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**Crossing Borders, Shifting Beliefs: The Influence of Studying Abroad on
Algerian Returnees' Identities and Cultural Beliefs**

Dissertation submitted to the Department of English as a partial fulfilment of the
requirements for Master's degree in Language Studies

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Declaration of originality

We hereby testify that this research is our own work and that all that comes after is our personal contribution to the subject matter. This work has not been previously published or submitted to any university for obtaining any degree. We also certify that this study contains no plagiarism and all works used have been explicitly acknowledged and indicated in the references section.

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Dedications

To all those who are dear, those to whom I owe my success:

To the one whose words have accompanied me since I was little, the first strong, courageous woman who suffered without letting us suffer, the one who taught me to be a strong girl and who always seeks to complete her goals at all costs; the one who encouraged me to pursue my dreams even the obstacles seemed insurmountable. My guardian angel, your love, and your presence in my life and the fact of being my mother will continue to illuminate my path.

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Finally, I dedicate this work to myself, it's time to be there!!

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“A language is not just words. It’s a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It’s all embodied in language.”

Noam Chomsky

Abstract

The present research study elaborates on the impact of studying abroad on Algerian returnees in terms of post-study identity reconstruction and shift in cultural beliefs. Different scholarships in the fields of intercultural communication, identity studies, language and cultural education discussed students' experiences abroad. However, evidence supporting the claim of identities or cultural beliefs shifts in such contexts appears to be limited, particularly regarding the long-term effects of those changes on the social and personal levels once students return to their home country, Algeria. In addition to how their reconstructed identities influence their readjustment or reintegration within their native cultural and social community. Drawing upon intercultural, psychological, and linguistic frameworks, this study is an interdisciplinary investigation into the complexity of cross-cultural experience on participants' well-being. Through an inductive reasoning qualitative method design, the study uses semi-structured interviews to delve into the analysis of deep, personal narratives of 16 informants. Research findings uncover the complex interplay between language, identity, and culture in the study abroad context on the individual's attitudes. This study reveals that participants in a study abroad setting confront cultural differences, are influenced by the environment in which they live. Therefore, they witnessed shifts in their identities and started readjusting them upon their return home. However, they do not entirely reject their native culture, nor do they fully assimilate into the new one; instead, they combine values and qualities from both cultures to create a hybrid identity.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Complementarity Principle	a foundational concept that suggests that bilinguals use different languages for different purposes, domains, and with different people.
Ego Identity	A psychological concept that refers to an individual's sense of self, shaped by their beliefs, values, and understanding of their role within society. It is a dynamic construct influenced by personal experiences, social interactions, and cultural contexts.
Gewri/Gewriya	In North African context (Algeria), Pejorative term meaning "infidel" or "foreigner" derived from Turkish <i>gavur</i> .
Integrativeness	Openness to and interest in the L2 community; desire for cultural and social integration.
Investment	A socially situated commitment to learning a language linked to identity and power relations.
Language Mode	a dynamic, context-sensitive state reflecting how much a bilingual's languages are activated and available for use.
Linguistic Capital	Language skills and varieties valued in specific social contexts; a form of cultural capital.
Linguistic Identity	The way people see themselves through the languages they speak i.e. each language reflects a different part of who they are, it is frequently observed among multilingual speakers.
Linguistic Relativity	Language influences how we perceive and interpret reality.
Mentalese	Hypothetical language of thought or mental language.
Mobility of Language	Language resources travel and change value across contexts, creating new forms of inequality.
Orders of Indexicality	The social meaning/value of language shifts across local, national, and global scales.
Strong Version	Language determines thought (largely rejected by scholars).
Symbolic Capital	Linguistic capital recognised as legitimate and authoritative, conferring social power.
Third Space	A theoretical or conceptual space where different cultures and identities meet and confront each other producing a new identity version.

Transnationalism	A phenomenon that describes the situation of migrants or international students when they hold feelings towards both countries i.e living across borders and building a new life in there but keeping ties with the home country.
Weak Version	Language influences thought (widely accepted, empirically supported).

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

General introduction

The overseas dream has been noticeably growing in Algerian students' minds. In recent years, a number of students have embarked on studying abroad scholarships, seeking better education quality and international opportunities. According to data reported from Statista Research Department, France, for instance, hosted around 24,600 Algerian students during the 2019-2020 academic year. The following destinations were Canada, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Malaysia, each sharing 2% of Algerian students.

Studying abroad entails not only geographical changes, but also a socio-cultural switch where they are immersed in a new environment that is different in terms of language, traditions, and culture. Hence, international students need to develop and adjust, not only to an unfamiliar educational system but also to new cultural values. Along this experience, they inevitably face challenges such as culture shock, moments of loneliness, and homesickness. However, it is important to note that not all students experience these difficulties to the same extent, and some may adjust with relative ease. A radical change or switch in viewing or evaluating themselves and the world around them occurs due to the constant interaction with people from different cultures and backgrounds. This whole journey became a gradual transition, yet extremely deep.

The present dissertation covers different disciplines such as interculturality, language studies, sociology, and psychology, which reflects its interdisciplinary nature. It lies in providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex experience of studying abroad, as being linguistic, social, psychological, and deeply cultural. Interculturality is a prominent field of study; individuals abroad have become part of cross-cultural interactions. They encounter new environments where they constantly engage with diverse social norms, cultural values, and ways of thinking. Research on studying abroad has focused on students' language acquisition, identity construction, and motivation. However, the lasting impact on students who have been part of this experience has been scarcely investigated. The latter is the primary concern of this study, which intends to explore how Algerian students' intercultural identity transforms abroad. More specifically, it focuses on the post-study impacts on social and personal relationships when trying to re-adjust to their community upon returning to their native country.

The purpose of this research is to shed light on the new identity reconstruction and cultural values adoption that Algerian students attained after their study experience abroad. The

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focus of the present study is to explore language role in reshaping students' thoughts, identities, and cultural beliefs; provide an all-encompassing inspection of cultural shifts during and after crossing borders; and demonstrate the factors that lead to identity transformation.

The study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. In what ways does studying abroad shape/ reshape students' relationship with language as a tool of identity reconstruction, cultural negotiation, and thought?
2. What factors contribute to identity and cultural beliefs transitions?
3. How do cultural beliefs shift during and after studying abroad experiences?

To answer the aforementioned research questions, the study adopted a qualitative approach. Data were collected from a sample of 16 participants who studied abroad and returned to Algeria. These participants come from different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with these informants, which aimed at investigating the outcomes of the lived experience overseas provided in data through narratives.

The present research is divided into two main chapters. The first one discusses the conceptual framework about language, identity, and culture in the study abroad context. Withal, the theoretical framework, where several theories related to individuals' adaptation in new environments and social groups' marginalisation were explained. The second chapter covers the practical part of this research. It justifies the research design, then provides data analysis, interpretation, and discussion. It ends with recommendations in addition to the limitations faced in this study.

Chapter 1:

Literature Review

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Part One: An Introduction to Language, Culture, and Identity

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the concepts and theories related to interculturality, such as Culture Shock Theory, Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, and others. It starts with providing definitions of the keywords. Then, it explores the variant theoretical frameworks covering the insights related to this study from linguistic, sociolinguistic, psychological, educational, and sociological fields. Next, it discusses the most crucial findings from previous studies regarding the case of Algerians abroad.

The notions of language, identity, and culture serve as the core conceptual framework upon which the investigation is built. These key concepts shaped the research questions; their distinctive formulation is for the purpose of aligning with the study objectives. Therefore, the following elaborations show the theoretical viewpoint that the research accepted, and place the inquiry within scholarly discussions that are important.

1.2 Language as a Cultural and Identity Practice in Study Abroad Context

Language learning is not only academic; it can be transformative at the personal, social, and identity level (Norton, 2013). In a study abroad context where a new language is used, students engage in a process of adaptation, negotiation, and accommodation (Shohamy, 2007a, as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) whenever they use the target language in social life. They go beyond the structural or linguistic system they already know and operate with unplanned or unpredictable aspects of language. This experiential aspect of language aligns with the philosophical view of Gadamer, who argues that life experience can be interpreted and expressed only through language. He stated “language is not only an object in our hands; it is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive our world” (Gadamer, 1976, p.29, as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p.16).

To clarify more, language is part of one’s being; it is, away from being a means of communication, as a reservoir storing values, traditions, and culture. It shapes people’s way of

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interpreting themselves and the world around them. Hence, international students' production of the target language abroad is a complex situation; they

need to know how to produce language that can be interpreted by native speakers, but which at the same time acknowledges their own place as members of another culture along with the identity issues that relate to their first language cultural frame of reference as non-members of the target language community (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p.29).

Hamidi (2023) found, in her study, that language is not only a tool for communication but a device for conveying cultural reality, and it is significant in shaping one's identity. In the same line, Sofiani (2023) stated that language is the reflection of values, convictions, and practices. It is deeply rooted and embedded in culture, producing social integration and identity. Accordingly, language is the medium by which humans make sense of their cultural background, social identity. Therefore, in order to understand the relationship between them, each concept must be explained first separately.

1.2.1 Language Explained

Hamidi emphasised the idea that language is a heritage that one receives from their family. Accordingly, language "reflects the individual's ability to communicate and convey meaning. However, using such a system (language) is not as easy as it seems because language is strongly related to culture and has many roles in shaping one's identity in society" (Hamidi, 2023, p.44). She added that each language is a component of culture and that "in every language, there are words that show the culture of that community" (p.44). Uzakova (2024) admitted that language plays the role of an indicator of group affiliation and a well of cultural knowledge. In a study abroad setting, on one side, language serves as a way to speak one's own culture. It cannot be restricted only to daily interactions, but it extends to involve the understanding of the host culture. On the parallel side, language is the reflection of culture in which the latter influences the former by determining what can or cannot be expressed. Therefore, they are two facets of the same coin.

