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Intercâmbio acadêmico: as dificuldades de adaptação e de readaptação<sup>1</sup>  
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## Academic exchange: the difficulties of adaptation and readaptation<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The internationalization of education through international academic mobility is a reality that, every day, brings more opportunities for Brazilian students to increase their knowledge and experience. The Science Without Borders program and initiatives of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have intensified and promoted an increase in student exchange, but when they back, the students have suffered from the process of readaptation. The purpose of this study is to analyze the process of readaptation of the exchange student on his return to Brazil after a period of studies in another country, identifying the main aspects and impacts on the exchange student's life. The methodology used in this study was a descriptive study with a quantitative approach based on a survey-type survey, in which data were collected from 586 questionnaires answered by ex-exchange students. The results show that the exchange students undergo a change of cultural identity, detaching themselves from their culture of origin when adapting to the destination, making return to Brazil more difficult. It was also concluded that HEIs do not play a fundamental role in this process by closely following their exchange students in the three stages of exchange: before, during and after.

### Keywords

Academic exchange – International experience – Readaptation - Education.

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## Introduction

With globalization and its consequences, the distance among countries and their respective cultures has diminished. The globalized world leads to the need of organizations and people to adapt to a new reality with ever smaller boundaries (STALLIVIERI, 2009). One of the ways to enter this world is the exchange for studies, increasingly sought by young people in search of knowledge, new transformative experiences. Indeed, the central idea of the exchanges is not purely of studies but, more than that, of changing oneself (SEBBEN, 2001), contributing to the formation of a citizen with a world perspective.

The Federal Government, through the Ministry of Education, has invested in programs aimed at conducting studies abroad for Brazilian students. According to Santos (2015), the Science without Borders program was created in 2011 by the Brazilian government with an investment of R\$ 6.5 billion and seeks to promote the expansion of science and technology through international mobility. In the first stage of the program, from the beginning to the year 2015, 101,446 scholarships were awarded, 78% of which was for undergraduate courses and the remainder divided into masters, doctorates and postdoctoral fellowships.

In addition to government programs, Brazilian higher education institutions (HEI) have invested in international cooperation agreements and agreements with universities in other countries. These agreements aim not only at student exchange, but at continuing education programs, post-graduation courses, broadening research horizons, and other activities.

In view of the above, this work aims to analyze the process of readaptation of the exchange student when returning to Brazil after a period of studies in another country. To do so, as a methodology, the descriptive research with a quantitative survey-type approach was used, with students who exchanged between the years of 2012 and 2015, remaining for at least one semester outside of Brazil.

The results show that on return to Brazil, the exchange students had difficulties in readapting to his or her culture. Feelings such as anguish, irritation, insecurity, confusion and depression appeared significantly in the responses, evidencing that the many returnees students strongly felt the reverse cultural shock.

Besides, 91% of the respondents stated that when they returned to Brazil they had feelings of nostalgia related to the period lived abroad, 84% said they felt like people with great intercultural skills and 72% wished they had never returned from the exchange. In addition, with regard to HEIs, after the exchange the students did not have the necessary support, since only 6% said that the Brazilian HEI provided support and 7.5% said the same from the foreign HEI.

## Literature review

The theoretical framework of this work is spliced into two parts. The first deals with the internationalization of HEIs and academic mobility. The second part deals with the main stages of academic exchange life, before, during and after emphasizing the aspects related to the difficulties of adaptation when the student back to Brazil after the academic exchange.

## Internationalization of HEIs and academic mobility

According to Stallivieri (2002), universities are international since the creation of European schools in the middle ages. These institutions had students and teachers from different countries, all in search of a common goal: knowledge. The internationalized university has become a cultural universe, where there is a plurality of thoughts, world views, scientific tendencies, etc., that is, different ways of thinking, since there are people from different parts of the planet.

In Brazil, in the 1980s and 1990s, the internationalization of Brazilian HEIs grew significantly, basically for four reasons: i) policies, such as the search for peace and mutual understanding; ii) economic, for the concern with competitiveness and economic growth; iii) socio-cultural, by the expansion of moral and national values; and, iv) academic, for the qualification of the people for the labor market, the reputation of the HEI, the quality of education, research and services, as well as cultural exposure resulting from the mobility of students and teachers (MIURA, 2006).

