with the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds and involves abilities, such as “message skills, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, and interaction management” (ibid, p.167).

Other scholars do not group intercultural elements into the three above-mentioned domains but rather describe IC in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which reflects the same idea. Such is the model proposed by Byram (1997), who has described IC in terms of the following constituents (what he calls *savoirs*):

- “Attitudes (*savoir être*): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own” (p.91).
- “Knowledge (*savoirs*): of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction” (p.94).
- “Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*): ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own” (p.98).
- “Skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*): ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices, and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction” (p.98).
- “Critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*): an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries” (p.101).

Because of the wide variety of IC interpretations, scholars have recently carried out research studies in order to obtain a clearer definition of the concept. I consider it important to mention here an exploratory study conducted by Deardorff (2006), who sought to clarify the notion of IC and to determine its components based on the consensus of higher institution administrators and intercultural scholars. In addition, she wanted to find out what assessment methods could be used for measuring the degree of IC one may have. Therefore, the study involved two groups of participants, higher education administrators and intercultural scholars. The methods Deardorff used were a questionnaire and the Delphi technique. The 11-item questionnaire was distributed to administrators from 24 higher education institutions around the US in order to collect

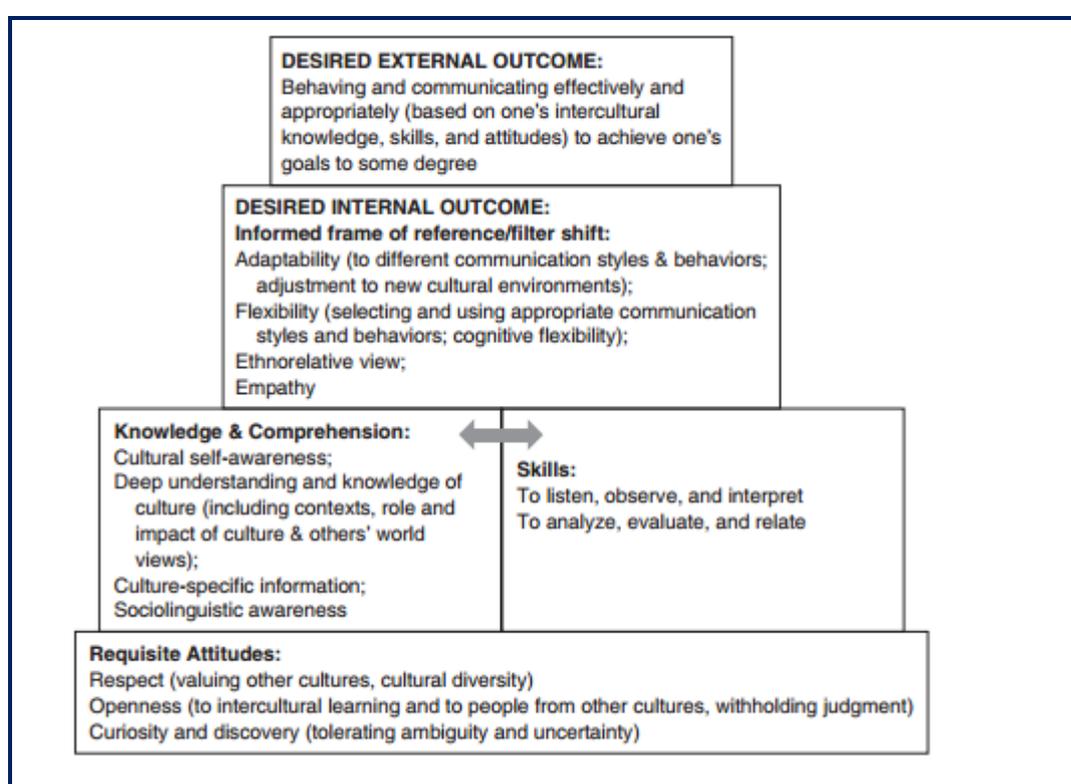
feedback on how they defined IC as a learning objective. The data obtained from this questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics. As a final step, the administrators were asked to provide the names of either national or international scholars prominent in the field of IC. As a result, 23 scholars participated in the second phase of the study where the Delphi technique was also used. The Delphi study consisted of three rounds. The results of the final round were analysed using frequency distributions and Pearson's chi-square test in order to compare the responses of administrators and intercultural scholars and to identify their consensus on general topics.

The data revealed that, although many definitions were provided, the administrators gave the highest rating to the definition of IC proposed by Byram (1997) and summarized as: "Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing oneself. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (Byram, 1997, p. 34, as quoted in Deardorff, 2006). As to the key components, they unanimously agreed that "The top three common elements were the awareness, valuing, and understanding of cultural differences; experiencing other cultures; and self-awareness of one's own culture" (ibid, p. 247). It is also worth noting that the administrators defined the concept of intercultural sensitivity using a variety of terms interchangeably, such as global competence, cross-cultural competence, and global citizenship.

Scholars were even more descriptive of their terminology, but they agreed that the best definition for IC was the following: "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in cultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 248). In regards to the components, scholars proposed a wider range of intercultural elements than the administrators, which involved "curiosity, general openness, respect for other cultures, cultural awareness, various adaptive traits, and cultural knowledge" (ibid., p. 248). Despite the variety of proposed intercultural elements, scholars agreed that "the understanding of others' world views" is the most crucial one for effective and appropriate communication.

In total, the administrators and scholars reached an agreement on 22 components of IC primarily dealing with communication and behaviour, but, as Deardorff suggests, most

of them are described in general terms and lack some kind of specification (e.g. mindfulness or flexibility), which means that more research needs to be done to scrutinize the definition of IC presented by both the scholars and administrators. In order to organize the final results, Deardorff developed two models: the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence and the Process Model of Intercultural Competence. The former highlights the components of IC while the latter, which contains the same components, emphasizes the “movement from the personal level to the interpersonal level (intercultural interaction)” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 257). Below I will briefly review the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence to present its key elements (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Deardorff’s pyramid model of Intercultural Competence**

(Source: Deardorff, 2006, p.254)

As can be seen in the above figure, IC involves four levels: attitudes, knowledge and skills, desired internal outcome, and desired external outcome. The model outlines the importance of attitudes, which are the foundation for the pyramid. These attitudes encompass such qualities as respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery. The second level of the pyramid is comprised of two separate but interconnected elements. The first element is knowledge and comprehension, which includes cultural self-awareness, deep

understanding and knowledge of culture, culture-specific information, and sociolinguistic awareness. Skills, the second element, work in tandem with the first one and are necessary for the acquisition of culture knowledge. These skills include such abilities as listening, observing, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and relating. The next two levels are internal and external outcomes, which are interrelated, as the former one reinforces the latter one. The desired internal outcome refers to “an informed frame of reference shift” and is characterized by the following four qualities: adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative view, and empathy. Altogether, all of the previously mentioned levels lead to the apex of the pyramid, which is the desired external outcome or, in other words, the ability to communicate and behave appropriately in a new cultural context.

Deardorff suggests that this model can provide general guidelines for assessing such a complex concept as IC. As to the assessment of the degree of IC, the scholar discovered that the most common methods used by the administrators were interviews, succeeded by student’s presentations, portfolios, observations, professor evaluations, pretests and posttests. In the results of the Delphi study, the administrators agreed on the following four specific assessment methods: “observation by others/host culture, case studies, judgment by self and others, and student interviews” (ibid, p. 250). Among other assessment tools and approaches, they also highly evaluated narrative diaries, self-report instruments, triangulations, and focus groups and workshops.

Intercultural scholars assert that both qualitative and quantitative measures should be used for a better assessment of IC. The use of scales or inventories alone was considered insufficient. IC can and should be measured as an ongoing process, not just following pre- and post-test design. Case studies and interviews were rated as top instruments followed by narrative diaries, observations, and other self-report instruments.

The results of Deardorff’s study suggest that IC is a very complex, constantly changing construct, which, as I see, is very difficult to define based only on a list of components. However, these components can provide guidelines for essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to achieve a communicative goal. I would rather avoid a consolidated list of required qualities but rather delve into the choices made by individuals in order to communicate and behave effectively in an intercultural context. Obviously, it is impossible to develop all the abilities and acquire all the skills proposed in the

aforementioned IC models, and also unnecessary because people do not adapt to everything and acquire the knowledge required for a particular situation. An individual can decide for himself or herself which qualities he or she lacks and needs to learn for a particular cultural context.

After having briefly reviewed the models and definitions proposed by scholars in the field of IC, I will further describe the key intercultural competences considered by the Council of Europe to be developed in education in the European Union.

## **2.2 Intercultural Competence in education in the European Union**

With the Bologna declaration and the advent of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), lifelong learning has become a key principle of education in the European Union. Learning throughout the life is a demand which involves developing the key competences necessary to succeed in this globalized world. This implies that European citizens should acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes, not only related to a particular job, but also those which will help them adapt to constant changes and keep pace with the times.

In order to highlight the abilities that would help citizens to cope with challenges of the modern world, the European Commission (2006) developed a European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The Reference Framework is comprised of eight key competences:

1. Communication in the mother tongue (“the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts; in education and training, work, home and leisure”) (p.4).
2. Communication in foreign languages (the ability “to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an appropriate range of

societal and cultural contexts (in education and training, work, home and leisure) according to one's wants or needs") (ibid., p.5);

3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology ("the ability and willingness to use mathematical modes of thought (logical and spatial thinking) and presentation (formulas, models, constructs, graphs, charts)") (ibid., p.6).
4. Digital competence ("the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet") (ibid., p. 7).
5. Learning to learn (learning to learn is the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organize one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups") (ibid., p.8).
6. Social and civic competences ("these include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary") (ibid., p.9).
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship ("it involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives") (ibid., p.11).
8. Cultural awareness and expression (this competence involves an awareness and understanding of one's own culture and other cultures, as well as the appreciation of and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity in other areas of the world. It also includes "appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media, including music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts") (ibid., p.12).

The primary objective of the framework was to provide a detailed list of key competences so that it could serve as a useful tool to support all pedagogical initiatives

in creating and developing special training programmes at either Community or European level. Member states were encouraged to disseminate and make the best use of it in order to promote and facilitate lifelong learning. Taking into account these recommendations, policy-makers and training providers could create a good opportunity to help young people and adults acquire necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for their self-realization, active social engagement and employability.

Two years later, the Council of Europe (2008a), based on the European Framework for Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning, highlighted the main objectives for intercultural competences and provided the framework for further action and initiatives in the fields of culture, education, youth and audiovisual. Within this framework, intercultural dialogue was considered a key instrument and one of the primary objectives in the work plans. In “The White Paper on Intercultural dialogue” published by the Council of Europe (2008b), intercultural dialogue was defined as “an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It operates at all levels – within societies, between the societies of Europe and between Europe and the wider world” (p. 10).

To promote and enhance intercultural dialogue, citizens are encouraged to develop three competences mentioned in the European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, namely communication in foreign languages, social and civic competences, and cultural awareness and expression. To fulfill these recommendations, European higher institutions have created special language courses and various study abroad programmes to contribute to multilingual and multicultural education (Coleman, 1998). These programmes have aimed to provide students with an opportunity to interact with people from linguistically and culturally different backgrounds, to participate in community activities while abroad, to travel and even to work. On the whole, these first-hand international experiences could give students insight into beliefs and values of different cultures, and also enhance their global learning and development. As Penbek et al. (2009) state in their article:

Today the majority of universities and social entities are applying different programs for students to give opportunities of studying and working abroad. Among

these programs most popular ones are Erasmus in the EU area, Study Abroad, Work and Travel and language courses. The logic behind sending students for overseas experience is providing them with a short term international experience during which they can develop required skills that will probably guide them in the global business world of today's economies.

(Penbek et al., 2009, p.4)

Not surprisingly, mobility programs have become increasingly popular in the last decade. A wide range of studies have been conducted to assess various outcomes of SA, especially in the field of language acquisition (Pérez-Vidal, 2014), intercultural communication, and cross-cultural transition (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001; Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012; Beaven, 2012). Particular attention has been paid to the students' process of adaptation to a new context and also to the development of their sensitivity to cultural differences, since these are two main outcomes of a successful SA experience.

The present study is concerned primarily with these two significant IC components: intercultural adaptation and intercultural sensitivity. In the following sections, I will briefly review the main approaches relating to the understanding of cross-cultural transition and adaptation, and also several frameworks that conceptualize intercultural sensitivity.

## **2.3 Intercultural adaptation**

Various scholars have used different terminology to define people's reactions and responses to intercultural contacts. The concepts such as adjustment, adaptation, acculturation, assimilation and integration are often used to describe changes in how people react to cultural differences and act in a new milieu. For instance, Kim (2005) employed the term cross-cultural adaptation as a broad concept that included all the above-mentioned terms, and defined the process itself as "the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal and functional relationship with the environment" (p.380). Whatever term is adopted, change and personal transformation are two core constituents of the process of "fitting"

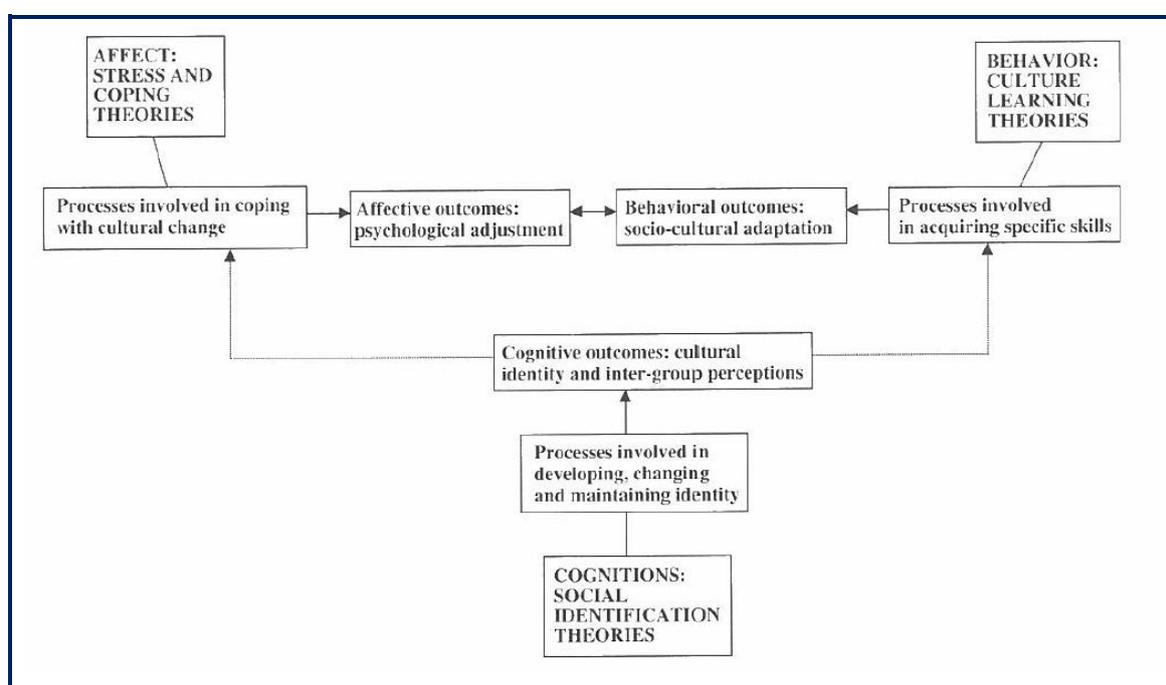
into a new social and cultural environment. Evidently, the experiences of long-term immigrants, workers and refugees, who are highly dependent on their host country, are not comparable with those of travellers and exchange students. Striking cultural differences, social and economic obligations will inevitably require greater effort on the part of newcomers, and the experience itself will lead to more radical personal change or transformation. Taking into account the residents' commitment and necessity to become used to a new situation, some scholars make distinctions between the terms *adjustment* and *adaptation*. Adjustment is often employed to mean "being the smaller and more short-term changes in order to solve immediate needs, while adaptation being the deeper and more long-term process of fitting better into another culture" (Beaven, 2012, p.37). Others scholars, on the contrary, avoid differentiating between these terms and apply them interchangeably to all residents, regardless of their immigrant status (Ward et al., 2001).

The adjectives *intercultural* and *cross-cultural*, which often accompany the terms adjustment and adaptation, are also often used synonymously. However, some scholars insist that there is a significant difference between these words (Lustig and Koester, 2010). The term cross-cultural is often used in studies that seek to contrast similarities and differences of two culturally different groups, while the term intercultural is more appropriate for studies that investigate the relations between those two groups, the way they communicate and interact.

In the present study, I will use the terms *adaptation* and *adjustment* interchangeably. I consider it irrelevant to draw a distinction between these two concepts, as both imply change that contributes to a better acclimation. Of the two adjectives *intercultural* and *cross-cultural*, I will definitely opt for the former when discussing adaptation. This study does not seek to compare different cultural groups, but rather to explore how Catalan/Spanish students adapt to new communication and behavioural styles and build relationships with people from different cultural background when abroad. In other cases, intercultural and cross-cultural will be employed synonymously.

A lot of theoretical frameworks and models have been emerged in an attempt to understand the process of "fitting" into a new social and cultural environment during stay abroad. Ward et al. (2001) summarized existing models in the field and identified

three theoretical approaches which they called “ABC of Acculturation”. These are the stress and coping approach, the culture learning approach, and the social identification approach. According to the authors, they correspond to affective, behavioural and cognitive domains of intercultural adjustment. Figure 2 depicts the interrelation of affect, behaviour and cognition during the intercultural adjustment process. These three aspects are closely interconnected and “parallel the three capacities identified as critical for overseas effectiveness; that is, the ability to manage stress, the ability to communicate clearly, and the ability to establish interpersonal relationships” (Ward, 2004, p.201).



**Figure 2. The ABC model of culture contact**

(Source: Ward, Bochner, and Furnham, 2001, p. 271)

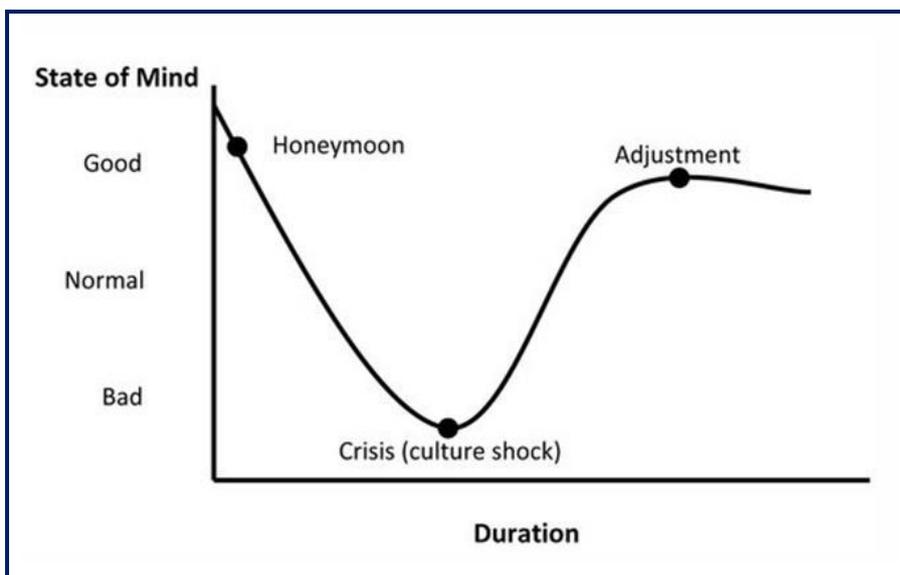
In the following three subsections, I will describe in detail each of these approaches and briefly overview several research findings that have shown support for hypotheses introduced within these frameworks.

### 2.3.1 Stress and coping approach

The first approach highlighted by Ward et al. (2001) corresponds to the affective domain of intercultural adjustment and is based on stress and coping theories. The central point of these theories is that cross-cultural transition always goes hand in hand

with stress-provoking situations which require migrants to apply coping strategies in order to overcome stress and to adjust to a new context. Nervous and confusing feelings that newcomers may experience after leaving their home are attributed to culture shock.

Within this stress and coping paradigm, the adaptation process has been viewed as a U-curve for many years. Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard (1955), based on his study of 200 Norwegian Fulbright awardees in the USA, described the initial stage of his students' adaptation as euphoria (also defined as the "honeymoon stage"). Soon after, his students' emotions tended to drop due to various factors, such as anxiety, fatigue, dissatisfaction, loneliness, homesickness, and uncertainty (common signs of "culture shock"). They began feeling hostility toward the environment, which indicated the movement to the following stage of their adjustment process termed as "crisis". With time, they gradually recovered as they continued coping with difficulties, making social connections and improving their linguistic skills. The "crisis" then passed into the "adjustment." This research also revealed that those students who sojourned in the USA less than six months and more than eighteen months had felt better adjusted than the others. Lysgaard never presented his hypothesis graphically. Later, however, scholars and intercultural trainers developed various diagrams in order to visually illustrate his theory. Figure 3 depicts one of such visual representations of Lysgaard's U-curve.



**Figure 3. Lysgaard's U-curve**

(Source: <http://erityisopettaja.fi/an-immigrants-experience-of-finnish-working-culture>)

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) extended the U-curve and proposed their W-curve model. The second curve consisted of re-entry shock that people experienced upon arrival in their original culture and the subsequent readjustment stages. The scholars hypothesized that when sojourners returned to their homes, they experienced shock again and went through a similar process of adjustment as they had experienced abroad. Reasons for such reactions may be attributed to personal changes and also changes at home. That is, sojourners changed during their stay abroad, the home environment may have changed while they were abroad, the political situation may have undergone some changes, and friends and relatives may have changed. After having adjusted to a host culture, people began feeling disoriented at home, and consequently, they had to readjust to their home culture.

Adler (1975) further elaborated upon the concept of culture shock and offered his model of transitional experience which included five phases: contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and independence. According to the scholar, sojourners are strongly influenced by their culture and guided by their beliefs and values in new surroundings during the contact stage. In the next stage, disintegration, cultural differences gradually impose themselves on sojourners, who begin to feel a decrease in self-esteem and their cultural ties. During reintegration, which is the following stage, sojourners begin to react to cultural differences by expressing their preferences, and they steadily recover their self-esteem. In the autonomy stage, sojourners acquire necessary skills to function in a new setting and no longer experience stress provoked by cultural differences. The final stage of the transitional experience is characterized by high degree of independence when sojourners enjoy cultural differences and can mediate between cultures.

It is worth noting that Adler departed from the view of culture shock as a psychological disorder during cross-cultural transition (Beaven, 2012). Stress was no longer considered to be a negative factor, but rather a drive for personal growth. This assumption generated a lot of interest from researchers who sought to identify predictors of and influences on intercultural adaptation. The subsequent theories within this approach accentuated “the significance of life changes during cross-cultural transition,

the appraisal of these changes, and the selection and implementation of coping strategies to deal with them” (Ward, 2004, p. 190). Research therefore covered a variety of aspects, such as cognitive recognition of stress, coping strategies, and social support, to name just a few (Berry, 1997; Adelman, 1988).

Recently, the validity and reliability of the U-curve model have been put in doubt by scholars (Church, 1982; Ward, 2004; Lustig and Koester, 2010). The main shortcoming of the model is reported to be its incompleteness, as it describes the adaptation process from the psychological perspective and reflects only emotional reactions to cultural change. The ambiguity in terminology used to define the stages and the concept of adaptation itself was also considered to be a theoretical flaw. Neither Lysgaard nor Gullahorn and Gullahorn conceptualized adaptation clearly, and described the cultural transition in terms of “a greater adjustment” or “a greater or lesser degree of satisfaction” (Beaven, 2012, p.44). Finally, the lack of longitudinal research to confirm the hypothesis is also mentioned as a weak point.

As a result of those weaknesses, many other frameworks conceptualizing the adaptation process began to emerge. For instance, Ward and colleagues (2001) suggest that intercultural adjustment is more consistent with a culture-learning model than with a U-curve hypothesis, and that it operates on two different levels: psychological and sociocultural. Although these levels are related to each other, they can be regarded as two independent constituents of one complex process. Psychological adjustment affects our emotions and is associated with psychological satisfaction, while sociocultural adjustment influences behaviour and deals with awareness of host cultural norms and values. Indeed, one can feel psychologically well in a host environment without knowing or accepting conventions and rules of another culture. Nevertheless, if an individual is willing to be engaged in an effective intercultural dialogue in a new cultural setting, culture-specific knowledge and skills are essential. Later on, Ward pointed out that these “two adaptation outcomes are best understood and explained in terms of different theoretical frameworks – culture learning and stress and coping, that they are generally predicted by different types of variables, and that they exhibit different patterns of variation over time” (Masgaret and Ward, 2006, p. 60). Such factors as “personality, expectations and social support” might have an influence on

psychological adjustment, whereas “cultural knowledge, cultural distance, previous experience abroad, language fluency, length of stay abroad and amount of contact with host nationals” might affect sociocultural adjustment (Ward, 2004).

Let us briefly examine some research findings within the stress and coping approach. Scholars claim that personality traits like extraversion may be correlated with a better adjustment (Ward, 2004). However, Ward warns that a number of studies do not always provide strong evidence for this correlation, which means that much more research needs to be done in order to make a clearer conclusion about this issue. Flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, self-monitoring and self-efficacy were named among other contributions to psychological well-being and overall adjustment. Research also highlights the role of social support during cross-cultural transition. It may come from family, co-national and host friends, spouses, and institutions, and appears to be a significant predictor of sojourners’ psychological adaptation during their residence abroad (Ward, 2004; Pitts, 2009). Pre-departure expectations also play a key role for psychological adaptation. Research shows that migrants whose stay abroad experiences exceeded their expectations demonstrated a higher level of psychological adaptation than those migrants who were less content with their stay abroad and whose expectations were unfulfilled (Kennedy, 1999).

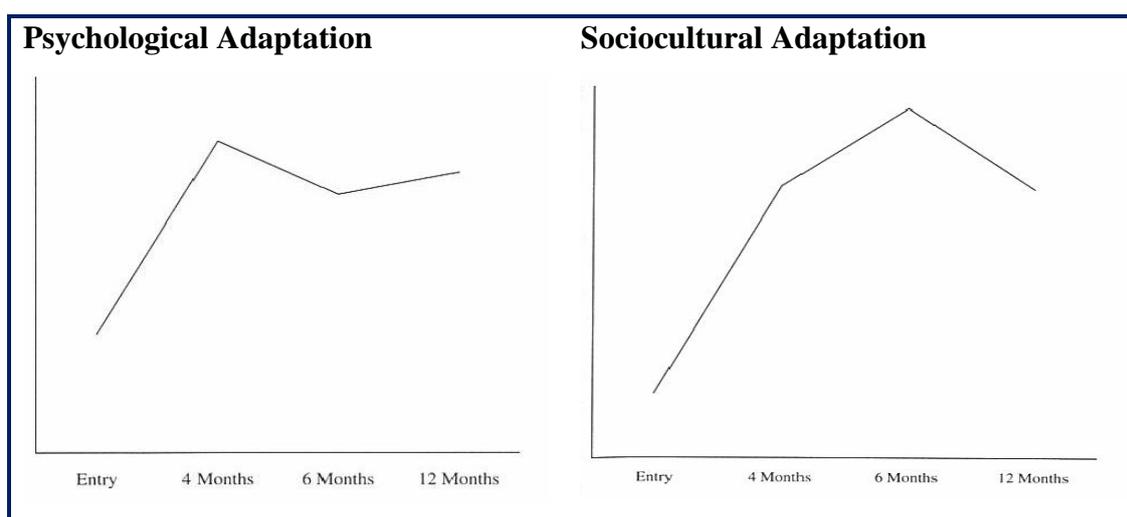
It is worth noting that the U-curve hypothesis guided research in the field for more than two decades before scholars began to move away from the classical view of the adjustment process. In the following section, I will examine the main characteristics of the culture learning approach, which is the second broad theoretical approach of culture contact.

### 2.3.2 Culture learning approach

The second approach mentioned by Ward et al. (2001) is based on culture learning theories, which were influenced by English social psychologists Michael Argyle and Adam Kendon (Ward, 2004, Margaret and Ward, 2006). Social skills and social interaction are at the core of these theories. The central point of this approach is that sojourners or migrants experience cultural problems because they lack culture-specific skills for effective interaction in a new cultural setting. Adaptation therefore occurs if

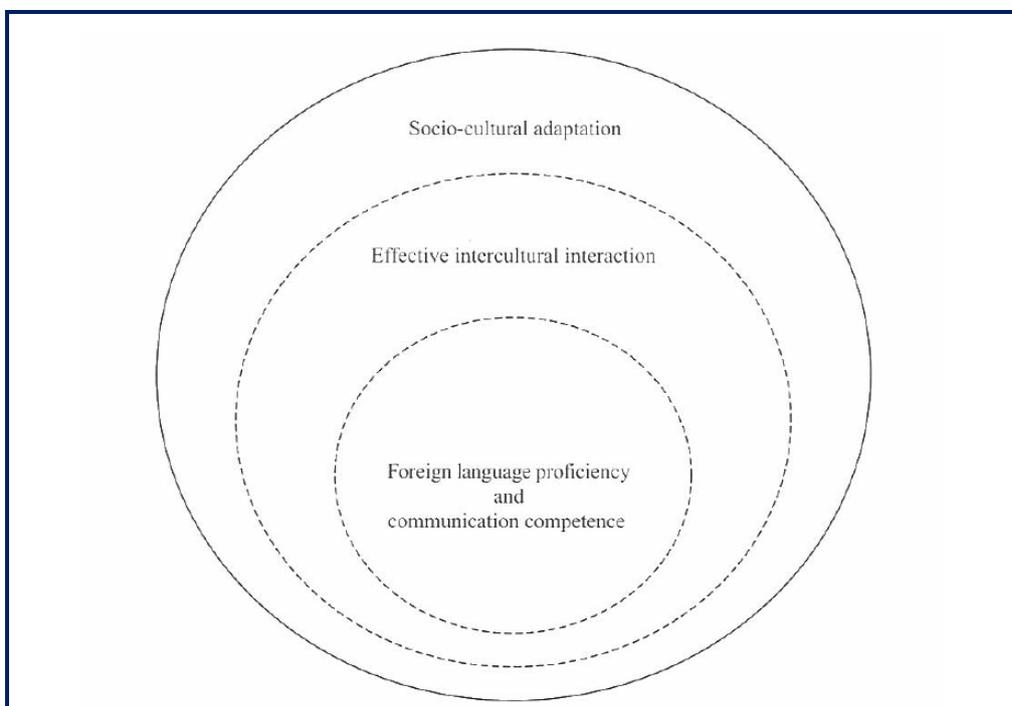
they learn and acquire these skills (Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman, 1978; Furnham and Brochner, 1986; Ward and Searle, 1991). By culture-specific skills, Masgoret and Ward (2006) refer to awareness of differences in verbal and nonverbal communication, in rules and conventions, as well as in norms and values. Within this culture-learning paradigm, the adaptation process has been graphically illustrated as a learning curve. In contrast to the U-curve hypothesis, the learning curve begins at low points and gradually improves, as individuals acquire necessary skills.

The culture-learning model of cross-cultural adaptation was clearly illustrated in studies carried out by Ward and colleagues. In an attempt to bridge the longitudinal research gap, Ward, Okura, Kennedy, and Kojima (1998) conducted a research study in which they surveyed 35 Japanese students in New Zealand at four different times: upon entry, at four, six, and twelve months after arrival. The results of the study supported Ward and colleagues' assumption. The participants' psychological and sociocultural adjustment resembled a learning-curve trend. However, the development of two domains of adjustment varied to some extent. Psychological adaptation was at its lowest upon arrival but recovered during the first four months without any significant changes until the end of the stay. Meanwhile, sociocultural adaptation recovered significantly after the first four months of sojourning abroad, and did not show any improvement in the remaining time. Figure 4 illustrates graphically the participants' psychological and sociocultural adjustment patterns in Ward and colleagues' study.



**Figure 4. Psychological and Sociocultural adaptation according to Ward and colleagues (1998)**  
(Source: Ward et al., 2004)

Turning to culture-specific skills, the language spoken within a host culture, the conventions, norms, and values can differ significantly throughout the world and lack of this knowledge can lead to unpleasant experiences while abroad. One of the ways to acquire these skills, as Masgoret and Ward (2006) suggest, is to increase communication with the representatives of the host environment. In the culture learning process, knowledge of the host language is of great importance since “language skills are relevant to the performance of daily tasks and are important in establishing interpersonal relationships in a foreign country, as they affect the quality and quantity of intercultural interactions” (ibid, p. 61). Misunderstandings usually occur when learners do not possess sufficient verbal skills and cannot articulate their needs. It is not surprising that language fluency is mentioned as a significant contributor to sociocultural adjustment (Ward and Kennedy, 1993). Figure 5 illustrates a visual representation of how language proficiency and communication competence are interrelated and affect sociocultural adaptation according to Masgoret and Ward (2006). As can be seen from the diagram, language fluency leads to effective intercultural interaction and this, in turn, facilitates sociocultural adjustment.



**Figure 5. Interactive model of foreign-language proficiency, communication competence, effective intercultural interaction and sociocultural adaptation**  
(Source: Masgoret and Ward, 2006, p. 61)

Although linguistic abilities are important, words are not the only source of communication. We can send messages through body language such as posture, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. When discussing nonverbal communication, it is appropriate to mention Edward Hall, a cultural anthropologist whose research focused on the differences in nonverbal interactions between different ethnic groups. Hall arrived at the conclusion that cultures could be of high and low context communication and described main characteristics that distinguish them (Lustig & Koester, 2010).

People from high context communication cultures are collectivists, that is to say, with a strong team spirit; they value interpersonal relationships, rely on feelings and prefer indirect verbal interaction. For instance, people from China, Japan, Mexico are the representatives of high context cultures. On the contrary, people from low context communication cultures are individualists; they rely on logic and facts, and prefer direct verbal interaction. Such countries as Germany, Great Britain and Switzerland can be referred to as low context cultures (ibid, 2010).

Many researchers use Hall's model to interpret the cultural differences and predict misunderstandings in the communication between people from different culture contexts. Indeed, gestures, such as scratching your head, an eye rub, and crossing arms can be interpreted differently around the world. Eye contact may indicate interest or honesty and is considered positively by people from low context cultures, while people from high context cultures may look down to show respect. In Russia, smiling at strangers can be considered as something suspicious or foolish, while in Japan people may smile when they are angry. Silence sometimes may convey much more information than words, and it is very important for high context cultures. Meanwhile, people from low context culture usually feel very confused and uncomfortable when silence occurs in their interactions (Baten, Dusat, and Van Maele, 2011). All these examples underline the importance of nonverbal communication skills during cross-cultural encounters.

Besides nonverbal communication, a major degree of difficulty in interaction is often caused by differences in rules and conventions. Under rules and conventions, Masgoret and Ward (2006) enumerate such aspects as formal treatments that reflect status, apologies and compliments, courtesy, and problem-solving, to name just a few.

Differences in norms and values are equally important as they also affect sojourners' interpersonal and intergroup communication. However, this does not assume that sojourners or migrants should deny their own values and acquire those of the host culture, but rather, develop useful and effective approaches to managing them.

Extensive studies have been conducted to identify possible contributions to adaptation within this approach. Motivation, previous experience, length of residence, intercultural contact, and cultural distance are some of the factors that have been strongly correlated with sociocultural adjustment.

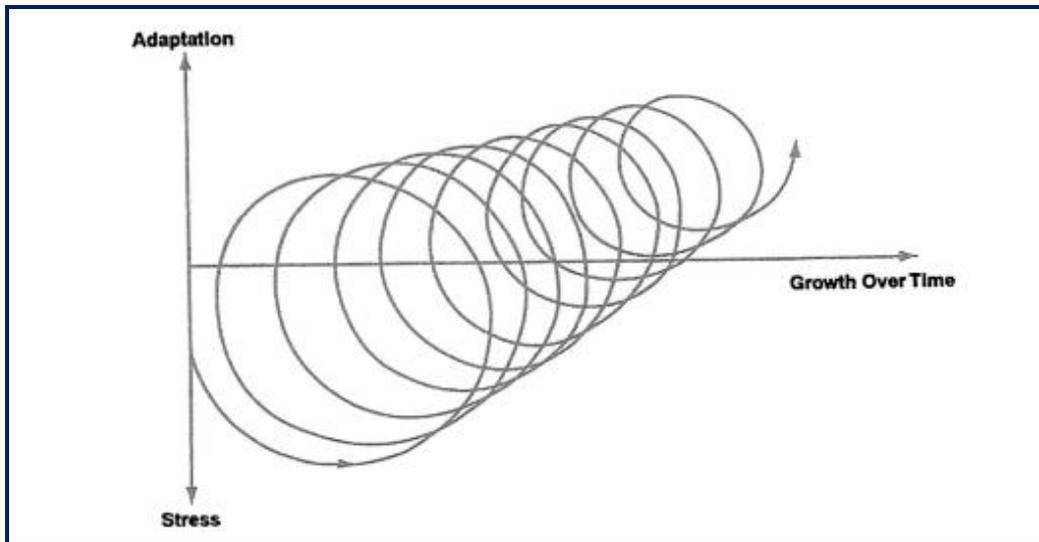
A crucial trait in the culture-learning process is individuals' motivation. Sojourners' attitudes towards the host society, openness to other cultures, and willingness to take part in social communication with host nationals contribute to what Gardner and his colleagues (in Masgoret and Ward, 2006) call "integrativeness." The level of integrativeness is a strong predictor for host language acquisition and consequent mastery, which in turn has influence on the amount of interactions with hosts. Results that were reported in previous studies suggest that increased intercultural contact and satisfaction with interactions contribute to culture learning and are correlated with a decrease in social adaptation difficulties (Ward and Searle, 1991; Ward and Kennedy, 1993). Research also proves that previous cross-cultural experience significantly facilitates adjustment in a new cultural setting. Those sojourners who had studied or had lived abroad demonstrated a higher degree of adjustment in further intercultural encounters (Ward, 2004). Similarly, length of residence is associated with a better fitting into a new cultural context. Studies provide strong evidence that the participants' adjustment to a new social and cultural environment increased with time they spent abroad (Vande Berg et al., 2009; Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012). Finally, cultural distance is one more important factor that facilitates transition. More specifically, those sojourners whose culture displays a great similarity with the host culture experience fewer difficulties in a new context.

### 2.3.3 Social identification approach

The final approach mentioned by Ward et al. (2001) is related to the cognitive domain of intercultural adjustment and is based on Social Identification theories. Due to the complexity and multiplicity of the research focus, the theories within this approach have been divided into three groups (Ward, 2004). The first group explores identity formation, its maintenance, change and assessment. The second group concentrates on exploring identity and intergroup relations. The third group is based on threat theories and explores prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination.

Kim's structural model of intercultural adaptation fits into the group which explores identity and its development. Although her Stress-Adaptation-Growth model is drawn from an integrative theory of intercultural adaptation, I consider it more appropriate to examine this model within this approach. Similar to Ward, Kim (2001) considers the intricacies of the adaptation process and develops a model in which stress and learning are closely intertwined. Deculturation and acculturation, the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic and intercultural transformation are three main pillars that underpin this theory. According to Kim, acculturation involves learning culture-specific skills about the host society (i.e., norms and rules) and inevitably leads to removing already existing conventions, that is, to deculturation. This process provokes stress and requires the person to react to challenges and adapt, which in the end contributes to personal development. Thus, this stress-adaptation-growth process entails transformation and results in the development of intercultural identity. A central point of this model is that adaptation is a dynamic and ongoing process through which a sojourner adjusts to a new environment. The scholar suggests that humans are apt inherently to adapt and any cultural experience, even if it is negative, contributes to their personal growth. Communication is at the core of adaptation and, consequently, humans adapt if they interact with each other. Kim depicts her model (Figure 6) in a form of a spiral that develops in an upward direction and explains that the "*stress-adaptation-growth dynamic* does not play out in a smooth, steady, and linear progression, but in a dialectic, cyclic and continual "draw-back-to-leap" pattern. Each stressful experience is responded to with a "draw back", which, in turn, activates adaptive energy to help individuals reorganize themselves and "leap forward" (Kim, 2005, p. 384). Every time

strangers face stress-provoking situations caused by cultural differences, the process repeats.

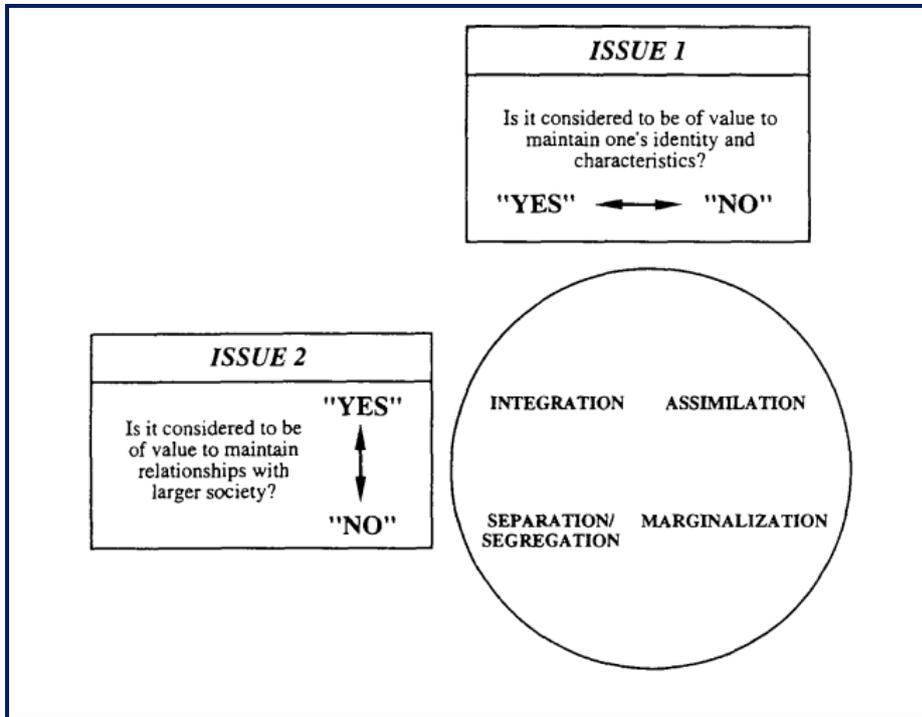


**Figure 6. A Stress-Adaptation-Growth model**  
(Source: Kim, 2001, p. 59)

Over time, the circles of the spiral shrink as migrants become more skilled in their new environment and the stress becomes less severe.

It is worth noting that the majority of the models within this approach target expatriates like migrants and refugees whose prolonged intercultural contact transforms their identity and intergroup relationships. Such is the model proposed by Berry (1997) which falls into the second group of this approach. The scholar suggests that during the intercultural encounter immigrants should answer two main questions for themselves: 1) Do I need to preserve my own identity and retain its features in a new cultural environment? and 2) Do I need to establish meaningful relationships with members of other groups in a new cultural environment? The outcomes of acculturation will depend on the responses to these questions. Berry identified four acculturation strategies that people adopt: *assimilation*, *integration*, *separation* and *marginalization*. Assimilation takes place if immigrants consider it more important to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with other groups rather than to preserve their own cultural identity. Integration occurs if immigrants tend to reserve their own cultural identity and, at the same time, seek for good relationships with their intercultural counterparts. If immigrants choose to preserve their own identity without maintaining relationships with

members of other groups, separation takes place. Finally, marginalization happens if immigrants neither preserve their own identity nor relate to members of other groups. Figure 7 illustrates Berry's forms of acculturation.

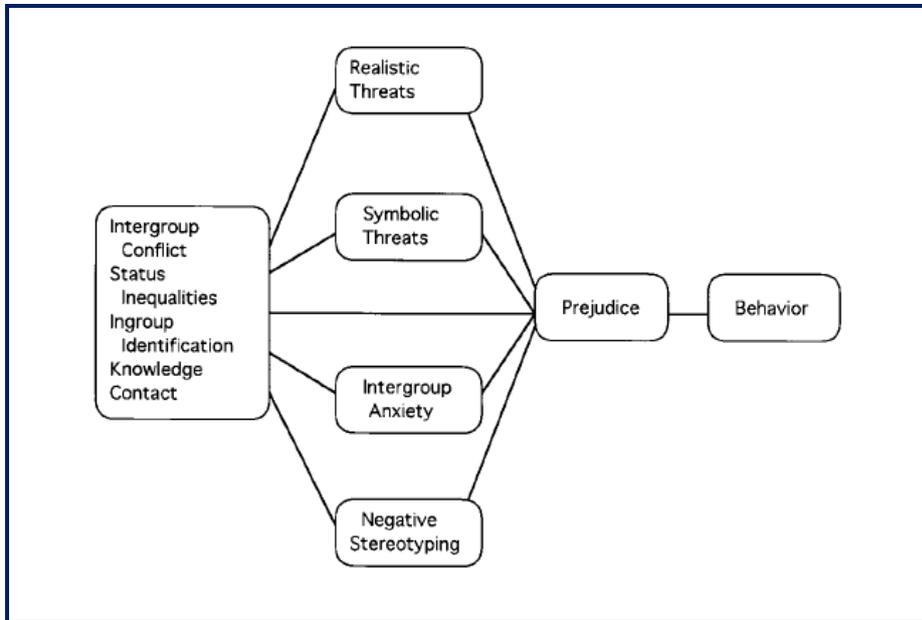


**Figure 7. Berry's acculturation strategies**  
(Source: Berry, 1997, p. 10)

In his subsequent studies across various groups of sojourners, refugees, and native people, Berry found supporting evidence that the most preferred strategy is integration (Donà and Berry, 1994). Integration also turned out to be a predictor for both psychological well-being and sociocultural adaptation (Ward, 2004).

Stephan and Stephan's (1985) Integrated Threat Theory falls into the group exploring intercultural perception and prejudice development. This model is drawn from anxiety theories and highlights the role of threat in forming prejudice during intercultural contact. The scholars discovered four types of threat that people may face in intergroup interactions: realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety and negative stereotyping. These four types of threat have been widely used in research on predicting attitudes toward outgroups (Stephan and Stephan, 2000), and receive considerable support in studies exploring attitudes regarding immigrants to the United States, Canada and Israel (Stephan, Stephan and Gudykunst, 1999). In the theory, the scholars

accentuate the word *perceived*, “because the perception of threat can lead to prejudice, regardless of whether or not the threat is `real’” (ibid, p. 619). Figure 8 depicts Stephan and Stephan’s basic Integrated Threat Theory.



**Figure 8. Stephan and Stephan’s Integrated Threat Theory**  
(Source: Stephan, Stephan and Gudykunst, 1999, p. 620)

Realistic threats involve all kinds of menace that may affect directly or indirectly economic, political and physical prosperity of the members within a group. For instance, previous research revealed that the threat of job loss and increased social support to recently arrived migrants turned out to be predictors of negative outgroup attitudes, resulting in opposition to immigration (Ward, 2004).

Symbolic threats refer to perils that may jeopardize the traditional value system of the group and its members. The scholars assert that “these threats arise, in part, because the ingroup believes in the moral rightness of its system of values” (Stephan, Stephan and Gudykunst, 1999, p. 619).

Intergroup anxiety arises when interactions with culturally-distant counterparts make people feel threatened. In their previous research, Stephan and Stephan (1985) had identified four significant adverse consequences of such threat: negative consequences for our self-concepts, negative behavioral consequences, negative evaluations by others, and negative evaluations by members of our ingroups.

Finally, negative stereotyping leads to an unpleasant or negative outlook on future interactions and events with outgroup members. In other words, the anticipation of negative outcomes derives from negative stereotypes that one group holds regarding the other, which in turn predicts prejudice.

In their article, Stephan, Stephan and Gudykunst (1999) further determined the antecedents of threat. The scholars suggest that “perceptions of threat depend on the level of prior conflict between the groups, the relative statuses of the groups, and the strength of identification with the ingroup, knowledge of the outgroup, and the nature of the contact between the groups” (p.620). Let us briefly describe each of the following antecedents.

Prior intergroup conflicts play an important role in causing threat and forming prejudice toward outgroups. These may involve confrontation of different points of view, competitions, and disputes including physical intimidation. The higher the level of the prior conflict, the greater the perception of all four threats. Status inequalities also contribute to threat perceptions. According to the scholars, no matter which social status the group possesses, high or low, it can perceive the other group as threatening. The larger the social gap between the two groups, the greater the perception of threats. Ingroup identification is one more factor that gives rise to all four threats. Individuals who strongly identify themselves with a particular group can feel threatened by the other groups. Lack of awareness of the other group’s value system and behavioural patterns is also mentioned as the antecedent of threat, as the fear of the unknown and uncertainty will make people perceive the other group as threatening. The last antecedent mentioned is the amount and the quality of prior contact between groups. The scholars suggest that “people whose prior contacts with outgroup members have been predominantly negative are likely to feel threatened by the prospect of future contacts with members of this group. In addition, contact itself is a direct predictor of intergroup attitudes” (ibid, p.621).

After having reviewed the main approaches that guide research on culture contact and adaptation, I will turn to intercultural sensitivity and describe several prominent frameworks that explore the concept.

## **2.4 Intercultural sensitivity**

Today, the existing body of research on IC covers a wide range of research interests from establishing the reasons for overseas failures to designing and testing pre-departure programmes. Most researchers agree that in order to be effective abroad, students should develop their intercultural sensitivity. However, what it is like to be interculturally sensitive has been described in many variations.

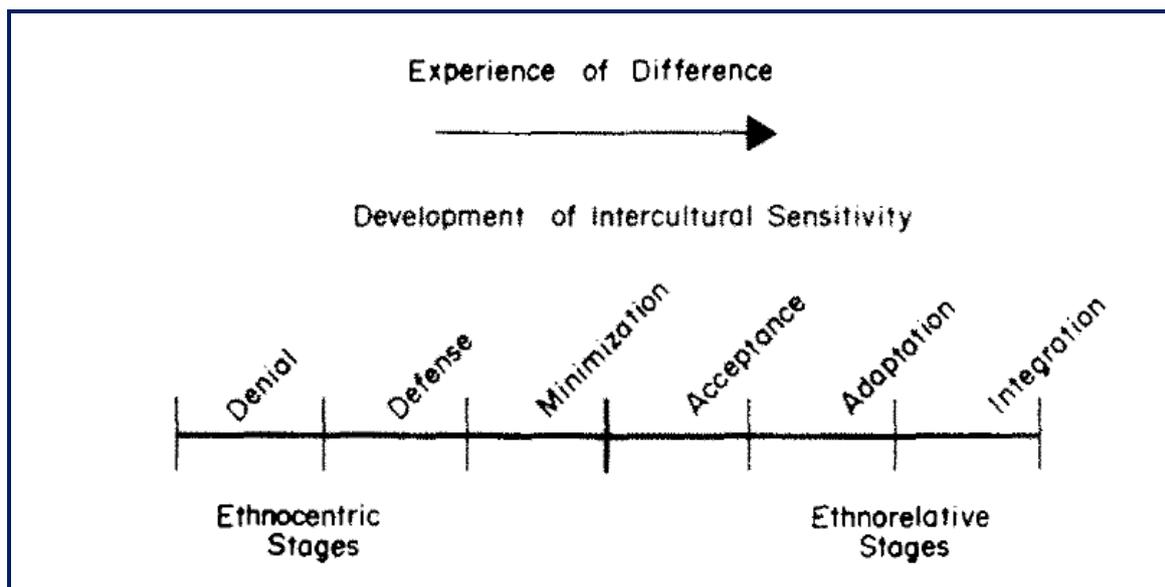
Much like the multiplicity of terms used when discussing IC, a variety of definitions exist to describe the concept of intercultural sensitivity. Moreover, research shows that the terms intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity have been often used interchangeably (Sinicrope, Norris, and Watanabe, 2007). In their article, Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) tried to clarify the definitions of these two concepts. They refer intercultural competence as “the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways”, whereas intercultural sensitivity is “the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences” (p. 422).

Some scholars try to explain the concept of intercultural sensitivity by a number of personal qualities or abilities that lead to efficient intercultural learning and communication. For instance, Kealey and Ruben (1983, as cited in Bhawuk and Brislin, 1992), based on the existing body of research, summarized several predictors of successful intercultural learning and arrived at the conclusion that in order to succeed in the academic and social life abroad, students should develop such abilities as “empathy, respect, interest in local culture, flexibility, tolerance, and technical skill” (p. 416).

Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) agree that all the above mentioned abilities may be indeed essential for effective intercultural communication. However, measuring the degree of empathy or tolerance, for example, can be a difficult task because of the abstract nature of these terms. According to the authors, “to be effective in another culture, people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures” (p. 416). In other words, the ability to express willingness to communicate with host nationals and to get to know a new culture, as well as the ability to understand cultural differences and adapt to new communication and behavioural

patterns have been considered the most important outcomes of study abroad. Bhawuk and Brislin have summarized these qualities into one concept called 'intercultural sensitivity'. Furthermore, the scholars emphasize the importance of cross-cultural training programmes and provide some practical recommendations for study abroad instructors and organizers. They suggest that if individuals are given to discuss samples of situations they may encounter abroad, their reflections may show whether they will be willing to respect other people's views and to adapt to new communication and behavioural styles. Therefore, in order to avoid any failures abroad, intercultural sensitivity should be assessed prior to departure. Based on such assessment, instructors will be able to provide training to help their students develop necessary skills and attitudes so that they can communicate effectively when moving from one culture to another.

Another understanding of intercultural sensitivity comes from American professor and former U.S. Peace Corps volunteer Milton J. Bennett. In order to explain the way people perceive and react to cultural differences, Bennett (1986, 1993) presented his Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The model describes how individuals move through stages from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. By ethnocentrism, Bennett means "that the beliefs and behaviors that people receive in their primary socialization are unquestioned; they are experienced as 'just the way things are'" (Bennett, 2004, p. 62). Meanwhile, he understands ethnorelativism as "the opposite of ethnocentrism - the experience of one's own beliefs and behaviors as just one organization of reality among many viable possibilities" (ibid, p. 62). This model involves six stages of which Denial, Defense and Minimization are ethnocentric, whereas Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration are ethnorelative (Figure 9). Bennett further describes strategies that people adopt at each stage.



**Figure 9. Bennett's model of Intercultural Sensitivity**  
 (Source: Bennett, 1986, p. 182)

The first ethnocentric stage, which is Denial, is characterized by a state in which individuals do not recognize cultural differences. Based on naïve observations, they believe that cultures throughout the world are more or less the same or view other cultures with disinterest. There are two common strategies that people pursue: *isolation* (when individuals limit themselves in their contact with differences) and *separation* (when individuals intentionally separate themselves from other cultures to protect their views). The second ethnocentric stage is Defense. At this stage, individuals recognize cultural differences, but believe that their culture is the best of the others. People tend to adopt the following three strategies: *denigration* (this is what Bennett calls “‘negative stereotyping,’ wherein undesirable characteristics are attributed to every member of a culturally distinct group” (Bennett, 1986, p.183), *superiority* (individuals believe that that their own culture is superior to others or even exceptional), and *reversal* (individuals conversely believe that the adopted culture is superior to their original culture). The last ethnocentric stage is Minimization. At this stage, individuals recognize cultural differences and normally evaluate them positively, but tend to accentuate cultural similarities. The common belief is that all people are the same in nature. There are two strategies that people adopt: *physical universalism* (when individuals believe that all humans have the same biological features which guide behaviour and “approach intercultural situations with the assurance that awareness of

basic human patterns of behavior is sufficient to ensure successful communication (ibid, p. 184), and *transcendent universalism* (when individuals hold a belief that all humans are creations of the universe and possess the same value system at large).

The first ethnorelative stage is Acceptance. At this stage, individuals recognize that their own culture is one of many other equally meaningful cultures and become interested in cultural differences. Consequently, they may pursue either of the two strategies: *respect for behavioural differences* (acceptance and appreciation of cultural differences in behaviour) and *respect for value differences* (acceptance and appreciation of cultural differences in values and beliefs). The second ethnorelative stage is Adaptation. At this stage, individuals have already acquired necessary communication skills for effective intercultural communication, and may show *empathy* (understanding other people's feeling and behaviours) or adopt *cultural pluralism* (internalization of various worldviews and perspectives). The final ethnorelative stage, which is Integration, concerns the identity formation. At this stage, individuals acquire various cultural frameworks and begin feeling that they do not belong to any particular culture, but rather mediate between cultures. There are two strategies that people adopt: *contextual evaluation* (employing multiple cultural frameworks according to a specific culture context) and *constructive marginality* (avoiding any cultural identification and mediating between cultures).

In order to measure the degree of intercultural sensitivity according to the DMIS, Mitchell R. Hammer and Milton Bennett created the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). It is a 50-item questionnaire which is widely used in the pre- and post-test design studies. Respondents indicate their agreements or disagreements on a five-point Likert scale. However, it is a commercial assessment instrument and researchers who want to use this instrument for their studies should attend a three-day IDI Qualifying Seminar and purchase the instrument itself, the user's manual, and required certification.

One more understanding of intercultural sensitivity comes from Chen and Starosta's model of Intercultural Communication Competence (2000). According to the scholars, intercultural sensitivity corresponds to the effective domain of the model and can be defined as "a person's ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and

appreciating cultural differences that promote appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication” (Chen & Starosta, 2000, p. 4). I have selected this definition as the most appropriate one for our study because intercultural communication is at the core of the concept. Intercultural sensitivity is characterized by the following features: self-concept (individual’s self-perception), open-mindedness (willingness to express one’s own points of view, as well as respect for ideas of other people), nonjudgmental attitudes (avoidance of stereotypes and reduction of prejudices), and social relaxation (confidence and comfort while interacting).

Similar to Hammer and Bennett, Chen and Starosta (2000) proposed an assessment instrument to gauge the degree of intercultural sensitivity. Their Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ICSS) contains 24 statements which measure the level of intercultural sensitivity in terms of five main factors:

- Interaction engagement
- Respect for cultural differences
- Interaction confidence
- Interaction enjoyment
- Interaction attentiveness

Respondents rate their agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. This assessment tool is non-commercial and does not require any training. As it is very easy to use and interpret the obtained data, many researchers choose this instrument for their studies (Penbek et al., 2009; Jin and Erben, 2007). Like all Likert scale questionnaires, it is used in pre- and post-design studies. In this study, I have adapted this assessment instrument for the purpose of collecting quantitative and qualitative data (see Chapter III Section 3.4.1.3).

Based on the frameworks mentioned above, I can conclude that an intercultural sensitive person is that one who displays ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences. Such a person is able to modify his/her behaviour and to adapt to different communication and behavioural styles in a new cultural setting. It is not accidental that the notion of intercultural sensitivity, which is also often referred to as personal growth, is considered crucial in theories on intercultural adaptation. As can be seen above in the

description of the DMIS by Bennett, intercultural adaptation is the first stage of ethnorelativism and is tightly intertwined to intercultural sensitivity. This is the reason why I believe that intercultural sensitivity and intercultural adaptation should be explored in combination, since any positive shift in the level of sensitivity to cultural differences leads to personal growth and better interactions and, consequently, to a better adjustment to a host culture.

## **2.5 Research on Intercultural Competence in the Study**

### **Abroad context**

As mobility programmes have become increasingly popular over the last two decades, extensive studies have been conducted to investigate the effect of residence abroad on students' IC development. The studies were carried out by researchers from various fields, such as linguistics, sociology, and education, and span a wide range of research interests from exploring pre-departure motives and expectations (Kitsantas, 2004; Teichler, 2004; Badstübner and Ecke, 2009; Institute of International Education (IIE), 2010; Beaven, 2012; Kavakas, 2013; Novak, Slatinšek and Devetak, 2013; Jackson, 2016) to investigating the impact of SA programmes on language acquisition (Pérez-Vidal, 2014) and intercultural awareness (Merino and Avello, 2014). The interests also include assessing intercultural effectiveness outcomes (Olson and Kroeger, 2001; Williams, 2005; Penbek et al., 2009; Braskamp, Braskamp and Merrill, 2009; Savicki, 2010; Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012; Gilliland et al., 2016) and identifying predictors or abilities leading to successful experiences abroad (Vande Berg et al., 2009).

In this section, I will review several recent research findings of those studies that have been concerned primarily with the adaptation process of university students and the development of intercultural sensitivity, as these are the foci of the present study. I would like to begin the review of the empirical studies that investigate motives for taking part in SA programmes. As was mentioned in previous sections, students' motivations are an integral part of culture learning and, consequently, are strong predictors of adaptation in a new cultural context. I will also touch on pre-departure expectations regarding SA experience and outcomes. As Martin, Bradford and Rohrlich (1995) noted "The notion of expectancy lies at the core of a great deal of

communication research. That is, individuals hold expectations about events, others' behaviors, and relationships. More important, these expectations are then used as criteria for evaluating experiences, other individuals, and relationships, and these evaluations influence subsequent interaction" (p.87). Therefore, sojourners' expectations always affect significantly the process of their adjustment and must not be ignored.

In an attempt to understand why a relatively small number of American university students choose to study abroad, Naffziger, Bott, and Mueller (2008) conducted a quantitative study investigating factors that contributed to students' decision to take part in SA programmes during their college studies. The researchers were particularly interested in exploring what attitudes, individual differences and university characteristics might have an influence on students' decisions to go abroad. They surveyed 471 undergraduate business students at a mid-sized Midwestern university. The results showed that academic perspectives, previous travel experiences and affordable programme costs were positively correlated with consideration of study abroad. Conversely, fear of the unknown, incompatibilities with the degree and personal goals, and social and family barriers to travelling abroad discouraged students from studying abroad. After having analyzed the demographic differences, the researchers came to the conclusion that gender, age, foreign language knowledge, amount of extra-curricular activities, and intent to study beyond undergraduate degree are strong predictors of either consideration of or openness to the idea of studying abroad.

Naffziger, Bott, and Mueller's results are in line with the quantitative findings presented by the Institute of International Education (IIE) in 2010. In order to examine the attitudes and perceptions of prospective international students from Vietnam, IIE surveyed more than 700 Vietnamese students considering the idea of studying in the US. The main reasons for studying abroad mentioned by the participants were: quality or type of academic programmes, culture learning, foreign language improvement, preparing for a future career, obtaining a degree, and making a professional contact. Respondents were also asked to indicate main obstacles for studying abroad. Programme cost was listed as a primary impediment, followed by lack of accurate

information, difficulties getting a visa, the language barrier, cultural differences and distance from family.

Badstübner and Ecke (2009) also conducted a quantitative study exploring students' motives for taking part in a one-month summer programme in Germany. Besides, the researchers investigated their participants' pre-departure expectations and perceived linguistic outcomes upon arrival from the SA. In total, 23 undergraduate American students from the University of Arizona took part in the study. The data were obtained through questionnaires which were administered at the beginning and the end of the SA programme. The scholars identified four main motives for going abroad: improving a foreign language, being in contact with host nationals, travelling, and learning about a host culture. Before departure, the participants expressed their expectations regarding language improvement. Listening, speaking, vocabulary, and cultural understanding were the skills they hoped to improve most. Conversely, reading, writing, and grammar were less expected to improve. Upon the end of the stay, the students reported that they had perceived improvement in their cultural understanding, followed by listening, vocabulary, reading and speaking skills. However, the statistical analysis revealed that the rate of perceived improvement was significantly lower than the rate of expected gains, suggesting that perceived improvement in listening, speaking, and vocabulary did not meet their prior expectations. Only cultural understanding showed a correlation between expectations and improvement. The researchers conclude that "a great amount of contact with native speakers alone does not suffice but that there is a complex interplay of different factors leading to proficiency gains, one of them being quality and depth of the interaction with native speakers" (p. 47).

Gu, Schweisfurth and Day (2008) conducted a two-year study to investigate how undergraduate international students adapted to various personal, pedagogical and situational factors during their study in UK higher institutions. The research used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and was carried out in three stages. During the first stage, more than one thousand first-year international students [all students from outside the UK] at four UK universities were surveyed about purposes for their studies, expectations and their experiences of initial difficulties. The researchers found out that the driven motives for coming to the UK were academic accreditation,

language improvement, and cultural experiences. Beside the motives, the researchers inquired into what their respondents were most worried about prior to their departure. Financial situation, loneliness and homesickness turned out to be three dominant concerns. The results obtained during the subsequent stages will be discussed below when reviewing studies on adaptation outcomes.

One more recent study carried out by Novak, Slatinšek and Devetak (2013) investigates the importance of motivating factors for international mobility in the context of European Higher Education. An online survey was sent to more than three thousand undergraduate students who had participated in university SA programmes in Slovenia, Germany and Norway. In order to identify general characteristics of mobile students, the researcher analyzed demographic data, destination choice factors, sources of information for decision-making and mobility costs. The demographic analysis revealed that most participants were originally from Germany, followed by students from Russia, European countries and the USA. For the majority of them, the length of their sojourn varied from three to six months. The female population was higher than the male population, and the participants' average age was 25. The Internet appeared to be the primary information source for decision-making. As for mobility costs, the research results show that although the mobility expenses per month were high, only one quarter received mobility grants while the others financed their sojourns from their savings or relatives' help. This fact shows a high degree of motivation on the part of students to go abroad and have intercultural experiences. The researchers also identified motivating factors for choosing a host destination. Those participants who opted for Norway as a destination choice reported that the most determinative factor that influenced their decision was international experience, followed by foreign language improvement, academic perspectives and the country's living standards. Those who chose Slovenia prioritized academic perspectives, the country's living standards, foreign language improvement, career prospects, and the institution's status. Finally, those who preferred Germany as destination were driven by the opportunity to have international exchange, to improve a foreign language, academic perspectives, the country's living standards, and career prospects.

After having reviewed several studies on motives, I will turn to empirical studies that explore the effect of education abroad on intercultural adaptation and the development of intercultural sensitivity, and also identify factors and learners' characteristics that contribute to these processes.

Williams (2005) explored quantitatively the effect of study abroad on the development of US students' intercultural sensitivity and adaptability. Her study represents a classical experiment design involving two groups. She compared a group of students who studied abroad with those who stayed on campus to find out whether students made significant gains in their level of intercultural sensitivity and adaptability after spending one semester abroad. The host destinations spread over Australia, European countries and Russia. To measure the level of adaptability, Williams used the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI), a commercial self-assessment tool developed by Kelley and Meyers (1995). The instrument consists of 50 items inquiring into four aspects: emotional resilience, flexibility and openness, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy. To measure the development of intercultural sensitivity, the scholar used the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ISI), a non-commercial self-scored tool developed by Bhawuk and Brislin (1992). This instrument consists of 46 items and measures value orientation in terms of three cultural dimensions: individualism, collectivism, flexibility and open-mindedness. In addition, she explored other independent factors which could affect the development of these intercultural communication skills, such as "gender, age, academic level, major religion, hometown, and previous intercultural exposure through foreign language study, international travel, friendships with individuals of different cultures, and coursework in cultural or international studies" (p. 362). The results revealed that students who studied abroad indeed made greater gains in their degree of intercultural sensitivity and adaptability after spending one semester abroad in comparison with those who stayed on campus. The best predictor of change in intercultural communication turned out to be "exposure to various cultures", no matter whether students studied abroad or stayed on campus. These results support the argument that the study abroad experience alone does not guarantee the total improvement of intercultural communication skills. If students interact with people from linguistically and culturally different backgrounds in or outside the home university, make friends, date people from different cultures or attend cultural courses,

their level of intercultural sensitivity and adaptability is higher, and as the scholar suggests proportionally echoes that exposure. Williams concludes that higher education institutions, both sending and receiving, should create opportunities to expose international students to their host culture and to facilitate interactions with host nationals. The same is applicable to local students, who do not choose a study abroad programme. Specially-designed courses and programmes on campus can contribute to their cultural awareness.

One more study which suggests that sojourns abroad contribute to personal growth was conducted by Jackson (2008a). The scholar analyzed how a 5-week SA programme in the UK contributed to the development of Chinese students' intercultural sensitivity. All the participants completed a 14-week preparation programme prior to departure. To better understand the developmental process, Jackson combined qualitative data collection instruments, such as cultural identity narratives, intercultural reflections journals, diaries, interviews, open-ended surveys, and a quantitative instrument in the form of the IDI created by Mitchel Hammer and Milton Bennett, which was administered at three different times (upon entry into the programme, after pre-departure preparation and upon returning from abroad). The results showed that the participants' IDI scores varied between the acceptance and adaptation stages (i.e., ethnorelative stages) at those three time points. The analysis of other pre-sojourn qualitative data led the author to consider that the students' opinions about their intercultural sensitivity level were inflated. Jackson, based on previous research, suggested that there were many reasons for such inflated self-assessment. These might include a fear of losing face and a strong wish to protect their dignity, self-serving bias, and insufficient metacognitive ability to recognize their own incompetence. The scholar concluded that those students who reached the ethnorelative stages became more tolerant to host nationals, understood cultural differences better, and appreciated cultural diversity as a result of study abroad. On the contrary, those students who displayed "an ethnocentric mindset had less appreciation of the complexity of cultural differences [...] Content to just be themselves, they naively assumed that they were more intercultural sensitive than they actually were. Their metacognitive competence was not as well developed as that of their more ethnorelative peers" (p. 359). Further in her book, Jackson (2008b) highlighted the importance of training prior to departure to enhance

students' cultural and self-awareness and providing students with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences while abroad.

In her ethnographic study, Pitts (2009) explores the relation between students' expectation gaps, stress and talk in the adjustment process during a short-term sojourn. The majority of the participants were American students enrolled in a short-term SA programme. The study lasted 15 months and included three stages: a six-month pre-departure period in the US, a four-month SA in Paris, and a five-month re-entry period. As a descriptive model, Pitts employed Kim's integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation. The data were collected through participant-observation, interviews with groups and individuals, and unstructured participant journaling. During the sojourn in Paris, the researcher attended classes and took part in university activities together with her participants. As a result of this longitudinal study, she collected data on her students' expectations, expectation gaps and the origin of those expectations. Besides, she investigated the types of talk they engaged in with their co-nationals with a purpose to discuss apparent gaps between expectation and reality. These included information sharing, gossip, humour, complaints, supportive talks, to name just a few. The results revealed that everyday talk with co-nationals helped students reconsider their expectations toward study abroad and also reduce the expectation gap, which in turn contributed to their gradual adjustment and to developing intercultural identity.

Despite the fact that previous studies generally highlight the ineffectiveness of co-national agency on long-term adaptation, the author argues that co-national support plays an important role for adjustment in the context of short-term mobility. As a concluding remark, Pitts suggests to encourage short-term sojourners "to develop co-national ties for support abroad until they develop the strength and skills needed to extend their network internationally. It may even be beneficial for students to start developing co-national support prior to departure so that supportive network is in place upon arrival" (p.460).

The results of the recent large-scale study conducted by Vande Berg et al. (2009) partially support Williams's findings (described above). It sheds light on to what extent study abroad contributes to university students' intercultural learning and host language acquisition. The study followed a pre- and post-test design and compared the language

proficiency and intercultural learning of students from three American universities, who opted for studying abroad. The participants of their study were U.S. students enrolled in different exchange programmes, which varied in length, type of faculty, and enrollment procedures. In total, the research sample amounted to 1,297 students. Vande Berg and his colleagues also investigated various learners' characteristics and stay abroad conditions which could predict effective intercultural learning such as program duration, pre-departure host language proficiency, instruction language at receiving university, class composition, participation in extracurricular activities, and academic support. To measure any change in students' intercultural development, the scholars used the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) created by Mitchell Hammer and Milton Bennett. The statistical analysis of the data revealed that females usually outperform males in their intercultural development after study abroad. Those students who had studies abroad showed better results on the IDI scale than the students on campus. As for academic major, humanities, social science, and language majors showed a statistically significant improvement in their intercultural development than other majors. Prior language study in high schools and colleges turned out to be one of the best predictors of intercultural growth. However, other learners' individual characteristics, such as previous experience living in another culture, despite a common assumption, did not predict intercultural growth. The same is applicable to prior study abroad, which did not correlate with intercultural proficiency. However, those students who had never travelled or lived in another cultural context demonstrated the lowest score before departing for a host country but displayed the most significant gains during sojourn.

With regard to stay abroad conditions and programme characteristics, the length of a mobility programme, blended class composition involving host and other international students, and the amount of time spent with host nationals were the best predictors of students' intercultural development. Research also shows that students who enroll while abroad in host language courses usually demonstrate higher scores in their intercultural growth. This implies that the knowledge of a host language and intercultural development are tightly intertwined.

Cultural mentoring<sup>8</sup> during study abroad also appeared to be an important factor to consider when designing and organizing a mobility programme. Despite the fact that many U.S. students while abroad live with host families and take classes together with host nationals, they tend to avoid communicating with representatives of the host culture. More often than not, they create their U.S. groups and spend their free time with other U.S. students. As a result, when these students return home, they do not demonstrate any significant gains in their intercultural learning. Therefore, a widely held belief that the study abroad experience definitely leads to intercultural learning has been open to question. Vande Berg et al. assert that for the most part, the exposure to a host culture contributes to intercultural learning provided that students abroad can communicate frequently with cultural mentors or study abroad instructors, who encourage and motivate them to communicate and spend more time with host nationals. Accommodation is one more important characteristic that has an influence on intercultural learning. Those students who lived with co-nationals and host nationals demonstrated greater results in intercultural learning. Those who lived with other international students or in a host family did not show such an improvement. However, the amount of time spent with members of the receiving family positively affected their intercultural learning. Those students who spent less time with host families demonstrated the lowest benefits. Contrary to common assumption, homestays with host nationals were not correlated with intercultural proficiency, but those students who made an effort to be in frequent contact displayed more progress and cultural awareness upon returning from the SA. The same is true for time spent with co-nationals. The more sojourners communicated with their co-nationals, the worse the intercultural development scores were. On the contrary, those who spent no less than 50% of their free time with host nationals made the most progress.

Vande Berg et al.'s findings align with the results of the two studies carried out by Behrnd and Porzelt (2012), who sought to find out the effect of study abroad programmes on the development of IC, which included intercultural adaptation and sensitivity among other components. The secondary objective of these studies was to

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<sup>8</sup> Pre-departure orientation courses and sessions that aim to prepare students for a new experience, as well as re-entry sessions helping students make their re-entry less challenging also fall into the category of cultural mentoring.

investigate the effect of intercultural training on students' level of IC. Additionally, other independent variables, such as "the number of visited countries, the number of foreign languages spoken, the number of private stays abroad and the length of stay abroad" (p. 217) were taken into account. In the first study, the authors explored how study abroad influences cognitive, affective and conative domains of IC according to the model proposed by Gertsen (1990). The results did not show significant statistical differences in the level of intercultural components between students who studied abroad and those who stayed on campus. None of the independent variables showed the significant effect on change in IC, except for the duration of stay abroad. The length of stay abroad did influence the affective domain. This suggests that students who have been abroad for a longer time become more motivated and interested in contact with people from different cultures; they overcome judgments and have a more positive attitude towards a host environment, and they are more willing to acknowledge and accept cultural differences.

In the second study, the authors assessed the effect of stay abroad on the social, individual, and strategic elements of IC according to the model developed by Bolten (2007, as cited in Behrnd and Porzelt, p. 215). The results of this study support the findings of the previous one and indicate that the best predictor of IC is the duration of stay abroad. The length of stay abroad influences students' individual (stress resistance, optimism, etc) and social intercultural competence (communication abilities, adaptation, and empathy), as well as problem solving. Moreover, the study revealed that students who studied abroad made more significant gains in the degree of their social, individual and strategic intercultural competence after special intercultural training in comparison with those students who also had intercultural training, but did not study abroad. This emphasizes the importance and necessity of intercultural training when organizing mobility programmes.

One more important research study that needs to be mentioned here was conducted by Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune (2011). The scholars analysed the relationship between the friendship networks, sojourners' social connectedness, their homesickness and satisfaction with SA experiences. The friendships included three groups of students: co-nationals, international students, and host nationals. In total, 86 international students

(from East Asia, South/Southeast Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Oceania, and the Americas) from the University in Hawai'i took part in the study. They were administered an online survey. The scholars employed various quantitative scales as instruments (e.g., Social Connectedness scale developed by Lee and Robbins, 1995; Homesickness and Contentment scale by Shin and Abel, 1999; and the Temporal Satisfaction with Life Scale taken from Pavot, Diener, and Suh, 1998). The results are in line with the studies that emphasize the importance of building a network of host national friends during the SA. Those students who communicated mostly with host nationals revealed a higher degree of satisfaction with their SA experiences and a lower degree of homesickness. On the contrary, those who maintained relationships mostly with co-nationals remained less satisfied with their SA experiences and revealed a lower degree of social connectedness.

The implications of Hendrickson et al.'s study highlight the importance of providing intercultural and social support training before departure, finding a way to house international students with locals and using the classroom as a platform for building friendships with hosts.

Another extensive study comes from Beaven (2012), who carried out longitudinal qualitative research to find out the effect of the Erasmus mobility programme on Italian university students' cross-cultural adaptation. She used interviews and specially designed tables, which students had completed on a weekly basis while abroad, as data collection instruments. To keep in touch with students when they were abroad, the researcher used a video-conferencing tool, Skype. In addition, she created a virtual space on Facebook where the participants of the study could communicate and share their experiences. Therefore, she explored all three stages: before, during, and after departure. In the initial stage, she collected data on the participants' motives for going abroad and expectations of the experiences and outcomes. Her findings confirmed previous studies to a greater extent and her participants' motives grouped around three main categories: language and culture learning, academic and career opportunities, and personal development. As for expectations, her participants sought to explore a new culture, to make new friends and acquaintances, and to become more autonomous and independent from their parents. Besides positive expectations, students also anticipated

difficulties. These anticipations were mostly based on previous experience abroad and other Erasmus students' comments.

Based on the data from the weekly tables, Beaven constructed graphs representing her participants' adaptation curves. The constructed curves displayed the variety of developmental patterns, which suggests that the adaptation process is dynamic and varies from one individual to another. In order to better understand the fluctuations in the graphs, she also analyzed social and academic obstacles her participants had faced (e.g., difficulties in making friends with host nationals or problems with active participation in seminars) while abroad and some of the coping strategies.

The scholar concludes that cross-cultural adaptation is a complex process which can be affected by different internal and external factors, such as students' motivation and expectations, personality, and stay abroad conditions. She also provides supporting evidence to Anderson's model of cross-cultural adjustment and claims that cross-cultural adaptation is not a linear process as most stages models describe (e.g. the DMIS by Bennett, 1993), and its effective, behavioural, and cognitive domains may not follow the same pace of development. As stated by Anderson, these domains "may be in synchronization in the adjustment process, one mediating, potentiating or accompanying the other, and on the contrary, producing dissonance and conflicts within the individual" (Anderson, 1994, p. 308, as quoted in Beaven, 2012, p. 296).

A recent study that explores the development of intercultural sensitivity is Gilliland and colleagues' *Building Cultural Sensitivity and Interprofessional Collaboration Through a Study Abroad Experience* (2016). A total of 50 health care students from a liberal arts university in south central Texas took part in the study. Although the majority of the participants were born in the US, they came from Caucasian and Hispanic backgrounds. 38 students reported that they had prior travel experiences and 20 students were fluent in their second language. China and India were two host destinations. The scholars employed a mix-methods design combining pre- and post-test assessment with reflective journals. To collect quantitative data, the participants were administered two questionnaires. The first one was the Clinical Cultural Competence survey that inquired into cultural knowledge, cultural skills and cultural awareness (adopted from Like, Fulcomer, Kairys, Wathington, and Crosson, 2004). The second questionnaire was

developed by the researchers of the study so as to collect the demographic data, such as age, ethnicity, marital status, health professions major, previous travel experience, and prior experience with health care professional roles. To collect qualitative data, the participants were required to complete reflective papers after their SA. They were asked to reflect on their expectations regarding experience itself and learning outcomes, perceived change in attitudes, acquired knowledge and skills related to host culture, profession and other disciplines.

The statistical analysis revealed that the participants benefited from the 15-week course abroad and their knowledge, skills, and awareness about China and India significantly increased. The qualitative analyses of the prevailing themes showed that the students were satisfied with their SA experiences and their expectations were surpassed. Those students who had been to China revealed that the sojourn helped them reduce their stereotypes about the country and people. Although all students commented on some negative aspects, such as pollution, unsanitary conditions and tumultuous driving, they perceived changes in their attitudes and sensitivity to Chinese people. The students also reported that the experience was valuable in terms of profession gains. Many realized that they had begun to appreciate other professions as a result of the sojourn, and suggested that understanding of various training approaches and roles facilitated collaboration in the interprofessional team. The qualitative data from the students who had been to India showed similar results. Having observed striking inequality in the private and public health sectors and poverty, the participants began to appreciate more all that had been previously taken for granted in their home country.

The implications of Gilliland and colleagues' findings are that "an interprofessional SA program resulted in a positive learning experience, improving cultural competence and knowledge, as well as IPE [interprofessional education] awareness and skill building. Students gained not only increased cultural awareness but also an improved appreciation and heightened awareness of a health professions group other than their own" (p.48). The scholars call for more research to assess the effect of long-term SA programmes on cultural awareness and interprofessional collaboration.

## 2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed some of the literature in the field of IC and SA. After having presented several prominent theoretical frameworks that conceptualize IC and its components, I have described two significant outcomes of SA experiences, namely intercultural adaptation and intercultural sensitivity. Firstly, I provided a detailed description of three main approaches that guide research in the field of cultural contact and transition. After that, I elaborated on the concept of intercultural sensitivity and also described several models that scholars use in their research. Finally, I have provided a review of several research studies that investigate how residence abroad affects the adaptation process and the development of intercultural sensitivity in the context of university mobility, and what factors contribute to these processes.

Some of the important findings can be summarized as follows:

- As opposed to the U-curve hypothesis, the culture learning approach assumes a higher degree of difficulty and stress at the beginning of the sojourn. The learning curve begins at low points and gradually improves, as individuals acquire necessary skills.
- Intercultural adaptation is not a linear process as most stages models describe (e.g. the DMIS by Bennett, 1993), and its effective, behavioural, and cognitive domains “may be in synchronization in the adjustment process, one mediating, potentiating or accompanying the other, and on the contrary, producing dissonance and conflicts within the individual” (Anderson, 1994, p. 308, as quoted in Beaven, 2012, p. 296).
- Such factors as personality, expectations and social support might have an influence on psychological adjustment, whereas cultural knowledge, cultural distance, previous experience abroad, language fluency, length of stay abroad, amount of contact with host nationals and also the quality of this contact might affect sociocultural adjustment (Ward, 2004; Williams, 2005; Masgoret and Ward, 2006; Vande Berg et al., 2009, Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012).
- Students’ motives for taking part in SA programmes grouped around three main categories: foreign language and culture learning, academic and career opportunities, and personal growth (Beaven, 2012).

- Co-national support plays an important role for adjustment in the context of short-term mobility. Short-term sojourners should be encouraged “to develop co-national ties for support abroad until they develop the strength and skills needed to extend their network internationally.” (Pitts, 2009, p.460).
- Pre-departure intercultural training and cultural mentoring during study abroad appeared to be an important factor to consider when organizing a mobility programme, since the SA experience alone does not guarantee the improvement of intercultural communication skills (Williams, 2005; Jackson, 2008a; Vande Berg et al., 2009).
- Self-reflection assignments and discussions during and after the sojourn are beneficial for students, since they give the opportunity to articulate problems and to reconsider SA experiences (Jackson, 2008b).

The review of these empirical studies reveals that most of them are quantitative with a pre- and post-test group design. On the contrary, qualitative studies which involve the analysis of students’ diaries, narratives of daily experiences, and students’ observations are scarce. Some of the studies that explore life experiences abroad longitudinally also display flaws. They normally focus on a certain stage of the students’ adjustment process and normally lack explanations and descriptions of how they achieved this stage and how they perceived change. It is worth noting that a great number of studies target US and Asian populations. There are a few studies where the population represents students of various European nationalities, but most of them are predominantly monolingual and little research has been carried out to explore the impact of SA programmes with a focus on bilingual students. When abroad, these students are required to speak a foreign language, which is the third for those of autochthonous origin and the fourth for those of immigrant origin. In addition, as mentioned earlier in the Introduction chapter, this bilingual population is often exposed to different cultures from their childhood due to increased international immigration. All that cultural, linguistic and religious diversity which surrounds this modern population in their daily lives has led to the unpredictability of their preferences and sociocultural characteristics. Much remains to be learned about what adaptation processes these students experience during their SA.