1.2.2 Culture Explained

Taylor (1871) defined culture as "the complex combination of elements that is composed of education, religions, ceremonies, rules, codes, traditions, and any other faculties

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learned by the individual inside his/her community or nation” (as cited in Hamidi, 2023, p.1). Hamidi stated that culture can be viewed as the way of living of a particular group or community. It contains some elements, such as beliefs, symbols, and values, that are mutual among individuals and which will be transferred from one generation to another through communication and imitation. From a philosophical perspective, Jiang (2000) describes culture and language as inseparable, in which “language and culture make a living organism; language is flesh, and culture is blood. Without culture, language would be dead; without language, culture would have no shape” (p.328). This metaphor illustrates how strong the bond between culture and language is and how they cannot be separated.

In a study abroad context, culture serves as a representative and as an image of a particular group or country. It plays a significant role in shaping the international student’s experience abroad. Studying abroad experience cannot be limited only to gaining academic knowledge and skills. It involves the discovery of new cultures and a journey to explore one’s own self, where a new identity will be reshaped.

1.2.3 Identity Explained

Hall (1996) suggests that identity is not an essence that is fixed and stable; rather, it is something dynamic, something in evolution. For him, identity is not something we have from the moment we are born or something completed. It is a “production” constantly being formed, reshaped over time. This process continues and never fully finishes. Within representation (i.e., language, media, culture), identity shapes itself; outside it, nothing of that sort happens. The understanding people have of themselves is framed by the cultural narratives and representations. In other words, we do not come into the world with a definite identity that cannot change. Rather, we become identified through experiences and interactions with people and how we are presented and present ourselves in various cultural contexts.

Similar to Hall, Hamidi (2023) explains “identity” is significant because it defines who we are. Many countries, like Algeria, have kept and preserved their national identity... during and after the Algerian War of Independence” (p.49-50). From this quote, one can notice that there are different types of identities, such as: national, social, cultural, personal, linguistic, and transnational or hybrid identity. First, personal identity: it is related to the unique traits and beliefs a person possesses. Second, social identity refers to someone’s connection to groups; it influences how one relates to others and society. Third, cultural identity refers to the traditions,

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language, and values, and how they can define someone's expression of himself. Fourth, national identity refers to the connection to a country through citizenship and patriotism. Fifth, linguistic identity is a person's relationship with language, and it reflects his or her identity. For instance, multilinguals associate different identities with different languages or dialects that they speak. Last but not least, transnational or hybrid identities are common among migrants and international students. Students abroad will confront different people from different backgrounds having different identities. Thus, all the aforementioned types -except the last one- are going to be affected by other elements which belong to the host country or culture. At this point, students start navigating between the different parts, which will yield a transnational or hybrid identity.

In conclusion, the relationship between language, culture, and identity is intertwined. One relies on, influences, and is part of the other, i.e., on one side, language influences identity and reflects culture. On the parallel side, identities are shaped by culture. These processes can be overt in a study abroad setting, within which students are constantly marketing their cultures through language, simultaneously confronting other cultures. In this process, a reciprocal influence will take place; students will be inevitably influenced, and their identities will be altered.

Part Two: An Overview of Language, Identity, and Culture Theories

1.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Language

In the world of research, language theories orbit around those emphasising its mechanisms, learning, function in social interactions, and cognitive development. Scholars have incorporated social, cultural, and psychological dimensions in order to explain the complexity of language.

Globalisation has brought about many changes in different areas, among them Sociolinguistics. In his attempt to understand the impact of these changes on language, Blommaert (2010) brought a new theoretical framework that aims to introduce a new approach to the study of sociolinguistics in the age of mobility. He argues that linguistic resources are

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valued differently in a globalised environment, which entails a problem of inequality across political, social, and economic contexts. Accordingly, he established a vertical metaphor of a sociolinguistic scale to see how language values, which he calls orders of indexicality, shift across scales of “local(macro) and global(micro) as its extremes and several intermediary scales in between” (Blommaert, 2010, p.32). In this sense, people move from a local code to a superior one for specific purposes like gaining respect or being heard. The value of linguistic resources is socially determined by power dimensions and/or the legitimacy of powerful institutions, which link linguistic capital (valued varieties) with symbolic capital (social powers) (Bourdieu, 1991). Blommaert’s paradigm stands as a socio-political framing that echoes Norton’s concept of “investment” in language learning.

On the other hand, Norton (2000) tried to build on the ideas of learning motivation, a new theoretical model of investment in a language. She challenged the views of traditional, motivational factors by claiming that learners' commitment to the use of the target language is not because of the fact of being motivated. Instead, they make an investment in the target language due to the profits they attain socially (e.g., respect, power, recognition) to affirm their identity. Hence, investment is related to one’s social identity. Norton also highlights that learners’ investment in the target language is an investment in their own identity (Darvin & Norton, 2017). While investing in language, learners negotiate their positions in the social world; they need to be aware of whether the gains are positive or negative, which makes the investment strategic and influenced by their choices as well as how they perceive themselves.

Similarly, Gardner’s Socio-Educational Model of Language Acquisition in 1985, which was later reaffirmed by incorporating empirical research gathered over twenty-five years, identifies a key concept in relation to language learning motivation labelled as “integrativeness” (Gardner, 1985, 2010). It refers to the interest in the second language (L2) community integration, which is influenced by cultural context. Learners’ integrative motivation reflects their desire to integrate within the target language group, besides, their positive attitudes towards the culture and people of L2. Thereupon, they achieve ongoing learning outcomes. Integrativeness is relevant to the context of studying abroad, where learners are immersed in the target language environment, seeking intercultural interaction.

From a functional viewpoint of language use, Grosjean (2010) brought the Complementarity Principle, where bi/multilinguals use their languages for specific purposes, in different domains and with different speakers. Grosjean argues that speakers of many languages

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choose what language to use strategically depending on their daily needs, where “different aspects of life normally require different languages” (Grosjean, as cited in Navracscics, 2003, p.1). This entails that bi/multilinguals treat languages non-interchangeably as their repertoires are developed distinctly and altered by different domains of life. The Complementarity Principle redefined bilinguals “as specific and fully competent speakers-hearers who have developed a communicative competence that is equal, but different in nature, to that of monolinguals” (p.2). Moreover, Grosjean developed a continuum known as language mode, which reflects the modes of language use. The continuum in which bilinguals activate one language and deactivate the other is context-sensitive or situational. At one edge, a monolingual mode (only one language is used) exists. At the other edge lies the bilingual mode (speakers switch between languages) with an intermediary mode of language processing in between. Consequently, people’s use of the languages they acquired or learned depends on the demands they encounter in their daily life interactions.

From a cognitive standpoint, the languages people speak affect the way they perceive the world around them. Extending Sapir’s view (1929) that language is a social reality guide, Whorf (1956) argues that cognitive patterns are shaped by linguistic structures. Ergo, an influential theoretical framework was established known as the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis (1956), which -despite its age- continues to offer valuable insights in linguistic and communication theories. The theory’s principles were discussed based on how the impact of language on perception can be strong. Two versions of the theory were at play: a “strong” and a “weak” version. The former claims that language determines the speaker’s thoughts. Meanwhile, the latter states that language influences thoughts to some degree. Recent research has supported the idea, in its weak form, that people who speak different languages have different worldviews (Athanasopoulos et al., 2015). This suggests that languages influence people’s experiences of the real world in terms of time, colour terms, spatial orientation, and categorisations (Everett's, 2023). This challenges the characteristics of language universality and confirms the interdependence of thought and language on each other.

To bridge sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, Geeraets in 2006 presented cognitive sociolinguistics as an approach that explains the way language shapes and/or is shaped by social, cultural and cognitive aspects. In their study, Geeraerts, Dirven, and Taylor (2006) investigated how cultural patterns influence language use and social meaning. They argue that cognition and culture are closely linked in language behaviour. They emphasise that people do

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not use language based solely on abstract mental rules. Their speech and expressions are influenced by shared cultural frameworks that structure their perceptions and interpretations of the world (Geeraerts et al., 2006). For example, metaphors such as “time is money” are not just individual cognitive constructions but reflect broader social values that are deeply rooted in Western industrial culture (Dirven & Taylor, 2008). These cultural patterns are not static; they vary between communities and evolve over time, leading to differences in the construction of social meaning. Speakers’ word choice -whether formal, dialectal, or colloquial- not only conveys information, but also indicates identity, group membership, and even resistance to prevailing norms (Geeraerts & Kristiansen, 2008).

Language is the vehicle of thought. According to Vygotsky (1962), cognition is developed through language, culture, and social interactions. He claims that cognitive development occurs first on a social level, then continues to happen on the personal level, which was depicted in his sociocultural theory. In this latter, he explains “internalisation” a significant concept in Vygotsky’s theory- as the transfer of knowledge from culturally meaningful contexts into internal thought. One central tool in internalising knowledge is language, which he believes plays two critical roles in cognitive development: transmitting cultural knowledge across generations and facilitating mental processes. Vygotsky identifies three stages of language use: social speech (external communication), private speech (self-directed speech for thinking) and inner speech (internalised thoughts). For him, language serves as a tool that shapes thought through cultural context in social interactions.