Indeed, for Altbach (2002), the internationalization of educational institutions can not be avoided, at the risk of becoming moribund and irrelevant when they become estranged from economic and social tendencies. Further, university knowledge no longer fits within the borders of the countries and the Brazilian university has to insert itself in international knowledge, both in terms of its qualities and its themes and prestige of the institution (BUARQUE, 2003). Moreover, also for the sake of survival to compete equally with the best national and foreign HEIs (STALLIVIERI, 2002).

One of the most intense forms of internationalization is university exchange. Stallivieri (2002) states that students need to expand their knowledge not only academically but personally and professionally. Academic exchange promotes integration between different cultures and people, as students interact with students not only from the country where they are studying, but with exchange students from all over the world (TAMIÃO; CAVENAGHI, 2013). Therefore, the university plays a fundamental role in preparing citizens for an interconnected and interdependent world with an internationalized educational experience that allows knowledge and respect for cultural diversity. Supported by international cooperation (bilateral and multilateral agreements, international programs and institutional agreements), Brazilian HEIs have a wide range of international insertion modalities for their students, teachers and researchers (LAUS, 2004).

The benefits of academic mobility can be analyzed under three aspects: the HEI, the country and the exchange student. In the case of HEIs, they do not seek financial return on their processes (ALTBACH; KNIGHT, 2007). The motivation was the enrichment of their academic curricula and their teaching staff (MOROSINI, 2011).

For the country, the greater the number of people internationalized and prepared to deal with cultural diversity, the greater the chances of projecting and remaining competitive. For the exchange student, the advantages go beyond learning, because they promote psychological development, self-confidence, maturity, independence, ability to relate and feel a global citizen, besides allowing to know different and specific habits opening new perspectives (OLIVEIRA; PAGLIUCA, 2012). Larsen and Vincent-Lancrin (2002) cite as motivations the possibility of study abroad being more qualified. In addition,

the process of business recruitment and selection has taken into account international experience (MALUTTA, 2013; TAMIÃO; CAVENAGHI, 2013).

However, the return to the country of origin generates difficulties similar to those found when the exchange student faced the cultural shock in the country of destination. It is a feeling of no longer belonging to the country of exchange and of belonging to the country of origin. Sebben (2001) states that before making the exchange, it is good to consider that there are two migrations: the one of return and the one of return.

### **The return to the country of origin**

For Uehara (1986), the young person who comes back from an exchange may have different feelings, such as alienation, loneliness, feeling of loss, isolation, unhappiness, loss of identity, depression and, sometimes, illnesses caused by extreme levels of change. It is common the feeling of solitude and isolation of family and friends. This is because the student has strong connections with both before traveling.

Sebben (2001) argues that the honeymoon phase after returning to Brazil lasts a few days or weeks. The exchange student feels happy and important, since his friends and family have never been so much interested in his experiences and his life as in that moment (STEUTEN, 2015). It is important to take advantage of this phase, because soon there is the reverse cultural shock, similar to the cultural shock that occurred on arrival in the country of destination, with the difference that is felt when returning to the country of origin.

Gaw (2000) points out that reverse culture shock is a process of readjustment, re-culture and re-assimilation of an individual in relation to his culture, after having lived in a different culture for a significant period. Already Uehara (1986) understands that the shock cultural reversal promotes psychosocial difficulties (sometimes associated with physical problems) that the returnee experiences in the initial phase of the adjustment process upon returning home after having lived abroad for some time. House not in the sense of simply the space where one lives, but rather where the exchange student feels at home, has the security of being accepted, understood and allowed to be himself (VON ELJE, 2013).

Indeed, due the change in their cultural identity, their personality has changed and the student has a new worldview, which can create confusion in those who remained in the country of origin. On the other hand, the life of family and friends has also changed and the exchange student also needs to adapt to what was unfamiliar to him before the trip.

The main difference between cultural shock and reverse cultural shock is the expectation. The exchange student usually hopes to return to the conviviality of people and societies that have not changed in the time he was away, which does not happen (GAW, 2000). Freitas (2006) affirms that the readaptation to the country of origin requires time and patience, and the possibility of shocks is as great as the trip abroad. In relating the two cultural shocks, the one of return and the one of return, Searle and Ward (1990) affirm that if before the trip the student is educated about the cultural shock that will suffer in the country of destination, it is possible that the effects of the shock cultural

background in their return are minimized and better controlled. This is done through appropriate trainings and guidelines in the period before the trip (LIMA; BRAGA, 2010).