As a concluding remark, I would add that previously SA experience was seen mainly as an opportunity for language acquisition, and immersion in the target culture was considered a key for linguistic improvement. In an increasingly multicultural environment, students may have difficulty becoming immersed in host society. Moreover, English used as a lingua franca often makes the immersion unnecessary for students. At the same time, we must not forget that foreign language acquisition may not be the ultimate goal. Nowadays, the priorities have shifted, and students are often driven to participate in various SA programmes by different motives. In addition, technological developments have changed the way we communicate. The Internet and social-networking sites abolish borders and give us the possibility to stay in touch across long distances. This aspect has altered significantly SA experiences.

As following from the above mentioned, it is evident that the concept of adaptation needs to be reconsidered. In particular, there is a need to explore how bilingual university students who come from a multicultural environment create a new understanding of cultural diversity; what motivates them to participate in SA programmes and what expectations they hold regarding experience itself and outcomes; what kind of vital experiences influence their adaptation process and how they perceived their outcomes as a result of residence abroad.

## **2.7 Research Questions**

This study seeks to extend our understanding of the effect of SA programmes on bilingual university students' intercultural adaptation and the development of their intercultural sensitivity. The two main research questions that this dissertation will attempt to answer are:

1. What intercultural adaptation processes do bilingual university students experience during a short- or middle-term university study abroad programme?
2. What is the impact of a short- or middle-term university study abroad programme on the development of bilingual university students' intercultural sensitivity?

To answer these two main questions, the following secondary research questions will be explored:

- i. What motives for taking part in study abroad do students have?
- ii. What expectations with respect to personal, linguistic and academic gains during study abroad do students have? To what extent are these expectations fulfilled?
- iii. What concerns regarding personal, linguistic and academic challenges do students have before and during study abroad?
- iv. What experiences during study abroad have an impact on: (a) students' intercultural adaptation, and (b) the development of their intercultural sensitivity?



## CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Having examined different theoretical approaches which guide research on intercultural adaptation and sensitivity, described recent findings in the field and identified the dearth of studies investigating these issues, in this chapter I will describe the methodological approach and design of the current study, the instruments used for collecting data, as well as its data collection and analysis procedures.

### **3.1 Methodological approach**

As explained earlier in the introduction chapter, this longitudinal study seeks to explore vital experiences abroad of Catalan/Spanish bilingual university students, namely how they adapt to a new cultural environment and to varying communicative and behavioral styles; what vital experiences affect change in their level of intercultural adaptation and sensitivity; and how students themselves perceive their personal development after study abroad. In order to obtain data for this exploratory study, I decided to employ a mixed methods approach which is often described in literature as one where a researcher collects data using both quantitative and qualitative methods at the same time or one after another in a single research study (Creswell, 2003; Bamberger, 2012). When selecting this approach, I was guided by the assumption that “collecting diverse types of data best provides an understanding of a research problem” (Creswell, 2003, p.21). More and more scholars assert that the use of scales or inventories alone turn out to be insufficient in assessing IC and call for more longitudinal studies employing multiple qualitative methods, such as interviews, observations, narrative diaries, and case studies (Ward, 2004; Deardorff, 2006). Thus, data obtained using qualitative exploration may considerably complement quantitative findings and add to a better understanding of phenomena. On the basis of the above, I considered the mixed methods approach as the most appropriate.

The participants of the current study are bilingual Catalan/Spanish university students from different disciplines whose destinations spread over various geographic areas: Europe, the USA and Canada, Argentina and Brazil, Australia (see more details below in Section 3.3). On the one hand, this sample presents a particular interest, as little research has been done to explore the impact of SA programmes on the development of

bilingual undergraduate students' IC skills, such as intercultural adaptation and sensitivity. Therefore, I considered it important to apply quantitative measures so as to test the overall effect of a SA programme on intercultural adaptation and the development of intercultural sensitivity and to generalize a conclusion from the statistical analysis (see details in Section 3.6.1).

On the other hand, in order to better understand what kind of vital experiences affect change in students' level of intercultural sensitivity and help them adapt to life abroad, the qualitative exploration of their individual experiences, personal viewpoints and unique insights into life while abroad becomes essential (see details in Section 3.6.2). To achieve this purpose, I decided to employ a narrative approach which is often referred to as a life history approach. It is generally defined as the collection of oral or written life narratives through various sources, such as interviews, dairies, open-ended questionnaires, photos, etc., and their further interpretation so as to explore a certain life fragment or an individual life course. (Atkinson, 2002; Abu Bakar and Abdullah, 2008; Roberts, 2002; Ojermark, 2007). However, there is still a certain confusion in the terminology relating to the life history approach, as a number of distinct terms (e.g. life stories, life histories, narratives, case studies, family histories, testimonies, biographies etc.) are often used interchangeably when defining it. According to Ojermark (2007), this may be explained by the fact that the life history method, initially springing from anthropological and sociological studies where personal histories and testimonies had been primary source of information, was later adopted by researchers of other fields, such as education, literature, cultural research and the like. As a result, the life history method "has gone by various names, and umbrella terms such as narrative inquiry, biographical method, life history research etc. are often used to simplify this vast field of research" (p.3).

Although a personal narrative is the core of the life history approach, its various methods should not be equally interpreted. They considerably differ from one another in terms of the researcher's role in the data collection procedure, his/her impact on an interviewee, type of accounts, and results presentation. Roberts (2002), for instance, differentiates between the two at first glance indistinguishable terms "life story" and "life history" claiming that these methods are fundamentally different with respect to

the researcher's influence on a subject and further data presentation: the former refers to an original, not edited life story told by an individual to a researcher during an interactive interview, while the latter is the interpretation of an individual's life story (not necessarily obtained by means of an interview) made by a researcher after having analyzed and edited it. Atkinson (2002) agrees with Roberts' assumption, but adds that the difference between these two methods also lies in "emphasis" and "scope". He specifies that a life story focuses on "a person's entire life", whereas a life history "most often focuses on a specific aspect of a person's life, such as work life or a special role in some part of the life of a community" (p.126).

Based on the distinctions drawn by Roberts and Atkinson between life story and life history, the latter term is the most suitable one for describing the method I adopted. Firstly, the scope of the current study covered a specific period of students' life, namely their short- or mid-term stay in a host country. Secondly, although I did not edit students' narratives and used original quotations within the text, final results were presented in my interpretation after a thorough analysis and drawing of conclusions.

Following this recommended mixed research framework, I developed several data collection instruments that enabled me to obtain both complementary and mutually supportive quantitative and qualitative data. Thus, in order to observe change in the level of students' intercultural sensitivity as a result of spending a short- or mid-term stay abroad, I adapted the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) (see Section 3.4.1.3 Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire for more details), which is widely used in pre- and post-design quantitative studies. The adapted version of this scale allowed me to collect both quantitative close-ended responses, which I used to statistically test the effect of the SA on the development of intercultural sensitivity, and qualitative open-ended explanations used to better interpret statistical findings.

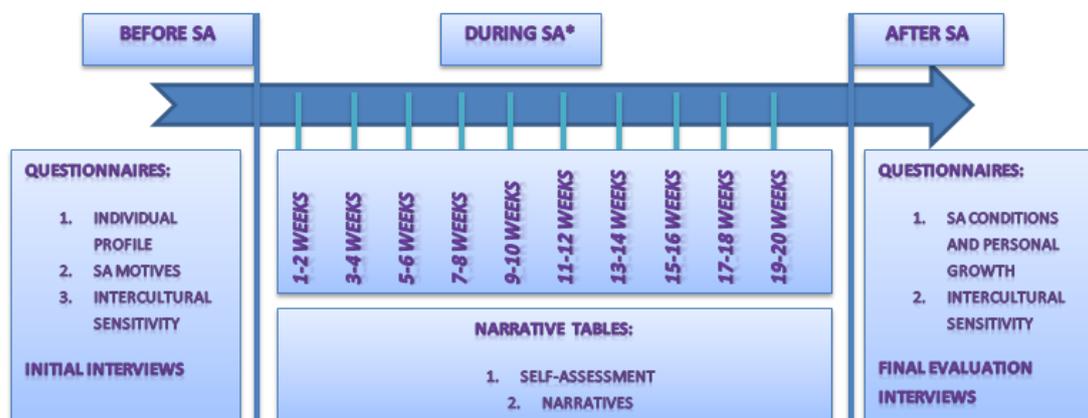
I also wished to collect longitudinal data from the participants while they were abroad in order to construct graphs with adaptation curves. For this purpose, I adapted Beaven's diary tables (2012). This adapted instrument, which is called *Narrative Tables* in this study (see Section 3.4.2 Narrative Tables for further description), allowed me to collect the students' intercultural adaptation self-assessment throughout their sojourn and, by

averaging these numerical data, to represent graphically the rises and falls of their personal and academic experiences.

Beside this quantitative self-assessment, I also wished to collect some qualitative data that would explain those fluctuations in the adaptation graphs. I was particularly interested in getting to know the reasons and factors that had influenced their evaluation. For this purpose, I asked the participants to leave explanatory comments concerning their intercultural adaptation self-assessment in each table. As a result, I could collect students' written narratives about their personal and academic experiences during their sojourn in a host country. Later on, I was also interested in knowing how the students perceived their personal development after the SA. Upon their return home, I administered questionnaires and conducted individual semi-structured interviews through which I could collect their reflections on their personal growth. The logic behind using those different methods was collecting different types of data that would complement each other and, consequently, could help to answer the research questions of this study in greater depth.

### **3.2 Research design**

In order to explore vital experiences abroad that have an impact on intercultural adaptation and the development of intercultural sensitivity, I employed a longitudinal research design, which implies data collection at three different times: before, during and after the SA. Figure 10 illustrates the research design of the present study.



<sup>9</sup>Figure 10. Design of the study

(Source: own elaboration)

Three - four weeks before their SA, the participants were given the following pre-departure questionnaires to complete:

1. Individual Profile Questionnaire: to collect data on their personal and linguistic background (see Section 3.4.1.1);
2. Study Abroad Motives Questionnaire: to collect data on their motives for participation in the SA programme and expectations with regard to outcomes, as well as pre-departure concerns (see Section 3.4.1.2);
3. Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire: to collect data on their intercultural sensitivity level before the SA (see Section 3.4.1.3).

Approximately one week after that, Individual Initial Interviews were conducted whose main aim was to clarify and complete the information given in the pre-departure questionnaires.

During the SA, the Narrative Tables (see Section 3.4.2) were used in order to collect:

1. The participants' intercultural adaptation self-assessment, which they made every two weeks while abroad;
2. The participants' narratives concerning reasons and factors that had influenced their self-assessment.

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<sup>9</sup> Not all participants spent the same amount of time abroad

Upon return home, the participants were given the following post SA questionnaires to complete:

1. Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire: to collect data on accommodation and living conditions; perceived foreign language improvement and change in their personal development; degree of overall satisfaction with the SA experience (see Section 3.4.1.4);
2. Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire: to collect data on their level of intercultural sensitivity after having spent a short- or mid-term stay abroad (see Section 3.4.1.3).

After having completed the questionnaires, Individual Final Evaluation Interviews were conducted whose aim was to collect the participants' reflections on: their perceived outcomes; their pre-departure expectations and the extent to which they had been fulfilled; their perceived change in their adaptability and sensitivity to cultural differences as a result of participating in the SA programme and factors which might have influenced that change.

### **3.3 Participants**

The participants of this study were 12 undergraduate Catalan/Spanish bilingual students at the UPF, 11 females and 1 male, who were enrolled in a short- or mid-term study abroad programme organized by their home university. Their mean age was 22.3 (range 20–25). The SA was not compulsory for completing their degrees and participation in the programme was on a voluntary basis. The students came from four of the eight Faculties at the UPF: Humanities, Health and Life Sciences, Political and Social Sciences and Communication. At first, I was motivated to engage only Catalan/Spanish students from the Faculty of Humanities. I thought that these students might be more interested in culture in general and other cultures specifically, as they were learning foreign literature, art, philosophical thoughts, traditions and historical events during their university studies. In addition, they often complemented their education with study abroad experiences because their career prospects included work closely linked to cultural industries (e.g., cultural tourism or cultural management) and, therefore, the development of IC was one of their interests. But finally, I decided to engage not only Humanities students who might be more motivated to take part in the research, but also

students from other faculties, whose interests could be beyond the sphere of culture and cultural issues.

All of the students volunteered to participate in this study after having received a recruitment letter (see Appendix I), which was sent on behalf of the GREILI research group<sup>10</sup> to the Mobility Coordinators of the above mentioned faculties who, in turn, forwarded it to their students' e-mails. Before sending the recruitment letter to the Mobility Coordinators, I had received a permit from the Deans of those faculties. The letter was sent four times during the academic year 2013-2014, that is, in June 2013 just right after the defense of the thesis project, in September and December 2013, and in late May 2014. In June it addressed those students who departed in August or September so as to start the first term (2013) in a host country. In September and December it addressed those students who departed in late January or February to start the second term (2014) abroad, while in late May it addressed those ones who departed in August or September so as to start the first term of a new 2014 – 2015 academic year. In addition, in May the letter was also sent to the Mobility Coordinator of the Global Cities programme. The objective was to involve students from a shorter SA programme.

Table 1 summarizes the students' profile data, such as gender, age, the academic year they had provided before departure, the faculty affiliation and degree, the destinations and length of the SA. To maintain confidentiality, all the participants were offered to adopt pseudonyms, which are the ones used in the present study.

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<sup>10</sup> Grup de Recerca en Espais Interculturals, Llengües i Identitats (GREILI) <https://www.upf.edu/greili-upf/>

**Table 1. Participants' profile data**

Participant	Gender	Age	Completed.Ac ad. year	Faculty	Degree	Destination	Duration of SA(months)
Maria	f	23	4th	Health and Life Sciences	Medicine	Germany	4
Cristina	f	23	4th	Health and Life Sciences	Medicine	Argentina	4
Virginia	f	21	2nd	Political and Social Sciences	Political Science and Public Administration	Canada	4
Daniel	m	25	3rd	Political and Social Sciences	Political Science and Public Administration	USA	1,5
Sara	f	22	2nd	Humanities	Humanities	Australia	6
Elizabeth	f	22	3rd	Humanities	Humanities	Brazil	6
Angela	f	26	3rd	Humanities	Humanities	China	6
Anna	f	22	3rd	Humanities	Humanities	USA	6
Kira	f	22	3rd	Humanities	Humanities	Netherlands	6
Lola	f	21	2nd	Communication	Audiovisual Communication	Netherlands	6
Ares	f	20	2nd	Communication	Advertising and Public Relations	Netherlands	6
Natalia	f	21	3rd	Communication	Advertising and Public Relations	China	4

As to the students' linguistic background, all of them were Catalan/Spanish bilinguals as they had been exposed to these languages in their family since birth. Besides, all had attended primary and secondary schools in Catalonia from which they had graduated with full command of both languages. As regards previous SA experience, all but Anna and Angela had attended foreign language courses abroad during their secondary and higher education in English speaking countries: England, Ireland, and Canada. The duration of such courses in general did not exceed two months. Only Virginia spent nine months doing an English course in London. As for prior SA experience not related to attending classes and learning foreign languages, all had made short sojourns in foreign countries within Europe and beyond. These involved school trips, exchange programmes, work and summer camps, internships and tourism. The duration of those

sojourns did not exceed 3 months. These data reveal that, on the one hand, all the participants had previous experiences abroad before participation in this study; on the other hand, those experiences were of short duration and the university SA programme they were enrolled in was going to be the first serious sojourn for a much longer period than they had previously made.

### **3.4 Data collection instruments**

The data collection instruments used in the present study were as follows:

- Questionnaires
- Narrative tables
- Interviews

As for the language used during the interviews and when completing the questionnaires and narrative tables, the participants were free to use the three work languages at UPF: Catalan, Spanish or English. However, all my interviews were conducted in English as the great majority of the students expressed the desire to speak in a foreign language with a purpose to practise it.

#### **3.4.1 Questionnaires**

As shown in the Research Design section, the participants were given questionnaires to complete at two different stages of data collection: before and after the SA. A total of four questionnaires were used in the current study:

1. Individual Profile Questionnaire
2. Study Abroad Motives Questionnaire
3. Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire
4. Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire

I shall describe each of the questionnaires, when each one was administered to the participants and what its purpose was.

##### **3.4.1.1 Individual Profile Questionnaire**

The Individual Profile Questionnaire was administered to the participants before the SA. It was adapted from the individual linguistic profile survey used in the Stay Abroad and

Language Acquisition research project (SALA) (Pérez-Vidal, 2014). The adapted version used in this study is comprised of 16 questions (see Appendix II) investigating the participants' cultural and linguistic background, namely where they were born and brought up, what kind of schools they had attended, what languages they are exposed to in their families and which ones they speak with their closest relatives. There are also questions inquiring into prior SA experiences, such as international travels, foreign language courses abroad or sojourns where they were exposed to a foreign language, participation in language tandems through the university programme "Voluntariat linguistic", frequency of interactions with Erasmus exchange students at UPF, and the ability in the language of the host country.

#### 3.4.1.2 Study Abroad Motives Questionnaire

The Study Abroad Motives questionnaire was given to the participants to complete before the SA. This was an adaptation of the self-report questionnaire used in SALA's research projects (see Chapter 8 in Pérez-Vidal, 2014, for more information). The adapted version is comprised of 4 open-ended questions (see Appendix III) inquiring into reasons why students chose to participate in this SA programme, their pre-departure worries, as well as their expectations about the experience abroad and the outcomes in particular in terms of language skills improvement, academic skills, making friends, intercultural adaptation and personal growth.

#### 3.4.1.3 Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire

The Intercultural Sensitivity questionnaire is an adaptation of the ISS developed by Chen and Starosta (2000). In the current study, this questionnaire followed the pre- and post-test design and, consequently, was administered to the participants before departing for a host country and after their sojourn so as to observe change in the level of intercultural sensitivity as a result of taking part in the SA programme.

The original ISS contains 24 items and is widely used in quantitative studies to measure the level of intercultural sensitivity in terms of five factors: Interaction Engagement, Respect for Cultural Differences, Interaction Confidence, Interaction Enjoyment, and Interaction Attentiveness. In order to fit this qualitative and exploratory study, the format of the scale underwent alteration (see Appendix IV). The adapted version was

reduced to 16 items which were transformed into close-ended questions. There were several reasons for reducing the questionnaire. First of all, I wanted to eliminate ambiguous and repetitive items. I also wanted to make it shorter because I introduced the qualitative element that was explanation for all answers, which was something that Chen and Starosta did not have in their scale. Figure 11 provides an example of such adaptation.

**Original Chen and Starosta’s statement:** I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.

**Adapted version:** Do you enjoy interacting with people from different cultures?

Underline:            Yes            Sometimes            No

Explanation:

**Figure 11. Example of an adapted item from Chen and Starosta’s Intercultural Sensitivity Scale**

The Intercultural Engagement factor was explored by means of three questions (1, 11, 16) investigating participants’ willingness to get into contact with people from different cultures. The Respect for Culture Differences factor is comprised of six questions (2, 6, 7, 8, 13, 15) inquiring into the degree to which participants are tolerant towards other cultural values and ways of behavior, and respect different cultures and opinions. The Interaction Confidence factor includes 3 questions (3, 4, 5) exploring participants’ feeling of confidence in interacting with people from different cultures. The Interaction Enjoyment factor has 2 questions (9, 10) referring to participants’ feeling of engagement into intercultural dialogue with his/her culturally-distinct counterpart. And finally, the Interaction Attentiveness factor has 2 questions (12, 14) inquiring into the degree to which participants are observant and try to obtain information when interacting with people from other cultures.

Furthermore, Chen and Starosta’s standard 5-point response format also underwent changes. In the original Chen and Starosta’s scale, respondents rate their agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Instead, I used a three-point scale. When responding to the close-ended questions, students could choose between “yes”, “sometimes” or “no”. The primary

reason for using a three-point scale instead of a five-point one was to reduce scale use bias (Pearse, 2011). Although a five-point Likert scale enables us to better discriminate between responses, such a scale, however, makes it difficult for the respondents to distinguish one response option from another (i.e., “agree” from “strongly agree”) or to clearly discern how it will be used, allowing for vague and inaccurate answers. Having had to choose between discrimination power and non-ambiguity, I have opted for the latter. In order to compensate or recover the information that might be somehow thrown away as a result of using a three-point scale instead of a five-point one, the participants were asked to provide the explanation of their choice for all the answers. These open-ended explanations could help to interpret students’ responses in more depth and to throw light on how students develop their sensitivity to cultural differences and learn to communicate in an effective and appropriate way. Figure 12 shows the extract from the completed pre-departure Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire.

**Intercultural Sensitivity questionnaire**

Below is a series of questions concerning intercultural communication. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be open and provide us with an explanation for all the answers. You may answer using **Catalan, Spanish, or English**.

**1. Do you enjoy interacting with people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes    Sometimes    No

Explanation: because diversity enriches us, and other perspectives are always new ways to looking at things. I believe that, because of having been born in one place or another, you think differently.

**2. Do you often have a feeling that people from other cultures are narrow-minded?**

Underline: Yes    Sometimes    No

Explanation: Actually Asia people are a bit narrow-minded. But “occidental” people too. In the US, for example, you felt like they felt the center of the world. And of course they are not...

**Figure 12.** Extract from the pre-departure Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire with Natalia’s answers

#### 3.4.1.4 Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire

The Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire was administered to the participants upon their return. It was adapted from the Study Abroad Conditions

survey (SAC) used in the SALA project (Pérez-Vidal, 2014). Pérez-Vidal's SAC contains 47 questions clustered around 10 sections: accommodation, work, formal study, social interactions, media contact, self-observed emotions, stress, personal development, perceived foreign language improvement and degree of satisfaction with the SA experience. The adapted version of this questionnaire is comprised of 12 questions (see Appendix V). The selection of the questions was stipulated by the research objective, namely to extend our understanding of the effect of SA conditions on adaptation and the development of intercultural sensitivity. The questionnaire collects data on living conditions, the amount of interaction with host nationals, co-nationals and other international students, work and travel experiences, stressful factors while abroad. It also contains a series of questions concerning perceived foreign language improvement and change in personal development, as well as overall satisfaction with the SA experience.

### 3.4.2 Narrative Tables

The Narrative Tables were used 1) to construct the longitudinal adaptation curves based on the students' assessment of their personal and academic life while abroad, and 2) to collect their observations and reflections concerning their SA experience. The idea to use the narrative tables in this study was inspired by Beaven's research (2012) on cross-cultural adaptation in the context of European mobility. In her study, Beaven used "weekly diary tables" in order to collect students' thoughts concerning their experience throughout the SA. Her students filled in the tables on a weekly basis: firstly, they rated their week experience ranging from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good) according to the degree of difficulty they had experienced during the week; and after that, they provided comments on the two broad categories "personal issues" and "academic issues". Personal issues contained three sub-categories: friends and social life, daily life and, social language. Academic issues also contained three sub-categories: courses, administration and academic language. The author made the following sub-division based on the analysis of the previous research results on intercultural adaptation. The main idea of the weekly numerical assessment lay in constructing graphs based on students' judgments so as to visually represent their "ups and downs" during the sojourn. At the same time, the explanatory comments given by the students were used to

better interpret their numerical assessment. Figure 13 illustrates Beaven’s “weekly diary table.”

	Week 1
	1 = very bad / 5 = very good
<b>Personal issues</b>	
friends and social life	
daily life (food, accommodation, weather etc.)	
Language	
Comments on personal issues	(text box for comments)
<b>Academic issues</b>	
Courses	
administrative issues	
Language	
Comments on academic issues	(text box for comments)

**Figure 13. “Weekly dairy table” used in Beaven’s study (2012)**

I therefore decided to adapt this table for the current study. The two main categories, Personal and Academic issues, remained unchanged, but I considered it important to extend some of the existing sub-categories and add several new ones. As for the Personal issues, the sub-category “friends and social life” in Beaven’s table seemed very broad and, as I think, needed to be unfolded. During a sojourn exchange students live in university dorms sharing their rooms with foreign or native roommates, or rent apartments outside the university campus. There are also those ones who stay in a host house. In the university, they also deal with people from all over the world, that is, other exchange students, host nationals and also natives. The friendship between these groups of people may evolve differently, which in turn may affect their adaptation and the development of intercultural sensitivity. So I decided to slightly unfold the sub-category “friends and social life” according to relationships students form with people around them throughout their sojourn. The relationships were split into three main groups: Relationships with native friends, Relationships with friends of other nationalities, and Relationships with host nationals. The reason for such a division was stipulated by the previous research on the effect of exchange students’ personal characteristics, study abroad conditions and social interactions on intercultural competence and intercultural adaptation in particular (Gu et al., 2008; Vande Berg et al., 2009). I also considered it

important to add the Culture, customs and habits sub-category to the Personal issues category, since living abroad assumes getting to know culturally-distinct values and beliefs, manners and etiquette, customs and habits, etc., things that may contribute to or hinder the students' adaptation process. As regards the Academic issues, I decided to add the Educational system sub-category. The inclusion of this sub-category was motivated by previous research on motives for participation in SA programmes (IIE, 2010; Beaven, 2012; Kavakas, 2013). Such previous research findings reveal that getting to know another education system and experiencing new teaching approaches were often mentioned as a stimulus for participation in SA programmes.

It is also worth noting that both the Personal and Academic issues categories include a sub-category related to the foreign language use in those different contexts. According to Beaven, the language for social interaction may “follow a different development pattern to the language for academic purposes” (Beaven, 2012, p.82). Bearing in mind Beaven's remark, I left this language division untouched. I also decided to make available the space under the title “other factors” for the students in case they wanted to comment on something that, on their opinion, did not fall into any sub-category in the Personal and Academic Issues.

Thus, in the adapted version the main category “Personal Issues” consisted of six sub-categories: Relationships with native friends, Relationships with friends of other nationalities, Relationships with host nationals, Daily life (food, weather, accommodation, job if any, leisure activities, etc.), Foreign language for social interaction, and Culture, custom and habits of the host country. In turn, the other main category “Academic Issues” included four sub-categories: Educational system, Classes (teachers, classmates, etc.), Foreign language for academic purposes, and Academic support for administrative issues. Figure 14 shows a model of a Narrative Table.

<b>Personal Issues</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Relationships with your native friends					
Relationships with friends from other nationalities					
Relationships with host nationals					
Your daily life (food, weather, accommodation, job if any, leisure activities)					
Language (social interaction, social networks)					
Culture, custom and habits from the host country					
<b>Your comments<sup>11</sup>:</b>					
Relationships with your native friends:					
Relationships with other nationality friends:					
Relationships with host nationals:					
Your daily life (food, weather, accommodation, job (if any), leisure activities):					
Language for social interaction (e.g. social networks):					
Culture, custom and habits:					
Other factors:					
<b>Academic Issues</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Educational system					
Classes (teachers, classmates and others)					
Language for academic purposes					
Academic support for administrative issues (instructors)					
<b>Your comments:</b>					
Educational system:					
Classes (teachers, classmates and others):					
Language for academic purposes:					
Academic support for administrative issues (instructors):					
Other factors:					

**Figure 14. Model of the Narrative Table used in the present study**

<sup>11</sup> Note: blank spaces have been deleted here for the sake of clarity

When filling out the table, the participants were asked to assess their two-week stay abroad ranging from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good) according to the degree of difficulty they had experienced. In addition, instead of commenting only on the main two categories as it was in Beaven's study, they were required to leave a few explanatory comments (in Catalan, Spanish or English) on their assessment for all the sub-categories. These commentaries could help to better explain the numerical assessment and offer a clearer insight into how bilingual exchange students adapted to the host country, what obstacles they encountered and what strategies they adopted in order to overcome difficulties. So as not to discourage the participants from making comments because of workload, I decided to change the time interval for completing the narrative tables from one week, which is what Beaven did in her study, to two weeks.

### 3.4.3 Interviews

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study with each of the participants: the Initial Profile Interview was carried out before the SA and the Final Evaluation Interview upon return. The interviews were semi-structured as I had general pre-determined questions that all the students had to answer. Besides, I also asked each participant a number of personalized questions depending on his or her answers to questionnaires. Other interesting issues that emerged spontaneously in the course of the interviews also allowed for additional questions.

Before departing for the host country, the participants took part in the Initial Profile Interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. The aim of this interview was to clarify and complement those data the participants had provided in their profile questionnaire. The pre-determined open-ended questions that I asked every participant were the following:

- Why have you decided to participate in this SA programme?
- Why have you chosen this host destination?
- What are your expectations towards the results?
- What are you most concerned about?

Examples of other questions that emerged in the course of the interview were:

- You wrote in the questionnaire "every time I go abroad I grow personally."  
What does it mean for you to grow personally?

- Are you planning to enroll in a host language course there?
- Have you already arranged your accommodation?

After the students' return home from the SA, the individual final evaluation interview was conducted. Its duration was between 50 and 90 minutes. During the interview, I asked them to formulate a definition of adaptation and intercultural sensitivity and describe whether they felt that they had changed in their level of adaptation and sensitivity to cultural differences, and if so, explain what vital experiences might have influenced that change. They were also asked to recall their pre-departure expectations and reflect on the extent to which they were fulfilled. In addition, I asked them to reflect on perceived outcomes as a result of spending a short- or mid-term stay abroad and to make suggestions to people organizing mobility programmes. The pre-determined interview questions were the following:

- Do you remember before your departure we were talking about intercultural adaptation and intercultural sensitivity? Could you please explain what these two terms mean for you?
- Describe how you feel that you have changed, from the beginning of your SA, in your sensitivity to other cultures?
- Do you remember your expectations about your SA before departure? To what extent have your expectations been fulfilled?
- Do you feel you have adapted to your host country? In what way do you feel you adapted well?
- What factors do you think helped you to adapt to your host culture?
- What exactly do you feel you have achieved as a result of spending a short or middle term abroad?
- What suggestions would you make to people organizing mobility programmes?

Examples of other questions that emerged in the course of the interview were:

- Do you believe that if you stayed in your host country for more time, let's say for four months, you would gain much more?
- What was the most difficult for you during your stay abroad?
- How long had you been studying French before you went to Quebec?

To conclude this section, Table 2 presents a summary of all instruments used in the current study and the purposes of their use.

**Table 2. Summary of the instruments and the purposes of their use**

Timeline of data collection	Instrument	Purpose of use
Pre-Departure	<p><b>Questionnaires:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Individual Profile</b></li>   <li>➤ <b>Study Abroad Motives</b></li>   <li>➤ <b>Intercultural Sensitivity</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>Individual Profile Questionnaire</i>, adapted from the SALA project (Pérez-Vidal, 2014), aimed at collecting data on the participants' cultural background, language use, prior language learning experience, previous study abroad sojourns, international travels.</p> <p><i>Study Abroad Motives Questionnaire</i>, adapted from the SALA project (Pérez-Vidal, 2014), aimed at collecting data on the students' motives for participating in the SA programme, pre-departure expectations and concerns.</p> <p><i>Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire</i>, adapted from the ISS by Chen and Starosta (2000), aimed at constructing the intercultural sensitivity graphs before departing for a host country and collecting students' reflections so as to better interpret their close-ended responses concerning their intercultural sensitivity.</p>
	<p><b>Semi-Structured Individual Interviews:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Initial Profile Interviews</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>Initial Profile Interview</i> aimed at clarifying and completing the information given in the pre-departure questionnaires.</p>
During Study Abroad	<p><b>Narrative tables:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Intercultural Adaptation Self-Assessment</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>Intercultural Adaptation Self-Assessment</i> aimed at constructing the longitudinal adaptation curves for personal and academic issues.</p>

	➤ <b>Intercultural Adaptation Narratives</b>	<i>Intercultural Adaptation Narratives</i> served to better interpret the intercultural adaptation self-assessment, as well as to collect the students' observations, feelings, reflections as to surprising or shocking experiences, whether pleasant or unpleasant, caused by cultural differences.
<b>After Study Abroad</b>	<b>Questionnaires:</b>	
	➤ <b>Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth</b>	<i>Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire</i> , adapted from the SALA project (Pérez-Vidal, 2014), aimed at collecting data on accommodation, work and travel while abroad, perceived foreign language improvement, perceived change in personal development and degree of overall satisfaction with the SA experience.
	➤ <b>Intercultural Sensitivity</b>	<i>Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire</i> , adapted from the ISS by Chen and Starosta (2000), aimed at constructing the intercultural sensitivity graphs after a short- or mid-term abroad and collecting students' reflections so as to better interpret their close-ended responses concerning their intercultural sensitivity.
	<b>Semi-Structured Individual Interviews:</b>	
	➤ <b>Final Evaluation Interview</b>	<i>Final Evaluation Interview</i> aimed at collecting students' reflections on perceived outcomes and change in their adaptability and sensitivity to cultural differences after the SA, as well as factors which might have influenced that change.

It should be pointed out that the data collection instruments used in the present study were not piloted and tested mainly because all the questionnaires were slightly adapted from other surveys and scales that, in turn, had been validated by their developers. Therefore, the Individual Profile, Study Abroad Motives, and Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth questionnaires were adapted from various questionnaires used in the SALA project (Pérez-Vidal, 2014), which had been piloted before the main SALA research study. The Intercultural Sensitivity questionnaire was an adaptation of the ISS developed and validated by Chen and Starosta (2000). The narrative tables were adapted

from the study conducted by Beaven (2012) who had carried out a pilot study in order to verify the accuracy of her data collection instruments.

### **3.5 Data collection procedures**

The data was collected in the following way. After having received responses from volunteers, I asked them to fill in the pre-departure questionnaire and send it back to me by e-mail. In this way, I could acquaint myself with the students' linguistic background and their previous stay abroad experience, as well as with their motives for participating in the university SA programme, expectations, and concerns. Then, I organized an informative, individual session whose purpose was to get to know each student personally, to explain the whole procedure of the research study and to record the Initial Profile Interview. In the session, the students were informed that the participation in this research was voluntary and anonymous and that they could stop taking part in the study at any time without any penalty. All of them signed a consent form as to the use of obtained data for educational research (See Appendix VI). They were also offered a small financial reward of 35€ for their participation which was going to be paid with funding provided by GREILI<sup>12</sup> upon their return from the host country. After having explained the goal of the research and the procedure, I conducted the pre-departure interview. The main purpose of this interview was to clarify and complete the information given in the pre-departure questionnaires. The informative session including the interview lasted between 1,5 and 2 hours at UPF classrooms.

To collect data during the SA, four virtual Moodle classrooms were created for the students of Humanities, Health and Life Sciences, Political and Social Sciences, and Communication. These virtual classrooms acted as a data collection medium. There was no need to organize any additional informative session on the use of Moodle classrooms, as the UPF students were already accustomed to use them in all their UPF regular courses. Figure 15 shows, as a sample, the Moodle classroom for the students of Humanities.

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<sup>12</sup> Grup de Recerca en Espais Interculturals, Llengües i Identitats [www.upf.edu/greili-upf](http://www.upf.edu/greili-upf), funded by [UPF](http://www.upf.edu).



**Figure 15. Virtual Moodle classroom for the Humanities majors**  
(Source: UPF)

In all Moodle classrooms, the Narrative Tables were uploaded for the period of one term. In order to avoid confusion, each table was labelled according to its respective time interval. Every two weeks, the participants could log in to their Moodle and download the needed table so as to complete it. After that, they uploaded the completed document on the Moodle so that I could access and read it. In order to allow the students to submit their completed tables through Moodle, for each table I created an assignment submission in every virtual classroom.

Once back home after their SA, the participants were asked to fill in the Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire and send it back to me by e-mail. I therefore had time to analyze the obtained data on living conditions, perceived personal development, and their overall degree of satisfaction with the SA programme, and to prepare clarification questions before organizing final evaluation interviews. Then, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted, also in UPF premises, to collect their reflections on perceived outcomes and change in their adaptability and sensitivity to cultural differences after study abroad, as well as on factors which might have affected that change.

The total data collection time took a period of one and a half year, since the participants of the current study embarked on the SA programme at different times of the academic year.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

The current exploratory study employs both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The data obtained were therefore analyzed using either descriptive and inferential statistics or in-depth thematic analysis. It should be noted that two instruments, namely the Narrative Tables and the Intercultural Sensitivity questionnaire, were designed in such a way as to obtain both complementary and mutually supportive quantitative and qualitative data. Each dataset was analyzed separately applying its specific analysis.

#### **3.6.1 Quantitative statistical analysis**

The statistical analysis was applied to the intercultural adaptation self-assessment in the narrative tables and close-ended responses in the Intercultural Sensitivity questionnaire.

In order to construct the graph representing a general adaptation tendency for the whole group in terms of personal and academic issues, the Intercultural Adaptation Self-assessment (see Section 3.4.2) that the participants made every two weeks throughout their sojourn was analyzed by averaging the mean values. For every student, the mean of her responses on a five-point Likert scale was calculated separately for every two-week period. Next, those mean values were averaged again and plotted as a function of time. Subsequently, a regression straight line was fitted to the two (personal and academic) datasets separately. In order to find out whether the slope of those straight lines fitted to the personal and academic issues mean data was statistically significant, the regression diagnostics were examined. Predictor and response variables were time (in weeks) and the Likert values, respectively. A level of  $p \leq (0.05, 0.1)$  or below was chosen a priori to be statistically significant, whereas a level of  $p < 0.1$  or below was considered to be already marginally significant. In addition to the overall group trend for the two main categories (personal and academic issues), individual adaptation curves were drawn for all the sub-categories to illustrate each student's personal experience and how s/he departed from the overall group tendency.

As for the close-ended responses in the Intercultural Sensitivity questionnaire (see Section 3.4.1.3), they were used to statistically determine the effect of the SA programme on the development of Intercultural Sensitivity. When responding to the close-ended questions, students could choose between “Yes”, “Sometimes” and “No”. We then assumed that these three answers (a three-point Likert scale) could be graded in an equidistant way, which is to say that going from “No” to “Sometimes” to “Yes” is the same as going for example from 0 to 1 to 2. This approach allowed me to go from a qualitative dataset (in which there is no a priori order) to an ordinal one (in which there is a clear rank in the responses) and to assign unambiguous numerical values to that order. It should also be added that Likert values were grouped per sets of questions, which implies that those questions inside each group measured the same Intercultural Sensitivity factor. Hence, for every student his or her responses per five groups of questions (Interaction Confidence, Respect for Cultural Differences, Interaction Engagement, Interaction Enjoyment, and Interaction Attentiveness) were averaged separately before and after the SA. In order to determine whether these average responses had become significantly higher between those occasions, a paired Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied, where the two samples to be tested were the pre- and post-test responses. In total, five Wilcoxon tests with twelve paired mean responses in each were carried out. All statistical analyses were carried out with functions from the R software (2014).

### 3.6.2 Qualitative thematic analysis

The qualitative thematic analysis was applied to the narratives collected through the Study Abroad Motives Questionnaire, the individual semi-structured interviews, the Narrative Tables and the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire.

Those oral and written narratives were analyzed employing a directed approach to content analysis in which “a theory or prior research is used to guide the analysis in the initial coding” (Lichtman, 2012). When using a directed approach to content analysis, initial coding is normally done applying two main strategies: 1) researchers “read the transcript and highlight all text that on first impression appears to represent an emotional reaction” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1281) and after that assign predetermined categories to the selected fragment, or 2) researchers “begin coding

immediately with the predetermined codes” (ibid, p. 1282). In both cases, any text that does not fall into initial coding categories is assigned a new code. Next, all the data for each category is re-examined so as to determine sub-categories. Finally, a thorough, recursive analysis of the content is conducted to reveal supporting or non-supportive evidence for existing theory, or to discover new factors which may extend or improve theory and previous research findings.

Accordingly, initial codes for the data from the study abroad motives questionnaire were assigned using predetermine categories from previous research on students’ motives for taking part in SA programmes, pre-departure expectations and concerns (IIE, 2010; Beaven, 2012; Kavakas, 2013).

With regard to the Intercultural Adaptation Narratives, the ten sub-categories defined by the narrative tables served as initial codes: relationships with your native friends, relationships with friends from other nationalities, relationships with host nationals, daily life, language for social interaction and culture, customs and habits from the host country for the personal issues dataset, and education system, classes, language for academic purposes, and academic support for administrative issue for academic issues dataset.

Open-ended explanations in the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire were coded using the five factors determined by Chen and Starosta (2000): interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment and interaction attentiveness.

As regards the data from semi-structured interviews, I used categories from previous studies which describe vital experiences that influence intercultural adaptation and the development of sensitivity (Word, 2004; Williams, 2005; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Beaven, 2012). They were divided into two major blocs:

- students’ personal characteristics: previous SA experience, previous foreign language learning abroad, foreign language proficiency;
- study abroad conditions: accommodation, work experience, travel experience.

After initial coding, the data for each category were re-examined in order to identify sub-categories. The text that did not fall into initial coding categories was assigned a new code. After this thorough and recursive exploration of the content, the obtained findings were then described and supported with original quotes in Chapters IV, V and VI. The quotes in Catalan and Spanish were translated into English and presented within the text. Meanwhile, its Catalan and Spanish versions were left in footnotes. Whenever no Catalan or Spanish version is presented in the footnotes, the narratives were originally provided in English.

## CHAPTER IV. BEFORE STAY ABROAD: PRE-DEPARTURE MOTIVES FOR GOING ABROAD, EXPECTATIONS AND CONCERNS

In this chapter, I will first examine the students' motives for taking part in the university SA programme; after that, I will discuss the participants' expectations with respect to study abroad gains; and finally, I will present their pre-departure concerns. For the presentation of these findings I have combined data obtained through both the Individual Profile Questionnaire and the Initial Profile Interview. Basic information on the participants' profile has already been summarized in Section 3.3 in the previous chapter.

### **4.1 Pre-departure motives for taking part in a Study Abroad programme**

The decisions we make have a lasting impact on our lives, but the reasons behind them are equally important, especially when we talk about such a complex process as adaptation. When undergraduate students take a decision to participate in SA programmes of different duration, they are always driven by various motives which will inevitably influence their adjustment to a new social and academic environment. The exploration of the personal experiences of the students in terms of their adjustment outcomes will not be complete without understanding the reasons why they choose to participate in their university SA programme and what kind of goals they set before departure.

All motives mentioned by the participants of the present study can be grouped into four main categories: learning and improving a foreign language, learning about new cultures, academic and career prospects, and personal growth. Table 3 summarizes the students' motives for participation in the SA programme. The subsequent sections from 4.1.1 to 4.1.4 present a detailed description of each category with the participants' quotes as examples.

**Table 3. Motives for participating in the SA programme**

FACULTY	Communication	Communication	Communication	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Medicine	Medicine	Polit. Science	Polit. Science	Total of students
MOTIVES	Lola	Ares	Natalia	Angela	Anna	Sara	Kira	Elizabeth	Maria	Cristina	Daniel	Virginia	
<b>LEARNING AND IMPROVING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE</b>													
To improve my English as an international language	X	X		X		X	X						5
To learn a host language			X				X	X	X			X	5
To learn a host language with an eye to future job opportunities;				X									1
<b>LEARNING ABOUT NEW CULTURES</b>													
To learn another way of life	X												1
To know more about other cultures;	X	X	X						X		X		5
To get to know a different world view								X					1
To meet people from different countries	X								X	X		X	4
<b>ACADEMIC AND CAREER PROSPECTS</b>													
To acquire knowledge needed for writing final degree papers				X			X	X					3
To do more practical work related to a future job	X									X			2
To study subjects that the home university does not offer					X	X	X	X					4
To get to know new methods and approaches to teaching a major		X	X		X	X							4
To get away from a home university routine			X						X				2
To study in a prestigious university whose qualification is globally recognized					X	X					X		3
<b>PERSONAL GROWTH</b>													
To live a new experience		X					X				X	X	4
To visit new places			X			X			X	X		X	5
To live independently without parents		X				X				X			3

#### 4.1.1 Learning and improving a foreign language

Linguistic gains were reported as a significant factor for making a decision to study abroad as well as for choosing a host destination. The majority of the students chose a host country where they could improve mainly English regardless of host culture and its language. There were also several students who were not so focused on the English language improvement and chose a country whose language they had studied for some time and had a strong motivation to improve or refresh those language skills.

Lola and Ares, Communication majors, being aware of the role English plays in the professional world, were drawn to the opportunity to improve this language. The Netherlands was chosen as their host destination. Although it is not an English-speaking country, a major factor that attracted them and influenced their choice was that the language of instruction at the host university was English. The fact that they did not have a sufficient level of Dutch was of less importance. For these students, the immersion itself in Dutch culture and the Dutch language in particular was not crucial.

I've always wanted to do an Erasmus, because I think it's an opportunity to learn another way of life, meet another culture and people from different countries. Moreover, I think that every student needs to have a good level of English because the professional world has been globalized during the last decades.  
(Lola)

I wanted to go abroad... It was my second choice. The first one was Brussels. But, I wanted to improve my English and...I like the Northern Europe, because of this I chose Groningen, the Netherlands. Yes, I know that the country language is Dutch, but the lectures at the university will be in English and I will use English. (Ares)

Natalia, a Communication student, was drawn by the chance to practise Chinese, the language she had been learning for one year before she decided to participate in the SA programme: "I've been learning some Chinese for one year now. And that's pretty why I felt like I could take an opportunity like this exchange program to go to China." Similar to Natalia, Maria, a medical student, decided to go to Germany because she had learnt German for several years and had a strong motivation to improve this language.

For Angela, majoring in Humanities, participating in the SA programme was a chance not only to improve her English as an international language, but also to learn Chinese for good career prospects.

Due to the fact that Asia is showing a huge development and is becoming more international, an exchange like this is a great opportunity for foreigners to try to learn their language with an eye to future job opportunities.

Sara, majoring in Humanities, wanted to go to a country which is far away from home and where she could have the opportunity to practise her English. During the pre-departure interview, she revealed that she could opt for such countries as China or Argentina, but her prevalent criterion in choosing a host destination was the English language improvement. Australia was considered as the best option:

May be because it is too far, but the main reason is that I didn't have many options outside Europe. I didn't want to go to Europe and outside Europe you don't have many options if you study in Humanities. I could choose China, but I didn't want because it's very, very different and the language...and I wanted to learn English. So, that's why I didn't go to South America either because they speak Spanish. Australia is very far away, and I wanted to go to a really far away country where I could improve English. [sic]

Kira, a Humanities student, also wanted to do her exchange in English like Lola and Ares. At the same time, she also wanted to learn a host language while being abroad. The Netherlands suited her best as this country offered both opportunities, since its universities provide degrees in English:

I wanted to do my exchange in English and I chose Europe, Holland. At the university the courses will be in English, but I also want to learn Dutch a little bit. There are some courses for foreign people and I will apply if I can.

Kira had plenty of options and could choose from some European countries and the USA. Although her primary motive for going to study abroad was to improve her English, she chose a non-English speaking country, instead of the USA where she could have immersed herself in an English-speaking environment. The decision to study

within Europe was influenced by her previous abroad experience. For several years she had taken part in the HelpX<sup>13</sup> programme and once she had been struck unfavorably with that experience. The cultural differences were too great for her and she perceived American society in negative terms:

I could choose between European and American universities. I chose Europe because of my previous experience in Canada, to be exactly in the USA. We did like a loop; we started in Montreal, then Vancouver, Seattle and finally New York. Canada was fantastic, but in the USA it was not so good because of the culture. I think it [the USA] is not consistent with my way of life. It's too aggressive and competitive. I don't like too much capitalism systems and I thought the USA was like a Mecca for capitalism societies, very cynical. I liked to do that experience in New York, but I didn't feel comfortable. I prefer more Europe.

She illustrates her feeling recalling her experience on an American bus:

Also, mostly because we had a three-day bus trip from Seattle to New York and we saw like the lower class of society and it was really shocking. In the bus there were people from everywhere [from different parts of the USA]. I have never realized that there are people like these. I was uncomfortable with people shouting in the bus at the driver because they were angry for some reasons. It really impacted me. I didn't like their behavior. There was a pregnant woman and she was smoking in every bus stop and for me it was really annoying. This kind of experience you can see also here [shouting people and pregnant women smoking], but I don't know... it was like there was a lot of this kind of experience and this really shocked me.

Nevertheless, this negative experience did not discourage Kira from participating in the university SA programme. She still wanted to go abroad for some time despite her unpleasant experience in the USA. What this experience actually affected was the

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<sup>13</sup> HelpX – free volunteer work exchange abroad. Through the website people can contact owners of farms and ranches with the purpose to go to work in exchange for accommodation and food. The destination choice is enormous, as the programme operates in many countries, such as Canada, the USA, New Zealand and even Europe.

choice of destination, even if she knew that the universities in the Netherlands were not as high ranking as American ones. She, however, considered the USA as a potential study destination in case she could continue her postgraduate education:

I am aware that the American universities are much better and I am thinking maybe to apply for a master programme there. But now it's ok to stay here within Europe.

Elizabeth, majoring in Humanities, saw studying abroad as a chance to learn Portuguese. Paying for expensive courses or private classes was impossible for her due to economic issues. Her decision was to go to Brazil where she would make every endeavor to learn Portuguese on her own by immersing herself into the local culture. Elizabeth understood clearly that it would be a challenge because she was also supposed to do university courses in Portuguese, and she was aware that her level might not be sufficient. Despite all possible language problems, she wanted to prove to herself that she was capable of learning a new language without attending expensive language courses.

For me it will be a chance to study Portuguese without attending expensive language courses. I'm totally against the language courses when you learn "I am, you are." I think the most amazing thing is to learn the language communicating with natives. I know it will be challenging, but I want to try. (Elizabeth)

For Virginia, a Political Science major, English had already been part of her life for a long time as she had studied it for many years in Spain and even had attended a nine-month language course in England. Now her major motive for going abroad was to learn French, which she had started studying in High school. Her first intention was to apply for Paris, but due to placement limitation she opted for Quebec. Having a B2 level of French according to the Common European Frame of Reference for Languages (CEFR), Virginia, just as Elizabeth, wanted a challenge and when she was enrolling for the programme, she took all the courses in French. She had a strong belief that in this way she would be pressured to speak French all the time and would eventually come back with a perfect command of this language.

#### 4.1.2 Learning about new cultures

Learning about new cultures was also one of the reasons that influenced the students' decision to go abroad. Globalization and improvements in communication, logistics and technologies have made today's world interconnected. The modern world, where people from different cultures meet and communicate, requires not only proficiency in languages, but also social and cultural knowledge. With the purpose to help university students integrate into the global context, the European Higher Education Area set goals targeted at "providing learners with equal opportunities in higher education, fostering social cohesion and maximizing the potential of individuals in terms of their personal development and their contribution to a sustainable and democratic knowledge-based society."<sup>14</sup> Increased mobility was one of those steps that have considerably contributed to achieving this objective. Participation in SA programmes was considered as a chance not only to improve their foreign language and to enhance employability upon graduation, but also to explore social and cultural aspects of a particular country.

The motives mentioned by the participants within this category were the following: to learn another way of life, to know more about other cultures, to get to know a different worldview, and to meet people from different cultures.

Ares and Lola, both Communication majors, had always wanted to go on an Erasmus programme because for them, as Ares says, "it's an opportunity to learn another way of life, get to know another culture and meet people from different countries." For Cristina and Virginia, majoring in Medicine and Political Science, meeting people from all over the world was one of the determining motives for going abroad and, as Cristina says, "an integral part of the culture learning process." Maria, a medical student, had always liked going abroad through SA programmes because it gave her the opportunity to learn about other cultures and to meet people from different background. Similar to Cristina and Virginia, she believed that "the best way to get to know a culture is through its people."

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<sup>14</sup> European Higher Education in a Global Context: <http://www.ehea.info/pid34788/global-context-2007-2009.html>

For Natalia, a Communication major, her decision to participate in the university SA programme was driven by a chance to learn about Asia in general and China in particular. She began to take interest in China while attending a two-week English course at an international school in England. The school was full of Chinese students and she also shared her room with a Chinese mate in a residence hall. While Natalia's co-nationals tended to avoid interacting with Asians, she was pleased to meet and communicate with them becoming more and more interested in their culture:

In one of my trips to England taking advantage of a scholarship from my hometown (in 2010) I had a Chinese roommate. The school was actually full of Chinese people. While the other people from my hometown were just ignoring the Chinese, I started to feel interested in them. Their thinking was different. Their values were different. They were so different and so interesting. From then on, I started to get more curious about Asia and China in particular. And this exchange was the opportunity to go to China. However, for Communications the choice we had was limited and the only place I could choose was Hong Kong. Fair enough!

Daniel, a Political Science major, "always wanted to learn more about the USA" and the Global Cities exchange programme was the best option for him to reach this objective. For Elizabeth, studying abroad seemed a chance to discover a new culture and to get to know a different global perspective. Being from Humanities, she was particularly interested in cultural issues, literature, art and philosophical thoughts from other countries:

I want to go to South America and the fact of studying in Brazil opens the doors for me to get to know, besides a language, a different culture and all that it entails: literature, specific view of the world...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Tinc ganes d'anar a Sud Amèrica i el fet d'estudiar a Brasil m'obre les portes a conèixer, a més d'una llengua, una cultura diferent i tot el que aquesta suposa: literatura, mirada concreta al món..."

### 4.1.3 Academic and career perspectives

The great majority of the participants considered study abroad as a chance for academic or career opportunities. The motives related to this category vary to some extent. In regards to academic perspectives, the students saw study abroad as the possibility to gain necessary knowledge for writing final degree papers, to study subjects that the home university does not offer, to get away from a home university routine and to experience a different approach to teaching and studying a major. As to career opportunities, the main motives were primarily focused on gaining practical knowledge related to a future profession and studying in a prestigious institution of higher education whose qualification is globally recognized.

Angela, a Humanities student specializing in philosophy and aesthetics, saw the SA programme as an opportunity to deepen knowledge related to her specialty so as to initiate final undergraduate thesis. She chose China as her destination because she was eager to acquire “enough knowledge of the Chinese art and Asian philosophy to start a dissertation based on it.” Elizabeth, Anna, Kira, and Sara, also Humanities majors, were motivated not only by the opportunity related to their undergraduate theses, but also by the possibility of studying subjects that did not exist in their home university.

I want to make use of those subjects that the UPF doesn't offer and lay the foundations of what will be my final degree work<sup>16</sup>. (Elizabeth)

I want to start my bachelor essay there. I also participate in the Erasmus program because I like the courses that they offer. (Kira)

It will allow me to study subjects and topics that I cannot do in my university.<sup>17</sup>  
(Anna)

I want to have the opportunity to take courses which the UPF doesn't offer.  
(Sara)

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<sup>16</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Vull aprofitar aquelles assignatures que la UPF no m'ofereix, posant així les bases del que serà el meu treball de fi de grau.”

<sup>17</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Em permetrà estudiar temes i matèries que no puc cursar a la meua universitat.”

Lola and Cristina manifested a desire to do more practical work related to their future job. Lola, a Communication student, was interested in TV and cinema, and aimed at applying theoretical knowledge acquired at the home university in practice: “I want to practice new skills related to my future job, and I am sure that it will be so useful in the future.” Similarly, Cristina, a medical student, applied for the SA programme with a purpose “to do more clinical practice.”

For Natalia and Ares, study abroad was an occasion “to study communication from another point of view”, that is, to see and to experience firsthand new methods and approaches to teaching their major. Similarly, Anna and Sara, Humanities students, were motivated to go abroad because it would allow them to familiarize themselves with another educational system and to get to know a new teaching methodology.

Moreover, I wanted to know a study method different from the one of the Catalan universities.<sup>18</sup> (Anna)

I want to know a university with such a good reputation and see the differences between their system and ours. (Sara)

For Maria and Natalia, majoring in Medicine and Communication respectively, going abroad and studying in another university was a chance to escape from an ordinary university routine and to continue their studies in a different manner.

I'm a little tired of the routine of the last 5 years at the university, and thus I could continue my studies in a new and very different way<sup>19</sup>. (Maria)

The UPF is good, but I'm a bit tired, and this will be fresh air, new perspectives of doing and learning academic stuff. (Natalia)

Studying in a prestigious university whose qualification is recognized all over the world was also mentioned as a motive for going abroad. Sara, for instance, was drawn by the chance to study in a very expensive university with prestigious reputation in Australia: “I do not want to lose the opportunity to study at a prestigious university where people

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<sup>18</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “A més, volia conèixer un mètode d'estudi diferent al de les universitats catalanes.”

<sup>19</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Estic una mica cansada de la rutina dels últims 5 anys a la universitat, i d'aquesta manera podia continuar els meus estudis d'una manera nova i molt diferent.”

pay a lot of money around 30-40 000 euros per year.”<sup>20</sup> Daniel and Anna in turn “did not want to lose the opportunity to study in a prestigious university in the USA.”<sup>21</sup> These last two motives are mostly related to career opportunities, as doing practical work and acquiring qualification from universities with a good reputation obviously lead to CV improvement and, consequently, to enhancement of employability after graduating from university.

#### 4.1.4 Personal growth

The intercultural experience by itself was a robust motivator for participation in the SA programme, as it was considered enriching for personal growth. There is no single definition for this concept as different people have a different understanding of what is important for their personality and personal development in particular. They have diverse preferences with respect to their personal success, set different goals and consequently, have distinct methods of their own for reaching them. Although the participants of this study had different interpretations of their personal growth, the mentioned motives cover three main themes: to live a new experience, to try out life abroad without parental support and to visit new places with a purpose to broaden their horizons.

Ares, for example, was driven to go to Groningen to try to live a new experience and also separately from her parents. Kira saw change as a test for her to learn self-sufficiency, and the SA program was the perfect chance for this kind of growth. Cristina, apart from improving her clinical skills, also wanted to grow personally. She had never been abroad alone and this SA programme was a chance for her “to try to live independently and take care of herself without support from others.”

I want to go to Groningen because I want to live a new experience and try to live alone, without my parents. (Ares)

I really want to have a new experience, to live in a foreign country because every change is a good opportunity to prove yourself. (Kira)

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<sup>20</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “No quiero perder la oportunidad estudiar en una universidad prestigiosa donde la gente paga mucha pasta alrededor de 30-40 000 euros por año.”

<sup>21</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “No volia desapropfitar la oportunitat d'estudiar a la universitat prestigiosa als Estats Units.”

Travelling was also mentioned as a motive for participation in the programme and was considered as a potential stimulus for personal growth. Students have greater opportunities to travel because of well-developed transport infrastructure and low-fare tickets and to explore the remotest corners of the host country, and also travel beyond its bounds. Visiting new places, students have a chance to acquaint themselves with a different outlook on life, behavioral patterns, new cuisine, and prevailing tastes in clothing of a particular country. Moreover, travelling helps reconsider beliefs often imposed by other people's views or mass media with regard to various cultures. Natalia's comment as to the benefits of travelling speaks for itself: "Every time I go abroad, I grow personally."

Like Natalia, Maria wanted to travel as much as possible around Germany, as she considered that "meeting people from other places and getting to know their culture and lifestyle is always enriching for personal development." Sara, before departing for Australia, revealed that she wanted "to see a country that is apparently well adapted to capitalism, and try to research as much as possible about the Australian Aborigines." Cristina, in turn, wished "to explore Buenos Aires and its outskirts so as to get to know better the local lifestyle and traditions" and believed that it would contribute to her multicultural knowledge. Similarly, Virginia wanted to travel around Canada while abroad and believed that it would contribute to her multicultural understanding.

## **4.2 Pre-departure expectations**

In contrast to the motives that push us to make decisions and act, expectations are assumptions or beliefs we hold about what someone or something should be like. Students who make the decision to study abroad usually envision the life they are going to have abroad, where and how they are going to meet people, what all those people will be like, how they are going to spend their leisure time, and many other things. These anticipatory beliefs are often based on friends' stories or former students' experiences (Beaven, 2012) and may affect sojourners' adjustment to a new environment both positively and negatively. There is evidence that unrealistic expectations impede adaptation (Ward, 2004). The reason behind such an impediment lies in the idealistic vision of life, which is frequently broken by objective reality upon arrival in the host country. As a result, the pre-departure expectancies do not match the reality and remain

unfulfilled, which leads to frustration. Conversely, realistic expectations, which are in accordance with reality, facilitate adaptation and decrease psychological adjustment problems which may arise as a result of life changes (Weissman and Furnham, 1987). Thus, pre-departure expectations play a significant role in adaptation outcomes of students living abroad and need to be considered.

As for the participants of the present study, their expectations about study abroad gains are mostly in accordance with the motives they were guided by regarding the participation in the SA programme. Table 4 summarizes the expectations, which may be grouped around the following themes: language improvement, academic and career prospects, personal growth, making acquaintances and friends, and tourism and leisure activities. In the subsequent sections from 4.2.1 to 4.2.5, I present a detailed description of the participants' expectations with their quotes as examples.

**Table 4. Pre-departure expectations about SA gains**

FACULTY	Communication	Communication	Communication	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Medicine	Medicine	Polit. Science	Polit. Science	Total of students
EXPECTATIONS	Lola	Ares	Natalia	Angela	Anna	Sara	Kira	Elizabeth	Maria	Cristina	Daniel	Virginia	
<b>LANGUAGE IMPROVEMENT</b>													
To gain English oral fluency	X												1
To improve English vocabulary	X		X								X		3
To gain linguistic confidence	X												1
To improve overall English		X		X	X	X	X		X				6
To improve debate skills in English											X		1
To improve overall host language			X	X			X	X	X			X	6
<b>ACADEMIC AND CAREER PROSPECTS</b>													
To learn a lot from chosen courses in a host university	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	9
To improve CV				X									1
To acquire practical skills in a field										X			1
To get high marks in academic records											X		1
To create a network of contacts			X				X						2
To find a job				X		X							2
<b>PERSONAL GROWTH</b>													
To gain more autonomy/independence	X	X			X		X						4
To improve interpersonal communication skills				X									1
To get a better understanding of oneself						X		X					2
To gain self-confidence	X									X			2
<b>MAKING AQUAINTANCES AND FRIENDS</b>													
To meet people from all over the world	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
To make new friends	X		X			X	X		X	X	X		7
<b>TOURISM AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES</b>													
To discover a host city/country	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
To participate in extra leisure activities		X		X	X		X	X	X			X	7

#### 4.2.1 Language improvement

Those participants whose main motive for participation was learning or improving their foreign language held great expectations with regards to this aspect. Although all the students were non-language majors and might not have known about the complexity of the language learning process, they were clear enough (when it dealt with English) about what exactly they expected to improve while being in the host country.

Ares, Angela, Anna, Sara, Kira and Maria expected to improve their overall English, which assumed the improvement of the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

I hope to improve my overall English to the maximum. (Sara)

What I expect from this study abroad is improving my English. Not only speaking (I think it will be easy because in Amsterdam a lot of people speak English), but also other skills like reading and writing because I want to start my final bachelor essay. (Kira)

Definitely I will come back with a very good level of English. (Anna)

Lola, Natalia and Daniel were more specific as to the skills they wanted to improve. Natalia, for instance, anticipated that after spending some months abroad “her English would improve in terms of vocabulary.” Lola expected to gain oral fluency in English, to improve vocabulary and feel more confident when speaking with people in English: “I expect more fluency in speaking, as well as more vocabulary and security with the language.” Daniel expected to improve his debate skills, as well as to acquire more colloquial and idiomatic expressions: “I expect to improve my debate skills and get native expressions.”

Regarding other languages, Maria, Natalia, Angela, Kira, Elizabeth and Virginia expected overall improvement. A few students prepared themselves by taking preparatory language courses while abroad. Maria, for instance, wanted to learn German and already before departure had enrolled in a language course in her host university: “I expect to practise English and learn much more German, I’ve already enrolled for a course with this purpose.” Natalia wanted to improve her Mandarin and, similar to

Maria, was thinking about joining a course in Honk Kong: “I may join a Mandarin course although it is not the main language in HK. My overall Mandarin, then, will improve a bit.” Angela, Kira, Elizabeth and Virginia were not planning to take language courses but rather improve their general language skills through attending university classes, local events, and socializing.

#### 4.2.2 Academic achievements and employment opportunities

Apart from the foreign language improvement, the majority of the participants also expected various academic achievements and future employment opportunities from their participation in the programme. The declared expectations were the following: learning a lot from chosen courses in a host university, improving CVs, acquiring practical skills in a field, getting high marks in the school record, creating a network of contacts in case of possible further education or future employment in the host country, and finding a job.

All but Elizabeth, Maria and Cristina had great expectations regarding the chosen courses in the host university and hoped to gain new knowledge related to their major and subjects that they were interested in. Daniel, for instance, anticipated improving his knowledge of the subjects he had chosen, namely American Foreign Policy and Economies of Developing Countries. He imagined himself “discussing various topics related to these subjects in the seminars and expected to get high marks in his school records.” Ares and Lola saw themselves attending classes and learning a lot about Communication and furthering their academic knowledge of the subject. Kira was most looking forward to starting the university courses and meeting her colleagues. She wanted to begin her undergraduate thesis and expected to have chosen the right courses for that purpose.

For Elizabeth, a Humanities major, the academic side was not a priority, and she instead chose to focus on learning the host language and exploring the local culture. Cristina, a medical student, was not going to attend university classes and expected to have more practical training and to apply her theoretical knowledge at work: “I hope that these 3 months of practice will serve me to improve my abilities to interact with the patients, my practical knowledge.”

Natalia and Anna hoped to learn not only what their curriculum assumed, but also new methods and approaches to studying and teaching. Angela held the belief that the period of residence abroad would lead to her CV improvement and enhancement of her future employability: “I expect an improvement that can be reflected in my CV to get better career opportunities and job offers.”

Kira and Natalia anticipated that they would meet a lot of people and would make useful contacts for further education or possible employment in the future. Due to the European economic crisis, some students saw going abroad as a vital way to improve their job prospects upon graduation. The statistics speak for themselves: as of February 2016, 45.3 percent of Spaniards under the age of 30 were unemployed, and some had sought better opportunities outside of the country.<sup>22</sup>

I expect to make new friends, speak a lot of English, to learn a lot from my university courses and maybe make contacts to apply for a master next year.  
(Kira)

Meeting a lot of people. Networking (a lot!!), because who knows, I may go there again when I finish my degree so to look for a job... (Natalia)

Sara and Angela embarked on the SA programme with the intention of finding a job or an internship that would help them cover basic expenses and feel more independent while abroad. Angela expected “to find a good internship in the art or philosophy field”, but she did not mind doing other work like giving Spanish or English classes to Chinese people. Similarly, Sara expected to find a job and could see herself giving private Spanish classes, working as a waitress, or doing other work.

#### 4.2.3 Personal growth

Positive expectations as to personal growth had not been pushed aside either. Just like their motives related to personal development, the participants also had different visions of their personal success and different ideas on how to achieve it. All of them had great expectations concerning the benefits of the experience of living abroad for their

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<sup>22</sup> The Statistic Portal: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/266228/youth-unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/>

personal development. Eight participants (Lola, Ares, Angela, Anna, Sara, Kira, Elizabeth, and Cristina) expected their stay abroad to be a personal, unique and enriching experience that would allow them to attain many goals, such as gaining autonomy, improving interpersonal skills, getting a better understanding of themselves, and gaining self-confidence.

It is worth noting that living away from home, without family support, was considered as an indispensable condition for achieving the above mentioned goals. Lola, for instance, hoped that spending some time in a new environment without family, friends and what she was accustomed to at home would make her more independent and self-confident. Moreover, she believed that getting to know people from all over the world would broaden her mind and would be a great experience on a personal level:

I think that I'll mature as a person and I'll gain more autonomy. Doing everything myself when living away from home, it's an important point, and also the fact that living with people from all over the world will give me new perspectives and great personal experiences.

Likewise, Ares and Anna expected to gain more autonomy and to learn to solve daily issues on their own as a result of living abroad for six months.

I expect to be more independent and capable to manage everything on my own.  
(Ares)

I think it will certainly be an experience that will make me grow a lot, living in another country, another language, living alone ...I hope to gain experience and independence, learn to solve problems that may arise in a country that is not mine and in another language, not only to study hard of course, but also everything that involves living in a different country.<sup>23</sup>(Anna)

Angela hoped to improve her interpersonal communication skills and held a belief that living away from home would be the best way to achieve it: "I expect a personal improvement in my relational skills and in facing new situations. All this improves

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<sup>23</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Crec que sense dubte serà una experiència que em farà créixer molt, estar en un altre país, una altra llengua, viure sola... Espero guanyar experiència i independència, aprendre a resoldre els problemes que puguin sorgir en un país que no és el meu i en un altre idioma, no només estudiar molt que per suposat, sinó també tot el que comporta viure en un país diferent."

when you are far from home.” Sara and Elizabeth anticipated that living abroad would lead to, apart from discovering new cultures, getting a better understanding of themselves and allowing themselves time for self-reflection.

I'm sure it will be a very enriching experience, regardless of whether the stay will be better or worse. Being alone in the other end of the world certainly will make me grow in multiple directions. I will learn about myself and a new culture.<sup>24</sup> (Sara)

I hope to take advantage of these incentives to be clear what I like, what makes me happy and what I would like to dedicate myself.<sup>25</sup> (Elizabeth)

Kira saw study abroad as a chance to test whether she was capable of overcoming all possible problems that might arise as a result of life changes: “Every change is a good opportunity to prove yourself so I think this would be a good personal experience.” For Cristina, study abroad was also something like a test, as she had never lived alone in a foreign country for a long time. Being by nature timid and indecisive, she even applied for the programme with two other friends, so as not to feel alone in another country. But at the last moment, her friends changed their minds as to going abroad. Cristina nevertheless decided to go forward on her own and hoped that the SA would help her overcome her excessive shyness and become self-assured:

I expect to improve my clinical skills but also to grow up as a person. I've never been alone in another country for long time. I think that apart from my academic skills, this will be the most important part of that experience. In some aspects, I feel like it's the best thing for me to go alone, because at the beginning I had to go with two friends but they refused. So, I feel like this experience it's something I need to do alone, to force me to open and not to be afraid to express myself, and I will have that opportunity there.

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<sup>24</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Estoy segura que será una experiencia muy enriquecedora, independientemente de que la estancia sea mejor o peor. Estar sola al otro lado del mundo seguro que me hará crecer en múltiples direcciones. Aprenderé de mí misma y de una nueva cultura.”

<sup>25</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Espero aprovechar tots aquests estímuls per tenir clar què és el que m'agrada, el que em fa sentir feliç i a què voldria dedicar-me.”

#### 4.2.4 Making acquaintances and friends

All the participants anticipated meeting not only people from the host country but from all over the world. Some students (Lola, Natalia, Sara, Kira, Maria and Cristina) also had great expectation with regards to making friends with them. Residence halls and universities were two main places where students expected to meet new friends.

Lola and Kira, for instance, were more interested in meeting other Erasmus students. They hoped to find good friends, to have a good time with them, as well as to learn a lot from them. They placed high value on enjoying their time with the people they would meet.

I expect to know a lot of foreign people and make new friends. (Kira)

I expect to have fun and learn a lot of things and values from foreign people that will become my friends and hopefully there, my family. (Lola)

Ares, Natalia, Anna, Maria and Virginia were open to getting to know and making friends with both local and foreign people. Elizabeth anticipated that she might have trouble prejudging people from different cultural backgrounds but hoped to be open and neutral when getting acquainted with others.

I hope not to prejudge anybody and to be open to meet both local people and foreigners.<sup>26</sup> (Elizabeth)

I hope to meet many Americans, to get to know their way of life but also other more distant cultures connecting with international students.<sup>27</sup> (Anna)

I want to meet people, both local and other Erasmus. I think the best way to know a culture is through its people. And to find good friends among all these people. I hope to make good friends; it is one of my main goals.<sup>28</sup>(Maria)

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<sup>26</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Espero no prejudjar ningú i estar oberta a conèixer tant gent estrangera com persones autòctones.”

<sup>27</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Espero conèixer molts americans, la seva forma de vida però també altres cultures més allunyades relacionant-me amb els estudiants internacionals.”

<sup>28</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Vull conèixer gent, tant locals com altres Erasmus. Crec que la millor manera de conèixer una cultura és a través de la seva gent. I d’entre tota aquesta gent, fer molt bons amics. Espero fer molt bons amics, és un dels meus principals objectius.”

Sara pictured herself being alone at the beginning, but she was sure that she would manage to make friends, as there would be many people around her in the university and the dorm. However, she fully realized the fact that the time she was going to spend abroad might not be enough for making strong friendships:

I suppose that at first I will be quite alone, but I imagine that there will be many people in my situation and eventually you will end up getting to know someone. Although six months it is not much time to make a firm friendship.<sup>29</sup>

Cristina hoped that living alone in another country would help her to banish shyness and fear when communicating with new people: “I’m an introvert person, so I hope that this experience to be alone in another country forces me not to be afraid of making new friends and to open to new people.”

Daniel was the only participant who expected to establish good relationships with his co-nationals while abroad. He participated in a short SA program where he met other Catalan students. Although he admitted that he might make friends with new people in the host country, he had high expectations concerning the friendship with a group of students from his home university: “I think I can make some friends from there and others around the world going there for Session C but I’m going, for sure, to make a really special relationship with my UPF mates.”

#### 4.2.5 Tourism and leisure activities

Concerning the leisure time, the participants visualized themselves discovering a host city, visiting other cities and participating in leisure activities, such as: yoga, dancing, music, sports, and theatre. For instance, Lola, Cristina, Natalia, Angela and Ares pictured themselves discovering their host city and outskirts, meeting new people and spending free time with them.

I want to spend my leisure time with the people that I’ll meet there. I want to meet all the ‘corners’ of Haarlem, its museums, walks, coffees and trips. I also want to travel to some nearby cities. (Lola)

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<sup>29</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Supongo que al principio estaré bastante sola, pero imagino que habrá mucha gente en mi situación y al final te acabas conociendo. Aunque seis meses no es mucho tiempo para hacer grandes relaciones de amistad.”

I would like to do tourism around the city and the surroundings. I'll try to visit everything I can. Also, I hope to meet people to go for a scroll, go lunch outside or go out. (Cristina)

Visiting, visiting, visiting, meeting people, eating, and meeting people again for visiting more stuff. I'll visit everywhere in Hong Kong. (Natalia)

I will visit museums and attend film festivals. And maybe I will do a short trip to rural small Chinese villages. (Angela)

Maria, Daniel, and Anna did not limit themselves to the host city boundary and its outskirts, and expected to travel a lot and explore their host country.

I would like to visit various places in Germany, so I hope to travel a lot. (Maria)

I'd like to visit all of Los Angeles. To travel with my catalan colleagues through the State of California. (Daniel)

I also want to take occasion for exploring the city, going out with friends and students I know, going to museums and art galleries, and visiting Harvard and New York ...<sup>30</sup>(Anna)

Ares, Angela, Anna, Kira, Elizabeth, Maria, and Virginia were eager to participate in extra leisure activities in addition to sightseeing and tourism. Some of these activities were general and some were culture-bounded. For instance, Anna and Kira expected to enroll in yoga or dancing courses, while Elizabeth anticipated playing basketball, participating in drama club and practising traditional Brazilian dancing.

I would like to enroll for oriental dancing or yoga if they do them because I already do them here and it would be a good way to meet people. <sup>31</sup> (Anna)

I also want to join some dance or yoga classes, but I am not sure it depends on my credit card. (Kira)

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<sup>30</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "També vull aprofitar per conèixer la ciutat, sortir amb els amics i estudiants que conegui, anar a museus i galeries d'art, visitar Harvard i Nova York..."

<sup>31</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "M'agradaria apuntar-me a dansa oriental o ioga si en fan perquè ja en faig aquí i seria una manera de conèixer gent."

I want to explore the city and the outskirts, be involved in a local organization, I would also like to play basketball, to practise theater and typical Brazilian dances...<sup>32</sup> (Elizabeth)

Similar to Elizabeth, Angela planned to enroll in music programmes and would “learn about Chinese musical instruments”, while Ares could see herself doing sports and participating in collective activities organized by the Mobility office or by students from the dorm: “I know that I want a bike and I want to do some sports. I’d also like to do some collective activities.” Virginia also pictured herself leading an active life: doing sports, reading a lot and participating in social life. She was also willing to participate in outdoor activities, but she was not sure whether she would be able to withstand an extreme cold in her host country (Canada), where the temperature can reach twenty degrees below zero: “I expect to do sports, take part in social life, read literature, and do outdoor activities if I can handle it.”

### **4.3 Pre-departure concerns**

Besides positive expectations, the students also raised concerns about possible challenges they might face or encounter during the SA. As they are few when compared to the expectations and of different kinds, this section does not include any further subsections. Table 5 summarizes the mentioned worries before departure.

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<sup>32</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Vull descobrir la ciutat i els voltants, involucrar-me amb alguna organització local, també m’agradaria poder jugar a bàsquet, fer teatre i danses típiques de Brasil...”

**Table 5. Pre-departure concerns**

FACULTY	Communication	Communication	Communication	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Humanities	Medicine	Medicine	Polit. Science	Polit. Science	Total of students
CONCERNS	Lola	Ares	Natalia	Angela	Anna	Sara	Kira	Elizabeth	Maria	Cristina	Daniel	Virginia	
Insecurity and feeling alone at the beginning of the SA	X			X		X		X		X			5
Missing things from home						X							1
Personal safety								X					1
Being disappointed with the host university and chosen courses		X											1
Weather		X										X	2
Food					X								1
Financial issues				X	X	X	X				X		5
Striking difference between home and host culture					X								1
Studying in a new academic environment						X							1
Accommodation			X										1
Insufficient language level to follow the courses in the university									X				1

The main worries and concerns were about feeling insecure and alone at the beginning of the SA. Lola expressed concerns about “being away from home, from family and friends.” Sara felt nervous about arriving alone in a foreign country and the prospect of missing many things she was used to: “Nerves are mainly because I imagine arriving alone to a different country, and certainly I will miss many things. But it is part of the trip.”<sup>33</sup> Although Cristina wished to discover her host city, she was worried about

<sup>33</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Los nervios son sobre todo porque me imagino llegar sola a un país distinto, y seguro que hecharé mucho de menos muchas cosas. Pero forma parte del viaje.”

loneliness and experiencing the unknown during the first few weeks: “My main worry is to feel alone, mainly the first weeks. I’m afraid of the unknown, even my wish to discover them is big enough to want to live that experience.” Elizabeth, on the other hand, was worried about personal safety in an unfamiliar city: “I am a little bit nervous about the insecurity I can breathe in the streets of the city.”<sup>34</sup>

Financial issues were also among the students’ concerns. Thus, Angela worried about having an insufficient amount of money to cover her basic expenses: “The main concern is being alone without enough money to cover my basic needs.” Sara, in turn, was aware of high prices in Australia, her host country, and understood clearly that she would have to find a job in order to have a sufficient amount of money to live there. Her main worries were about combining work with her university studies. Kira still did not know whether she had been awarded a study grant for going abroad and worried about her financial situation. Daniel in turn was worried that his planned expenditures might exceed available funding.

What also worries me is the economic issue, I have to find work and study in a different environment, and in another language (the two things at the same time are supposed to be a problem at the beginning).<sup>35</sup> (Sara)

Money is always something to concern about. Because we do not know until the last moment if we have scholarships. (Kira)

Not to spend too much money. (Daniel)

Other concerns reflected individual worries. For instance, Natalia’s were mostly about accommodation, as she had been denied a room in the hall of residence just before departure. The fact that the cost of accommodation in Honk Kong, her host country, was high and she was going to start her journey without having arranged it made her feel quite nervous. The use of capital letters in her Profile questionnaire reflects her emotional state.

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<sup>34</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Em fa patir una mica la inseguretat que pugui respirar pels carrers de la ciutat.”

<sup>35</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Lo que me preocupa también es el tema económico, tendré que encontrar trabajo y estudiar en un ambiente distinto y con otra lengua (las dos cosas a la vez pueden suponerme un problema al principio).”

ACCOMMODATION. IN HONG KONG IS JUST SO EXPENSIVE. And a couple of days ago they told me and the other 2 girls coming that we haven't got a place at the residence, so... Where am I going to live? Will it be too small? WHO AM I GOING TO SHARE MY PLACE WITH?! (Marta)

Maria was worried about her level of English. After having chosen some subjects in English, she realized that her level might be insufficient and she might find it difficult to follow chosen courses in the host university.

What worries me most is the academic aspect of Erasmus. As I don't have a sufficient level of German, I took a few subjects that were in English. Some of them are from the master programme in neuroscience. At the same time, I don't know much about neuroscience, and I'm not sure I can follow perfectly classes in English, I'm afraid not to manage. <sup>36</sup>(Maria)

Ares expected a lot of the host university and in particular chosen courses, and would not like to feel disappointed with the choice she had made. Weather was also mentioned as a concern, as it was different to what she got used to in Barcelona. Similarly, Virginia was worried about extreme ambient temperatures in her host country, whether she could withstand such a cold.

The main worries are about the host university as well as the courses I'll attend and if I like them. Another thing is the weather, because it is really different from here. (Ares)

Extreme cold in Quebec, -15- 20 C (Virginia)

Anna's main concerns were mainly about striking differences between her home and host cultures, finding food that she was accustomed to and high prices she might pay:

One of my concerns is whether I will feel comfortable, whether all it will be very different (food, people's character) and on the other hand, whether I will

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<sup>36</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "El que més em preocupa és l'aspecte acadèmic de l'Erasmus. Com que no domino suficientment l'alemany, he agafat les poques assignatures que hi havia en anglès. Algunes d'elles són d'un màster de neurociències. Entre que no en sé gaire de neurociències, i que no estic segura que pugui seguir perfectament les classes en anglès, em fa por no sortir-me'n."

find it all very expensive. I am also worried about finding food that I'm accustomed to (oil, bread, cuisine ...) <sup>37</sup>

All in all, the above data show a variety of concerns that reflects idiosyncrasies except for financial issues and insecurity and feeling alone at the beginning of the stay.

## 4.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have examined the participants' motives for going abroad, their expectations concerning the benefits as a result of spending a short- or mid-term period abroad and also their main pre-departure concerns. Their motives group around four main themes: learning and improving a foreign language, learning about new cultures, academic and career perspectives, and personal growth. Improving English as an international language, learning a host language, getting to know more about other cultures and visiting new places were among the motives mentioned most frequently. As regards the expectations concerning gains, they are mostly in accordance with the motives and also group around the themes of language improvement, academic and career prospects, personal growth, making acquaintances and friends, and tourism and leisure activities. Here the most frequent ones were: discovering a host city/country, meeting people from all over the world and learning a lot from chosen courses in a host university. Apart from positive expectations, the participants also expressed concerns about possible challenges they could face while abroad. Two concerns, namely financial issues and feeling insecure or alone at the beginning of the SA, were the most frequently mentioned ones. The others were idiosyncratic and included worries about personal safety in an unknown city, missing things from home, feeling disappointed with the host university and chosen courses, weather, food, striking difference between home and host culture, studying in a new academic environment, accommodation and insufficient language level to follow the courses in a host university.

In the following chapter, I will analyze the longitudinal data obtained from the Narrative Tables, which the participants completed on a biweekly basis, so as to explore their

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<sup>37</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Una de les meves preocupacions és si m'hi sentiré a gust, si no serà tot molt diferent (menjar, caràcter de la gent) i d'altra banda també si ho trobaré tot molt car. També estic preocupada per si trobo productes alimentaris als que estic acostumada (oli, pa, cuina de mercat...)”

personal and academic experiences, as well as turning points in their sojourns that might have affected their adaptation process in the host country.

## CHAPTER V. DURING STAY ABROAD: LIFE EXPERIENCES AND THE PROCESS OF ADAPTATION

In this chapter, I am exploring the participants' experiences abroad and the extent to which these experiences have an impact on their adaptation process in a foreign country. For this purpose, I will analyze the longitudinal data obtained from the Narrative Tables completed by the participants on a biweekly basis. Firstly, I will examine the graphs representing the overall group adaptation curve for each of the two broad categories: Personal and Academic issues. This will provide us with an overview of the group's adaptation process. Within this section, I will also focus upon each of the participants and provide an overview of their individual adaptation process. Secondly, in order to better interpret the general fluctuations depicted in the graphs, I will provide a detailed analysis of the different kinds of experiences, either personal or academic, that have been identified by the participants as relevant. In the case of each category, I will present samples of the participants' narratives<sup>38</sup> when they explain what can be considered as turning points during their sojourn in the host country (as reflected in their adaptation curves). Finally, I will focus on the case of a single participant, Ares, and describe in detail the reasons for her falls and rises in the graphs. Her life story will serve as a case in point.