A contradictory viewpoint about language and thought was represented in Steven Pinker’s *Mentalese Theory*. Pinker (1994) states that people think in “mentalese,” not in a specific language. He sees language and thought as separate, where he said:

People do not think in English or Chinese or Apache; they think in a language of thought. This language of thought probably looks a bit like all these languages; presumably, it has symbols for concepts, and arrangements of symbols that correspond to who did what to whom, as in the paint-spraying representation shown above. But compared with any given language, mentalese must be richer in some ways and simpler in others (p. 81).

‘Mentalese’ is a mental language that helps humans form their thoughts. Similar to other languages, it symbolises ideas as it is rich in concepts and does not involve rules. In this sense,

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mentalese is the central medium of human thoughts, which are communicated -but not determined- by language.

To estimate, those previously mentioned hybrid frameworks contributed to informing the notion of language from distinct perspectives. In Blommaert's world mobility, Norton's identity negotiations, Geeraerts' integrated view, and Vygotsky's developmental theory, language lies as both a socially and culturally constructed resource as well as a tool of cognition. Together, these perspectives have enriched the comprehension of language not only as spoken, but also as lived and embodied in participants' lives, either abroad or in their homeland.

1.4 Cultural Frameworks and Intercultural Contact

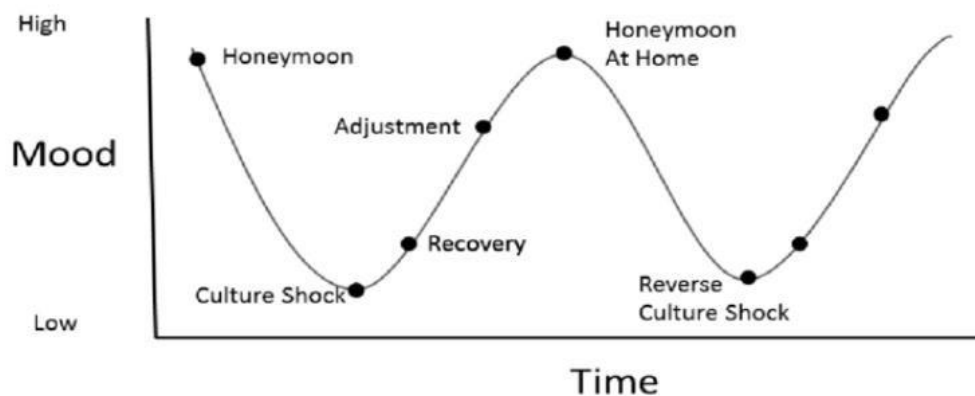
The phrase "*culture shock*" is attributed to the anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960), who used it to illustrate the way people react to strange places. When going abroad, the first thing to experience is culture shock. As the name implies, culture shock refers to the shock or anxiety that results from losing all the familiar signs and symbols of daily life. Oberg (1966) mentioned some examples "when to shake hands, what to say when we meet people, how to make purchases, and when to take statements seriously and when not" (p. 142). All these previously acquired norms will be changed and replaced by new ones that belong to the host country and fit into its culture. It is believed that when people start complaining about the host country and its people, it is a sign that they are experiencing a culture shock, and the home country starts to seem like a paradise, where only the good things and the positive aspects are remembered. Adler (1975) mentioned "although culture shock is often defined as an illness or disease (Foster, 1962; Oberg, 1958, as cited in Adler, 1975. p. 13), it is most often treated as a field problem in adaptation and adjustment" (Arensberg & Niehoff, 1964, as cited in Adler, 1975. p.13).

According to Kalervo Oberg (1960), people differ in the degree of their culture shock, and this was best explained in the four-stage model of cultural adjustment. The first stage, called the honeymoon phase, is marked by the attractiveness and excitement people feel when going abroad. This will last for a few days, as people are new there and will meet other nationals who will treat them well. However, when living there, they start facing challenges, for instance, with the banking system or transportation issues. At this point, they enter the second stage of culture shock, generally characterised by hostility towards foreigners and the host country as a whole. This feeling is due to the lack of understanding from locals. Individuals move to a third stage

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when they start adapting to the new environment and become more open and tolerant to differences. Finally, in the fourth stage, which is called adjustment, individuals are generally comfortable and less anxious, and they may even miss the host country when returning home. Over and above that, they may experience another form of shock in their home country, described by Gullahorn (1963) as '*Reverse Culture Shock*'. At this stage, they are excited about returning home, but then face some challenges with their families who could not understand what they experienced abroad or recognise the personal changes they have undergone. This stage is followed by a recovery phase and then the adjustment stage, where they will readjust themselves to their home country. Nevertheless, in rare situations, some individuals do not experience culture shock. This is due to the prior knowledge they possess about the host culture. This exception is explained in Oberg's (1960) Culture Shock Theory, where the crisis phase is skipped. Although culture shock is believed to be a psychological barrier, it can be seen from a positive lens as a chance for self-discovery, intercultural skill building, and long-term identity development.

The following diagram illustrates the U-curve and W-curve models of cultural adjustment and re-adjustment over time, originally proposed by Oberg (1960) and later extended by Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963).



Source: Based on the U-curve (Oberg 1960) and extended by (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963)

Figure 1-1: The stages of culture shock

First, the honeymoon phase (abroad) where the mood is high, everything initially seems glamorous, and people often feel fascinated by the differences. Second, culture shock where the mood drops sharply. It is after the honeymoon period has elapsed that struggling with language barriers, societal norms, and loneliness becomes a reality. It is characterised by

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feelings of frustration, yearning for home, and confusion may prevail. Third, recovery: there will be a gradual improvement in mood and the individual would start learning to survive in the new culture with the newly acquired modes of survival. Fourth, adjustment: mood becomes stable and positive again. The person now feels more at home, comfortable, more competent and integrated into the host culture. Fifth, honeymoon at home (returning home) the mood will rise again upon returning home in which people are still excited to see family and friends, to get back to familiar environments. Sixth, reverse culture shock where the mood drops again. Returning home proves difficult because people realise they have changed and their home culture did not. They feel out of place, misunderstood, or disappointed. Seventh, recovery and readjustment (at home) over time, they re-adjust to the home environment by amalgamating the two ways of experiencing old and new. In brief, the U-curve describes adjustment abroad (Oberg, 1960), and the W-curve adds experience of coming back home and readjusting (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).

The stages of culture shock are part of the acculturation process, “more than 100 different theories about acculturation have been established and then developed” (Rudiman, 2003, as cited in Worthy, Lavigne, & Romero, 2025, p.1). Berry proposed a model of acculturation that categorises individual adaptation strategies along two dimensions (Berry, 1992, as cited in Worthy, et al., 2025). The first dimension is related to the rejection of the home country, and the second dimension is related to the rejection of the host country. From these two dimensions, four acculturation strategies emerge: assimilation, which occurs when individuals adopt the cultural norms of the host culture over their own culture; separation, which is the opposite, where individuals fully reject the host culture and preserve their original culture; integration, as the name implies, occurs when individuals integrate and maintain both cultures, the host and the original culture; and lastly, marginalisation, which is the opposite, it occurs when individuals reject both cultures. Some acculturation research suggests that integration strategy has “the most favourable psychological outcomes” (Nguyuen, Thanh, Clark, Michele, Ruiz, Jeanne, 2007; Okazaki, et al., 2009, as cited in Worthy, et al., 2025), while marginalisation has “the least favourable outcomes” (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006, as cited in Worthy, et al., 2025). The following figure summarises and simplifies the process:

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		Value and Maintain Native Culture	
		YES	NO
Value and Maintain Host Culture	YES	Integration	Assimilation
	NO	Separation	Marginalization

Figure 1-2: Berry's Acculturation Process

Milton Bennett's *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* describes the developmental stages via which most people develop their understanding and acceptance of intercultural differences. It was originally pioneered by the sociologist Milton Bennett; the model is sometimes called *Bennett's scale*. It consists of two phases: the first one is called *ethnocentrism*, and the second one is called *ethnorelativism*.

An indispensable process to undergo or to experience is called *ethnocentrism*. It is the belief that one's own culture is the most superior one and the tendency to evaluate other cultures based on certain cultural standards. This behaviour can lead to misunderstanding and create bias towards others, which will negatively affect the cross-cultural interaction. This intolerance towards other cultures abroad certainly influences international student's experiences in the host country (Campbell, 2016). When students go to accomplish their goals overseas, they may face people who see their culture and their customs as perfect. In such cases, they will face difficulty in adapting, feeling comfortable, and most importantly, feeling accepted. Sometimes this narrow-mindedness can also lead to academic discrimination because of the disrespect of thoughts, ways of living, or customs that are seen as normal in other cultures. For instance, underestimating the value of the instructional or research methods used by international students if they are not in line with the cultural norms of the host academic community. Another example to elaborate more clearly is the case of Arabs and Muslim students in the West. They may find stereotypes built on ethnocentrism, where they will be judged on their traditions or religious practices from such a narrow perspective. Therefore, they are underestimated by their religious or cultural practices, such as fasting or wearing the hijab, based on the belief that Western values are superior, most liberal, and rational. Ethnocentrism has a big negative

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influence on the student's psyche, in which they will feel a sort of isolation and foreignness. This will lead to psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression. This excessive patriotism can be a barrier to the success of international students and their adaptation to their new environments abroad. To put it in other words, in an interconnected world where understanding and acceptance are crucial, ethnocentrism can be the limit. Sumner (1906), who coined the term «*ethnocentrism* », highlights its limiting nature in fostering an « Us vs. Them » mindset through the following quote: “the technical name for this view of things in which one's own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scored and rated with reference to it” (p.13). However, by promoting mutual cultural understanding and taking firm measures to reduce biased attitudes, the experience of international students can be improved, and will be more positive and richer (Doscher, 2024). In contrast, *Eethnorelativism* is the belief that all cultures deserve equal respect, should be understood and appreciated based on their own context, and not compared to the criteria of another culture. In other words, ethnorelativism calls for understanding or respecting different cultures without judging them from the perspective of a particular culture (Bennett, 2017). Ethnorelativism is significant in a study abroad experience because international students will face challenges related to the adaptation to a new cultural environment that differs from their native one. This cultural relativism will positively influence the experience in different ways, as it facilitates learning and adaptation to some extent because the student is at ease, so there is no discomfort that harms or distracts him or her. This will lead them to build friendships and social networks successfully. To elaborate more, one can provide examples of how ethnorelativism can help students get an education overseas without problems. For instance, in some countries, an international student may face religious rituals that differ from their practices. Instead of refusing or judging them, it is preferable to accept these practices as part of the host country's religion and culture. Showing respect for the hijab, prayer times, or Eid celebrations demonstrates cultural openness, acceptance, and tolerance. Cultural relativity is a key element in the success of the study abroad experience. It allows students to understand, respect other cultures, enhances their ability to adapt and form positive relationships, making them more willing to work and interact in multicultural environments in the future. Kottack (2011) highlights the significance of ethnorelativism in fostering openness and greater tolerance for cultural differences, promoting a framework where diversity is seen as enriching rather than threatening.