Chart 1 presents a synthesis of the factors that influence the reverse cultural shock, aiming, mainly, to guide the instrument of data collection. The factors that characterize a general dimension to be analyzed were considered in the *factor* column. In the *focus* column, the factors were deployed in the sense of better understanding them. Finally, in the column *authors* are described those that base the theoretical base.

**Chart 1** - Synthesis of the factors influencing the return to Brazil

Factor	Focus	Authors
Genre	Women tend to feel different shocks in return.	Brabant, Palmer and Gramling (1990), Rohrich and Martin (1991)
Age	The older the returnee, the less problems he faces in return.	Rohrich and Martin (1991); Szkudlarek (2010); Cox (2004)
Cultural distance	Cultural differences between countries of origin and destination may influence repatriation.	Kogut and Singh (1988)
Marital status	The identification with the culture of the destination country is greater for singles, which can generate a change in cultural identity and bring depressive feelings.	Cox (2004); Szkudlarek (2010)
Length of stay abroad	Larger stay contributes negatively to reverse cultural shock, since the individual had more time to detach himself from the culture of origin.	Szkudlarek (2010)
Previous international experiences	Those who already have prior international experience tend to have a facilitated repatriation.	Szkudlarek (2010)
Contact with people in the destination country	Interactions with people in the destination country are directly related to repatriation.	Rohrich and Martin (1991)
Contact with people from the country of origin	Contacts with compatriots through the internet are related to the quality of the readaptation process.	Cox (2004)

Source: Authors (2016)

It is noticed that the age factor is influential in the reverse cultural shock. The young person is easier to detach from their native culture, so it is possible that, when returning to the country of origin, those who are younger may feel more difficult in the process of readaptation. Allied to this, it is noticed that the civil state influences the return to the local culture. Married travelers have more frequent contact with the country of origin, not giving up so much of their culture of origin at the same time that they are entering the new culture.

After all, many may be the reasons that promote exchange, but so many are the difficulties in returning. Family, IES and proper preparation facilitate the process of going and returning, mitigating the problems and making a productive experience.

## Methodological approach

In this study, Gil (2002) proposed a descriptive study with a quantitative approach, developing a survey composed of objective questions, so that the results could be verified in their reliability. The target population of this research is Brazilian undergraduate

students who have undergone academic exchange in foreign HEIs between the years of 2012 and 2015. This interval was determined by the fact that these students had more accurate memories when compared to exchange students who had traveled the longest.

The sampling was non-probabilistic, that is, the respondents were selected for convenience, and this means those who agreed to respond (HAIR, 2005). At the end, 586 responses were obtained. It was also decided to consider only students who stayed at least one semester in a foreign HEI. With this, it aims to eliminate from the population the students who possibly did not feel the same cultural shocks as the study's target participants.

The survey was elaborated based on the research conducted by Steuten (2015) with the exchange students and consists of four parts: identification of the respondents, period prior to the exchange, period lived abroad and return to Brazil. The data collection instrument was developed in the Google Forms platform and was available to be answered between March 13 and 28, 2016. The Steuten base questionnaire (2015) had a double translation into Portuguese and it was chosen to maintain the scales originally used by the author, sometimes with 5, sometimes with 7 points.

In addition, based on the elements of the theoretical foundation, questions were included to differentiate students who traveled with their own resources from those who participated in governmental programs to encourage education abroad, such as Science without Borders, Brafitec, among others. Questions were asked about the academic and professional life of the exchange students, aiming to find possible related factors that could interfere in the readaptation of the individuals to the country of origin.

A pre-test was performed to detect possible failures and / or doubts in the questionnaire and to evaluate the coherence of the answers. As a result, six issues were reviewed and improved. Hair (2005) suggests four or five respondents to the pre-test, however, six individuals were selected for convenience, who responded on March 11, 2016.

For the application of the questionnaire, students were contacted through the social network Facebook, email and telephone. We accessed a group of 30,000 students who participated in the Science without Borders program and other specific groups of universities that were contacted, as well as other groups that were accessed.

Subsequently, the questionnaire was verified in terms of quality and integrity. Then, the data was edited, eliminating incomplete, inconsistent or ambiguous responses that could mask the data obtained. Data was submitted to descriptive statistical analyzes and data crossing through the SPSS program (v. 21).