### **5.1 The process of adaptation: Personal and Academic Issues**

As explained in the Methodology chapter, the Narrative Tables, which the participants completed and sent to me every two weeks during their SA, were used to collect longitudinal data about their personal and academic experiences abroad. When completing the Narrative Tables, the participants assessed their two-week stay abroad on a five-point Likert scale (1 given to a very negative period and 5 given to a very positive period). Based on their assessment of their experiences in each two-week period, I have constructed graphs representing adaptation curves following Beaven (2012), first for each of the two broad categories (Personal Issues and Academic Issues) and, second, for each of their sub-categories: five of them were adopted from Beaven's weekly diary tables (2012), and the other five were motivated by previous research in

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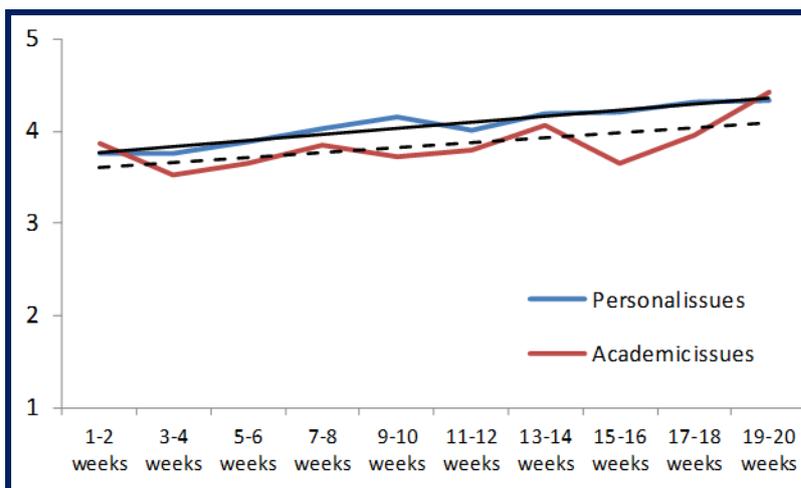
<sup>38</sup> Spelling and punctuation in the original quotes are preserved.

the field, specifically by Gu et al. (2008), Vande Berg et al. (2009), IIE (2010), and Kavakas (2013) (see review in Chapter 2 section 2.4 for details).

The twelve students went through the whole research procedure from our pre-departure meeting to our final post-stay meeting and all of them completed and submitted all their tables. Therefore, I constructed graphs for each of the twelve. Let us first examine the overall group adaptation curve and, then, turn to their individual curves.

### 5.1.1 A general overview of the group's adaptation process

In this section, I will present a general overview of the group's adaptation process. In order to construct a graph representing an overall group adaptation trend for Personal and Academic Issues, the students' responses to the five-point Likert scale in the Narrative Tables were averaged for each two-week period. Figure 16 depicts the graph which was built upon these mean values.



**Figure 16. Overall group adaptation curves for Personal and Academic issues and results of regression calculations. Solid and dashed lines in the figure are regression lines fitted to the Personal and Academic datasets, respectively.**

The vertical axis represents Likert values varying from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good), while the horizontal axis shows weeks when an assessment was done. The mean values are presented in the form of two curves: the blue one for personal issues and the red one for academic issues. Both illustrate a learning curve trend. The two curves start at high points (almost at 4, which is a positive evaluation) and display a general upward trend over the whole SA. The Personal Issues curve ascends quite smoothly without

significant falls or rises, while the Academic Issues curve shows more fluctuations. Both curves finish at points higher than where they began (between 4 and 5), which indicates a positive attribute. The black solid and dashed lines in Figure 16 represent graphically the results of the regression calculations, as explained in Section 3.6.1 in the Methodology chapter. These results indicate that the slope of both curves is statistically significant (see detailed statistical results in Appendix VII).

### 5.1.2 A general overview of each participant's adaptation process

In this section, I will present graphs representing adaptation curves built for each participant individually. For 11 out of 12 participants, these calculated graphical representations resemble either of the two trends described in theoretical models that conceptualize adaptation processes (Lysgaard, 1955; Ward, 2004): a U-shaped curve and a learning curve. However, the curves for one student (Ares) display two different trends, which implies that her personal and academic life abroad followed a completely different development. Ares's personal life's graph illustrates a learning curve trend while her academic life's graph depicts a U-curve. Table 6 shows the trends of the curves built for each participant. In order to depict whether at the end the curves scored higher, lower or the same as at the start, I also included a column representing their trajectories in the table. A downward arrow indicates that the trajectory is descendant and the curve ended at a lower point than where it began. In contrast, an upward arrow shows an ascendant trajectory, which means that final weeks scored higher at the end of the SA. An equal sign illustrates that the curve ended at the same point as at the start. The table also groups the trends and their trajectories by colour so as to show similarities. The complete set of graphs with individual adaptation curves for the broad categories for all the participants can be found in Appendix VIII.

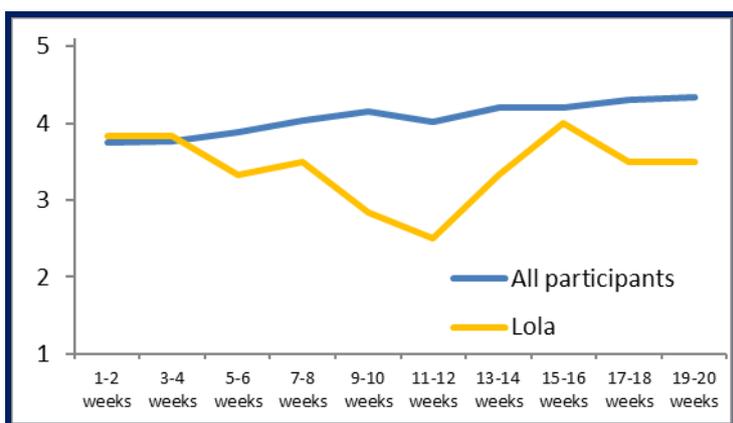
**Table 6. Trends of individual adaptation curves built for Personal and Academic Issues**

	Personal Issues trend		Academic Issues trend	
	U- or learning curve	Trajectory: Higher or lower in the end than at start	U- or learning curve	Trajectory: Higher or lower in the end than at start
Daniel	U	↓	U	↓
Lola	U	↓	U	↓
Angela	U	↑	U	↓
Natalia	U	↓	U	↑
Sara	U	↑	U	↑
Ares	/	↑	U	=
Virginia	/	↑	/	=
Anna	/	↑	/	↑
Kira	/	↑	/	↑
Maria	/	↑	/	↑
Cristina	/	↑	/	↑
Elizabeth	/	↑	/	↑

As can be seen from the table, Daniel and Lola demonstrate an overall negative trend, as their curves illustrate a descendant trajectory in both categories. Natalia and Angela show a descendant trajectory in one category and an ascendant trajectory in the other. The remaining eight (Sara, Ares, Virginia, Anna, Kira, Maria, Cristina and Elizabeth) illustrate a more positive tendency, as their curves show ascendant trajectories in both categories or in one category and equal in the other.

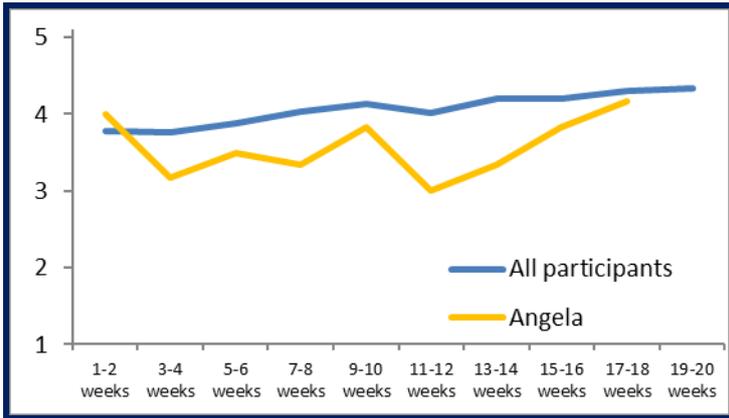
Furthermore, I provide a general overview of the trend groups and their trajectories as reflected in Table 6 and present the clearest examples of their curves. The graphs below depict the curves against the background illustrating the general group trend so as to show how each student departed from the overall tendency.

Daniel’s and Lola’s graphs for the two broad categories represent a U-shaped curve. The trajectory of their curves is the most negative one of all. Starting at high points (that is, valuing the experience abroad as positive), the curves afterwards show a downward incline. After some time, the curves begin to improve again but end at a lower point than where they begin. In Lola’s case, the whole process is often accompanied by fluctuations of various intensities. Figure 17 shows Lola’s graph as a clear example of this curve.

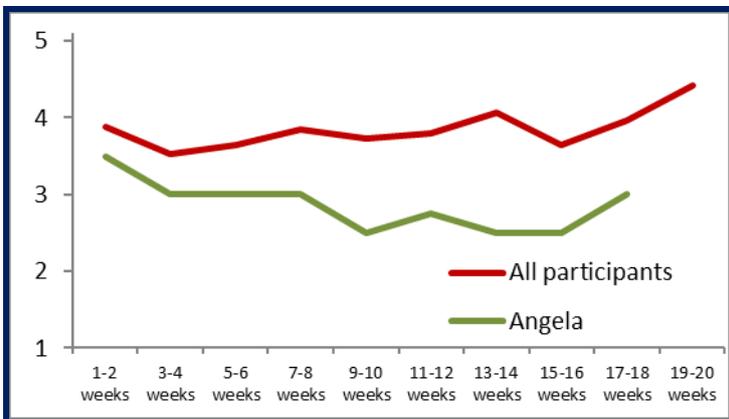


**Figure 17. Lola’s graph for Personal Issues as an example of a U-shaped curve**

Angela’s graphs also illustrate a U-curve trend for both broad categories, albeit the curves depict two different trajectories. Her curve for Personal Issues begins at point 4 (which is a positive evaluation), fluctuates for some time and ends slightly higher than at the start. In contrast, her curve for Academic Issues starts between 3 (neither bad nor good) and 4 (good) and shows a downward incline almost over the whole SA period. The trend begins to change only one month before the end of her studies, which may be explained by the fact that Angela, whose host destination was Beijing, needed much more time to adjust to a completely new academic environment than the other participants who spent their SAs in either Europe, North America, Latin America or Australia. Although the curve ended at a lower point than where it began, it demonstrates a recovery from protracted emotional crisis in the end of the sojourn and, consequently, may be considered as a U curve. Figures 18 and 19 show Angela’s graphs for the two broad categories.

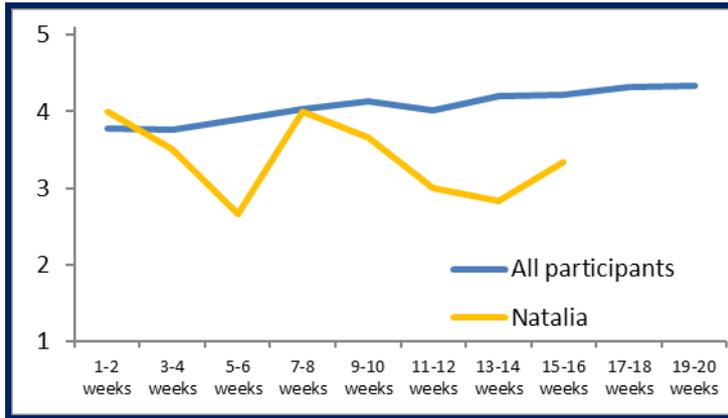


**Figure 18. Angela’s graph for personal Issues**

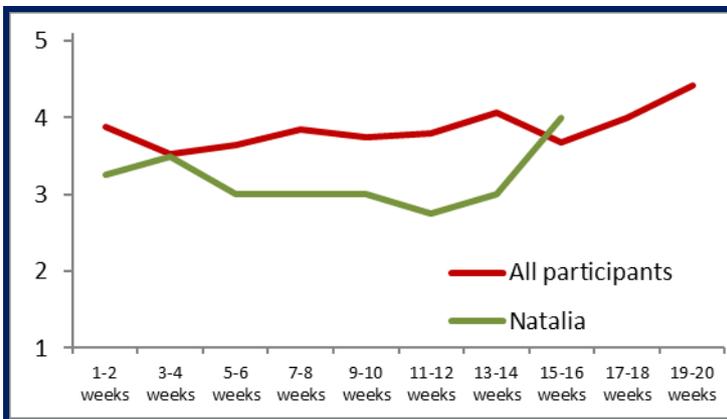


**Figure 19. Angela’s graph for Academic Issues**

Natalia’s personal and academic experiences reveal a U-curve. Similar to Angela’s graphs, the curves depict two different trajectories. Her Personal Issue curve is descendant. Starting at a high point, the curve shows the fluctuations of various degrees of intensity and ends at lower points than it was at the beginning. On the contrary, her Academic Issues curve is ascendant as final weeks provide a slightly higher evaluation (see Natalia’s graphs in Figures 20 and 21 as examples).

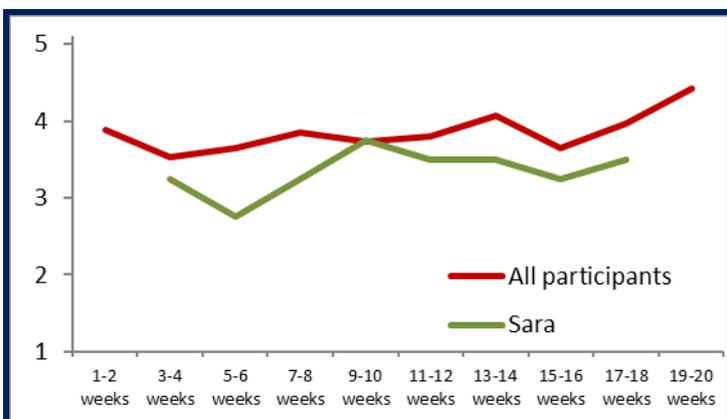


**Figure 20. Natalia’s graph for Personal Issues**



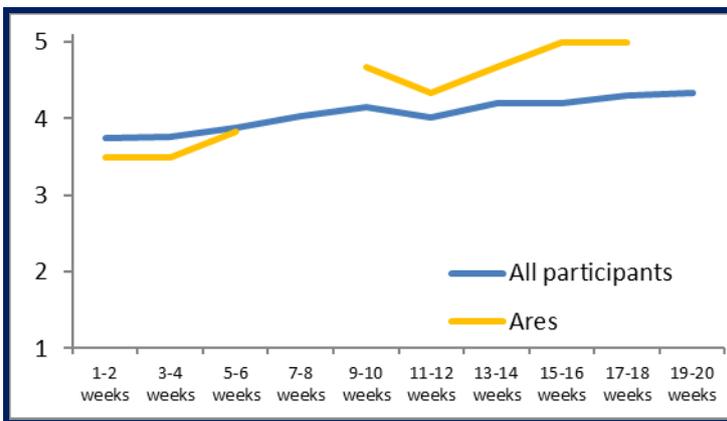
**Figure 21. Natalia’s graph for Academic Issues**

Sara’s graphs show a U-shaped curve whose trajectory is ascendant in both categories. The final weeks provide a slightly higher evaluation than it was in the initial period (see Sara’s graph for Academic Issues in Figure 22 as an example).

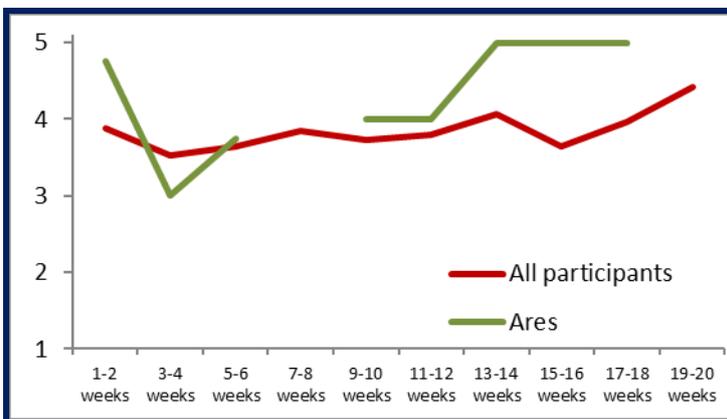


**Figure 22. Sara’s graph for Academic Issues**

As mentioned above, Ares is the only student whose curves display two different trends in the broad categories: a learning curve for Personal Issues and a U-shaped curve for Academic Issues. The trajectories of these curves also differ one from another. Her personal life’s curve starts with a downward incline but ends in a higher place, while her academic life’s curve remains at the same point as at the beginning. Figures 23 and 24 below illustrate Ares’ curves for Personal and Academic Issues. The missing space in the graph corresponds to a break when Ares was on a trip and could not submit her Narrative Table.



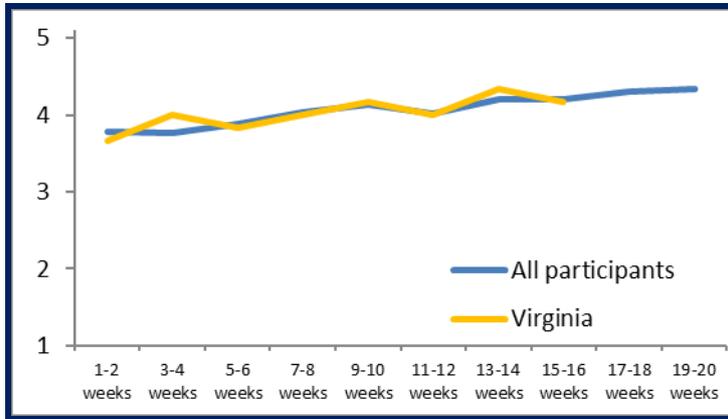
**Figure 23. Ares’s graph for Personal Issues**



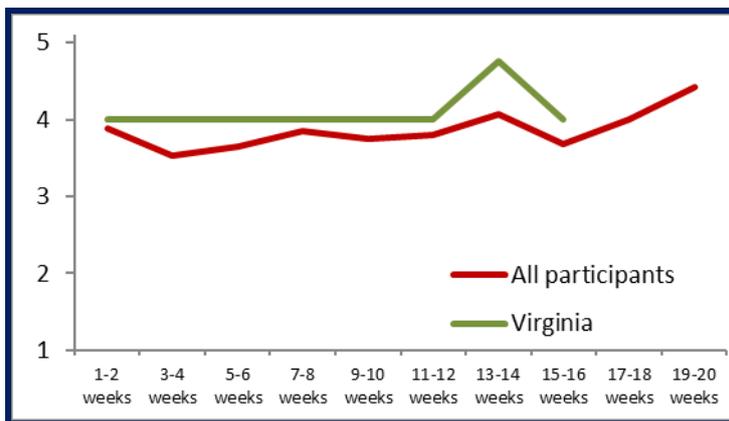
**Figure 24. Ares’s graph for Academic Issues**

Virginia’s graphs illustrate a learning curve trend in both categories, albeit the trajectories are different. Her Personal Issues curve ascends smoothly without significant fluctuations and ends at a higher point at the end of the SA, while her Academic Issues curve represents a straight line with minor fluctuations at the end and

ends at the same point as at the start. Figures 25 and 26 illustrate Virginia’s graphs for Personal and Academic Issues.

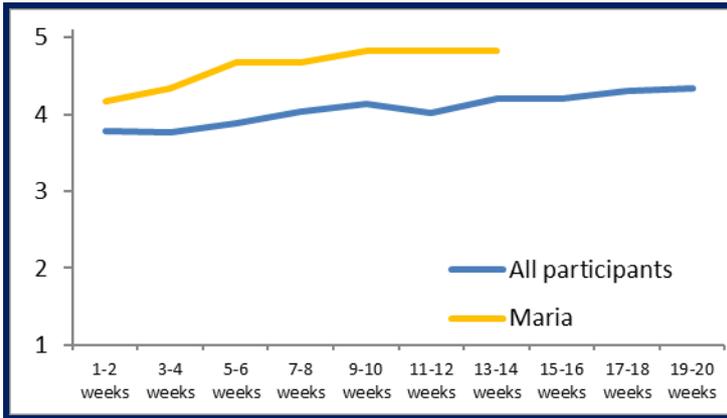


**Figure 25. Virginia’s graph for Personal Issues**

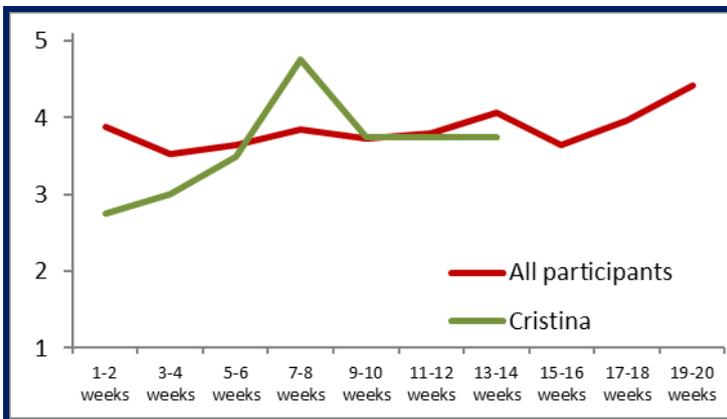


**Figure 26. Virginia’s graph for Academic Issues**

Anna’s, Kira’s, Maria’s, Cristina’s and Elizabeth’s graphs resemble learning curves whose trajectories are ascendant in both categories. Starting normally with an assessment of between 3 and 5, some of the curves demonstrate a smooth upward incline, while others contain noticeable ups and downs. Figures 27 and 28 below illustrate Maria’s and Cristina’s graphs as the examples, respectively, of a smooth learning curve and a learning curve with noticeable fluctuations.



**Figure 27. Maria's graph for Personal Issues as an example of a smooth learning curve**



**Figure 28. Cristina's graph for Academic Issues as an example of a learning curve with fluctuations**

Despite the fact that all graphs reflect some certain similarities with the learning and U-shaped trends, it is obvious that the curves represent different experiences with falls and rises, prominent for some students and slight for others, throughout the SA. The trajectories also display differences. Some curves demonstrate an overall negative trajectory in both categories at the end of the SA. Some curves remain the same as at the start in at least one category, while others show ascendant trajectories. This indicates that their adaptation processes were not always smooth and might have been affected by various factors. In order to better understand the reasons for the fluctuations, it is necessary to unwrap these broad categories and explore, in greater detail, their individual sub-categories. Such exploration is also necessary because the use of averages for predicting general trends is not always considered an accurate technique for interpreting broad categories, especially when they contain a number of single sub-categories. In her study, Beaven (2012) warns about those graphs that are usually

obtained by means of averages and resemble each other. These graphs, which are used to represent a general tendency within a group, may not reflect a full picture of what is occurring and sometimes even lead to misinterpretation of data:

These general trends within a group can only be identified through the use of averages... However, we also need to bear in mind that similar-looking graphs may conceal very different experiences. A sojourner indicating, for example, 1 (very bad) for friends and social life, 3 (neither good nor bad) for daily life, and 5 (very good) for languages, will show the same trend as someone indicating 3 (neither good nor bad) for all three categories. The same would apply to somebody attributing 1 to language, 3 to daily life and 5 to friends and social life, although this individual's experience would presumably be very different.

(Beaven, 2012, p.118)

Thus, in addition to the graphs depicting the general trend for each broad category, I also decided to construct a set of ten graphs representing single sub-category curves for each participant. In order to find out possible reasons for the fluctuations in the graphs, I decided to explore the narratives provided by the students for each sub-category.

## **5.2 An analysis of the participants' narratives: The turning points in their lives abroad**

In this section, I will examine the narratives provided by the students for each sub-category in order to better interpret their biweekly assessments and, therefore, understand what kind of vital experiences influenced their adaptation processes while abroad.

As described in Section 3.4.2 in the Methodology chapter, the Narrative Tables contained ten sub-categories: six for the Personal Issues category (Relationships with co-nationals, Relationships with friends from other nationalities, Relationships with host nationals, Daily life, Foreign language for social interaction, and Culture, custom and habits from the host country) and four for the Academic Issues category (Educational system, Classes, Foreign Language for Academic purposes and Academic support for administrative issues). By averaging the participants' biweekly assessments, I

constructed the graphs for each single sub-category for each student individually and, like in the previous graphs, I depicted the curves against the background representing the group's tendency for each particular aspect (see the complete set of the graphs in Appendix IX). After having analyzed these graphs, I detected relevant ups and downs and turned to the participants' narratives to find out possible explanations for turning points in their lives abroad.

In the following ten sub-sections, I will provide examples from the participants' narratives that explain those ups and downs in their graphs. I included the narratives from all the students except for Ares, since I will devote a whole section to describe her personal and academic life experiences abroad.

### 5.2.1 Relationships with co-nationals

In this sub-category, the participants raised issues related to friends back home, family, and students from UPF who went to the same destination or other co-nationals who were met upon arrival in the host country. Anna's, Maria's, Elizabeth's and Daniel's graphs show minor fluctuations varying between 4 (good) and 5 (very good), suggesting that these participants did not experience any major issues regarding this aspect while abroad. For the rest of the students, their relationships with co-nationals were not always stable and, as can be judged by their comments, sometimes even underwent changes over time. Their graphs depict noticeable ups and downs fluctuating between 2 (bad) and 5 (very good).

Friends from home and family provided what Beaven (2012) calls "emotional support." Communication was made mostly through Skype and social networking websites such as Facebook. Nevertheless, relatives' and friends' visits were not uncommon either. These visits triggered a great deal of positive emotions and broke up the routine of their lives abroad. The participants felt more like tourists than students while also enjoying the feeling of returning to their home lives. A negative or undecided rating, that is 2 (bad) or 3 (neither bad nor good), was given to this aspect mostly due to the lack of contact with native friends. During these periods, the students were travelling or were overwhelmed with their workloads at the university and could not stay constantly in touch. The cases of Lola and Natalia provide clear examples. If we look at Lola's graph

for the sub-category Relationships with co-nationals (Figure 2 in Appendix IX), we can see two significant drops during weeks 5-6 and 11-12. The first drop was due to travelling and reduced contact with friends at home: “This week I have been on a trip with three Erasmus friends and have maintained little contact with those from home.”<sup>39</sup> The second drop was caused by her university studies, which also made it difficult for her to keep contact with her friends: “These weeks I was very busy with the final paper at the university and have not had time to connect them either.”<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, the curve shows recovery after Lola’s friends came to visit her during weeks 13-14: “I have finished the semester and have had a two-week holiday. Fortunately, it has coincided with the visit of one friend and friends from the university, and I have been very glad to see them and share all this with them.”<sup>41</sup> Her friends’ visit made her feel at home and really excited about the possibility of sharing her experiences with them. This excitement is clearly visible during weeks 15-16 when Lola’s curve reaches its peak: “This April I have had a lot of visits and I have literally felt at home. I have been lucky to share all this with them.”<sup>42</sup>

Another example is Natalia who had already begun to feel distant from some of her friends from Barcelona at the end of her first month abroad: “I have lost contact with some of them, and I keep contact with some others. Sometimes I miss them.” This slightly affected her assessment of her relations with native friends, which is reflected in the graph by a drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) in weeks 3-4 (see Figure 1 in Appendix IX). Later in weeks 13-14, Natalia attributed 2 (bad) to this aspect referring to the fact that frequent travel and intensive studying made her extremely busy and almost brought to naught all her contacts with native friends at home:

I have spent these 2 weeks very busy, so I haven’t had the time to deal with friends back home. Sometimes I whatsapp with some, but I haven’t done any

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<sup>39</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Aquesta setmana hem marxat de viatge amb tres amics de l’Erasmus i he mantingut poc contacte amb els de casa.”

<sup>40</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Aquestes setmanes he estat molt ocupada amb el treball final de la universitat i tampoc no he tingut tant temps per connectar amb ells.”

<sup>41</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Ja he acabat el quadrimestre i he tingut dues setmanes de festa. Afortunadament, ha coincidit amb la visita d’una amiga i dels amics de la universitat, i m’ha alegrat molt poder-los veure i compartir tot això amb ells.”

<sup>42</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Aquest mes d’Abril he tingut moltes visites d’amics i m’he sentit literalment com a casa. Ha sigut una sort poder compartir tot això amb ells.”

Skype. First week of December I have been in Seoul, Korea, and second week closed at home studying.

An issue raised by some students was that the distance had an impact on relationships with friends left at home. Being abroad, they reassessed the concept of friendship, which led them to narrow their circle of native friends and keep contact with those ones who continued to stand by their side despite the distance. Sara, for instance, made acute observations of how her friendships changed while she was abroad during weeks 9-10. During this period, her curve showed a drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) (see Figure 5 in Appendix IX). Before departing, she expected to communicate with some friends regularly, but she found that some of those friends could not maintain the relationship over that distance:

While you are away, you realize who really is a good friend, who really cares about you. So I can say that some friendships are getting stronger, and I also realize who I miss the most and who misses me.

Anna found it challenging to keep in touch with friends back home because her absence changed her relationships with them. At times, she felt her best friends were not attentive while communicating through Skype, and this feeling increased the sense of distance for her. In her biweekly assessment, Anna noted that she did not feel she had her best friend at her side supporting her when she needed to share her experience during her SA. Previously, Anna's friend had lived abroad and Anna had done her best to be available for her. However, when Anna went abroad and needed her friend's attention, her friend was not receptive to her needs:

But I feel as if when she was abroad I really tried to be at her side, skypeing her when she needed to. But now that I'm here I do not feel her at my side, moreover, when I explain things to her I feel as if she doesn't give importance to them or she does not pay attention to me - the first Skype we made she was painting her nails so she wasn't even looking at me or the screen and this makes the distance deeper. [sic]

Apart from friends back home, some of the participants (Angela, Elizabeth, Anna, Maria, Daniel and Natalia) also maintained close relations with Spanish students from

UPF and other natives who were in the same location. These relationships were always assessed positively. Anna, for instance, was in constant contact with a group of fourteen girls from Barcelona in Boston. At the end of her first month abroad, she noted: “We are making a nice group here; I suppose it is because we are in the same situation and we are willing to open ourselves to others. We are doing lots of things together and we are going to go to California during the Spring Break (with other 2 Italians) on a road trip.” Anna really felt supported by her native friends with whom she could share her pleasant and unpleasant moments, which positively affected her biweekly assessments throughout the whole sojourn. She always attributed high values 4 (good) or 5 (very good) to this aspect (see Figure 4 in Appendix IX). Once she, however, admitted that sticking to that group also had a negative effect. The group belonged to the international community of the university and all Spanish and Catalan students ended up meeting together in all events, which sometimes hindered communication with host nationals and other international students:

I just want to say one bad thing, as we are so many Spanish and Catalans here it is more difficult to interact with internationals or Americans, and this is not because you could say that we are always together which is not the case (we do things together but we do not need to be always all of us in order to do something). It is because if we go to a party, even if we do not plan to go together, we are going to be there because we belong to the international community too.

Elizabeth arrived in Brazil with her best friend and believed their relationships to be one of the best experiences abroad. She found the friendship to be helpful without being overbearing, and it did not impede her exploration of the host culture: “I think that having arrived with Elena, not just a person from my country but a great friend, is the best thing that could have happened to me. I was afraid of not having my time or needing more space, but with her we share experiences and we know how to respect moments.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Crec que haver vingut amb l’Elena, no només una persona del meu país sinó una gran amiga, és el millor que em podia haver passat. Tenia por de no tenir el meu temps o necessitar més espai, però amb ella compartim experiències i ens sabem respectar moments.”

Similar to Elizabeth, Maria arrived with a fellow student from UPF with whom she developed a meaningful friendship that she had not been able to build at home. In one of her comments, she revealed: "I'm happy we could get to know each other so well, in our daily life in Barcelona we couldn't do it." Later she met more Catalan students, but she did not want to create a permanent circle of Catalan friends and spend all her time with them. She wanted to focus on her foreign language improvement:

I came to Germany with a colleague from my home university. We have spent almost all the time together, and we are becoming very good friends. I met some other Catalan people, but we haven't been much in contact. I don't want to make a Catalan circle of friends because I don't want to speak Catalan all the time, I already know this language. I want to practice German and English.

Angela, from the very beginning, built a real friendship with two other Catalan girls who stayed with her in the residence hall. She also included in this circle an Italian girl who could speak perfect Spanish and understand Catalan: "Luckily we are becoming more than exchange students mates. We are building something like a real friendship. We are always checking upon each other but we are also letting ourselves private moments to do some things on our own." These friendships were very important for Angela, especially during her busiest moments when she felt exhausted. She knew that she could talk with her friends and disconnect briefly from tough moments of the day. Speaking her native language gave her a refuge from the necessity to express everything in a foreign language. If we look at Angela's graph for this sub-category, we can see that during weeks 7-8 and 9-10 her curves peak (see Figure 3 in Appendix IX). These peaks correspond with the moment when Angela felt overwhelmed by her university studies and job interviews she had to attend, but simultaneously she was very grateful to her friends for being at her side:

This month has been quite hard, to be honest. I went to job interviews (and I've got one). We have the exams very soon and I've been up and down in this huge city, taking the underground every day for more than three hours. I arrived

exhausted at night, but I was glad to know that I could talk to the girls, disconnect with them even if it lasted only a moment.<sup>44</sup>

There were also the participants (Sara, Cristina and Virginia) who hardly kept in touch with co-nationals during their SA. For Sara, her relationships with Spanish students met in the host country featured mostly the so-called instrumental friendship (Beaven, 2012). These friends were approachable in terms of basic needs and functional problems.

As for Spanish people who are in Australia, I've just known basically two guys, one [girl] left about two months ago, and we really got on very, very well, and another boy who is very nice, but we have hardly ever met here. We keep in touch to help each other on topics such as, how to send the suitcase, to get university papers, and so on.<sup>45</sup> (Sara)

Similar to Sara, Cristina did not maintain close relations with co-nationals during her sojourn in Argentina. When travelling to her host country, she met some Spanish fellows, but their relationships remained superficial. The only co-national Cristina communicated with was a Spanish doctor under whose guidance she was doing her practices in the hospital. Although she described their first encounters as being neither bad nor good, this acquaintance positively affected her assessment of this aspect during weeks 5-6 (see Figure 9 in Appendix IX). During weeks 11-12 the curve reaches its peak maintaining the same level until the end. Cristina established a closer relationship with this woman and even felt their interaction changed her outlook on life. In her comments, Cristina remarks: “The only Spaniard I have met has been one of the doctors on call, with whom I have gotten along very well. She told me what made her live here,

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<sup>44</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Este mes ha sido bastante duro, la verdad. He ido a entrevistas de trabajo (y he conseguido uno). Tenemos los exámenes muy pronto y he estado de arriba abajo en esta inmensa ciudad, cogiendo el metro cada día durante más de tres horas. Llegaba agotada por la noche, pero me alegraba saber que podía hablar con las chicas, desconectar con ellas aunque sólo fuera por un momento.”

<sup>45</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “En cuanto a gente española que esté en Australia, apenas he conocido, básicamente a dos chicos, una se marchó hace unos dos meses, y la verdad que nos llevamos muy y muy bien, y otro chico que es muy majo, pero apenas hemos coincidido por aquí. Mantenemos el contacto para ayudarnos en temas como, cómo enviar la maleta, conseguir papeles de la uni, y demás.”

why and she opened my mind; because we never know where we will end up in the future.”<sup>46</sup>

Virginia tried to set herself apart from co-nationals during her sojourn in Quebec. Departing for Canada, she aimed at improving her French and meeting as many host and exchange students as possible. Therefore, she was not interested in solely interacting with Spanish students: “I try not to interact too much with Spanish people because that is certainly NOT what I look for in an exchange program, but the few I have met are nice and we are in good terms.” However, two peaks during weeks 3-4 and 9-10 in her graph were due to her acquaintance with co-nationals (see Figure 10 in Appendix IX). In her comments, she admitted that, despite the fact that she did not spend much time with Spanish people, the fact of being from the same country brought together and made the relationships close more quickly than with other exchange students. Moreover, she was always pleased to speak in her native tongue: “No changes, very good vibes, it is true that being from the same country gets us closer faster, but I do not spend much time with Spanish people.”

### 5.2.2 Relationships with students from other nationalities

While abroad, the majority reported that they had spent most of their time with other international students. Orientation sessions or other events organized by the Erasmus Students Network and the host university mobility office during the first week were a starting point for getting to know exchange students from all over the world. After having made first acquaintances, the participants usually joined a group on Facebook or WhatsApp so as to coordinate joint events. Residence halls and apartments were other places where the participants were making friends with their roommates or other residents in the shared common areas such as the kitchens, living rooms, and hallways. Elizabeth, Kira, Maria, Anna, Sara and Virginia found their relationships with people from other nationalities to be quite easy and also enriching. Their graphs depict fluctuations varying between 4 (good) and 5 (very good), which is a positive trend. The graphs built for Natalia, Lola, Angela, and Cristina reveal more noticeable ups and

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<sup>46</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “La única española que he conocido ha sido una de las doctoras de guardia, con la que me he llevado muy bien. Ella me contó que hace viviendo aquí, el porqué y me abrió la mente; porque nunca se sabe dónde acabarás en el futuro.”

downs fluctuating between 2 (bad) and 5 (very good), suggesting that their relationships with people from other nationalities were not always stable and might be influenced by various factors. Lola's, Angela's and Cristina's curves end at the highest point, which shows a positive development. Natalia's graph, on the contrary, shows a negative trend. Her curve ends at the lower point than where it begins. Daniel's curve tends to remain neutral.

Virginia, Sara and Elizabeth were among those students who ranked their relationships with people from other nationalities always positively. Virginia, for instance, admitted that during most of her time she was surrounded by French people who she had met at the airport on her arrival in Canada. It was a group of students from the same university who had come from France to do their exchange in Quebec. From the very beginning they stuck together and were on friendly terms till the end of the exchange programme. Her graph depicts the only drop from 5 (very good) to 4 (good) in weeks 11-12 (see Figure 21 in Appendix IX), the reason for which might be some slight disagreements she sometimes had with her new friends. She, however, believed that disputes sometimes could even strengthen friendly relations. In her comments, she notes: "As usually the best: getting closer and narrowing relationships, obviously going through some little personal disagreements at times but it shows the maturation of the friendship."

Most of her time in Sydney, Sara was surrounded by people from other cultures either at the university or in the apartment where she stayed. Her pre-departure worries (i.e., feeling alone at the beginning of the SA) do not seem to have been realized. She felt happy that she could build her network of international friends in a relatively short time. Her excitement about this is clearly visible in the graph by a rise from 4 (good) to 5 (very good) during weeks 13-14 (see Figure 16 in Appendix IX). In her assessment, she wrote:

Always good, the same group of friends. I especially like the people from work, is like a small family, really, they have made me feel very comfortable since the beginning and I will miss them for sure. Apart from them (actually, I realized that I have spent most of my time with them, 17 hours per week), I have a very

good relationship with my roommates, especially two of them. And I usually spend my evenings with my neighbors. Easy life, I like it.

Elizabeth's graph shows a series of relatively frequent ups and downs varying between two positive values 4 (good) and 5 (very good) (see Figure 17 in Appendix IX). As can be judged by her comments, such fluctuations were mostly caused by a language barrier. English was a hurdle that impeded communication with foreigners. She found it easier to express herself in Portuguese, but it did not always help as the majority of exchange students spoke English: "The truth is that I notice the language barrier more with English than with Portuguese. I think I would have deeper friendships if I could express myself better in English."<sup>47</sup>

Angela, from the very beginning, managed to create a group that consisted of two Spanish students and three international ones: one girl from Italy, one girl from Germany and one boy from Uzbekistan. They even created a WhatsApp group so as to stay in constant contact with each other. But with time, Angela began to gravitate towards her co-national friends with whom she did not need to make an effort speaking in English. The Italian girl was included in this circle of close friends, as she could speak Spanish and understand Catalan. The other friends (from Germany and Uzbekistan) were left outside that circle. The two drops in the graphs during weeks 7-8 and 11-12 were due to very limited contact Angela had with those two foreign students (see Figure 14 in Appendix IX). In her comments, she wrote:

With the group of the university, that one that in the beginning consisted of six, four of us, the German girl and the Uzbek boy, every time we are more distant. Apart from the fact that each one [Angela, two Catalans girls and one Italian girl] expands her circle outside the university (I with my co-workers, they with linguistic partners, classmates ...), when we want more intimacy and closeness we want to be together, speak the same language and share opinions. The

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<sup>47</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "La veritat és que la barrera lingüística la noto més amb l'anglès que amb el portuguès. Crec que podria tenir amistats més profundes si em sabés desenvolupar millor en anglès."

German girl and the Uzbek boy are, to put it rather colloquially, from another roll [i.e. have other interests].<sup>48</sup>

Since weeks 11-12, Angela's graph shows a steady rise until it reaches its highest point in weeks 15-16. At that moment, she felt she had achieved all her set objectives for this sojourn: she could establish a meaningful friendship with her Italian and two Catalan friends, she could pass successfully all her exams and she managed to find a job. As a result, she felt that she had achieved her self-realization and had become financially self-sufficient. She could afford some whims that were inaccessible to her in Barcelona. In her final comments, she revealed: "I am content... In the end everything has turned out good for me: the exams have gone great, the job, the friends..."<sup>49</sup>

Natalia managed to create a group of international friends already during the orientation week at her host university. She spent a lot of time together with her new friends and sometimes felt like they had known each other for ages. In two weeks after her arrival in Hong Kong, she wrote:

All of us are in the same situation, so it's always good to get to know new people from other countries, share experiences and points of view... the orientation week was key to get to know these people and communicating with them in English is great. ☺ most people are super nice, and open, and exchanging contacts with one another is very easy. We made a Facebook group together so as to share plans for the weekends, parties...we actually go out a lot.

However, her graph depicts two falls in weeks 5-6 and 15-16 (see Figure 12 in Appendix IX). The first drop was due to several reasons: a) her trip around China that reduced her contacts with her international friends, and b) her intensive studies at the university upon her return from the trip, when each one of the group was stressed with workload and did not take part in out-of-class activities. In her assessment, she wrote:

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<sup>48</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Con el grupo de la Universidad, ese que al principio éramos seis, nosotras cuatro, una chicha alemana y un chico de Uzbekistán, cada vez estamos más distanciados. A parte de que cada una va ampliando su círculo fuera de la universidad (yo con los compañeros del trabajo, ellas parejas lingüísticas, compañeros de clase...), cuando queremos más intimidad y cercanía queremos estar juntas, hablar una misma lengua y compartir opiniones. La chica alemana y el chico de Uzbekistán son, para decirlo de un modo coloquial, de otro rollo."

<sup>49</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Estoy contenta... Al final me ha salido todo bien: los exámenes me han ido genial, el trabajo, las amigas..."

“Okay. The week I was in Yunnan hadn’t much relation with them, the week I was here I had, but we didn’t go out a lot because everyone was stressed out...” The second drop was caused by her sadness that the sojourn was coming to its end and it was time to say good bye to all her friends:

Good, although I have been busy. These 2 weeks have been study weeks and I have spent most of my time working on group projects. At the end of November we did a farewell dinner with all the friends from the group. December, exams and trips were coming for all of us so it was the time to say good bye. I feel sad!

Lola maintained favourable personal relationships with Erasmus students who were from the same floor in the hall of residence. She particularly highlighted the relationships with her roommate, who was from Turkey. From the very beginning, they were on common ground sharing the same interests, going out and travelling together, which helped her overcome the feeling of loneliness and anxiety in the initial period of her SA. Lola therefore attributed high values of 4 (good) and 5 (very good) to this aspect during the first month (see Figure 13 in Appendix IX). From weeks 3-4, her graph shows a steady fall until it reaches point 2 (bad) in weeks 11-12. At that moment, Lola was overwhelmed with workload at the university. Besides, her relationships with her roommate began to deteriorate without reasonable cause. Lola’s roommate began to avoid talking with her and preferred communicating with other Turkish students, which resulted in emotional exhaustion: “This week we are all busy with work and exams at the university and I have not seen many people, only those with whom I share the same floor. With the roommate I don’t know why but the relationship has cooled a bit, although there has been no discussion or problem ...”<sup>50</sup> Lola attributed her roommate’s weird behavior to her tiredness and willingness to find a refuge among her co-nationals. Lola decided to dive into her studies and let the relationships with her roommate take its course without sorting out the problem. The strategy helped and their relationships gradually returned to normal. Since weeks 11-12, Lola’s graph shows a constant increase until it reaches its highest point in the two last weeks.

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<sup>50</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Aquesta setmana estem tots enfeïnats amb exàmens i treballs de la universitat i no he vist a gaire gent, només amb els que comparteixo planta sobretot. Amb la companya d’habitació no sé perquè però la relació s’ha refredat una mica, encara que no hi ha hagut cap discussió ni problema...”

Daniel communicated with a Chinese boy and a Turkish girl who were in one of his classes at the university in Los Angeles. Sometimes they went to have lunch together or to have just a coffee after the class was finished. The relationship was considered superficial. Outside the university, Daniel could not built friendships with other exchange students, which may be explained by the short length of his SA. His assessment of this aspect did not exceed point 3 (neither bad nor good) over the whole period he spent abroad (see Figure 22 in Appendix IX):

I have a relationship of friendliness with a guy from China and a girl from Turkey. They are both in my class of “Economies of developing countries”. We usually stay talking and drinking a coffee or whatever when the class ends but we have never done anything outside of the university.

### 5.2.3 Relationships with host nationals

As for the relationships with host nationals, Elizabeth, Kira, Cristina, Anna and Maria succeeded in establishing friendly relationships with host nationals both in and outside the university. Their graphs reveal minor fluctuations varying normally between 4 (good) and 5 (very good). The curves always end at the same or a higher point than where they begin, suggesting that the students felt satisfied with the relationships they had managed to build throughout the SA. The graphs built for Natalia, Lola, Angela and Virginia depict noticeable fluctuations, between 1 (very good) and 5 (very good). Natalia’s, Lola’s and Angela’s curves show a downward trend, while Virginia’s curve starts at a lower point and shows an upward incline. Sara’s and Daniel’s curves tend to remain neutral over the whole sojourn. Let us examine the possible reasons for the most noticeable ups and downs depicted in the students’ graphs.

For Natalia and Lola, their contacts with host nationals were normally bounded to the academic context. Natalia, whose destination was Hong Kong, dealt with Chinese mainly while doing joint projects in class. She found working with host students annoying, as they often skimmed their work or shifted their duties to Natalia. Her annoyance with her host groupmates’ attitude reached its worst in the second half of her sojourn. If we look at Natalia’s graph, we can see the curve reached its bottom during weeks 11-12 (see Figure 23 in Appendix IX). In her comments, she bitterly noted:

I am working with them in group projects. I am so pissed off in one of my projects as the host nationals really didn't do anything, lots of free riders. I am supposed to be the one partying around and having fun as I am the exchange, but, on the contrary, I am doing the work of others. TOO BAD!

Beyond the university, Natalia managed to meet some local people thanks to “friends of friends” and even went to a restaurant to try local food, but the contacts were not frequent. Language barrier also complicated communication, as very few people in Hong Kong spoke English:

Most people here speak Cantonese, so I don't understand a word – I can only speak a bit of Mandarin. They told me that in Hong Kong people would speak perfect English but I feel like I've been fooled, since most people do not speak the language (uni is a world a part of course). So sometimes I find myself using sign language in shops or using my smartphone to show what I want to say. [sic]

Lola, whose destination was Haarlem, also stayed in touch with host nationals mostly at the university. During her first weeks abroad, she met some of the Dutch students from the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), who had volunteered to organize out-of-class activities for exchange newcomers. She had constant contact with them throughout the whole SA and participated in the parties, excursions and other events organized by the ESN. She was also well received by her classmates. Unlike Natalia, Lola found her groupmates approachable when it came to working jointly on projects and other in-class activities. However, if we look at Lola's graph, it illustrates three significant drops during weeks 5-6, 9-10 and 19-20 (see Figure 24 in Appendix IX). As can be judged by her comments, her negative assessment was caused by very limited contacts with host natives during those periods: “These weeks I have not maintained any contact with any Dutch student”<sup>51</sup> and “With Dutch volunteers from the ESN the truth is that I don't keep in touch too much now because we almost don't coincide.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Aquestes setmanes no he mantingut cap contacte amb cap estudiant holandès.

<sup>52</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Amb els holandesos voluntaris de la ESN la veritat és que ara ja no m'hi faig massa ja que no coincidim gaire.”

Although it might sound paradoxical, some students found it difficult or even impossible to establish close relationships and to build friendships with host nationals in the SA context. Sara, for instance, admitted that it was difficult for her to get to know locals because, both at the university and in a pizzeria where she worked as a waitress during her free time, she was surrounded mainly by people from other countries: “I don't know, here in Australia, it is quite hard to meet people from here. Most of them are international. I have a bit of relationship with two Australians, but not like very deep relationship. I'm basically with people from all over the world but not from here.” Throughout almost her whole sojourn, Sara attributed a neutral value 3 (neither bad nor good) to this aspect (see Figure 27 in Appendix IX). When her contacts with Australians were practically brought to naught, she assessed her biweekly experiences in this sub-category negatively.

Angela, whose destination was Beijing, felt disappointed with host university students who were interested more in practising their foreign language skills than in building a meaningful friendship. This disappointment is reflected in her graph by a dramatic fall during weeks 7-8 (see Figure 25 in Appendix IX). In her comments, Angela revealed:

I'm thinking seriously that I may finish this experience without making any native “friend”. Besides my Catalan friend, Ari, who is married with a Chinese, I did not get the chance to meet locals outside university campus. And sincerely I'm not so interested in meeting Chinese students because they are too focused on their language exchange and (for me) childish activities.

In her free time, Angela worked as a teacher of Arts in a private school. She admitted that her relations with Chinese at work differed from those at the university. At work, her colleagues regarded her “with respect and sometimes even with admiration” and often wanted to demonstrate their erudition and educational level. In one of her comments, Angela shared her observations:

I don't interact with Chinese at the University, but I do interact with them at work. I have been able to see that between them, if one is more open-minded than the other, when they are with me they want to make me notice this difference. One day I was impressed when I commented to my colleague that I

had visited the museum of the Ethnicities with the class and that I knew that there were a total of 56 ethnicities. She corrected me: 55 and one, ours. She was referring to the ethnicity Han, considered as official. This denotes a feeling of superiority, doesn't it? I thought.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the fact that Angela was well received by her colleagues at work, her biweekly assessments with regards to this aspect did not exceed point 3 (neither bad nor good) until the end of the SA (see Figure 25 in Appendix IX). In her final comments, she concluded that Chinese co-workers, similarly to university students, were only interested in speaking English and in talking about other countries, which did not contribute to building a meaningful friendship.

Daniel, whose destination was Los Angeles, admitted that his contacts with Americans were very limited to spending one evening with American roommates of his Catalan fellows and random encounters with his neighbors on the terrace where they talked briefly. He also kept in touch with the students from UCLA who had come to Barcelona through the Global Cities programme. Although they helped a lot with the bureaucratic things at UCLA when Daniel and his Catalan friends arrived in the States, the relationships were considered superficial.

Virginia did not communicate with Quebecois people because their accent was difficult for her to understand. In the residence where she stayed, there were no locals: "I interact less with Quebecois because of the close French accent they have. In the residence I live in there are not so many locals (for obvious reasons)." In her classes, Virginia did not interact much with host students as the groups changed very often and she never had the same classmates. In this regard, she expressed a slight regret at not having made a single close friend from Quebec.

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<sup>53</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Yo no me relaciono con chinos en la Universidad, pero en cambio sí que lo hago en el trabajo. He podido comprobar que entre ellos, si uno es más open-minded que otro, cuando están conmigo quieren hacer notar esa diferencia. El otro día me quedé impresionada cuando le comenté a una compañera que había ido al museo de las Etnias con la clase y que sabía que en total había 56 etnias. Ella me corrigió: 55 y una, la nuestra. Se refería a la etnia Han, considerada la oficial. Esto denota un sentimiento de superioridad, ¿no? Pensé."

#### 5.2.4 Daily life

In the commentaries for this sub-category, the participants raise issues related to weather, food, accommodation, daily chores, leisure activities, working and travelling experiences. Maria, Elizabeth, Anna, Daniel and Virginia quickly became used to new realities and did not experience any significant changes in the new place. Their graphs depict smooth curves with minor fluctuations (in Maria's case it is a straight line) at high points. The other participants' graphs show more noticeable ups and downs varying between 2 (bad) and 5 (very good), suggesting that their adjustment to a new life in a new environment was positively or negatively affected by various factors.

Natalia arrived in Hong Kong without having arranged her accommodation, as she was denied a room in the hall of residence just before departure. She found an off-campus apartment which she had to share with four other students. The apartment was very small, which sometimes made Natalia feel frustrated and miss her room in Barcelona: "My room is so small... I start to miss space ☹️ I think I will be more grateful of my room when I come back!" This disappointment is clearly visible in her graph by a drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) during weeks 5-6 (see Figure 34 in Appendix IX).

Travel experiences usually affected Natalia's assessment of this aspect positively. For instance, her curve hits a peak in weeks 7-8 due to her trip to Tokyo where she went to visit her Japanese friend. She was well received by her friend's family. During the stay, she explored the city and tasted Japanese cuisine. Upon return to Hong Kong, she wrote:

"Super. I visited a Japanese friend in Tokyo (we had met in Canada, and I was able to stay at her place with her family. It was just awesome. Her family was super nice to me, she was the best host ever, took me to so many places, invited me to food... AND HEY: I LOVED FOOD IN JAPAN A LOT. Healthy, tasty, of great quality... I ate lots of fish, which usually I don't eat in Hong Kong because I always buy the cheapest stuff or eat in the canteen, where they mostly have rice or noodles with vegetables or meat.

In weeks 13-14, Natalia's curve reaches its bottom. As can be judged by her comments, this dramatic fall was provoked by the cold and cloudy weather that she had

experienced on a trip in Korea: “I mark this with a 2 because in Korea was SUPER COLD. Minus 7, we even reached minus 10. I hate cold so I had a bad time regarding the weather. Now in Hong Kong it is colder than when I left also, but nothing compares to the cold I had in Korea.” Two weeks later, her graph shows an improvement from 2 (bad) to 4 (good), which was due to a trip to Malaysia.

For Lola, the weather did not cause any particular difficulty. Regarding accommodation, she stayed in a residence hall and shared a room with a Turkish exchange student, which she positively assessed at the beginning of the SA because the relationship helped her avoid feeling lonely (see Figure 35 in Appendix IX). In weeks 3-4, her graph shows the first drop which was caused by workload at the university: “With all the work at the university we have had neither time nor desire to go out much.”<sup>54</sup> Her assessment improved two weeks later when she had the opportunity to travel to Berlin and Prague. Her curve increases from 3 (neither bad nor good) to 4 (good): “Given that I haven’t stayed in the residence, I can assess the stay abroad as very good. We have had a very good time, we have visited Berlin and Prague, we have slept in hostels where we have been with other young people from around the world, and we have eaten quite well considering that we cooked some dinners in the hostel.”<sup>55</sup> In weeks 7-8, the curve reaches its peak. Healthy food, good weather and leisure activities made her feel happy and enjoy her sojourn:

This week has been very good in terms of food, with my roommate we have filled the fridge with fruit and vegetables! I cooked various but healthy meals all the week. Also, the weather favored a lot and it seems that spring is arriving! Today we are at 15°C above zero. I am also happy because I have done many activities this week: bowling, playing soccer, billiards ...”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Amb tota la feina de la universitat no hem tingut temps ni ganes de sortir gaire.”

<sup>55</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Contant que no he fet vida a la residència, puc valorar l’estada a l’estranger com molt bona. Ens ha fet molt bon temps, hem visitat Berlín i Praga, hem dormit en albergs on hem estat amb altres joves d’arreu, i hem menjat força bé considerant que alguns sopars els hem cuinat a l’alberg mateix.”

<sup>56</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Aquesta setmana ha sigut molt bona en quant a menjar, ja que amb la meua companya d’habitació hem omplert la nevera de fruita i verdura! He cuinat variat però saludable tota la setmana. Alhora, el temps acompanya molt i sembla que ja arriba la primavera! Avui estem a 15°. També estic contenta ja que he fet forces activitats aquesta setmana: bowling, jugar a futbol, bitllar...”

Several weeks later, she, however, attributed 2 (bad) to her daily life explaining that she was overwhelmed with intense studies at the university. In weeks 15-16, the curve reaches point 4 (good). The reason for the rise is her friends' visits, which broke her routine and made her feel more like a tourist than a student: "Having had visits my daily life has changed completely. I have been more a tourist than a student sometimes..."<sup>57</sup>

Upon arrival in Buenos Aires, Cristina was adversely affected by her new accommodation. There were problems with Internet connection in the room. The kitchen was always overcrowded, as it was intended for more than fifty people. Food was also mentioned as a weak point. The host cuisine was quite different because it included a lot of fried food without the fresh fish, fruit, and vegetables Cristina was used to. Rainy weather aroused no enthusiasm either. These factors together negatively affected Cristina's rating during her first two weeks abroad (see Figure 42 in Appendix IX):

The first few days when I arrived were horrible, I wanted to change the place. The residence has a lot of defects: the internet does not work very well, the rooms are not bad but could be worse, a kitchen for more than 50 people ... On the other hand, I'm used to eat lots of fruits and vegetables, fish, grilled food ... and instead, here people eat a lot of sweets, a lot of fried things, and of course pasta and rice are cooked faster and in a kitchen with 50 people it is the most important. And eating fish is impossible, because it is not only bad but also expensive. Finally, there were a few rainy days and the rain does not help at all.<sup>58</sup>

Since weeks 1-2, Cristina's curve moves in an upward direction, suggesting that she became gradually accustomed to her new life. In weeks 11-12, the curve reaches its highest point. The reason for such an improvement was a three-day trip to the Cordoba

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<sup>57</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Al tenir visites la meva vida quotidiana ha canviat completament. He fet més de turista que d'estudiant a estones..."

<sup>58</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Los primeros días cuando llegué eran horribles, me quería cambiar de sitio. La residencia tiene muchos defectos: el internet no funciona muy bien, las habitaciones no están mal pero podrían estar peor, una cocina para más de 50 personas... Por otro lado, yo estoy acostumbrada a comer mucha fruta y verdura, pescado, comida a la plancha... y en cambio, aquí se come mucho dulce, muchas cosas fritas, y claro la pasta y el arroz se cocinan más rápido y en una cocina con 50 personas es lo más importante. Y comer pescado es imposible, porque no es nada bueno aparte de ser caro. Finalmente, hizo unos días lluviosos y la lluvia no ayuda a nada."

mountain range. In her comments, Cristina explained that the experience helped her leave behind briefly the chaos of city life and just enjoy viewing beautiful landscapes and tasting traditional food: “This week there were three days off, so I took an advantage with another girl from Brazil to go to get to know the Sierra de Córdoba. The truth is that these three days were perfect, it was good to get away from the chaos of Buenos Aires.”<sup>59</sup> During her last weeks, the curve depicts a slight dip caused by the sadness that her sojourn was coming to its end. By that time, she had felt part of her team at the hospital and fully integrated into her host environment. The cloudy and rainy weather partially contributed to this emotional drop making her recall her first days abroad when she was disoriented and felt like an outsider:

At work perfect, I could not have felt better. I felt part of the team, but of course I could not do many things, I was explained everything, I was engaged in all the activities. It is colder now, and there are a lot of rainy days. For me, the rain is the worst, it makes me reflect and I wish I had felt so integrated as I feel now from the first moment. Undoubtedly, when the sun shines my mood is better.<sup>60</sup>

Prior to her departure to Beijing, Angela anticipated that the food would be different and she might not like it, but her concerns proved groundless: “I was kind of worried about Chinese food. I didn’t taste it before - besides some rice and ‘Japanese’ noodles. However, I have to recognize that for the moment I like it a lot: we have this canteen where we all have lunch together after finishing our lessons.” As for accommodation, Angela was quite satisfied with her dorm although it was old and the bathroom had to be shared with other students, which was an inconvenience that she needed to adjust to. The first drop in her graph happened in weeks 3-4, when Angela had to prepare for her first Chinese exam (see Figure 36 in Appendix IX). The preparation took her a lot of time and evoked stress. Simultaneously, she began to work as an Art teacher in a private school. The new job assumed a great deal of responsibility and commitment, but Angela

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<sup>59</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Esta semana había un puente de 3 días, así que aproveche con otra chica de Brasil para ir a conocer la Sierra de Córdoba. La verdad es que fueron tres días perfectos, era bien alejarse del caos de Buenos Aires.”

<sup>60</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “En el trabajo perfecto, no me podía haber sentido mejor. Me sentía parte del equipo, aunque por supuesto no podía hacer muchas cosas, me lo explicaban todo, me incluían en todas sus actividades. Hace más frío, y hay muchos días lluviosos. Para mí la lluvia es lo peor, me pone pensativa y pienso que ojala me hubiera sentido tan integrada como me siento ahora desde el primer momento. Sin duda, los días que hace sol mi ánimo esta mejor.”

was excited at the possibility of earning money. Her positive feelings about her new job are visible in an increase from 3 (neither good nor bad) to 4 (good) in weeks 5-6. However, combining intensive university studies with this job proved to be unbearable for Angela and resulted in such exhaustion that she asked for a reduction of hours at work. This exhaustion is clearly visible in the graph in a drop during weeks 11-12. After that, her emotional state gradually improved as she had more free time to enjoy her stay and the company of her friends while also exploring her host culture. In her assessment, she wrote:

I am going to have more money now as I work. I am going to have more free time now as I asked to do fewer hours. I am going to take my classes with more calm now as I understand more and more the language. I'm very happy. I am going to go sightseeing and to combine my studies with leisure: with beers, with the four girls. I am going to eat western food without worrying much about the price.<sup>61</sup>

Sara was satisfied with her accommodation in Sydney, which she shared with other exchange students. Weather was not problematic for her as it was similar to the weather in Barcelona. At the end of the first month, she managed to find a part-time job in a pizzeria, but the first week was stressful because she needed to memorize the menu, work with the cash register, and adjust to the mixture of Italian and English used in the restaurant. Moreover, she needed to combine university studies and her new job:

Luckily I have found a job!! Yesterday I did my first trial day and ...bff, very stressful. I am very lost. Still I have this week to go when I want and learn the job (it is in a pizzeria). But now I'm very nervous because I want to do it well. I guess in one or two weeks I will be quiet and will do it well. But now, first, I have to learn the restaurant menu, then, the mix of English and Italian, I also have to learn to manage the computer, to take care of the bills (and here the currency is different), etc. etc. etc., apart from the work at the uni, I'm very

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<sup>61</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Voy a tener más dinero ahora que trabajo. Voy tener más tiempo libre ahora que pedí hacer menos horas. Voy a ir más tranquila con las clases ahora que entiendo cada vez más la lengua. Estoy muy contenta. Voy a hacer turismo y combinar los estudios con el tiempo libre: con cervezas, con las cuatro chicas. Voy a comer comida occidental sin preocuparme tanto por el precio."

stressed out !!!! The good news is that here you are paid a lot of money (nothing to do with Spain) so it compensates.<sup>62</sup>

All this stress is clearly shown in the graph by a drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither good nor bad) during weeks 3-4 (see Figure 38 in Appendix IX). Once she had settled into her work and school schedules and had got to know better new people around her, her emotions improved for some time. In weeks 9-10, the graph displays another drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither good nor bad). By that time, her initial excitement had gone and she became used to her daily routine. Sara began to feel bored. To combat this feeling, she spent an increased amount of time with her friends:

Well, although I've noticed that I start getting used to a routine. AND I DO NOT WANT. It seems that excitement, adrenaline of the beginning is no longer present, and I want it back. These last few days I'm returning to live intensely, making the most of my stay. Once you already have your friends, your work, the university, it seems you enter a zone of convenience, comfort, and no no no, I want adrenaline, emotions, new things.<sup>63</sup>

During weeks 11-12, her curve hits its peak at 5 (very good) maintaining this rating until the end of the sojourn. In her comments, Sara wrote that she enjoyed her daily chores, her work, and her university studies and felt she had achieved self-realization. In her final assessment, she also added that the SA contributed to her maturity and independence. Working experience gave her a feeling of freedom that she had never had before because she had never worked or earned her own salary. Although she felt slightly sad because her SA program would be ending soon, she had made plans for one month of solo travel and farm work in Australia before returning to Spain:

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<sup>62</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Por suerte HE ENCONTRADO TRABAJO!! Ayer hice mi día de prueba y... bff, muy estresante. Voy muy perdida. Aún tengo esta semana para ir cuando quiera y aprender el trabajo (es en una pizzería). Pero ahora estoy muy nerviosa porque quiero hacerlo bien. Supongo que cuando lleve una o dos semanitas ya estaré tranquila y lo haré bien. Pero ahora, entre que tengo que aprenderme el menú del restaurante, entre la mezcla de inglés y italiano, entre que tengo que aprender a manejar el ordenador, llevar bien las cuentas del dinero (y aquí las monedas son diferentes), etc. etc., sumado al trabajo de la uni, estoy muy estresadaaa!!!! La buena noticia es que aquí te pagan mucho dinero (nada que ver con España) así que compensa."

<sup>63</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Bien, aunque me he dado cuenta que empiezo a acostumbrarme a una rutina. Y NO QUIERO. Parece que la excitación, adrenalina del principio ya no está, y quiero recuperarla. Estos últimos días estoy volviendo a vivir intensamente, aprovechando al máximo mi estancia. Una vez ya tienes a tus amigos, tu trabajo, la uni, parece que entres en una comodidad, confort, y no no no, quiero adrenalina, emociones, cosas nuevas."

Super good, feeling of total freedom! I had never lived away from home and had never earned my own salary, so explosive mixture of freedom! I liked cooking meals for myself, organizing my room in my way, planning my routine without anyone to tell me how to do things. And it could not have gone better. I feel much more mature, independent, sure of myself, with more strengths. Now a new adventure begins, I'm going to travel for one month alone around Australia, I am going to work in different farms, and I really want it!!!<sup>64</sup>

### 5.2.5 Foreign language for social interaction

In the commentaries for this sub-category, the students described issues regarding their foreign language used outside the university. Elizabeth, Kira, Maria, and Virginia did not experience trouble with this aspect and their graphs show stable curves at high points almost without fluctuations. One word should be said about Cristina, who went to Argentina where she spoke Spanish and did not speak any foreign language. Her curve features an overall upward trend, but her improvements were primarily due to adjusting to Spanish dialect and slang. The curves built for Natalia, Sara, Lola, Angela, Anna, and Daniel reveal ups and downs fluctuating between 2 (bad) and 4 (good). Let us examine the reasons the participants gave for noticeable fluctuations.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Cristina needed to speak neither English nor other foreign languages as host-nationals spoke Spanish. However, she admitted that, despite sharing the same language, she did not understand a lot of words at the beginning. Moreover, the use of some words in Argentina was considerably different from their use in Spain and she needed to select words carefully.

In spite of the same language during the first days I did not understand a lot of words. And the most important thing is the forbidden word "coger," we use it to say to catch a flight or to catch something ... and there it means going to bed

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<sup>64</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Súper bien, sensación total de libertad, de valerme por mi misma y de estar orgullosa porque me lo he montado de puta madre!! jejej. Nunca había vivido fuera de casa y nunca había ganado mi propio sueldo, así que mezcla explosiva de libertad! Me ha encantado hacerme mis comidas, organizarme mi cuarto a mi manera, planearme mi rutina, sin nadie que me diga cómo hacer las cosas. Y no me podría haber salido mejor. Me siento más mucho más madura, independiente, segura de mi misma, con más fuerza. Ahora empieza una nueva aventura, me voy un mes a viajar solita por Australia, voy a trabajar en distintas granjas, y tengo muchas ganas!!!”

with someone, so I have to constantly think about what I have to say in order not to use completely different words to say the same things.<sup>65</sup> (Cristina)

Cristina's curve for this aspect starts at 3 (neither bad nor good) and gradually moves in an upward direction until it reaches the highest point in weeks 11-12 (see Figure 53 in Appendix IX). That is when she adjusted to the local dialect and did not need to consciously choose the right words for expressing what she wanted.

For Natalia, who departed for Hong Kong, English remained her basic language for communication during the whole sojourn. In her initial comments, she noted: "English is super KEY, I use it all the time. No Chinese, no Cantonese. Just English. With people from Spain I also use Spanish, but the standard is always English." Travel experiences affected Natalia's assessment positively and negatively, and her ranking depended on whether or not she could speak English during those trips. For example, her graph shows a rise from 3 (neither bad nor good) to 4 (good) during weeks 3-4 (see Figure 45 in Appendix IX). This improvement was caused by her excitement about an upcoming trip around mainland China: "Tomorrow with another girl from UPF we will be travelling/backpacking to China for the national holiday – during 1 week - and I am pretty excited and scared too!!" However, this trip adversely impacted Natalia's subsequent assessment. Upon return, she attributed 2 (bad) to this aspect explaining that the trip might have been a nightmare for her and her friend if they had not been able to speak some Mandarin. Two weeks later, she improved her assessment from 2 (bad) to 3 (neither bad nor good). In her comments, she explained the improvement by her trip to Japan where she went to visit her friend who she had met on her previous exchange. Although most people could not speak English in Japan, Natalia was glad to have her Japanese friend by her side and to speak to her in English. As for Hong Kong, she still felt disappointed by the fact that people there, including her neighbors, did not understand English:

In Japan most people couldn't speak English (among them my friend's parents) but I was lucky she was with me most of the time. I spoke English with her. In

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<sup>65</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Todo y ser el mismo idioma los primeros días no entendía muchas palabras. Y lo más importante la palabra prohibida "coger", para nosotros es coger un vuelo, coger algo... y ahí significa ir a la cama con alguien, así que he de pensar constantemente que he de decir por no hablar de palabras completamente diferentes para decir las mismas cosas."

Hong Kong English keeps being the language. It is frustrating sometimes that they don't understand you, especially in my neighborhood, where lots of old people from shops only speak Cantonese, but at one point you get used to it.

During weeks 15-16, her curve reaches point 4 (good). The reason is the trip for Malaysia where she did not have any language problems as Malaysians spoke good English: "English. Surprisingly lots of people could speak it in Malaysia. We didn't have any major problems. And in Hong Kong the same as always."

For Sara, English was also a key language in Australia. From the very beginning, she admitted that her English skills were quite good for standard conversations in formal settings. However, she lacked vocabulary and could not express herself freely among friends. She often did not understand their jokes, which sometimes frustrated her and resulted in an indecisive evaluation of this aspect:

I begin to realize my limitations in English. I speak English well but for having standard conversations. I find it difficult to understand jokes, I lack a lot of specific vocabulary, and when I'm with a group of friends many times I do not understand what they're talking about ... and it's a little bit frustrating.<sup>66</sup>

During weeks 7-8, Sara's curve reaches point 4 (good) maintaining the same level until the end of the SA (see Figure 49 in Appendix IX). In her comments, she admitted that she felt much more confident with English and was able to have long discussions with people on various topics. Moreover, she became used to the Australian accent which she did not understand in the beginning. It is worth noting that Sara was one of those students who normally commented in Spanish or Catalan in their Narrative Tables, but this time she decided to write in English, which also demonstrates her language improvement. Besides, she felt happy because Australia turned out to be for her a linguistic laboratory where she could also practise other foreign languages:

Much better! I feel much more confident with English now. I don't understand everything, of course, but I can have long-deep conversations with people. The

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<sup>66</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Empiezo a darme cuenta de mis limitaciones en el inglés. Hablo bien inglés pero para tener conversaciones estándares. Me cuesta entender las bromas, me falta mucho vocabulario específico, y cuando estoy con un grupo de amigos muchas veces no me entero de lo que están hablando... y es un poco frustrante."

Australian accent is pretty hard sometimes, but in general, I can understand almost everything or at least, guess the meaning by the context. I'm also happy because I really love languages, and because of all the international people, I can also practice my French and learn some words from other languages. At work, I'm learning Italian ('cause it's a pizzeria, everybody is Italian except me), and at uni I'm learning Japanese!! yeeeah

Unlike Sara, Anna found it easier to speak English with hosts and other international students in informal settings than in class. In weeks 9-10, her graph shows a dramatic fall from 4 (good) to 2 (bad) (see Figure 48 in Appendix IX). During spring break, she went to California with a group of Catalan and Italian students and mainly spoke Spanish or Catalan. Upon return from the trip, she felt that her English speaking ability had become worse. The drop therefore was caused by her disappointment. In her comments, she wrote: "As in California we were Spanish and Italians, even if we tried to speak in English all the time, I feel that my English is a little bit worse than before the break." However, this disappointment did not last long. Two weeks later, during a meeting with her international assistant (who was assigned to help her at the university), she received positive feedback about her improved language skills, which resulted in a rise from 2 (bad) to 4 (good). This meeting proved to be encouraging for her and helped to increase her confidence: "Better. I feel more confident. I had lunch with my IA the other day and she said to me that she was impressed! That it seems as if I have been here for a longer time than I have actually been. I was so glad!" This trend maintains the same level until the end.

Angela's graph shows a series of rises and falls fluctuating between 3 (neither bad nor good) and 4 (good) (see Figure 47 in Appendix IX). The falls were caused to a greater extent by her unconfidence in English. During weeks 3-4, for instance, her graph displays a fall from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good). At that time she felt that her English skills had not improved because she had to speak Chinese all the time, and her friends had surpassed her abilities: "I feel that my friends are making progress with their English and I do not. Maybe it is because my level was good enough for daily life communication but I wanted to improve it here. Maybe this won't be possible. I guess it is Chinese only now."

Angela gradually used less English when communicating with her international friends. As she had some Italian friends who perfectly spoke Spanish and understood Catalan, Angela always used Spanish in their communication while her Italian friends always responded in Italian. She found this mixture of languages to be not only practical but also funny, which resulted in a rise from 3 (neither bad nor good) to 4 (good) in weeks 7-8: “Also with the Italian group we are keeping our promise of not speaking in English between us, so when we are together I speak Spanish and they reply in Italian and vice versa which is not only more practical but much more interesting.”

At school where Angela worked after university hours, she was required to take classes in English. In weeks 11-12, she felt a bit overwhelmed, which resulted in a drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) in her biweekly assessment. She made a constant effort and sometimes even felt ashamed that her level was not sufficient enough to be a teacher. Although her colleagues were approachable and always encouraged her, the commitment she made was exhausting for her:

At work I speak English all the time. Imagine the effort! I feel it is not enough and sometimes I'm a little embarrassed, but they encourage me. There are also Chinese colleagues and sometimes I ask them things about the classes. There everything is basically in English. And when I'm with children (I am an art teacher at an incredible center, look for it: [www.artbug.com.sg](http://www.artbug.com.sg)) I speak English, and they sometimes repeat my words in Chinese. It is a true melting pot, really. I guess that's why I'm so tired and sometimes I have the feeling that I'm going to fall down.<sup>67</sup>

Two weeks later, she decided not to worry about her English level so as not to feel so stressed. Every time she understood her colleagues better and felt more confident with every interaction in English, which resulted in a rise from 3 (neither bad nor good) to 4 (good). In her comments, she wrote: “At work I speak English and every time I am less

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<sup>67</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “En el trabajo hablo en inglés, todo el tiempo. Imagínate el esfuerzo! Siento que no es suficiente y a veces me avergüenza un poco, pero ellos me animan. También hay trabajadores chinos y de vez en cuando les pregunto cosas de las clases. Allí básicamente es todo inglés. Y cuando estoy con los niños (soy profesora de arte en un centro increíble, búscalo: [www.artbug.com.sg](http://www.artbug.com.sg)) hablo inglés, y ellos a veces repiten mis palabras en chino. Es un verdadero melting pot, realmente. Supongo que por eso estoy tan agotada y a veces tengo la sensación de que me voy a caer.”

concerned about not having "the level". The truth is that every time I understand more and when I understand more, I speak less, in an inversely proportional relationship."<sup>68</sup>

After her first two weeks in Haarlem, Lola noticed that she lacked fluency, which resulted in her negative assessment of 2 (bad) (see Figure 46 in Appendix IX). She realized that she could not express herself freely and sometimes had to consult dictionaries in order to say what she wanted: "In general I am communicating in English with everyone, although there are six Spanish-speaking people (two Mexicans and one Brazilian). I also speak Spanish sometimes. I feel that I lack fluency and often consult how to say words and expressions, but gradually I'm adapting to the language."<sup>69</sup> Her subsequent ups and downs in the graph fluctuate between 3 (neither bad nor good) and 4 (good). The downs are caused by her disappointment about her vocabulary limitations, while the ups are due to her short-term feeling of improvement.

At the very beginning of his stay in Los Angeles, Daniel felt quite confident with his English. He used it in a variety of settings and felt satisfied. In his initial assessment, he wrote: "Language hasn't been a problem. I have been able to develop conversations with classmates, with the supermarket workers, with the university administrative staff..." However, two weeks later, he noticed that, although his English level was very good for Spain, he lacked vocabulary to have long and profound discussions with native speakers. His disappointment about his linguistic abilities caused the drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) in the graph (see Figure 44 in Appendix IX): "I have realized that, even though that my English level is very good in Spain, it is not enough here to develop my ideas profoundly: I feel a little bit like children who cannot talk properly." His final assessment remained neutral. Although he felt his oral English had improved, he still found it difficult to understand native speakers in some conversations: "Not a problem in general. I would even say that my oral English has improved and I felt more comfortable. The host nationals were, still, a bit difficult to fully understand."

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<sup>68</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "En el trabajo hablo inglés y cada vez me preocupa menos no tener "el nivel". La verdad es que cada vez entiendo más y cuando más entiendo, menos hablo, en una relación inversamente proporcional."

<sup>69</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "En general m'estic comunicant en anglès amb tothom, encara que hi ha 6 castellanoparlants (2 mexicans i una brasilenya) i també parlo en castellà a estones. Noto que em falta fluïdesa i sovint consulto com dir les paraules i expressions, però poc a poc estic adaptant-me a la llengua."

## 5.2 6 Culture, customs and habits from the host country

In the commentaries for this sub-category, the participants described cultural differences they could observe in their host country and how some of them triggered turning points in their stays. They raised issues related to the host transport system, eating habits, sanitary conditions, shopping and treatment in the shops, local timetable, parties, and travelling experiences. Kira's and Virginia's graphs represent a straight line at high points, which suggests that they did not find their host culture to be different from their own and had no trouble adjusting to it. Elizabeth's, Maria's, Cristina's and Angela's graphs display minor fluctuations varying between 3 (neither bad nor good) and 5 (very good), which also indicates that their host cultures did not make them step out of their comfort zone. Natalia's, Daniel's, Anna's, Lola's and Sara's graphs depict noticeable ups and downs of various intensities. Let us examine the reasons for significant changes in the graphs.

Natalia, who departed for Hong Kong, found her host city to be inconvenient. She could not buy some basic things for women and take beauty treatments she got used to in Barcelona. In two weeks after her arrival, she wrote: "Hong Kong is not a comfortable city. There are lots of basic things, like tampons, that cannot be found here. I wanted to go to a beautician to wax my legs and I found out that they don't wax (some don't have much peel, others just have it and keep it!!!!)." During weeks 5-6, her graph shows a drop which was caused by the trip around mainland China (see Figure 56 in Appendix IX). In her comments, she explained that she was shocked by poor sanitary conditions she could observe while travelling. Besides, she found that the Chinese tried to cheat her every time she needed to take a taxi or other services:

Mainland Chinese culture was more Chinese than Hong Kong culture. I had some shocks during my trip. For instance, most toilets are floor toilets and they are soooo dirty. Very very dirty. Also, when they see you're a tourist, they try to fool you, charging you more than what is fair, etc...

With time, she became adjusted to her life in Hong Kong and paid less attention to insufficient sanitary arrangements (e.g., meat was allowed to sell in the streets) and also to locals' habits that shocked her in the beginning. Her adjustment is visible in the graph

by a rise from 2 (bad) to 4 (good) during weeks 7-8. In her comments, she noted: “Every time I get more used to Hong Kong, it is no longer unpleasant that people spit in the streets (well, actually it is, but I do care less about it...)” Two weeks later, she already wrote: “I am almost a Honkonger, every time more integrated.” The trips beyond China partially contributed to her positive assessment during those weeks. In weeks 7-8, for instance, she could visit Tokyo. This travelling experience was a chance for her to get to know another Asian culture and to compare its customs and traditions with those ones she could observe in Hong Kong and other Chinese provinces. Later, she also could visit several cities in Korea and Malaysia. Upon return from the trips, Natalia felt more knowledgeable about the places she had visited. She, however, knew the life and how everything worked in Hong Kong much better, which gave her a feeling of returning home.

Daniel, who went to Los Angeles, was disappointed with the Americans’ eating habits. The abundance of fast food unpleasantly surprised him. Besides, he found urban public transportation to be poor, which made the movement around such an extensive city as Los Angeles difficult. In two weeks after his arrival, he attributed 3 (neither bad nor good) to this aspect and commented:

I knew that Americans weren’t much healthy in food terms but now I have understood in my own flesh why it is so and it shocks to me that such a developed country has such bad habits. Apart from that, distances are a problem if you don’t have a car since public transportation is not as good as it is in Barcelona and Los Angeles is one of the most extended cities in the world. [sic]

Having settled in the residence hall, he attempted to get acquainted with his American neighbors, but he found that they were reluctant to make any contact with foreigners. In the university, the situation was no better and he did not manage to build closer relations. At the same time, he was struck by excessively pleasant manners with which shop assistants treated him in shops. All these factors together negatively affected his assessment during weeks 3-4 (see Figure 66 in Appendix IX):

It is very difficult to approach other students or residence mates: they don’t even say hello when they are neighbors you see every week. In Spain, I think we are

more open to be nice. On the contrary, it is interesting to notice that shop assistants and other people working in shops are ridiculously nice even to the point of asking how has my day been (I understand this could happen when you go to the same shop every day and you know the guy) [sic]

At the end of his sojourn, Daniel remained adversely impacted by his host culture. In his final comments, he expressed his regret at observing a lot of poor people in the streets and the high inequality that existed between poor and rich people in the USA: “It is pitiful for me to see so many homeless in the streets and know that people struggle so hard to keep going when there are people so rich. You can see the high inequalities in that there are many private things and very few public things (as good green parks, for example).”

Anna, who departed for Boston, found her host country to be excessively militarized. What shocked her most was that the Americans always treated their soldiers as heroes and expressed their gratitude for their military service by applauding, as Anna felt, at the most inappropriate place and time (e.g., during the football match). This factor negatively affected her initial assessment (see Figure 59 in Appendix IX). In her comments, she remarked:

Culture, custom and habits: this is the worst part. I am starting to realize that I cannot cope with certain things. I now understand what 'culture shock' is. I'll explain. I went to a Celtics game several days ago, I don't remember, and it turned to be a special day dedicated to soldiers, that is, every five minutes the big screens were having connections with soldiers in Afghanistan in real time. I couldn't believe my eyes. And there were lots of servicemen in the grades and between parts they would go to the center of the 'pista' and people applauded them! This was so weird, I knew America was a really militarized country but what I didn't expect is having this relation with soldiers in the every-day life and worse than that, people applauding them and treating them as 'heroes' that is how they announced them.

During weeks 5-6, Anna's graph shows another drop. In her assessment, Anna brought up the issue of parties. She expressed her disappointment with the American way of

entertaining which came to drinking and gaming. According to Anna, those parties lacked interpersonal communication because locals actually preferred playing games in order to get drunk to interacting with each other. She came to the conclusion that international parties had another atmosphere because exchange students tended to get to know as many people as possible and were interested more in speaking than in drinking or playing games:

I haven't talk about parties here. I go out once or twice a week. Much more than in Barcelona. There are two types of parties: American parties and international parties. I definitely prefer the latter ones. It is not that American parties are not good but they are just different, and I feel sometimes like out of place, whereas I really like the environment in international parties, where everyone speaks with everyone. In American parties, as far as I can say, it seems as if everything is about drinking. There are lots of games, they are really fun I have to admit but I do not see people really interacting with each other (I am not telling with me but between them) it is as if they need the game in order to socialize but they are not really talking just cheering and drinking (I am trying not to judge it – it is just what I feel – I am not even saying that this is always like this it is just my opinion based on the few parties I have been in but I have to say that all the other girls from Barcelona share that opinion). I mean, it seems to me that Europeans or internationals drink but not just to get drunk but to speak, talk and chat (and this may be also because we are so interested in getting to know people from all the world) while in the other parties it was just drinking and playing and drinking while playing.