Thus, for this study, ethnorelativism is more than a theoretical idea; it is a key facilitator of change in identity. Where ethnocentrism blocks the way, relative thinking unlocks paths for all important parts of the traveling experience, such as: significant adjustment, creation of

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blended identities, and cross-cultural skills. Bennett's scale summarises the process of experiencing the difference as follows:

Contact and interaction between groups will reduce barriers and misunderstandings. The more



Figure 1-3: Six Proposed Developmental Stages from Ethnocentrism to Ethnorelativism

people know about each other, the less likely they are to hate one another. In other words, contact theory is the solution to avoid or get rid of ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and racism.

It has been argued by several authors, namely Allport (1954) and Pettigrew (1998), that direct contact between members of different social and cultural groups can reduce biases and prejudices among them, but under some conditions. This mostly occurs in study abroad environments. As mentioned by the originator of the theory, Allport (1954), who highlighted how prejudice can be reduced by equal status contact between people, especially when they have common goals, and when it is accepted by institutions. These conditions can be elaborated more as follows: First, equality of social status, that is to say, there must be a feeling of belonging and equality amongst all the members of the different groups. For instance, if international students felt that they were treated equally with their local peers, their interaction would be better. Second, goals that are common mean that when members of different cultural backgrounds cooperate to achieve a common goal. This will lessen their cultural sensitivity or tensions and boost reciprocal understanding. Third, institutional support in which those institutions, like universities, have to provide a supportive environment for a positive interaction between the different groups. A good example is the cultural exchange programmes as mentioned by Tropp (2005) and Pettigrew (2005), in a study on intergroup contact and its effects where they mentioned the way the permanent interaction and contact between local and international students lead to deep understanding therefore friendships and how much it is significant in reducing prejudice. International students confront diverse beliefs, traditions, and cultures that those they were habituated in their native countries. Here appears the significance of contact theory in guiding the interaction between the local and international students, in which the positive contact will enhance or lessen the cultural biases and erase the preconceptions. The Intergroup Contact Theory provides a perspective not only for

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understanding but also for assessing the conditions under which identity shifts happen in study abroad experiences. Good intergroup contact not only lowers prejudice but also speeds up identity negotiation. By dealing with different value systems, styles of communication, and worldviews, students often start to question and rebuild parts of their own identities. These times of cultural face-off and shared discovery are at the very centre of intercultural growth, but only if the setting promotes safety, reciprocity, and real belonging. Rather than assuming that diversity alone would lead to intercultural development, the theory under discussion reminds us that transformation would have to be supported intentionally and critically. Through this lens, the experiences of international students can be understood as both deeply personal and socially shaped. A dynamic process of identity shift, enabled or hindered by the quality of contact they experience abroad.

The assumptions of Contact Theory are likely to be problematised by Holliday's Cultural Essentialism, which interrogates the tendency to perceive cultures as homogenous and static. Cultural Essentialism Theory of Holliday (2010) presents that individual behaviour and personality traits are essentially defined from the culture that one comes from, allowing one to generalise everyone from that culture. Holliday counter-argues it by claiming that it also engenders "othering" (viewing other people as something different), and "homogenisation" (thinking that every person of a group/culture is similar). It ignores the very dynamic and complex aspects of culture, which are shaped by many factors other than nationality or ethnicity. Cultural essentialism can become an obstacle to meaningful cross-cultural interactions among international students. They have preconceived images of the indigenous culture showing stereotypes or expected behaviours or vice versa; i.e., the locals may have some stereotypes about the international students and interact with them based on those false cultural generalisations. This blocks the growth of skills and understanding that come from interacting with different cultures, which are important parts of changing the way one sees oneself while studying in another country. If culture is seen as flexible rather than fixed, and if each person is seen as unique, then teachers and schools can create friendlier places where students are free to develop beyond strict cultural boxes. This change in one's perspective is key for real cross-cultural talk and for helping different or changing identities form, rather than keeping cultural walls up.

Completing the challenge to fixed cultural identities is Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, which directs attention to how a person acculturates to a new culture, to the change that

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has in fact taken place, rather than to the static nature of cultural identity. International students will inevitably pass through challenges and difficulties in adapting to their new environment but in the end will adapt and become more comfortable with it. This process is described as “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to an unfamiliar cultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment” (Kim, 2001, p.31). To understand better, Guerriche and Grimshaw (2024, p.47) clarified “this repeated process occurs in response to the sociocultural and linguistic challenges faced by sojourners in the host society”. Kim established a cycle that he called: ‘the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic’ as shown below in the figure:

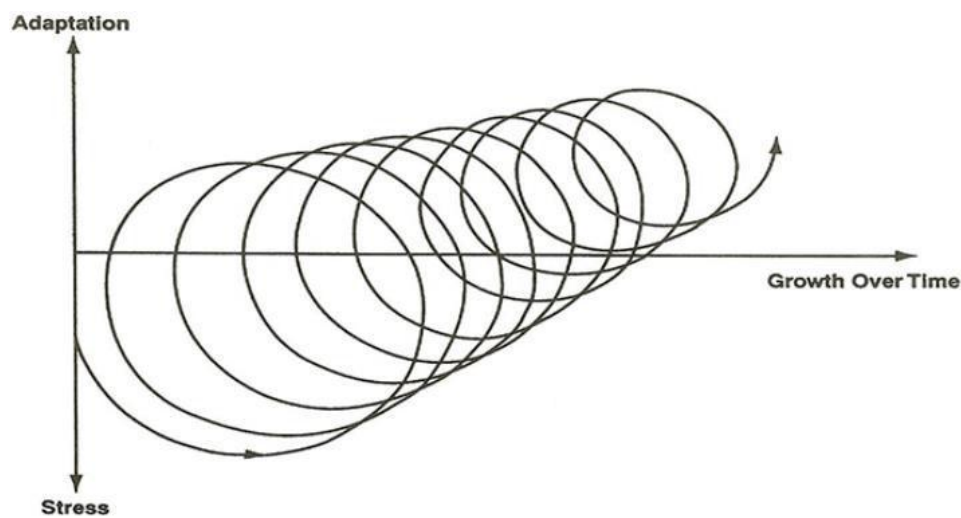


Figure 1-4: The Stress Adaptation Growth Cycle (Kim, 2001)

The figure above shows that the individual feels the first stress, which will be high because of the adaptation which is low adaptation. Then, over time, stress will decrease simultaneously with the increase of adaptation. This cycle repeats itself in a spiral pattern in which each turn represents a higher level of adaptation. This will lead in the final stage to growth.

Similar to the psychological focus of Kim’s model, Hofstede adds a macro-level view by treating aggregate cultural values in terms of measurable dimensions onto which a culture’s position can be plotted. Cultural Dimensions Theory was originally based on a large study about workplace values in different countries by Dutch management researcher Geert Hofstede. It is the theory that best explains how culture has an impact on values, behaviours, and social norms. As quoted by Kole (2024, p.1) “it offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of cultural values on individual and social behaviour, including in educational settings”.

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Hofstede identified six dimensions that make the distance between cultures, including: Individualism vs power distance; uncertainty avoidance; masculinity vs femininity; long-term vs short-term orientation; and indulgence vs restraint. However, since this study focuses primarily on belief and identity shift among international students and the theme that was raised among participants is individualism vs. collectivism, it is the only one that will be discussed. It explains how people move from a collectivist mindset to an individualist one in the host country which will result at the end to an identity shift. As Hofstede (2011, p.11) stated “in collectivist societies, the word I is avoided and they have stress on belonging. Unlike in individualistic societies, the word I is indispensable and they have the right of privacy”. This shift not only reflects an adaptation to the cultural norms of the host society but also contributes to a reconfiguration of the student’s identity. Exposure to individualistic values often prompts self-reflection, encourages autonomy, and reshapes the way individuals perceive themselves in relation to others. Thereby, reinforcing the intercultural transformation central to the study abroad experience.