## Results

The results are presented in two parts. In the first part, the profile of the respondents was analyzed in Tables 1 to 6. In the second part, the analysis of the answers that evaluated the difficulties and facilities that respondents had on their return to Brazil was analyzed.

We made the profile of the participants to clarify the main aspects of the students. Table 1 shows the representativeness of the sexes, the age groups and the international experiences prior to the exchange.

**Table 1** – Sex, age and previous experience

Sex	Male	33,3%
	Female	66,7%
Age	Less than 20 years	1%
	From 20 till 22 years	32,3%
	From 23 till 25 years	51,9%
	More than 25 years	14,8%
Previous international experience	The student had been abroad to ride	33,6%
	The student had been abroad for work	1,4%
	The student had been abroad to study	11,3%
	Never been abroad	53,8%

Source: Authors (2016)

Table 2 shows the places of origin of the respondents, separating them by region, the number of cities that had representatives in the survey and the number of respondents from each region. Only Rondônia, Roraima and Amapá had no participants.

**Table 2** – Place of origin of the respondents

Place	Number of cities	Number of students	%
Southeast region	67	230	39,2
South region	52	129	22
Northeast region	20	86	14,7
Midwest region	7	36	6,1
North region	4	13	2,2
Total	150	586	100

Source: Authors (2016)

It was also asked in the questionnaire which was the upper course of each student. In Table 3, they were divided into the eight major areas of knowledge, evidencing the number of courses in each area that were present in the research responses and the number of students representing each area of knowledge.

**Table 3** – Graduation courses

Knowledge Area	Number of courses	Number of students	%
Engineering	18	172	29,4
Applied Social Sciences	15	156	26,6
Health Sciences	9	90	15,4
Agronomic Sciences	12	67	11,4
Biological Sciences	6	38	6,5
Exact and Earth Sciences	11	30	5,1
Health Sciences	7	17	2,9
Linguistics, Literature and Arts	7	16	2,7
Total	85	586	100

Source: Authors (2016)

We asked each student what was the country and the city of destination. Table 4 shows the destinations of the respondents, stratifying them by country, number of cities that each country had representatives in the survey, and the number of students who studied in each country. The United Kingdom was the most chosen destination country with 89 responses (15.19%). Seven countries with only one exchange response were withdrawn.

Table 4 also shows that Portugal is one of the countries with the highest number of exchanges. In addition to the ease of language, culture reserves similarities that may have been taken into account in choosing the country as a destination.

**Table 4 – Destination country**

Destiny country	Number of cities	Number of interchanges
United Kingdom	32	89
Portugal	12	85
Spain	33	85
EUA	33	58
Germany	28	56
France	24	45
Italy	13	43
Ireland	8	29
Hungary	3	24
Australia	7	21
Canada	8	15
Netherlands	8	13
Norway	4	7
Chile	1	4
Argentina	2	3
Belgium	1	2
Total	213	586

Source: Authors (2016)

Table 5 presents the answers to the following questions: type of exchange, year of beginning, duration and time of return to Brazil. It is noted that the majority of the respondents carried out their studies through government programs for one year, since the Federal Government granted about 100 thousand scholarships for academic exchange abroad.

**Table 5** – Exchange characteristics (%)

Year of beginning of exchange	2012	14,3
	2013	21,2
	2014	50
	2015	14,5
Duration	Less than one semester	0,7
	1 semester	24,9
	2 semesters	50,3
	3 semesters	15,9
	More than 3 semesters	8,2
Type of exchange	Academic Mobility	25,8
	Government Programs	67,7
	Scholarship	6,5
Time after return to Brazil	Less than 1 month	5,3
	From 1 till 3 months	7,7
	From 3 till 6 months	8,0
	From 6 months till 1year	33,4
	From 1 till 2 years	27,1
	From 2 till 3 years	15,4
	More than 3 years	3,1

Source: Authors (2016)

After choosing the country of destination, the students prepare in different ways in relation to the language spoken in the country of studies abroad. Because of this, it was asked if the respondents studied the language spoken in the destination. Of the participants in the survey, 28.2% opted not to study the language. Of those who studied the foreign language, 30.2% did so in the country of destination with funds from the Federal Government. On the other hand, 33.1% took courses of the foreign language still in Brazil, in order to prepare adequately for the period lived abroad. There were still those who carried out courses with their own resources, which had the lowest representation in the research, 8.5%.