In weeks 9-10, Anna's curve reaches its peak. Such a rise was caused by her trip around California, where she went with her Spanish friends during her spring break. They were travelling through CouchSurfing<sup>70</sup>, which allowed them to get to know a lot of natives and to see the host culture in a new perspective. In her assessment, she revealed:

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<sup>70</sup> CouchSurfing is an online platform through which people can connect with hosts and stay at their home free of charge in different cities all over the world. CouchSurfing connects travellers and organizes events, such as language exchanges, hikes, dinners, in around 200.000 cities worldwide. See the website for more details: <https://www.couchsurfing.com/>

I have made lots of new friends in California – I went there during the Spring Break. We were travelling using CouchSurfing so we met lots of natives. In San Francisco I met for the first time an American that was really critical with America itself – until now all the Americans that I met seemed to live in a paradise, I mean, they were not critical with nothing – I think it would be hard to find a person in Spain that thinks that our country goes well and here as far as I know seems the normal thing to think like this. I really enjoyed the conversation, I learnt a lot.

Upon arrival in Haarlem, Lola found the host culture to be very similar to hers. From the very beginning, she was pleasantly surprised at good city organization and how everything was adapted for bicycles. On the other hand, she noticed that the signs in the streets and the labels on the products in the supermarkets were in Dutch. As there was neither translation to English nor other indications, Lola sometimes considered it inconvenient to move around the city or to identify some foodstuff. Moreover, the shops in Haarlem did not always accept the credit cards issued by Spanish banks: “In many shops you can only pay by credit card that has a chip (special of Holland). And you have to pay mandatorily in cash ...”<sup>71</sup> One more inconvenience was that the local timetable differed significantly from what she got used to in Barcelona. Public institutions shut their doors at 18.00. In one of her comments, she noted: “We have gone to the town library, but I am surprised that they always close at 18.00. Still sometime I find it difficult to understand the European timetable.”<sup>72</sup> All these factors together resulted in her disappointment, which is clearly visible from her graph during weeks 11-12. The curve reaches its lowest point of 2 (bad) at this time (see Figure 57 in Appendix IX). However, this feeling did not last long and in two weeks her assessment already began to improve.

### 5.2.7 Educational system

In the commentaries for this sub-category, the participants often compared their home and host educational systems describing the differences and similarities in terms of

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<sup>71</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “En moltes botigues només pots pagar amb la targeta de crèdit que porta xip (especial d’Holanda). I has de pagar obligatòriament amb efectiu...”

<sup>72</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Hem anat a la biblioteca del poble, però em sobta que tanquin sempre a les 18h. Encara a vegades em costa d’entendre l’horari europeu.”

university facilities, requirements, schedule, curriculum, teaching and studying approaches. Elizabeth, Kira, Maria, Virginia, Ares and Daniel were satisfied with a new educational system in their host countries. Their graphs display minor fluctuations, between 5 (very good) and 4 (good). Lola's, Angela's, and Sara's graphs illustrate noticeable fluctuations, between 1 (very bad) and 4 (good), suggesting that they experienced trouble adjusting to the host educational system. There were also several students (Natalia, Cristina and Anna) who remained neutral regarding this aspect over almost the whole SA. Their graphs do not fluctuate dramatically but rather remain stable. Let us examine the reasons for the fluctuations reflected in the graphs.

For Lola, the turning point here was during weeks 9-10 when she was overwhelmed with school work and final papers (Figure 68 in Appendix IX). The graph illustrates a fall from 3 (neither good nor bad) to 2 (bad). She found a new educational system to be stressful because the university assumed that students would work a lot at home independently. The distribution of workload differed from what she got used to at her home university. As a result, the final project required a lot of commitment, and although she could contact her professors when she had doubts, she felt stressed:

These last few weeks have been very stressful with the final project, as it has brought a lot of work. However, we could contact the teachers in case of doubts. Here the work is concentrated mainly in the last two weeks, as opposed to Pompeu, where it is usually distributed during the last month. All the work you have to do at home and to document on your own. Definitely in the Netherlands they do have the Bologna plan implemented well.<sup>73</sup>

Angela, whose destination was Beijing, found a new educational system very difficult to follow, militaristic, and sometimes even childish. The students were expected to repeat after professors and write until told to stop by the teachers. If they followed all of these steps and did not miss classes, they passed with satisfactory marks:

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<sup>73</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Aquestes últimes setmanes hem anat molt estressats amb el projecte final, ja que ha comportat molta feina. Tot i això, hem pogut contactar amb els professors en cas de dubtes. Aquí la feina es concentra sobretot en les dues últimes setmanes, a diferència de la Pompeu, que en general es reparteix durant l'últim mes. Tota la feina l'has de fer a casa i t'has de documentar pel teu compte. Definitivament a Holanda sí que tenen ben implementat el pla Bolonya."

It's very hard. It seems literally the military service. I don't want to seem disrespectful or lacked of knowledge about it but you can feel the working way of doing from the communism times. We all repeat, we respect our teacher, we all write until the teacher tells us to stop. We don't do more than we have asked for. There is a program and if we follow it step by step -no flexibility, we will pass the course with good marks.

The turning point for Angela was during weeks 9-10 when she felt frustrated with the way people in China studied (see Figure 69 in Appendix IX). In her comments, she bitterly noted that children in China do not have childhood but rather a heavy workload from an early age. At that time, Angela worked in a private school teaching art to small children and was struck by pressure small children faced. She recalled her experience working during one weekend, which was a holiday in China. Angela had to go to work because parents were going to bring their children to study instead of allowing them to enjoy the holiday. The parents thought that working hard would enable their infants to stand out from the rest of the children, to enter university in the future, and find well-paid jobs. According to Angela, when these children enter the university, they all remain immature and inflexible, and care only for the merit system. She felt sorry for the children, and her reaction affected the evaluation of this aspect, which is clearly shown by a dramatic drop from 3 (neither good nor bad) to 1 (very bad).

I hate it. Children do not have childhood. The university is a career of sacrifices and effort without any space for their enjoyment. I am working in a private school and a co-worker has told me that although this weekend is a holiday, some crazy parents will bring their children for training on their days off so that they can find a good job, can enter the university, can stand out from the millions of children growing up the same time. I asked her if her parents also made her to attend as many courses as possible and she said yes. She replied: I had no childhood. What a pity.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Lo odio. Los niños no tienen infancia. La universidad es una carrera de sacrificios y esfuerzo sin espacio para su goce. Trabajo en una escuela privada y una compañera del trabajo me dijo que aunque éste fin de semana sea festivo, algunos padres locos llevarán a sus hijos a formarse en sus días libres para poder encontrar un buen trabajo, poder entrar en la universidad, poder destacar entre los millones de niños que crecen al mismo tiempo. Le pregunté si sus padres también le

Anna was one more student who was disappointed with the host educational system. Her destination was Boston, Massachusetts in the United States. The turning point came for her during weeks 5-6 when she realized that the system was too structured and did not allow students to be flexible (see Figure 70 in Appendix IX). She suggested that, if students in that program had not been provided with guidelines, they would have felt lost. She recognized that, for her, flexibility and independent work were indispensable parts of undergraduate studies, and she learned to appreciate these aspects about her home system.

This is one of the things that have disappointed me. I mean, I thought I was going to feel inferior or that I was going to discover how great an educational system can be, that I am neither feeling inferior, neither feeling that this system is better than ours. I am used to go on my own, I study a lot but I like to organize myself and here I simply cannot do that because everything is guided, you know what you have to do for every single class, it seems good but for me it is not. I feel that if they were left alone they would not know how to organize themselves, and I think this is one thing that you learn while in the university.

At the beginning of her SA, Sara felt impressed by her host university in Australia and the way it functioned. She found her host university curriculum to be very organized and efficient with a wide range of courses available. Students also enjoyed a lot of academic freedom without the obligation to study compulsory courses.

Okay, I really like how it works. Here the education level is higher. To begin with, there are many more subjects to choose from, and more interesting to be honest (at Pompeu [Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, Spain] the majority are a pain in the neck, very very theoretical and very broad. European literature, history of the twentieth century ... etc) Here not, you have subjects such as "The woman of the twentieth century." Classes are not boring at all, the teacher tries to explain the most curious, anecdotal and, of course, fundamental parts of any theme. It is necessary to do more work at home, but there are not so many hours in the classroom (usually only 2 hours per week per subject). I like it more. In

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hacían atender a cuantos más cursos mejor y me dijo que sí. Me respondió: yo no he tenido infancia. Qué pena.”

addition, the classes are more active, there is more participation, and [classes are] also more practical. For example, I have a music class, and we have to listen to music and analyze how it makes us feel, and we do that in the seminar in a very entertaining way. You can also do dance classes (at Pompeu it seems unthinkable), theater, etc. And there are many languages to choose from (I take the Japanese classes!!). There is total freedom in choosing courses you want, no compulsory subjects as at Pompeu. Very cool.<sup>75</sup>

But after some time, Sara reevaluated her situation and decided that the cost did not correspond with the education provided:

Mmm, not bad, of course, but I'm still thinking that if you have to pay the tuition fee (around 30.000 dollars/year), then uni is not that good. For me it's good 'cause I'm here for free, but if I had to pay all this money, I would feel a little bit cheated. The university is huge, all facilities are quite new, everything is clean, the university environment is cool, but the system does not seem so efficient, I don't know how to explain it, I really thought that it would be better, more incredible.

This reassessment resulted in a drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither good nor bad) during weeks 5-6 in her graph for this aspect (see Figure 71 in Appendix IX). Her curve peaked a few weeks later when she evaluated the course agenda as being very clear and efficient again. Soon after this peak, the curve dropped again to 3 (neither good nor bad) and maintained the same level until the end. This neutral assessment can be explained by the fact that at that moment Sara had to combine the job in a pizzeria with her university studies and felt so overwhelmed that she had to drop her Japanese course, which she liked a lot but required serious commitment.

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<sup>75</sup> Original quote in Spanish: Bien, me gusta mucho como funciona. Hay más nivel educativo. Para empezar, hay muchas más materias para elegir, y más interesantes la verdad (en la Pompeu la mayoría son un rollo, muy muy teóricas y muy amplias. En plan: Literatura europea, historia del siglo XX... etc) Aquí no, tienes asignaturas como "la mujer del siglo XX". Las clases no son para nada aburridas, el profesor intenta explicar las partes más curiosas, anecdóticas y por supuesto, fundamentales, del tema que sea. Hay que hacer más trabajo en casa, pero no hay tantas horas en el aula (normalmente solo 2 horas por semana por materia). Me gusta más. Además, las clases son más activas, hay más participación, y son también más prácticas. Por ejemplo, hago una clase de música, y tenemos que escuchar música y analizar cómo nos hace sentir, y eso lo hacemos en el seminario de una forma muy entretenida. También puedes hacer clases de danza (en la Pompeu parece impensable), teatro, etc. Y hay muchas lenguas para elegir (yo hago japonés!!). Hay total libertad para elegir los cursos que quieras, no hay asignaturas obligatorias como en la Pompeu. Muy guay.

### 5.2.8 Classes

In the commentaries for this sub-category, the participants brought up issues related to new teaching approaches and working rhythm in class, requirements for assignment submissions, exams, class composition, relationships with classmates, and collaboration with classmates on projects and presentations. Elizabeth, Kira, Maria, Virginia, and Daniel were satisfied with their classroom experiences. Their graphs show minor fluctuations between 3 (neither good nor bad) and 5 (very good), and their curves ended at the same level or a higher one from where they began, which indicates overall satisfaction with this aspect. Anna, Angela, Cristina, Lola, Ares, Sara and Natalia faced challenges adjusting to a new academic environment, and particularly, the classwork. Their graphs show significant ups and downs varying between 2 (bad) and 5 (very good). Although Cristina did not attend classes at university, in her biweekly assessment she referred to her practices as a medical student in a hospital. Her graph also shows a noticeable change.

Angela, a Humanities major whose destination was Beijing, found it difficult to follow a rapid pace she had to follow in classes: “it is a little bit difficult to follow their pace; it is too fast and sometimes exhausting. We are going to study harder to get used to a way of doing that is completely natural for them, but maybe too strict for us. It is not better or worse, it is just different and we have to get used to it.” During weeks 15-16, she began to feel tired of the intensive working rhythm, which affected her evaluation. Her graph shows a drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) during that period (see Figure 80 in Appendix IX). This feeling, however, did not last long and two weeks later, Angela attributed the highest value 5 (very good) to this aspect explaining that her classes became much more interesting and the atmosphere was more relaxed. She also noted the role of her teacher who did all her best to make her classes amusing and less stressful for foreign students:

Our classes every time become more interesting. As we speak more Chinese, we can create funny phrases and even make jokes. I have noted it these last weeks and told my classmate about this, a Japanese student. She thinks the same. Even, and this is really funny, we have started to use these moments to waste out time

and relax a little bit. Our teacher also commented this – as there are only four of us in class, we can't do what the majority of the students do: to sleep.<sup>76</sup>

Lola, whose destination was Haarlem, found working together with some of her classmates challenging. Their reluctance to fulfill their duties or act in concert with other group members hindered collaboration, which made Lola feel disappointed. Her graph reflects two significant falls during weeks 5-6 and 19-20 when Lola felt mostly affected by her groupmates' attitude (see Figure 79 in Appendix IX). At the end of her SA, to her disappointment was added exhaustion, as some of Lola's teammates decided to leave her work group just before the final paper submission and she was forced to take on extra work:

This last week, just two weeks before the final submission, two Dutch groupmates told us that they were not going to finish all the projects within the deadline. Finally, they decided to separate and leave us, me and another Spanish mate alone. This act seems very egoistic on their part, because they knew that this subject was new for us and we needed their help to succeed.<sup>77</sup>

Natalia, who went to Hong Kong, faced a similar problem as Lola because teamwork with some of her classmates also resulted in disappointment for her. For some projects, she was required to accomplish set objectives jointly with local and other international students. Although Natalia thought she maintained good relationships with her classmates (as evidenced by her comments like "Classmates are nice, I've met a couple of nice people in each of the 4 classes I'm taking" or "I feel like I communicate more with locals and other classmates than other exchange students do"), she found that local students were avoiding collaboration with the exchange students: "Okay, teachers were supportive if I was missing a class. On the other hand, for some projects we had to team

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<sup>76</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Nuestras clases cada vez son más divertidas. Como hablamos un poco más de chino, podemos crear frases divertidas e incluso hacer algunas bromas. Lo he notado ésta semana pasada y se lo comenté a mi compañera de clase, la japonesa. Ella piensa lo mismo. Incluso, and this is really funny, hemos empezado a usar estos momentos para perder tiempo y relajarnos un poco. Nuestra profesora también lo comentó - como sólo somos 4 en clase, no podemos hacer como la mayoría de estudiantes: dormir."

<sup>77</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Aquesta última setmana, a 2 setmanes de l'entrega final, les dues noies holandeses del grup ens van dir que no tenien la intenció d'acabar tots els projectes per la data final. Finalment, ells van decidir separar-se i deixar-nos a mi i a l'altre company espanyol sols al grup. Aquest fet em va semblar molt egoista per la seva part, ja que sabien que aquesta assignatura és nova per nosaltres i que necessitàvem la seva ajuda per tirar-lo endavant."

up and local students didn't want to team up with us exchange in some of the classes. Maybe they think we don't work or something..." Later, she also expressed her disappointment with the class organization in some of the subjects, because of which she was expected to work harder for the final exams:

I am disappointed with the organization of one (and partly other) of the classes, as due to bad organization I will have super busy weeks soon... the end is approaching! I start to be worried about one of the exams, as we did one presentation and it didn't go very good.

The disappointment related to the above mentioned issue accompanied Natalia until her classes finished, which is reflected in her graph (see Figure 78 in Appendix IX). The curve shows a negative trend for almost the entire period she attended her classes. It starts at a neutral point 3 (neither bad nor good) and peaked only once at point 4 (good) at the end of the first month. As can be judged by her comments, this increase was due to the fact that her initial classes were very easy and looked like "more of a vacation than an actual exchange." However, this did not last long and, since weeks 3-4, the curve showed a constant decrease till the end of the stay.

Cristina did not attend classes at the university, as she went to do clinical practice in a hospital in Buenos Aires. When enrolling in the SA programme, she expected to receive intense training and to put new skills into practice. After one month working in the hospital abroad, she felt that her expectations remained unrealized. This disappointment is reflected in her graph by a drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) during weeks 3-4 (see Figure 86 in the Appendix IX). In her comments, she revealed: "The practices disappointed me a bit. Not that I did not feel well received, but my expectations were higher (I thought I could do more)."<sup>78</sup> Two months later, when she began the second block of her practices, she became more engaged in the hospital carrying out visits to some patients and doing other practical work. This experience was encouraging for Cristina because she finally felt that she was acquiring new skills and was doing exactly what she had planned before departure. This positive change is

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<sup>78</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Las prácticas me decepcionaron un poco. No es que no me sintiera bien recibida, pero mis expectativas eran superiores (pensaba que podría hacer más cosas)."

clearly visualised in Cristina's graph during weeks 7-8. The curve reaches its peak at that period and remains steady till the end of the SA. In her comments, she remarked:

The Department of Obstetrics is better organized than Gynaecology; both with regard to students and service. It is the most powerful service, and you are allowed to visit alone postpartum women. It may seem insignificant, but accustomed only to be behind the doctor observing, it is much appreciated. In addition, you learn much more.<sup>79</sup>

For Maria, the other Medicine major, the majority of the subjects she was studying at the host university were not interesting as they were not directly related to her speciality. She was much more interested in taking medicine subjects, but, when enrolling in the exchange programme, she decided not to choose them. The reason for such a decision was that the language of instruction for those subjects was German and Maria felt her language level was still insufficient to study university courses. Instead, she chose biology subjects, whose instructional language was English and with which she felt more confident. Thus from the very beginning, she did not anticipate anything extraordinary from her classes in terms of academic achievements: "Some of the classes I'm taking here don't have much interest for me, so I'm getting quite bored of them. The teachers are good, I think, their explanations are very clear and I don't have problems to follow the class." What she really expected was to get to know better her German classmates and, if possible, to build a friendship and improve her German. However, during her first weeks she bitterly noted: "my classmates are not very sociable, the first days I wanted to know the people, but it's impossible with the classmates I have, so I desisted." Things started improving when Natalia began to attend her German course. In her Narrative table, she commented that the only subject she was interested in and liked was the German language. She felt these classes contributed a lot to her language improvement, which was one of the determining motives for going abroad. She also managed to build a friendship with some of her classmates, though they were not host nationals:

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<sup>79</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "El servicio de Obstetricia está mejor organizado que el de Ginecología; tanto de cara a los estudiantes como servicio. Es un servicio más potente, y te dejan visitar a ti sola a las puérperas. Puede parecer poca cosa, pero acostumbrada a solo estar detrás del médico mirando se agradece mucho. A parte, que aprendes mucho más."

I still have the same problem for classes. I'm not very interested in the subjects I'm studying. And I definitely desisted to make friends in class. Except for my German classes! I like the classes, I learn a lot, and I'm making new friends there. However, they are not German, of course.

If we look at Maria's graph, this improvement is clearly seen during weeks 5-6 when the curve shows an increase from 3 (neither bad nor good) to 4 (good) and then maintains the same level over the whole stay abroad (see Figure 85 in Appendix IX).

Anna, a Humanities major, expressed her dissatisfaction with the teaching approach her professors used in classes at Boston College. According to her point of view, the classes lacked more explanations on assigned readings on the part of teachers. She even suggested that professors from her home institution used a better methodology in their classes:

I do not really like how teachers teach here. I mean, as there are lots of things to read for each class they rely on that and they do not really explain. And for me of course it is important to read, I also read a lot in UPF, but I also like when a teacher really explains why this happens. Because I have the feeling that here you can read Kant one week and Hegel next week and read their complete works but you will not know how to go from one to another, what happened in society to go from one point to the other, because teachers just comment the text – at least in my classes, except one I have to say but he is not really explaining either – so I do not feel teachers here are better than there, especially in my degree I now really think that I had professors in UPF much more better than here.

Anna, however, admitted that her evaluation might be affected by very high expectations she held before departure regarding her host university. She arrived at the conclusion that a lot of her co-nationals held prejudices and sometimes deify the American educational system:

Maybe it is because I expected so much and from there people 'venerate' the American system (without having been here I think) that now it is like ok, it is normal or, in fact, for me it does not worth paying the great amount of money that they pay for this education.

Anna's disappointment is reflected in her graph by a drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) during weeks 3-4 (see Figure 81 in Appendix IX). The curve maintains the same level for some time before increasing during weeks 9-10. In her comments, Anna explained this positive change by the fact that she began to study a new subject and felt her new teacher's enthusiasm for the subject and the class was very similar to what she had gotten used to in UPF:

Classes are not bad but I expected much more level. Teachers are not really teachers. They comment the subject matters - not teach them. I have to say, though, that they are nice and accessible. My Northern Renaissance Art teacher really loves the subject matter and he transmits it to us - it is a lecture class, the most similar to our system.

Similar to Anna, Sara also held high expectations regarding her host university and classes. During her first weeks abroad, she admitted that the course topics were well-organized, efficient and divided by weeks, which facilitated learning. The content was clear and interesting. If we look at Sara's graph for the sub-category "Classes", this positive evaluation is seen during weeks 3-4 (see Figure 82 in Appendix IX). However, two weeks later, the curve showed a decrease from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good). This decrease may be caused by the gap between her expectations and the reality. In her biweekly assessment, she arrived at the conclusion that the university tuition fees were too high even for such well-organized classes. Besides, they were too easy and did not require much commitment:

What I do think seems better is that here the agenda is divided by week, much more organized, and moreover the agenda given in the classroom is much more efficient, more forceful. In Spain we divagate a lot and have very silly classes, here not. The content is always interesting, clear and focused. You learn more. But I do not know, for the price difference, it does not seem so spectacular. The classes are too easy to get good marks"<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Lo que sí me parece mucho mejor es que aquí el temario se divide por semana, mucho más ordenado, y además el temario que se da en la clase es mucho más eficiente, más contundente. En España divagamos mucho y tenemos clases muy tontas, aquí no. El contenido es siempre interesante, claro y van al grano. Se aprende más. Pero no sé, por la diferencia de precio, pues no me parece tan espectacular. Las asignaturas son muy fáciles de sacar buena nota."

Two weeks later, the curve showed an increase. In her comments, she wrote that this positive change was due to her philosophy and music classes that she enjoyed a lot. In other classes, Sara felt distance between herself and her teachers, but she managed to establish a close relationship with the philosophy teacher. At the end of the SA, she took a neutral position again about her classes, and her curve maintained at the same level for the remainder of her sojourn.

### 5.2.9 Foreign language for academic purposes

In their comments for this sub-category, the participants brought up issues related to the foreign language used for academic purposes, such as giving presentations in a foreign language, understanding lecturers, completing writing assignments, and participating in classroom debates. Elizabeth, Maria, Virginia, and Kira did not experience much trouble with this aspect. Their graphs reveal smooth curves or curves with minor fluctuations between 5 (very good) and 4 (good). Natalia's and Cristina's graphs also show overall positive trends although the curves show more intense fluctuations varying from 3 (neither bad nor good) to 5 (very good). Daniel, Sara, Anna, Angela, and Lola experienced difficulties with this aspect as reflected in their graphs. Their curves show significant ups and downs fluctuating between 5 (very good) and 1 (very bad). Below I will describe the reasons the participants gave in their narratives for ups and downs in their curves.

Natalia, a Communication major who departed for Hong Kong, felt she was not improving her English as her classmates and sometimes teachers had a lower level: "English is super key; I use it all the time. English is also the language for academic purposes, although some professors cannot speak it perfectly. Sometimes I feel like I am not improving it." This feeling affected her evaluation during weeks 5-6 when the curve fell from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) maintaining the same level for more than two months (see Figure 89 in Appendix IX). During this period, Natalia had to accomplish tasks and give oral presentations in English and found out that she was not as confident in English as she expected. She, however, felt much more self-assured in the end of her SA and surprised at how her level had improved upon completion of all her exams and final projects. Her satisfaction is reflected in the graph by a rise during

weeks 15-16: “I feel like I can develop my thoughts pretty well in English, I was gladly surprised about myself in the final projects and exams.”

Lola, the other Communication major whose host destination was Haarlem, found completing some class activities challenging as a high English level was demanded of her. She particularly had trouble when fulfilling writing tasks. The first weeks turned out to be stressful and made her feel exhausted: “The truth is that I have been overwhelmed during the first week due to the university, more than anything else at the time of writing and being able to keep up with the level that was required.”<sup>81</sup> Giving oral presentations was not easy either. Nerves and constant fatigue had an impact on her biweekly assessment during weeks 5-6 (see Figure 90 in Appendix IX). At that time, the graph shows the curve declining from 3 (neither good nor bad) to 2 (bad). Gradually she got used to the pace in class and the language requirements, which can be seen in comments like “English is improving little by little, I have planned to work every day and so not to overwhelm myself during the last week”<sup>82</sup> or “English is improving although I often use the translator to check a word or a grammatical doubt”<sup>83</sup>. This explains a constant rise in her graph during weeks 7-12. When Lola submitted her final paper, which consisted of twenty pages written completely in English, she felt particularly proud of herself. At this time, the curve reaches its highest point 4 (good) during weeks 11-12, which demonstrates how important her improvement was for her. In her comments, she revealed: “Although at first it was difficult for me to change the chip, then after writing 20 pages I found it easier.”<sup>84</sup> After having begun a new block of courses, Lola again felt stressed as one of her new teachers spoke English fluently and she often did not understand him. Moreover, she was required to read articles in English, and sometimes it implied substantial work on academic vocabulary. She, however, quickly adjusted to new requirements. If we look at Lola’s overall graph for this sub-category, it shows a positive trend. Although the curve fluctuates significantly,

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<sup>81</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “La veritat és que m’he agobiat una mica aquesta primera setmana pel que fa a la universitat, més que res a l’hora d’escriure i poder estar al nivell que demanen.”

<sup>82</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “L’anglès va millorant mica en mica, m’he planificat per anar fent feina cada dia i així no agobiar-me l’última setmana.”

<sup>83</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “L’anglès va millorant encara que sovint haig d’utilitzar el traductor per comprovar alguna paraula o dubte gramatical.”

<sup>84</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Encara que al principi em va costar canviar el xip, després d’escriure 20 pàgines ja m’era més fàcil.”

the final weeks show a higher evaluation than the first weeks, which indicates her satisfaction with this aspect.

Before departing for Los Angeles, Daniel, a Political Science major, considered his English level to be high, and did not anticipate any problems with this aspect. He, however, found it difficult to participate in classroom debates at his host university. Every time he wanted to express his point of view on a discussion topic, he felt unable to develop his ideas properly. Despite understanding perfectly his lecturers and classmates, his lack of vocabulary often made him refrain from taking part in classroom discussions. The disappointment with his linguistic abilities resulted in a drop from 5 (very good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) during weeks 3-4 (see Figure 99 in Appendix IX). In his assessment, he revealed: "I have got no problems of understanding. Speaking properly, however, is more difficult: for example, I wanted to participate in a debate about the Vietnam War and I finally didn't do it because I thought I couldn't say what I wanted to say." Daniel continued to attribute a neutral value until the end of his stay explaining that he did not dare to take part in classroom debates: "Perfectly understood what was taught in class, even jokes but I did not dare to speak in public to participate."

Virginia, the other Political Science major who went to Quebec, experienced difficulties understanding the Quebecois accent in the initial period. She, however, considered it as an obstacle which she was eager to overcome. In her comments, she noted: "Quebecois accent is very difficult to understand in class, but it is an extra challenge and it motivates me." Besides the accent, she found writing in French also challenging. She had to invest extra time to correct her French in handouts and still preferred submitting her tasks in English when it was allowed. It took her one month to adjust to a specific French pronunciation and to improve her French to the point she began to feel more confident. Her graph shows a rise from 3 (neither bad nor good) to 4 (good) during weeks 5-6 (see Figure 98 in Appendix IX). That is when she felt the improvement: "Slow but constant improvement and thus more comfortable than at the beginning." The curve remains at point 4 until the end of the sojourn.

Similar to Lola, Sara, a Humanities major who departed for Sydney, had difficulties writing essays and completing other writing tasks. When it came to reading, she lacked vocabulary and spent a lot of time translating. In classes, she did not understand what

the lecturers were talking about. All these factors made her feel frustrated in the beginning, which is clearly visible in her graph (see Figure 93 in Appendix IX). The curve starts at point 2 (bad) maintaining the same level for about one month. In her assessment, she notes:

Now I understand almost everything what the professors say but I am a little bit “crushed” because for the next week I have to write an essay in philosophy of about four pages and my English is still regular for writing about philosophy. I feel very childish when writing, I know that I make mistakes and I get frustrated!! I have been reading about twenty pages in English for one week and I don’t understand what it is about, so imagine writing.<sup>85</sup>

During weeks 7-8, Sara’s graph shows an impressive rise from 2 (bad) to 4 (good). The reason for such a change is that she managed to write an essay of seven pages in English and the final mark surprised her. Although she still did not understand everything in classes and did not dare to take part in classroom discussions, she admitted that her English was steadily improving: “I start understanding the professors much better, not everything but more or less almost everything. Still I don’t dare to intervene a lot in class. But I am content because today I have handed in a 7 pages essay in philosophy and it has gone better than I expected. With quite good English.”<sup>86</sup> From then on, Sara always attributed 4 (good) to this aspect commenting in her biweekly assessments that her language abilities were improving.

Anna, the other Humanities major who departed for Boston, felt her speaking was her weakest point. In classes, she was required to actively participate in discussions. Similar to Daniel, she could not express herself freely, lacked more vocabulary and had difficulty using proper grammatical structure: “This is what is the most difficult for me. Here we must intervene a lot in class and I notice that in many subjects I have more

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<sup>85</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Ahora entiendo casi todo lo que dicen los profes pero estoy un poco “rallada” porque para la semana que viene tengo que hacer un ensayo de filosofía de unas cuatro páginas y mi inglés ya es regular como para encima escribir filosofía. Me siento muy infantil cuando escribo, sé que hago muchas faltas y me frustró!! Llevo una semana leyendo unas veinte páginas en inglés sobre filosofía y no me entero de lo que dice, así que imagínate para escribir.”

<sup>86</sup> Original quote in English: “Empiezo a entender mucho mejor a los profes, no todo pero más o menos casi todo. Aun no me atrevo a intervenir mucho en clase. Pero estoy contenta porque hoy he entregado 7 páginas de redacción de filosofía y me ha salido mucho mejor de lo que esperaba!! Con bastante buen inglés.”

base than natives but I can't express myself or I can't intervene at the right moment, I find it difficult to think it over and as these are quick questions I am always caught unprepared.”<sup>87</sup> This explains her negative evaluation of this aspect during her first two weeks. She attributed 2 (bad) as can be seen in her graph (see Figure 92 in Appendix IX). However, she made an effort and completed many written tasks for her classes, which made her feel much more confident with her speaking ability. Within one month, she improved her assessment from 2 (bad) to 4 (good) explaining that she felt more comfortable with the language, even when writing essays. Furthermore, she recalled a positive experience in which she received help from the university study center with academic writing. There she was matched with a native student-tutor who helped correct her essay in terms of coherence and grammar. Her confidence increased due to the encouraging feedback from this student-tutor:

And I had to deliver a paper on Tuesday. The professor had specially point out that it had to be well written ('being an international student is not an excuse') and that it would affect the total grade. I was well aware of this so I wrote it really carefully. In the library there is a center named 'Family Connors Learning Center' where you can go and get your paper corrected in terms of writing. You are paired with an English Major student that helps you with the text. They do not do the work for you – I want to make it clear, they just correct it in terms of proper grammatical structure or the whole structure of the text. So I went there on Monday. It went really well. I was with a girl and we commented each paragraph we worked on the idea of each paragraph and how it was linked to the next one. She explained me things about English writing. She said me that she could notice I was European because of my vocabulary and the way I used words (I cannot explain why exactly, it is what she said - she also said to me that I was really poetic in my writing). I did not have to make big changes it was really useful to me to comment my text with her and I felt more confident about it after it.

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<sup>87</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “és el que més m'està costant. Aquí s'ha d'intervenir molt a classe i em noto que en moltes matèries tinc més base que els nadius però que no ho puc expressar o no puc intervenir en el moment, em costa més pensar-ho i com són preguntes ràpides m'agafen desprevinguda.”

Angela, also a Humanities student who went to Beijing, started with a very basic level of Chinese. Of all the participants, her graph is the one with a prominent negative trend fluctuating between 1 (very bad) and 2 (bad) (see Figure 91 in Appendix IX). Her initial classes focused on learning basic expressions for daily life and also elementary Chinese character writing. However, outside of the classroom, she used Chinese only for random communication with waiters. In the streets of Beijing, she could understand the signs and advertisements, but she still felt her language level was quite basic and her assessment never exceeded 2 (bad) for this aspect: “I only use it for communicating with the waiters, my classmates and my teachers. I realized that I observe much more when I walk along the street and I understand many more things (still very few, but more than before). I do not know if I will continue studying. We'll see. Maybe not.”<sup>88</sup>

#### 5.2.10 Academic support for administrative issues

As for academic support for administrative issues, the students brought up issues related to the process of enrollment upon arrival in the host country, paperwork procedures for documents, the host university's welcome events, and their instructors or assistants who were assigned to them in order to resolve their doubts in the academic sphere. Elizabeth, Maria, Virginia, Daniel, Sara, and Natalia were satisfied with the service they received from administrative staff at their host universities. They mostly assessed this aspect at the beginning and the end of the SA when they needed paperwork or other tasks completed for them by the administrative staff members. In the intermediary time, they evaluated this aspect as 4 (good) or 3 (neither good nor bad) because they did not need this support at the time. For these students, their graphs show minor fluctuations varying from 3 (neither good nor bad) to 5 (very good). Cristina's, Lola's, Angela's, Anna's and Kira's graphs show more variation. Let us examine the reasons the participants gave in their narratives for those ups and downs in their graphs.

Initially, Cristina had problems with enrolling in the program. She felt desperate because the staff sent her from one place to another without offering substantial solutions. She found her medical practices to be chaotic. She was responsible for asking

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<sup>88</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Sólo lo uso para comunicarme con los camareros, mis compañeros de clase y mis profesoras. Me he dado cuenta que me fijó mucho más cuando voy por la calle y entiendo muchas más cosas (aún muy pocas, pero más que antes). No sé si voy a seguir estudiándolo. Ya veremos. Quizás no.”

where to go and what to do and worked without a fixed timetable. Even after one month, she was still in the process of enrolling and had to make at least three visits to obtain her student card. Her frustration is visible from her graph during weeks 1-2 when she attributed 1 (very bad) to this aspect (see Figure 108 in Appendix IX). Then the graph displays a spike in her curve when she reassessed this aspect as 5 (very good) during weeks 7-8. In her comments, she wrote she was very happy with the coordinator of her practices, who helped Cristina organize her rotation in the hospital and attend a conference for obstetrics and gynecology: “I am very happy with my internship coordinator. She has been concerned so that I could go to Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and has organized everything so that I could make my last rotation in the service of Neonatology, the truth is that the rotation could not be better organized.”<sup>89</sup>

From weeks 7-8, Cristina’s graph shows a steady decline until it reaches 2 (bad). In her comments, she explained that all paperwork procedures for documents such as visas normally took a lot of time and effort, which stressed her.

Unlike Cristina’s experience, Lola was very happy with the administrative services of her host university because the secretaries were efficient and approachable. This explains her high evaluation of 5 (very good) during weeks 1-2 (see Figure 101 in Appendix IX). For those periods when she did not need any administrative assistance, she ranked this aspect at 3 (neither bad nor good). Two peaks during weeks 7-8 and 11-12 were due to satisfactory service on the part of the international office staff who answered her questions related to residency payments and the schedule of the night bus: “This week I went to consult with one of the girls from the international office about the residence payment. She told me not to worry, that we would call together and she would clarify it for me. I am really reassured that they are there to give us a helping hand.”<sup>90</sup>

At the beginning, Angela was satisfied with the administrative procedures. Although they did not speak English, she always found Asian students who could translate her

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<sup>89</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Estoy muy contenta con la coordinadora de mis prácticas. Ella se ha preocupado para que pudiera ir al congreso de Obstetricia y Ginecología, y me ha organizado todo para poder hacer mi última rotación en el servicio de Neonatología, la verdad es que no podía estar mejor organizada la rotación.”

<sup>90</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Aquesta setmana vaig anar a fer una consulta sobre el pagament de la residència a una de les noies de l’oficina internacional i em va dir que no em preocupés, que hi trucaríem juntes i ho aclariria. Realment em reconforta saber que elles hi són per donar-nos un cop de mà.”

questions and help her resolve issues. In general, she characterized the administrative staff of the host university as being very approachable and helpful with documents such as transcripts and other certificates. She also reported that group activities and other events for international students were well-organized. She therefore attributed 4 (good) to this aspect until weeks 11-12 (see Figure 102 in Appendix IX). In weeks 11-12, her curve drops from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) maintaining the same level until weeks 15-16. In her comments, Angela explained her assessment by the fact that the staff of the mobility office did not do their work properly and often shifted their duties to professors. The professors in turn had to take on their job of informing and resolving all the doubts that exchange students had:

Lucky with teachers. They are in charge of everything, of all doubts we have. In the office of international students, it is normal to find employees sleeping, playing computer games or chatting on the mobile. From the very beginning we were notified and were the same professors who informed all of us. Now, they are a little bit tired of doing the work of others and, although they still help us, they do it groaning towards others.<sup>91</sup>

Anna found the administrative staff at Boston College to be approachable and supportive. What she especially highlighted as helpful was assigning an international assistant (IA) to every exchange student. The IA helped the student resolve his or her doubts. In Anna's case, it was an American girl who had been assigned to her before she arrived in Boston. Her IA helped Anna settle her queries about academic aspects of her SA programme, and also about basic needs she might have living abroad. Anna therefore felt taken care of during the whole her sojourn:

All international students are matched with a native American (not always native but at least a full year student at BC) that becomes our IA (International Assistance). We met them the second week of classes I think and they divided us in groups so each group would have 10-15 internationals with 10-15 IAs. I

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<sup>91</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Suerte de los profesores. Ellos se encargan de todo, de todas las dudas que tengamos. En la oficina de los estudiantes internacionales, es normal encontrarte los empleados durmiendo, jugando al ordenador o chateando con el móvil. Al principio nos avisaron y fueron los mismos profesores quienes nos informaban de todo. Ahora, ellos mismos están un poco cansados de hacer el trabajo de los otros y, aunque nos ayudan igualmente, lo hacen con quejas hacia los demás."

already talked with my IA when I was in Barcelona, she sent me an email introducing herself and I did the same. They are our IA not only for academic purposes but for everything, I mean, for example, when she sent me that email she said that I could ask her whatever I wanted or needed – so I ask her where could I buy my winter clothes once there because I didn't have a proper coat either boots, and she replied with a list of shops where I could find them – and I actually did.

In weeks 13-14, Anna's graph hits its peak reasoned by a tutorial with her music professor where she received very positive feedback on her essay (see Figure 103 in Appendix IX). She felt so excited that she decided to attribute the highest value to the sub-category "Academic support for administrative issues", albeit this experience was not directly related to the administrative staff members and their functions. Two weeks later, she already assessed this aspect neutrally. By that time, she had arranged all papers and did not need any support on the part of the administrative staff.

Kira characterized the administrative staff members at Amsterdam University College as cooperative and responsive to the exchange students' needs. However, the enrollment and paperwork procedures were exacerbated by bureaucratic delays, which resulted in a drop from 4 (good) to 3 (neither bad nor good) in her graph during weeks 3-4. In her assessment, she noted: "They have a good crew that is constantly in contact with you, professional and personal. Although bureaucracy is so horrible." After she brought her enrollment in order, her assessment began to improve. In weeks 9-10, her curve reaches its highest point maintaining the same level until the end of the SA, suggesting that Kira was satisfied with this aspect (see Figure 106 in Appendix IX).

### **5.3 The case of Ares**

As describing in depth all the explanations provided by each of the twelve participants was beyond the scope of this thesis, I decided to focus on one student (Ares) and analyze her graphs as regards all sub-categories within the Personal and Academic Issues. Upon the basis of Ares's narratives, which she had provided every two weeks while abroad, I attempt here to describe in greater detail reasons and factors that might have influenced fluctuations depicted in her graphs. It is not an accident that I chose

Ares, as her graphs for the two broad categories revealed two different trends (see Section 5.1.2), which indicates that these two aspects of her life abroad followed a completely different development.

Ares, a 20-year-old female student, was in her third academic year majoring in Advertising and Public Relations in the Faculty of Communication. She was from a small town in the outskirts of Barcelona, where she had attended public primary and secondary schools and where she was still living with her parents and siblings. Since birth, she was exposed to two languages, Catalan and Spanish both at home and at school, and was fully bilingual. Before entering the university, she began to learn English as a foreign language. Determined to improve it, she had attended several courses of two or three weeks' duration in Great Britain when she was between sixteen and eighteen years old. Beside these courses, she had also travelled around Europe and had even spent around two weeks in a work camp in France. Her total previous experience abroad did not amount to more than three months.

After starting studies at UPF, she began to interact with other Erasmus exchange students taking part in language tandems, tours and cultural activities through the Language Volunteering programme (i.e. *Voluntariat Lingüístic*). Then one day, she decided to become an exchange student herself. In her Profile Questionnaire, she wrote that English language improvement and academic opportunities were primary motives for participating in the ERASMUS programme. She decided to go to the Netherlands to study at the University of Applied Sciences in Groningen. There she could do all courses in English and also study Communication subjects that were not offered in her home university. Her main concerns before departure were related mainly to academic issues such as whether she would like the courses she was going to attend, the professors, and the new educational system. Personal growth, which she described as the ability to be more self-sufficient and more independent from her parents, was also a determining motive for going abroad.

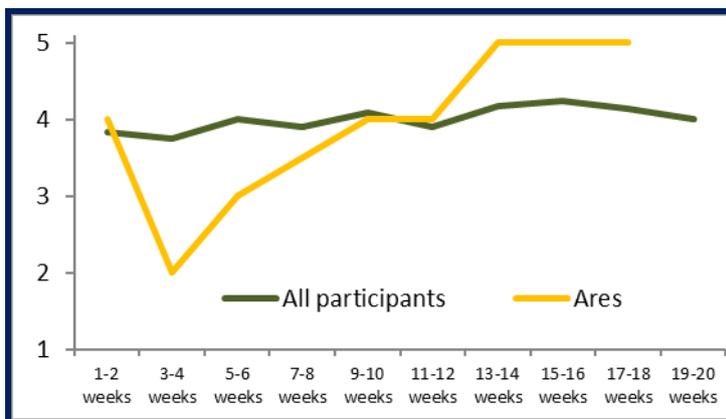
Having already been to the Netherlands for one week, Ares did not anticipate any social difficulties. She was planning to spend her leisure time doing sports, riding a bike and going sightseeing. As for meeting people and making friends, she was planning to socialize mainly with other students from her host university and the residence hall.

Despite having learned Dutch previously (the level mentioned during her pre-departure interview was between B1 and B2 according to the CEFR), Ares knew that English would be her primary language of interaction in Groningen and expected communication to be easy.

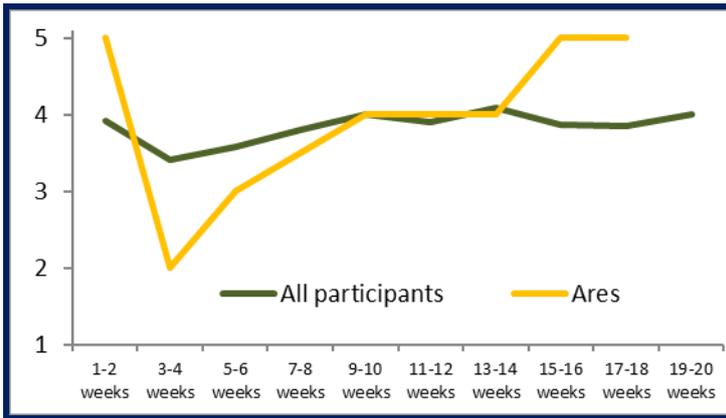
### 5.3.1 Ares's personal life abroad

In this section, I will present the graphs built for Ares' Personal Issues sub-categories and will provide an in-depth analysis of all falls and rises based on the narratives she wrote when doing her biweekly assessment while abroad.

If we look at Ares's graphs below (Figures 29 – 34), we can see that not all of them reveal a learning curve trend as is shown in her overall adaptation graph (see Figure 23 in Section 5.1.2). Two sub-categories "Relations with co-nationals" and "Relations with host nationals" demonstrate the clearest examples of a U-curve trend (Figures 29 and 30).

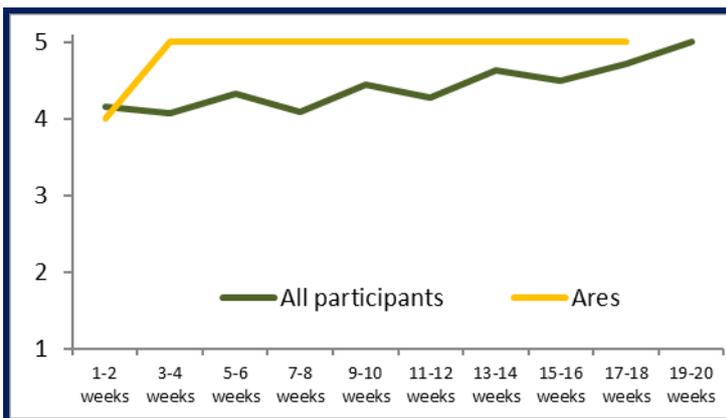


**Figure 29. Ares's graph for the sub-category "Relationships with co-nationals"**

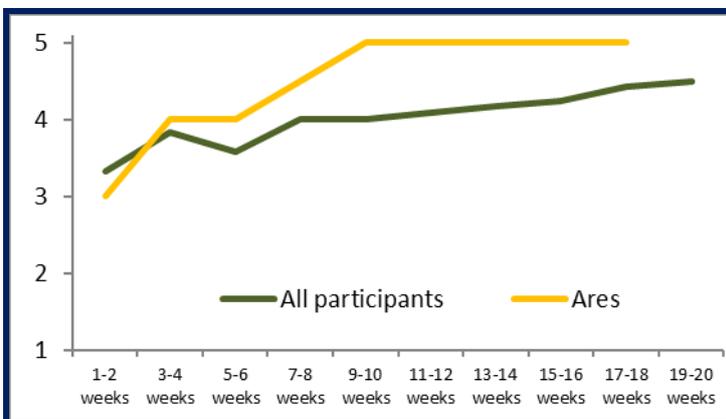


**Figure 30. Ares's graph for the sub-category "Relationships with host nationals"**

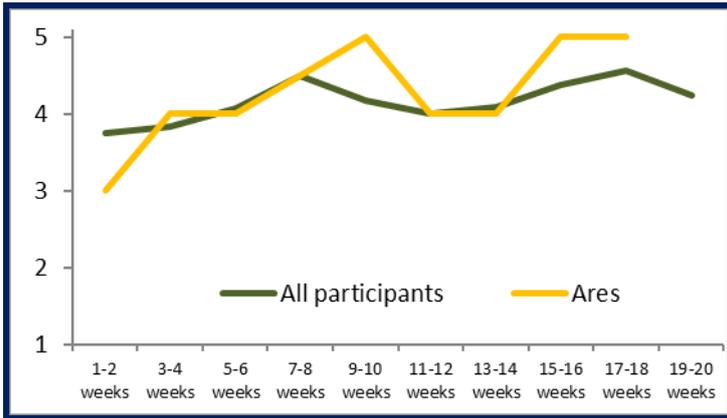
Meanwhile, the graphs for the rest four sub-categories "Relationships with friends from other nationalities", "Foreign language for social interaction", "Daily life" and "Culture, custom and habits" resemble a learning-curve trend (Figures 31-34).



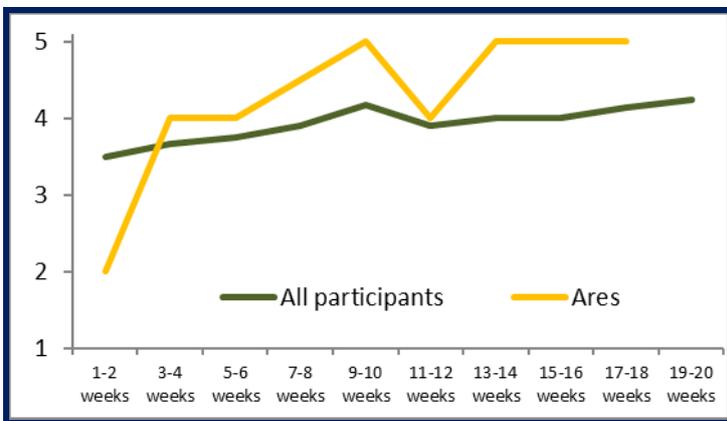
**Figure 31. Ares's graph for the sub-category "Relationships with friends from other nationalities"**



**Figure 32. Ares's graph for the sub-category "Foreign language for social interaction"**



**Figure 33. Ares's graph for the sub-category "Daily life"**



**Figure 34. Ares's graph for the sub-category "Culture, custom and habits of the host country"**

Besides these two visible tendencies (i.e. the learning curve and the U-shaped curve), these graphs illustrate the ups and downs of various degrees of intensity indicating that Ares experienced some drastic changes for some aspects and minor changes for others. Let us examine possible reasons for such fluctuations based on her comments.

As regards to the relationships with co-nationals, they were far from good in the initial period. Ares was glad that she came to her host country accompanied by one student from her home university. Although she had not been much acquainted with that girl at home, she admitted that having someone who spoke the same language and with whom she could share problems and feelings made her feel less lonely and not so lost in a new environment. This fact explains the high value given to this aspect at the beginning of her sojourn (Figure 29). Having settled in the residence hall, she found herself surrounded by Spanish students, but she also wanted to meet new friends from other cultures as it was "one of the vital and indispensable aims of coming to Groningen" for

her. However, her co-nationals who had already managed to form their own groups did not accept her eagerness to spend time and communicate with other Erasmus students. Ares was bitterly disappointed, which is reflected in the graph by a considerable drop from 4 (good) to 2 (bad) in the end of the first month:

The relationship with Spanish people here in Groningen is quite difficult maybe. As I live in a student house which is full of Spanish people, they've already made a group, and I am supposed to be included. The problem is that I also have friends from outside, and I prefer to spend my time with them, instead of with Spanish people. Some of them understand it but some don't. So, it is a problem for me that Spanish people stick together and are afraid to interact with foreign people.

She, however, made a decision to communicate with those Spanish students who did not insist on her inclusion in their group. After one month, she created her own group of three friends and admitted: "Relationship with Spanish is good. I have 3 good friends, two of them are Catalan and one is Galician. It's good to have people from your own country to talk about your feelings and compare them in this stage". Since then, the graph shows a constant increase and reaches a peak between weeks 13 and 14 keeping the same trend till the end of the SA.

The relationships with host nationals were less smooth than Ares desired. Figure 30 depicts the curve that starts at the highest point in the first two weeks and falls dramatically two weeks later. This fall might have been provoked by her disappointment at the lack of support and understanding on the part of her groupmates, who were the only host nationals she knew at that point and spent most of her time with in the university. In the beginning, Ares commented: "Our welcome has been so nice! Both professors and Dutch students have been really kind to me, showing patience and empathy." This explains the high value given to this aspect at the beginning. However, after having worked with Dutch students on several projects, Ares noted that the relationship with her teammates was not what she had expected:

I expected that my classmates would be more emphatic, more comprehensible with exchange students. Our relationship it's not a friendship but working together in a group. I have mixed feeling about them, because sometimes I feel they

recognize my work and are kind to me, but sometimes I just feel that I have no credibility for them, and this makes me feel really frustrated. I don't really feel that they are supporting me, and as it is a group of 7 people, exchange students are like on a second place. Maybe it is difficult to manage a group of 7 people but I think they don't let us express ourselves with freedom and comprehension.

Having redefined her expectations and gradually adjusted to a new way of working in the group, her emotions began to improve in the middle of the second month, which is plainly visible from the graph (Figure 30). During the 5-6 weeks Ares commented: "Sometimes I don't understand them and their behavior, but I've learnt how to deal with them, and not to be affected by some comments that they say." Since then, the curve shows a steady increase, reaches point 4 and levels off for a certain period. During the 15-16 weeks, the curve reaches its highest point keeping the same trend till the end. The reason for this rise may lie in several study trips organized by host university professors, which positively affected her relationship with her classmates. In her comments, she particularly highlighted the trip to Germany where she took part in Model United Nations (MUN). One of her tasks was to represent a country and to defend its interests. This project allowed her to establish closer relationships with her classmates who had supported her in all necessary respects. After returning from the trip, she noted: "My teammates were very happy that I went to the MUN and supported me. I have a good relation with them". From then on, she maintained a positive attitude toward her interactions with her classmates.

As for the Relationships with friends from other nationalities, the graph illustrates probably the most positive development (Figure 31). After having spent her first two weeks abroad, Ares attributed a "4" (that is, a good evaluation) to this aspect noting that the only thing that impeded her communication with other international students at that moment was the language gap that sometimes made her feel unconfident. Nevertheless, she continued to attend all possible meetings and parties organized by her host university Mobility Office and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) so as to get to know other Erasmus participants. Two weeks later, she remarked: "Getting better. I have had the opportunity to meet new people during the last weeks and my confidence increased. So I don't have problems when talking in English anymore." Since then, Ares

began to attribute the highest values to this aspect throughout the whole sojourn, which is visible in the graph. The curve reaches its highest point in the end of the first month and remains unchanged till the end of the SA.

Undoubtedly, Ares's relationships with other exchange students were inextricably linked to her English proficiency. It is not coincidental that the curve for the sub-category "Foreign language for social interaction" represents a relatively similar trend. (Figure 32). Using English as a lingua franca with other Erasmus students, she realized that it was not always easy for her to express exactly what she wanted and often felt that other students had a higher language level. Lack of confidence made her feel timid and sometimes even refrain from engaging in dialogues for fear of not being understood. That was something that she did not anticipate. In her initial self-assessment, she attributed 3 (neither good nor bad) to this aspect, which explains this uncertainty (Figure 32). However, she continued attending all events where she could meet people from other cultures. Already in two weeks, she remarked: "Getting better. Although is more difficult than I had expected." The graph shows this improvement in an increase from 3 to 4 in the end of the first month. After having participated in several study trips where she had to give presentations and to engage in debates, Ares admitted that this experience had contributed to improving her English speaking skills. She again particularly highlighted MUN that had taken place in Germany: "After the MUN I have improved my English speaking so I feel totally comfortable talking with people in an informal context." Her involvement in MUN explains a significant rise during the 9-10 weeks. From then on, the curve remains stable till the end of the SA.

The two last sub-categories "Daily life" and "Culture, custom, and habits" also resemble each other. The curves begin at 2 (bad) and 3 (neither good nor bad) moving in an upward direction with fluctuations until they reach the highest point and then stabilize (Figures 33 and 34).

In the initial period, Ares's daily life was affected by the weather, which made her sometimes feel sad or even frustrated because it was completely different from what she was used to in Barcelona. Her first impression of the residence hall where she had to stay was not encouraging either. Intended for three hundred students, the residence gave the impression of living in "a huge hotel with huge showers, huge kitchen and huge

room.” It was also difficult for her to get used to the idea of sharing these premises with a large number of students. Although she was surrounded by many people, Ares felt lost and alone, a feeling that the repetition of the word “huge” in the quotes above communicates. This state of confusion is clearly visible from the graph (Figure 33) in which the curve for daily life begins at 3 (neither good nor bad). Two months later, she remarked: “Once I knew my neighbors and made friends, everything changed. But it took me almost two months to get used to this kind of living, sharing and being alone although I was surrounded by 300 people.” Since then, the graph shows a gradual increase until weeks 11-12 when there is a slight drop. The reason for this could be due to Ares’ disappointment with unsatisfactory service she received in a shop where she brought her bike to repair after having punctured a tire. As her host destination was the Netherlands, where bikes are an essential form of transportation, Ares became heavily dependent on her bike throughout the whole sojourn. It is not surprising that this accident affected her assessment, as her lack of a bike subsequently caused some trouble to her.

As regards to the sub-category “Culture, custom and habits from the host country”, the only issue mentioned by Ares was the new timetable that all institutions followed. In the initial period, Ares was quite confused by the fact that all bars, coffee shops and supermarkets in Groningen closed much earlier than in Barcelona. For her, this change of schedule implied changing lifestyle habits she had got used to. This fact explains the negative value given to this aspect in the beginning (Figure 34).

It is a bit difficult to cope with the timetables, basically. I used to have lunch and dinners much later at home. And I cannot keep with Spanish schedule because here everything is adapted, so it means that shops, bars, cafeterias close at 6, for instance.

However, this frustration did not last too long. By the end of the first month, Ares already felt quite adapted to her new lifestyle, which is shown by a rapid rise from 2 to 4 in her graph (Figure 34). A slight fall during weeks 11-12 seems to be directly related to the accident with the bike described above, as can be judged by the comments.

### 5.3.2 Ares's academic life abroad

In this section, I will present the graphs constructed for Ares's Academic Issues sub-categories and will examine possible reasons for fluctuations depicted in these graphs.

As can be seen from Ares's graphs below (Figures 35–38), all the single sub-categories confirm the overall U-curve trend for the broad category "Academic Issues" (see Figure 24 in Section 5.1.2), though with some variation. All the curves start at high points 4 (good) or 5 (very good), decrease by the end of the first month, and then gradually increase and remain positively stable until the end of the SA.

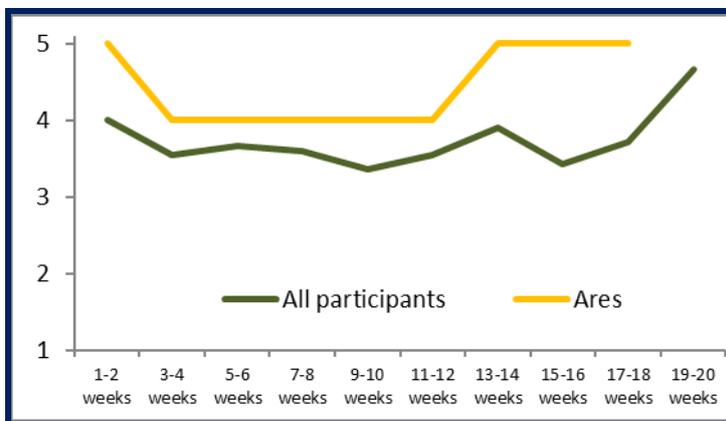


Figure 35. Ares's graph for the sub-category "Educational system"

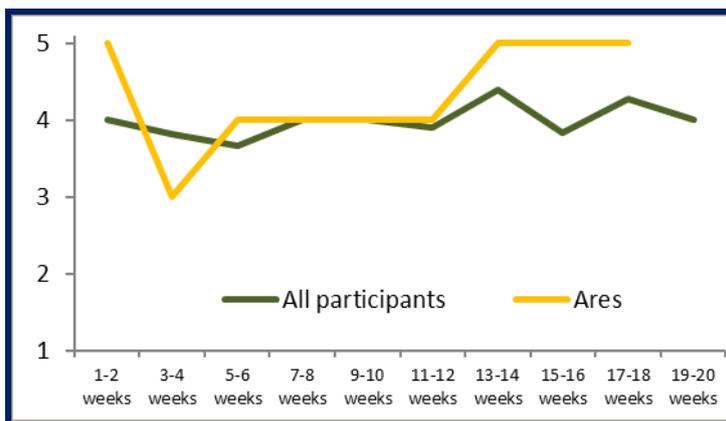
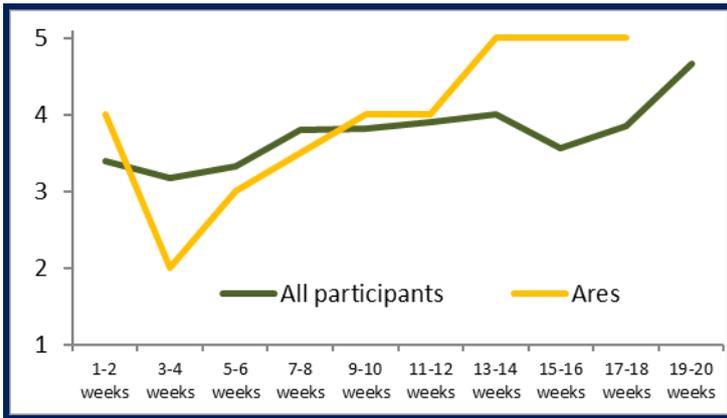
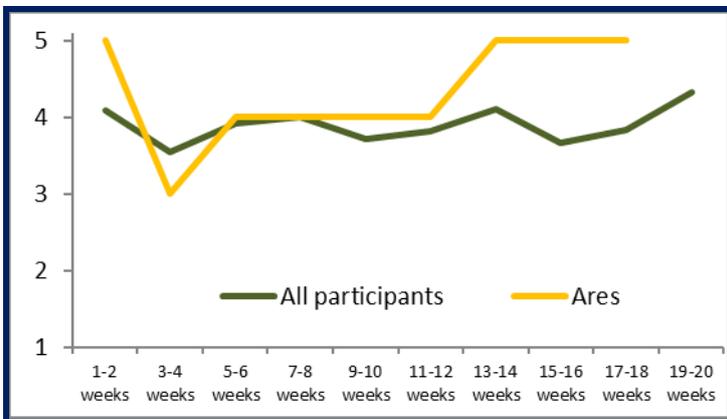


Figure 36. Ares's graph for the sub-category "Classes"



**Figure 37. Ares's graph for the sub-category "Foreign language for academic purposes"**



**Figure 38. Ares's graph for the sub-category "Academic support for administrative issues"**

What Ares was most looking forward to from the academic side of her SA were: a) to improve her English by studying courses she had chosen, b) to familiarize herself with a new educational system, and c) to experience new teaching approaches, which conjointly gave her the opportunity to study Communication from other points of view. She began her studies with great enthusiasm, which is plainly visible from the graph for "Educational system" (Figure 35). In weeks 1-2, she attributed the highest value to this aspect describing the new system as "strict, serious and of high quality." However, soon afterwards, her initial excitement was followed by difficulties adjusting to new rules and requirements often characterized as "highly demanding." Two weeks later, Ares reported: "These two weeks have been quite difficult. My problems were mainly to deal with the university's way of taking lectures, working in groups, etc. Although now I already know much more the system and how everything works, it has not been easy." Gradually getting used to new academic demands, as evidenced by the subsequent

comments like “getting better”, “already understood” and “no problem”, it took almost two months for Ares to adjust to new academic realities and to begin to feel more relaxed. After having successfully passed her first exams in weeks 11-12, she reported: “Very good. I have already done the exams. My opinion has not changed. Although in the beginning it was difficult for me because of high demanding, I got used to the dynamics and I am very happy with my learning process.”

As for the classes, this aspect is inseparably linked to language used for academic purposes. The graphs for these two single sub-categories reveal relatively similar curves (Figures 36 and 37). Unlike language for social interaction, whose development was generally positive from the very start, language used in the academic sphere implied much more commitment and, consequently, presented for Ares a considerable academic barrier in the initial period. Once she started the courses at the host university, she realized that her English level was much lower in comparison with her classmates. “Students have a perfect English because this specialization is part of an entire English degree. So, although my English is quite under this level, I feel I can communicate with others and I hope to improve it a lot”, she remarked in weeks 1-2. Although she did not experience difficulties with assigned readings, giving presentations and expressing her points of view in English turned out to be challenging. In class, teachers required active participation in discussions, which was a completely new experience for Ares, and often showed their dissatisfaction with those students who avoided giving their opinions on a topic. At the end of the first month, she bitterly noted: “The worst thing I had to face is that lecturers want us to talk, ask and comment during the class. This is very new for me, because in my home university this is something completely optional and at any case mandatory, just positive. So, I had to deal with the fact that a professor was disappointed because I didn’t express my opinion during the class.” In addition, the classmates were not always understanding and sensitive to her work style, which also caused frustration for her in the initial period.

I didn’t receive the best treatment from my teammates. When I had an exchange student in my class in Barcelona, I tried to help him, explained him everything, but never treated him as stupid or less intelligent. And here, I have the impression that they feel superior than us, it’s kind of difficult to cope with this

behavior. They always talk, they always want to express their opinion and for them, it's strange that someone only wants to listen and make few comments. It may seem that I am not interested, but it's not that, it's only that they are 7 people, speaking at the same time and it's complicated to jump in.

However, she quickly overcame her initial dissatisfaction and gradually became used to a new way of working and also improved her speaking skills, as evidenced by her comments “getting better” or “still difficult to have fluency when I speak up” or “the oral presentations are not as hard as before.” The turning point came during the second half of her SA, when Ares successfully passed final exams of the first block of courses and started the second block. As judged by her comments, it was then that she could enjoy her academic experience most. As new teachers replaced the former ones, they brought new teaching approaches into the classroom. Although the classes followed relatively the same structure as before (i.e. lectures were followed by group presentations or discussions on a specific topic), teachers also required students to comment on the content of all readings using their own words, which Ares found interesting and challenging at the same time. By that time, she had become used to speaking English in the classroom, though she still lacked fluency. She, nevertheless, enjoyed her classes and did not feel as stressed as it was in the beginning.

It is worth noting that the “Academic support for administrative issues” graph and the “Classes” graph reflect the same trend (Figures 36 and 38). In both graphs, the curves start at their highest points and then fall significantly at the end of the first month. After that, the curves improve, stabilize for some period, and climb higher at the end of the SA. Although Ares did not leave any comments for the “Academic support for administrative issues” sub-category, it seems that the rating was affected by the difficulties she faced in the classroom as we have seen above.

## **5.4 Summary**

In this chapter, I have analyzed the longitudinal data obtained from the Narrative Tables which were completed by the participants on a biweekly basis while abroad. The students' responses to the five-point Likert scale in the Narrative Tables were averaged for each two-week period. These mean values were used to construct graphs

representing the overall group adaptation curve and the participants' individual adaptation curves for each of the two broad categories (i.e. Personal Issues and Academic Issues).

The overall group adaptation curves built for Personal and Academic Issues displayed the learning trend. The two curves finish at points higher than where they begin. The regression calculations suggest that the incline of both curves is statistically significant, which indicates that the participants' adjustment to a new social and cultural environment increased with time they spent abroad.

The graphs representing the participants' individual adaptation curves for the two broad categories Personal and Academic Issues showed two main trends: the U-shaped curve and the learning curve. It should be pointed out that some of them demonstrate clear examples of the learning or U-shaped curve, while others are not so obvious and display fluctuations of various intensities. In addition, the graphs reveal that the participants' academic and personal experiences may follow a different development as can be seen in the case of Ares.

In order to better understand the general fluctuations in the graphs for the broad categories, I have also constructed the graphs for each single sub-category for each student individually. The participants' narratives, which they provided in every biweekly assessment, were used to find out possible reasons for turning points in their personal and academic lives abroad.

As for Personal Issues, friends from home and family provided emotional support and their visits positively influenced the participants' biweekly assessments. The relationships with co-nationals who were in the same location were also assessed positively, especially in stressful moments of their stay. It is also worth noting that the students understood that sticking to Catalans and Spanish might cause the impediment for their foreign language progression and interaction with locals and other internationals. They therefore refrained from spending all their time only with native friends.

Besides the co-nationals, the majority spent their time with other international students. Orientation sessions or other events organized by the Erasmus Students Network and

the host university mobility office during the first week were a key for building a network of international friends. Residence halls and apartments were other places where the participants were making friends. The majority assessed their relationships with other exchange students positively. The drops in the graphs were mostly caused by linguistic difficulties (e.g. vocabulary limitations) and reduced contact with other exchange students because of intensive studies at the university or travelling. As for the relationships with host natives, the greater part of the participants experienced trouble in establishing friendly relationships. The reasons for this were the language barrier, a difficult local accent, reluctance on the part of host nationals to build meaningful friendships, and the Erasmus context itself. As for the foreign language used for social interaction, the majority spoke English as a lingua franca. The drops in the graphs were mainly caused by vocabulary limitations, lack of fluency, the difficulty to understand jokes and the strong local accent in the initial period.

In their daily life, travelling experiences and leisure activities triggered a great deal of positive emotions. Accommodation, food and weather were mentioned by all the participants and sometimes affected their biweekly assessments. However, these factors did not cause major changes or incite them to leave SA programmes. Working after university hours was considered stressful, as this assumed a great deal of responsibility and commitment. Nevertheless, the overall assessment of working experiences was positive. At the end of the SA, the participants noted that working had contributed to their maturity and independence.

As a concluding remark for personal experiences, the majority of the participants did not find their host culture to be different from their own and experienced no trouble adjusting to it. However, it is worth noting that the majority lived in university dormitories on campus. Such dormitories are normally situated on the outskirts of a city and equipped with everything students need for living inside. As a result, they have little contact with the real host culture. As for the students who lived off-campus and also worked, the drops in their graphs were normally caused by certain inconveniences, such as poor public transport, unhealthy food, bad sanitary conditions, and local timetable.

When assessing Academic Issues in their narratives, the participants shared the reflections on their host educational system, classes, administrative support and the problems they faced with the foreign language used for academic purposes.

The students verbalized difficulties to adjust to new teaching approaches and rhythms in class, and to high demanding requirements for assignment submissions and exams. They also found it challenging to establish close relationships with classmates and to work jointly on projects and presentations with groupmates. In fact, initial disappointment was often caused by the gap between the reality and the very high expectations as regards the academic experience abroad they held before departure. As for the service they received from administrative staff at their host universities, the majority of the students were satisfied with it. The falls in the graphs were mostly due to a slow process of enrollment upon arrival in the host country and bureaucratic delays in paperwork procedures.

Finally, the use of the foreign language for academic purposes triggered some negative experiences mainly related to difficulties in fulfilling writing tasks, giving oral presentations, understanding lecturers, and participating in classroom discussions.

In the following section, I will analyze the data obtained from the Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire and the Final Evaluation Interview. I will describe the participants' perceptions of achieved outcomes as a result of their SA programme, as well as factors and conditions that contributed to their adjustment to a new setting. I will also present the results obtained from the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire.



## CHAPTER VI. AFTER STAY ABROAD

In this chapter, I will present the findings drawn from the data which was obtained through the Stay Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire, the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire and the Final Evaluation Interview after Stay Abroad. In the first section, I will examine the extent to which the participants' pre-departure expectations were fulfilled, as well as the degree of their overall satisfaction with the SA programme. After that, I will analyze their perceptions of achieved outcomes in terms of their foreign language enhancement, academic skills improvement and personal growth. In the second section, I will focus on the participants' adaptation process and conditions that had helped them adjust better to their new context. In addition, I will also discuss factors that the students, based on their own experience, considered in general to be important for a better adjustment to a new social and cultural environment. Finally, in the third section, I will provide the statistical findings and the subsequent qualitative analysis of the explanatory comments drawn from the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire data.

### **6.1 Fulfillment of pre-departure expectations**

Upon returning from the SA program, the participants were asked to reflect on their overall satisfaction with the program during their Final Evaluation Interview. They were also reminded of their pre-departure expectations and were asked to consider the extent to which they had been fulfilled.

#### **6.1.1 Overall satisfaction with the sojourn**

Despite the fact that there were some students who felt slightly disappointed with the academic side of their SA program, all the participants expressed their overall satisfaction with the sojourn and reported that the majority of their expectations had been met. I chose the most representative comments from several students to present below as examples.

Prior to departure, Anna held high expectations concerning the quality of her host university. Her main motives for participating in the programme were related to academic prospects, such as studying subjects not offered by her home university,

experiencing new teaching methodologies, and most importantly studying in a prestigious university whose qualification is globally recognized. Boston College was the option that ideally met her requirements. Despite being slightly dissatisfied with her academic experience, she assessed the sojourn as a whole as being enriching:

Anna: Well I had expectations regarding the educational system, the other nothing.

Researcher: You expected the host university would be better...

Anna: And this is the only thing that has not been like this. But that does not change anything for me, the experience has been amazing. Because I value all together, because I have gone there to study, for now I'm back, having studied there is not the most important. It's altogether ....<sup>92</sup>

Maria expected to meet as many people from other countries as possible, to improve her German and English, and to have fun. She felt all of her expectations had been met completely. She returned feeling satisfied with her experience and described it as being unique: "I improved German and English, I'm happy about it. Meeting people perfect. I met a lot of people, and I had a lot of fun. And the other one, the unique experience. Yes, it was."

Sara, like Anna, was dissatisfied with the academic side of her experience. However, this dissatisfaction did not affect her final evaluation. Prior to her departure for Sydney, she stated that personal growth, work opportunities and English improvement were driving factors for her participation in the programme. She felt that most of her pre-departure expectations had been realized. She managed to find a job, earn money, meet many international people, and travel a lot. All of these elements contributed to her maturation and personal growth:

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<sup>92</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Anna: Bueno yo tenía expectativas respecto al sistema educativo, lo otro nada.

Researcher: You expected the host university would be better...

Anna: Y es en lo único que no ha sido así. Pero eso no cambia que para mí, la experiencia ha sido increíble. Porque yo valoro todo en conjunto, porque yo he ido ahí a estudiar, para ahora que he vuelto, haber estudiado ahí no es lo más importante. Es todo el hecho de haber....

As for work, I worked and I earned a lot of money. As for being alone and setting up a new life I did everything, because I had my apartment, my work, I studied, I made my life, then I travelled alone also there. And then personal growth, enormous.<sup>93</sup>

Prior to departure for Quebec, Virginia expected to have new experiences, to improve her French, to learn a lot from chosen courses in her host university, and to meet people from all over the world. She felt that her expectations were met completely: “From all I wrote there [pre-departure questionnaire] – 100% because I gained academic perspective, I improved French, and I have met new people. All those expectations were met.”

Cristina expected to grow as a person and to improve her clinical skills as a result of sojourning in Argentina. She defined personal growth as a process of becoming more open-minded and self-aware about her future. Upon returning home, she felt she had acquired new knowledge and changed in a positive way: “I feel I have changed. I am not the same person that I was when I... Like I feel I opened more my mind because I was there and I felt different. I feel I understand now what I really want to do.” As for clinical skills, Cristina was initially disappointed with her medical practices because she had limited participation and mostly had observed what other doctors on call were doing. For this reason, she felt this way of learning was not what she expected before departure. In the middle of her sojourn, she became more involved in the procedures on her own. This experience was assessed as the best because she made noticeable improvement in how she related with patients and in her self-confidence:

Yes. Maybe at the beginning I had had higher expectations, and when I arrived there [Argentina] then it wasn't exactly what I expected. I did like three different practices; the first part wasn't really good. But in the middle one, it was the best part of the practice and then I really learnt there and felt like I had more confidence to do things alone. In the third part it was different but also I feel that I learnt things. So I think I improved the way I could relate with patients, because I have more confidence...

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<sup>93</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Si era lo del trabajo, trabajé y gané mucha pasta. Por lo de estar sola y espabilarme lo hice todo, porque tenía mi piso, mi trabajo, estudiaba, hice mi vida, luego viajé sola también por ahí. Y luego crecimiento personal, enorme.”

Daniel admitted that most of his expectations had been fulfilled. Although he expressed slight dismay at not having seminars at his host university, in general he was satisfied with the academic side of his experience and rated it as five on a scale of one to five.

Researcher: To what extent have your expectations been fulfilled?

Daniel: Quite a lot. From one to five, I think, academically they have maintained. The only thing I think could have been even better, would have been that I told you before: to have seminars. Which maybe they exist during the year and it was only in the summer session that they weren't applied. That was the thing that I consider could have improved my experience. But about the readings that we had to do for the classes, they were very interesting. They made you think, the classmates were participative, something that you don't see here. And the teachers were very passionate. They were talking as if they were living what they were talking about. I really enjoyed the experience. Also the exam that I had for American Foreign Policy, it was a very interesting one.

As for relationships with host nationals, Daniel did not hold expectations from the beginning but rather wanted to develop close friendships with his Catalan friends in the program. He did not express any regret at not having any local friends, and this did not affect his evaluation of the overall sojourn.

I didn't have high expectations of meeting host nationals. And it was the case, I only met people who were... well we had a good relationship with students from UCLA who came here to Barcelona in July. But it was just a good relationship. It was not a friendship, superficial relationship. They were nice, they helped us with the bureaucratic things in the University. Or to get to know the places were... but it was not like they were doing everything with us. We were not a group so, we the Catalans were at the one side, and then they were not together either. Because they didn't know each other before.

Lola was frustrated with her host university in the Netherlands and even suggested that if she had another chance, she would choose a different university. Before departing, she did not have a learning agreement and chose courses related to Communication, but upon arrival, she realized that the subjects did not directly correlate with her major in

her home university. Besides, she was slightly dissatisfied with the classes describing them as being of no use. She, however, assessed her sojourn as being good despite her disappointment with the host university.

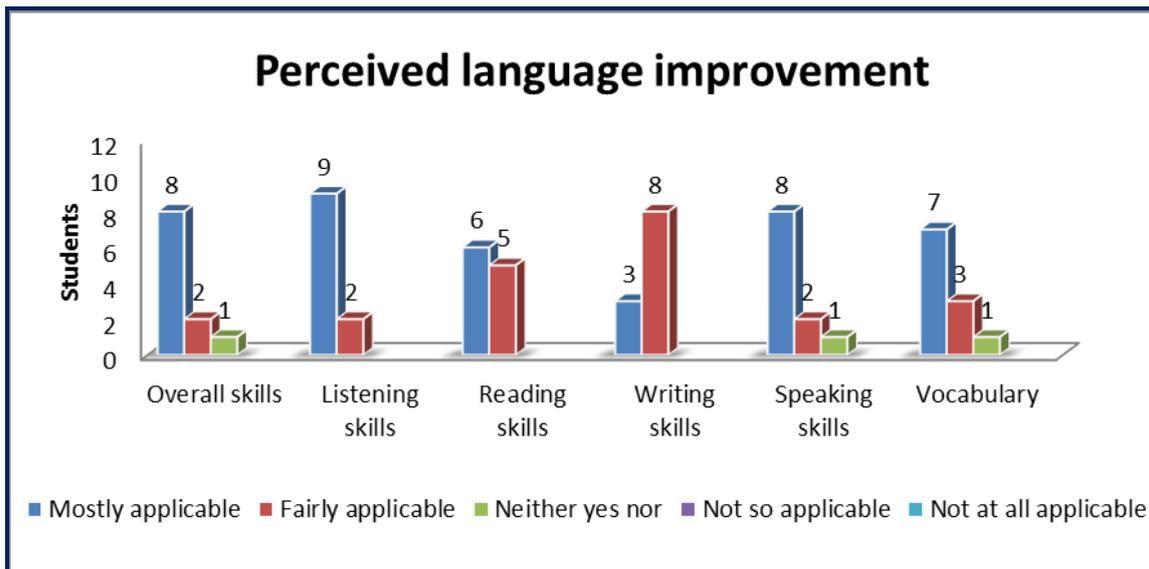
As for satisfaction with the programme, on a scale of 1 to 5 I would choose 5, if not the university because the University has not been the best. I expected more about the university. Yes, reading, researching... That part we also have here, but there the lessons are not useful. The teachers were nice, that is one point that was helpful. If we had some doubts, we could consult them. That was good, but I suppose, maybe, it was not my field. If I had the learning agreement, the minors were not from TV and Cinema. It was media, but another kind of media, music, events... Now I can say that I would rather choose another university, but there were not many universities to choose.

Apart from the fulfillment of expectations and the degree of satisfaction with the SA programme, the participants were also asked to reflect on their perceived outcomes in terms of foreign language enhancement, academic skills improvement and personal growth, as these had been mentioned as the main motives for participation in the exchange. In the following three subsections, I will provide the graphs illustrating the participants' perceptions in terms of the aforementioned themes as reflected in the Stay Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire and will also present the most representative comments from the interviews.

### 6.1.2 Perceived foreign language improvement

English language improvement was a main goal for the great majority of the participants. Despite this fact, only three (Sara, Anna, and Daniel) left for English-speaking countries. The other students selected those destinations where English was the language of instruction at the receiving university. There were also the participants who decided to go abroad to learn or improve a foreign language other than English like Virginia (French), Elizabeth (Portuguese) and Maria (German). Upon arrival home, all of them were asked to reflect on whether they felt they had improved in their target languages and, if so, to indicate which skills they had managed to improve most. Figure 39 shows the overall results of the participants' perceived foreign language

improvement as reflected in their answers to the Stay Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire. The graph has been built for eleven participants as one student (Cristina), whose destination was Argentina where host-nationals speak Spanish, did not need to speak either English or other foreign languages. When responding to this question, she marked it as not at all applicable to her experience. That is why I decided not to include her in the graph.



**Figure 39. Participants’ perceived language improvement**

Furthermore, in the Final Evaluation Interviews, the students explained in greater detail their self-assessment. All but Natalia expressed that their overall foreign language had been considerably enhanced (they answered “mostly applicable” and “fairly applicable”) and felt satisfied with the experience that allowed them to use the target language both for social interactions and academic purposes, since it was in line with their pre-departure expectations. The participants also reported that the exchange contributed not only to the overall foreign language improvement, but also to their confidence. Kira, for instance, felt that after her sojourn in the Netherlands she was no longer afraid of speaking in English. Although she made mistakes when communicating, she became less critical of herself and appreciated opportunities to practise.

I have improved my English, but also my confidence speaking in English although I can make mistakes. I know I made mistakes but it doesn’t feel like is

so wrong now. Because I feel like if I talk more and more it's going to be better with exercising it. So it's good in this sense that now I'm not afraid to speak in English.

Natalia remained uncertain (she answered “neither yes nor no”) with regards to this aspect explaining that most of her time she communicated with Chinese and other international students in English, but their level was not good enough. In the academic context, her professors did not always have a high level of English either. With time, she even felt that her ability to speak English was deteriorating because of that:

English was the key, but sometimes I felt like I was even getting worse at it, since I talked a lot with people with a lower level. The situation was not better in classes either. English was the language for academic purposes, although some professors couldn't speak it perfectly. I understand that they are not natives, but sometimes I felt like if they could speak better English, I would learn more.

As for the linguistic skills, listening, reading and writing skills were considered to have improved most (all the participants opted for “mostly applicable” and “fairly applicable”), followed by speaking and vocabulary skills (in the two latter cases – except for Natalia for the reasons described in the paragraph above). The improvement of listening, reading and writing skills can be explained by the academic context itself. The students attended classes, read a lot and prepared written tasks in order to complete successfully the chosen courses. Kira's quote is just one example:

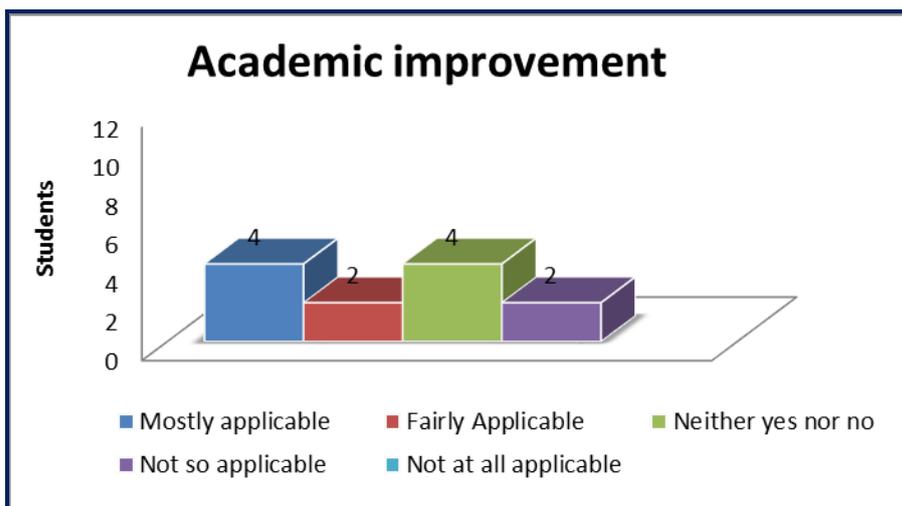
I think after having written my midterm papers and essays, I feel like I've improved my writing skills in English.

It is also worth noting that being capable to follow classes, to submit written assignments, to give presentations, and most importantly, to pass all exams in a foreign language were factors that contributed a lot to their confidence and pride in accomplishments. This is clearly exemplified in Anna's comment below. Anna, who was studying at Boston College, almost burst with pride when her professor was really impressed with one of her exam papers. She managed to use specific vocabulary and to organize her essay much better than American students did.