1.3.1 Approaches to Identity

The social identity theory was developed in the early 1970s by Tajfel and his colleague Turner. They originated the theory from the conviction that group membership can help people to instil meaning in social situations. The mere act of categorising individuals into groups can be sufficient to make them think of themselves and others in terms of group membership instead of as separate individuals. Tajfel & Turner (1979) proposed that the groups people belonged to were important sources of pride and self-esteem. Its main focus is on inter-group conflict and relations. It aims to connect cognitive processes and behavioural motivation i.e.; the cognitive factors explain the way individuals create and define their place in society and how that affects their perceptions of others (stereotyping) as well as their own behaviour in groups (such as social influence). This happens through three central psychological processes: social categorisation, identification and social comparison. The process of categorisation involves assigning people into social categories based on attributes like: race, gender, nationality or religion. Thus, individuals understand the social environment and define the appropriate behaviours by referencing the group’s norms as they adopt the identity of the group they belong to: identification. After that, they begin comparing their group to others which is often biased leading to in-group favouritism. As a result, individuals tend to maintain a positive image of

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the groups to which they belong, which explains the phenomena of stereotyping and prejudices. The following figure summarises what has been mentioned above about social identity theory.

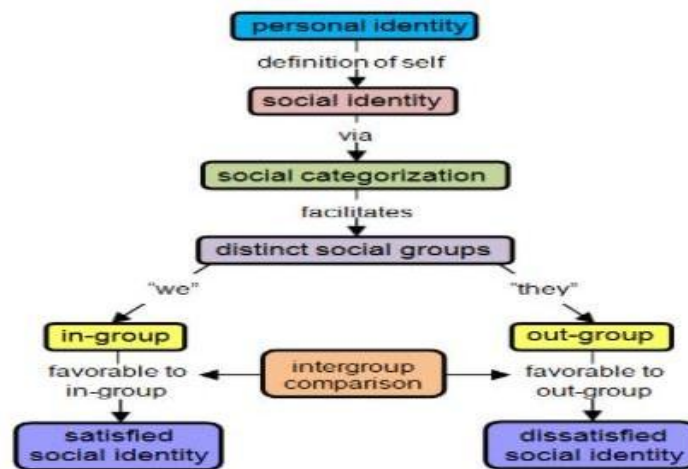


Figure 1-5: The Process of Social Identity Formation (Tajfel & Turner)

Tajfel & Turner theoretical framework is relevant to understanding the transformational experience of students who went overseas. It demonstrates the way students derive a sense of identity in a new social environment with its different cultural norms where they can reconstruct their identity. Then, when returning home, they may be disconnected from their original social context and start to perceive themselves differently within their home community.

Reflexivity refers to the constant revision of social activity in the light of new knowledge (Giddens, 1991). The construction of identities is based on reflection on past experiences, i.e., personal identities are not static but rather dynamic; they are constantly evolving and being reshaped through reflection and new knowledge. To elaborate more, individuals will critically examine their identities, beliefs and own practices, resulting in change based on new experiences. Before leaving their home country, students may strongly identify with their own home country and culture. However, through exposure to different cultural influences and perspectives, they begin to reflect, negotiate and revise their identities and beliefs. Then? redefine some aspects and adopt new ways of thinking. O'Brien, Penna and Hay (2014) critically examined Giddens's theories, their analysis delves into whether all human beings experience reflexivity in the same manner. Adams (2010, p.3) stated that reflexivity "has been central in reinvigorating debates over the relationship between structure and agency in social

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theories of identity... particularly in Giddens's work, remarkably adept as a cornerstone concept in meta-theorisation of the interrelationship of psychological and social dynamics". This idea has become significant in discussions about how much our lives are shaped by society (structure) versus our own decisions (agency). In social theories about identity, reflexivity explains the way people shape who they are not just because of social rules, but also because they reflect on their experiences and act based on that reflection. It shows how individuals and society are closely connected and influence each other.

In the same vein, Erickson's Identity Formation theory, founded in 1968, is psychological, in which he sees identity as dynamic and not static, generally influenced by life experiences. Besides, he views identity formation as a process that changes and progresses over time. As a case in point, studying abroad, which is considered nowadays as a life transition; thus, it is viewed as an identity- shaping stage. Erickson emphasises the social context in identity formation, in which individuals are immersed in new societies with different norms, traditions and perspectives. All of which will, in any respect, influence their identity reconstruction. In other words, it is shaped by cultural, historical and social factors. Erickson's work on identity formation corresponds effectively with Giddens's reflexivity because self-reflection is considered a catalyst for identity transformation. Erikson (1968), mentions that identity development is a psychosocial process in which individuals are in a constant development and evolution of identity across the lifespan. Kroger and Marcia (2022, p.3) stated "for Erikson, identity was a psychosocial construct", i.e. he believed that identity is not something people are born with, but something they form over time through interaction between the individual's psychological development and the social context they live in. Erikson's focus on the social dimension of identity aligns well with Giddens's notion of reflexivity, as both frameworks underscore the transformative power of self-reflection in response to new environments. In sum, the interplay of Giddens's reflexive project of the self and Erikson's psychosocial development offers a comprehensive understanding of how studying abroad can catalyse deep identity transformation through exposure to unfamiliar cultural systems and the reflective negotiation of self within them.

Unlike Erikson's progressive, linear path of development, hybridity implies a certain critical poststructuralist gaze, an effort to show that identity is not coherent. Rather, identity is built up in and through ambivalences, negotiation and cultural (in-betweenness). Bhabha (1994) introduces the idea of cultural hybridity, in which he changed the notion of viewing cultures as

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fixed and pure. Rather, he argues that identity and culture are constantly shaped within an ‘in-between’ space he calls the ‘Third Space’. This is a space where different cultures meet, confront one another and interact. In this space, a new, hybrid form of identity emerges. Although Bhabha’s theory comes from the field of postcolonial studies, its ideas, especially cultural hybridity, have been taken and used more widely in modern studies about identity, migration, and globalisation. To put it in the context of this study, international students from different backgrounds and cultures meet each other, live together and experience so many things together. Through this continuous interaction, they inevitably influence each other and adopt new ways of living and thinking. Over time, this will lead to the emergence of a new hybrid identity that incorporates elements and merits of both cultures.

Transnationalism, a term introduced by Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992) in migration studies, as exemplified in the following quote:

It is like many -ism- terms (e.g., multiculturalism) both a concept with which to analyse a specific (social) phenomenon and the phenomenon itself. Transnationalism as a concept point to the significance of a wide range of transnational phenomena, that is, social, economic, political, and cultural processes that extend beyond the boundaries of nation-states (as cited in Knörr, 2020. p. 6179).

Transnationalism is a concept that highlights how people, ideas, and activities can move and stay connected across different countries. It shows the way these things are no longer limited to only one country but they often cross borders. Migrants or international students cannot totally separate themselves or break with their home country; as Chaney (1979, p. 209, as cited in Knörr, 2020, p.6181) put it, they become “people with their feet in two (and often more) societies”. However, “one should bear in mind that not all people are transnationals” (Portes, 2003, as cited in Knörr, 2020, p.6181). When people are transnational, it means they belong to two different countries and cultures and have a sense of attachment to both of them. This may yield hybrid identities and lifestyles from both home and host countries. Vertovec (2010) believed that globalisation changes the way we form our identities because we live in a world where cultures mix, people migrate, and connections span across countries. Vertovec argues that identity is not just a personal matter. It is a powerful lens through which we can analyse the effects of globalisation and migration. When people move across borders, their identities evolve. Studying this evolution helps scholars understand broader patterns in migration, belonging, and cultural adaptation. It is through globalisation that transnationalism has become

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visible and pronounced in the contemporary world. There are advanced technologies of communication plus cheap travel and economies that are interconnected. Hence, migrants find it much easier to remain connected with their countries of origin even as they build lives for themselves in another country. Transnationalism has turned into a main lens of looking at migration. It assists learners from different fields -like sociology, anthropology, political science, and cultural studies- in seeing how migrants build identities, belong to many groups, and move through two or mixed lives.

Transnationalism reveals the complexities and contradictions of cultural identity in an era of mobility. It shows how the sense of belonging is no longer singular but shared, negotiated, and redefined across cultural spaces. For international students, this means navigating hybrid identities and sometimes conflicting values. While this dual attachment can enrich one's worldview and expand cultural competence, it can also provoke identity dilemmas or a feeling of being 'in-between'. Nonetheless, transnationalism offers a powerful lens for understanding how cultural identities are reshaped, not discarded in global, intercultural experiences such as studying abroad.

1.5 Case of Algerians abroad

The existing studies that shed light on the case of Algerians' experiences abroad are limited in number. They evolve from exploring identity development, adaptation, and motives for migration. A study conducted by El Ouali & Mohadjer in 2019 was an investigation of Sojourners' cultural identity in Britain, aiming at understanding how this cultural identity is reconstructed after direct contact with people from different cultures. They found that identity reconstruction happens at an ongoing, dynamic process, influenced by new intercultural communications that eventually foster sojourners' interpersonal, academic, and cultural competencies. Later, Guerriche (2020) conducted a study in the UK that also delved into the intercultural identity development through study abroad programmes of Algerian students. She focused on coping strategies and social interaction roles in dealing with adaptation and intercultural awareness. Her inquiry revealed that some students showed better adaptation and displayed an intercultural identity development that helped them to integrate into the new socio-cultural environment. This was due to personal/social communication, environmental factors, and individual predispositions. However, others were maladaptive, and that change entailed

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stronger attachment to the original cultural identity, refusal to adhere to new cultural values, and rejection of diversity. Similarly, Sadoudi (2021) explored Algerian doctoral students' transition to Britain in terms of physical displacement and role transition. It aimed at examining participants' expectations of life in Britain; the extent to which these relate to their lived experiences; and how these experiences affect their identity construction. She discovered that despite the challenges students encountered academically, personally, and socially, they still could find sources of support in their transitional experience, such as family, friends, and university staff. Additionally, Participants used some coping strategies that helped them adapt to the new environment, among which: time management, social media usage, joining the gym, and doing some sporting activities. Hence, their academic identity has developed, which also includes other facets of their identity, among which: their perception of self and other, openness, acceptance, flexibility, and most importantly, they became less prejudiced.