Table 6 presents data on the language skills of the exchange students before the academic exchange and at the end. Most of the respondents who reported having extreme ease in the domain of the foreign language were destined to Portugal, because before the exchange most of the respondents were between the basic and intermediate levels.

**Table 6** – Language skills from the beginning to the end of the exchange

level of knowledge of the exchange student	Beginning	End
He had a basic knowledge of the language (he used only simple phrases).	126	11
He could have simple conversations.	111	11
He could express opinions and describe things as experiences and desires.	123	35
Communication with natives was effortless.	51	88
He could use the language in a flexible and efficient way for academic, social and professional purposes.	75	178
He was able to understand with extreme ease what he read and heard, even in situations of greater complexity.	100	263

Source: Authors (2016)

It is also worth mentioning that 126 respondents (21.5%) reported having only basic knowledge of the language. Of these, 76 studied the language abroad with resources of the Federal Government, that is, they had the opportunity to improve what was once a language almost unknown. Note the improvement of the level of knowledge of foreign languages by the students. At the other end of Table 6, in the last two levels (considered the most advanced), 175 students considered having this knowledge at the beginning of the international experience. At the end of the exchange, this number rose to 441, or 75.3% of respondent exchanges returned from their travels with advanced levels of foreign language.

### Analysis of the return to Brazil

Upon returning to Brazil, the student maintains ties with Brazilian and foreign friends from the interchange period, so he wondered how these ties were. Thus, 46.2% said that they maintain contact with some Brazilian friends, while only 4.8% say they do not maintain contact with Brazilians of the time of the exchange. On the other hand, the majority, 49%, claim to have contact with many Brazilian friends. Regarding the foreign friends of the period abroad, 70.5% of respondents say they have contact with some friends from outside Brazil. Complementing, 14.3% have contact with many friends and 15.2% say they no longer have contact with foreign friends.

Another factor that can influence the readaptation of the student to Brazil is the (re) insertion of the professional. Respondents were questioned about their professional situations upon return to the country. Table 7 shows the data on the professional situation after the return.

**Table 7** – Students' professional situation after the return to Brazil

Did not want to have a job	227 (38,7%)
International experience was key to getting a job.	113 (19,3%)
He got a job normally, without influence of the exchange.	103 (17,3%)
Could not find a job.	72 (12,3%)
He returned to the same job he had before the exchange.	32 (5,5%)
Spent a long time to get a job.	28 (4,8%)

Source: Authors (2016)

In exchange, the support of the two universities is an important issue that can influence the process of student academic exchange. It was questioned whether the respondents received any support from the universities (both foreign and Brazilian) before and after their trip (Table 8). What can be observed is that IES foreigner gives more support to the exchange student when compared to Brazilian, both before the trip and after. However, it is noteworthy that both HEIs are unsatisfactory when it comes to supporting students after studying abroad.

**Table 8** - Support to the student by the Institutions of Education (%)

HEI	Period	Did not give support	Gave little support	Gave a great support
HEI - Brazilian	Before the exchange	47,4	37,7	14,8
	After the exchange	65,2	28,8	6,0
HEI - Foreign	Before the exchange	17,7	42,3	39,9
	After the exchange	57,8	34,6	7,5

Source: Authors (2016)

Table 9 shows the cross-reference of the expectations of foreign HEIs compared to the Brazilian ones with the change of opinion about the Brazilian HEI after the exchange.

**Table 9** – Expectation about foreign HEI versus Brazilian HEI

		Change of opinion about Brazilian HEI			Total
		Did not change your mind	For worse	For the best	
Expectation of how the foreign HEI is compared to the Brazilian HEI before the exchange	Worse	5	3	3	11
	Equal	26	14	24	64
	Better	155	148	208	511
Total		186	165	235	586

Source: Authors (2016)

One interesting fact is that 87.2% of the respondents expected that the university of destination was better than the Brazilian one represented by 511 out of 586 respondents. When they were crossed with the data about the change of opinion about the Brazilian university, 40.1% (235 participants) changed it for the better. Of these 235 respondents, 208 had responded that, before the exchange, they expected the foreign HEI to be better than the Brazilian one. This indicates a good positioning for Brazilian HEIs, since these students previously expected higher quality in foreign teaching and after the exchange improved their opinions about them.