One day I went to a tutoring with my professor of Introduction to Music. He wanted to see us before the midterm exam. It was the day when I wasn't feeling really well but I went because I didn't want to miss it before the exam. In each class we had to deliver homework. We had to analyze a piece of music and it was the first time I did so, moreover, using technical words about music in English. I was a little bit worried because I didn't know how I was doing it – I thought – not well at all. The thing is I entered at his office and the very first thing he said to me was 'I have to say that I am impressed'. He said that I was doing it really well and even more taking into account that I had no background and that I was an international student. I couldn't believe it – I was so happy to hear it. He is Italian and he especially highlighted one homework where he wrote 'impressed!' at the end (he showed it to me) and said to me that when he read it he thought that as bad as the situation is in Europe our universities can still produce things like this. I do not want to exaggerate and he said that he did not want to flatter me but that he was proud of this. The thing is that I was organizing really well the texts and this is what American students were not achieving. I felt so proud I have to say.

### 6.1.3 Perceived academic improvement

With regards to academic improvement, only half of the participants (Natalia, Ares, Virginia, Kira, Cristina and Daniel) reported that they had learnt and had improved their academic skills (they answered "mostly applicable" and "fairly applicable"). They also expressed their satisfaction with the educational system, the teaching methodology, and activities and projects they had done for completing their courses at the host university. Figure 40 illustrates the students' perceptions in terms of their academic skills improvement as reflected in the Stay Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire.



**Figure 40. Participants' perceived academic improvement**

Ares, for example, seemed impressed with her host university's overall approach to classes and assignments:

The University is so much more serious and strict than UPF. Maybe because I was coursing the specialization of the degree, I felt that I was working for a company, projects were real, and the whole atmosphere was characterized by passion, positive view, seriousness and a lot of participation by the students. I liked it and I think it was really good, high quality.

Daniel felt he had learned a lot from the courses, which he described as being focused, specific, and concrete. He also enjoyed the teaching styles of his professors:

I started my courses and my first class was Economies of Developing Countries and I saw that my teacher was very passionate about what he was teaching. His name was Mauricio Velazquez, he's from Colombia and he was very critical with everything it was happening in the world, which is something I had never seen in my University. And also my other teacher was called, Professor Levin. I think it was original from a French country because he had a strong accent. He taught us American foreign policy, and he was very passionate too. But well, the thing was that the weeks were passing by and I really liked what I was learning, because it was very focused and it was not learning some abstract theories or abstract numbers. It was more specific.

Kira appreciated the extensive feedback from teachers, which had contributed greatly to her learning, especially in terms of her academic language use. The excerpt from the interview below demonstrates her opinion:

Kira: I feel more confident, because I had the grades and also teachers there, they comment everything. They actually read everything in your essay.

Researcher: And here [UPF] teachers don't read everything?

Kira: I don't think so. Possibly maybe some teachers do but I think they only read the introduction and the conclusion, because if you have like 80 students and each of them write something about ten pages I think it's impossible to read everything...

Researcher: But you saw that it was possible, teachers there, they read everything...

Kira: Yes, but they don't have 80 students in class. I think this is the most important thing, because when they gave me back the paper I could actually learn about my mistakes. I had a lot of corrections, like "this is not good in English" or "you have to change this expression" or "this is not so academic, try to change this". So they helped me a lot in that sense.

There were also four students (Angela, Lola, Anna, and Elizabeth) who expressed that their knowledge neither had improved nor had worsened (they answered "neither yes nor no"). Angela was really disappointed with the host university educational system which was characterized as too strict and inflexible. The classes, according to her point of view, were repetitive and did not contribute to gaining knowledge:

I don't like the way they teach in China. It is very repetitive and sometimes childish: they work with merits and if you show that you have done your homework, if you are always on time and never miss class... then you will pass the course with higher marks. It's totally contrary to that in Europe, when you are supposed to be more independent, more curious and it is always better if you make your own questions related to your personal interests. Here is like this: do

not look forward, do not worry about what is next, follow the book and go step by step.

Lola, Elizabeth and Anna found the classes at the host university to be very “light” for them, which was in contrast with their expectations and resulted in feeling of disappointment. Anna’s comment is representative of such feeling:

I think my vision is generally different from that of the other internationals. Because everyone said it was a very good school and they are very very happy. But the majority did Economics and it is true that the Boston College, I think it is true because a study was conducted according to which it was the fourth Faculty of Economics in the United States. But in my case, in Art History or Humanities in general, things were not so... I like it a lot when I am demanded a lot in order to contribute more. And sometimes the classes were very light for me, as if they lacked deep analysis and people from Boston College, that is, native Americans, also thought the same.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, two students (Sara and Maria) reported that they had not become more knowledgeable as a result of studying at the host university (they answered “not so applicable”). Sara found the teaching methodology to be regular, which did not show the best correlation with that level of prestige the host university gained and enormous tuition fees. She also expressed her dissatisfaction with the courses she had chosen. Just like Anna, Lola and Elizabeth, she found them to be very easy for her (except for a Japanese course she had to drop because of her job). Sara also pointed out that her host university was extremely huge, which in turn had influence on establishing closer relationships either with teachers or other students:

Nothing. Nothing at all. Maybe a little bit in philosophy because he was a good teacher. It is not that I don’t really like the university, but I think that the prize Australian people pay for this education is really high. They pay like 30

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<sup>94</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Creo que mi visión es diferente en general de la de los otros internacionales. Porque todo el mundo decía que era muy buena escuela y están muy muy contentos. Pero la mayoría hacían económicas y es verdad que el Boston Collegue, creo que es verdad que se hizo un estudio y era la cuarta facultad de económicas de Estados Unidos. Pero en mi caso, en historia del arte o en general Humanidades, cosas no estaban así... A mí me gusta mucho cuando me exigen mucho para poder dar más. Y a veces las clases se me hacían como muy light, como que no profundizaban y eso también lo pensaban los mismos de Boston College, o sea, los nativos americanos.”

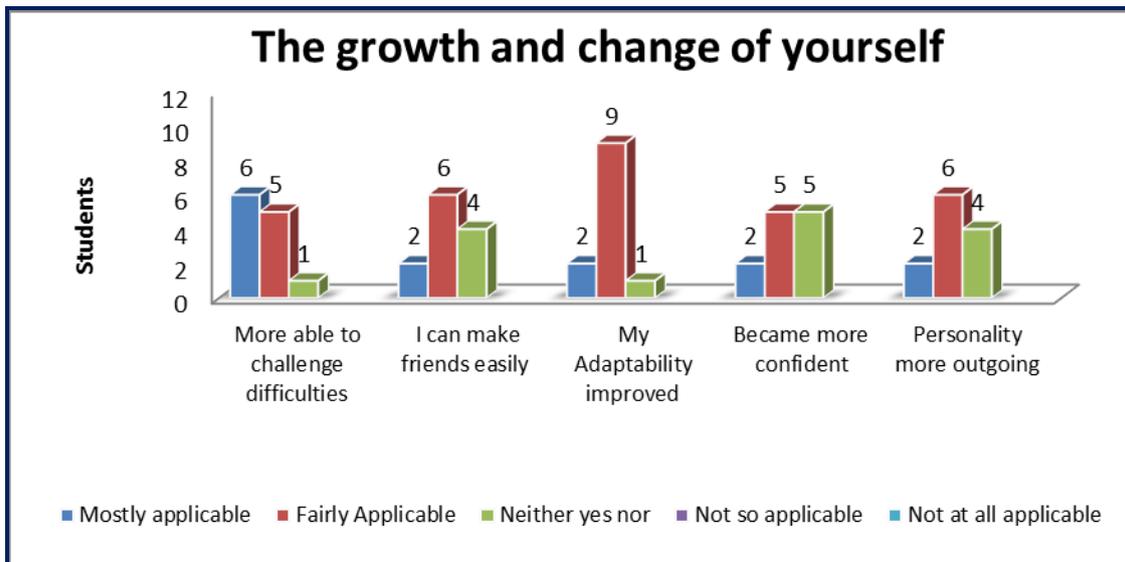
thousand euros per year, which is a lot of money. It does not seem worth all that money for that education, which is not bad, but ... no. The good thing about it is that it has many subjects to choose from, which we don't have here. But then subjects too easy, low-level and, well, ordinary. I expected to find some materials, computers, library, to be very impressive and no, it was ordinary. Education at the UPF is, in some things, much better. UPF is a good university and it's small, while in Sydney it was a big university. Here I have very close contact, I know the teachers. There with the professor of philosophy yes, but with others not. They give huge classes, in one subject the teacher was changed every week and the topic was explained so badly. I don't know, it doesn't motivate me.

For Maria, who was majoring in Health and Life Sciences, academic achievements were not the main aim. Yet before departure, she knew that she would not attend subjects related to her speciality (medicine), as they were taught in German in the host university. Despite the fact that she had studied German for three years before applying for a place in the SA programme, she found her level insufficient for following classes related to medicine. As she was willing to go abroad, she decided to choose biology subjects that were taught in English. She therefore did not expect academic improvement from the chosen courses. What she wanted was to improve her foreign language skills, namely English and German. She felt she had achieved this goal:

I did not improve my academic skill because I was not taking medicine subjects there. It was more like biology subjects. All the medicine subjects were in German. And I couldn't study in German when I arrived there. But I'm really satisfied with my improvement in English and German.

#### 6.1.4 Personal growth

As mentioned before, the participants were also asked to reflect on whether they felt that they had changed regarding their personal development as a result of spending a short- or mid-term stay in the host country. Figure 41 shows the participants' perceptions of their personal growth as reflected in the Stay Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire.



**Figure 41. Participants' perceptions of personal growth after the SA**

As can be seen from Figure 41, eleven of the participants reported that they had become more able to challenge difficulties, and their adaptability to a new environment had improved (they answered “mostly applicable” and “fairly applicable”). Eight students perceived that they could easily make friends and their personalities had become more outgoing after the sojourn (they opted for “mostly applicable” and “fairly applicable”) while four remained uncertain regarding these aspects (their response choice was “neither yes nor no”). In addition, seven students returned feeling more self-confident (they chose “mostly applicable” and “fairly applicable” response options) while five students did not feel this change (they answered “neither yes nor no”).

During the Final Evaluation interviews, all but Maria confirmed again that they had become more able to face obstacles after their stay in the host country. The experience of living alone was considered to be enriching in terms of personal development, as it made the majority feel like real adults. What had been taken for granted before started to be significant during the SA. Activities, such as finding accommodation, managing a budget, completing errands and chores on their own (i.e., going shopping, cooking or doing the laundry) made them feel more independent and self-sufficient. Sara’s quote is just one example:

I loved the feeling of being alone (no need to give explanations to anybody). I felt I was getting stronger every day and more self-confident and independent (I loved buying my own food, cooking delicious and healthy meals, I even enjoyed doing the laundry, cause I've never done that before, and it made me feel like a real adult).

As for Maria, she expressed uncertainty (she answered “neither yes nor no”) about her ability to overcome difficulties explaining that she lived in Germany in very similar conditions to her home country and did not experience any stressful situations that made her step outside of her comfort zone: “I did not have difficulties. Germany is not so different.”

All but Sara also admitted that their sojourn contributed a lot to their adaptability to a new environment. Anna, for instance, expressed that after staying in Boston she felt like she “could go anywhere to live now and be able to adapt there.” However, the majority noted that they had spent most of their time in an international academic environment and, consequently, had adapted to the international students' lifestyle, rather than to the life of host nationals. Meanwhile, working off-campus during their studies was considered as an opportunity to live more like host people and consequently be better integrated into the host culture. Lola's comment is a clear example of this opinion:

Well, I didn't have a really Dutch life, because I didn't work. Probably I have adapted well to the Erasmus life in Holland, not to the Dutch life. (Lola)

Sara remained uncertain about her adaptability (she answered “neither yes nor no”). Similar to Maria, she did not find her living conditions in Sidney to be different from her home country. During the interview, she noted: “Living in Australia is similar to living in Spain. In Australia there are supermarkets, restaurants, hair salons...the same things as here. Of course there are different things, but the organization of the society is similar.”

Apart from the above-mentioned personal changes, several participants also found themselves different in other aspects. For instance, Anna, Kira and Christina reported that studying abroad taught them to enjoy more the present moment and value their own country, culture and university.

I am more independent, more confident in myself. I feel more prepared to adapt to different situations now and I value more my own country, university and culture. (Anna)

I have learnt to value more the time I have, to enjoy more the moment I'm living right now. (Cristina)

Kira also added that, besides self-confidence and academic improvements, she became more open to meeting new people and having a more active social life:

I realized that I am more open to meet new people now and also that I enjoy more doing things with more people, in groups or in pairs rather than alone in my room. I came back a week ago and I feel more confident with myself and also I am more confident with my academic skills. I can enjoy more being in Barcelona again.

In Angela's case, she had learned to feel less stressed, to have a broader perspective of difficulties, and to value human relationships. Furthermore, she also learned to ignore her cultural judgments:

I have learnt to stay more relaxed, less stressed and to face different situations from more distance than before. I have learnt to look at things with more perspective and not to care too much. I have realized that humans relationships are what matters the most for me and that we are more or less the same, with different backgrounds (especially we, Europeans with our concerning about Culture) but with feelings after all. I have also learnt not to try to change what is different, not to look at new things with only my point of view, but with the neutrality of someone who is a stranger: more slowly, more kindly until, at some point, I can perceive, at least, part of it.

Ares' experience has made her more willing to go abroad for work or study and to build her own life: "I am more willing to go abroad again, to study and to work. More willing to change the world. More willing to build my life on my own." Similarly, Lola returned more self-assured and more capable of having new experiences, meeting people, and even working abroad: "I feel more confident like to go abroad, to work in another

country, to meet other people from other countries, to see the world. I have like one step more or even two.”

For Sara, living alone abroad was also the opportunity to reconsider her previous life and change it for the best. She felt she had succeeded in this goal:

I must confess that before I had very bad habits (to be very sincere I had some problems with drugs and I felt I was losing my time). So for me, this was an opportunity to improve myself and be able to have a good life. And I am very proud because I did it.

Natalia felt she had become mature as a result of the SA program in Hong Kong. She had managed to create a network of valuable personal contacts and also had become more culturally aware:

I feel different and I feel like I have lived a lot of things that have made me a different person, so I have achieved more maturity. Then, lots of new connections, which are super valuable, not in the business sense, but as personal like knowledge. The thing is when you travel or you are in Hong Kong discovering the city, you learn a lot. I think that knowledge is key. So I feel like more cultural person.

## **6.2 Factors that influenced intercultural adaptation**

Before exploring factors that contributed to the participants’s adaptation, I considered it important to examine whether they felt adapted to their new environments at the end of the SA.

### **6.2.1 Overall perceived intercultural adaptation**

During the Final Evaluation Interview, the participants were asked to reflect on how they perceived their adjustment. Below I present excerpts from their interviews as examples.

Anna reported that she felt adapted to her life in Boston. For her, adaptation meant feeling comfortable in her daily life abroad while also maintaining her habits from her home country. She felt she had achieved it:

For me adaptation, thinking of my experience, means that you can live in another country feeling happy and feeling that you can live following their way of doing things. Providing that it does not assume, or that every day is not a personal battle. Considering that yes there can be things that you do not agree with, like for me the issue of the military. But ultimately, although there are things that of course, you do not agree or do not feel well with, or miss, but globally, there are more things that make you feel that you are well there. That you can call that place home. I think adaptation means placing together on a tray the things you like and those you don't, and see if in the end you feel good every day going to the supermarket, I do not know, these small things ... For me, I think I feel adapted and I would define adaptation like this.<sup>95</sup>

Daniel did not find it difficult to adapt to a new life in LA. The only serious drawback was that he did not have a car to travel large distances. This complicated his movement around the city and did not allow him to visit every place he wanted to go.

Researcher: Do you feel you have adapted to your host country?

Daniel: Yes because it was not a nightmare for me to be there so I would say that the word adapted is correct for me. I tried to live in the conditions the country offered me. The only thing which I didn't adapt to was the fact of having to get a car to go to places. That's true, one thing I didn't do, which was bad for me, was to visit all the places in LA that I would have liked.

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<sup>95</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Para mi adaptación, pensando en mi experiencia, significaría que tú puedas vivir en otro país sintiéndote feliz y sintiendo que puedes convivir con su manera de hacer las cosas. Siempre que esto no suponga, o que el día a día no sea, una batalla personal. Teniendo en cuenta que sí puede haber cosas que no estás de acuerdo o que no, como para mí el tema de los militares. Pero que en definitiva, aunque haya cosas que es lógico, no estás de acuerdo o no te sienten bien, o echas de menos, pero que en global, haya más cosas que te hagan sentir que tú estás bien allí. Que le puedes llamar casa a ese sitio. Yo creo que es poner en una bandeja las cosas que te gustan y las que no, y ver si al final tu te sientes bien cada día yendo al súper, no sé, estas pequeñas cosas... Pues para mí, yo creo que me siento adaptada y llamaría adaptación a eso."

Elizabeth felt she had adjusted to her new life in Rio de Janeiro rapidly. She described the society as being multicultural, which did not make her feel like a foreigner there. She also quickly gained confidence using a host language in her daily life:

Now I feel like... because the thing is, and talking about culture, people ask me how it was in Brazil... and I said I found a place that fits with my soul, not with my "character", my personality. Because I didn't even feel as a stranger there. And in two days I started trying to speak Portuguese, and rapidly I felt inside this culture. No, I didn't feel Brazilian, but I felt really... I mean, there are many people with many differences, economical and physical, ethnical... many differences. So, no one is Brazilian. So it's much easier to... it's very multicultural. And the thing is this made me feel like at home, at my second home.

Some students (Natalia, Maria, Ares, and Lola) again emphasized that they had felt adjusted to international student life but not necessarily to the host culture. Natalia, for example, described the life of host nationals in Hong Kong as being fast-paced and stressful. She did not experience this pace because she did not work but rather led a student life of study and travel. She therefore felt adjusted to this lifestyle but expressed regret at not having had local friends during her SA. According to her point of view, having local friends would have helped her to familiarise herself with the culture in Hong Kong.

Researcher: Do you feel you have adapted to your host country?

Natalia: Yes, kind of. I think I have adapted to the exchange student life in Hong Kong. Because there in Hong Kong people that are really living there and working there, as they are super stressed and everything goes so fast and for me the fact of living there was fast but I was a student so it was not as fast. But yes, I have adapted because it's very cultural to eat outside and to... I don't know things that at home you wouldn't do as much. I think I have adapted quite a lot. But as I have written in the tables and in the interview, I really didn't meet a lot of locals that I can consider my friends. I have more friends that are

internationals, so in that sense maybe if I had more local friends I would have adapted even more.

For Virginia, intercultural adaptation was equal to openmindedness, and she believed her previous SA in London had already broadened her mind. She felt this was enough for her four-month stay in Quebec. Like Natalia, Virginia felt she had adapted easily to her Erasmus life on campus without having much contact with the local culture:

Intercultural adaptation for me is to open my mind more, with my open-mindedness that I had I feel like it has been enough for me to adapt in this case. Maybe because it has been for 4 months, I don't know exactly why. I was in London before and I think previous study abroad contributes to the openmindedness. I feel I have adapted, but I haven't interacted enough with the local culture to be able to say that. I adapted well to the exchange life.

Although Cristina initially had difficulty with the food and currency in Buenos Aires, she also felt adapted to her new life. Eventually she managed to overcome these beginning inconveniences and accept the lifestyle of her host country:

I think yes. I have adapted to the food because in the beginning, I kind of hated it... No, I didn't hate but I feel like disappointed, because you can eat really well but mostly meat. If you want to eat fish, it's possible but it's not good and it's more expensive than meat. Also at the beginning I had problems with the currency because they change it every day and I didn't know before going there that it would be better just to have euros and then change it in the black market. At the beginning I felt kind of angry and worried, because it was like I'm stupid, I'm paying more than I had to pay. But at the end it was ok, this is what happened and I only could accept it.

Kira, who went to Amsterdam, did not find her host country to be challenging to adapt to. Her life there was similar to the one she led in Barcelona. She suggested that cultural distance is a significant factor and that if she had been to China, she would have experienced more difficulties adjusting to a new social and cultural environment:

Cause also it was not so different. But the things that were different I loved them so I think I adapted good. If I were in China, I think it would be much more difficult, because more things are different, so you have to do kind of more effort to adapt yourself. But I think, if you can do it in a little scale, you can amplify this scale.

Like Angela, Sara also felt adapted to her life abroad at the end of the SA. In Sydney, her host destination, She could find everything she needed as “the organization of the society” was very similar to that of Barcelona. The only thing she found difficult was the use of English in the university and beyond. She confessed that she did not understand what professors spoke in class at the beginning, which made her feel frustrated. Similarly, she often failed to grasp the meaning of conversation when interacting with other students and did not understand their jokes. However, one month after her arrival, she became to understand people better:

The most difficult was the first month with the language, because ... I did not understand anything. Social and academic, both. And I remember being with people who talked and made jokes and I did not understand anything. Then in class I understood less than half of what the teacher said. So, I had no idea what was happening around me because of English. That desappeared in two, three weeks or, at the most, a month. Now my English has improved especially listening. I understand everything. And I had a hard time at first.<sup>96</sup>

As can be seen from the comments, the participants did not experience significant difficulties living abroad and felt adapted to their new environment at the end of the SA programme. Nevertheless, during the Final Evaluation Interview, the students were asked to reflect on conditions or factors that had made for their adjustment to their new context. In the subsequent section, I will be discussing their reflections on contributions to their adjustment.

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<sup>96</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “The most difficult was the first month with the language, because... No entendía nada. Social and academic, both. Y me acuerdo de estar con gente que hablaban y hacían bromas y yo no entender nada. Luego en clase no entendía ni la mitad de lo que decía el profesor. Entonces, no tenía ni idea de lo que estaba pasando a mi alrededor por el inglés. Eso en dos, tres semanas o un mes como mucho se me pasó. Ahora mi inglés ha mejorado sobretodo en escuchar. Lo entiendo prácticamente todo. Y al principio lo pasé mal por eso.”

## 6.2.2 Stay Abroad conditions that contributed to intercultural adaptation

The three factors most commonly mentioned as significant contributions to adjustment were accommodation, work and travel experiences. I combined these contributions into one group and called it Stay Abroad conditions. Before presenting the participants' reasonings, I summarize the SA conditions under which the students lived during their SA in terms of the type of accommodation, work and travel experiences (Table 7). These data were obtained from the Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire.

**Table 7. Summary of SA conditions**

Participants	ACCOMMODATION			Work Experience	Travel Experience
	Home-stay with a family	Residence hall	Apartment		
Angela		x		x	
Elizabeth			x		x
Sara			x	x	x
Anna	x				x
Maria		x		x	x
Cristina		x			x
Virginia		x			x
Daniel		x			x
Ares		x			x
Lola			x		x
Natalia			x		x
Kira			x		x

In the following three sub-sections, I will present the participants' reflections in terms of the three aforementioned themes, as well as other influential factors, they mentioned in the Final Evaluation Interview.

### 6.2.2.1 Accommodation

Accommodation was mentioned as the most significant contribution. Six students (Angela, Maria, Cristina, Virginia, Ares and Daniel) reported that they had lived in a residence hall during their sojourn. All but Cristina and Daniel stayed in a single room.

Daniel stayed in a double room, which he shared with a co-national, while Cristina shared her double room with host nationals. Five students (Sara, Elizabeth, Lola, Natalia and Kira) reported that they had stayed in an apartment sharing their rooms with both hosts and other international students. Finally, Anna was the only one who had stayed in a host family with children.

Those students who had lived in a residence hall or an apartment expressed that it was the experience that significantly contributed to their adjustment to a new environment. It was where they spent most of their times and made new friends. Cristina, for instance, expressed that living with other students in the residence hall was the most positive experience during her SA and recalled the day when she was going to a party with a group of students so as to represent how she had felt when living there:

I think the most positive part of my experience it was living in the residence with people from different nationalities or also from Argentina. One day we were going to a party, all the people from the residence, because it was the birthday of one of the girls from there. And we went by bus because it's cheaper, we were like 20 people and we made like a party in the bus, music and singing. I choose this moment because it represents how I felt when I was living there, because there in the residence were people from Peru, Argentina, from Argentina but from different places because they were not living with their families and maybe they didn't see their families for more than one year or for five or six months. So it's like a family that has positive things and bad things of course. But it's like this travel on the bus represents the way we lived there in the residence.

The participants also reported that shared facilities such as kitchens and halls made them feel integrated into the community. Virginia's comment below is presented as an example:

A very good factor was that the kitchen was shared by all the halls that I was living in, there were like 5 different residences. My hall shared the kitchen with a thousand people. Of course they were never all there. They fluctuated; it depended on time, afternoons and evenings. Some people of different nationalities had dinner, let's say French, at 8-9, Quebecois people had dinner at

7, and Spanish people had dinner a bit later, African people were usually the latest who had dinner. But there were also mixt groups all the time. So it was a very good chance to meet people. I have to say that it was a really positive factor of those dorms because even if you wanted to be alone, if you have to cook, you have to see people. So there was no way to stay alone in your room and become a lone person. There I met a lot of people. (Virginia)

The type of accommodation was also mentioned as a factor to be taken into consideration. Living in a single room gave the participants a sense of having a personal space, which also made for developing harmonious relationships with the surrounding people.

I think living in a residence hall helps because you can communicate with others, and also having your own room. I liked staying in a single room, because I had my own space. I think this was perfect because you could have your own space and you could also share it with others when you wanted to. This sense of privacy is important in the first place for yourself and also for a better harmony with others. (Maria)

Living off campus was also considered to be a significant factor, as it gave more chances to experience a real host life and to gain more knowledge about the host culture. Despite of all benefits halls of residence provide with their sojourners, living in the dorms on campus has its main disadvantage, it limits students to the university context. As a rule, dorms are situated on the outskirts of a city and equipped with everything students need for living inside. Because of having little contact with the outside world, students usually possess superficial knowledge regarding their host country. Sara's comment below is representative of this state of affairs:

What helped me to be there was to live with people. Because before I had doubts of hiring a flat for me. There were also several single rooms at the university. The best thing is to live off campus because within the university in those flats you will be only with people from the university. I had some friends that were inside and they had breakfast and dinner included, so they were never out of the university. They were always there, so all their friends were from the University,

everything was there. And then you just know a little part of Australia. You just know this part.

As for the homestay, Anna expressed that this experience was very enriching and valuable. She lived with a family that included an American man and a Venezuelan woman with two children. Living in the family where the parents were from different cultures allowed Anna not only improved her English, but also to learn about political and cultural aspects of each country. From the very beginning, staying with this family made her feel like she was at home.

I think what helped me a lot was that I went to a family, I mean, not a family, but I think I had much luck finding them, because the father was American, from there from Boston. And the mother was from Venezuela. At first I thought ... “no...because I preferred an American family to speak more English.” But the truth is that I feel no regrets because everything has been perfect. I felt from the first moment like at home. And for example when I was travelling, and then when returning, I thought, “Okay, I go home”. At no time I thought “Ok I return to the house in Boston”. And I haven’t had a family, family life either; ... I was living completely independent, what happens is that, if they were having supper just when I was cooking, then we were having supper together. And things like that. So being with this family has helped me a lot, because I have learned a lot too. And just this year has been like very difficult for Venezuela, and I have experienced in the first person from there.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Yo creo que me ayudó mucho el hecho de que fui a una familia, y o sea, no una familia, sino que yo creo que tuve mucha suerte encontrándolos a ellos, porque el padre era Americano, de allí de Boston. Y la madre era de Venezuela. Al principio yo pensaba... “no.. porque prefería una familia americana para hablar más inglés”. Pero la verdad es que no me arrepiento de nada porque me ha ido genial. Me he sentido desde el primer momento como en casa. Y por ejemplo cuando me iba de viaje, luego al volver, yo pensaba “vale, vuelvo a casa”. En ningún momento pensaba “vale vuelvo a la casa de Boston”. Y entonces que tampoco es que haya hecho una vida en familia, familia; yo iba... vivía completamente independiente, lo que pasa es que, pues si cenaban justo cuando yo estaba cocinando, pues cenábamos todos juntos. Y cosas así. Entonces estar con esta familia me ha ayudado mucho, porque he aprendido mucho también. Y justo este año ha sido como muy complicado para Venezuela, y yo he vivido en primera persona desde allí. (Anna)

### 6.2.2.2 Work experience

With regard to work experience, three students (Angela, Sara and Maria) reported that they had worked during their SA. Angela and Maria had worked less than twenty hours per week. Angela was teaching Arts to kids from one up to seven years old in a private school, while Maria was participating as a subject in some experiments. Sara in turn had managed to find a part-time job in an Italian pizzeria where she was working as a waitress. In general, the students were very happy to find a job while studying at the host university. For Maria, it was the combination of a pleasant experience with financial opportunity. Although Angela and Sara had difficulty balancing work commitments and university activities, they found their work experiences to be very rewarding, both financially and culturally.

Sara, for instance, lived with four other international students, but she was the only one who worked. She felt that her work had helped her to settle in her new environment far better than the others. In comparison to her roommates, she expressed that her stay was not a journey for her but rather an opportunity to create her life:

I lived with other four girls in the flat. They all were nice, also in exchange programmes. None of them worked. And to tell you the truth, I think that who settled everything better was me. One thing is to go on a trip for one or two months, then you don't stop. Another thing is to go through Erasmus all over Europe, which is more or less cheap and you can catch a train and move around different countries. And the third thing is to stay in Australia during six months or one year, which is no longer a journey, but a life. That's it. For me, I was not on a trip, but I was creating my life.<sup>98</sup>

Sara also added that her working in the pizzeria helped her to get closer to the host culture. She admitted that in the university she was surrounded by international students, and it was very difficult to encounter host nationals. At work, she had contact

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<sup>98</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Vivía con cuatro chicas más en el piso. Eran todas muy majas, también de intercambio. Ninguna trabajaba. Y si te digo la verdad, creo que la que se lo montó mejor era yo. Una cosa es irte de viaje un o dos meses, entonces no paras. Otra cosa es irte de Erasmus por Europa, que es más o menos barato y puedes coger un tren y moverte por distintos países. Y la tercera cosa es estar en Australia durante seis meses o un año, que ya no es un viaje, sino una vida. Es eso. Para mí, yo no estaba de viaje, sino que estaba creando mi vida."

with Australians who showed her local places known only by them. She suggested that work experiences while studying gave her the opportunity to get to know better the host culture. In the excerpt below, Sara described her point-of-view:

Working helped me a lot. I think it is a different kind of experience. Other students did not meet many people and used chats for meeting people on the mobile, I say hmmm... Also it is older people who work. And I have always gone out with people a little bit...of course if there were not those university parties, drinking or getting drunk in a flat with 21-year-old people, and I say this does not suit me. Instead, working, well we worked, when finished we were going to a bar but that was already another thing...And then the Australian people, there were some Australian boys at work who showed me wonderful places in Sidney that only Australians know. On the other hand, at university, as I have said, it was not easy to meet Australian people, that is to say work helped me to meet Australians. So for me, you have a much more realistic approximation to the country than if you go as a 21-year-old person to have university parties or to go to the beach. You lack something, which is what the job gives to you.<sup>99</sup>

After she had finished her university studies, she decided to go work on a farm in order to escape the city and have more contact with real Australian culture. She used the Woofing website to find a short-term job which included accommodation and food free of charge. She assessed this experience positively as she lived with an Australian family and had an authentic experience:

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<sup>99</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Trabajar me ayudó mucho. Creo que es una experiencia diferente. Otros estudiantes no conocían mucha gente y se hacían chats de estos de conocer gente en el móvil, que digo mmh... También al trabajar es gente más mayor. Y yo siempre he salido con gente un poco... claro si no se hacían las fiestas estas universitarias, con gente de 21 años de beber y de emborracharte en un piso, y yo digo es que esto a mí no me va. En cambio trabajar, vale trabajábamos, al salir nos íbamos a un bar pero ya de otro... Y luego ya la gente australiana, había chicos australianos en el trabajo, que me enseñaron partes preciosas de Sídney que solo los australianos conocen. En cambio en la Universidad, ya te he dicho, no era fácil conocer a gente australiana, o sea el trabajo a mí me ayudó a conocer gente australiana. Clientes australianos que venían y hablaban conmigo, me contaban cosas de su cultura. O sea para mí, tienes una aproximación mucho más real al país que si vas como una persona de 21 años a hacer fiestas universitarias y a irte a la playa. Falta algo, que es lo que te da el trabajo.”

Researcher: After working, after finishing your studies and after finishing your work in the pizzeria, you went for travelling and during this trip you were working on a farm...

Sara: Yes, it's a system called woofing where you can travel without paying your bed and food. So I was living in a farm for two weeks, working on the farm and living with this family. It was good for me because I could learn how real Australian people live. And that was very different from Spain, from Sydney or other city everywhere, almost everywhere in the world it is kind of the same thing. So when I was living in Sydney I was feeling a little bit bad with myself. Not bad, but I was feeling "ok, Sara, you are in the other part of the world but you are not really seeing this part of the world, you are just living in the city and studying and working" and I needed something else.

### 6.2.2.3 Travel experience

As for tourism during the sojourn, all but Angela reported that they had travelled around the area or even outside the host country at the weekends, on days off or on holiday. For instance, Ares, who was studying at the Hanze University of Applied Science in Groningen, explored her host city and also visited Berlin with her new international friends during a week-off at the university. Natalia, who studied at the City University of Hong Kong, visited other Chinese provinces. She also had the opportunity to visit other Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Japan, and Korea. Daniel, who stayed at the University of California in Los Angeles, made a five-day road trip with his Catalan friends in the States. Virginia, who stayed at the University of Laval in Quebec, made a road trip with a group of her new French friends around Canada. Later at the end of her exchange programme, she also went to Mexico with the same people.

All of them admitted that travel experiences while studying abroad were a gateway for leaving their international academic environment and for experiencing the host culture firsthand. Virginia, for instance, believed that travelling outside the campus, especially alone, increased multicultural understanding and consequently contributed to intercultural adaptation:

Travelling contributes to intercultural adaptation a lot. I think it is very important to leave the campus, to leave your city. It also really depends on who you are travelling with, of course. But travelling is always a plus in any multicultural understanding and, I think understanding fosters adaptation and interaction also does.... You interact in a way or another. I can say that it is at most the best solution, because sometimes you travel in groups, you stick to your group as usual, unfortunately. That is why I would say that it is amazing to travel alone. I think travelling alone while in the exchange would be even better for intercultural adaptation.

Anna made a road trip to San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco in a group of eight students while studying in Boston. She preferred to use the Couchsurfing website for finding places to stay instead of booking hotels. The advantage of this website is that it connects travellers with locals, and in this way, international students can not only stay for free but also get to know host nationals and make friends with them. Anna found this experience to be very enriching because she was able to see American culture from another perspective and to ask direct questions to get to know different standpoints.

We visited San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco. So, for example, in San Francisco in the house where I stayed, we found ... well there were two students and I contacted... that one who had a profile [in the Couchsurfing webpage] was a boy, but then we were mostly with a girl because he worked and we did not coincide. So she helped us a lot, for example: “when you go down the road, stop here or there!” And then to every person who we stayed with, we asked direct questions like “what do you think of this?” The experience helped me in the sense that I could compare people in California or people from here or just speak more with host people. With this girl I had a very good relationship and she is now here in Spain, she is mostly in the south, but she is coming here to Barcelona in September and then we have agreed that I will show her the city as she also showed me her city there. That was then what we also did in LA and SF. For me it is not the same to go to a hotel in SF and to stay with people who live there and tell you: “come here, go there,” “I like this in this city ...” I think that you get to know it differently and this of course, by travelling and doing it in

this way, I think I've known much more than if I had remained in Boston or had gone from hotel or hostel.<sup>100</sup>

Sara, while studying in Sydney, wanted to get to know other parts of Australia. She spent more than one month travelling and working on farms. This experience brought her closer to authentic Australian culture:

Of course, think that being in Sidney, not in the city, but in the outskirts in a residential area, I was stuck in a place where I could hardly move and I needed to get to know more Australia than Sidney. And of course during one month and a half I travelled as much as I could, I went to work on farms with Australians and more than to adapt, it helped me to get to know the real Australia, more rural, more authentic which was not part of the city.<sup>101</sup>

Kira travelled within the Netherlands while studying in Amsterdam. In her comments, she noted that she was mostly surrounded by Dutch students from a higher social and economic class, and she wanted to get to know how Dutch people from other social classes lived. During Christmas holiday, she travelled to Texel, an island in the north of the Netherlands. Like Anna, Kira found accommodation with a family through the Couchsurfing website. She admitted that this experience helped her to be immersed in authentic Dutch culture and also to learn how Dutch people perceived Spaniards and Spanish culture:

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<sup>100</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Hicimos San Diego, Los Ángeles y San Francisco. Entonces, por ejemplo, en San Diego en la casa donde estuve durmiendo yo, encontramos a... bueno eran dos estudiantes y yo contacté... el que tenía el perfil era un chico, pero luego estuvimos sobre todo con una chica porque él trabajaba y no coincidimos. Pues ella nos ayudó muchísimo, por ejemplo "cuando vayáis por la carretera parar aquí o allí." Y pues con cada persona que estábamos durmiendo con ellos, preguntábamos directamente "qué pensáis de esto..." La experiencia me ayudó en el sentido que pude comparar como es la gente en California o como es la gente de aquí o para hablar más con gente nativa. Con ésta chica hubo muy buena relación y ella ahora está aquí en España, está más para el sud, pero vendrá en setiembre aquí a Barcelona y entonces ya hemos quedado que le enseñaré la ciudad como ella me la enseñó también allí. Eso luego lo hicimos también en LA y en SF. Para mí no es lo mismo irte tú a un hotel en SF que estar viviendo con gente que vive allí y que te dice: "ves aquí, ves allí", "me gusta esto de la ciudad..." Yo creo que lo conoces diferente y esto pues claro, hacer el viaje y hacerlo así, yo creo que he conocido mucho más que si no me hubiese quedado en Boston o me hubiese ido de hotel o de hostel."

<sup>101</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Claro, piensa que yo estando en Sídney estaba, no en la ciudad, en la parte de fuera en una urbanización, pero estaba metida en un sitio en que casi no podía moverme y yo necesitaba conocer Australia más que Sídney. Y claro un mes y medio viajé todo lo que pude y conocí, me fui a trabajar en granjas con australianos y más que adaptarme, me ayudó a conocer la verdadera Australia, más rural, más auténtica que no la parte de la ciudad."

Because people that I met in AUC [Amsterdam University College], they were from a higher social class. They [the family who Kira stayed with] were middle social class. And it was more like... authentic maybe, because the other people are used to travel a lot and their parents were I don't know, journalists or designers... they were used also to speak in English and they were really outgoing and friendly. But then, when we travelled to the northern islands and we met this family, we could see the traditional family, the typical house... we were also talking about how they see us (Spanish people) and it was funny. It was more cozy. [sic]

### 6.2.3 Other influential factors

Besides the above-mentioned conditions, the participants also reported several influential factors that generally contributed to a better adaptation to a new environment in the context of academic mobility. These included:

- previous experience abroad,
- previous foreign language studies,
- family background,
- personal motivation,
- host university services for integration (i.e. introduction weeks and activities)
- the extent to which the host country is multicultural.

Below I will present the most representative comments from the interviews.

All the participants expressed that previous experience abroad contributed a lot to adaptation to a new place. Sara, for instance, suggested that those people who had never travelled or had never had prior international experiences would feel nervous in the face of the unknown. Moreover, during the previous exchanges, people normally had a chance to practice a foreign language, which significantly contributed to confidence in the following encounters:

The experience of previous exchanges. Sure it has helped me. One: in my English, that before departure I was able to communicate a little bit; then in not having deep fear of being there and not being able to express myself with

people. That fear I did not have, I was worried about being alone, about managing by myself, because I had never travelled alone. But I was not afraid of being in a different country. I imagine that someone who has not travelled can feel scared, of having absolutely no idea what you are going to find. And in my case it was not like this either, I was not afraid. I was worried, but not afraid.<sup>102</sup>

Kira believed that prior experience abroad was significant because it gave her the first encounter with people from different cultural backgrounds. This valuable experience helped to shape her behaviors and attitudes towards interactions with people who held different beliefs, values, and traditions:

It helps because you first experience is with people that is not like you, and with people that has not been raised in the same way as you. They are not thinking like you, they don't have the same values maybe, the same perspective. So it's like "ok this is me and this is the world, and I have to make a relationship of this". I cannot be just alienated by my own way of living.

Previous foreign language study abroad was also mentioned as a factor to be taken into consideration. Learning English at school, although sufficient for academic contexts, is not enough for understanding colloquial language. Lola, for example, stated that her previous studies in Canada had helped to enrich her vocabulary in terms of colloquial expressions and also improve her understanding of local accents and abbreviations. This prior experience helped her feel more confident with using her English during this SA programme.

Lola: Because if you only have this English that you learn at schools in Spain, it is nothing. If you have only this background, it is really difficult to get the meaning of the others when they are speaking to you. Because you only have been so academic that you don't have the colloquial way of speech. You don't know the way they actually speak.

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<sup>102</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "La experiencia de intercambios interiores. Seguro que me ha ayudado. Uno: en mi nivel de inglés, que antes de irme ya me defendía un poco; luego en no tener miedo profundo de estar allí y no poder entenderme con la gente. Ese miedo no lo tenía, tenía nervio de estar sola, de espabilarme, porque nunca había viajado sola. Pero no tenía miedo de estar en un país diferente. Que imagino que otra persona que no ha viajado lo puede tener, de no tener absolutamente ni idea de lo que te vas a encontrar. Y lo mío pues tampoco era así, yo no iba con miedo. Iba nerviosa, pero miedo no."

Researcher: Does this help to adapt?

Yes, when I was in Canada... you can also recognize more accents, more words that are colloquial or the way they abbreviate words. If you don't know this could be difficult.

Virginia mentioned that her previous experience in a nine-month English course in London had helped her to develop social and communication skills as well as to become more linguistically and culturally self-assured: "Previous experience in London helped me develop social and communicational skills and broke the ice about foreign languages/cultures." Besides, Virginia also mentioned a positive mindset and personal motivation towards communication with people from different cultures as being significant factors. Prior to departure for Quebec, she knew what she wanted from this exchange, and she was motivated to meet as many international people as possible:

Good previous mindset. I knew clearly what I wanted to get from this experience, a good mixture of fun and knowledge without much stress. Personal predisposition or motivation. I really believe that if you don't meet people, it must be because your mindset is different; I may be wrong because I can judge, but your mindset may not enable you. If you have an open mind and predisposition, you will be ok.

Another important factor was the host university's services for integration, such as introduction weeks and other activities. Virginia, for example, noted how useful for her the integration services in the University of Laval had been:

So university services for integration are super important. They do a great job in my opinion. In Quebec they did a lot of activities: visiting the city, activities to meet people, activities that advise you how to adapt to the cold weather, etc. Super important!

Kira also emphasized how important introduction week and the activities organized by her host university had been for her. They helped her to build a network of contacts at the beginning and to get to know her teachers, classmates, and surroundings. Altogether, these activities gave her a sense of belonging to a community without feeling alone.

Kira: They organized at the beginning, but because it was also for the first year students, a barbecue with a concert. I thought this is amazing, I haven't found this in UPF. It was really good, everyone was there. Teachers, students, everyone. So you could go and talk with your teacher while you are eating tofu-Frankfurt or meat-Frankfurt, or potatoes. It was a buffet and also a concert performed by the students. They were doing the performances, so it was also funny to see how your other fellows are there dancing or playing or singing... so it was a kind of sense of community.

Researcher: Do you think these activities help in adaptation?

Kira: Yes, because it was at the first week, so you don't know anyone in the Erasmus or in the university and you don't know also the city. The activities were "going to the city center and take a photo with..." these crazy things. So you get to know the surroundings and it helps you to move quickly, more quick than the others. Also you can work with other people. I remember also we had some group tasks and we organized ourselves and you can also be in contact with others. [sic]

The family background was also mentioned as a significant factor. Having a close relative who had also travelled or lived abroad influenced other members of the family. They might become more motivated and interested in discovering other places and meeting people, which eventually facilitated their adjustment.

Maybe to have the background of your family. If you have someone in your family that has done the same, maybe you are also more keen to do it. For example, my dad likes to travel. He was living in Peru for four years. He was married with a Peruvian girl, so now they are living in Spain again and I have a little sister and a step-mum who is from Peru. So I'm also more open to new food and it is enriching to see how my dad has given it to me this interest for traveling, to go abroad, to meet more people and to see that his town where you are living is not only the center of the world. My mum doesn't like too much to travel. She is more this kind of home-person but I think my sister is more like

my mum, but I think I get this from my dad: to go abroad and to see the world. He was really influential to me in that sense. (Kira)

Daniel, for example, also mentioned that previous experience abroad and foreign language proficiency are important factors for adaptation. Similar to other students, he suggested that people who had always lived with their parents and had never been abroad would have limited cultural knowledge and, consequently, would have trouble adapting. He also added that the extent to which the country was multicultural was very important. In a country with a multicultural society, newcomers do not feel like outsiders: “I would add the factor of how multicultural is the place you go to. Because the US is very multicultural. So the fact that there is already a wide variety of cultures in a place makes you feel that you are not so different, so discriminated. The differences are well-accepted in such places.”

### **6.3 The development of intercultural sensitivity**

Before presenting the results drawn from the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire, I consider it important to examine how the participants understood the concept of Intercultural Sensitivity and whether they felt that they had changed from the beginning of the SA in their sensitivity to other cultures.

#### **6.3.1 Participants’ definitions of intercultural sensitivity and overall evaluation**

During the Final Evaluation Interview, the participants were asked to define the concept of intercultural sensitivity and describe their perceptions of change (if any) in their level of sensitivity to cultural differences after their sojourn.

For Lola, just like for Angela and Maria, an interculturally sensitive person was one who possessed knowledge of different cultural behaviors and beliefs. Upon returning home, she felt she had changed in her sensitivity to cultural differences because she had lived in a multicultural environment, which helped her apprehend different points of view and even accept customs she did not share:

It would be...not so much to accept, but to learn about other behaviours, other beliefs, and meanings of what you maybe thought that was only one direction or one face and then you... I have learnt a lot because you live everyday with those people that are really different, maybe more than you expected in the beginning, but you just have to deal and accept, maybe you don't agree with something, but you don't push anything and just let it be. As I wrote at the end sometimes we used to contrast our points of view because it was a really nice atmosphere. Sometimes small arguing...

After returning home, Lola felt she had learned about different cultures and had become more experienced in communicating with people. She came to the conclusion that she needed to avoid generalizing about particular cultures because individual differences were more important:

Probably yes, I have learnt a lot of things I didn't know, I could add more experience and deepen that I had known. They have shown me other points of view, but maybe I have now some prejudice about... I don't know everyone is different and I cannot generalize. For example, on my floor there were 6 people from Turkey and they were very different even if they were from one country.

Similar to Ares and Cristina, Kira understood intercultural sensitivity as being open to others. Besides, an interculturally sensitive person should be empathetic, compassionate, and tolerant: "For me, intercultural sensitivity is when you are open to the others. And also you have the understanding or the comprehension or empathy." As a result of spending six months in the Netherlands, Kira felt that she had become more sensitive to cultural differences because she had begun to understand foreign people's behavior and feelings better. Moreover, she had become more knowledgeable about her own culture and her likes and dislikes.

Kira: Yes, I think so. I think I'm more open, if I can, I'm more... I feel like before I was open but in some sense also judgmental. But now I feel like I can understand how other people feel about their own culture. For example, with my own friends from the US, a lot of them were saying that they don't like also this kind of American Style of living... They had a lot of good things and they

wanted to preserve this but they were also aware about what it was not so good or wrong. Like me, I love Spain. I love the weather and the culture as well, and the Catalan culture, but I also know that there are a lot of things that I don't like and I don't belong to. So in the same sense, they were saying the same.

Virginia defined intercultural sensitivity as: "the ability to interact with people from different cultures, from different backgrounds, by considering that your differences will probably not be necessarily opinion-based, but sometimes cultural-based." She did not feel she had become more interculturally sensitive as a result of spending four months in Quebec. She, however, felt she had become more knowledgeable of other cultures but especially of French culture. Virginia believed that she was already open-minded as a result of previous experience abroad. Consequently, this four-month stay was not challenging for her. Partially, it was because she mainly communicated with a group of French students, who were not so culturally different.

Ok, I think about it and I would say, of course I have changed, but I think I have more learnt than changed. So I have learnt from different cultures more than I have changed my approach to different cultures. Now I know more about French culture and the countries I used to be closest by friends. I have more information about the way they think or they feel. But I feel, I am not sure maybe I have to wait a bit longer in order to accept my sensitivity changes, but I feel like I already had an open mind before and this specific experience hasn't given me a specific challenge let's say.

For Natalia, intercultural sensitivity meant appreciation of and interest in other cultures. Furthermore, she defined it as "understanding that there are other cultures in the world and they are important or as valuable as your own." After having spent six months in Hong Kong, Natalia felt she had become more tolerant of and open to other cultures. As a result of the SA programme, she had made a lot of international friends from countries she had never visited. She particularly highlighted her travel experiences while studying because they gave her the opportunity to meet people from different cultural backgrounds and also had learnt from them.

Of course I have changed; I have met lot of people. I already had a lot of international friends before, but I have met people from cultures that I have never been a friend with before. So yes, I think it has opened my mind a little bit more. I think I was open-minded before but now I'm more open-minded. I have met people also when I travelled and I have learnt from them. I think I am respectful with every culture. So I think I have grown more in this direction.

For Elizabeth, intercultural sensitivity was the ability not to fall into cultural relativism but rather to understand non-judgmentally foreign people's reactions and behaviors in certain circumstances. Also, she suggested not measuring behavior and customs according to one's own moral scale.

Without falling into a cultural relativism, to understand what is difficult, to understand the arbitrariness of certain reactions in some circumstances. For example, to understand that not everyone is ... not to measure everyone according to your moral scale, it would be that.<sup>103</sup>

After having stayed in Rio de Janeiro, she perceived that she had eradicated relativism and judgment, and had become more aware of her likes and dislikes. She admitted that after her SA she dared to say to herself that she preferred one cultural reaction over another:

Maybe what I have changed is to dare to say that I feel more akin to one thing than to the other. Before perhaps I fell a little bit in relativism ... in a discourse ... yes, before I was more theoretical I think, but now I became more real, more aware and although, it is not perfect ... Do you understand what I mean? It is not about anti-European or anti-American, it is not so much that but as this "well yes, there are different ways of understanding and it's ok if I feel more akin to one kind of reaction than to another."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Sin caer en un relativismo cultural, entender que es difícil, entender la arbitrariedad de ciertas reacciones en algunas circunstancias. Por ejemplo, entender que no todo el mundo está... no medir todo el mundo como igual a tu escala moral, sería eso."

<sup>104</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Tal vez lo que he cambiado es atreverme a decir que me puedo sentir más afin a una cosa que no a la otra. Que antes tal vez caía un poco en el relativismo... en un discurso... sí, antes era más teórica yo creo, pero ahora yo veo más real, más consciente y aunque, no sea el perfecto... ¿sabes lo que quiero decir? No es que sea anti-europeos o anti-americanos, no es tanto eso sino como

Similar to Sara, Anna defined intercultural sensitivity as “the degree to which people can appreciate the differences and how they can manage being in a different environment.” She admitted that this experience opened her mind, and she had learned a lot of things that she would not have been able to read in books or see on TV:

I think I’ve learned a lot and it has opened the way I think about different cultures. I thought I was quite open-minded, but now I feel that it has improved. But it’s not the same being here and speaking once a month with someone different, that every week you found people and different ways of thinking and they’re living in their own countries. I love when people explain about the political situation or about what they think about their own governments. Think like that, that you can meet in the news but I’m aware that what you read it’s not the same what people think. And I really like asking questions like these to really have the input. Or their own point of view, comparing with what I received from my media.

After having spent six months in Boston, Anna said she now had an easier time getting to know people and making friends with them. She felt she had become more culturally aware and realized that there were a lot of cultural differences among people, which was something she had not taken into account before:

I feel it has increased, or I felt already open, but now more and I can’t tell you in what specifically, but meeting people from different parts of the world is much more accessible to me now. And I think that I value more ... or I’ve noticed more differences than before maybe I did not take into consideration...<sup>105</sup>

Daniel defined intercultural sensitivity as the ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences. According to his point of view, an interculturally sensitive person has “to realize that there are differences in cultures because you may think that you are so international minded, you are a citizen of the world, and everything is similar... but

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“vale sí, hay diferentes maneras de entenderlo y no pasa nada porque yo me sienta más afín a un tipo de reacción que a otro.”

<sup>105</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Siento que ha aumentado, o sea ya me sentía abierta, pero ahora más y tampoco te sé decir en qué concreto, pero en el hecho de conocer gente de diferentes partes del mundo es mucho más accesible para mí ahora. Y creo que valoro más... o que me he dado cuenta de más diferencias que antes a lo mejor no tenía en cuenta...”

no.” He admitted that after having stayed in LA he realized there were differences among people even if they were of the same educational level. Previously, he believed that being a “universitarian” [undergraduate student] meant being cosmopolitan, but he arrived at the conclusion that what mattered was a person’s cultural background. As an example, he mentioned one Chinese student with whom he studied in his host university. Daniel believed that university students were critically minded, but he was surprised to see that his Chinese classmate was unable to critically discuss the Chinese political system. Daniel suggested that it was because Chinese people live under a dictatorship and are not allowed to openly criticize their politicians:

But for example, it was the case with the boy I knew from China. He was critique with what we were learning about economics, I would say, but when we wanted to talk about politics, he was not going to be. Because in China they have a dictatorship and it’s I guess difficult for them to talk critically about how the political regime is functioning. So they are not even allowed to have a Facebook account. So that was shocking to me, somebody who is really intelligent, who is critique about economy and not about politics.

After having examined how the participants perceived they had changed in their sensitivity to cultural differences after the SA, I will turn to the findings drawn from the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire data.

### 6.3.2 Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire findings

As described in the Methodology chapter (see Section 3.6.1), the participants’ Likert responses to five factors in the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire (i.e., Interaction Confidence, Respect for Cultural Differences, Interaction Engagement, Interaction Enjoyment, and Interaction Attentiveness) were averaged separately before departure and after the sojourn abroad. After that, a paired Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied so as to check whether these average responses had become significantly higher between those two different times. The results are shown in Table 6.2.

**Table 8. Wilcoxon signed-rank test results**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>p-values</b>
Interaction Confidence	0.021
Respect for Cultural Differences	0.534
Interaction Engagement	0.814
Interaction Enjoyment	0.862
Interaction Attentiveness	0.445

Apart from this statistical analysis, the explanatory comments, which the participants provided in the questionnaire when giving reasons for their answers, were analyzed.

In the following five subsections corresponding to the five factors in the Intercultural Sensitivity questionnaire, I will present the statistical findings and the subsequent qualitative analysis of the explanatory comments. The students' responses for each question in each group will be depicted in a respective pie chart showing the results before and after their stays. The shares of the pie will display how many students chose a given response at a certain time. Thus, any difference in responses at two different times will be clearly shown.

### 6.3.2.1 Interaction Confidence

The Interaction Confidence factor deals with the participants' feeling of confidence in interacting with people from different cultures. There were three questions exploring this issue:

Q3 Do you feel sure of yourself in interacting with people from different cultures?

Q4 Do you find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures?

Q5 Do you always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures?

The statistical analysis reveals that this group of questions showed a statistically significant test result ( $p$ -value = 0.021), which means that the participants attributed

significantly higher Likert values to this aspect after their sojourn. Let us examine each question of this group separately.

Figures 42 and 43 show the participants' responses to Q3 before and after the SA.



Figure 42. Participants' responses to Q3 before the SA



Figure 43. Participants' responses to Q3 after the SA

As can be seen from the pie chart (Figure 42), before departure half of all participants (Natalia, Angela, Sara, Kira, Maria and Virginia) opted for “yes” and commented that they felt self-assured when interacting with people from different cultures. All of them reported that they were always open to communication with foreign people, especially when it was mutual and based on genuine interest. Natalia’s comment below exemplifies this opinion:

Q3 Yes, especially if they are open to communicate and the interaction is 2-sided, like both sides feel interested in learning about the other side.

The other half (Ares, Lola, Anna, Elizabeth, Cristina and Daniel) chose a “sometimes” option. Linguistic and cultural barriers were mentioned as the main reasons for feeling

unconfident when interacting with foreigners. For Lola, Ares, and Elizabeth, for instance, inability to express themselves because of lacking foreign language skills and vocabulary was the factor that influenced their confidence most.

Q3 Sometimes. I can't express myself with all freedom, because sometimes I don't have the vocabulary and competence to say what I want to say in English.  
(Lola)

Q3 Sometimes. I think I must improve my languages.<sup>106</sup> (Elizabeth)

For Cristina and Daniel, besides linguistic barriers, cultural differences (i.e., different cultural habits and mentality) also affected their feeling of confidence in interaction with foreign people. Daniel explained that sometimes he did not feel confident for fear of being impolite and offending his intercultural counterparts. As a reference, he felt hesitant about making jokes that he would normally make in Spain:

Q3 Sometimes. I may not be as brave to say something I would say to native people because I would fear to be impolite to them. Joking is a typical example. Jokes relating to sexuality.... for example. Here we are very used to them but I'm not sure whether they are for them.

Christina in turn expressed that, besides individual differences, cultural proximity was also of great importance to her, as she always felt more comfortable and self-reliant when she communicated with someone from a Mediterranean or Spanish-speaking country:

Q3 Sometimes. It depends on the person and where she or he is from. For example, I feel more secure when I'm interacting with a person from a Mediterranean country or with person from a Spanish speaking country.

Anna, who was born in Catalonia and identified herself more as Catalan than Spanish, pointed out that she felt especially unconfident when bringing up the topics related to Catalonia and existing problems between Spain and the Catalonian society. These are topics, according to her point of view, that foreign people might have never heard about or might not have been interested in. Lack of concern or understanding of the problems

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<sup>106</sup> Sometimes. Penso que he de millorar els meus idiomes.

and the reasons behind them by foreigners sometimes made her take a defensive stand. She felt she had to defend her cultural identity and political beliefs:

Q3 Sometimes. Especially when I explain things about Catalonia, the problematic with Spain or topics that most of them have never heard before and I can give them my own opinion... When they just don't want to hear about what you have to say about your country, when you try to explain that you are not Spanish, that you feel Catalana...

After the SA, there was a positive shift. Figure 43 shows that ten students chose "yes", while only two opted for a "sometimes" option. Natalia, Angela, Sara, Kira, Maria and Virginia chose "yes" as before the SA programme. Cristina and Daniel also remained of the same mind as before departure and chose "sometimes." However, four students (Ares, Lola, Anna and Elizabeth) made a positive shift from "sometimes" to "yes."

Ares and Elizabeth felt that they had improved their language skills, which helped them express themselves better. Ares's comment is representative of this shift: "Yes, once I was comfortable with the language, I felt sure and interested in interacting with them. It is like magic when I stopped thinking what I wanted to say and I just said it without planning how."

Lola perceived that she had become more open to meeting people as a result of her sojourn abroad. Although her English still needed to be improved, she felt herself capable of maintaining interactions with people from other cultures and felt encouraged to speak more after realizing that people had often reacted kindly to her efforts:

Q3 Yes, I consider myself a person with enthusiasm that, despite not having a good command of English, is open to talk to everyone and to share good moments. This is the philosophy with which I have lived these months and being self-confident has been one of the key pillars, confidence that also was encouraged after having seen that people in general responded positively.<sup>107</sup>

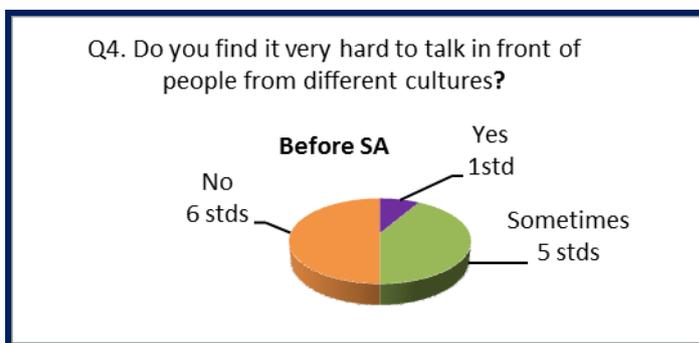
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<sup>107</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Sí, em considero una persona amb entusiasme que tot i no tenir el millor nivell d'anglès està oberta a parlar amb tothom i compartir bones estones. Aquesta és la filosofia amb la que he viscut aquests mesos i tenir confiança amb mi mateixa ha sigut un dels pilars claus, confiança que també es veia reconfortada al veure que la gent en general sempre responia amb positivament."

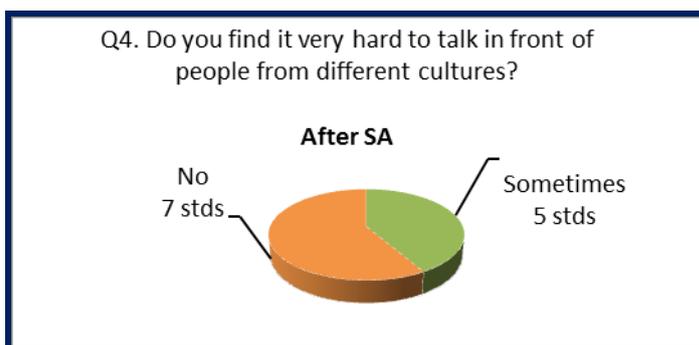
Anna began to feel much more confident when talking about the Catalan-Spanish problem after the SA. Instead of taking a defensive stand, she became more open about this topic when she found a receptive audience with whom she could not only exchange opinions but also learn:

Q3 Yes. I think I have a lot to offer, explaining the Catalan-Spanish situation and I also feel I have a lot to learn from others so it was always interesting when other people were eager to know about my country and they had things to share with me about what they thought of that or of their own culture and experience.

Let us move on to the next question in this group. Figures 44 and 45 illustrate the students' responses to question 4 before and after their SA programme.



**Figure 44. Participants' responses to Q4 before the SA**



**Figure 45. Participants' responses to Q4 after the SA**

Figure 44 shows that before departure half of the participants (Natalia, Elizabeth, Kira, Maria, Virginia and Daniel) reported that they did not feel discomfort when talking in front of people from different cultures. Natalia and Virginia, for instance, found it to be no harder than performing in front of people from their own culture.

Q4 No. Why should I? Because of feeling rejected? You have to take care of what you say, of course, but I don't know why it should be harder than any normal conversation. (Natalia)

For Kira, it was always possible to adapt herself to any communicative situation and to find common ground with intercultural counterparts, although cultural differences sometimes could complicate interaction: "Not in general. You could adjust always your speech. It depends on who you are talking to. But sometimes cultural factor makes communication a little bit difficult. But in general you can explain to the others what the point is." Elizabeth relied on mimics in case her linguistic abilities played her false, while Daniel always tried to explain his ideas as clearly as possible and to attract his interlocutors' attention.

Q4 No. I also rely on the universal language, the gestures. I work in a campsite where there are a lot of Dutch, the ties don't stop being established even if I don't have a good command of the language.<sup>108</sup> (Elizabeth)

Q4 No. I try to be understandable and to get their attention. (Daniel)

Maria admitted that she had never experienced difficulties in the context of informal communication. However, when it dealt with public speaking, she assumed insufficient foreign language ability might cause anxiety:

Q4 No. On the colloquial level I have no problem in this regard. As for oral presentations in front of a large audience, I usually feel nervous when I do it in Catalan, I imagine that in English it can be worse because I don't master the language so well.<sup>109</sup>

Figure 44 shows that there were also five students (Lola, Angela, Anna, Sara, and Cristina) who opted for "sometimes." The insufficient level of a foreign language, fear of talking in front of a large number of people (even in front of co-nationals) or of being misunderstood were the most frequent reasons given by the students.

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<sup>108</sup> No. També confio molt en el llenguatge universal, els gestos. Treballo en un càmping on hi ha molts holandesos, el vincle no deixa d'establir-se amb les persones encara que no domini l'idioma.

<sup>109</sup> No. A nivell col·loquial no tinc cap problema en aquest sentit. Pel que fa a exposicions orals davant d'un públic gran, acostumo a posar-me nerviosa quan ho faig en català, imagino que en anglès pot ser pitjor, ja que no domino la llengua tan bé.

Q4 Sometimes. It is just when the speaking language is not my own that I can be shy. (Angela)

Q4 Sometimes. I find hard to talk in front of a big group (even in Spanish groups) or if I don't manage enough the language I have to speak. (Cristina)

Q4 Sometimes, when I have to use their language. If I can use mine is a little bit easier but I'm always thinking if they really understand me.<sup>110</sup> (Anna)

Q4 It depends on the language, of course, and the affinity between people and cultures. Sometimes a significant cultural difference can enormously hinder communication between two individuals. (Sara)

Finally, one student (Ares) found talking in front of foreigners to be hard for her. Ares felt especially uncomfortable when talking in front of native English speakers or other people whose language level was higher.

Q4 Yes. It's hard because I can't express myself really well because of my level of English and especially when I am surrounded by natives or internationals with a very good level.

After the SA, Figure 45 shows a slightly positive shift. Seven students chose a "no" option, while five students selected a "sometimes" option. Natalia, Elizabeth, Kira, Maria and Virginia remained of the same mind and, as before departure, claimed that they had not found it difficult to talk in front of people from different cultures. Lola, Angela and Cristina noted that they sometimes had difficulty with this aspect, while Ares, Anna, Sara and Daniel changed their opinions after the SA. Ares shifted from "Yes" to "Sometimes", while Anna and Sara from "Sometimes" to "No", which are positive shifts. The reason for these changes seems to be the improvement of their English skills, which made them feel more linguistically confident.

Q4 Sometimes. In the beginning it was. It was hard when I was surrounded with very good English spoken people, but then it became easier. (Ares)

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<sup>110</sup> Sometimes, quan he d'utilitzar el seu idioma. Si puc utilitzar el meu és una mica més fàcil però sempre estic pensant si de debò m'entenen. (Anna)

Q4 No. The only problem might be the language, but if you both can understand each other, I don't see the problem. On the contrary, it enriches you. (Sara)

Q4 No. Not really. If we are discussing about a complicated issue that is polemical to some people from determined cultures, may be, but not in general... (Anna)

Daniel in turn made an adverse shift from "No" to "Sometimes" explaining that he felt much more comfortable with the group of his co-nationals. The reason for that feeling was that sometimes he was not sure of what foreign people thought of various topics and used humour to establish a closer relationship, but he always had doubts about the appropriateness of his jokes. He arrived at the conclusion that the knowledge of the host culture was key for him, as it contributed to his confidence in interaction.

Q4 Sometimes. I don't feel as confident as when I am with a group of Catalan or Spanish people, in general. You do not know what they think about very specific topics and tend to use joking to break the ice. I think that the more I know about their culture, the more confident I feel to speak fluently and not having fear to say something disgusting for him/her (even though it may seem funny to me).

Figures 46 and 47 show the participants' responses to the last question related to Intercultural Confidence.

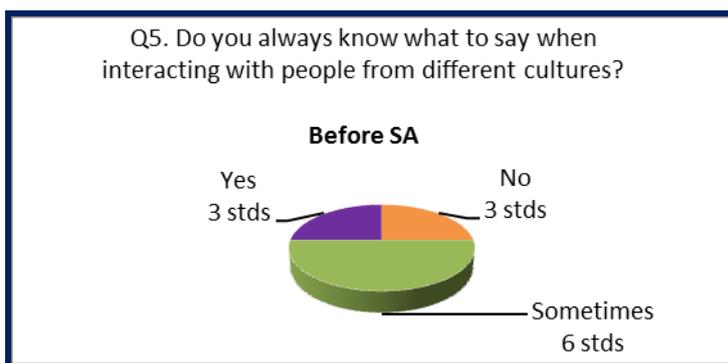
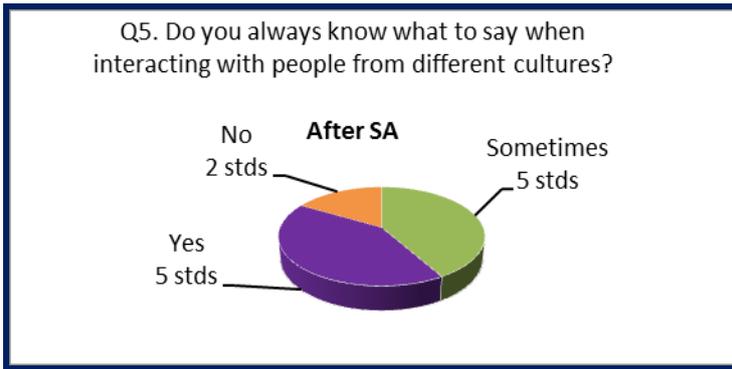


Figure 46. Participants' responses to Q5 before the SA



**Figure 47. Participants' responses to Q5 after the SA**

As can be seen from Figure 46, before departure three students (Elizabeth, Maria and Virginia) chose a “yes” option, three students (Lola, Anna and Cristina) selected a “no” option, while six students (Natalia, Ares, Angela, Sara, Kira and Daniel) opted for “sometimes.”

Elizabeth, Maria and Virginia reported that they had not found it difficult to start or deepen conversation and always had known what to say when interacting with people from different cultures. Elizabeth and Maria considered communication with foreign people to be much more interesting as it was always easier for them to find topics of interest such as cultural differences. Virginia also believed that communication with foreigners was engaging. Besides, she believed that multicultural background contributed to the establishment of rapport among strangers.

Q5 Yes. I can easily start a conversation with anyone. (Elizabeth)

Q5 Yes. I am quite a sociable person, so I never have this kind of problems. And with people from other cultures it's even easier, because you can always talk about the cultural differences. (Maria)

Q5 Yes. It's actually easier!!! Multiculturalism gives you a great startup for conversations! (Virginia)

Lola, Anna and Cristina, on the contrary, admitted that they often could not find the words to express themselves. The main impediments mentioned were the language barrier and the difficulty in finding topics of similar interest to engage others in conversation.

Q5 No. Sometimes I don't know how to say something and I simply listen, but when I gain confidence I try to say it in another way. (Lola)

Q5 No. Even when I interact with people from my country, I don't always know what to say. And of course, the language is another difficulty added. (Cristina)

Q5 No. This is like when you talk to people from here, you don't always know how to start, how to come up with political topics for example that can be found or very interesting or on the contrary inappropriate.<sup>111</sup> (Anna)

Natalia, Ares, Angela, Sara, Kira and Daniel commented that sometimes what happened is that they did not know what to say when starting conversation with foreign people. The language barrier, the difficulty in finding topics of common interest, the interlocutor's individual traits and the degree of familiarity with the other person were mentioned as the main reasons for such difficulty.

Q5 Sometimes, with my friend's linguistic partner from England, we just don't know what to say... Maybe it is because we don't share much in common, and we only talk about "superficial" topics like the weather, school, traveling... the same happens to me with my Chinese language partners. In this case we are even more limited by the language, because their Spanish is as bad as my Mandarin, and their English is not very fluent...(Natalia)

Q5 Sometimes. When you have language deficiencies, you can never be sure you are going to be completely understood. (Angela)

Q5 Sometimes you don't know what to say but not for the reason that they're from other countries but because of the person, because maybe you don't know enough each other. (Ares)

Q5 Sometimes. It depends on whether we have had previous conversations or not; whether we have been in the same meetings, classes... If I have never spoken to him/her, it will be difficult to speak more than 3 sentences. (Daniel)

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<sup>111</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "No. És com quan parles amb gent d'aquí que no sempre saps per on tirar, com encetar temes polítics per exemple que ho poden trobar o molt interessant o per contra poc adient."

Figure 47 displays a positive shift in the participants' responses after the SA. Five students (Elizabeth, Maria, Virginia, Ares and Angela) chose "yes", two students (Anna and Cristina) opted for "no" and five students (Natalia, Lola, Sara, Kira and Daniel) selected "sometimes."

Elizabeth, Maria and Virginia did not change their minds and, as before departure, commented that they had not experienced difficulties when interacting or starting conversation with intercultural counterparts. Natalia, Sara, Kira and Daniel also remained of the same mind and selected "sometimes" after the SA. All of them explained their choices with the same justification as before departure. However, Ares, Angela and Lola shifted in their responses after the SA.

Ares and Angela made a positive shift from "sometimes" to "yes." After her sojourn, Ares found conversations with foreigners to be enjoyable, and her linguistic limitations were no longer a problem for her. Angela, in turn, was no longer worried about not being understood because of her "linguistic deficiencies" and learned how to react when her linguistic abilities played her false.

Q5 Yes. For me it is even more joyful and interesting because so many things are mysterious and unknown for me. (Ares)

Q5 Yes. The truth is that if I don't know what to say, I say I don't know what to say. And I have seen that this happens to many people, you stand looking at the other person and say: well, yes, maybe... I don't know actually...and then you just smile.<sup>112</sup> (Angela)

Lola also made a positive shift from "no" to "sometimes", which may be explained by the fact that she had become more self-assured because her linguistic abilities had improved:

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<sup>112</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Yes. La verdad es que si no sé que decir, digo que no sé que decir. Y eso he visto que le pasa a mucha gente, te quedas mirando a la otra persona y dices: well, yes, maybe... I don't know actually... and then you just smile."

Q5 Sometimes, if I was not sure how to explain something because of vocabulary, perhaps it made me step back and not explain. However, with time I learned to try everything despite having some doubt.<sup>113</sup>

### 6.3.2.2 Respect for Cultural Differences

The Respect for Cultural Differences factor is concerned with participants' ability to respect different cultures and opinions, as well as tolerate other cultural values and behavior. There were six questions (2, 6, 7, 8, 13, and 15) which addressed this factor:

Q2 Do you often have a feeling that people from other cultures are narrow-minded?

Q6 Do you like being with people from different cultures?

Q7 Do you think you respect the values of people from different cultures?

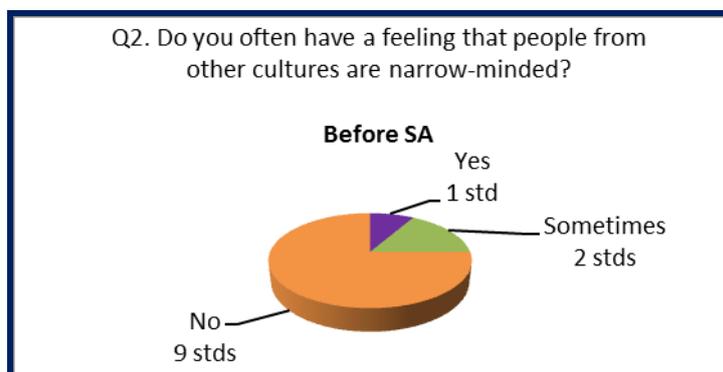
Q8 Do you think you respect the ways people from different cultures behave?

Q13 Do you accept the opinions of people from different cultures?

Q15 Do you think that your culture is better than other cultures?

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test reveals that the participants did not attribute significantly higher Likert values to this group of questions at the end of the SA programme (p-value = 0.534).

Figures 48 and 49 illustrate the participants' responses to Q2 before and after the SA programme.



**Figure 48. Participants' responses to Q2 before the SA**

<sup>113</sup> Original quote in English: "Alguna vegada, si no estava segura de com explicar alguna cosa per tema vocabulari, potser em feia enrere i no ho explicava. Tot i això, amb el temps vaig aprendre a intentar-ho tot i tenir algun dubte."



**Figure 49. Participants' responses to Q2 after the SA**

Before departure (Figure 48), the great majority of the participants (Ares, Lola, Angela, Kira, Sara, Elizabeth, Maria, Virginia and Daniel) opted for a “no” option and commented that they did not have the feeling that people from other cultures were narrow-minded. Narrow-mindedness was considered to be a personality trait that did not depend on a particular culture to which an individual belonged. Below are several quotes demonstrating this opinion:

Q2 No. I think there are all kinds of people everywhere. You may find a very narrow-minded person, but that does not mean that everyone is the same in their culture<sup>114</sup>. (Maria)

Q2 No. It depends on the person, not on the culture. I don't feel that because they are different they are narrow minded, that would be narrow-minded from my part. (Kira)

Q2 No. Of course, there are always narrow-minded people. However, in general I would say it doesn't depend on cultures but individuals. (Ares)

Sara also added that being in contact with people from different cultural backgrounds was one of the ways to become more aware of prejudices she held. She admitted that intercultural communication facilitated by previous experience had broadened her mind.

Q2 No. Not at all, I suppose there are people around the world that are narrow-minded, but normally, when you are in contact with other cultures you learn

<sup>114</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “No. Crec que hi ha gent de tota mena a tot arreu. És possible trobar algú més tancat de ment, però això no significa que tothom de la seva cultura sigui igual.”

about the prejudices that we have. And if any, it [communication with foreigners] opens your mind thanks to what other people bring to you. And people from other places are usually also interested in your culture<sup>115</sup>. (Sara)

However, there were also two students (Natalia and Cristina) who chose a “sometimes” option when responding to this question before departure. Natalia, on the contrary, believed that the extent to which a person was narrow-minded actually depended on the culture he or she belonged to. In her comments, she provided several examples: “Actually Asia people are a bit narrow-minded. But “occidental” people too. In the US, for example, you felt like they felt the center of the world. And of course they are not...” Cristina in turn refrained from generalizing and believed that both the culture and personality might play a significant role in forming stereotypes and beliefs:

Q2 I would say it depends on the culture and the person her/himself; so, I don't think we can generalize, because here in Spain you can also find people open to discover another culture and people really narrow-minded who think that what they have is the best or the only way that could be.

Anna was the only one who chose a “yes” option. Her opinion was based on her previous contacts with foreigners who had visited her country. As already mentioned above, Anna was born in Catalonia and identified herself more as Catalan than Spanish. She explained that the foreign people with whom she had communicated normally did not take into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of Spain, which she considered as narrow-mindedness in a way:

Q2 Yes. When they come to Barcelona thinking that the whole Spain is the same and that only Spanish exists without worrying about the history of the city or country they have arrived in<sup>116</sup>.

After the SA, there was a minor shift in the students' responses (Figure 49). Seven students opted for “no”, while five for “sometimes.” Ares, Kira, Sara, Elizabeth, Maria,

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<sup>115</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “No. Para nada, supongo que hay gente en todo el mundo que es de mente-cerrada, pero por lo general, al estar en contacto con otras culturas te das cuenta de los prejuicios que tenemos. Si acaso, te abre la mente gracias a lo que te aportan los demás. Y la gente de otros lugares suelen estar también interesados en que les hables de tu cultura.”

<sup>116</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Yes. Quan vénen a Barcelona pensant que tota Espanya és el mateix i que només existeix el castellà sense preocupar-se per la història de la ciutat o país al que han arribat.”

Virginia and Daniel were of the same mind as before departure, since they claimed that they had not felt that their foreign counterparts were prejudiced toward or intolerant of them.

Natalia and Cristina did not change their minds either and, as before, they opted for “sometimes.” Natalia, who had spent four months in Hong Kong, still continued to believe that culture played a fundamental role in forming peoples’ beliefs and adopting a certain type of behavior. During her SA, she travelled not only around China, but also in Korea and Japan. Based on this experience, she arrived at the conclusion that those Asian people who were constantly in contact with foreigners or previously had stayed abroad were much more tolerant, open and unprejudiced.

Q2 Sometimes. It depends a lot on the culture. Usually, people that have stayed abroad or know people from other countries are more open minded. This is more obvious in cultures such as the Japanese one, where they are usually quite shy when communicating and don’t wanna mix up with foreigners. (Natalia)

There were also those who returned from the exchange adversely impacted. Lola and Angela, for instance, shifted from “no” to “sometimes” after the SA. Lola’s reaction resulted from negative experiences of working in a group with other international classmates from Turkey and Bulgaria at the host university. Their unwillingness to work collaboratively on projects and presentations contributed to the development of her stereotypes regarding these cultures. Angela also came back with stereotypes about Chinese people, who she believed showed racist treatment towards African people.

Q2 Sometimes. Some mates did show a more reserved behavior when it dealt with their point of view and the way of working. They thought that their way of doing was the most correct and effective one, and had no intention to adapt to a working method that seemed good, more cooperative to all of us. In this case, they were from Turkey and Bulgaria, people with whom other students have also experienced cultural shocks.<sup>117</sup> (Lola)

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<sup>117</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Sometimes. Alguns companys sí que van mostrar una conducta més tancada en quant al seu punt de vista i manera de treballar. Pensaven que la seva manera de fer era la més correcta i eficaç, i no tenien intenció d’adaptar-se a un mètode de treball que ens semblés bé a tots, més

Q2 Sometimes. Like everywhere, each person has a different character. I cannot generalize. But there are characters of all kinds. The Chinese, for example, are a little bit racist to people of color.<sup>118</sup> (Angela)

Anna, after spending six months in Boston, was less certain and shifted from “yes” to “sometimes.” From her point of view, people from cross-cultural backgrounds were much more open-minded and could better mediate between cultures. In addition, she assumed that factors such as monolingualism and lack of previous study abroad or travel experiences affected the extent to which people were biased and intolerant:

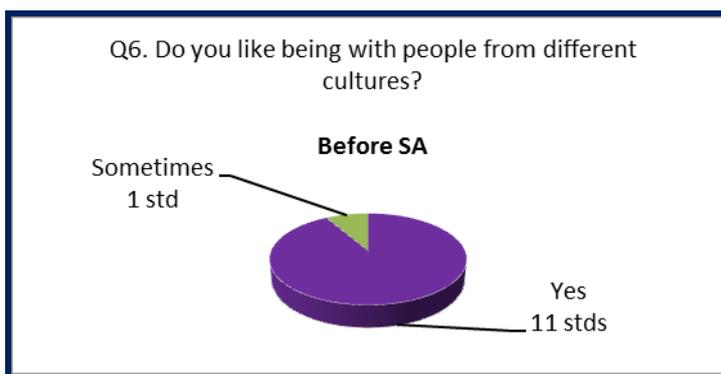
Q2 Sometimes. It depends on the culture they come from, I felt that people that came from environments that were their-selves cross-cultural, that is to say, a French whose parents were born in Vietnam, or a Chinese that has lived in France for 3 years, were more open-minded than people that just spoke one language or haven’t studied abroad, or haven’t just travelled to a different country.

The responses to the next four questions in this group (6, 7, 8, and 13) did not show significant changes before and after departure (Figures 50–57). The comments provided by the participants were also relatively similar. The great majority of the participants enjoyed foreign people’s company and considered themselves to be tolerant and respectful towards other cultural values, behaviors, and opinions. Responding to Q6, for instance, all but Sara opted for a “yes” option before departure (Figure 50).

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cooperatiu. En aquest cas, eren de Turquia i Bulgària, persones amb qui altres companys també han patit altres xocs culturals.”

<sup>118</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Sometimes. Como en todo el mundo, cada persona tiene un carácter distinto. No puedo generalizar. Pero hay de todo. Los chinos, por ejemplo, son un poco racistas con la gente de color.”



**Figure 50. Participants' responses to Q6 before the SA**



**Figure 51. Participants' responses to Q6 after the SA**

Interaction with foreign people was considered to be one of the best ways for getting to know other cultures, different traditions, beliefs and values while also to be a profound learning experience.

Q6 Yes. I like showing everything I can in my city, sharing retreats and history and sometimes learning things from their places of origin.<sup>119</sup> (Anna)

Q6 Yes. As I said, meeting people from other cultures allows you to get to know first hand their way of thinking and seeing life, you can understand much better their culture. I think it is very enriching to get to know different cultures, therefore, I love being with people from other cultures.<sup>120</sup> (Maria)

<sup>119</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "M'agrada ensenyar tot el que puc de la meua ciutat, compartir racons i història i a la vegada aprendre coses dels seus llocs d'origen."

<sup>120</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Yes. Com he dit, conèixer gent d'altres cultures et permet conèixer de primera mà la seva manera de pensar i de veure la vida, pots entendre molt millor com és la seva cultura. Crec que és molt enriquidor conèixer diferents cultures, per tant, m'encanta estar amb gent d'altres cultures."

Q6 Yes. Because I like to live new experiences, and to be with people from another culture it's the best way to know more things about their country.  
(Cristina)

Sara, in turn, chose a "sometimes" option explaining that foreign language limitations were a barrier that did not facilitate rapport with people from other cultures and sometimes even provoked exhaustion:

Q6 Sometimes. Usually yes, but I recognize that sometimes it is also difficult to reach a good level of affinity if there are obstacles that impede communication, I am referring especially to the language. (if there is someone who does not understand you very well or whom you do not understand very well this eventually results in tiredness).<sup>121</sup>

At the end of the SA, all the participants responded positively to Q6 (Figure 51). Sara, who had previously chosen "sometimes", shifted her choice to "yes." Her sojourn in Sydney positively influenced her linguistic abilities, and she became more knowledgeable of different cultures:

Q6 Yes. You can learn new things: food, habits, different thoughts, different religions, and different reasons to do different things.