Complementary sociological research on Algerian students' migration to France was conducted by Belhocine (2022). The study aimed to understand the reasons behind Algerian students' decision to emigrate: migration logics and dynamics. The results revealed that in their home country, Algerian students feel confined both socially and economically. Accordingly, driven by hope, students view migration as a project that is achieved strategically through following the path of studying abroad. For these reasons, Algerian immigrants rarely intend to come back to their country despite the difficulties they face in the host country (France in this case).

Together, these aforementioned studies reveal the outcomes of studying abroad on Algerian students' beliefs, personalities, and cultural identity reconstruction. They provide a solid foundation for further exploration in this study. However, there are areas that could be improved regarding the post-study experience. To specify, the exploration of the long-term effects of those changes on the social and personal levels once students return to their home country Algeria. In addition to how their reconstructed identities influence their readjustment or reintegration within their native cultural and social community.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the primary concepts and theories that contributed to providing a comprehensive view on how identities can be reshaped by external influences in a study abroad setting. While students go abroad with the intention to accomplish certain goals,

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it turns out to be gaining other significant and worthy changes. The relevance of these frameworks lies in their ability to capture the influence of external factors including: language use, culture shock and ethnocentrism on students which will lead to internal transformations such as shifts in self-perception, values, and critical thinking. Other theories like: ethnocentrism vs ethnorelativism and acculturation model, also offered further lenses to analyse how Algerian students navigate or negotiate their identities across cultural boundaries.

Ultimately, this theoretical chapter not only informs the analytical approach but also provides a foundation for interpreting the narratives of Algerian returnees. The next chapter will build on this framework by detailing the methodology used to collect and analyse the data which bring these theories to life.

Chapter 2:

Research

Methodology and Data

Analysis

Chapter 2: Research Methodology and Data Analysis

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Part One: Methodological Framework

2.1 Introduction

The practical aspect of research is the methodological framework by which every researcher constructs their investigation. The research aim lies in uncovering the degree and nature of Algerian returnees' transformations, including their self-perceptions and cultural identities. The study uses a qualitative approach following an inductive reasoning. This second chapter begins by discussing the research methods, the study sample followed by a presentation of the ethical considerations that have been covered in this study. It, then, offers an analysis of data and provide a discussion of the main findings. Based on the analysis, recommendations for future research are proposed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points.

2.2 Research Methods and Design

This research is a purely exploratory qualitative case study that follows inductive reasoning, which helped in generating new insights explored with the gathered data. Thomas (2006) argued that the primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies. On the other hand, the case study allowed for providing a holistic view. It also gives an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomena in their real-life settings. In this regard, Yin (2018) mentioned: "a case study is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context." (p.15). In line with this, a qualitative approach was utilised involving interviews, which provided deep and rich insights into the lived experiences of Algerian students who studied abroad and then came back to their country. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), the adoption of a qualitative approach enabled researchers to uncover personal experiences, perceptions, and identity reconstruction by analysing narratives inductively, breaking them into themes and interpreting their meaning.

In terms of data collection tools, this study relied on semi-structured interviews due to their flexibility to gather data. They include a set of structured questions, along with the possibility to ask spontaneous follow-up questions during the interview to gain a deeper understanding or to explore emerging themes (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Recordings were used to ensure accuracy and transparency after spending approximately 40-60 minutes discussing relevant aspects with interviewees. The interview template was divided into 3

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sections (see Appendix G), the first one included demographic questions to understand the participant's background, the second one was about the experiences abroad, and the cultural exposure, i.e., the interviewee had to provide answers about their experience when he was still living there. The third section contained questions about their experiences when heading home, which was about their retrospective reflection after an academic experience overseas. This yielded 10 themes, with some having sub-themes. It is worth mentioning that the data gathered from the practical chapter guides the choice of main concepts in literature review chapter. This means that the inductive reasoning approach allowed researchers to filter theories of language, identity, and culture for this study.

1.2.4 Research Sample:

Given the nature of the sample population, the fact that it represents a group within society -international students who have experienced cultural transitions- this study explores their narratives to understand the impact of studying abroad on their cultural beliefs and identities. It followed a linear snowball sampling in which researchers recruited one participant as the starting point of the chain of referral. The snowballing process proceeds until enough participants are involved and data saturation is reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For the success of this process, researchers sought assistance from academic staff at Tlemcen University from different departments, who suggested different referrals.

Research participants underwent a selective process. The inclusion criterion involved the duration of their residence in the host country, which exceeded one year, due to the belief that identities shift because of a total cultural immersion in the host country after 12 months of living there (Oberg, 1960). The selected group for this study experienced studying abroad, and a total of 16 participants contributed to the completion of a semi-structured interview as a main data collection instrument until data saturation was achieved. The latter is defined by (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 61, as cited in Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs, & Jinks, 2018) as the point at which no further data is being obtained through which a sociologist can develop the properties of a category. The researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated as they start seeing similar instances repeatedly. they therefore extend their search for groups representing the greatest possible diversity of data to ensure that saturation is based on the widest possible range of data on the category.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

To ensure research is conducted under ethical practices, this study implements the use of a participant information sheet as well as a consent form, which were used to inform participants about the study and to explain different aspects of it (see Appendix A). At the first contact, informants were provided with both forms to familiarise themselves with the different aspects of the study, such as the study's purpose, procedures, and their participation; then their participation was completely voluntary. Once approved, informants were invited to the interview sessions (face-to-face and online interviews via Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet) during which they were asked different questions (see Appendices A, B, C, D, E, F). These sections involved questions about the interplay between language, culture, and identity while studying abroad and upon returning home. Participants' identities were anonymised, and their names were replaced with pseudonyms. The recorded data were encrypted and only accessible to the researchers in order to meet ethical research rules. A further point of interest is that the interpretation truly reflects the informants' narratives owing to the use of semi-structured interviews. Follow-up questions helped ensure that the interviewee's ideas were fully captured; illustrations highlighted from previous interviews clarified certain aspects; the recordings were likewise helpful in revealing deeper insights.

Part Two: Data Analysis and Interpretation

The process of data analysis involves the use of logical strategies to systematically examine and interpret the collected data. According to Little (2019), the process of data analysis transforms raw data into meaningful insights, enabling researchers to test hypotheses, validate theories, and draw accurate conclusions. This section will go through the in-depth data gathered from semi-structured interviews, analysing them qualitatively to address and answer the research questions to end up with adequate conclusions. A thematic analysis was used to identify the most recurrent themes within the data. In addition, a narrative analysis was adopted to focus on the lived experiences and to preserve the depth, personal meanings behind those themes. During the thematisation process, most recurrent patterns were identified and grouped into 20 themes, which were evaluated then some were merged to result in 9 themes with their sub-themes, among which: language role in negotiating identity, culture shocks, stereotypes, behaviour, perceptions, identity re-adjustment, and others. These themes were analysed in particular contexts by looking closely at the stories informants told and interpreting their personal experiences through the narrative analysis.

2.4 The Multifaceted Role of Language in Negotiating Identity

The role of language in shaping Algerian students' identities when living abroad has manifested in different ways within the collected data as a multifaceted theme. Participants who went to English, French, and Spanish-speaking countries reported that mastering the target language enabled them to engage with societal norms, overcome communication barriers, and avoid social detachment. Other students did not have target language proficiency due to insufficient cultural competence. Thus, those who did not master the target language due to cultural competence were frustrated while interacting with people of the host country in their daily lives. Additionally, after the adaptation to the host country's language and culture, data reflected reverse challenges related to participants' bilingual and bicultural competencies in their native community.

2.4.1 A Tool of Communication and to Exercise Power

In its primary function, some participants perceived language simply as a tool of communication to build their daily interactions. Therefore, using the target language helped them build connections easily with natives, ensure clarity, and communicate without making extra effort to confirm meaning. In contrast, the lack of knowledge of some local vocabulary and key expressions provided barriers to communication. Data further indicated participants' awareness of the varied roles language displayed in different situations, especially when using their native tongue was futile. Daizy, a returnee from Hungary, reflected the facility of inclusion within the host community even when having little linguistic competency. Conversely, the inability to perform linguistically in an appropriate way often led to isolation; she stated:

"...So, learning the Hungarian language enabled me to connect with others, even though my level was not good, but I could say some things, and I could build some friendships. So, communicating with them using their language made me feel, being friendly, being close to them. So, the language facilitates the way of living, because most of the time it's a barrier..."

Sometimes language was a tool to exercise power and show power dimensions. In this regard, data showed that speaking in English sometimes was used to gain respect and to avoid ill-treatment. James, a returnee from Spain, reported:

“...when you go to a European country and they know you're an Arab, you're going to be seen as a lower-class citizen. It's not conscious, even on their part, but once you speak English, it's a whole different discussion. They feel like they are the lower-class citizens....So when I spoke English, they sort of felt humbled, and they literally sometimes didn't want to discuss...”

In his narrative, James affirmed his awareness of the impact English has on people who do not speak it in Spain. He felt a sense of empowerment in English, hence, whenever he faced people who might bluster over him, he spoke English as a method of humbling them. This entailed the symbolic authority of English in foreign countries.