In order to deepen the perceptions of changes that have occurred, the questionnaire has a series of statements about it. Table 11 presents the statements about the perceptions of changes and their means and standard deviations. It is notable that the averages are

high, just as all standard deviation, which represents a concentration of responses close to the means. The statement “regularly had feelings of nostalgia related to my exchange” stands out, since it had the highest mean (4.54) and the lowest standard deviation (0.81).

**Table 10 – Perception of life in Brazil after return**

	Mean	Std Deviation
I regularly had feelings of nostalgia related to my exchange.	4,54	0,81
I have often wished I had never returned from the exchange.	3,96	1,30
I had difficulty in adapting to the rhythm of daily life.	3,92	1,14
The standard of spending of Brazilians bothered me.	3,67	1,29
I often had the feeling of not “ fitting ” into society.	3,67	1,31
They made comments about the Brazilians.	3,59	1,17
I rarely felt understood by people who never lived abroad.	3,57	1,27
I had the feeling that I had lost something when I thought about my exchange.	3,56	1,38
I felt uncomfortable with my daily social activities.	3,51	1,26
There were many social mores in Brazil that I no longer understood.	3,41	1,30
I had difficulty identifying myself with the Brazilian lifestyle.	3,36	1,27
I had the feeling that people treated me more superficially than I was used to.	3,32	1,25

Source: Authors (2016)

The Table 11 shows the feelings themselves, that is, as they appeared after the academic exchange.

**Table 11 – Self perception after the exchange**

	Mean	Std Deviation
I have the feeling that I am now a more global / international person.	4,42	0,71
After completing my exchange I feel like a person with great intercultural skills.	4,17	0,76
The culture of the destination country influenced my readaptation to Brazil.	3,88	0,99
In some ways I feel less Brazilian when compared to the period before the exchange.	3,17	1,39
Since my exchange, I feel more Brazilian than foreign.	2,77	1,13
Since my exchange, I feel more like a foreigner than a Brazilian.	2,73	1,18

Source: Authors (2016)

The first assertion (Table 12) has the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation, representing the importance that the exchange has in becoming a more global and international person. It is also noticed that the students reported that, after the exchange, they started to have greater intercultural skills. Another fact that calls attention is that the

culture of the destination country had an influence on the readaptation to Brazil, with an average considered high (4.17) and low standard deviation.

Upon returning to Brazil, together with the so-called reverse cultural shock, students experience sensations from the most varied, from depression to happiness. Because of the amount of feelings they may have, the respondents said they felt little or very much, or simply did not feel these emotions. Of the 586 participants in the survey, 544 (92.9%) were not relieved to return to Brazil, meaning they had good experiences while abroad.

Table 12 discusses student change. The vast majority said that they felt a great change in their mentality (72.6%) and world view (84%), just as they realized they had returned another person from the exchange (74.5%).

**Table 12 – Feelings on returning to Brazil**

Feelings	Did not feel	Feel a little	Feel a lot
Change of world view	21	73	492
Impression of returning "other person"	32	117	437
Change of mentality Insecurity	40	121	425
Boring	96	213	277
Insecurity	133	178	275
Irritation	150	186	250
Anguish	111	238	237
Confusion	143	212	231
Fear	203	178	205
Happiness momentary, because of homesickness	70	318	198
Depression	230	214	142
Relief, because he did not like the exchange	544	30	12

Source: Authors (2016)

Because of the amount of feelings (Table 12), some students may suffer more than others. Therefore, it was asked whether, because they did not readapt to Brazil, the interchanges sought some kind of psychological help. While 518 (88.4%) stated that no, 68 (11.60%) said they had sought some professional in the area.

The last questioning of the survey was about the students' future plans and desires regarding traveling abroad. The expressive data was that 533 of the 586 respondents chose the "totally disagree" option for the statement "I do not intend to return abroad", so most students intend to return abroad, either to study or to live.

## Discussion of the results

This section relates what was obtained through the questionnaires with the 586 ex-exchange students who were interviewed with what was exposed in the theoretical framework. A total of 23 destination countries were represented with 213 foreign cities,

and the countries that received the most Brazilian exchange students were the United Kingdom (89), Portugal and Spain (both with 85). According to Larsen and Vincent-Lancrin (2002), there are several factors that influence the choice of destination country, among them economic, academic and social.