Responding to Q7 before departure, all but Elizabeth and Cristina selected a "yes" option commenting that they always tried to have respect for the people, their cultures, and beliefs even if they did not share them (Figure 52). Ares's comment is just one example: "I absolutely respect values and beliefs which I don't have or I don't share." Elizabeth and Cristina both selected "sometimes" before departure. Both found it difficult to understand or accept those beliefs that seemed to be against their own, even if those beliefs could have existed in Catalonia in the past. Cristina therefore avoided bringing up cultural issues in order to avoid conflicting situations or misunderstandings.

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<sup>121</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Sometimes. Por lo general sí, pero reconozco que a veces es también difícil llegar a un buen nivel de afinidad si hay obstáculos de por medio que impiden la comunicación, me refiero especialmente a la lengua. (si hay alguien que no te entiende muy bien o que no entiendes muy bien resulta al final cansino)."

Q7 Sometimes. I would like to say yes but I am aware that it is difficult for me to understand convictions that our culture has overcome for long.<sup>122</sup> (Elizabeth)

Q7 Sometimes. I tried to respect always the values from different cultures; however, sometimes it's difficult if those values are against mine. So, I respect but I prefer not to talk about that with them. (Cristina)



**Figure 52. Participants' responses to Q7 before the SA**



**Figure 53. Participants' responses to Q7 after the SA**

At the end of the SA programme, all the participants opted for a “yes” option (Figure 53). The students who shifted from “sometimes” to “yes” were Elizabeth and Cristina. Elizabeth confessed that the sojourn had helped her to rely less on hidden prejudice and stereotypes, and respect other cultural values more. Cristina, who had previously avoided talking about cultural beliefs she did not share, became more willing to communicate with foreign people so as to understand the reasons behind their behavior and values.

<sup>122</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Sometimes. M’agradaria dir que sí però soc conscient que em costa entendre conviccions que la nostra cultura ha superat al llarg dels anys.”

Q7 Yes. Every time better, I think I will always need to get rid of all the prejudices which I involuntarily have, and which I was not aware of before.<sup>123</sup>  
(Elizabeth)

Q7 Yes. At least I always try to do it; to know more about them, to know why they have those values. (Cristina)

As for Q8, before the SA, the twelve participants admitted that they always tried to have respect for other people's behavior despite not sharing or fully understanding it (Figure 54).

Q8 Yes, I think it's part of their culture so everyone has its own freedom. (Ares)

Q8 Yes, I do, although sometimes I don't share them. I also like them to accept mine. Culture is something built in part by society and the environment, so I observe but I don't judge. (Natalia)

Q8 Yes. It is clear that everyone has his own perspective in life. (Kira)



Figure 54. Participants' responses to Q8 before the SA

<sup>123</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Yes. Cada vegada més, crec que sempre em faltará arribar a desprendre'm de tots els prejudicis que involuntàriament tinc, i abans desconeixia."



**Figure 55. Participants' responses to Q8 after the SA**

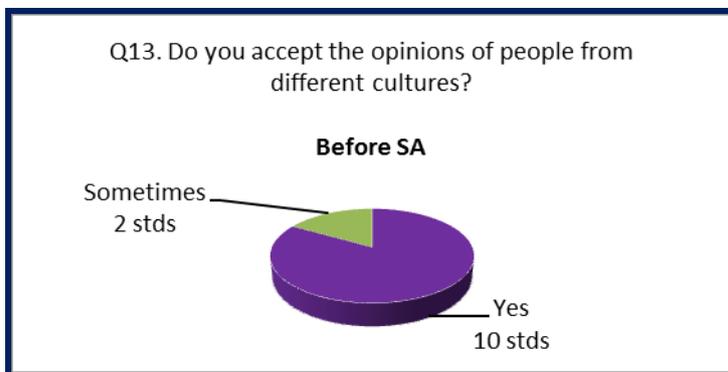
No change occurred in their opinions upon returning from the SA. All of them opted for “yes” (Figure 55) and provided similar comments as before departure.

Q8 Yes, I respect them, maybe sometimes I am surprised but I never tell them as a negative thing. (Ares)

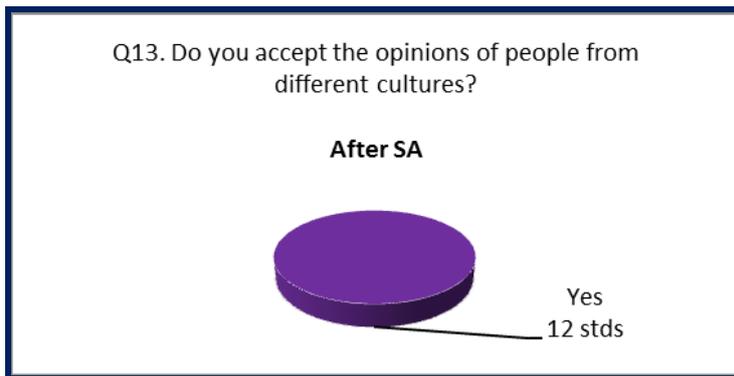
Q8 Yes. If I don't agree, I try to understand. If I don't understand, I can debate, but I respect, always respect. (Sara)

Q8 Yes. I think I respect, though, I do not always agree with them. (Anna)

Responding to Q13, all but Anna and Cristina opted for a “yes” option before departure (Figure 56). The participants admitted that they accepted the opinions of people from different cultures, but they did not necessarily share them. The diversity of different judgments and standpoints made the interaction with foreigners for them interesting and also enriching. At the same time, they tried to remain critical and if there was a significant disparity in views regarding cultural issues, they preferred to have debates.



**Figure 56. Participants' responses to Q13 before the SA**



**Figure 57. Participants' responses to Q13 after the SA**

Below are several examples of the comments the participants provided for this question:

Q13 Although I don't share them, thinking can be diverse and multiple, and that is what makes the world amazing. (Natalia)

Q13 Yes, I really appreciate them. They come from another point of view, with another cultural background so they're sometimes surprising and enriching. (Ares)

Q13 Yes, I respect but I remain critical and prefer to open a debate if certain attitudes do not coincide with my way of understanding the world in a global sense.<sup>124</sup>

Although Anna and Cristina selected "sometimes" before departure, their comments did not differ from the rest of the group. Both manifested that they tried to consider the opinions of people from other cultures as rationally as possible, and sometimes they found it difficult to agree with some of them. Just like other students, they preferred to debate in the case of a significant divergence of views. Anna's comment is presented below as an example:

Q13 Sometimes. Yes, but they [opinions] are of their own country and I think they are not well grounded and if I don't coincide with them it is more difficult for me, but in general yes, although what is more important is the debate that is

<sup>124</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Yes. Les respecto però em mantinc crítica i davant certes actituds que no concorden amb la meva manera d'entendre el món en sentit global prefereixo obrir un debat."

generated, to interact, not to always accept, it is logical that there will be some points that you won't agree with.<sup>125</sup> (Anna)

Figure 57 shows that all the participants chose “yes” when responding to question 13 at the end of SA programme. In the cases of Anna and Cristina, they made a slightly positive shift from “sometimes” to “yes.” Cristina did not provide any comments. From Anna's comment, it appears that she had become less critical and was more easily accepting of other people's opinions, even though she disagreed with them, without the need to convince or debate: “Yes. I accept them. It's their point of view, though I do not always share it or think in the same terms.”

With regards to Q15, before departure all the participants reported that they did not consider their culture to be better than others (Figure 58). Everyone admitted that there was no perfect culture and that cultural differences should be equally appreciated although they were sometimes difficult to accept.

Q15 No, It is just mine, and is different. Sometimes I think there are stupid cultural issues in other cultures. But there A LOT in mine too. (Natalia)

Q15 No. Like all things, my culture may be better in some aspects but worse in others in comparison with other cultures. No culture is more or less perfect, they are as they are and this is the greatness of the human being, his plurality.<sup>126</sup> (Sara)

Q15 No. I've said before, there is no culture that is better than another. They are simply different and equally valid, and it is interesting to learn new things from these differences.<sup>127</sup> (Maria)

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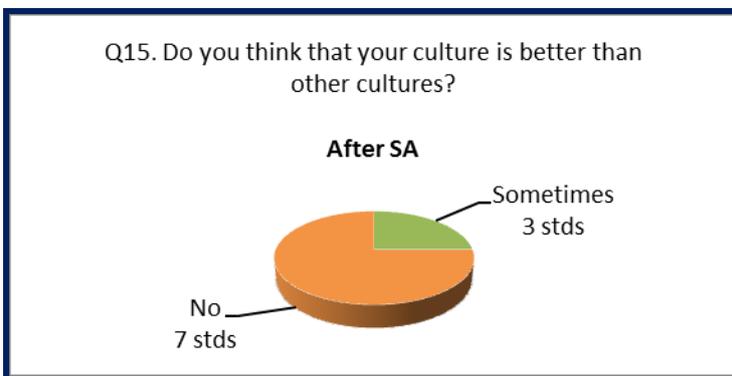
<sup>125</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Sometimes. Sí, però són sobre el seu propi país i crec que no estan gaire fonamentades i no hi coincideixo em costa més, però en general sí, tot i que crec que és més important el debat que es genera, interactuar, que no acceptar sempre, és lògic que hi haurà vegades que no et posaràs d'acord.”

<sup>126</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “No. Como todas las cosas, mi cultura puede ser mejor en unos aspectos pero peor en otros en comparación con las demás culturas. Ninguna cultura es más o menos perfecta, son como son y es la grandeza del ser humano, su pluralidad.”

<sup>127</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “No. Ja ho he comentat abans, no hi ha cap cultura que sigui millor que una altra. Simplement són diferents i igual de vàlides, i és interessant aprendre coses noves d'aquestes diferències.”



**Figure 58. Participants' responses to Q15 before the SA**



**Figure 59. Participants' responses to Q15 after the SA**

However, several students (Natalia, Elizabeth and Daniel) changed their minds after their sojourns abroad (Figure 59). Natalia felt reluctant to accept those cultures where, from her standpoint, fundamental freedoms, such as democracy and gay marriage, were not promoted and human rights were flouted:

Q15 Sometimes, not better but there are some things like democracy, gay marriage... that I consider to be universal rights and some cultures don't contemplate them, and this goes against human dignity so I may be a bit reluctant to embrace certain kind of thinking. But I respect it.

Elizabeth tended to draw parallels between Brazilian culture and her own. She came to the conclusion that Catalonia would be always far ahead in terms of food:

Q15 Sometimes. I find it difficult not to compare. Especially with food, I will always think that it is better in Catalonia.<sup>128</sup>

Daniel began to appreciate more his own country after he returned from the SA programme. Although he had not lived abroad for a long time, he felt he would not find a better place for living than Spain. After having stayed in Los Angeles and having communicated with international students and locals, he concluded that Catalonian society enjoyed greater stability and that Spain was in a more developed stage politically and economically:

Q15 Sometimes. I like mine because I have mostly lived in this one. I haven't had the possibility to live for a long-period in another place of the planet. Had I done so, I think I could give my opinion more properly. With the information I have now I say that mine is in a more developed stage than others in political and economic matters and that those others can take, if they want, what we have learnt and implement it in their places. It may be true that those other cultures have happier people too, who knows? I just can say I don't think I would be happier, as I am now, living in those other cultures.

### 6.3.2.3 Interaction Engagement

Interaction Engagement refers to individuals' willingness to participate in communication with people from different cultures. There were three questions in the questionnaire which addressed Interaction Engagement:

Q1 Do you enjoy interacting with people from different cultures?

Q11 Are you open-minded to people from different cultures?

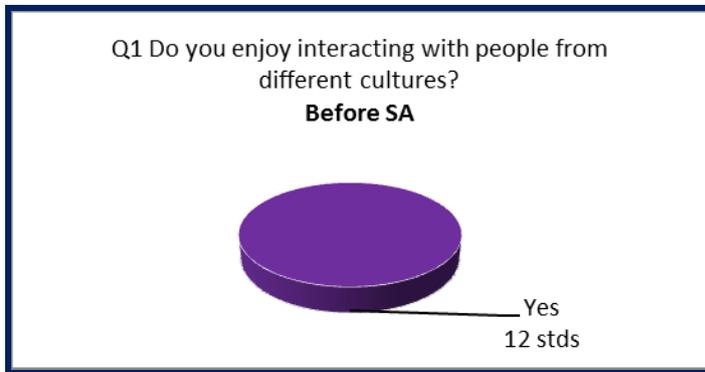
Q16 Do you avoid those situations where you will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons?

This group of questions did not show a statistically significant change at the end of the SA programme (p-value = 0.814). The participants' ranking was positively high from the very beginning.

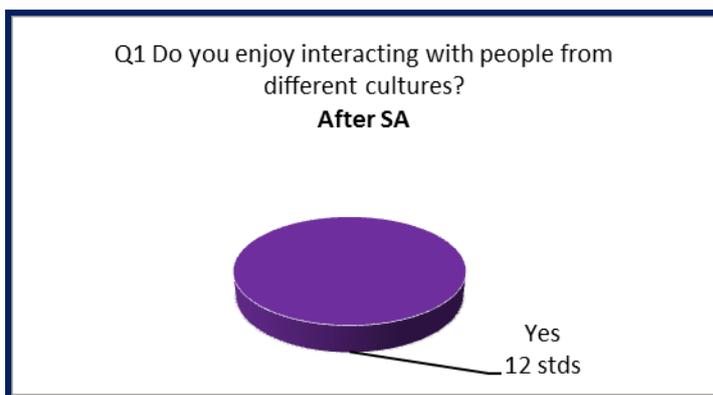
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<sup>128</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Sometimes. Em costa no comparar. Sobretot amb el menjar, sempre pensaré que a Catalunya és millor."

As shown in Figures 60 and 62, before departure all the participants already considered themselves to be open-minded persons (Q.11) who enjoyed interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds (Q.1).



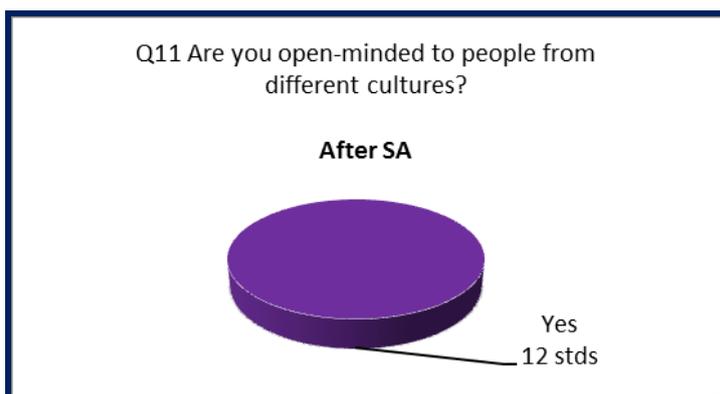
**Figure 60. Participants' responses to Q1 before the SA**



**Figure 61. Participants' responses to Q1 after the SA**



**Figure 62. Participants' responses to Q11 before the SA**



**Figure 63. Participants' responses to Q11 after the SA**

Some quotes from the explanatory comments illustrate that intercultural interaction was considered as a learning process through which people got to know and shared different cultural perspectives, which eventually led to personal enrichment.

Q1 Yes, because diversity enriches us, and other perspectives are always new ways to looking at things. (Natalia)

Q1 Yes. I'm learning with it. I love knowing things about other places so..! (Ares)

Q1 Yes. I like to meet people from all around the world to share our knowledge and points of views. (Lola)

Q1 Yes. I like to know other cultures, to see how different or similar we are from each other. (Kira)

No change occurred in their opinions after the SA (Figures 61 and 63). However, some of them became more aware of how media or other people's judgments based, more often than not, on limited previous experiences with a particular cultural group might affect our perceptions of that culture. Ares' comments before and after her sojourn clearly demonstrate this awareness:

Before the SA:

Q11 Yes. I'm open to new lifestyles, values, beliefs, religions I don't mind these things, I appreciate them and I respect them.

After the SA:

Q11 Yes. I try to not have prejudices and going to Erasmus has taught me a lot in this aspect. “All Chinese are quiet and shy” was something I always heard. After having done the Erasmus I have two very good Chinese friends who are cheerful and very talkative.

As for Q16, before departure all but Lola and Angela responded that they did not avoid the situations involving interaction with people from different cultures (Figure 64). On the contrary, they were willing to communicate and to deal with foreigners at every opportunity.

Q16 No. I actually pursue them. Sometimes I go to the Chinese bazaar just for the sake of exchanging some words with Chinese people. (Natalia)

Q16 No. On the contrary, I try to participate in every situation that I can meet people from all over the world. (Ares)

Q16 No. On the contrary, I like meeting people from other cultures; in part this is why I participate in this exchange programme.<sup>129</sup> (Anna)

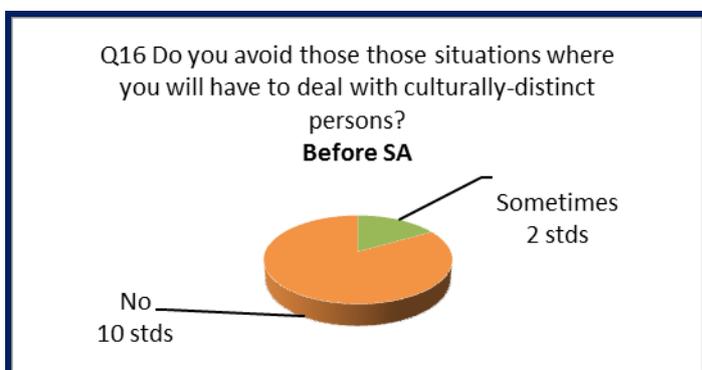
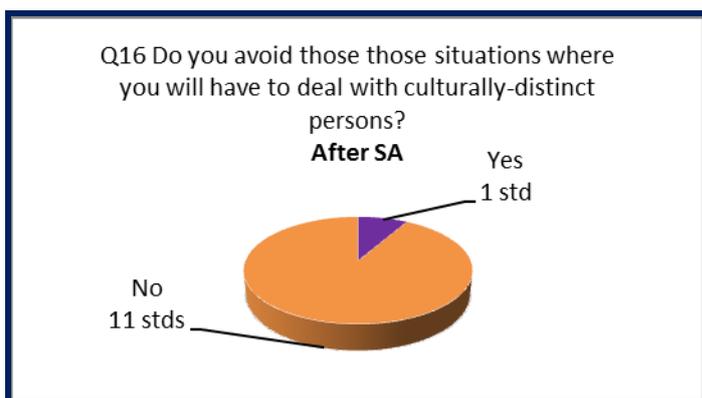


Figure 64. Participants' responses to Q16 before the SA

<sup>129</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “No. Al contrari, m'agrada conèixer gent d'altres cultures, per això marxo d'intercanvi en part.”



**Figure 65. Participants' responses to Q16 after the SA**

No change occurred in their opinions after the SA; nevertheless, a lack of language skills was mentioned as a factor that could impede dialogue with foreigners. Sara, for instance, confessed that the incapacity to maintain the conversation due to language problems sometimes made her refrain from interaction.

Q16 Normally no, but it is true that sometimes the language imposes a distance that you sometimes want to preserve<sup>130</sup>. (Sara)

In regards to Lola and Angela, both chose a “sometimes” option when answering Q16 before departure. At the beginning, Lola did not leave any explanatory comment for this answer. However, after spending a mid-term abroad she shifted positively from “sometimes” to “no”. From her comment, it is evident that living in a residence with students of other nationalities was an enriching experience that helped her learn to find common ground with people who held different opinions and views.

Q16 No. On the contrary, I liked living with people from other cultures, whose principles and values I have not necessarily shared. However, I have always tried to position myself neutrally if at any time a small conflict arose. (Lola)

Before departure, Angela admitted that sometimes she avoided situations involving culturally-distinct persons, and if she had to deal with people whose opinions she did not share, the best strategy to avoid conflicts was keeping her judgments silent. After her SA, Angela shifted from “sometimes” to “yes” (Figure 65) explaining that she

<sup>130</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “No por lo general, pero es cierto que a veces la lengua impone una distancia que a veces prefieres preservar.”

tended to avoid dealing with internationals and host nationals at the end of her sojourn and instead preferred to interact with co-nationals. She expressed difficulties explaining the reason for such behavior but attributed it to fatigue and homesickness.

Q.16 Yes. I think I was doing that at the end of this exchange. Maybe because I was tired? Maybe because I missed home? Or was exhausted of it all? At the same time, I loved more and more speaking Chinese with Chinese people. So... Actually, I don't know how to answer this question. (Angela)

#### 6.3.2.4 Interaction Enjoyment

The Interaction Enjoyment factor has two questions (9 and 10) referring to the participants' feelings and reactions towards engagement in intercultural dialogue with their culturally-distinct counterparts:

Q9 Do you get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures?

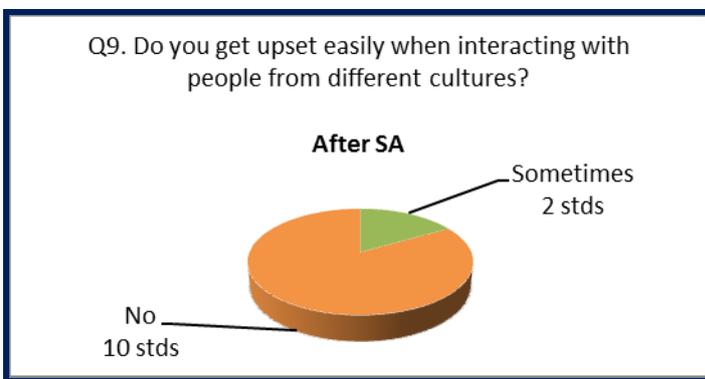
Q10 Do you often feel useless or unimportant when interacting with people from different cultures?

The statistical analysis shows that there was no significant change in the responses to this group of questions before and after the SA programme ( $p$ -value = 0.862). This result suggests that the participants remained of the same mind as before their sojourns in terms of their interaction enjoyment ability.

Responding to Q9 before departure (Figure 66), all the participants indicated that they "did not get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures", which shows that all of them already had a high degree of enjoyment in intercultural communication.



**Figure 66. Participants' responses to Q9 before the SA**



**Figure 67. Participants' responses to Q9 after the SA**

After the SA, all but Ares and Angela held the same opinion (Figure 67). Ares and Angela, in turn, chose a “sometimes” option explaining that linguistic ability sometimes made them feel frustrated because they could not express themselves fully.

Q9 Sometimes. The reason is basically related with misunderstandings due to language gap. In the beginning, when it was hard to express exactly what I wanted to say, sometimes happened that my friend or interlocutor didn't get my point. (Ares)

Q9. Sometimes. It's not so upset; it's just sometimes I can't express myself as I would and I feel impotent. (Angela)

As for Q10, before departure all but Ares, Lola, and Cristina expressed that they had never felt useless or unimportant when interacting with people from different cultures (Figure 68). For Ares and Lola, inability to express themselves in a foreign language was the reason for sometimes feeling useless.

Q10 Sometimes. If I cannot express myself with facility it becomes harder to explain what I wanna communicate and I feel useless. (Mar)

Q10 Sometimes, because if there are people that have a high level of English, they always speak more, and sometimes, if I want to express myself I have to think a lot about it before saying to make sure it's "correct" and they will understand me. (Lola)

For Cristina, culture made no difference. What actually mattered were the personality traits of individuals because she assumed that she could feel useless even while communicating with co-nationals:

Q10 Sometimes. I think it depends on the situation and the person, but in the same way I can feel useless or unimportant when I'm interacting with people from my country.

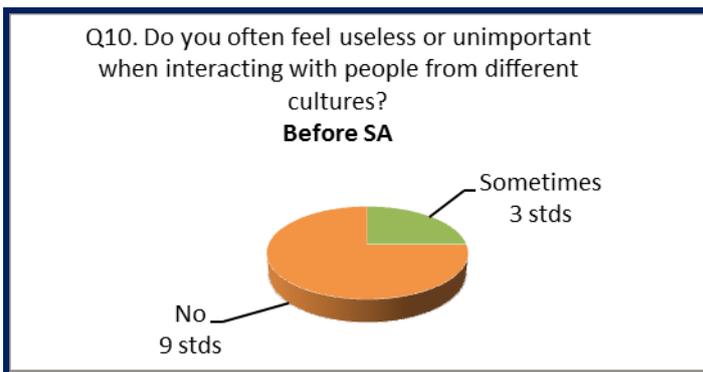


Figure 68. Participants' responses to Q10 before the SA

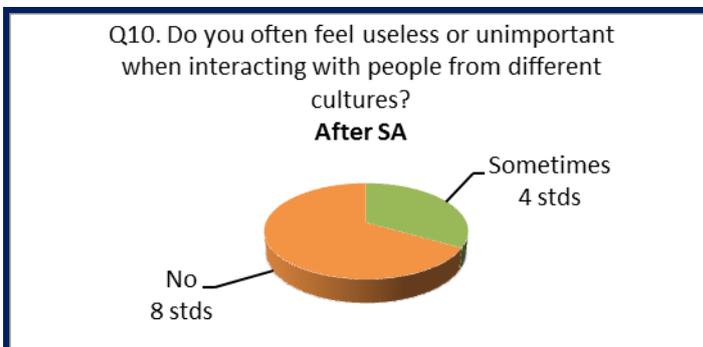


Figure 69. Participants' responses to Q10 after the SA

At the end of the SA programme, eight students chose “no” while four opted for “sometimes” when responding to question 10 (Figure 69). Natalia, Sara, Elizabeth, Kira, Maria, Virginia and Daniel did not change their minds and responded negatively to this question as before departure. Ares, who had opted for “sometimes” before sojourn, chose a “no” option upon returning home. This positive shift may be explained by her foreign language improvement.

Lola and Cristina did not change their minds regarding this question as a result of the SA programme and selected “sometimes.” Lola still felt that she was limited in terms of her foreign language proficiency, especially when she had to interact with native speakers: “Sometimes, especially when it dealt with certain boys or English natives perhaps I was not so relaxed so as to actively get involved in the conversation. In this sense the language slowed me down a little bit ...”<sup>131</sup> Cristina insisted that the interlocutor’s personal traits and qualities were of more importance for her than his or her cultural background. She again assumed that she could feel ineffective even while interacting with people from her own culture:

Q10 Sometimes. There are some people (even from my country) that it’s more difficult to know what they are thinking. In these cases, sometimes I feel a little bit unimportant, that my opinion it’s not of value or they really don’t want to speak with me.

Angela and Anna returned adversely affected and shifted from a strong “no” to “sometimes.” Angela explained that she had felt unimportant when communicating with native English speakers or people from northern Europe because they travelled a lot and had broader viewpoints. Angela was financially limited and could not travel as extensively. While communicating with these people, she felt like she could not contribute.

Q10 Sometimes. It happened when I was surrounded by English native speakers, and also people from the northern European countries because I felt they had

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<sup>131</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “A vegades, si és tractava sobretot de determinats nois o bé anglesos nadius potser no em sentia tant relaxada com per implicar-me activament en la conversa. En aquest sentit l’idioma em frenava una mica...”

more freedom to go wherever they chose, and it was more difficult for me.  
(Angela)

During Anna's sojourn in Boston, she occasionally felt useless talking to those people who showed her their sense of national superiority and also when talking about her Catalan identity. While talking about the Spanish and Catalan situation, her interlocutors were not always receptive to her explanations of why she considered herself more Catalan than Spanish.

Q10 Sometimes. If the other person makes me feel as she or he is superior because of where she or he is from, or when others just don't want to hear about what you have to say about your country, when you try to explain that you are not Spanish, that you feel Catalana, and they immediately say or look at you like this is a useless discussion, why you guys would like to separate, etc.

#### 6.3.2.5 Interaction Attentiveness

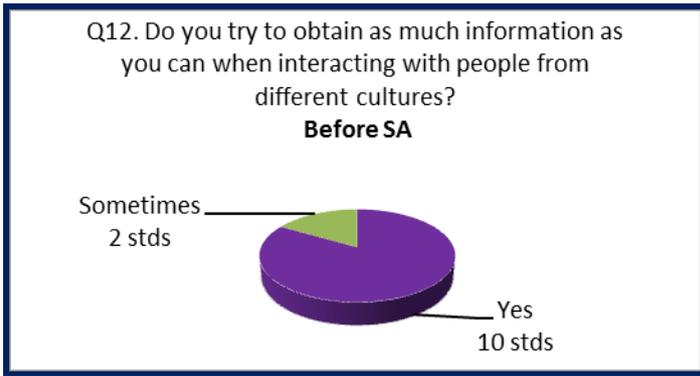
The Interaction Attentiveness factor has two questions (12 and 14) inquiring into the degree to which participants are observant and try to obtain information when interacting with people from other cultures:

Q12 Do you try to obtain as much information as you can when interacting with people from different cultures?

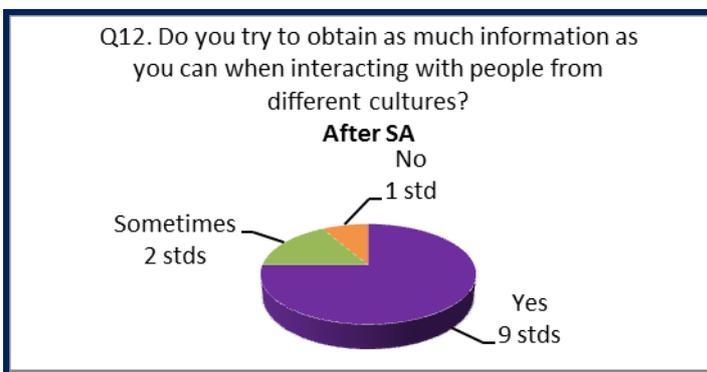
Q14 Are you very observant when interacting with people from different cultures?

The statistical analysis showed an insignificant test result for this group of questions, which assumes that the participants' responses after the SA were not significantly different from the responses before departure regarding their interaction attentiveness ability ( $p$ -value = 0.445). Let us have a short look at each of the two questions.

Figures 70 and 71 illustrate the participants' responses to question 12 before and after the SA programme. Before departure, all but Lola and Sara opted for "yes" claiming that they always tried to obtain as much information as they could when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds (Figure 70).



**Figure 70. Participants' responses to Q12 before the SA**



**Figure 71. Participants' responses to Q12 after the SA**

The areas of interest varied significantly from the personal life to cultural values and beliefs, from cuisine to political views, education, the way people interacted between each other, and also folklore.

Q12 Yes. About the country they come from, their lifestyle, their politics, education system...in general, everything that involve their life in that country. I also want to know things about their personal life, hobbies, studies, passions, etc. (Ares)

Q12 In general I try to know their values, their culinary culture, the way they interact and also other folkloric characteristics like fairy tales, customs, and so on. (Kira)

Sara and Lola in turn selected a “sometimes” option. Sara justified her choice by the fact that sometimes she was interested in one culture more than another and normally wanted to obtain more information for the purpose of future travels or even life abroad:

Q12 Sometimes. Some cultures seem more interesting than others, and yes I am interested in getting to know information about countries and the way people think so as to have more prospects and think of future places for travelling or living.<sup>132</sup>

Lola preferred to take a passive role and waited until the point when her interlocutors showed a willingness to have a deeper conversation. Only after that point was she able to share her experiences with them: “Sometimes. I prefer to have a conversation and exchange our experiences, and if the other wants to tell me something of their life/culture I listen very interested. And then, if I think that is appropriate, I ask.”

After the SA, there was a slight change in the participants’ responses (Figure 71). Ten students chose “yes”, one chose “sometimes” and one selected “no”. The students who made shifts in their responses were Lola and Angela. The rest of the participants did not change their opinions regarding this question and provided relatively similar reasons for their choice as before departure. Lola made a positive shift from “sometimes” to “yes”. After her sojourn, she became more willing to engage into dialogue and obtain as much information as she could from her interlocutors: “Yes, I tend to be very curious and interested in learning about different cultures and if young people can share with me real experiences firsthand it is a privilege!<sup>133</sup> Angela in turn made an adverse shift from “yes” to “no.” In her comment, she revealed that she tended to adopt a wait-and-see approach. She realized that sometimes it was better not to hurry and to let things take their natural course:

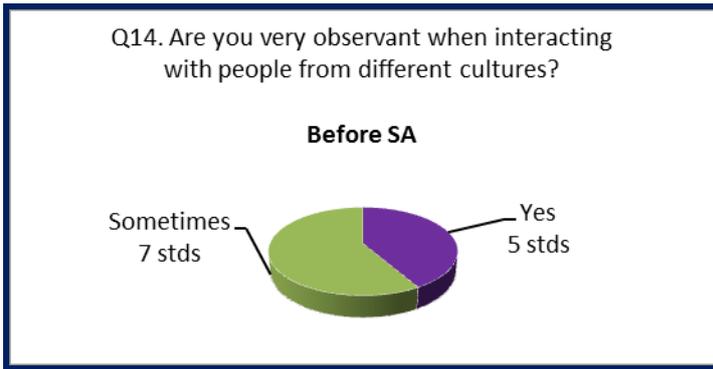
Q12 No. I like to be patient. Not to hurry to get to know. Through the time and experience I’ve realized that sometimes it’s better just let things flow and there’s no hurry in knowing what something means exactly and why it is done.

As for Q14, before departure seven students (Natalia, Ares, Lola, Anna, Sara, Kira and Virginia) opted for a “sometimes” option, while five (Angela, Elizabeth, Maria, Cristina and Daniel) chose a “yes” option (Figure 72).

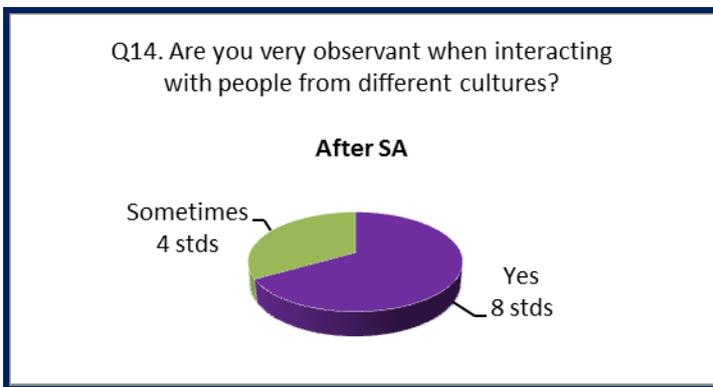
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<sup>132</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Sometimes. Algunas culturas me parecen más interesantes que otras, y sí que me interesa conocer información sobre los países y la forma de pensar de la gente y así tener más perspectivas y poder pensar en futuros sitios para viajar o para vivir.”

<sup>133</sup> Original quote in Catalan: “Sí, acostumo a ser molt curiosa i m’interessa aprendre sobre diferents cultures i si m’ho poden explicar joves en primera persona amb experiències reals és tot un privilegi!”



**Figure 72. Participants' responses to Q14 before the SA**



**Figure 73. Participants' responses to Q14 after the SA**

The comments between these two groups of students were relatively similar. The most commonly mentioned aspects for observation were verbal and nonverbal language, the way foreigners interacted between each other, their clothes and behaviour. The only thing that may be noted is that the former group seemed less certain about the aspects they were interested in observing. Natalia's and Kira's comments below are clear examples.

Q14 Sometimes, I hadn't really thought about this before... I guess I look at the way they look, especially with Chinese. They are very respectful, and most of the time cherish. Since communication, due to language, isn't as good as it may be, other signs can help. (Natalia)

Q14 Sometimes. Observant about their gestures, the way they talk, I do not know things that catch your attention because it is different from yours. (Kira)

Whereas the latter group expressed more clearly what they were observant about when communicating with foreign people. Daniel's and Elizabeth's comments are presented as examples:

Q14 Yes. The way they interact with their fellows and with me. I observe their vocabulary, their oral English in general, how they gesticulate, whether they look at me when I speak and when they speak. Also it is interesting to see whether they behave one way and another different when they are with more people of their same sex, or of their same culture, or of the same age...[sic]

Q14 Yes. Nonverbal language, especially. (Elizabeth)

At the end of the SA programme, there was a positive change in the students' responses. Eight students opted for "yes", while only four selected "sometimes" (Figure 73). The students who shifted in their responses after their sojourn were Ares, Lola and Anna. All of them made a positive shift from "sometimes" to "yes". The rest of the students remained of the same mind as before departure.

Ares admitted that she had become more observant about nonverbal communication, that is to say, people's gestures and facial expressions: "Yes. I observed the nonverbal communication aspects, such as, hands movements, facial expressions, etc. Because it says a lot of things about the person and his/her personality." Lola also found herself more observant and attentive especially when communicating with fluent English speakers: "Yes, I am observant and more attentive because depending on the person, if he speaks another language quickly, I try to follow the thread of the conversation"<sup>134</sup>. Anna became more observant about such aspects as the personal distance that foreign people preferred to keep, the way they introduced themselves, the extent to which they were critical of their government and of information their mass media provided:

Q14 Yes, the way they introduce their-selves, the physical contact they are able to accept (because I've learnt that not all the cultures are so familiar with our way of interacting...), the way they trust TV or media in general, how critical

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<sup>134</sup> Original quote in Catalan: "Sí, sóc observadora i més atenta ja que amb segons qui, si parla ràpid en una altra llengua, procuro seguir el fil de la conversa."

they are with their government, if they repeat just what the general opinion says or if they show ideas of their own... [sic]

## **6.4 Summary**

In this chapter, I have presented the findings drawn from the data obtained through the Stay Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaires, as well as through Final Evaluation Interviews. First of all, I have analyzed the extent to which the participants' pre-departure expectations had been fulfilled and how satisfied they were with the SA programme. After that, I have described their perceptions of achieved outcomes as a result of spending a short- or mid-term stay abroad. Furthermore, I have focused on their adaptation process and have summarized the factors that, according to their points of view, had contributed to their adjustment to the new environment. Finally, I have also provided the results drawn from the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire data.

Upon returning from their host countries, all the participants reported that the majority of their pre-departure expectations were met and expressed their overall satisfaction with the programme. The students felt they had considerably enhanced their foreign language skills as a result of the SA. Listening, reading and writing skills were considered to have improved most. However, only half of the participants felt that they had gained a lot from the chosen courses. They gave a positive feedback to the new educational system, the teaching methodology and classes at the receiving university. The rest expressed a slight disappointment with the academic side of their experience. The strict and inflexible educational system, repetitive and "light" classes, regular teaching methodology which did not correlate with the host university prestige and enormous tuition fees were mentioned as the main reasons for their disappointment. All the participants also admitted that their sojourn had contributed a lot to their personal growth. The majority felt that they had become more knowledgeable culturally, more self-assured, more able to face obstacles and more capable of having new experiences, meeting people, and even working abroad.

As for their perceived adaptation, the participants reported that they had not experienced significant difficulties living abroad and had felt adjusted to their new setting at the end of the SA programme. The factors most commonly mentioned as significant

contributions were accommodation, work and travel experiences. The participants also reported other influential factors that, from their points of view, generally contributed to a better adjustment to a new environment in the context of academic mobility. These included: previous experience abroad, previous foreign language studies, foreign language proficiency, the family background, personal motivation, host university services for integration (i.e. introduction weeks and activities) and the extent to which the host country was multicultural.

In order to observe change in the level of the participants' intercultural sensitivity as a result of taking part in the SA programme, I used the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire. The statistical analysis reveals that only the Interaction Confidence group of questions showed a statistically significant test result, which means that the participants attributed significantly higher Likert values to this aspect after their sojourn. The insufficient level of a foreign language was mentioned as the main reason for feeling unconfident. The responses to other groups of questions were highly positive already before departure. The great majority of the participants enjoyed foreign people's company and considered themselves to be open-minded, tolerant and respectful towards other cultural values, behaviours, and opinions. Although there was no significant change in the students' responses after the SA, they admitted that they had become more aware of their prejudices and of how media or other people's judgments might affect their perceptions of a particular culture. Living in a residence with students from other nationalities was considered to be an enriching experience that had helped them shape their attitude towards cultural differences and divergence of views.



## CHAPTER VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the three previous chapters, I presented the results which emerged from the data collected in three different stages of this study corresponding to the period before, during and after the participants' stays abroad. In this chapter, I will summarize and discuss these findings in light of previous research and existing theoretical frameworks. Firstly, I will discuss findings related to the motives, expectations and concerns that university students may have when starting a stay abroad. Secondly, I will answer the two main research questions: 1) What intercultural adaptation processes do bilingual university students experience during a short- or middle-term university study abroad? and 2) What is the impact of a short- or middle-term university study abroad programme on the development of bilingual university students' intercultural sensitivity? As concluding remarks, I will provide recommendations for further research and for university SA programmes.

### **7.1 University students' motives, expectations and concerns when going on a stay abroad**

Before answering the main research question, it is important to refer to the students' motives for participation in the SA programme, their pre-departure expectations and concerns, and also to correlate these with their perceived improvement at the end of the SA programme. I believe that the exploration of the students' personal experiences and their adaptation processes would be incomplete without understanding why they decided to take part in the SA programme. The reasons behind these decisions are essential and may influence their adjustment to a new social and academic environment. In light of previous research on intercultural adaptation, the exploration of their pre-departure expectations with respect to linguistic, academic and personal gains as well as concerns about possible challenges while abroad is equally important. These anticipatory beliefs may facilitate or hinder their adaptation processes and, thus, need to be considered.

### 7.1.1 Motives

In response to the question inquiring into the motives the students were driven by for taking part in study abroad, the data obtained through the Individual Profile Questionnaire and the Initial Profile Interview reveal that their motives are related to four main groups of motives: learning a host language/improving English as an international language, learning about new cultures, academic/career prospects, and personal growth. These results, as we will see below, confirm previous studies to a large extent (Kitsantas, 2004; Badstübner and Ecke, 2009, IIE, 2010; Beaven, 2012; Kavakas, 2013; Novak et al., 2013, Jackson, 2016) though not exactly.

As for the first group of motives, nine out of twelve participants reported that linguistic gains were one of the reasons that influenced both their decision to go abroad and the choice of their host destination. Participants, such as Lola, Ares, Angela, Sara and Kira, were primarily drawn to the opportunity to improve their English language skills. However, of this group, only Sara left for an English-speaking country because she believed in the importance of native language immersion. The other four chose non-English speaking destinations, but with English as the language of instruction at the host university. For some of these students, such as Kira and Angela, participating in the SA programme was also a chance to learn a host language. Angela, for instance, considered that some basic knowledge of Chinese would enhance her career opportunities in the future, which is understandable as “the ultimate goal of university studies is a good job and therefore, prospects for professional development is a major motivation, given the fact that the experience of studying abroad by itself is valued by prospect employers.” (Kavakas, 2013, p.10). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the immersion itself in the host culture and the host language in particular was not crucial for these four students. During the Initial Profile Interview, they admitted that it was unnecessary for them to be proficient in the host language, as English would be their primary language inside and outside of the host university. As Beaven (2012) observed, students’ focus on English as a lingua franca, rather than on the host language, opens “a very different perspective on study abroad, no longer seen as a chance to immerse oneself in the local language and culture of the country, but rather as an opportunity to spend time in an international

academic environment where English is the lingua franca, and where the country's language and culture fade into the background" (p. 105).

There were also a few students, such as Natalia, Maria, Elizabeth and Virginia, for whom English improvement seemed to be of less importance. They chose a country whose language they had learned previously and were strongly motivated to refresh their language skills in the courses at the host university or by socializing with hosts. Such motivation might have been triggered by the recognition that knowledge of other languages could be a desirable qualification upon graduation. Bearing in mind their bilingual background, the ability to speak foreign languages beside English could considerably enhance their work opportunities. Apart from this, some of the students wanted a linguistic challenge and believed that the pressure of the university environment would force them to improve their language skills. Virginia, for example, chose Quebec in order to enhance her French, which she had started studying in high school. When enrolling in the SA programme, she chose all the courses with French as the language of instruction, although her level was far from advanced. She, however, felt that the experience would force her to improve her command of this language. Similar to Virginia, Elizabeth wanted to learn Portuguese but was limited by her financial resources and could not afford expensive language courses. She therefore decided to go to Rio de Janeiro to immerse herself in the Brazilian culture and greatly improve her Portuguese by socializing with locals. She, however, understood that the experience would be challenging as she was also supposed to follow university courses in Portuguese and her level might be insufficient.

Besides learning or improving a foreign language, eight out of twelve participants were driven by the opportunity to learn about new cultures, confirming both previous quantitative and qualitative studies (Teichler, 2004; Beaven, 2012). For instance, Beaven's (2012) participants were willing to visit different places and to experience their cultures, as well as to meet as many students from Europe as possible. The present students expressed similar motives, albeit in a slightly broader context. Getting to know more about other cultures was predominant, followed by meeting people from different countries, getting to know a different worldview and learning another way of life. All of them believed that the best way to learn about a culture was through its people. As I said before, immersion in the host culture and its language was not necessary for some of the

students, but rather they were motivated to socialise with international students and, thus, learn about their cultures, lifestyles and viewpoints.

As for the third group of motives, eleven out of twelve participants considered the SA programme as a chance for academic and career opportunities, contradicting Kavakas's (2013) findings. For his participants, lifestyle and travelling appeared to be two major motives, while academic considerations were of less importance. Indeed, Erasmus students often choose this program because they see it as an opportunity to travel and have fun. The present population was not different in this aspect and also wanted to take advantage of potential travel opportunities, but at the same time they recognised academic benefits of their SA programme. Thus, the two predominant motives for them were studying subjects that the home university does not offer and getting to know new methods and approaches to teaching in higher education.

Some students, such as Angela, Kira and Elizabeth, saw study abroad as the possibility to acquire necessary skills for writing final degree theses. This motivation differs from those that have been documented in previous studies (Badstübner and Ecke, 2009; IIE, 2010; Beaven, 2012; Novak et al., 2013; Jackson, 2016). This could be explained by the fact that those students were in their last years at the university and the SA programme was an opportunity for them to deepen knowledge related to their specialty. The choice of host destination was also driven by this objective. For instance, Angela, who was specializing in philosophy and aesthetics, chose China as her host country because her BA thesis was related to Chinese Art and Asian philosophy. Studying in a prestigious university whose qualification is recognized all over the world was also mentioned as a motive for going abroad. This is in accordance with Kavakas (2013) who, in reporting a study conducted by Macready and Tucker (2011), maintains that the university reputation coupled with the high quality education it offers often provide a stimulus for participating in SA programmes. Several students, such as Lola and Cristina, expressed a desire to apply theoretical knowledge acquired at the home university in practice and believed that the SA programme would provide them with the opportunity to do more practical work related to their future job. Finally, some students, such as Natalia and Maria, felt tired of the routine at their home university and just wanted to continue their studies in a new academic environment, similarly to Italian students in Beaven's study (2012).

With regard to the fourth group of motives, personal growth was paramount for eight out of twelve participants. Within this group of motives, travelling was a predominant one, confirming Badstübner and Ecke's (2009) findings. This motivation may be explained by the fact that nowadays travelling while being on a SA programme is much more accessible for exchange students. Low-fare tickets and well-developed transport infrastructure allow them not only to explore the host country, but also to travel beyond its borders. Besides, visiting other places gives students the possibility to witness cultural differences first-hand and to reconsider their beliefs about cultures or even to shed existing prejudices. Interestingly, the intercultural experience by itself was a driving factor for going abroad, as some students were motivated to participate in the programme just to live a new experience. Some students, such as Ares, Sara and Cristina, also saw study abroad as a chance to try to be independent from their parents and to test whether they would be able to overcome possible problems abroad, similarly to Beaven's (2012) participants. Although they had prior international experiences, the university SA programme was going to be the first serious sojourn for a much longer period than they had previously had, and which they were going to experience away from their families. Consequently, living abroad on their own was considered to be a potential stimulus for maturation and personal growth.

### 7.1.2 Expectations

In Chapter IV, I have also explored the students' expectations and concerns with respect to linguistic, academic and personal gains during study abroad and the extent to which they were fulfilled. The data obtained through the Individual Profile Questionnaire and Initial Profile Interview reveal that their expectations centred around the following five themes: foreign language improvement, academic and career prospects, personal growth, making new acquaintances and friends, and tourism and leisure activities. Previous research on students' motivation for taking part in SA programmes and their pre-departure expectations reports very similar findings (Teichler, 2004; Beaven, 2012; Jackson, 2016).

Eleven of twelve participants held great expectations with regards to their foreign language improvement, namely English. Six students, for instance, expected to boost their overall English ability, which assumed the enhancement of the four skills. It

should be, however, pointed out that all of them tended to believe that their speaking ability would improve naturally simply because they would be surrounded all the time by English-speaking people. Jackson (2016) reports very similar findings. In her study, the participants also anticipated that language improvement would occur naturally just because of the English-speaking environment. Some of the students in the present study, such as Lola, Natalia and Daniel, were more specific concerning the English language skills they expected to improve and anticipated enhancing vocabulary, oral fluency and confidence in speaking English with foreigners, and also debating skills after spending some months abroad. With regard to other languages, six students expected the overall improvement of the language whose country they had chosen as a host destination. Two of them, Maria and Natalia, were planning to take language courses in the host university, while the rest expected to improve their host language skills by attending university classes, local events, and simply by socialising.

Ten out of twelve participants also expected that the SA would have a positive effect on their academic and career prospects. The great majority of the present cohort held high expectations regarding the chosen courses in the host university and anticipated improving knowledge of the subjects of their interest, similarly to Beaven's (2012) participants. Several students, such as Angela, Daniel, Natalia and Elizabeth, saw their participation in the programme as a possibility to enhance employment opportunities upon graduation and, therefore, anticipated some extrinsic rewards, like improving CV, getting high marks in academic records, and also building a network of useful contacts for future work or further postgraduate education. Two students, Angela and Sara, did not want to miss the opportunity to earn extra money while in a programme and expected to find a job or an internship. This expectation differs from the typical ones that students hold with regard to their SA, such as language improvement or academic and career prospects (Beaven, 2012; Jackson 2016). A possible explanation for this anticipation is these students' remote host destinations (i.e., China and Australia), which implied increased travel expenses in comparison with European countries. The financial aid that these students had been granted was insufficient to cover their basic needs abroad, especially in the case of Sara who went to Australia where living costs are very high. Another consideration that these students may have kept in mind is that work placement could provide them with the opportunity to try a life beyond the university

and thereby to widen their SA experiences. Finally, one student (Cristina) expected to acquire practical skills at the workplace. This can be explained by the fact that Cristina was a Medicine major who was going abroad to do clinical practice in a hospital. Her SA programme did not include any university courses.

Eight out of twelve also held positive expectations concerning their personal growth as a result of staying abroad. All of them expressed that the experiences would be enriching and believed that living in a new cultural setting without family support and solving daily issues on their own would inevitably lead to their maturation. Thus, gaining more autonomy or independence was cited as a prevalent expectation. Two students, Sara and Elizabeth, saw the sojourn abroad as the opportunity for self-reflection and anticipated that they would get a better understanding of themselves upon returning from the SA. This expectation is very different from those documented in the previous studies and reviewed in Chapter II. As Badstübner and Ecke (2009) observed, study abroad can be a good opportunity for students not only to improve their cultural awareness and linguistic ability, but also to learn more about themselves. It is, therefore, possible that this anticipation was driven by the necessity to reconsider their previous life and to identify the right priorities for the future. The other two students, Lola and Cristina, believed that living in another country on their own would contribute to their self-confidence. They therefore anticipated that they would overcome their personal insecurity and become more self-assured. One student, Angela, also held the belief that living abroad would help her to improve her interpersonal communication skills. This anticipation is also distinct from those reported in the previous studies and might be influenced by both personal and career considerations, though her motives for going abroad and other expectations point strongly toward the last of these options. Angela, being from Humanities (a field in which career opportunities often include work related to cultural industries where employees are strongly required to communicate effectively with colleagues and clientele) could have been interested in improving her interpersonal communication skills for a future job. Living for six months in Beijing among people from a different cultural background could have been considered as the best way to achieve this goal.

The great majority of the participants embarked in the programme with the intention of making new acquaintances and making a circle of host and international friends. Eleven

out of twelve expected to meet as many people from all over the world as possible and to enjoy their time with them. Seven of them also hoped to build friendships, although some fully realized that the programme length might be insufficient for making those friendships meaningful and lasting. The two main places where the students expected to meet new friends were residence halls and the university, confirming Beaven's (2012) findings.

The students also shared their expectations with regard to their leisure time. All of the participants visualised themselves going sightseeing and travelling either within or outside the borders of their host country. Besides, seven students also planned to participate in leisure activities or to enrol in extra-curricular courses. Some activities were culture-bound (e.g., practising traditional dances of the host culture, attending special programmes of traditional music or participating in drama club), while others were general activities in which exchange students normally engage while abroad (e.g., doing sports and participating in the events organized by the Mobility office). These results confirm Teichler's (2004) findings reporting that Erasmus students' expectations span around academic, cultural, linguistic and professional benefits, which they are often willing to combine with an interesting extra-curricular life during their sojourn. "Travelling in the host country" and "sports and other leisure activities with host country nationals" are frequent extra-curricular activities that exchange students take advantage of while in a programme.

### 7.1.3 Concerns

Apart from positive expectations, the participants also expressed concerns about possible challenges they might face while abroad. Feeling insecure or alone at the beginning of the SA and financial issues were prevailing concerns. The others were idiosyncratic, reflecting individual worries about: a) personal safety in an unknown city, b) missing things from home, c) weather, d) food, e) accommodation, f) striking difference between home and host culture, g) being disappointed with the host university and chosen courses, h) studying in a new academic environment, and i) insufficient language level to follow the courses in a host university. These findings contradict Jackson's (2016) study in which her participants' major concerns were related to linguistic difficulties, striking cultural differences that might provoke culture

shock, and intercultural interactions, followed by financial difficulties, personal safety issues and homesickness. Conversely, almost none of the present students anticipated significant difficulties either in adjusting to a new academic environment/educational system or in following classes in a foreign language. Most admitted that they were going to communicate in English while abroad and considered their English level to be adequate to attend the courses in a host university. The fact that the participants studied in a university where three languages (Catalan, Spanish and English) are used regularly could give them more self-confidence in their linguistic skills. Another explanation to such linguistic self-confidence may lie in the fact that all of them had had previous international experience, in which they managed to communicate effectively in English. Interestingly, the majority of the present cohort did not expect to feel homesick, also contradicting Beaven's (2012) findings. Their lack of homesickness could be explained by their strong motivation to go abroad and high expectations with regard to their extra-curricular life. Given that the programmes were of short or middle duration, the participants wanted to take full advantage of their sojourns and those visualised travel and leisure activities left them no time for nostalgia.

#### 7.1.4 The fulfilment of expectations

As regards to the fulfilment of expectations concerning linguistic, academic and personal gains after SA, the participants remained satisfied with their SA experiences, which were rated as five (very good) or four (good) on a scale of one to five. Although some of the expectations regarding their academic experiences had not been met (the reasons for which will be discussed below), the participants assessed their stay as a whole as being enriching both at the personal and at the cultural levels. These findings are in accordance with previous studies that documented the beneficial effect of SA programmes on students' cultural awareness and personal development (Merino and Avello, 2014; Gilliland et al., 2016).

As for linguistic gains, the great majority of the students felt they had improved their foreign language skills as a result of the SA. According to the Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire, listening, reading and writing skills were considered to have improved most, followed by speaking and vocabulary skills. These perceptions may have been impacted by the academic context. Following classes,

submitting written tasks, giving presentations, reading assigned articles and passing all exams in a foreign language not only contributed to the development of the corresponding skills, but also to the students' linguistic confidence and pride in accomplishments, similarly to Italian students in Beaven's study (2012). As a result of SA, most felt that they had become even more willing to learn foreign languages. This is line with research that reports a positive effect of SA on learner's motivation towards language learning (Trenchs-Parera and Juan-Garau, 2014). The anxiety that some of the participants experienced, particularly in the initial period, decreased. A connection between reduced anxiety and increased linguistic confidence was also found by Trenchs-Parera and Juan-Garau in their study. In contrast, some of the students in this dissertation felt that they had improved their foreign language skills but not to the extent they had expected. Daniel, for instance, believed that his sojourn in the USA had had an overall positive effect on his linguistic abilities. He felt he had improved listening, reading and also writing skills. He could understand his lecturers perfectly, including their jokes. Nevertheless, expressing his viewpoints in classroom debates appeared to be much more difficult than he could have imagined before the SA. As he felt unable to develop his ideas properly, he often refrained from participating actively in the debates. His pre-departure expectations about the enhancement of debating skills do not seem to have been realized.

Natalia was another student whose pre-departure expectations about linguistic gains had not been fully met. She had expected to improve English vocabulary and her overall Mandarin as a result of sojourning in Hong-Kong. At the end of the SA programme, she revealed that her overall English had probably remained at the same level as other international students and also professors did not speak very good English. As for Mandarin, she had little opportunity to practise it, as outside the university local people spoke Cantonese and other Chinese students tended to speak English. Badstübner and Ecke (2009) report similar findings. Their participants perceived the improvement in their listening skills, followed by vocabulary, reading and speaking skills after a short stay in Germany. Nevertheless, the statistical analysis revealed that their perceived enhancement in listening, speaking, and vocabulary was significantly lower than the rate of expected gains, suggesting that their prior expectations concerning the previously mentioned skills were not fulfilled.

With regard to academic outcomes, only half of the participants felt that they had benefited from the chosen courses, contradicting previous studies that report the overall academic improvement of their participants after the stay (Teichler, 2004; Beaven; 2012). The other half expressed disappointment with the academic side of their experience. As main reasons they mentioned the strict and inflexible educational system, repetitive and easy classes that lacked deep analysis, unexceptional teaching methodology which did not correlate with the host university prestige and enormous tuition fees. This frustration may be caused by the gap between the reality and the very high expectations with respect to the host university and courses these students held before departure. A connection between unrealistic expectations and adjustment problems has already been documented in previous research (Ward, 2004).

These participants' high expectations were mostly based on the assumption that foreign universities are much better, but the experience taught them to value their home university. UPF is often ranked highly for its quality of teaching and also personal attention is given to students through a tutoring programme, which is something not offered by other universities. At UPF, all students have an academic tutor, who is always available for consultation and support, throughout their academic studies. Relationships with professors abroad also caused dissatisfaction for some students. As in the case of Sara, who found that it was impossible to build closer relationships with professors at her host university in Sydney because there were a lot of students in seminars and teachers often changed in some subjects. Similar to several participants in Beaven's (2012) study, Sara believed such organization had affected negatively the overall atmosphere of classes and had demotivated her. A possible explanation to such a reaction may lie in the fact that Sara's home university is far smaller than the one in Sydney and there are fewer people in seminars and tutorials, which enables both professors and students to get to know each other better. Besides, the degree of formality between teachers and students in Spanish universities is less strict than in other countries, and students are often accustomed to having more informal relationships with their professors.

All of the participants reported that the experience of living alone had been enriching for their personal growth. The great majority felt that they had become more able to overcome difficulties and their adaptability to changes had improved. Completing daily

errands and chores on their own made them feel more independent and self-sufficient. These results confirm Beaven (2012), who also yields evidence of similar SA contributions to her participants' personal growth. In the present study, eight out of the twelve students felt that after the sojourn their personality had become more outgoing and they could easily make friends. Seven also perceived that they had returned more self-confident. These findings coincide with the results of Tracy-Ventura, Dewaele, Köylü, and McManus (2016) who found that their students had perceived themselves as being more confident not only linguistically but also personally after having spent one academic year abroad. Apart from the aforementioned changes, a few also felt that they had become more culturally knowledgeable, as Merino and Avello (2014) also point out, and that the experience taught them to value more their own country, culture and university. Interestingly, they needed to leave their home countries in order to compare and to recognize the value of where they were coming from. Gilliland et al. (2016) observed a similar trend with their students who, after spending their sojourns in China and India, had begun to appreciate more all that had been previously taken for granted. Several students perceived that they had become more capable of having new experiences, more open to meeting new people, more willing to study and even to work abroad. Those students, such as Angela and Sara, who managed to find a job abroad reported that this experience had been very rewarding both financially and culturally, albeit difficult to combine with university studies. According to them, work placement outside the university helped them meet locals and get closer to the host culture, which was very difficult in an international environment. As Beaven (2012) rightly points out, the Erasmus context itself may complicate contact with host nationals. Despite the fact that SA programmes are developed to bring students in closer contact with host society, this objective can be very difficult for exchange students to achieve. Being surrounded mostly by other international students both at the university and in the residence halls, their contact with locals tends to be very limited.

As a concluding remark for the whole section, when looking at this group of bilingual students, no significant differences were found in their motives for taking part in the SA program than those of monolingual students from previous studies. The present cohort was driven to go abroad bearing in mind linguistic, academic, personal benefits and travel opportunities. Although all of them were motivated to learn about other cultures,

they experienced this learning through communication with other international students rather than through immersion in the host culture. This tendency was also found in the case of monolingual students in Beaven's (2012) study. It should be also pointed out that all students recognized the academic benefits of their SA programme, which may dismantle the common assumption that Erasmus students often go abroad to have fun and enjoy.

As for their expectations, they were mostly in accordance with the motives the participants were guided by for taking part in the SA programme. A few expectations, however, differed from those ones normally held by students regarding SA gains (i.e., learning more about themselves and future priorities, improving interpersonal communication skills and finding work placement). It is also worth noting that the great majority of the students felt self-confident with their academic abilities and linguistic skills prior to departure and did not anticipate difficulties in a new academic context, which is not consistent with previous research findings (Jackson, 2016). This self-confidence may have been influenced by the fact that they came from a trilingual university, that they had had previous SA experiences and they were all bilinguals used to daily use of more than one language.

## **7.2 What intercultural adaptation processes do bilingual university students experience during a short- or middle-term university study abroad programme?**

The first research question investigated what adaptation processes had an influence on the participants' intercultural adaptation during their SA programme. The visual representation of the group's adaptation process obtained from the self-assessment that the participants completed every two weeks while abroad displayed a learning curve model. This theoretical model suggests that sojourners will experience the most difficult moments upon entry and that their adaptation to a new social and cultural environment will steadily increase, as they will acquire social and culture-specific skills (Ward, 2004). The statistical analysis shows that the slopes of the two curves built for both Personal and Academic Issues are statistically significant, suggesting that, in general, the participants' adjustment increased with time and they had felt adapted to their new

personal and academic context by the end of the stay. Qualitative data drawn from the Final Evaluation Interviews supported these results, as all the students revealed that they had felt adjusted to their new setting at the end of the programme. It is, however, worthwhile to note that most admitted that they had not experienced a real host life abroad. Residing in university dormitories on campus, which were normally situated on the outskirts of a city and equipped with everything students needed, often made it unnecessary for them to leave this comfortable international area and come into contact with the real host culture. Thus, it would be appropriate to say that they felt adjusted to the international student lifestyle and their adaptation processes can be discussed only in this particular context. Beyond the university campus borders, as Beaven (2012) observed, “the adaptation cycle may start all over again as the changed environment makes new demands on the sojourner” (p.286).

The two curves built for Personal and Academic Issues, although moving in an upward direction (that is, improving throughout the sojourn), depicted fluctuations of various intensities. The Academic Issues curve displayed more noticeable falls and rises than those of the Personal Issues curve, indicating that the academic experiences triggered many more turning points in the participants’ lives abroad. In order to better understand the reasons for those general fluctuations, these two broad categories were unwrapped and individual adaptation curves were constructed. These graphical representations featured more diversity and showed similarities not only with the learning curve but also with the U-shaped curve. In contrast to the learning-curve model, the U-curve model of adaptation suggests that sojourners experience excitement upon entry, which is then followed by a period of difficulties and gradual recovery. Perceived well-being, however, will be lower than the initial excitement upon entry (Lysgaard, 1955). In fact, in the participants’ personal lives, the number of learning curves surpasses U-curves by a small margin, while their academic lives illustrate an equal number of each type of curve. Whatever criticism concerning the reliability and validity of the U-curve model (Ward, 2004; Beaven, 2012), the participants still experience the U-curve of adaptation and this model should not be underestimated. Even if the U-curve model, as some scholars claim (Lustig and Koester, 2010), reflects only emotional reactions to cultural differences, these individual graphs point to the fact that emotions are an indispensable part of adaptation.

Another important finding in the present research was that academic and personal experiences could follow different developments (as in the case of Ares, whose personal life displayed a learning curve while her academic life illustrated a U-shaped curve). This result is also consistent with Beaven's (2012) study. The trajectories of the curves also differed, as some curves remained the same as at the start while the others ended at a lower or higher point than where they began. When describing the results in Chapter V (Table 6), I have intentionally presented the trends of the curves together with their trajectories, as the trajectories of the adaptation curves had not been considered before in previous studies. I believe they need to be taken into consideration because they illustrate if the participants' sojourns contributed to their adaptation positively, negatively or in no significant way.

Following the logic of the culture learning approach, the learning curves should be ascendant, illustrating the learning process in this way. What if the learning curve finishes its final weeks at the same level as at the start (as in the case of Virginia, whose curve for academic issues remains at the same level at the end of SA)? Can we consider that a student with such a visual representation of his or her adaptation process has acquired necessary skills? Can we, in general, consider such a curve to be "learning"? The learning-curve model does not suffice to explain this variability.

The U-curve model also does not seem to take into account the variety of adaptation processes. Lysgaard (1955) put forward the view that the perceived well-being after a period of difficulties would be at a lower level than the initial excitement upon entry. This claim suggests that the curves of those students who undergo the U-curve model of adaptation will normally end lower than where they begin. Some graphs, indeed, showed such descendant trajectories. As in the case of Angela, whose adaptation curve for Academic Issues displays a downward trend almost over the whole sojourn and shows a recovery from prolonged crisis only one month before the end of the programme. Nevertheless, the curve ends at a lower point than at the start of the sojourn. Theoretically, Angela went through "crisis" and reached the adjustment stage. In reality, this may not have been the case. I believe that this descendent trend may be explained by the fact that Angela, who had stayed in Beijing for six months, needed more time to adjust to a completely new educational system and academic requirements

than the other participants who stayed in Europe, North America or Australia. If she had stayed longer, her curve could have ascended. Daniel is another participant whose graphs reflect a descendent trajectory. His curves for Personal and Academic Issues show a recovery but end at a lower point than in the beginning, suggesting that he finished his sojourn feeling less optimistic. A possible explanation for Daniel's descendent trajectory could be that his stay in Los Angeles was too short (around one month), which may have been insufficient for him to adjust to a new social and cultural environment. Just like Angela, if he had stayed longer, his curve could have ascended. These two examples may point to a correlation between the students' adaptation, the length of their SA and also cultural distance, which has been already explored within the culture learning approach to adaptation (Ward, 2004). In fact, the length of SA has been also seen as a significant variable for foreign language acquisition (Llanes and Muñoz, 2009; Sasaki, 2011; Pérez-Vidal, 2014).

Alongside the curves that seem to fall within Lysgaard's explanation, some of the participants experienced the U-curve of adaptation but their curves end at a higher point than where they began or remain at the same level as in the beginning. What factors helped these students to reach a higher level of perceived well-being? Lysgaard's model does not provide a detailed explanation of such variability.

On the basis of these observations, it was necessary to address the following secondary question in search for possible explanations: what experiences during study abroad have an impact on students' intercultural adaptation? To answer it, individual adaptation curves for the two broad categories were further unpacked by their sub-categories and the narratives provided by the students were examined so as to find out possible explanations for turning points reflected in the graphs.

The graphs built for each single sub-category showed a variety of trends illustrating how personal and academic adaptation processes varied from one individual to another. Some of them demonstrated clear examples of the learning and U-shaped curve, while the others departed from these models displaying, for example, straight lines or plateaus at high points, or lines with frequent ups and downs moving straight forward. When looking at all these graphs, the two existing models, the U-shaped and learning curve, seem to be too basic and do not suffice to describe adaptation processes. Maybe, a better

explanation of the intricacies of the participants' adaptation processes can be provided by Kim's structural model of intercultural adaptation (2001). Her model is centred around the process, rather than stages, in which stress and learning are closely intertwined. Kim depicts her Stress-Adaptation-Growth model in a form of a spiral, which implies that the process of adaptation is ongoing and cyclical. The cycles will repeat every time the individual faces new challenges. Depending on academic, linguistic and social abilities, students in similar environments may experience very different adaptation processes. Therefore, Kim's interpretation of adaptation might better cater to a variety of individual experiences which can be affected by various personal and environmental factors. However, as I have observed, the model is also limited in a way. By suggesting the "draw-back-to-leap" pattern as the main adaptive strategy, Kim's model does not seem to allow for other adaptive patterns in the cycle.

Kim's model of adaptation also touches on the development of intercultural identity. In fact, the data collected in this study were not analysed in relation to the social identification theories (Berry, 1997; Stephan and Stephan, 1985), as the majority of models focus more on long-term residents like migrants and refugees. In the context of this study, these models are beyond the scope of this research because the participants of this study are short-term sojourners. The length of their SA programmes did not exceed six months and I believe the participants' stays abroad were too short to affect their identity.

Turning to the qualitative analysis of the narratives, a number of issues triggering fluctuations in the graphs were identified. Regarding personal experiences, friends from home and family provided emotional support and their visits positively influenced the participants' personal lives, confirming Beaven's (2012) results. The relationships with co-nationals who were in the same location also had a positive influence, especially during stressful moments of their stay. This is also in line with Pitts (2009) who argues that co-national support plays an important role for adjustment in the context of short-term mobility. There were also a few students, such as Sara, Cristina, and Virginia, who hardly kept in touch with co-nationals during their SA. This was due partly to the fact that there were very few Catalan and Spanish students in their locations and, if their ways crossed, their relationships were mostly instrumental. Another reason was that the

participants themselves strove to build friendships mostly with other international students. Nevertheless, some prominent rises reflected in their graphs for this aspect were attributed to the acquaintances with co-nationals, which shows an overall positive effect on their personal lives abroad.

Given that meeting as many international people as possible was one of the main motives for going abroad, the participants seemed to reach this objective. Most felt satisfied with the relationships they had established with other exchange students and had considered them as being positive and beneficial for their cultural learning. These results contradict Hendrickson et al. (2011), who emphasized the importance of building a network of host national friends during the SA after having explored the relation between the friendship networks, students' homesickness, and satisfaction with SA experiences. Almost all the students admitted that orientation sessions or other events organized by the mobility office at the host university played a key role in helping them establish initial contacts with other exchange students. Given that every exchange student was in the same situation, these initial friendships were built very quickly and easily (Beaven, 2012). Most of the friendships were, however, made in the residence halls and apartments. Particular mention should be made here of the relationships with roommates, which were not always stable and sometimes adversely affected personal experiences. As in the case of Lola, whose relationships with her roommate, a Turkish girl, despite being described as supportive at the start, began to deteriorate mid-sojourn without reasonable cause and provoked emotional exhaustion. Although everything had returned to normal by the end of the programme, this conflict had an overall negative effect on Lola's personal life and may explain why her individual graph for Personal Issues reflected a descendant trajectory.

As for the relationships with host-nationals, several students, such as Elizabeth, Kira, Cristina, Anna, and Maria, succeeded in building friendships with host nationals as the sojourn proceeded. However, the greater part of the students had trouble in establishing friendly relationships with hosts. Some students, such as Sara, Lola, Ares and Angela, could not express themselves freely in English and linguistic difficulties were one of the hurdles for them (this issue will be discussed below in greater detail). The correlation between fluency and increased intercultural interactions has already been explored

(Ward, 2004). For Natalia, the language barrier complicated her communication with locals in Hong Kong, as very few people spoke English outside the university. She sometimes had to use sign language in shops or translation apps in her smartphone to make people understand her. Virginia found the local accent to be very difficult to understand and this aspect complicated interactions with hosts. Besides, she pointed to the difficulty of meeting locals in the Erasmus international environment as I previously discussed. In the residence hall where she lived, there were very few local students. In her university classes, she never had the same host classmates, as the groups changed very often. She therefore was mostly surrounded by other exchange students. Sara faced the same problem. Being surrounded mostly by international students, she could not build a meaningful friendship with host nationals at the university, just like several students in Beaven's (2012) study. The reluctance on the part of host nationals to build friendships was also mentioned as a reason. As in the case of Angela, who chose to limit her relationships with Chinese at the university almost from the very beginning, as they were only interested in practising their English. After university hours, she however communicated more closely with her Chinese colleagues at the school where she had a part-time job. Although she was well-received at work, Angela considered the relationships superficial as her co-workers were not interested in building a friendship, but rather wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to talk in English with a foreigner from Europe. Daniel also felt reluctance on the part of Americans to have closer relationships with newcomers. This is in accordance with Ward (2004) who, in reviewing previous studies within the culture learning approach, claims that intercultural friendships between host nationals and sojourners tend to be infrequent due to various factors, "including the willingness of host nationals to interact across cultural boundaries and their perceptions of newcomers" (p.190).

Undoubtedly, the participants' relationships either with host nationals or other exchange students were inextricably linked to their foreign language proficiency. For the great majority, English was the key language for social interaction and communication with other international students, and they expected communication to be easy. The recognition of their own linguistic limitations came later during the stay, which then caused not only frustration and diffidence but sometimes also exhaustion. Vocabulary limitations, lack of fluency, the difficulty of understanding general conversations and

particular jokes were frequently mentioned in the initial period. Sara, for instance, confessed that, when she was with a group of international friends, she often did not understand what they were talking about, especially when it came to jokes. She came to the conclusion that her English was good only for having standard conversations. Similarly, Daniel admitted that his English level was very good for Spain, but insufficient for the USA. He realized that he lacked vocabulary to have profound discussions with host nationals. Ares, Lola and Angela could not express themselves freely and this language gap often made them feel timid in interactions. It is no coincidence that many turned to co-national friends when feeling tired or stressed. Angela, for instance, appreciated her friendship with Catalan girls who stayed in the same residence hall, and with whom she could speak Catalan, which gave her refuge from what Beaven (2012) calls “foreign language exhaustion.” This is not to say that students tended to spend most of their time with co-nationals and to speak only their native languages. On the contrary, all of them understood that sticking to their native friends might cause an impediment for their foreign language progression and also for interacting with internationals. Once again we see how important co-national support was for the participants’ adjustment, although previous studies generally highlight the ineffectiveness of co-national agency on adaptation (Hendrickson et al., 2011).

As for the participants’ daily life, travel and leisure activities triggered a great deal of positive emotions while accommodation, food and weather did not cause major changes or incite them to leave their SA programmes, confirming Beaven’s (2012) study. Concerns regarding these issues expressed by the students before departure do not seem to have been realized. Those participants who lived in university dormitories on campus did not find their new environment to be different from their own in their home town and experienced no trouble adjusting to it. However, as was discussed earlier, they had little contact with the real host culture. Some students, such as Virginia, even expressed a slight regret over this aspect and speculated that if their sojourn had been longer, they would have tried to make local friends. As for the students who lived off-campus, they had closer contact with their host country and revealed some difficulties adjusting to certain inconveniences, such as poor public transport, unhealthy food, bad sanitary conditions, and local timetable. These results point to the necessity of pre-departure preparation sessions in which students should be briefed on such challenges.

The academic life was less smooth than some participants expected and triggered some negative experiences. The students verbalized difficulties adjusting to new teaching approaches and work pace in class, as well as to strict requirements for assignment submissions and exams. Angela, for instance, found it difficult to follow a rapid pace in classes. Anna was very disappointed with the teaching approach of her new professors. The classes, according to her, lacked explanations of assigned readings. Ares experienced difficulties adjusting to new academic requirements that she characterized as being “highly demanding.” Some participants also found it challenging to establish close relationships with classmates and to work jointly on projects and presentations with groupmates. Lola, for instance, reported that her group mates were reluctant to fulfill their duties and she often had to do work for them, which overwhelmed her. Similarly, Natalia found that her local classmates tended to avoid collaboration with exchange students. The participants’ initial disappointment was often caused by the very high expectations they held before departure with respect to their academic experience or practical training abroad. Cristina, for example, expected to receive intense training and to put new skills into practice in the hospital. After one month staying abroad, she felt her expectations were unfulfilled. As for the service they received from administrative staff at their host universities, the majority of the students were satisfied with it. The falls in the graphs were mostly due to a slow process of enrollment upon arrival in the host country and bureaucratic delays in paperwork procedures.

Finally, language used in the academic sphere implied much more commitment and presented a considerable obstacle for most of the students, particularly in the initial period. The students articulated difficulties in completing writing tasks, giving oral presentations, understanding lecturers, reading articles and participating in classroom discussions. Natalia, for instance, realized that she was not as confident as she expected when giving oral presentations. Ares faced the same problem, and she felt particularly flustered when she needed to speak in front of students with a higher level of English or native speakers. Lola experienced difficulties understanding some of her lecturers whose English was very fluent. She also found completing writing tasks challenging as a high English level was required of her. Similarly, Virginia found writing in French difficult and had to invest extra time correcting her French handouts. Similarly, Sara had difficulties writing essays. When reading, she lacked vocabulary and spent a lot of

time translating. Similar to Lola, she often did not understand what the lecturers were explaining, which caused her anxiety. Anna and Daniel felt their speaking skills were their weakest point. When required to participate in classroom debates or discussions, they felt unable to develop their ideas properly due to vocabulary limitations. Anna sometimes even had difficulty using proper grammatical structures.

All in all, these experiences point to the complexity of the adaptation process, which cannot be limited to one particular theoretical model. A large number of factors, such as academic and linguistic abilities, should be taken into account when analyzing individual journeys. Besides, various SA conditions may influence students' adjustment. Like in our study, students reported that accommodation as well as work and travel experience significantly contributed to their acclimation. The participants also reported other influential factors that, from their points of view, generally contributed to a better adjustment to a new environment in the context of academic mobility. These included: previous experience abroad, previous foreign language studies, foreign language proficiency, the family background (whether or not parents had travel experience), personal motivation, host university services for integration (i.e. introduction weeks and activities) and the multiculturalism of the host country, which makes students' cultural transition easier in a new setting.

### **7.3 What is the impact of a short- or middle-term university study abroad programme on the development of bilingual university students' intercultural sensitivity?**

The second major research question this dissertation has intended to explore is the impact of SA on the development of the participants' intercultural sensitivity. Results from the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire administered before and after the sojourn revealed that only the Interaction Confidence group of questions showed a statistically significant test result, suggesting that the students returned from their stay feeling more self-confident when interacting with people from different cultures. The Interaction Confidence group of questions explored the degree of self-assurance in intercultural interactions, confidence in talking in front of foreigners, as well as the

ability to initiate and maintain conversations. Linguistic and cultural barriers turned out to be the main reasons that had an influence on the participants' interaction confidence.

As for the degree of self-assurance when interacting with foreigners, half of the participants (Natalia, Angela, Sara, Kira, Maria and Virginia) felt self-assured already before departure, while the other half (Ares, Lola, Anna, Elizabeth, Cristina, and Daniel) expressed uncertainty by choosing "sometimes" as an answer to the questionnaire. Qualitative data, from the students' comments, point to foreign language enhancement as the main reason for a positive shift in responses at the end of the SA. The students' improved foreign language ability helped them express themselves more fluently and, therefore, increased the number and the quality of interactions with people from different cultures. The correlation between language proficiency and increased intercultural interaction had already been shown in previous studies on adaptation (Ward, 2004; Masgoret and Ward, 2006).

As for talking in front of people from different cultures, six students (Natalia, Elizabeth, Kira, Maria, Virginia and Daniel) did not feel any discomfort with this aspect from the start and found talking to be no harder in front of co-nationals. Five students (Lola, Angela, Anna, Sara, and Cristina), however, admitted that sometimes they had felt less self-reliant for fear of being misunderstood and of talking in front of a large number of people (including co-nationals). The latter comment seems to be related mostly to public speaking in the academic context rather than to intercultural communication. Only one student (Ares) confessed that it was hard for her to talk in front of foreigners, especially native speakers or those who had a higher language level. Vocabulary limitations were mentioned as the main reason.

After the SA, three participants (Ares, Anna and Sara) changed their self-assessment positively, one (Daniel) made an adverse shift, while the others remained of the same mind as before. The improved self-assessment of this aspect was also due to the English language enhancement. Those three students revealed that they had become more capable of maintaining conversations in English with internationals and native English speakers. They also became more confident in discussing a variety of topics, especially after realizing that interlocutors reacted kindly to their efforts. This finding is in line with Trenchs-Parera and Juan-Garau (2014), who found a correlation between their

participants' increased linguistic self-confidence and their reduced anxiety when speaking English after their sojourns. Daniel explained his adverse self-assessment with the lack of cultural knowledge. To break the ice at the beginning of conversations and to establish a closer relationship with foreigners, he was eager to use humour, but he had often felt hesitant about making jokes for fear of offending his intercultural counterparts. The lack of cultural knowledge (that is, according to him, how to make jokes without offending his interlocutors and how to behave if misunderstanding did occur in that particular context) sometimes affected his self-assurance. The fact that Daniel did not improve in this aspect may be related to the length of his programme. His sojourn lasted around one month, which is probably too short a period to become aware of host people's preferences, reactions and humour. Another explanation may be due to the fact that Daniel had realised prior to departure that his short-term sojourn would be insufficient to build a network of international friends. He therefore sought to establish closer relationships with his co-nationals from the Global Cities programme rather than with local or international students, which did not contribute to his cultural awareness and to his building that cultural knowledge he missed afterwards.

The last question in this group explored whether the participants found it difficult to initiate and maintain conversations when interacting with people from different cultures. Prior to departure, three students (Elizabeth, Maria, and Virginia) reported that they could easily start conversations with culturally-distant people and also find topics of interest because their multicultural backgrounds and cultural differences provided a good starting point. In contrast, three students (Lola, Anna and Cristina) revealed that they often could not find the words to express themselves or to choose appropriate topics to discuss, while the other six (Natalia, Ares, Angela, Sara, Kira and Daniel) admitted that sometimes it was difficult to maintain conversations with people from different cultural backgrounds. The language barrier, the difficulty finding topics of common interest, the interlocutor's individual traits and the degree of familiarity with a foreigner were among the main reasons for such difficulty. After the SA, three students (Ares, Angela and Lola) made a positive shift in their responses, while the rest remained of the same opinion explaining their responses with the same justification as before departure. In their comments, Ares and Lola attributed their positive change to the improvement of their foreign language abilities, which made them feel more relaxed

and allowed them to enjoy conversations with foreign people. Angela felt her anxiety had reduced, and she was no longer worried about her linguistic limitations. With the SA experience, she seemed to have learnt how to react when her foreign language abilities limited her.

The responses to the other four groups of questions (Respect for Cultural Differences, Interaction Engagement, Interaction Enjoyment, and Interaction Attentiveness) did not show statistically significant change, which can be explained by the fact that the scores were highly positive before departure. However, it is still necessary and interesting to summarize the results obtained in these questions and explain the positive and negative shifts the participants made as a result of SA.

The Respect for Cultural Differences group of questions explored the extent to which the participants were open-minded towards cultural differences and enjoyed foreign people's company, their ability to respect different values and behaviours, and also to accept different opinions. At the end of the SA, although the majority of the students did not make a quantitative shift in their responses to the questionnaire, their comments revealed some positive changes. Elizabeth, for example, felt she had begun to respect other cultural values more. Cristina reported that she became more willing to communicate with foreigners so as to better understand the reasons behind their behavior and values. Previously, she had avoided bringing up topics covering cultural beliefs she did not share. Sara felt her sojourn contributed to her linguistic abilities and cultural awareness, a change Merino and Avello (2014) had also observed in their study. Sara's perceptions of improved cultural knowledge may be due to her work placement, which brought her closer to real Australian life. Another explanation may be due to her traveling experiences, which gave her the possibility to work and live with a local family. Anna felt she had become less critical and had begun to accept more easily other people's opinions, despite not sharing or fully understanding them. This comment may indicate that she reached what Bennett (1986) calls the Acceptance stage in his Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity.

Some participants, however, came back from the exchange adversely impacted. Lola and Angela, for example, returned with stereotypes about their host country and people, confirming some of Beaven's observation (2012). Turning to Bennett's model, it seems

that these students became more ethnocentric in their views of the host culture and people. Lola's reaction was influenced by negative experiences while working in a group with international classmates from Turkey and Bulgaria at the host university. Their lack of collaboration on projects and presentations contributed to the development of her stereotypes regarding these two particular cultures. Angela also came back with stereotypes about Chinese people, who she believed showed racist treatment towards African people. Similar to Lola and Angela, Natalia seemed to have moved to a more ethnocentric standpoint although initially displaying ethnorelative opinions. She became reluctant to accept those cultures that strongly protect their set of values and ignore those values that are fundamental in Western society, such as gay marriage and human rights. These findings point to the necessity of pre-departure training so that SA participants are better prepared to encounter cultural differences and can avoid the development of stereotypes.