In contrast, Amara, another returnee from Spain, emphasised on the importance of mastering the language of the host country as a way of being recognised within the community while establishing her own identity. She said: *“...because how would you prove your existence as a Muslim there without knowing the language and communicating through it?”*. In this vein, the target language was used as a tool of expressing and positioning oneself socially as being Arab, Muslim to gain presence and acceptance within the host community.

2.4.2 Linguistic Complexity and Cultural Identity

When participants were asked the questions: How would you describe the role of language in your cultural identity after going abroad? Do you feel that using a different language influenced your personal or cultural identity? Most of them believed that language influenced cultural and personal ways of expression. They emphasised that it did not alter their core beliefs and identity, which are associated with their *Algerianness*. Language was seen as part of their linguistic identity, enabling them to express themselves in different ways more effectively and develop a broader view of the world. However, they felt that they maintained their original identities and cultural beliefs, especially when most of these beliefs were linked to religious ones. In this regard Sophia, previously studied in the UK, stated: *“...when you speak a new language, this is how you communicate with others so you can speak about your own culture in that new language, but I don't think it has changed my cultural identity, in fact it makes you more self-confident...”*

2.4.3 Language as a Foreignisation Marker

Language, particularly the tone and accent, was a marker of Algerian students' foreignness. Agatha, a returnee from Tunisia, narrated her experience of being provoked by natives once they realise from her way of speaking that she is an Algerian. However, some other natives would act properly. Thus, her way of speaking activated cultural stereotypes among Tunisians, shaping their perceptions of her and influencing their behaviour towards her. In this regard, she mentioned:

".... when they knew that there were words in Tunisia that the Algerians didn't like, they would say them in front of me to see if I'm going to blush.... They were childish provocations. But you have the two kinds; one kind that tries to provoke because they were childish, the others, who were very friendly and who love the Algerians and try to even change their habits, more than not, to be taken for a bad person..."

Additionally, when coming back to her hometown, her dialect was affected by the Tunisian one, which made her perceived by her surroundings as a foreigner again, she added:

"...Maybe coming back to Algeria, I was again considered as a foreigner because I was still influenced by the Tunisian one. So, some people would scorn me, and they may feel I was still being influenced by the Tunisian dialect, and asked me to switch to Algerian again. But then I don't think it has affected my identity..."

This shows that even when being in one's own community, language shapes belonging and can lead to alienation. Thus, her linguistic choices altered how others perceived her because they serve as social markers; her mixed dialect made her perceived as an outsider.

2.4.4 The Cognitive Effect of Language

The psychological role of language lies in influencing students' thoughts and internal dialogue. Participants explained this as a switch of their thoughts from their native language (Algerian dialect) to English or the languages of the host countries they lived in. They started thinking in the target language; even when speaking in their mother tongues, they would first formulate their thoughts in the foreign language before translating them into Algerian dialect. This, sometimes, resulted in using words unconsciously in English, Spanish or Tunisian in their

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speech, which made them seen by the people around them as “Gawri” or “Gawriya” (an Algerian colloquial labels for Westerners, Europeans or non-Muslims (signification de Gaouri / Gawri, 2025), which appeared from the collected data) and thus being privileged. Arslane, a returnee from the USA, experienced this state of being westernised or perceived as a westerner due to the dominant language he was using, he asserted:

“...If you speak English all the time, it's almost like you are the American version. If you speak the Arabic dialect most of the time, you are the Arabic or the Algerian version. Okay, you feel it or people feel it, because it takes you time to readapt to retune you...”

Arslane found himself still using English words when interacting with people from his community as he returned. He was marked, and in a way, his language switching was not acceptable, i.e. it created social tension, he said:

“...Sometimes it comes to your mind automatically. You just say certain expressions, like when I sneeze. I used to say “sorry”, and it took me a while to get rid of “sorry”. it was a little bit difficult, because there is this feeling of people looking at you as maybe showing off your experience abroad. So, they say hey, become Algerian again. You're in Algeria. so, it took me only two months to become who I used to be...”

Furthermore, thinking in another language makes people, in one way or another, adopting certain attitudes related to the culture linked to its country, as mentioned by Eliana, a returnee from the UK:

“...I would say that it has influenced how I think, because if I think with an Algerian dialect. It's not actually the same as how I think in English. So, in my house, I usually adopt that English mindset, or I usually think in English, but if I think in Algerian, it will be a lot different...”

Similarly, Camille, another participant, also added: *“... Once you come back, it stays there. It stays in your mind. And you think it in English, but you say it in Arabic...”*

These excerpts indicate how mastering a new language through real-life exposure can influence inner thoughts, leading to a shift in speakers' mindsets to the extent that their internal thoughts do not align with their linguistic self-expressions. In the light of what was said, a contrasting viewpoint was raised from some other participants who claimed that language did not influence their thinking, instead, it is just a bonus which helps them express themselves in alternative ways. For instance, Flora, previously studied in the UK, mentioned:

“...But in my case, I don't think that language will change my thoughts, if I express myself in whatever state, I will do it using all languages. For example, I will be angry in French, if I express myself in French, in Arabic, in whatever language, it doesn't mean that I won't get angry when I'm speaking English but I will when I'm speaking Arabic...”

Equally, Arines, who was a student in the UK, mentioned: *“...But for the comfort of the self, I can decide which language I'm going to use...”*. She emphasised the idea of choosing the language based on her personal preference for better expressing herself.

2.5 Culture Shock, Reverse Culture Shock and No Culture Shock

2.5.1 Culture Shock

It is another inevitable experience encountered when international students, as the name implies, cross the borders of the Algerian territory. They experience the shock towards some attitudes or behaviours of the inhabitants of the country of residence that are unfamiliar to their native culture. An example can be mentioned here by Arines:

“...At the first year I was trying to figure out many things, how should I talk to people outside if I'm addressed, how should I talk to my supervisor, to my teachers, the way I should address them, because they never say Mr. Or sir, or professor, they call their teachers by their names. The thing that we do not have here in Algeria. So that was the first thing to be shocked by...”

The first year of Arines was a time of constant observation and learning of how to figure out so many different things, even the simplest acts like addressing a teacher seemed different in which she found it uneasy and disrespectful to talk to her supervisor or lecturer without adding a title: professor, Mr or Dr, the thing that she was familiar with here in Algeria and could not deal with it when she went abroad. Arines could not get rid of Prof or Dr before mentioning her teacher's name because addressing professors with formal titles reflects esteem and acknowledgment of their status otherwise, it signals informality, although this was typical and usual in the host country.

For a better understanding of the concept of culture shock, other examples can be mentioned. Jonathan, for instance, was shocked once because he was invited but then found himself paying for his meal. This cultural practice does not exist in Algerian norms, i.e. if

someone is invited, the people who invited him have to pay the costs. This moment was not expected by Jonathan, which made him introduce his culture and pay for all of them, showing them Algerian generosity. Similarly, Eliana was invited too to her friends' house, but to her surprise, she found no food as they expected her to bring her food, even though she was the guest. This contrasted with Algerian hospitality norms, where people who invite have to prepare food for the guests and not the opposite.

2.5.2 Reverse Culture Shock

As the term suggests, reverse culture shock is the way by which people will feel strange, uncomfortable, or even upset in their home country after experiencing life abroad. It was noticed among the majority of participants when they were habituated to and adopted the new culture and way of living abroad but then were shocked from the customs when returning home, it was felt just as disorienting as the first moments there, the thing that was noticed amongst their families giving rise to misunderstanding and having struggles to locate themselves in the new environment especially with those who never had similar experiences as Eliana mentioned: *"...I came back from the UK, I had to face a reverse shock from my own culture to the point that I did not actually learn how to deal with arguments again and how to belong again to my culture and to my community..."*

Eliana's viewpoint on culture shock was illustrated later by her experience when she handed a gift to her cousin expecting her to open it at that moment and appreciate it, which is the gift-giving etiquette of British people, but it was not the case. This disappointment resulted in an emotional and psychological distress leading her to rethink her cultural values and compare the two cultures realising her home culture had become something she needed to readjust to after spending years overseas.

2.5.3 No Culture Shock

While most participants experienced culture or reverse culture shocks, others reported that they did not, due to prior knowledge they had about the host culture. Arslane, for instance, linked this to his exposure to western or international media i.e. he was acquainted and familiar with their culture and behaviours from American movies he used to watch, on the contrary side he loved the *"glittering shining civilisation they have"*, Anaïs as well confirmed that she did not have a culture shock because of her academic interest in American literature and civilisation. Last but not least, Nicolas explained that being part of the last generation who

studied in the French language with native French professors in Algeria, he did not experience any shock from France because he had a bicultural relationship between France and Algeria before even going to France.

2.5.4 From Ethnocentrism to Ethnorelativism: A Change in Cultural View

Before crossing the country's borders, research respondents reported believing that their own culture, customs, and lifestyles were the best ones. However, after experiencing studying abroad and immersing themselves in a new society and culture, they began to compare, think about differences, and draw conclusions about their own culture. Research informants: Anais, John, and James said that they started comparing from the moment they arrived at the airport. To better understand this shift, the adventures of our interviewees are illustrative indicators of the process of experiencing the differences, namely, moving from an ethnocentric perspective to an ethnorelative one. John neglected cultural differences, believing that his culture is the best, and Anais confessed that she was interacting only with people from her own country. Anaïs's behaviour represents the first stage: *denial*. The second stage, *defence*, is exemplified by Agatha, who viewed Tunisian customs as strange, inferior, and wrong. She mentioned an example of garbage where women had to take it out and not men, which is the contrast in Algeria. This shows Agatha's comparison of 'Us vs Them', preferring her cultural norms. The third stage of *minimisation* is reflected in the example of Camille when she came to a moment of realisation in a shop where a white, tall, gorgeous lady helped her find her lost ring, something that she did not expect because the lady seemed arrogant. That was a moment of realisation for Camille, who believed that "*deep down we (as humans) are all alike*". In the fourth stage of *acceptance*, participants reported that they learned to tolerate the differences without judgment. In this respect, nearly all participants expressed their belief that one has to "*think globally but act locally*," i.e., they built a broad, open-minded perspective on the differences. Fifth, *adaptation* to the new environment, in which students just gave up and adapted. Arslane, who was excessively hygienic, once he was in a car with his friend, and when he looked at the seats, he noticed that they were all covered with the dog's hair. He started complaining, but then chose to disregard the situation. The last stage is *integration*, which relates to the reconstruction of an identity, i.e., incorporating the good values from both cultures for a perfect identity version. Participants' journeys reflected the transformation from rigid ethnocentrism to an intercultural state of openness.