The results of the research indicate that the most influential factors in the student's decision are related to the culture and life in the destination country, as well as the high educational standard and language. In this case, Portugal has, besides a similar language, a culture close to the Brazilian one, and the country is considered the cheapest in Western Europe, which influences in the moment of decision of the student who travels with his own resources. The UK, on the other hand, has the ability to learn and practice English as well as a high academic and social reputation, but it is a country with a high cost of living. As a result, 85 of the 89 exchange students who studied in the country did so with help and resources from the Federal Government.

When questioned about their adaptive skills, the highest average was in relation to obtaining basic community services (4.55), such as transportation, health, etc. On the other hand, the lowest average was in relations of friendship with native students (3.41), which confirms the fact that Brazilian students are looking for each other more in the process of adaptation. Thus, the exchange students must be flexible to accept the new and the differences (CHANG; YUAN; CHUANG, 2013; CANUTO, 2014), which can be observed in the exchangers' answers, that is, they have succeeded in their adaptation processes.

The results confirm the finding by Steuten (2015), that there is a change of cultural identity in the exchange process, since only 84 respondents saw themselves as global citizens before the exchange, while after the experience this number changed to 326. This is due to the fact of the student to have contact with diverse types of foreign cultures, at the same time that it learns to deal with the differences between the towns. According to Bennett (1998), this change is part of adaptation and is the process by which the individual expands his worldview so that he can include the appropriate behavior and values in the culture in which he is inserting himself.

Indeed, the students judged to have greater intercultural skills after the exchange, just as they affirmed that the culture of the destination country has influence in the readaptation to Brazil. By studying abroad for a long time and adapting to the new environment, the student detaches himself from his local culture (SZKUDLAREK, 2010). This was observed, since the respondents stated that they had a different world view of their countrymen. This demonstrates that traveling and adapting to a new culture assists in strengthening students' intercultural skills. In addition, it indicates that in the view of those who travel, those who have never had the experience of living abroad do not have those same skills.

Analyzing this questioning, it can be affirmed that the exchange students did not look similar to the Brazilians in any of the questions. The less perceived differences are related to the friendships and styles of communication, which is explained by the majority of the friends of the respondents abroad being Brazilian. As for the people of the country of destination, it was noted that the students looked similar to them, which shows the success of the adaptation, because when familiarizing with a foreigner, the exchange student was able to insert himself in the new culture.

The research endorses what Sowa (2002) affirmed, for whom the exchange helps in the learning and the proficiency of a new language, along with the cultural interactions. At the end of the international experience, 90.3% of respondents claimed to have spoken language in their country of destination, while that number, before the exchange, was 38.6%. What also contributed to this increase was that 30.2% of the exchange students studied the language in the destination country with Federal Government resources.

It is worth mentioning that strong bonds of friendship among Brazilian exchange students were created in the period of exchange, making it difficult to return to Brazil, since suddenly there is dissolution of these circles of friendship. Of the interviewees, 95.2% still maintain contact with Brazilian friends. This, in a way, arrests them to the period in which they lived abroad, because the conversations and memories are constant in the contacts between these groups of friends. The friends who stayed in Brazil are no longer so similar to the traveler and this makes them seek the friendships of the time they were abroad.

Upon returning to Brazil, the student finds an increasingly fierce job market, with exchange being an interesting and highly valued competitive differential for companies (MALUTTA, 2013). Of the 586 respondents, 113 said that the exchange experience was essential for them to get a job on their return. This data is in line with what Malutta (2013) states, that selection processes have increasingly taken into account international experiences and fluency in foreign languages.

Another important aspect is the role of the educational institution. Hunley (2010) argues that it is necessary for HEIs to support their students in the three phases of the exchange process. In fact, the results show that, in the students' view, the HEIs do not give adequate support to the students after the studies abroad. For the respondents, the universities foreigners gave them more support than the Brazilian ones, both before and after the exchange. Proof of this is that only 6% said that the Brazilian HEI gave much support and 7.5% said the same from the foreign HEI. In addition, most of the answers focused on the "no support" option, that is, there is a need for greater support and support for the exchange process: before, during and after.