The Interaction Enjoyment group of questions explored the participants' reactions towards intercultural interactions. Chen (2010) asserts that the Interaction Enjoyment and the Respect of cultural differences dimensions include "the psychological and affective abilities that help participants better adjust to an uncertain or ambiguous situation caused by the unpredictable nature of intercultural interaction [...]" (p.6). The higher the degree of these abilities, the lower the level of intercultural communication anxiety. The results indicate that before departure the great majority of the participants already experienced a high degree of enjoyment in intercultural communication regardless of their field of studies. Upon returning from SA, several students, however, changed their self-assessment. Ares and Angela, for example, reported that linguistic barriers sometimes made them feel upset, as they could not express themselves fully and their interlocutors did not understand them. For Lola, this inability to express herself in a foreign language was also the reason for feeling useless or unimportant, especially when interacting with native speakers. Cristina seemed to give more importance to the interlocutor's personal traits and qualities than to his or her cultural background. Similar to Lola, Angela felt unimportant when communicating with native English speakers and people from northern Europe. She felt like she could not contribute, as these people had wide travel experiences and broader viewpoints. Anna felt useless talking to those people who, as it seemed to her, showed their sense of national superiority and also

when her interlocutors were not receptive to her explanations of why she considered herself more Catalan than Spanish.

The Interaction Engagement group of questions inquired into the extent to which the participants were willing to interact with people from different cultures. Chen (2010) describes the Interaction Engagement dimension as “the aspect of intercultural sensitivity which basically refers to participants’ delight and satisfaction in interacting with people from different cultures with an open mind and the ability to respond positively to their counterparts’ messages” (p.6). Before departure, all the participants considered themselves to be open-minded persons who enjoyed interacting with culturally-distant counterparts. The great majority did not quantitatively change their self-assessment as a result of SA. The explanatory comments, however, reveal an improvement in this aspect for some students. Ares, for example, felt she had become more aware of existing prejudices and of how media or other people’s judgments might affect her perceptions of a particular culture. Similarly, Gilliland et al. (2016) demonstrated that the SA helped their participants reduce their stereotypes about the host country and host nationals. For Lola, living in a residence with students from other nationalities was an enriching experience as a result of which she learned to find common ground with people who held different opinions, although she did not share them. In their large-scale study, Vande Berg et al. (2009) also revealed a positive correlation between accommodation and increased sensitivity to cultural differences. In contrast to the present study, they found that those students who resided with co-nationals and host nationals demonstrated greater results in intercultural learning, while those who lived with other international students or in a host family did not show such an improvement. In Lola’s case, it seemed that gathering in shared spaces with students from all over the world contributed to her ethnorelative perspective, and she began to experience her set of values as one among many. The only person who showed an adverse shift in interaction engagement was Angela, who began to avoid dealing with internationals and host nationals at the end of her sojourn. Such reaction may be caused by her fatigue and homesickness, as Angela suggested in her comments. She was simultaneously working and studying, and by the end of the stay, she was overwhelmed.

Finally, the Interaction Attentiveness group of questions explored the degree to which the participants were observant and tried to obtain information when interacting with culturally-distinct counterparts. The interaction attentiveness is characterized by such abilities as responsiveness, perceptiveness and attentiveness, and corresponds to what Chen (1997) called “interaction involvement” in his review of the concept of intercultural sensitivity. Chen claims that “being responsive, perceptive, and attentive enables interculturally sensitive persons to better receive and understand messages, to take appropriate turns, and to initiate and terminate an intercultural interaction fluently and appropriately” (p.9).

Before departure, out of twelve participants, ten revealed that they tried to obtain as much information as they could when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. The areas of interest covered a variety of topics such as personal life, cultural values and beliefs, cuisine, political views, education, the way foreigners interacted between each other, and folklore. Five students considered that they were normally observant when interacting with people from different cultures, while seven students chose “sometimes”. The most commonly mentioned aspects for observation were verbal and nonverbal language, cloths, behaviour, and the way foreigners interacted with each other. At the end of the SA, the students who made shifts in their interaction attentiveness were Lola, Angela, Ares and Anna, while the rest remained of the same opinion as before. Lola became more observant and attentive especially when communicating with fluent English speakers. Besides, she felt more willing to engage in dialogue with her foreign interlocutors, which may be due to her foreign language improvement. Ares also became more observant, especially of nonverbal communication, as she believed that people’s gestures and facial expressions could provide information about a person and his or her personality. Anna became more observant about such aspects as the personal distance that foreign people preferred to keep, the way they introduced themselves, and the extent to which they were critical of the government and their mass media. Angela, in turn, made what may seem at first sight an adverse shift and revealed that she tended to adopt a wait-and-see approach at the end of SA. In fact, she learned that it was better for her not to hurry and to let things take their natural course. Maybe this strategy turned out to be positive for her in the context of Chinese culture.

The present discussion of the results can be further enlightened by the students' responses to the Final Evaluation Interview. In the interview, the participants reflected on how they understood the concept of intercultural sensitivity for themselves and whether they felt they had changed in their sensitivity to cultural differences as a result of SA. The majority perceived a positive effect of sojourning on their sensitivity. The students seemed to assess their intercultural sensitivity level more objectively although each understood this concept differently. For some, the concept included the knowledge of different behaviors, values, and beliefs. Some described the concept in terms of openness, empathy, compassion, and tolerance. Some understood the concept as an appreciation of and an interest in other cultures. Finally, others saw intercultural sensitivity as the ability to avoid falling into the trap of cultural relativism but rather to understand non-judgmentally the way foreign people behave and their reactions. All of them felt improvement in the above-mentioned abilities and seemed to have become more aware of their weaknesses as a result of SA. Comments similar to Kira's "before departure I thought I had already been open to cultural diversity, but this SA experience showed that I still should work on this quality" were frequent and point to a more objective assessment of their own intercultural sensitivity level, which is in itself an interesting result. This feedback may also indicate that their perceptions of their intercultural sensitivity level prior to departure were exaggerated. This finding is in line with Jackson (2008a), who by means of a mix-method study, also found that her Chinese participants' opinions about their level of sensitivity to cultural differences had been inflated. Such exaggerated initial self-assessment may have been no more than the students' wishful thinking or, as Jackson suggested, may have been caused by their self-serving bias. Nevertheless, other facts could explain such behaviour, especially as regards to students with similar cultural background to that of the present cohort, which came from a multicultural environment where cultural and linguistic diversity surrounded them from their childhood. Living with people from different nationalities and ethnicities in their own neighbourhoods at home or studying together with them at primary and secondary schools may account for their feeling of already being fully open to "otherness" before their stay abroad.

In conclusion, although the statistical results show improvement only in the participants' interaction confidence, the qualitative data provide clear evidence that SA

experiences had an overall positive effect on intercultural interaction skills. However, as we have seen, sojourns may sometimes contribute to the development of cultural stereotypes. Clearly, the participants in this study perceived improvement of such abilities as empathy, respect, tolerance, and appreciation of cultural diversity, which are often claimed by scholars (Bhawuk and Brislin, 1992; Chen, 2010) to be important for living in today's multicultural society. Finally, we have been able to document that foreign language fluency appears to be a crucial factor for the participants' interaction confidence, enjoyment and engagement.

## **7.4 Limitations and recommendations for further research**

This longitudinal study sought to explore the impact of short or middle-term university study abroad programmes on intercultural adaptation and the development of intercultural sensitivity of bilingual Catalan/Spanish students.

The results drawn from the obtained data point to the diversity and complexity of the adaptation process, which can significantly depart from those pictures which emerge from either the U-curve or learning curve models. A variety of factors, such as motives for going abroad and expectations, personal characteristics, and SA abroad conditions have an influence on sojourners' lives abroad, confirming previous research (Beaven, 2012). It is, however, necessary to note that the present study has encountered some limitations that could be addressed in future research. First of all, a small group of bilingual Catalan/Spanish students from one Catalan university took part in the research, which does not allow any conclusions to be made concerning other contexts (i.e., bilingual students from other Spanish or European universities and different linguistic backgrounds). I could not explore a larger group of students, as this research study is a dissertation that cannot cover the full scope. Secondly, the study did not include any control group of students who stayed on campus when exploring the effect of the SA programme on the development of intercultural sensitivity. Thirdly, through the use of different instruments, I collected a large amount of information describing the participants' individual experiences which, unfortunately, was impossible to present fully in this thesis. The obtained data were significantly reduced and the selection of information was stipulated by the research objectives. Finally, although I did not edit

the students' narratives and showed original quotations within the text, final results were presented through my interpretation, which could be influenced by my personal experience of living and working abroad.

In view of the above considerations, recommendations for further research work are as follows:

- Future research may be conducted including larger groups of bilingual students from other universities in bilingual context in Spain (e.g., the University of the Basque Country where students are speakers of Euskara and Spanish) or in Europe (e.g., the University of Helsinki where students speak Finnish and Swedish) in order to explore what vital experiences affect their adaptation and the development of their intercultural sensitivity;
- When exploring the students' SA experiences in this study, no specific attention has been paid to such variables as gender and disciplinary degrees. In my study, there was only one male participant, and the participants came from four different Faculties (Humanities, Communication, Political Science and Administration, and Medicine) which did not allow for a broad investigation of these variables. Enlarging the group of participants in further studies would be valuable for exploring differences between male and female students, and also among the degrees they study;
- As can be judged by their adaptation curves, some of the participants in the present study needed more time to adapt to their new environment, which may be due to their culturally-distant host destination. A further study could compare experiences between those students who sojourned in Europe and those in Asia, and explore whether their difficulties were due to cultural distance or to personality traits;
- Some of the participants ended their sojourns less optimistic, which may be due to the length of their SA. Further research might then explore length of SA as a variable and compare the progress and experiences of short-term and mid-term sojourners;
- When discussing the role of university support and tutoring, a further study could also assess the impact of an online tutor on students' adjustment by

comparing the experiences of those who had an online tutor in their home university and those who did not;

- When exploring the level of intercultural sensitivity, it would be also useful to include a control group of students in order to investigate whether there is any difference between those who studied abroad and those who stayed on campus, especially among those students who follow Humanities-related degrees. As previously mentioned in the Methodology chapter, these students study cultural subjects in their degrees and thus are aware of different philosophies, arts, and traditions. Those who go abroad may not necessarily outperform them in intercultural sensitivity;
- It would be worthwhile to conduct pre-departure training to enhance students' cultural awareness so that they are prepared to encounter cultural differences and avoid developing stereotypes during their sojourns. Upon returning from SA, students should be provided with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and also on the extent to which that training programme contributed to their adaptation process and enhancement of intercultural sensitivity. The results may help study abroad administrators get to know what difficulties their students went through while abroad and understand better their needs so as to facilitate the sojourn for future students;
- Further testing the validity of existing models on intercultural adaptation is strongly recommended.

## **7.5 Recommendations for Study Abroad programmes at university level**

Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the findings can be informative for study abroad administrators and instructors. As has been observed in the previous sections, the results point to the need of pre-departure training to prepare outgoing students for possible challenges they may face abroad. In such preparatory courses, students may discuss with their instructors their motives for going abroad as well as expected gains. Thus, instructors may help them to form more realistic expectations and reduce disappointment at the end of the programme. Obviously, it would be important for students to be aware of some culture-specific information of a

particular host destination, such as public transport, food, sanitary conditions, and local timetable to prepare themselves for living abroad. With this purpose, instructors may organize activities involving foreign students currently studying in the home university. In these sessions, outgoing students may have real opportunities to communicate with representatives of the host universities and receive tips to make their transition easier. Moreover, by attending such sessions, students will have the possibility to meet co-nationals going to the same location. The results of this study indicate that building a few relationships with co-nationals could be a positive strategy for adaptation, especially in the initial period. Another example of activities which may be included in pre-SA sessions could be to present students with case-studies or video clips of how people behave in other countries so as to demonstrate cultural differences that students are unaccustomed to. Such an activity may help them enhance their cultural awareness and avoid developing stereotypes towards particular cultures.

The evidence from this study suggests that a pre-departure preparation course should also touch on academic and linguistic challenges students may face abroad. To help students improve their awareness, instructors may invite former Catalan/Spanish students who can share their academic experiences and talk about teaching approaches, work pace in class, teachers' expectations of exchange students, and requirements for assignment submissions and exams in their host universities.

I also wanted to hear the voices of my participants regarding how programme organizers may facilitate sojourns for future students. In the Final Evaluation Interview, all of them were asked to make suggestions based on their own experiences. Their recommendations were the following:

- to provide more information on the amount of money each students would spend in a particular country or university
- to recommend banks in foreign countries
- to make a list of all documents to be presented in case the host destination is not within the EU (visas, monetary system, etc.)
- to further promote mobility programs in order to encourage more students to go abroad.

The majority of the students believed that they had benefited from participation in the study, as they had the opportunity to reflect on their developmental process and other issues that they would not have thought of if they had stayed at home. Assessing regularly their progress and describing experiences while abroad helped them to be more observant about what was happening around them. The current data highlight the beneficial effect of the Narrative Tables through which students could verbalise difficulties faced during SA and sometimes even reconsider their experiences. Thus, self-reflection activities, such as writing journals while abroad, are strongly recommended. Debriefing sessions upon returning from SA are also of great value, as they provide students with the opportunity to reflect on their perceived linguistic, academic and personal improvement. The activities of such de-briefing sessions may include personal presentations and satisfaction feedback on their host institution's services, such as welcoming programs, residence halls, integrating activities, and counselling services.

## **7.6 Final remarks**

This research has showed how the participants' adaptation processes varied from individual to individual depending on his/her social, linguistic, and academic abilities. Their adaptation processes and development of intercultural sensitivity were influenced by such factors as expectations, language fluency, personal and linguistic confidence, and previous SA experience. The participants' personal and academic journeys differed greatly, which made it difficult for the researcher to explain their trajectories within one particular model but rather through a combination of theoretical approaches to culture contact and transitions.

Despite its exploratory nature, I believe this research makes significant contributions to the following areas:

- The current findings add to a growing body of literature on the effect of SA university programmes on students' adaptation and intercultural sensitivity;
- Although this study is a springboard for further investigations, it offers some insight into how bilingual university students adapt to their new cultural

environments and to various intercultural communication styles, and what vital experiences influence their adaptation and communication;

- The present research also extends our knowledge of university students' motives for participating in SA programme, their pre-departure expectations towards gains, and pre-departure concerns;
- This research has several practical suggestions for pre-SA training programmes, cultural awareness preparation, and post-SA de-briefing activities;
- This study contributes to the exploration of SA as a superdiverse context in which university students experience a multiplicity of cultures and languages and the role of foreign languages and especially English as a lingua franca;
- taken together, these findings suggest that international student mobility has undergone changes since its founding due to an increasingly globalised society and technological developments, which has altered significantly the SA context.

Obviously, the findings of the present research will contribute to my further research and publications, as well as to my development as a researcher. However, at a more personal level, I benefited from communicating with the twelve participants and their sharing their life narratives with me. By living part of their journeys with them, I became more aware of their needs and difficulties while abroad. I hope that, in a future career as a scholar at a high education institution, I may use this information for making future students' SA experiences easier by means of preparation sessions, reflection activities and appropriate materials.



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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I. Recruitment letter

Dear student:

**The GREILI-UPF research group from the Department of Humanities invites you to participate in a pilot experience that will help you make the best of your future study abroad at a foreign university.** By participating, you will be able to adjust better to the host environment and develop better language and culture learning strategies. This learning experience will be the focus of a research study that has a twofold objective:

- to assess this new initiative in order to improve it for future UPF students;
- to explore the impact of university study abroad programmes on intercultural adaptation and the development of intercultural sensitivity of bilingual Catalan/Spanish students.

**The requirements for participation are very simple:**

- you must be undergraduate bilingual Catalan/Spanish student from the Faculty of Communication at the UPF;
- in the age range 20-25;
- enrolled in a study abroad programme;
- have done your learning in the primary and secondary schools of Catalonia;
- be interested in cultural issues.

In this learning experience, we will ask you to participate **before your departure in two 2-hour sessions** during which you will do some reflection activities. **During and right after your study abroad** you will be asked to share with us your experiences in the host culture. **To reward your participation** in this pilot learning, **we will give you €35** when you are back from your stay abroad.

**In case you are willing to take part in this research study, we will appreciate if you answer this message and inform us about:**

- the date of your departure to the host country;
- the dates and time (morning/afternoon) when you prefer to participate in the pre-departure sessions.

Please be assured that your participation in this study will be voluntary and anonymous.  
Thank you for considering this research opportunity.

For any further information please write to Mrs. Iryna Pogorelova,  
[irynapogorelova24@gmail.com](mailto:irynapogorelova24@gmail.com)

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This project is supervised by the research group GREILI of the Department of Humanities and its lead researcher, Dr. Mireia Trenchs Parera.

## APPENDIX II. Individual Profile Questionnaire

1. Name (include two last names):

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Year of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What degree are you studying at the UPF?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What academic year have you finished? (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or 4<sup>th</sup>)

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Where were you born (country and town):

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Where were you brought up? (country, town, and neighborhood)

: \_\_\_\_\_

7. What kind of primary and secondary schools have you attended?

Public: \_\_\_\_\_

International: \_\_\_\_\_

Religious (“concertada”): \_\_\_\_\_

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

8. What language(s) were you exposed to in your family since birth? Underline your answer(s):

Catalan

French

Spanish

Galician

English

Basque

German

Other (specify which): \_\_\_\_\_

9. What language do you speak with your closest relatives?

With your mother: \_\_\_\_\_

With your father: \_\_\_\_\_

With your siblings: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Have you ever been to a course in a foreign country for the purpose of learning a foreign language?

Underline: Yes / No

10a. If yes, when? \_\_\_\_\_

10b. Where? \_\_\_\_\_

10c. School \_\_\_\_\_

10d. For how long?

\_\_\_\_\_ less than 3 months; \_\_\_\_\_ between 3 and 6 months; \_\_\_\_\_ over 6 months

11. Other than the course mentioned, have you ever lived in a situation where you were exposed to a language other than your native language?

	Experience 1	Experience 2	Experience 3
Country/region			
Language			
Aim			
From when to when			

12. How often do you interact with Erasmus exchange students at UPF? Underline:

Often                      Sometimes                      Never

13. Is it “Voluntariat linguistic”?                      Yes/No

13a. If yes, what languages do you speak with the exchange students? Underline:

Catalan                      Spanish                      English                      Other (specify which): \_\_\_\_\_

14. How often do you interact with foreigners outside the UPF? Underline:

Often                      Sometimes                      Never

15. What language(s) do you use when you interact with foreigners outside UPF? Underline:

Catalan                      Spanish                      English                      Other (specify which): \_\_\_\_\_

16. In the boxes below, indicate the language of the country you will be going to and rate your ability in this language. Use the following ratings:

1 - Poor; 2 - Good; 3 - Very good; 4 - Native/nativelike.

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing

## **APPENDIX III. Study Abroad Motives Questionnaire**

### **1. Place of study for the Stay Abroad:**

**Fill in the name of your host University, Department.**

(a) University of

---

(b) Department, School of

---

### **2. Describe the reason(s) why you chose to participate in this study abroad program?**

---

---

---

### **3. Reflect on the following questions and provide a sincere explanation:**

3.1. What do I expect from my period of residence abroad?

3.2. What am I most looking forward to?

3.3. What are my main worries and concerns?

3.4. How am I going to meet people?

3.5. Do I have any expectations about what people will be like?

3.6. What aspects of the culture do I think will be similar to or different from what I am used to?

3.7. How do I think I am going to respond to these differences?

3.8.How am I going to spend my leisure time?

3.9.How am I going to communicate with people? Do I expect to find communication easy or difficult?

**4. Reflect on what you expect from this study abroad experience in terms of :**

the improvement of language skills -

academic skills -

making friends -

intercultural adaptation -

personal growth -

## **APPENDIX IV. Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire**

Below is a series of questions concerning intercultural communication. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be open and provide us with an explanation for all the answers. You may answer using **Catalan, Spanish, or English**.

### **1. Do you enjoy interacting with people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

### **2. Do you often have a feeling that people from other cultures are narrow-minded?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

### **3. Do you feel sure of yourself in interacting with people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

### **4. Do you find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

### **5. Do you always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

### **6. Do you like being with people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

### **7. Do you think you respect the values of people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

**8. Do you think you respect the ways people from different cultures behave?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

**9. Do you get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation: (if yes, what are the reasons?)

**10. Do you often feel useless or unimportant when interacting with people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation: (if yes, what are the reasons?)

**11. Are you open-minded (unprejudiced) to people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

**12. Do you try to obtain as much information as you can when interacting with people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation: (if yes, what kind of information and why?)

**13. Do you accept the opinions of people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

**14. Are you very observant when interacting with people from different cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation: (if yes or sometimes, what are you observant about?)

**15. Do you think that your culture is better than other cultures?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

**16. Do you avoid those situations where you will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons?**

Underline: Yes      Sometimes      No

Explanation:

## APPENDIX V. Study Abroad Conditions and Personal Growth Questionnaire

1. Place of study for the Stay Abroad:

Country \_\_\_\_\_

University \_\_\_\_\_

2. How many other students from the UPF were in your same destination?  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Did you spend time together with them while abroad?

Most of the time \_\_\_ A little bit \_\_\_ Little \_\_\_

4. Accommodation. Put a cross if applicable.

\_\_\_ **Home-stay in family:**

\_\_\_ with children

\_\_\_ no children

\_\_\_ **Hall of residence:**

\_\_\_ Single room

\_\_\_ Double room with native speaker

\_\_\_ Double room with non-native speaker from Spain

\_\_\_ Double room with non-native speaker from another country

\_\_\_ **Apartment:**

\_\_\_ Individual

\_\_\_ Shared with native speakers only

\_\_\_ Shared with natives and non-natives speakers

\_\_\_ Shared with native Catalan/Spanish speakers

\_\_\_ Shared with speakers of other languages

\_\_\_ **Other, please specify**  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Did you work while you were abroad?

\_\_\_ Full time      \_\_\_ Part time      \_\_\_ Less than part time

6. What kind of job did you have?  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Did you travel around in the area while you were abroad? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

8. Relationships:

How often did you carry out any of the following activities in your leisure time during your study abroad?

1 - Very often    2 - Often      3 - Sometimes    4 - Seldom    5 - Never

- Studying, doing class work of any sort of work in English on your own.
- Studying with someone else.
- Being with host nationals people in general.
- Being with new friends from the host country.
- Being with friends of a variety of nationalities.

9. Degree of difficulty or stress

How difficult, or stressful did you find the following ten features in your study abroad experiences?

1.....	2.....	3.....	4.....	5.....
Very easy	Fairly easy	Unable to say	Fairly difficult or stressful	Very difficult or stressful

- English
  - Academic situation (in general).
  - Living conditions (i.e., clothes, food, housing etc.)
  - Human relationships (teachers, classmates and others.)
  - Leisure and hobby activities
  - Culture, custom, and habits.
  - Financial conditions
  - Physical health conditions
  - Mental health conditions
  - Your job if you had any
  - Other stress factors. (Please describe anything you find very difficult or stressful beside those mentioned above)
- 

10. Perceived English language improvement (or host language in case you didn't communicate in English)

How much do you think your English has improved after your stay abroad?

1.....	2.....	3.....	4.....	5.....
Not at all applicable	Not so applicable	Neither yes nor	Fairly applicable	Most applicable

- I have improved my overall skills in English.
- I have improved my speaking skills in English.
- I have improved my listening skills in English.
- I have improved my reading skills in English.
- I have improved my writing skills in English.
- I have improved my vocabulary in English.
- I have improved my English grammar.

11. The growth and change of yourself.

Are there any ways in which you find yourself different after your stay in the host country?

1.....	2.....	3.....	4.....	5
Not at all applicable	Not so applicable	Neither yes nor	Fairly applicable	Most applicable

- I have become more able to challenge difficulties.
- My academic skills have improved and I am more knowledgeable.
- I can make friends with people easily.
- My English has improved very much.
- My cross-cultural adjustment ability has increased.
- My personality has become more cheerful and outgoing.
- I have become more confident in my own ideas.
- Other changes. If you find yourself different in other aspects, please describe in details.

Other changes:
----------------

12. Conclusion:

How satisfied are you with your study abroad experience in general?  
Choose one number from 5 (greatest satisfaction) to 0 (no satisfaction).

5    4    3    2    1    0

## **APPENDIX VI. Consent form**

Dear participant:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the research “The Study of Intercultural Adaptation and the Development of Intercultural Sensitivity of Catalan/Spanish University Students during Study Abroad.”

In this study, we will be exploring the impact of university study abroad programmes on intercultural adaptation and the development of intercultural sensitivity of bilingual Catalan/Spanish students who come from a superdiverse background. The purpose of the study is to explore students’ vital experiences abroad which lead to a better understanding and the appreciation of cultural differences, the adjustment to different communication and behavioral styles, and contribute to their intercultural development and personal growth.

Approximately 20 students are expected to participate in this study. Each participant will be asked to fill out open-ended questionnaires at three different phases: before departure, during stay abroad, and after sojourn. Each participant will also participate in two individual interviews: before departure and after stay abroad. In addition, students while abroad will have an opportunity to interact frequently with the researcher through a virtual Moodle classroom, and share their observations, feelings, frustration as to unpleasant experiences (if any) or incidents in which cultural awareness caused difficulties.

Please be assured that your participation in this study is voluntary and you can stop participating at any time without any penalty. All personal data and answers obtained for this study will be kept confidential; results will be used only for educational research and presented without your name or other personal information. In addition, you need not answer any question which makes you feel uncomfortable.

This project is supervised by the research group GREILI of the Department of Humanities and its lead researcher, Dr. Mireia Trenchs Parera.

In order to participate in this study, please fill out the consent form below. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation, please do not hesitate to contact Iryna Pogorelova at [irynapogorelova24@gmail.com](mailto:irynapogorelova24@gmail.com)

Faithfully,

Iryna Pogorelova

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

### Statement of Consent

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read

the information above and I voluntarily agree to participate in the study “Vital Experiences and Catalan/Spanish University Students’ Intercultural Sensitivity and Adaptation during Study Abroad,” conducted by Iryna Pogorelova at Universitat Pompeu Fabra.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher

## APPENDIX VII. Results of regression calculations for Personal and Academic Issues

In order to build a graph representing an overall group adaptation trend for both categories, the participants' responses to the five-point Likert scale were averaged for each two-week period. Next, those mean values were averaged again and plotted as a function of time. Subsequently, a regression straight line was fitted to the two datasets. In order to verify whether the slope of those lines was statistically significant, the regression diagnostics were done for each dataset separately. Predictor and response variables were time (in weeks) and the Lickert values, respectively. The results are presented in Tables 5.1 and 5.2.

Table 5.1 – Personal issues regression results

Coefficients:	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr (> t )
(Intercept)	3.69772	0.04424	83.581	4.68e-13
x2	0.06679	0.00713	9.368	1.38e-05
Residual standard error: 0.06476 on 8 degrees of freedom				
Multiple R-squared: 0.9165				
Adjusted R-squared: 0.906				
F-statistic: 87.76 on 1 and 8 degrees of freedom				
p-value: 1.379e-05				

Table 5.2 Academic issues regression results

Coefficients:	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr (> t )
(Intercept)	3.56170	0.14575	24.438	8.39e-09
x2	0.05257	0.02349	2.238	0.0556
Residual standard error: 0.2134 on 8 degrees of freedom				
Multiple R-squared: 0.385				
Adjusted R-squared: 0.3081				
F-statistic: 5.009 on 1 and 8 degrees of freedom				
p-value: 0.0556				

The results showed that, for a standard  $p < 0.05$  significance level, the slope of the straight line fitted to the Personal Issues mean data was highly statistically significant ( $p$ .value  $< 0.00005$ ), while the slope of the line fitted to the Academic Issues mean data was marginally significant ( $p$ .value = 0.0556). These findings indicate that there is a clear trend for intercultural adaptation, as measured by the Likert scale, to increase with time spent abroad.

## APPENDIX VIII. Graphs for the two broad categories: Personal and Academic Issues

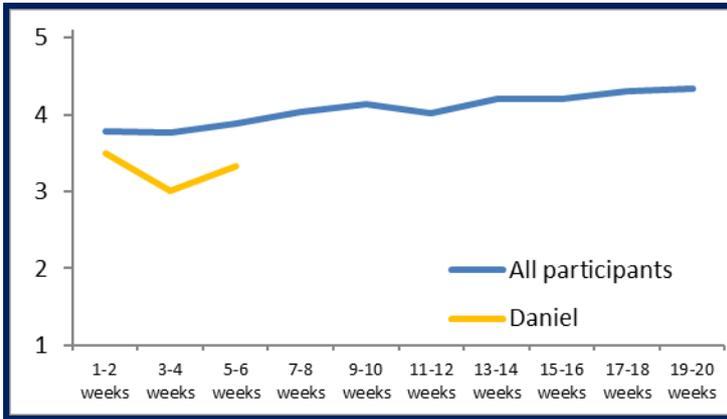


Figure 1. Daniel's graph for Personal Issues

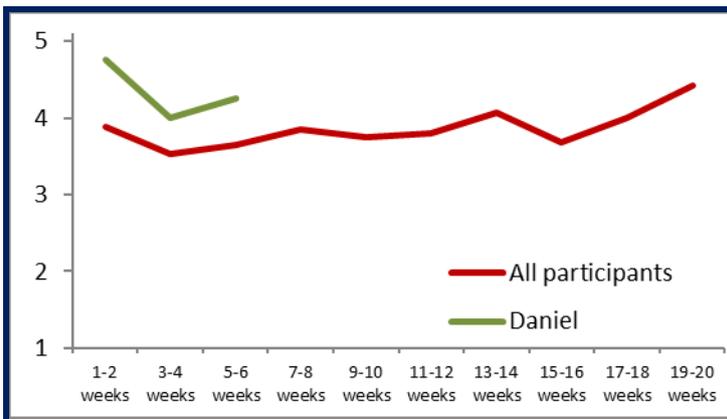


Figure 2. Daniel's graph for Academic Issues

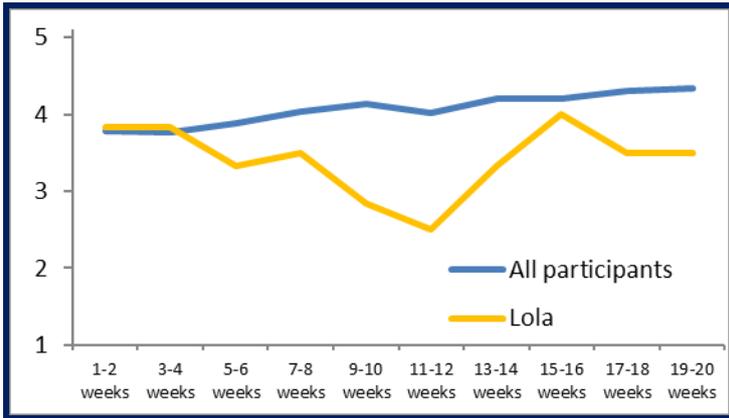


Figure 3. Lola's graph for Personal Issues

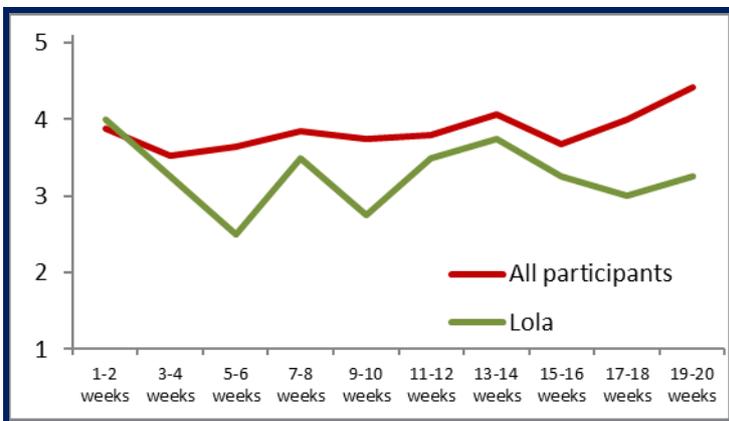


Figure 4. Lola's graph for Academic Issues

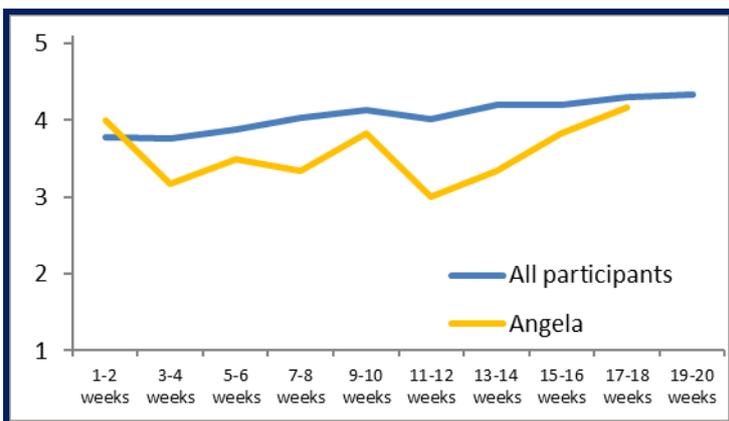


Figure 5. Angela's graph for Personal Issues

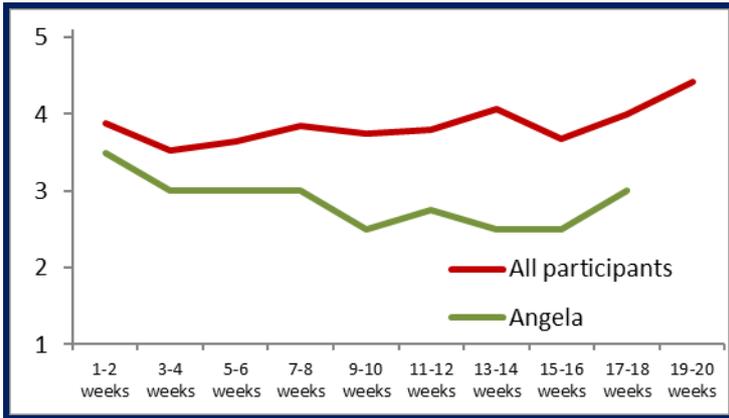


Figure 6. Angela's graph for Academic Issues

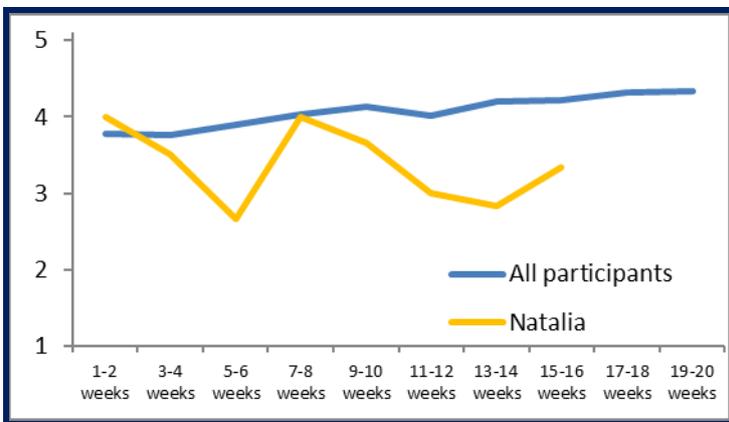


Figure 7. Natalia's graph for Personal Issues

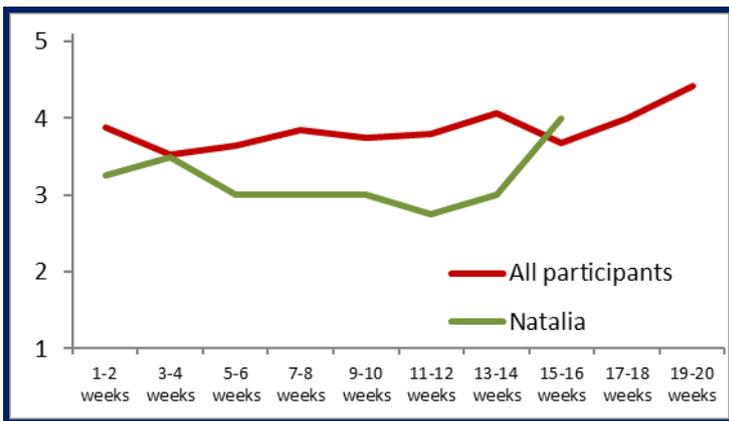


Figure 8. Natalia's graph for Academic Issues

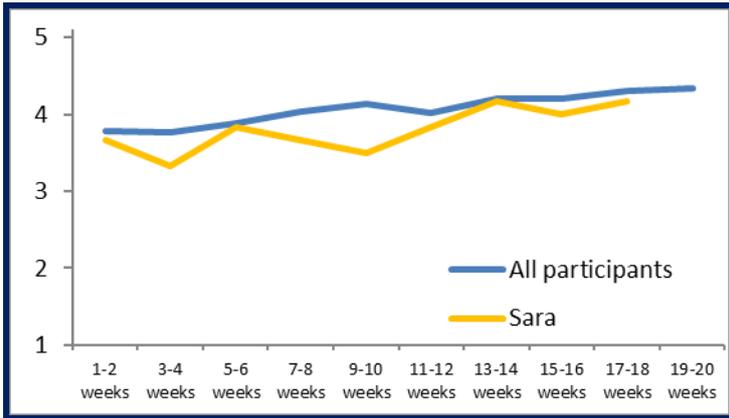


Figure 9. Sara's graph for Personal Issues

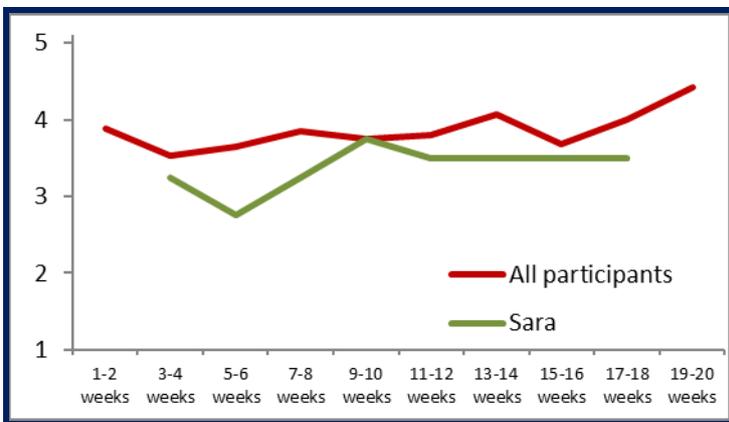


Figure 10. Sara's graph for Academic Issues

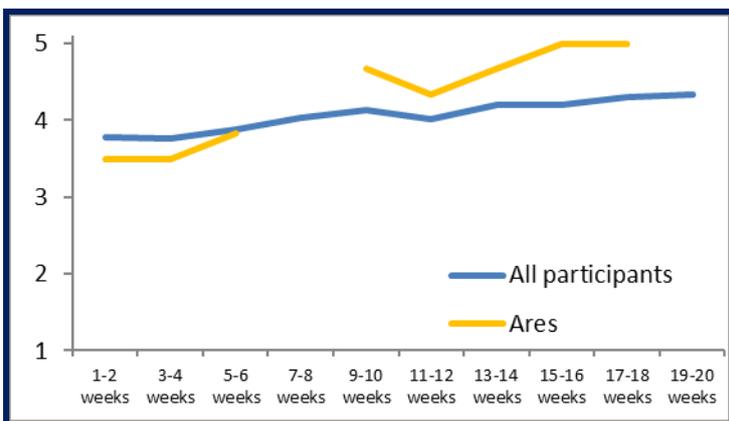


Figure 11. Ares's graph for Personal Issues

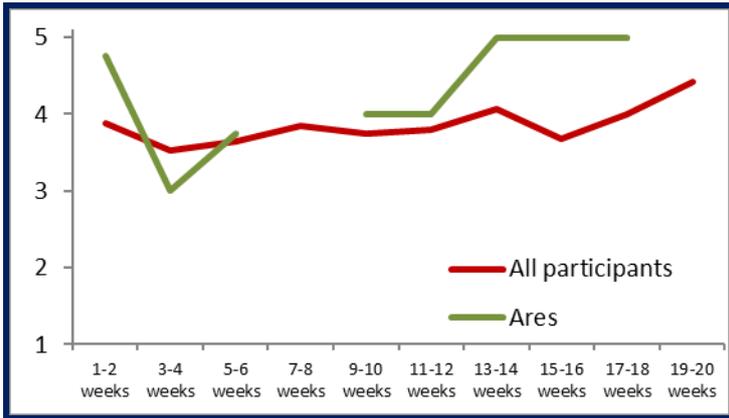


Figure 12. Ares's graph for Academic Issues

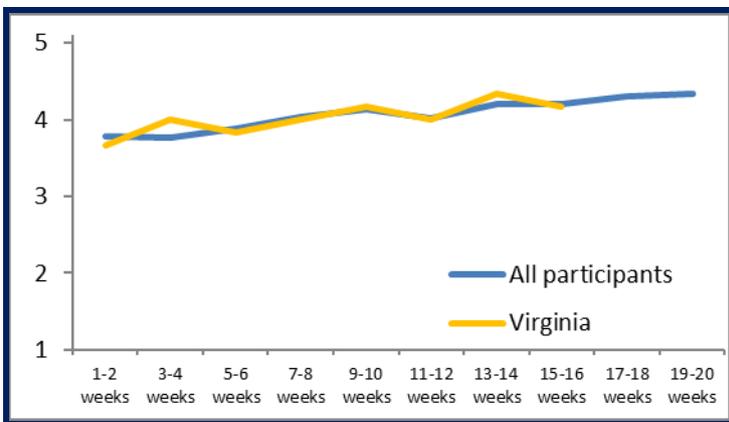


Figure 13. Virginia's graph for Personal Issues

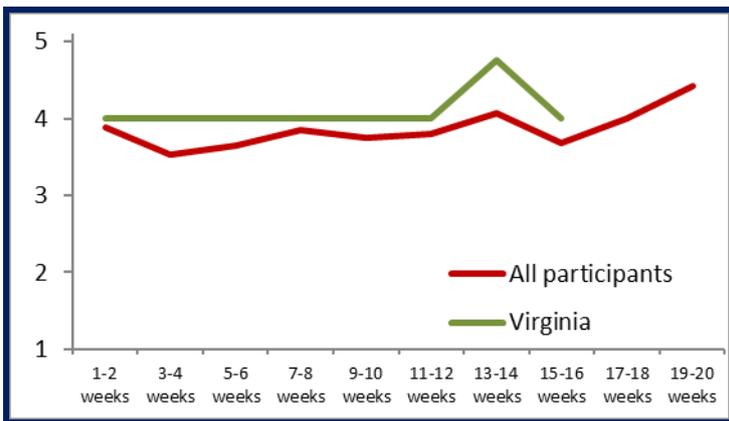


Figure 14. Virginia's graph for Academic Issues

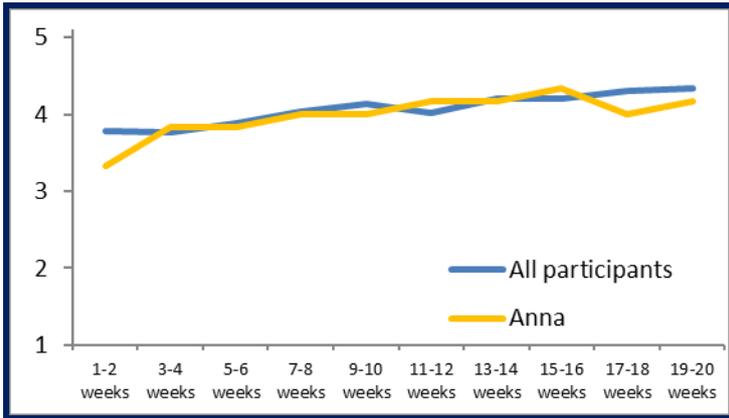


Figure 15. Anna's graph for Personal Issues

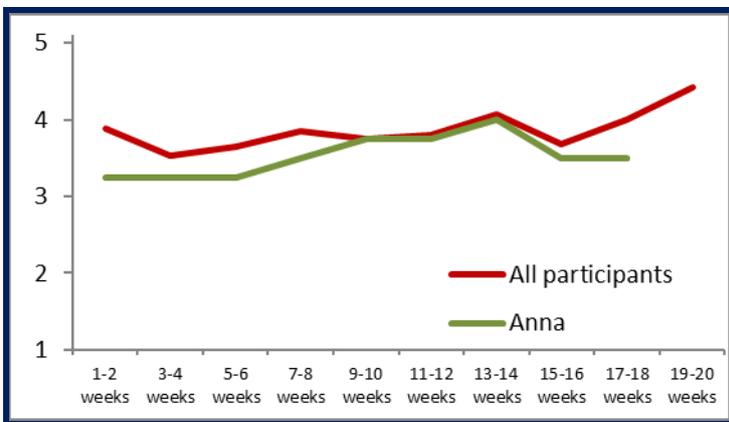


Figure 16. Anna's graph for Academic Issues

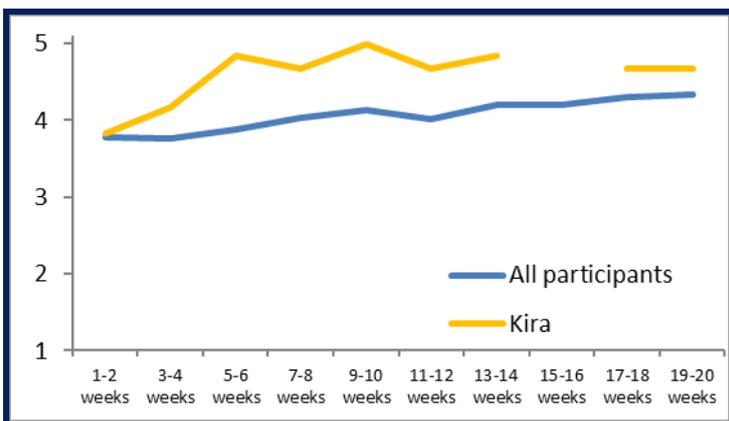


Figure 17. Kira's graph for Personal Issues

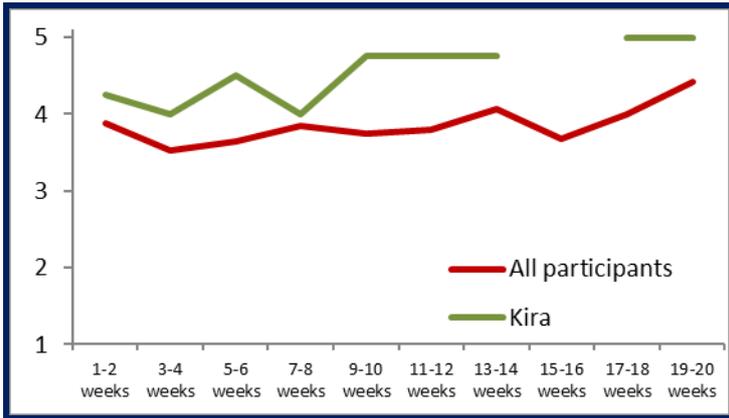


Figure 18. Kira's graph for Academic Issues

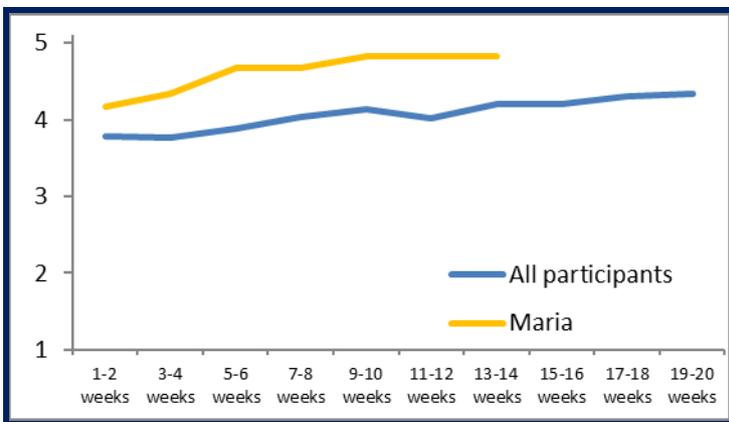


Figure 19. Maria's graph for Personal Issues

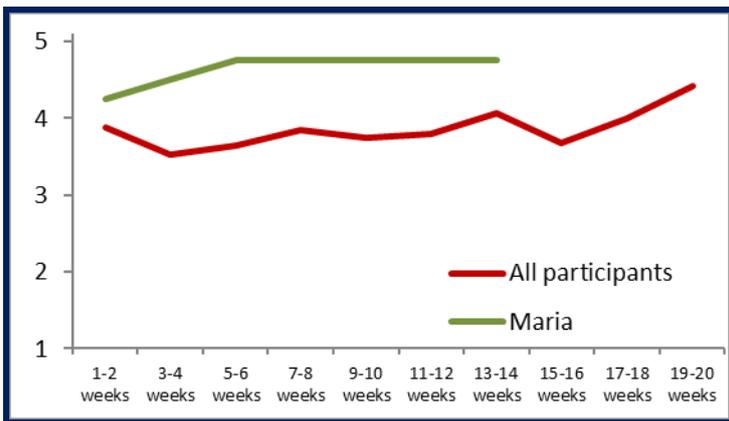


Figure 20. Maria's graph for Academic Issues

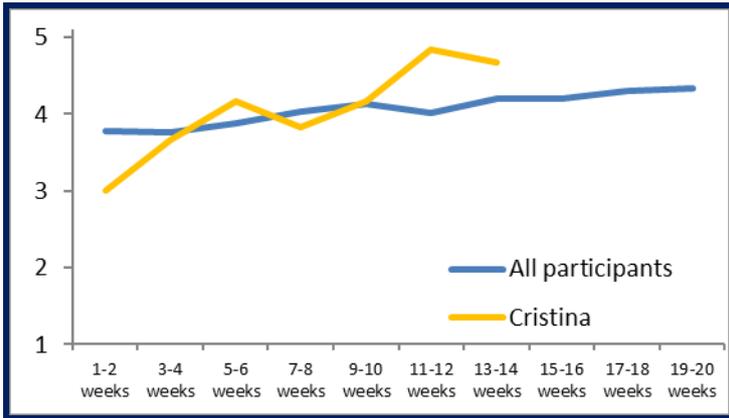


Figure 21. Cristina’s graph for Personal Issues

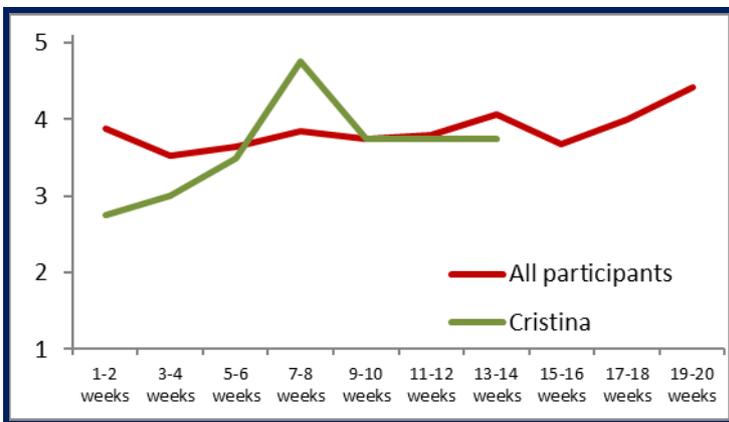


Figure 22. Cristina’s graph for Academic Issues

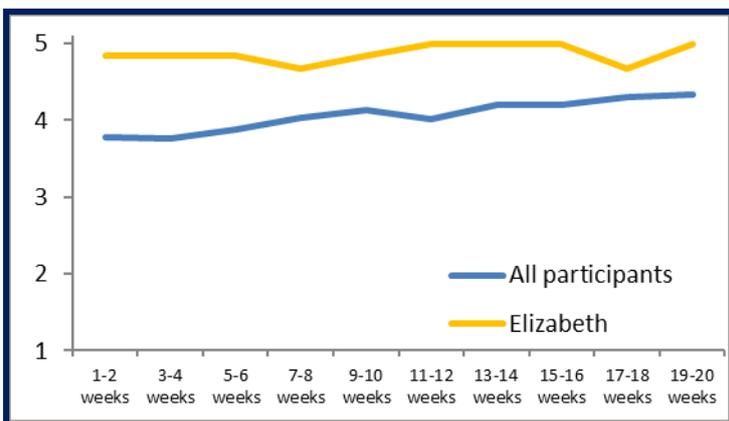


Figure 23. Elizabeth’s graph for Personal Issues

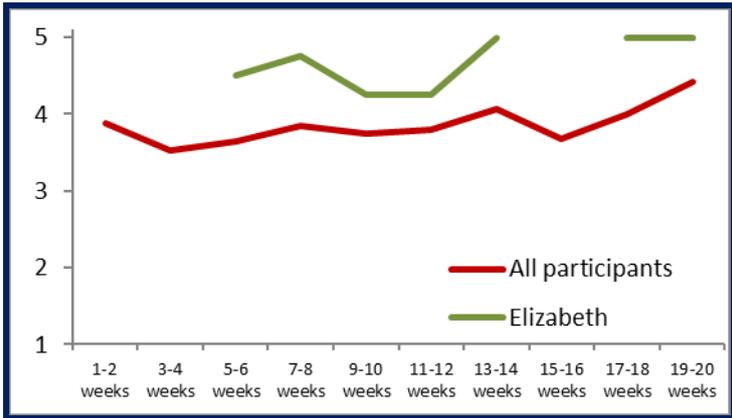


Figure 24. Elizabeth's graph for Academic Issues

## APPENDIX IX. Graphs for the sub-categories within the Personal and Academic Issues categories

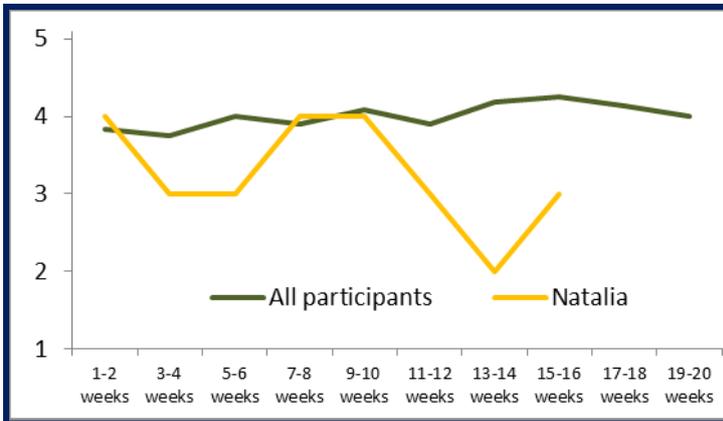


Figure 1. Natalia's graph for the sub-category "Relationships with co-nationals"

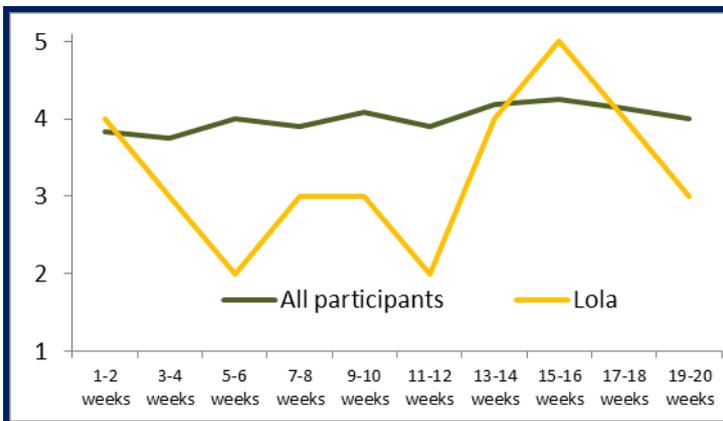


Figure 2. Lola's graph for the sub-category "Relationships with co-nationals"

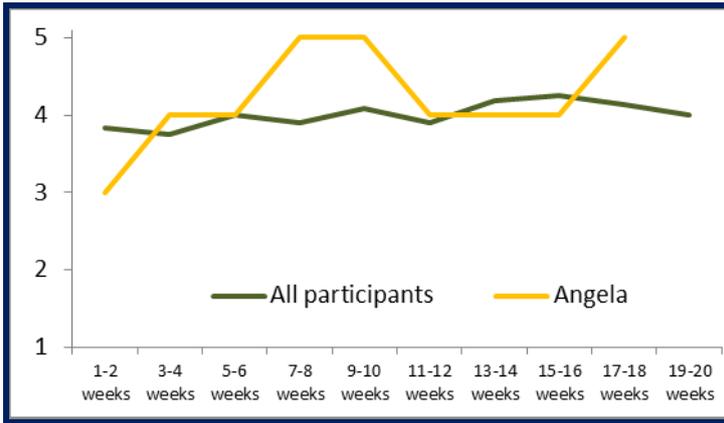


Figure 3. Angela’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with co-nationals”

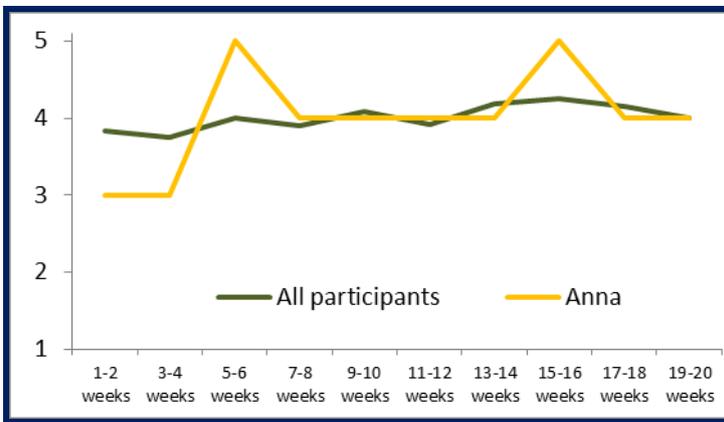


Figure 4. Anna’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with co-nationals”

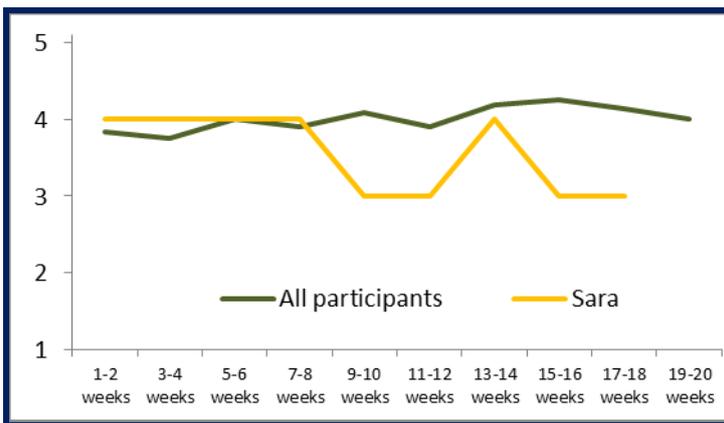


Figure 5. Sara’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with co-nationals”

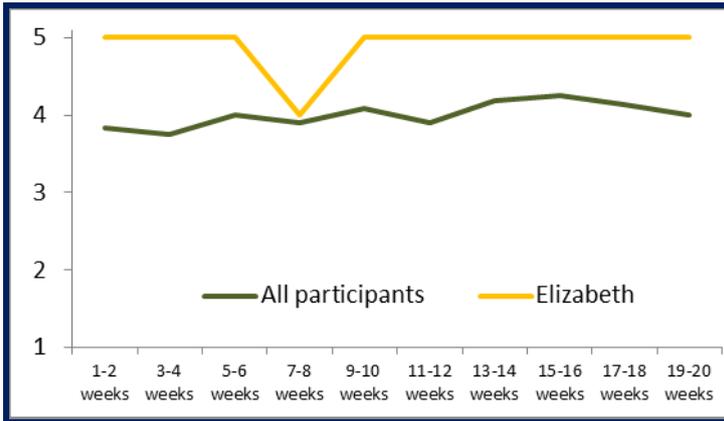


Figure 6. Elizabeth’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with co-nationals”

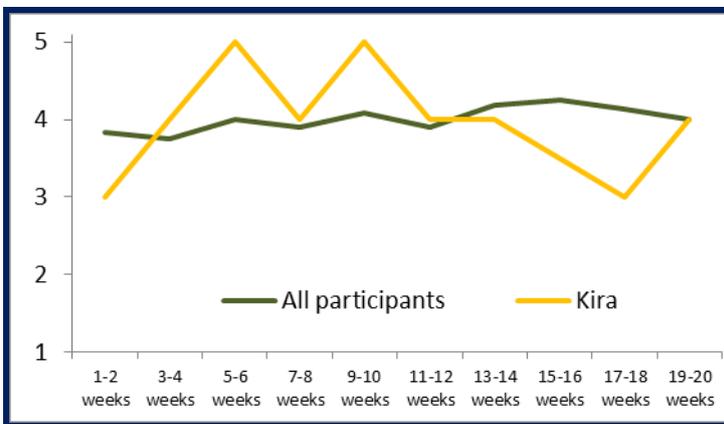


Figure 7. Kira’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with co-nationals”

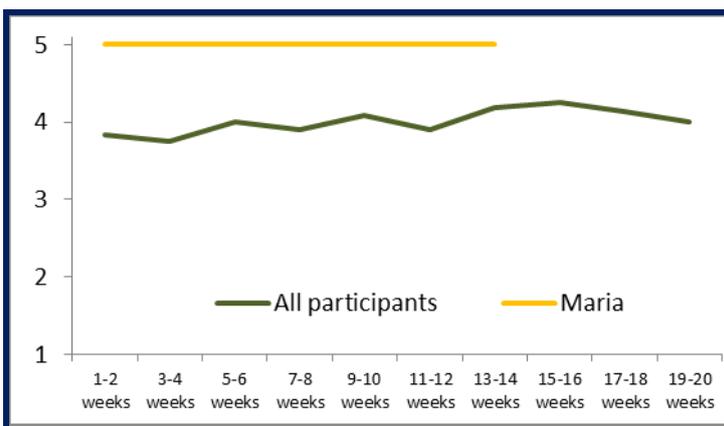


Figure 8. Maria’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with co-nationals”

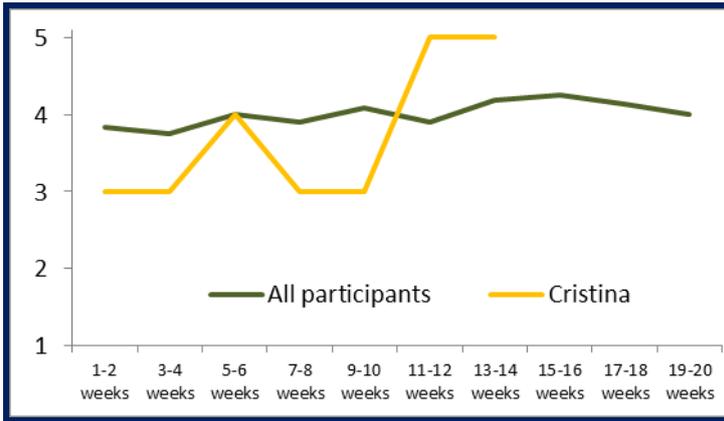


Figure 9. Cristina’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with co-nationals”

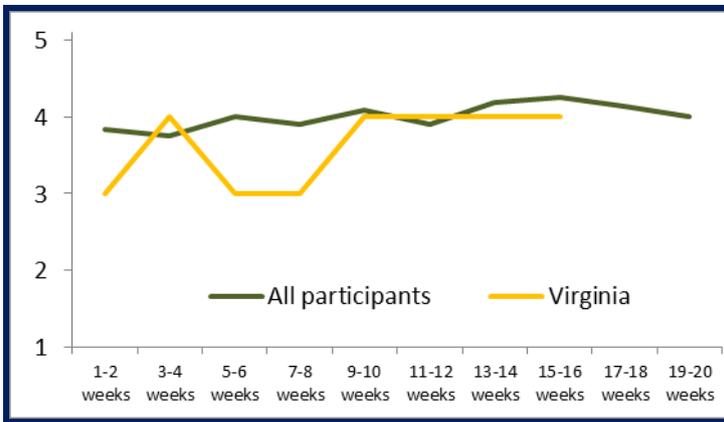


Figure 10. Virginia’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with co-nationals”

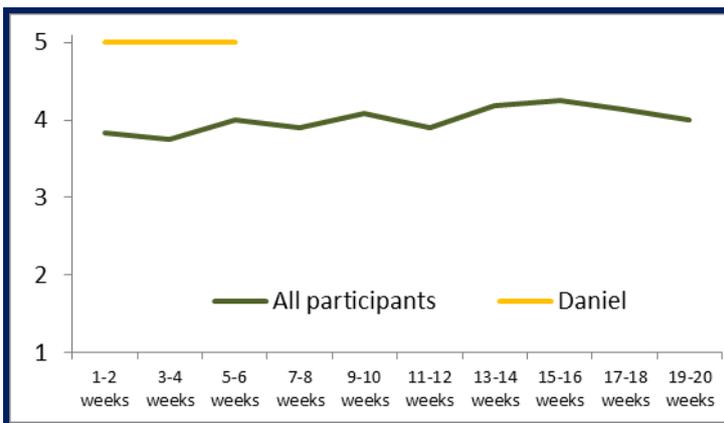


Figure 11. Daniel’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with co-nationals”

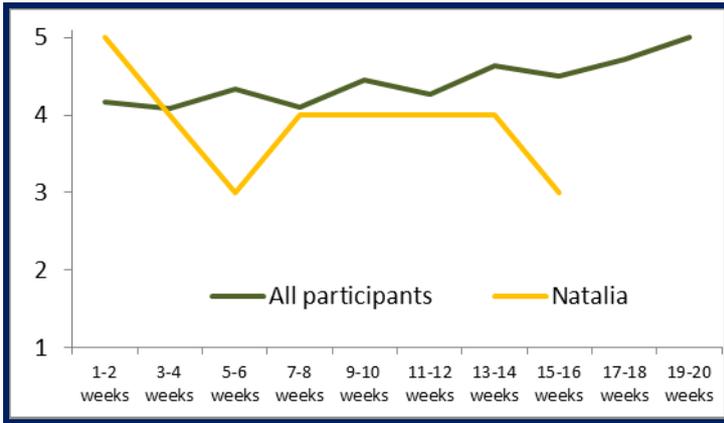


Figure 12. Natalia’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

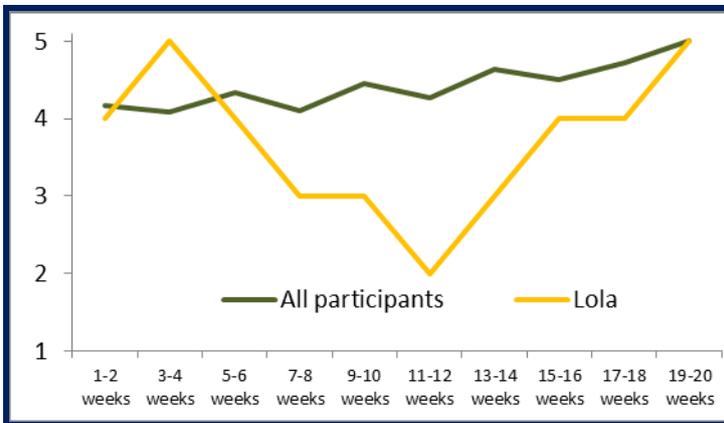


Figure 13. Lola’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

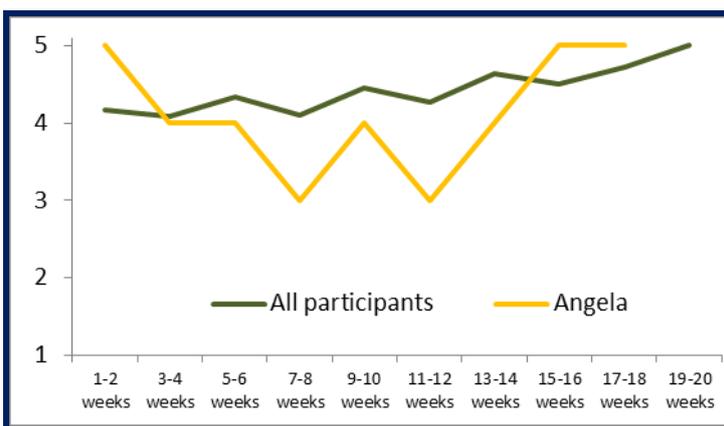


Figure 14. Angela’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

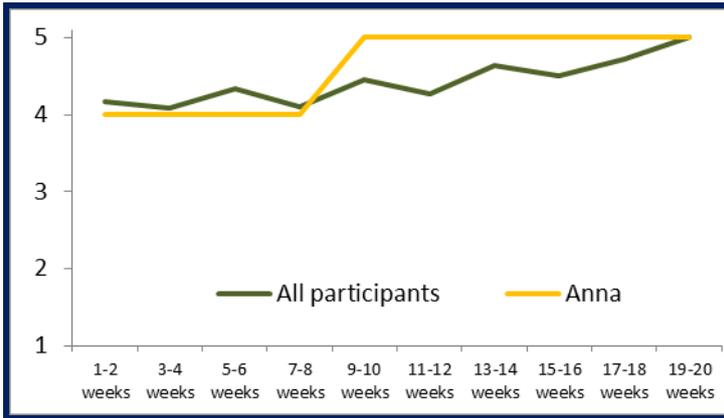


Figure 15. Anna’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

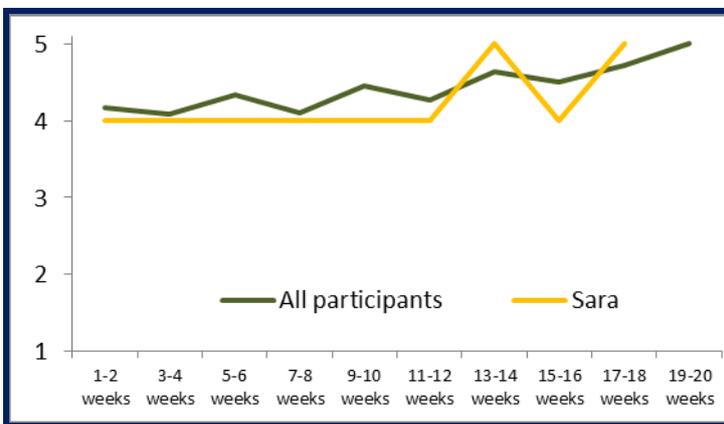


Figure 16. Sara’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

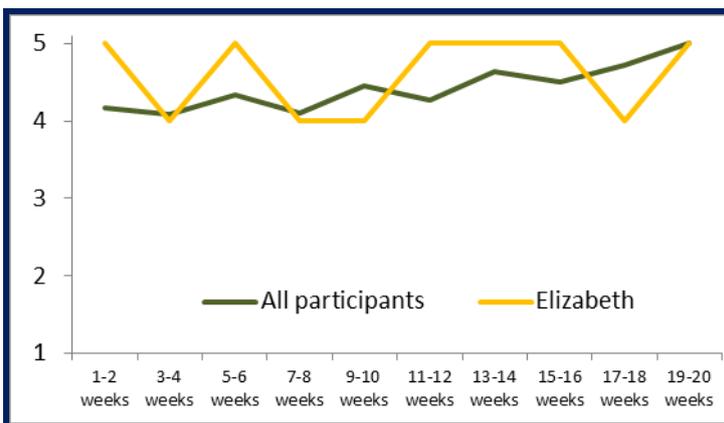


Figure 17. Elizabeth’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

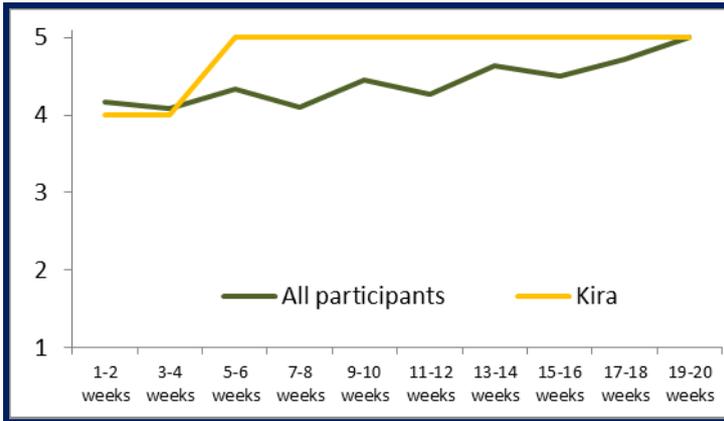


Figure 18. Kira’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

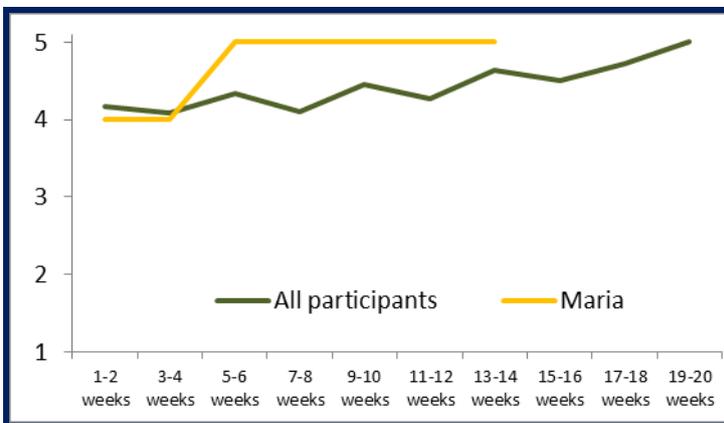


Figure 19. Maria’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

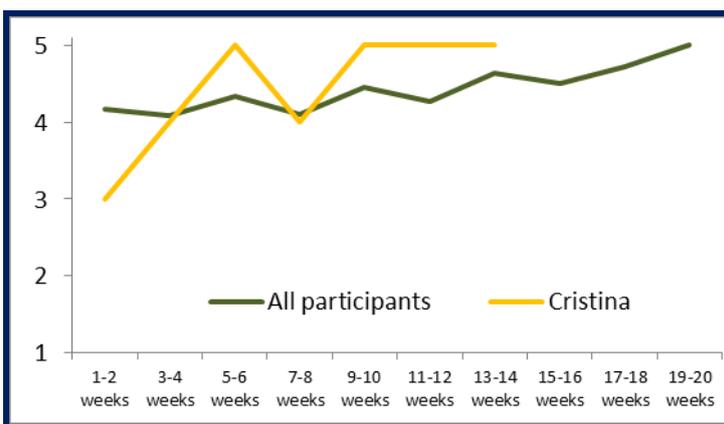


Figure 20. Cristina’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

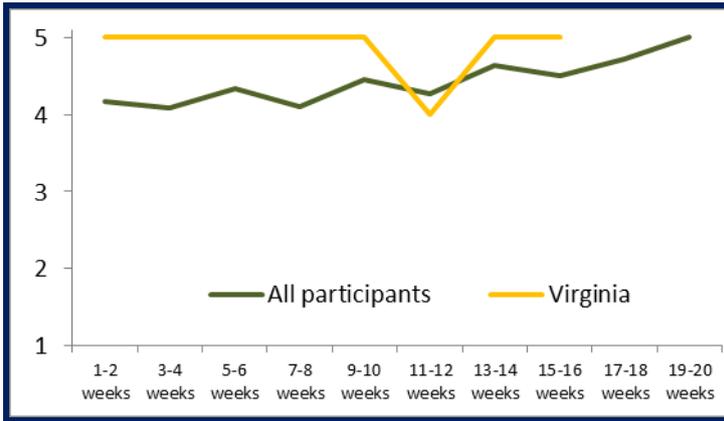


Figure 21. Virginia’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

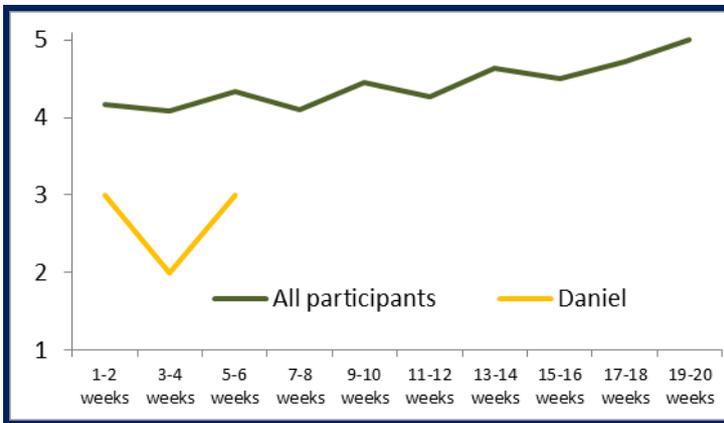


Figure 22. Daniel’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with students from other nationalities”

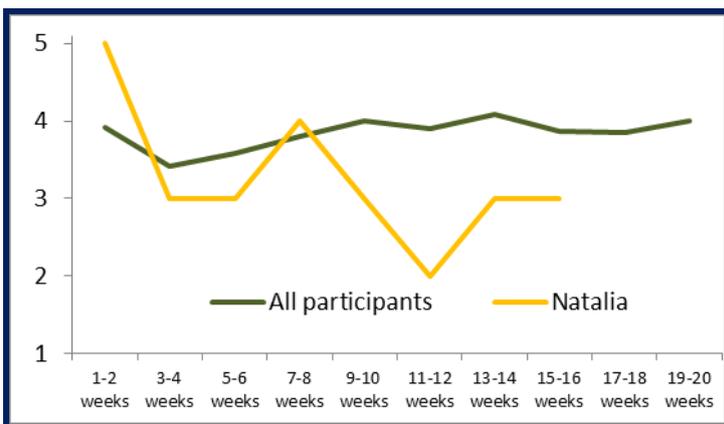


Figure 23. Natalia’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

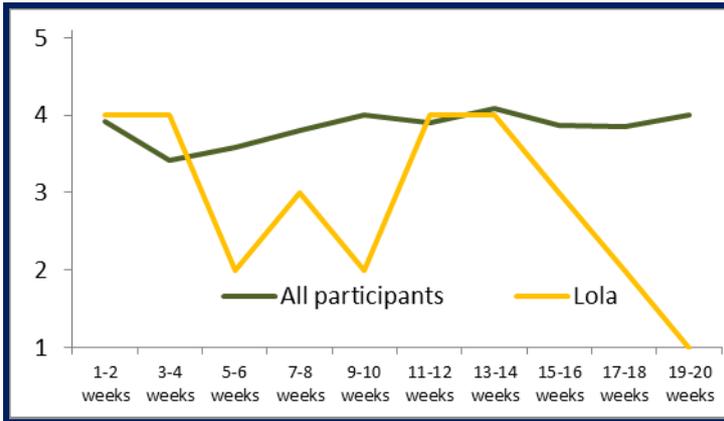


Figure 24. Lola’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

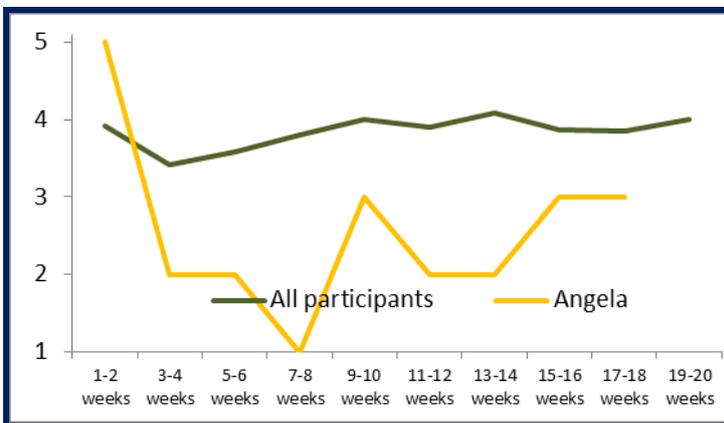


Figure 25. Angela’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

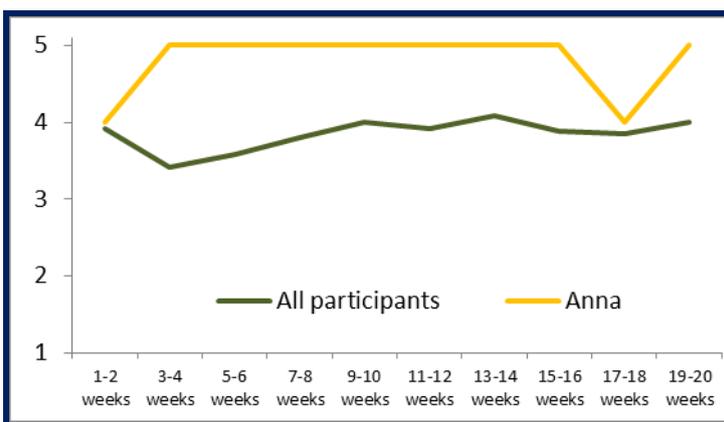


Figure 26. Anna’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

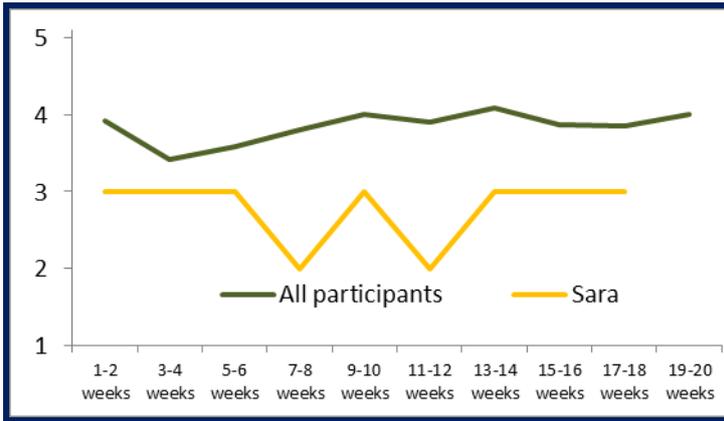


Figure 27. Sara’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

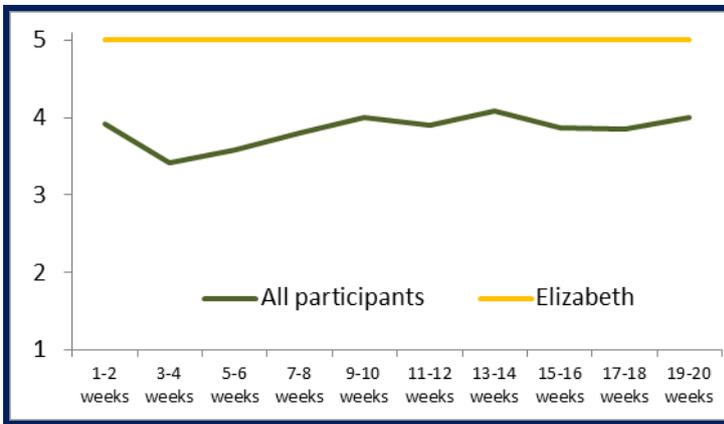


Figure 28. Elizabeth’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

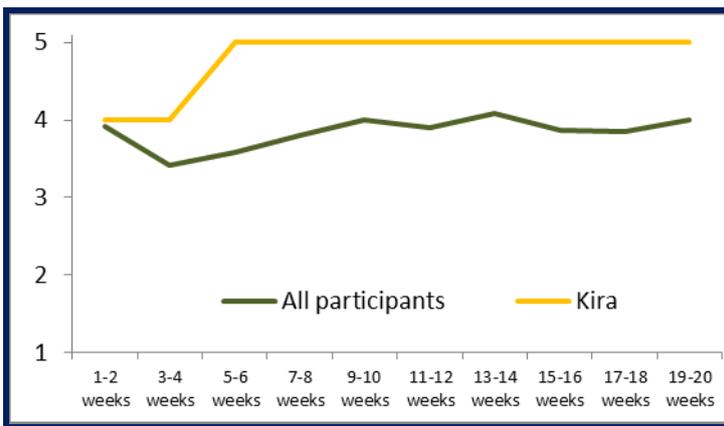


Figure 29. Kira’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

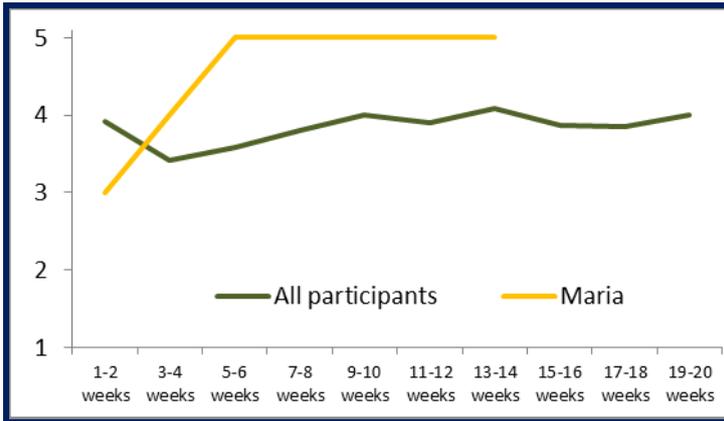


Figure 30. Maria’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

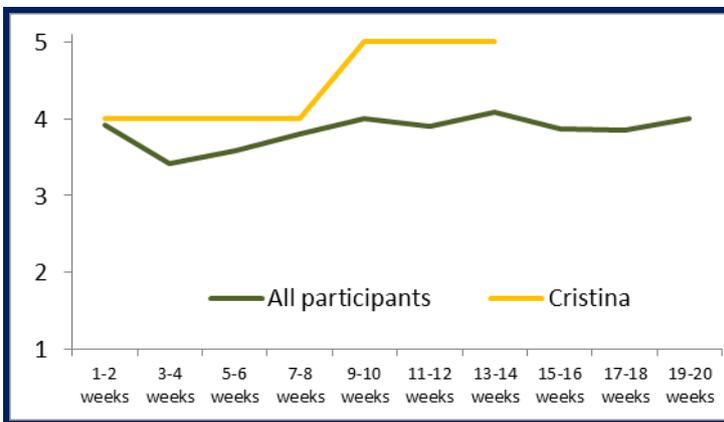


Figure 31. Cristina’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

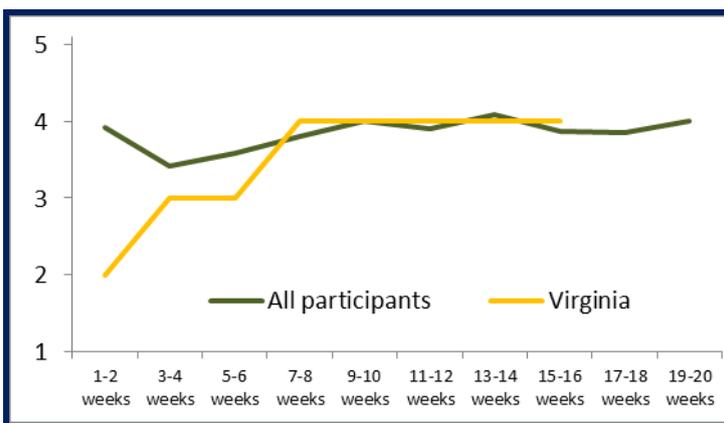


Figure 32. Virginia’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

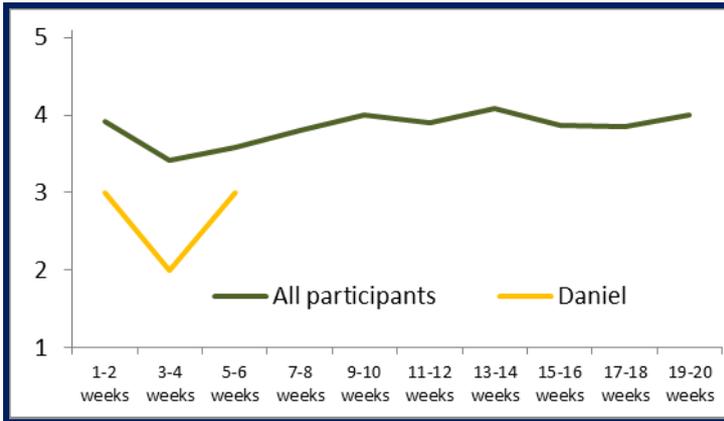


Figure 33. Daniels’s graph for the sub-category “Relationships with host nationals”

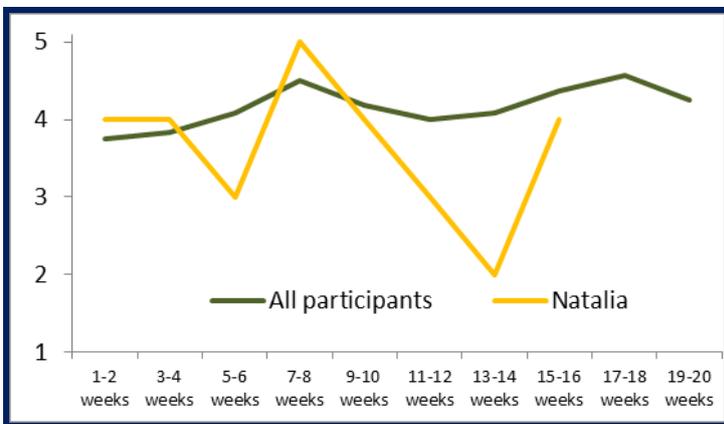


Figure 34. Natalia’s graph for the sub-category “Daily life”

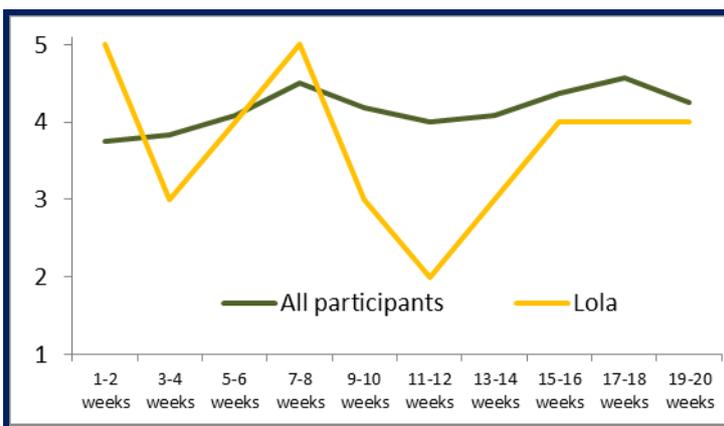


Figure 35. Lola’s graph for the sub-category “Daily life”

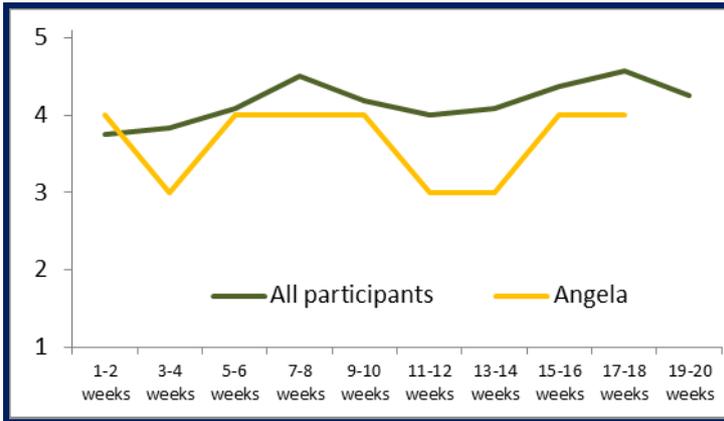


Figure 36. Angela's graph for the sub-category "Daily life"

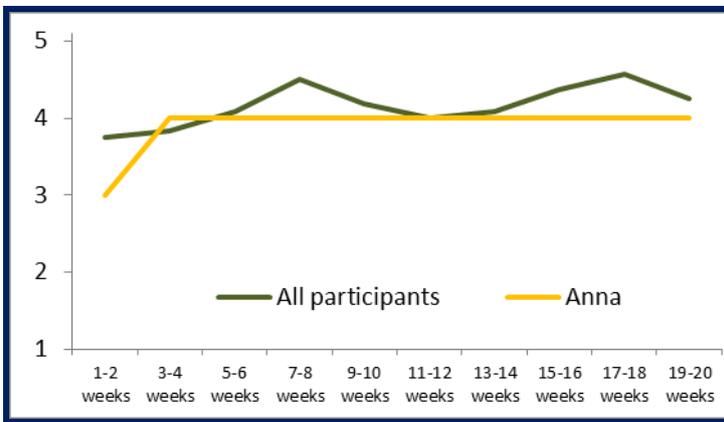


Figure 37. Anna's graph for the sub-category "Daily life"

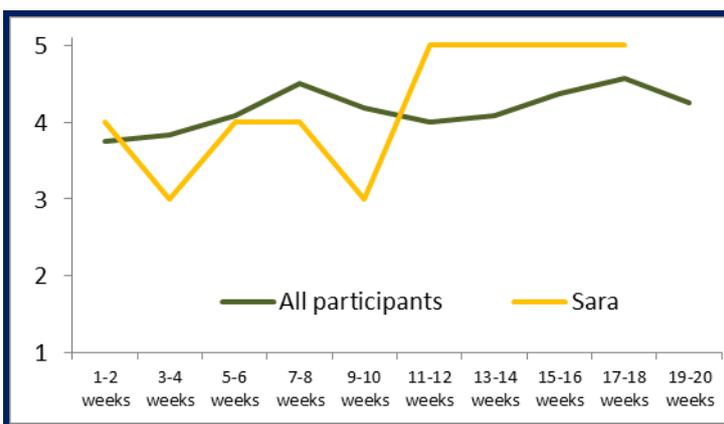


Figure 38. Sara's graph for the sub-category "Daily life"

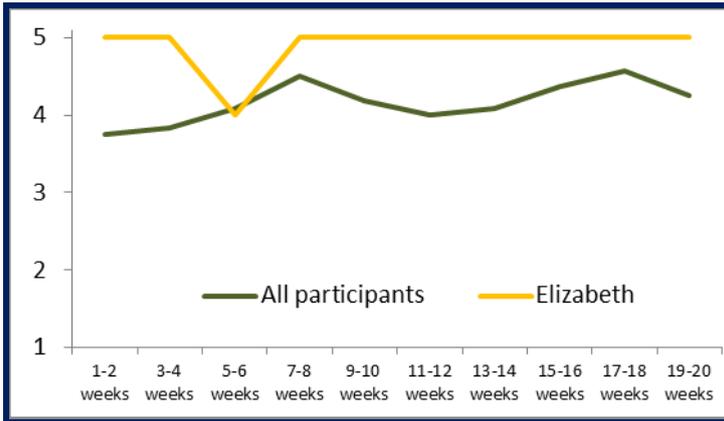


Figure 39. Elizabeth's graph for the sub-category "Daily life"

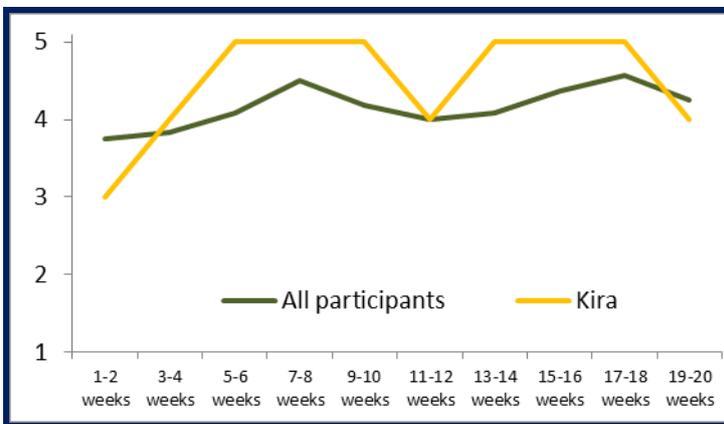


Figure 40. Kira's graph for the sub-category "Daily life"

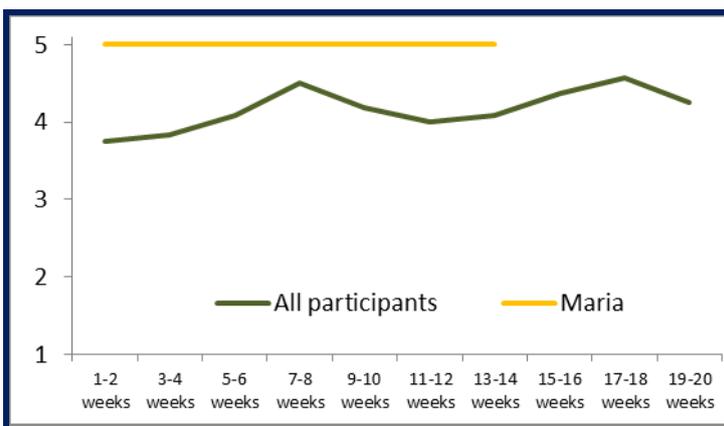


Figure 41. Maria's graph for the sub-category "Daily life"

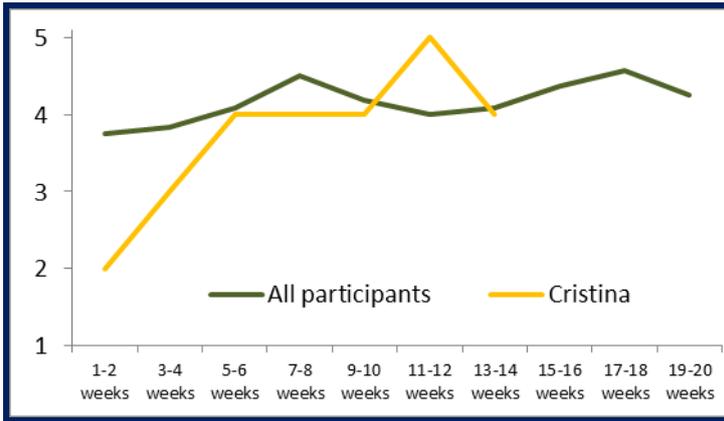


Figure 42. Cristina's graph for the sub-category "Daily life"

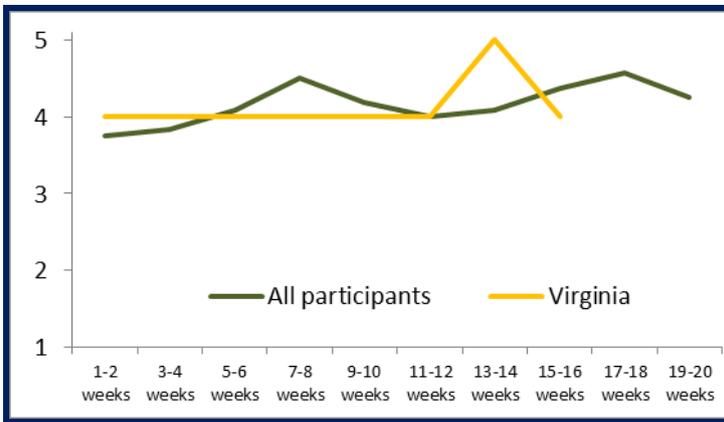


Figure 43. Virginia's graph for the sub-category "Daily life"

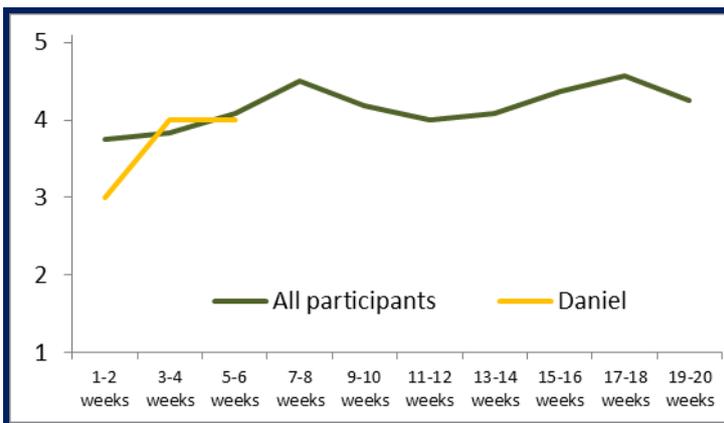


Figure 44. Daniel's graph for the sub-category "Daily life"

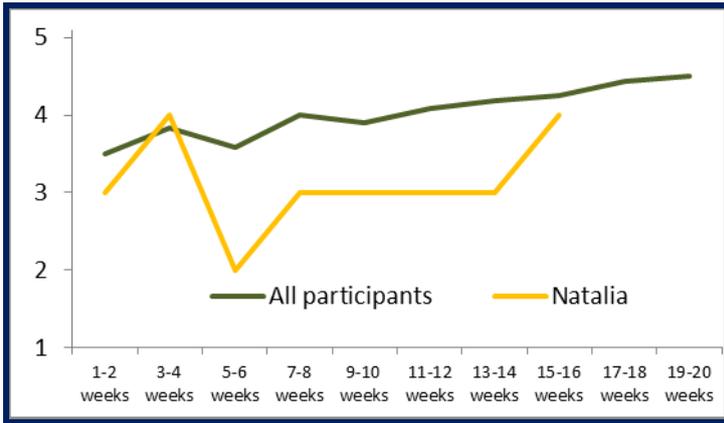


Figure 45. Natalia’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

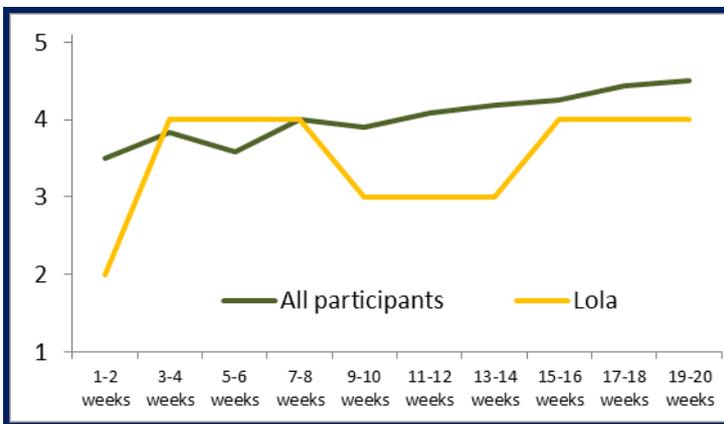


Figure 46. Lola’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

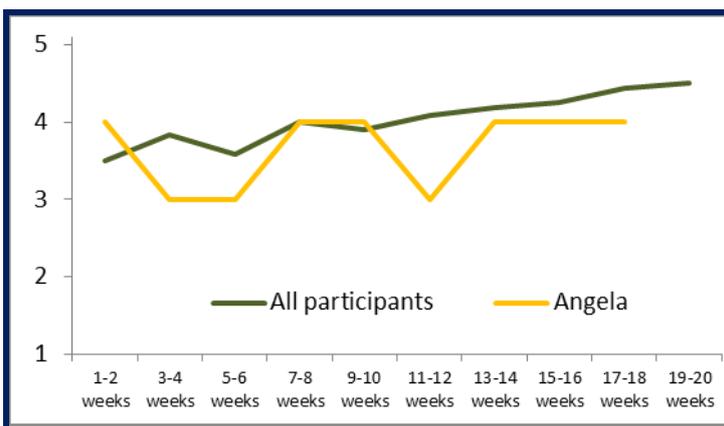


Figure 47. Angela’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

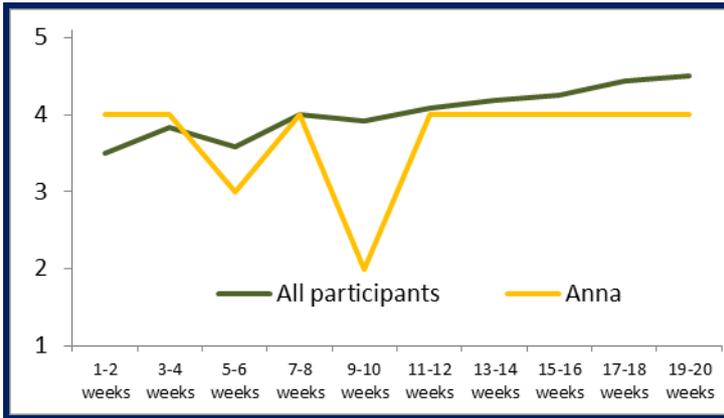


Figure 48. Anna’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

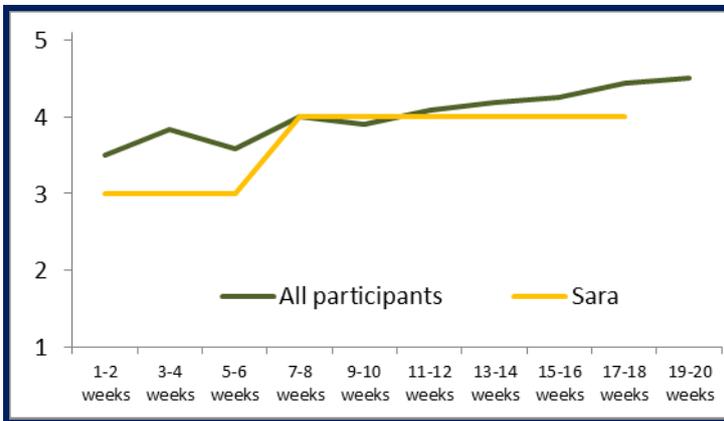


Figure 49. Sara’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

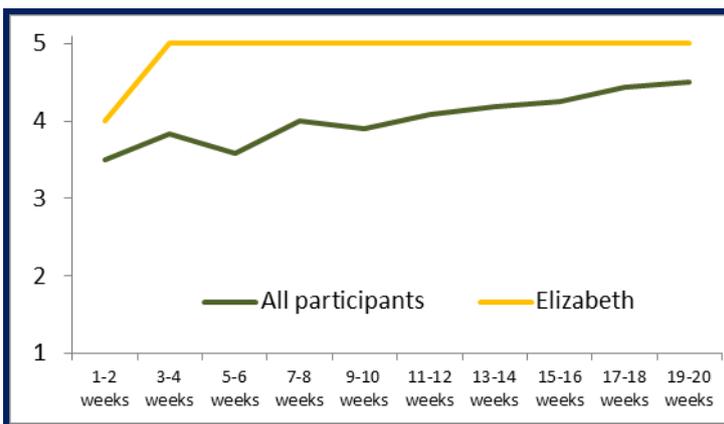


Figure 50. Elizabeth’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

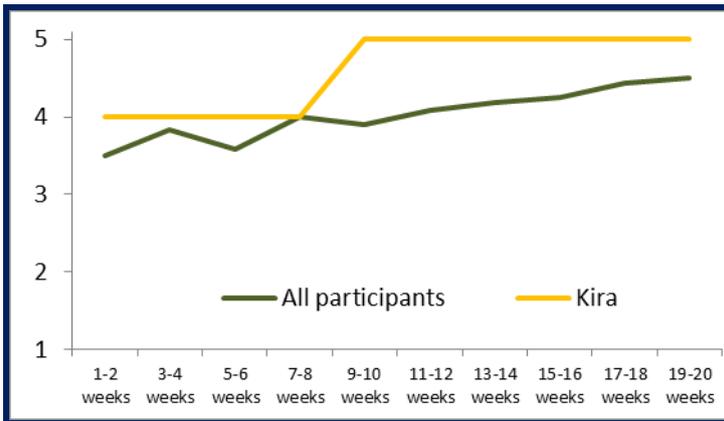


Figure 51. Kira’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

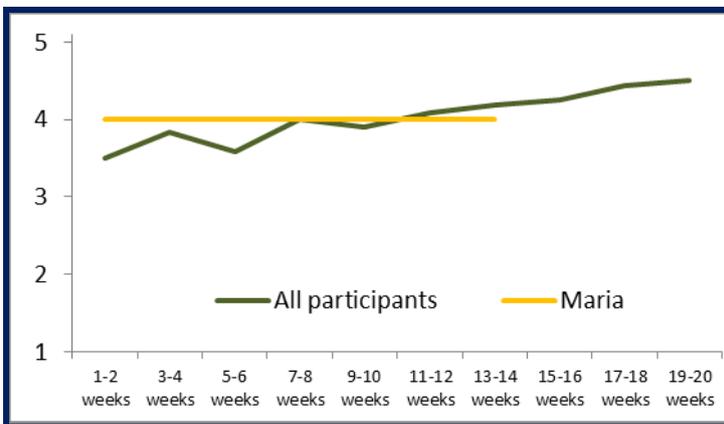


Figure 52. Maria’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

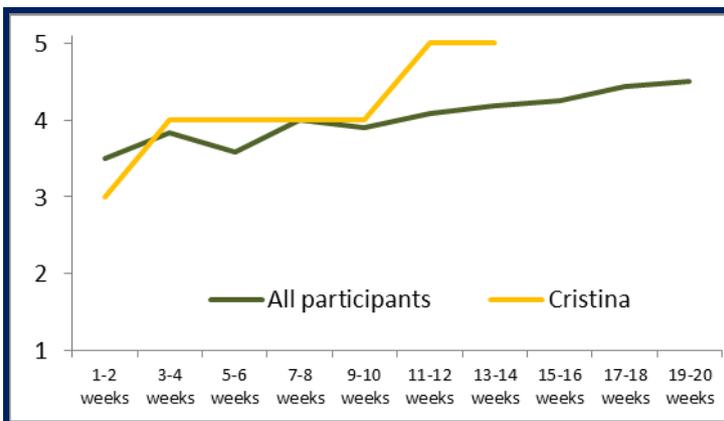


Figure 53. Cristina’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

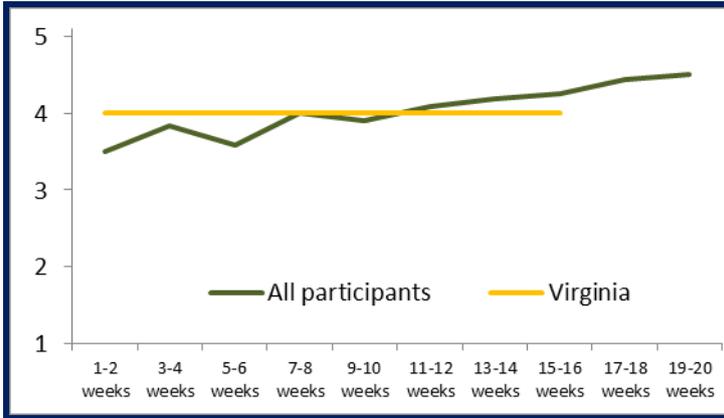


Figure 54. Virginia’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

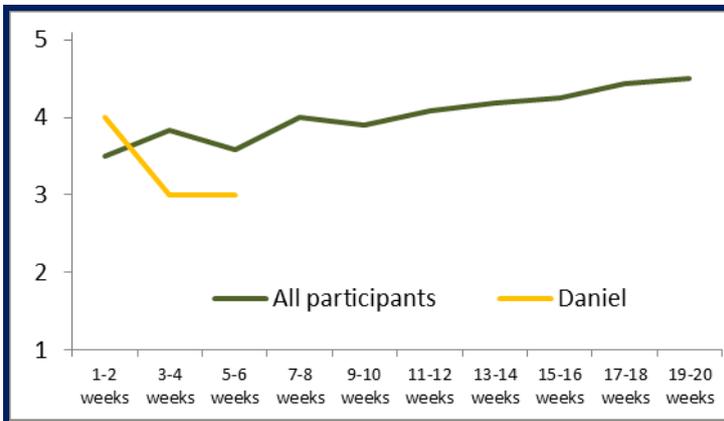


Figure 55. Daniels’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for social interactions”

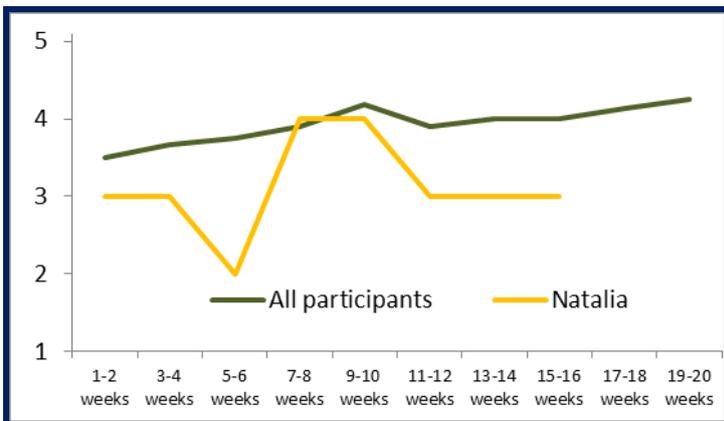


Figure 56. Natalia’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

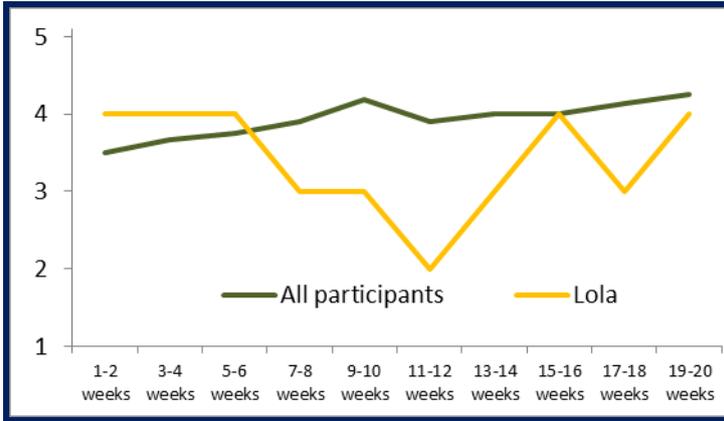


Figure 57. Lola’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

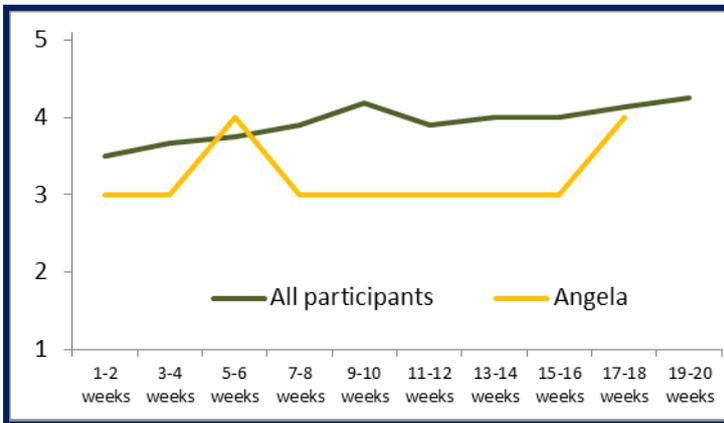


Figure 58. Angela’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

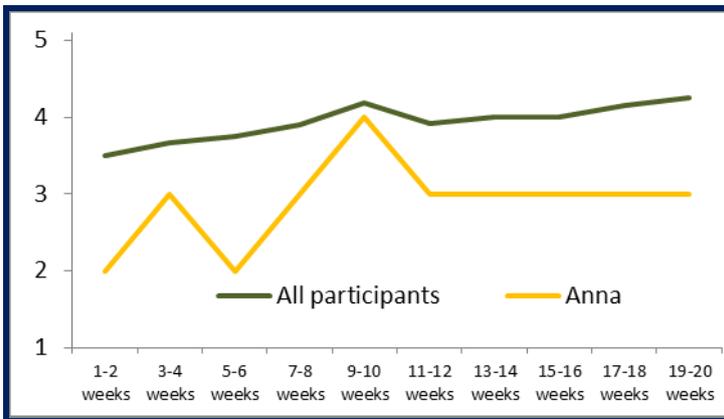


Figure 59. Anna’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

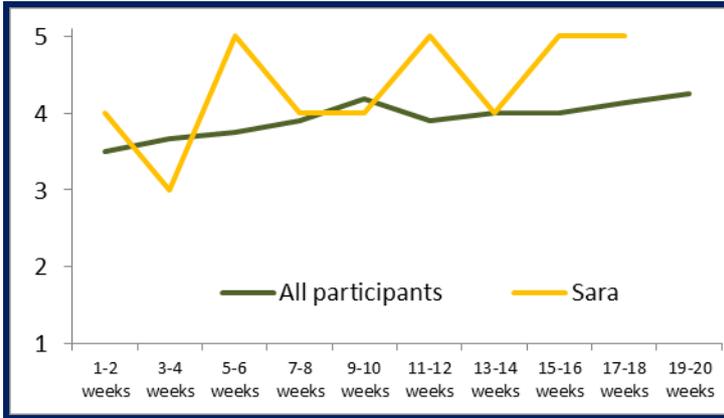


Figure 60. Sara’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

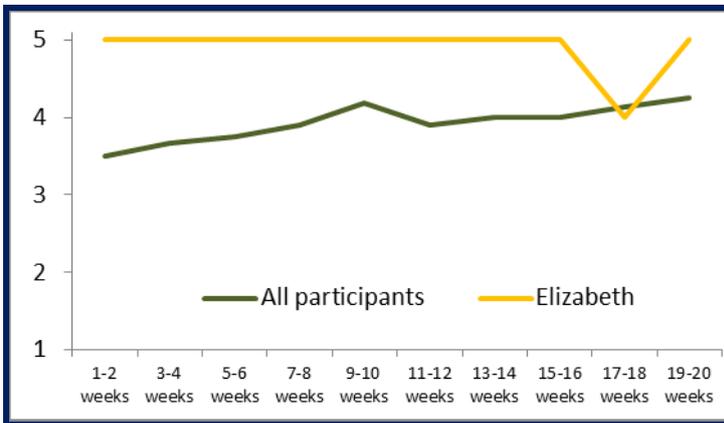


Figure 61. Elizabeth’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

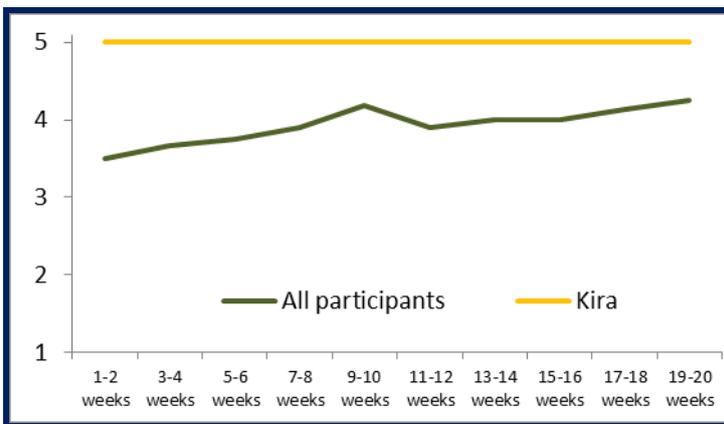


Figure 62. Kira’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

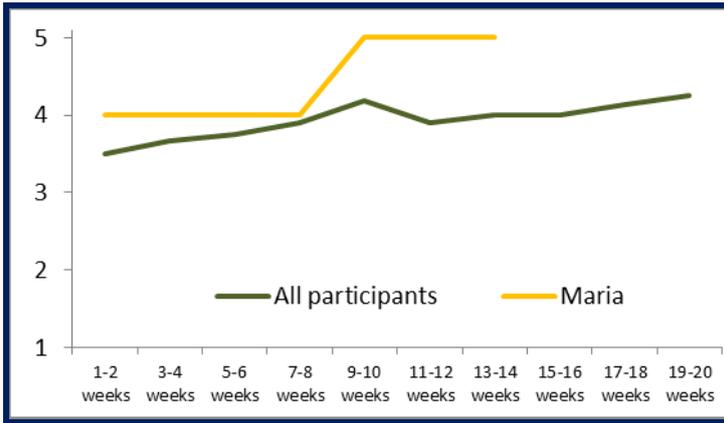


Figure 63. Maria’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

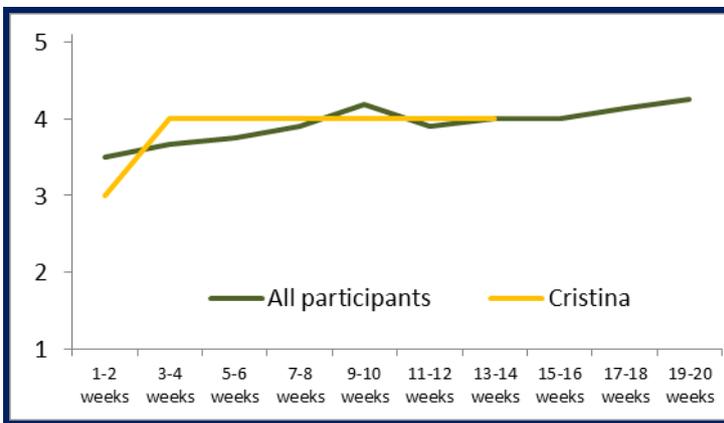


Figure 64. Cristina’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

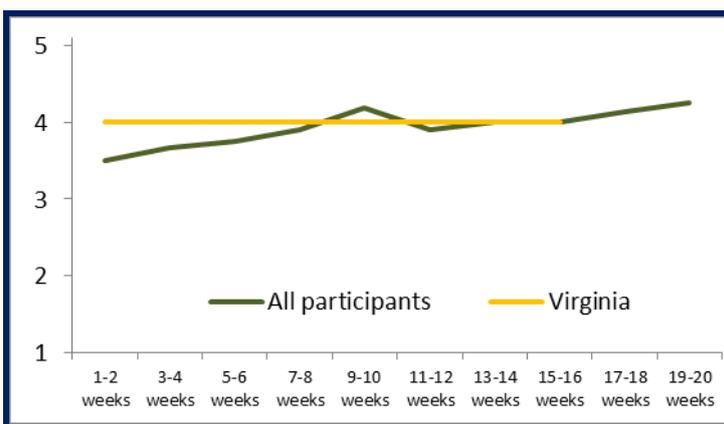


Figure 65. Virginia’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

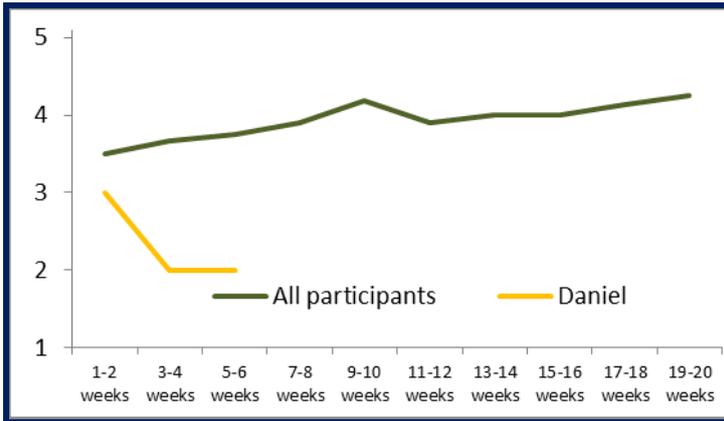


Figure 66. Daniel’s graph for the sub-category “Culture, customs and habits from the host country”

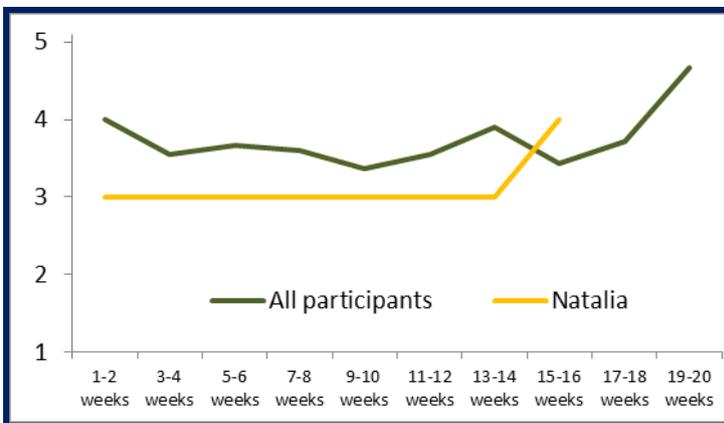


Figure 67. Natalia’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

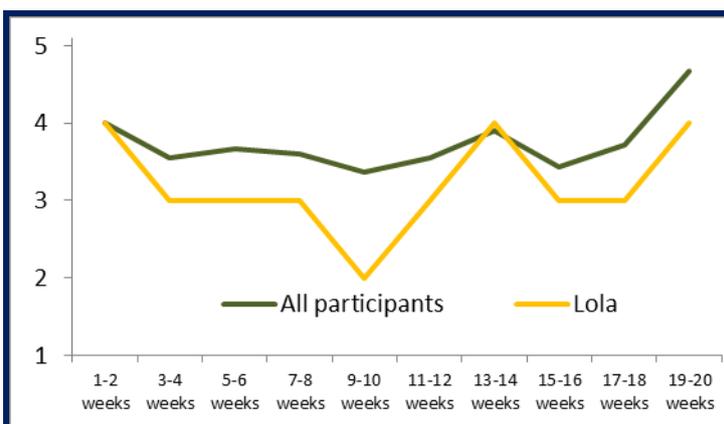


Figure 68. Lola’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

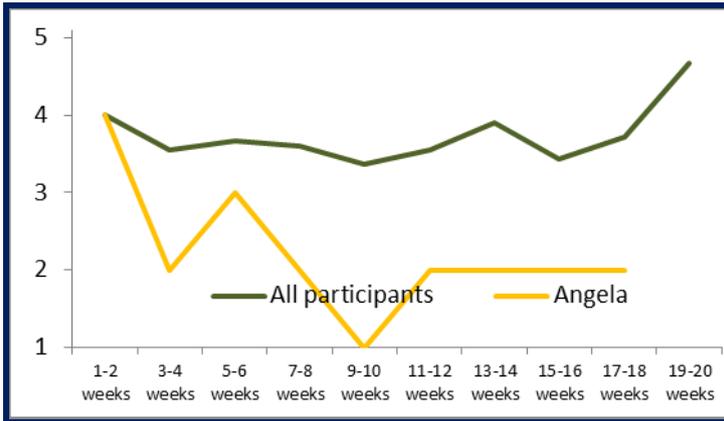


Figure 69. Angela’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

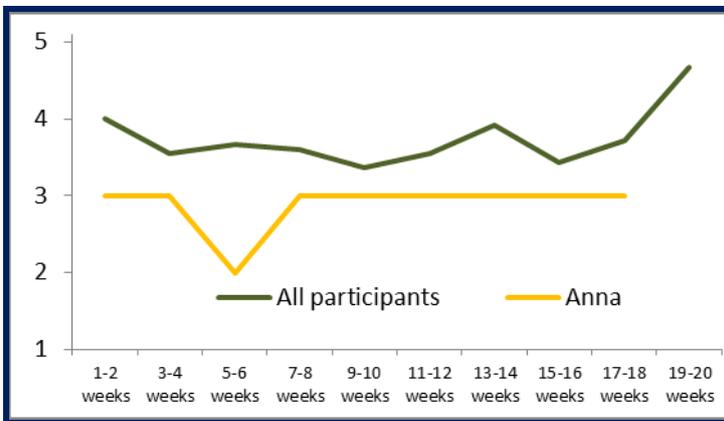


Figure 70. Anna’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

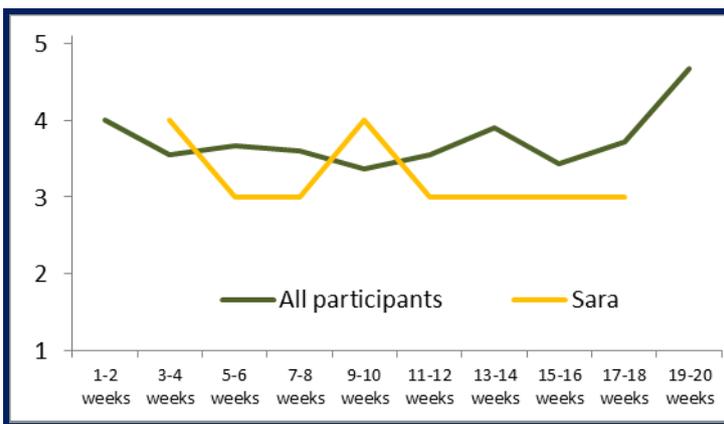


Figure 71. Sara’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

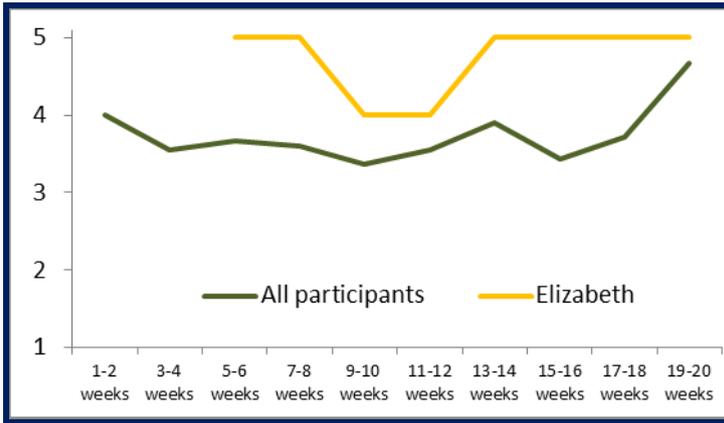


Figure 72. Elizabeth’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

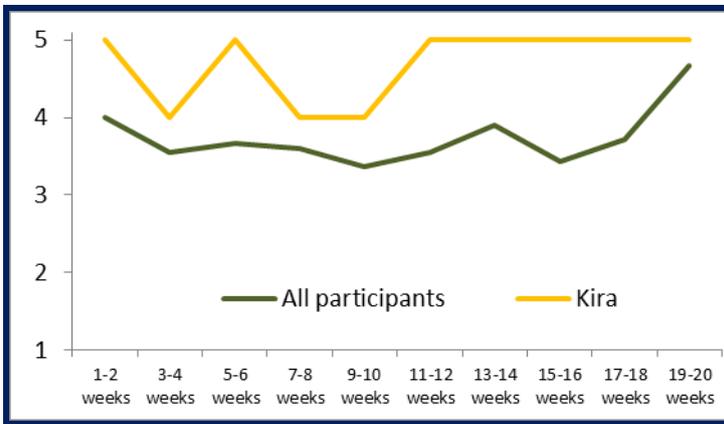


Figure 73. Kira’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

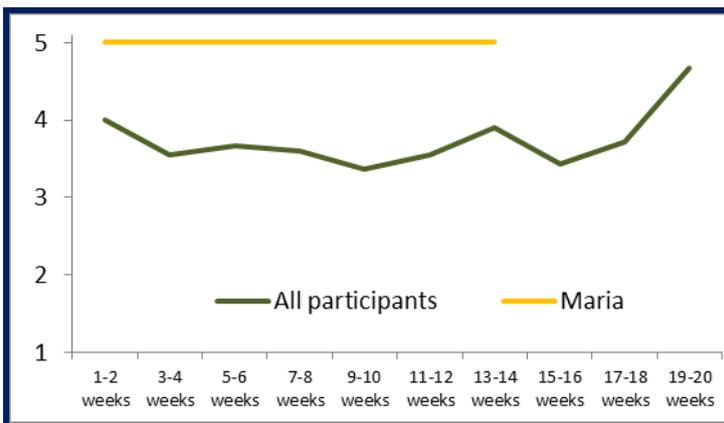


Figure 74. Maria’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

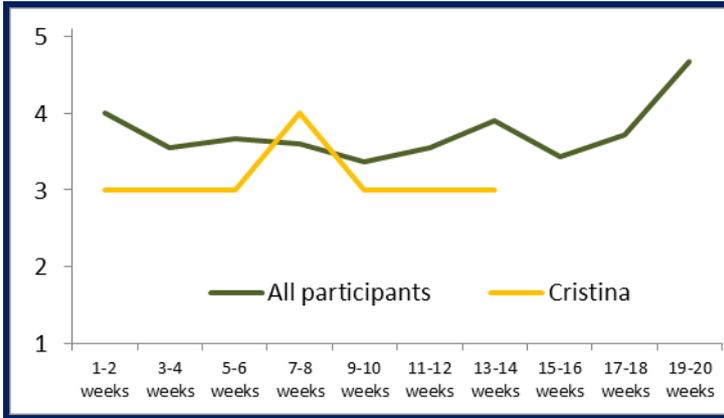


Figure 75. Cristina’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

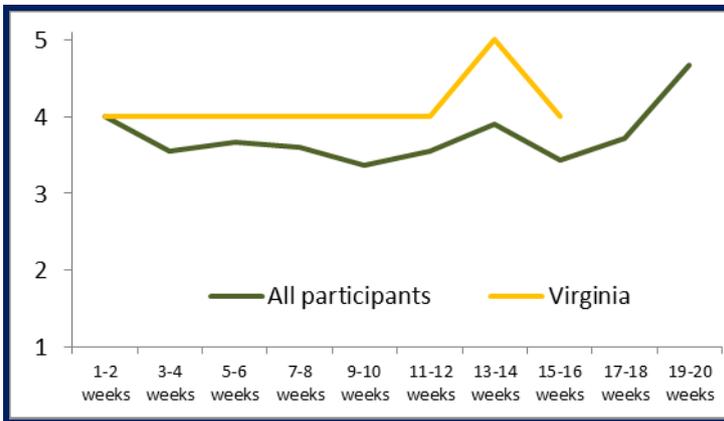


Figure 76. Virginia’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

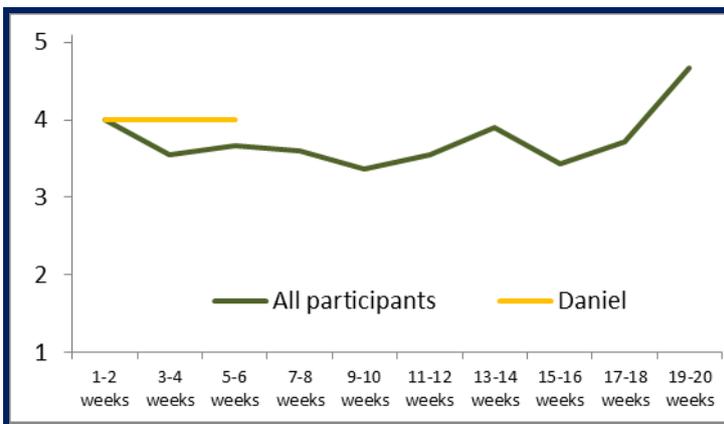


Figure 77. Daniel’s graph for the sub-category “Educational system”

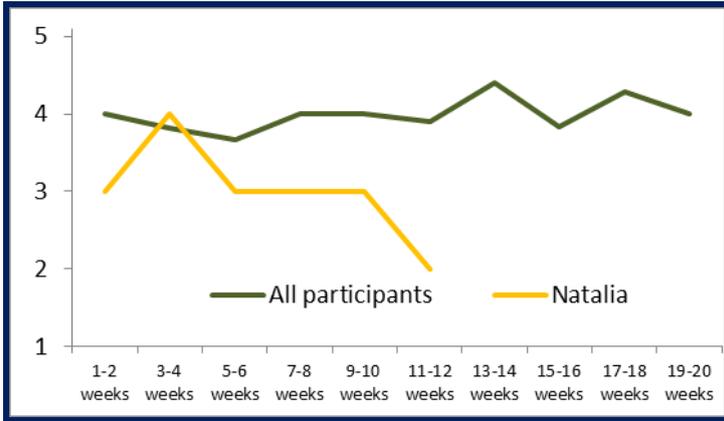


Figure 78. Natalia’s graph for the sub-category “Classes”

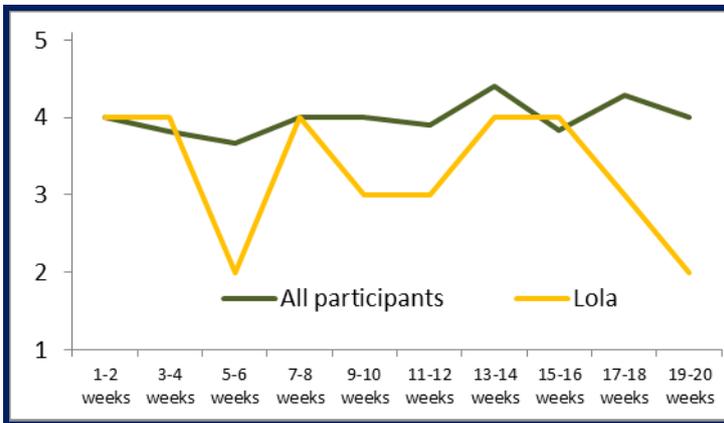


Figure 79. Lola’s graph for the sub-category “Classes”

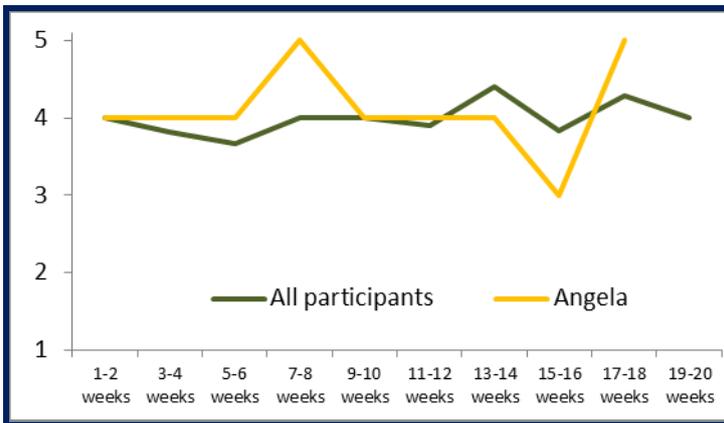


Figure 80. Angela’s graph for the sub-category “Classes”

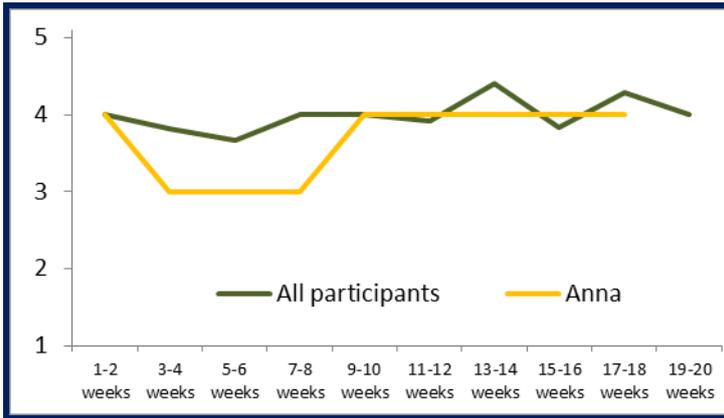


Figure 81. Anna’s graph for the sub-category “Classes”

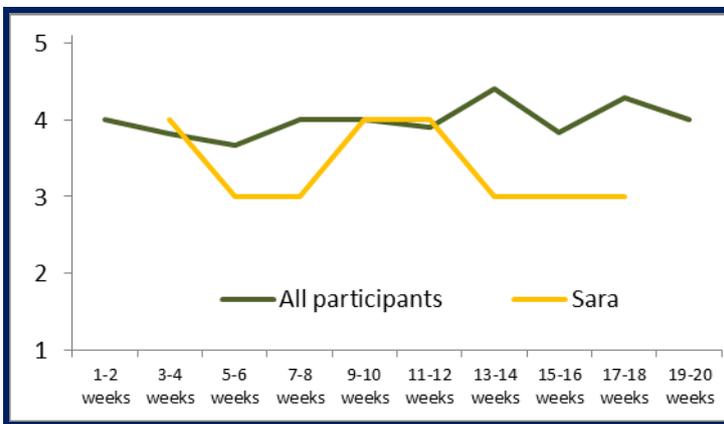


Figure 82. Sara’s graph for the sub-category “Classes”

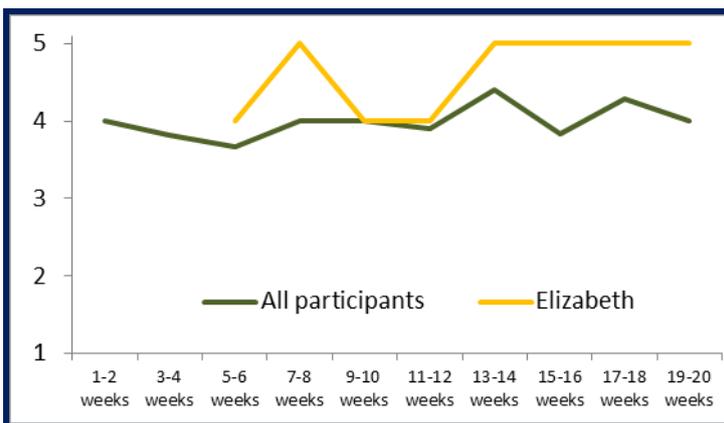


Figure 83. Elizabeth’s graph for the sub-category “Classes”

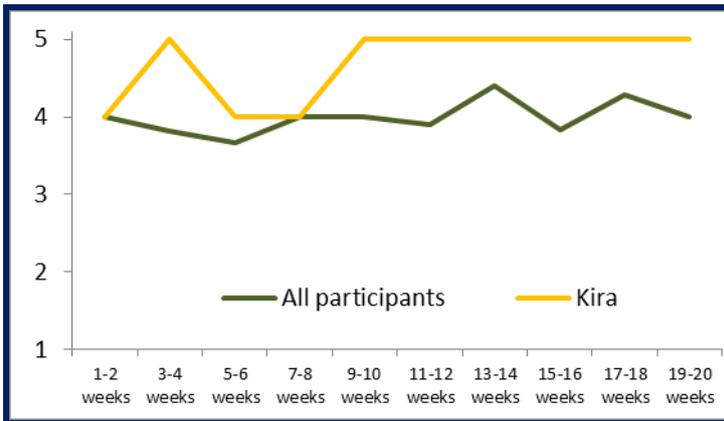


Figure 84. Kira's graph for the sub-category "Classes"

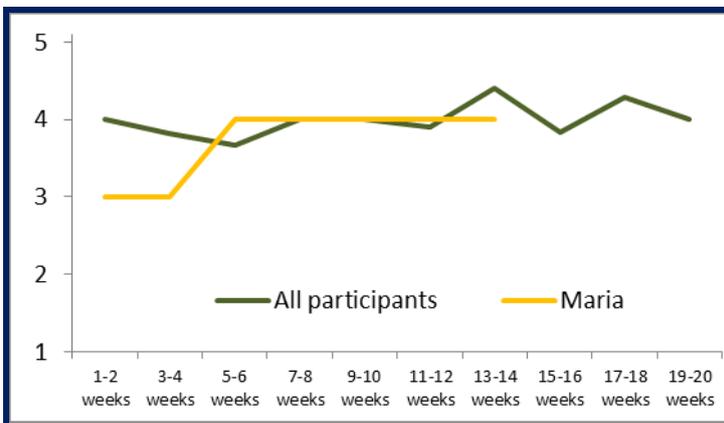


Figure 85. Maria's graph for the sub-category "Classes"

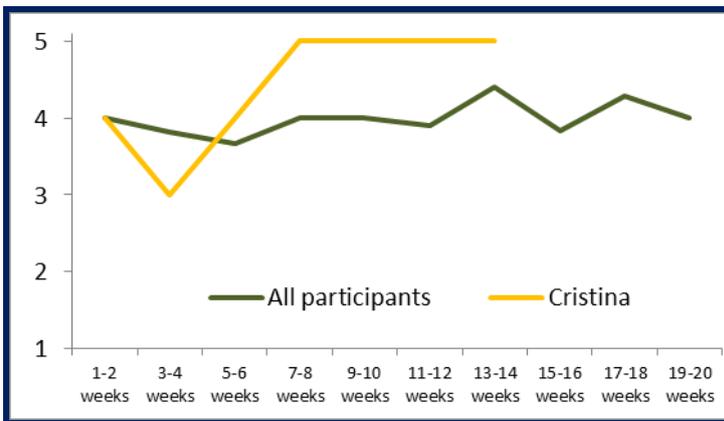


Figure 86. Cristina's graph for the sub-category "Classes"

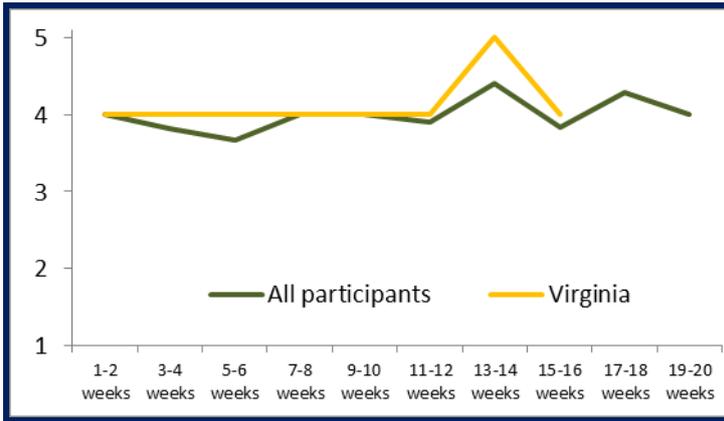


Figure 87. Virginia’s graph for the sub-category “Classes”

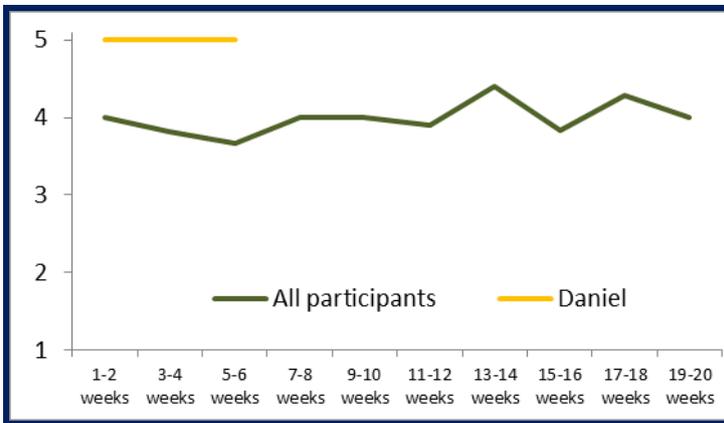


Figure 88. Daniel’s graph for the sub-category “Classes”

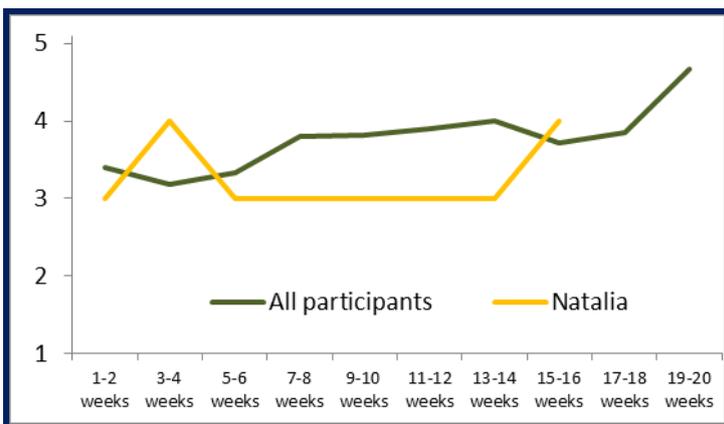


Figure 89. Natalia’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

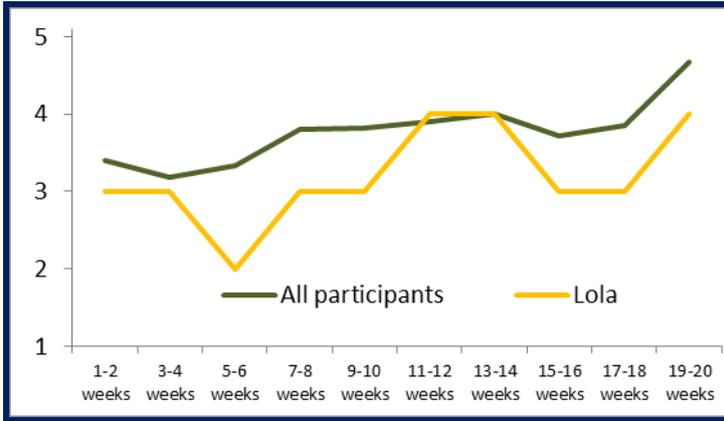


Figure 90. Lola’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

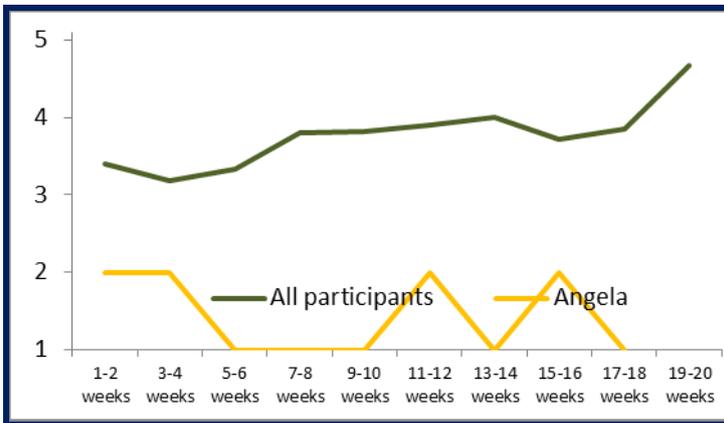


Figure 91. Angela’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

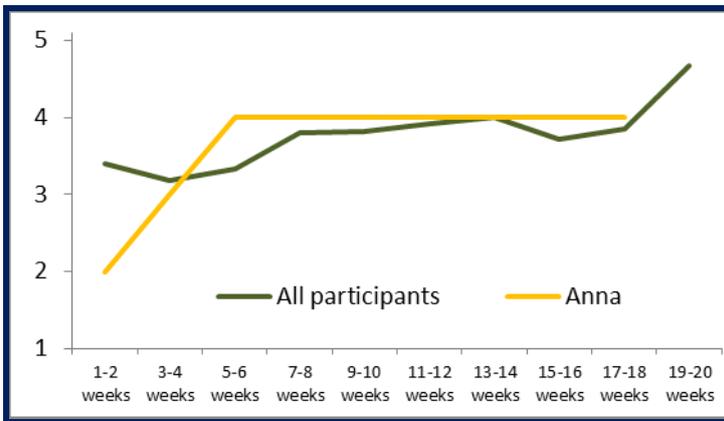


Figure 92. Anna’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

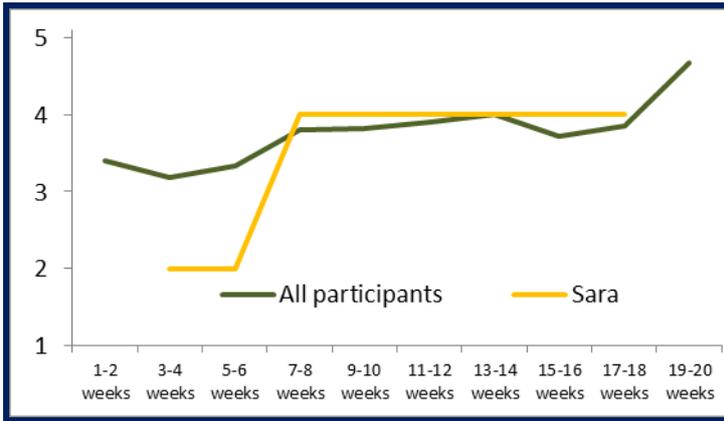


Figure 93. Sara’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

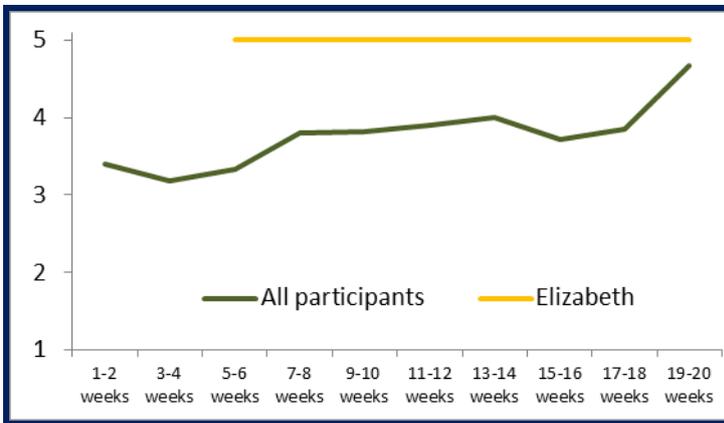


Figure 94. Elizabeth’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

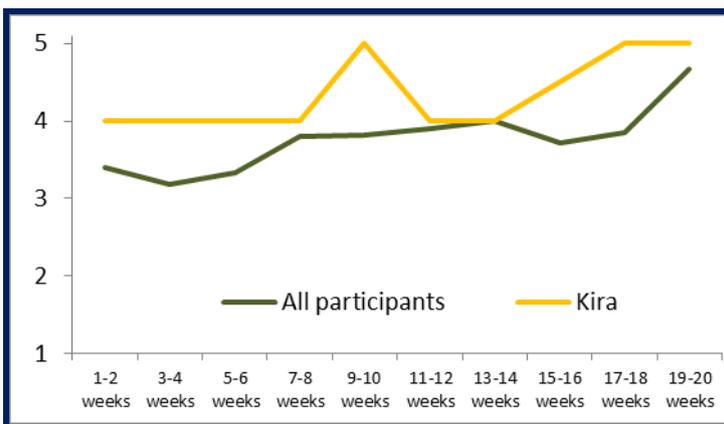


Figure 95. Kira’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

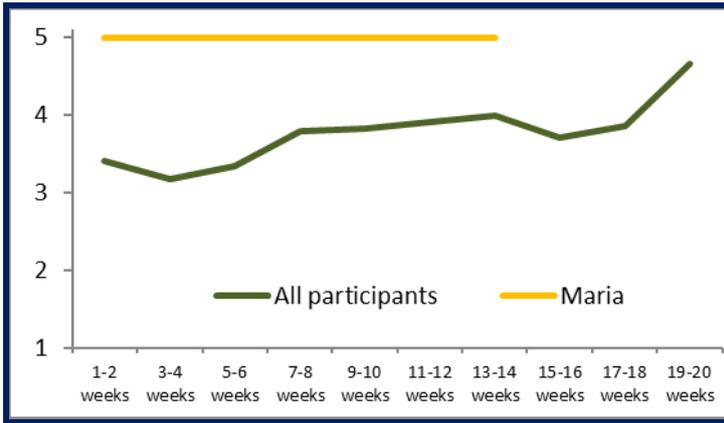


Figure 96. Maria’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

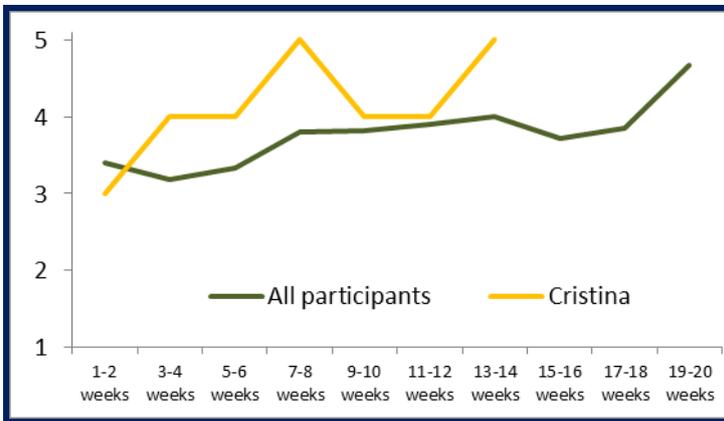


Figure 97. Cristina’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

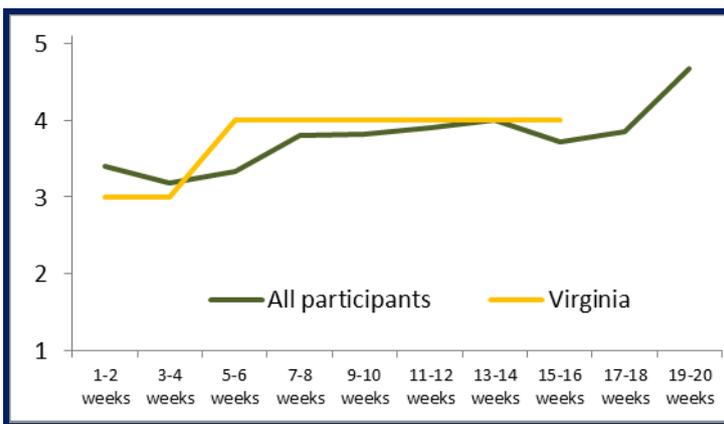


Figure 98. Virginia’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

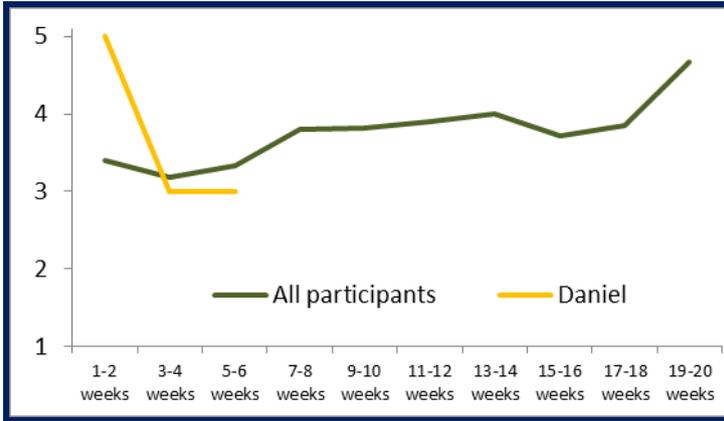


Figure 99. Daniel’s graph for the sub-category “Foreign language for academic purposes”

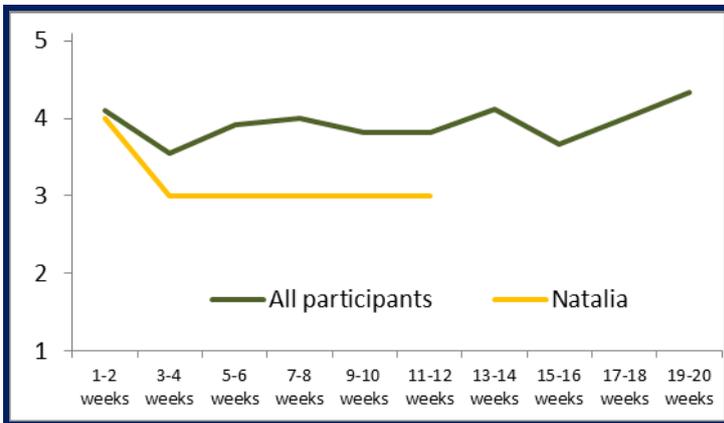


Figure 100. Natalia’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”

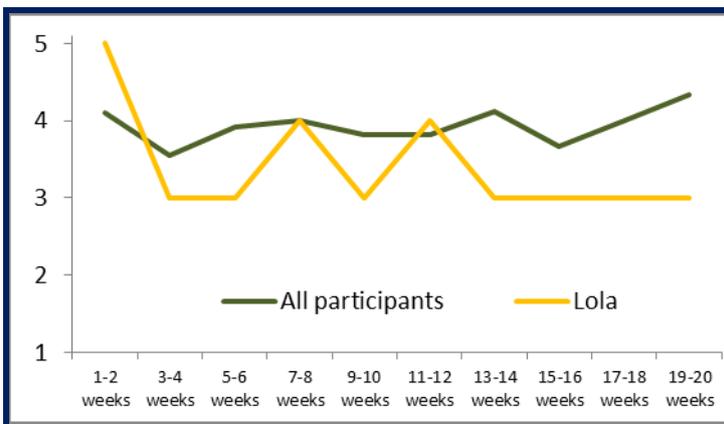


Figure 101. Lola’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”

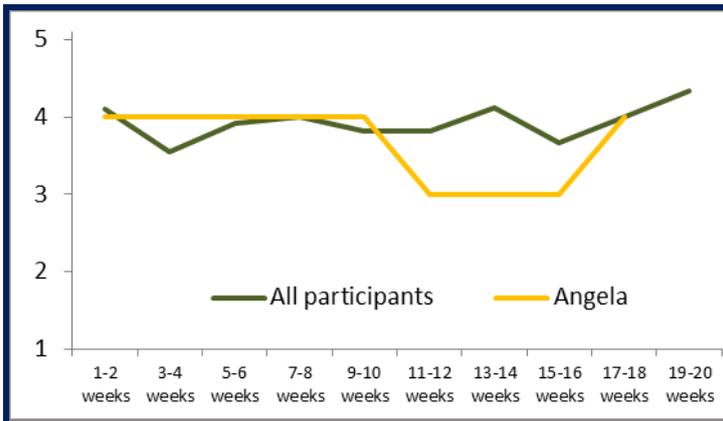


Figure 102. Angela’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”

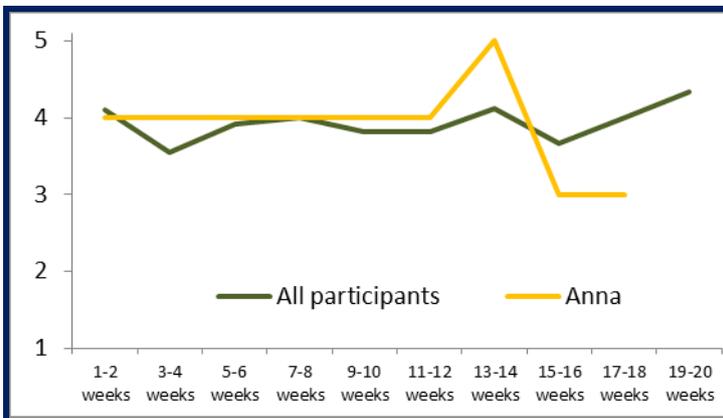


Figure 103. Anna’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”

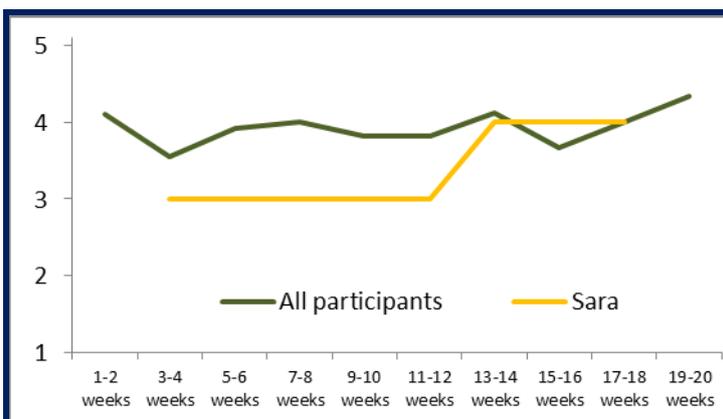


Figure 104. Sara’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”

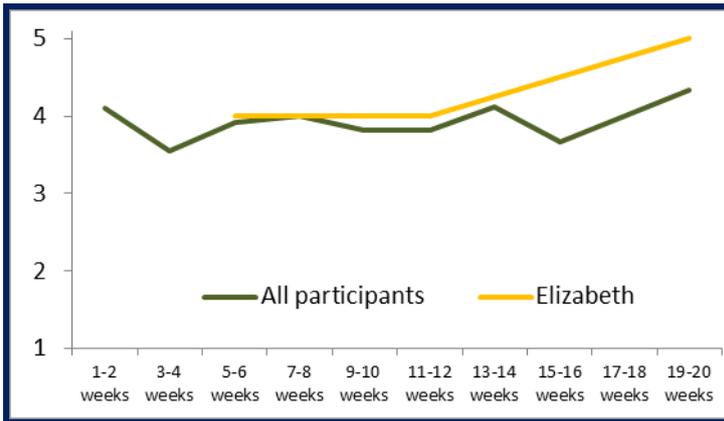


Figure 105. Elizabeth’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”

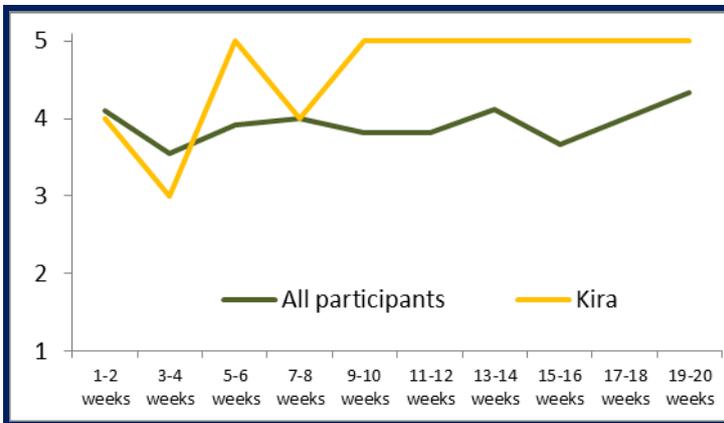


Figure 106. Kira’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”

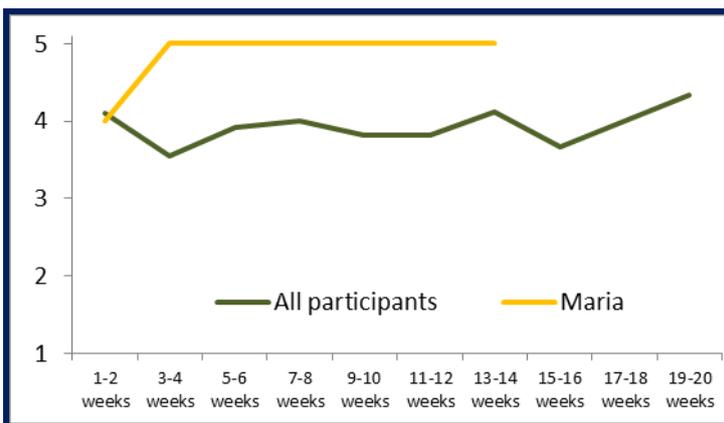


Figure 107. Maria’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”

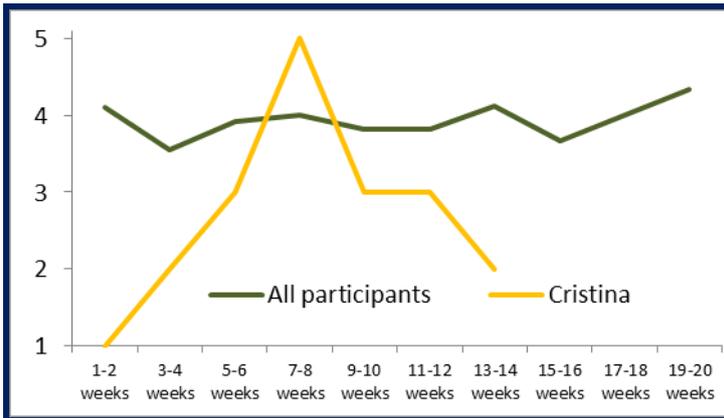


Figure 108. Cristina’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”

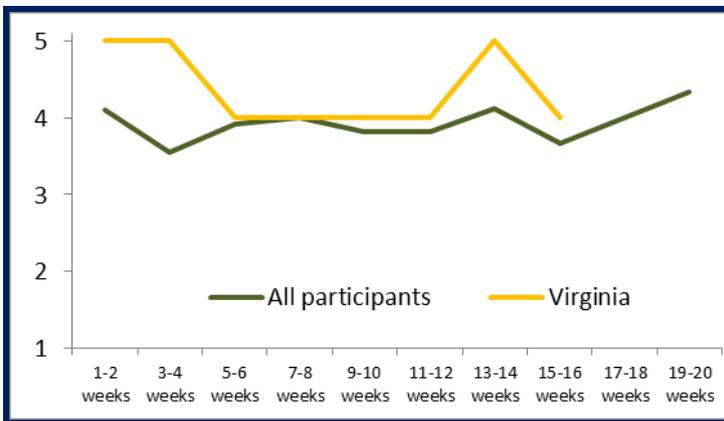


Figure 109. Virginia’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”

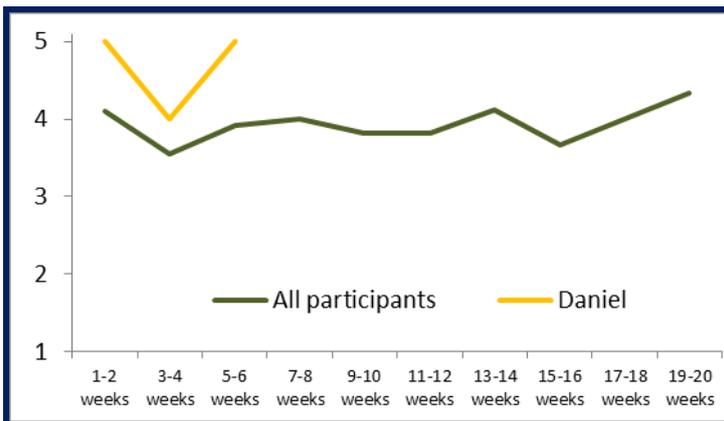


Figure 110. Daniel’s graph for the sub-category “Academic support for administrative issues”