If the exchange student is instructed through appropriate training and guidance regarding the cultural shock that will be experienced in the destination country, it is possible that the effects of reverse cultural shock on their return are minimized and better controlled (SEARLE; WARD, 1990). Still about the HEIs, before the exchange, 511 respondents expected the foreign HEI to be better than the Brazilian one, however, when 235 students returned they said they had changed their minds about the Brazilian HEI, which shows that they are close to the foreign ones quality of teaching.

Upon their return to Brazil, the respondents showed that they had difficulties with readaptation. Feelings of nostalgia and desire to never return from the exchange are examples of what can make this process difficult. Most of the respondents remained for two semesters abroad, corroborating with Szkudlarek (2010), who states that a longer stay contributes negatively to reverse cultural shock, since the individual has had a lot of time to detach himself from the culture of origin.

Sebben (2001) recalls that all exchange students go through the migrations to and fro, and for some the return to Brazil may be more complicated than the departure.

For Uehara (1986), the young person who returns from an exchange may have different feelings, which was demonstrated in the results of this research. Observing the students' responses, it is noted that they were not prepared for or did not want to return to Brazil. Feelings such as anguish, irritation, depression, insecurity, confusion and depression appeared significantly in the responses, evidencing that the exchangers felt the reverse cultural shock strongly.

There are also students who seek psychological help after the exchange. In the present study, 68 respondents reported having done so. This is in line with Uehara (1986, p / p), who points out that "the psychosocial difficulties (sometimes associated with physical problems) that the returnee experiences in the initial phase of the adjustment process when returning home after having lived abroad for some time". Since this process of readaptation is complicated and due to the changes that occur, it is important that the exchange student has psychological counseling in the first months after returning. This could lessen the impacts and implications of the reverse cultural shock, making the student have a natural readjustment and without major problems.

## Conclusions

The overall results show the importance of the Science without Borders program, since 67.7% of the students used it. United Kingdom (89), Portugal and Spain (both with 85) were the most chosen destinations. The results also confirm that there was a change of cultural identity in the exchange process (STEUTEN, 2015), since at the beginning of the exchange 84 respondents saw themselves as global citizens and after that number moved to 326. Also, at the end of the international experience, 90.3% of the respondents stated that they had mastery of the language spoken in their country of destination, whereas before the exchange they were 38.6%.

It was also concluded that the time and quality of the period lived abroad have a great influence on the readaptation of the student to Brazil, that is, if the exchange was successful, it is likely that the return to the country of origin will be hampered. This is because the student has had enough time to detach himself from his local culture and adapt to the place of destination, corroborating a change in the individual's cultural identity.

With regard to vocational rehabilitation, the exchange brings benefits to the student. The companies value the professionals with international experiences facilitating the time of selection processes. It has also been realized that there must be adequate preparation before an exchange takes place. In this respect, universities come on the scene, which must give the necessary support to their student, both in the bureaucratic part and in the psychological part. HEIs are also important in monitoring the students' situation, before, during and after the exchange, so that, in the end, the exchange has been a healthy and trauma-free experience for the student.

After all, academic exchange must be carried out with rationality about what will come after, that is, when initiating the process, it is important that the student is aware of what may happen upon his return to Brazil. In this way, the exchange can be better utilized, step by step and, in the end, the experience will be satisfactory for both the student and the HEI.

## Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although this study provides important insights it has some limitations. The present research was restricted to one type of exchange, the academic, therefore, the data and the interpretation of the results may be different for other types of exchange. The research was also limited to Brazilian exchange students who traveled between the years of 2012 and 2015 and have already returned to Brazil.

As suggestions for future studies, it is proposed to carry out qualitative research with Higher Education Institutions investigating their policies of academic exchange and relating them to the perspectives of the students when they return. Also, it is suggested to analyze the main differences between the exchange experiences of students from different Brazilian states, verifying if the geographic and cultural factor is determinant so that there is a significant differentiation in the readaptation of the participating students.

## Management implications

The results of this study can help the Institutions of Higher Education to make improvements in their areas responsible for academic exchanges. At present, universities do not provide the necessary support and follow-up for the exchange students, which sometimes make it impossible to obtain feedback from them regarding the benefits and difficulties of the international academic experience. That said, it is important that HEIs are present in the three phases of the exchange, before, during and after, so that it is as successful as possible.

As far as the Federal Government is concerned, it is important to maintain the educational exchange projects abroad (Science without Frontiers and BRAFITEC) so that students can have more cultural and academic knowledge and are able to coexist with other cultures and respect them.

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