2.6 The Role of Stereotypes: From Misconception to Understanding

As previously mentioned, stereotypes are an inevitable component of cross-cultural interactions. People in the host country have wrong beliefs about international students and their countries of origin, which influence their behaviour. Flora and Arines had different experiences where the former could manage and correct the view of the other person, but the latter was not able to control the situation because the person was blinded by the stereotype and looked through such a narrow lens, as a case in point of this incident, Arines stated:

“...There was a woman walking her dog. She said, why are you scared of this dog? I said: I have a phobia, I'm Dog phobic, she said, no, no, I know your culture. I know where you're coming from. She judged me by this (pointing at her veil) because she believes that in Islam dogs are نجاسة (impurity). I told her It's not about impurity. It's about me. I was trying to explain to her but she didn't listen to me or tried to understand me...”

It was a moment when she was afraid of the dog, yet the woman focused only on the veil and, without hesitation, she started attacking and blaming her, linking Arinés's phobia to cultural and religious beliefs rather than recognising it as a personal experience. However, the reality was entirely different. Despite Arines's attempt to express herself, her words seemed to fall on deaf ears, since the woman did not show a willingness to listen or to understand her. This dog phobia incident highlights cultural misconceptions and shows how stereotypes not only shape but also restrict mutual understanding and intercultural empathy. This illustrates the way cultural beliefs can become so entrenched that people find it difficult to see alternative viewpoints. Therefore, it is not always possible to change people's cultural assumptions by only talking to them. Another exemplification of the concept is in Flora's story during Ramadan. She was fasting, but she had to work on her thesis; this had surprised her supervisor, who thought that during Ramadan Muslims cannot work, because they are at a low energy. Flora succeeded in changing that viewpoint by presenting counter-evidence and bringing arguments from a scientific perspective rather than a religious one.

Another case of stereotypes involved people's reactions to participants' national identity, ethnicity, or religion, as being Algerian, African, or Arab Muslim, which automatically reinforced stereotypes. They associated Algerians with Africans in a way that implied nationality determined intellect, and skin tone reflected social status. This often led to comparisons, especially when the individual had a bronzed or warm-toned complexion. In such

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cases, they would rank them lower and underestimate them, simply because they came from an underdeveloped country. This prompted inferiority as if one's passport or complexion dictated intelligence or social worth. This was mentioned by John who went for a training course to the UK, as he said: *"... I noticed that they had that look of inferiority in their eyes towards me simply because I have a warm toned skin ..."*.

Another case was Agatha's. She noticed that Tunisians, even though they are neighbours with Algerians, have some stereotypes about Algerians in which she said:

"...Tunisians have their own stereotypes about Algerians, and the first thing they think about when they realize that you are an Algerian, is they will think of the list of stereotypes that they have about you and start checking them. So, the first thing you are, if you are an Algerian woman, of course, you are very religious, deeply traditional or conservative, you're stubborn, resistant, you don't like people lying or telling different versions of the same story, and they change behaviour towards the Algerian on the one side..."

Agatha raised an important point about the stereotypes Tunisians held about Algerians. These stereotypes influenced how Tunisians behaved toward Algerians, showing that such preconceived ideas play a significant role in shaping interpersonal relationships and social behaviour.

2.7 Behaviour

Behaviour emerged as a dominant theme in this research; it was about the social practices students adopted, which were reinforced by cultural norms. Data revealed that participants' behaviours differed between "being *there* Vs being *here*". These shifts were driven by the vehicle of language through which they learnt how to act according to the host country's community practices. It was not an immediate process; they took some time to observe the cultural practices, comprehend them, and then act accordingly. When returning to Algeria, they had certain attitudes shaped by previous foreign culture, so they kept behaving accordingly, which was challenging, and sometimes they were perceived as being odd. Arslane stated: *"...you feel it or people feel it, because it takes you time to readapt, or tune yourself again with the new environment. It's almost like a radio, so you need to tune yourself again..."* Having to engage with their native communities again, returnees were adopting foreign attitudes which do not align with their community's practices. They began to behave

unconsciously in ways that confronted the previous environment they lived in. It was not until they faced misunderstandings or frustrations when interacting with people in different settings (home, public places, administrations) that they realised their attitudes and comportments were foreignized.

2.7.1 Adopting New Habits

It is worth mentioning that most participants acknowledged being influenced by the host culture and adopting certain habits that were not really foreign or new, but rather undervalued or neglected, as they claim, in their original cultural context. Research informants, namely Flora, Amara, Amelia and John, emphasized going to the library, spending hours studying there was a habit that they did not engage with previously. They realised it was the perfect spot for studies due to the host country's attention to detail that helped in creating a comfortable and appropriate atmosphere for students, Flora said:

"...I used to study at university, go back home and do my activities, tasks and write my dissertation everywhere, but there I got the habit to study at the library and keep home or the accommodation as a place to take rest, to forget about studies and to do something else..."

Other habits related to time management included punctuality and planning ahead, both reflecting a strong appreciation of the value of time. In Algeria, time perception is shaped by Islamic culture, traditional, and social practices. Like most Arabic-speaking countries, events revolve around task completion rather than exact hours; appointments are loosely given ("at the next market") (Bourdieu, 1963 as cited in Allon, 2007). In contrast, Western culture is usually classified as a clock-time culture (Levine, 1997, as cited in Allon 2007). Arslane said:

"...We have a polychronic culture, and they have a monochronic culture. They value time differently. We feel that time is infinite. They feel that time is finite. So, this feeling of time being finite also pushed me to prepare schedules. I was not used to the idea of scheduling my work..."

Realising the value of time drove participants to become more time-oriented and to start building new habitual behaviours. Arines also said: *"...I became more organised, more targeted and I set goals, resolutions..."* Arines described her internalisation of the host country's values in terms of self-development and having a more goal-oriented life

2.8 Sense of Belonging and Appreciation for the Homeland

After living a long period in a foreign country among people with different beliefs, customs, and lifestyles, many returnees deduced that they were considered as outsiders, never accepted as insiders, even though they spent more than one year there. Flora, a returnee who studied in the UK for 5 years and travelled to different countries before, recalled:

“...Once, I was exploring a church, I heard a voice behind me saying oh! refugees everywhere! I wasn't a refugee and I never intended to settle there but because that woman noticed that I was wearing modest clothes she thought I was a refugee, at that moment I got angry but I did nothing and it was at that moment that I realised that I belong to my country and not to that place...”

This moment of social exclusion and judgement, Flora experienced, resulted in a set of sensations such as discrimination, displacement, and separateness, in addition to a confirmation that she can never belong to the UK. At that moment, Flora was annoyed by the woman's comment because, as she mentioned, she had spent years traveling to different European countries, but it was her first time experiencing such an incident. She felt foreignised due to her modest clothing, which classified her within a category she did not identify with or did not belong to. This incident reinforced her sense of belonging to Algeria and not the UK. Similarly, Sophia, a returnee who studied abroad for 5 years in the UK, confessed:

“...When you're there, you're always an outsider. Whatever you do. Even if you live the best life, you are always a foreigner, you feel yourself not belonging to them. You always feel that you belong to your country. When you come here, you feel home, you feel like you entered your house...”

Sophia -and all participants- admitted that no matter how much someone tried to fit in and assimilate with them, they would always be considered as outsiders, sometimes not explicitly but implicitly, in which there was always that invisible thread that put them aside and set the boundary between them. However, this feeling of separateness vanished when one stepped off the plane and breathed in familiar air again. Thus, the experience of Sophia and all the participants conveyed an important message: no matter how much someone travels, their home country will always be the place where they never have to question their sense of belonging. Respondents also admitted that they used to complain about the usual, lived problems in Algeria, but their journey abroad made them become aware of the positive aspects of the country. They began to appreciate the sense of belonging in Algeria, and their perceptions

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of their own country have changed. They started to think differently about the shortcomings it had. Before crossing Algeria's borders, they used to criticise rather than defend, but when they stepped away and saw how other countries function, their way of thinking shifted. They perceived the country's problems as challenges that demand action. For instance, Spanish people did not abandon their country to chase better opportunities elsewhere, rather, they worked to improve it themselves. James believed that it was no longer about wishing for or escaping the home country but rather about becoming part of the change that would happen, as he revealed:

"...I never used to defend my country, but once I went there and came back, I was like, it has to be defended, because, who's going to do it if you're not going to do it? You complain about stuff, but you don't provide any solutions. We have to criticise so we can make it better. The Spanish did not leave for France or for America to work there. I think that if we actually believe in that, we can make things better, we would! I think for the first time, I realised the saying of Gandhi 'be the change you want to see', and I started to work towards it..."

Camille experienced a similar transformation; when she was abroad, she could observe the host country's limitations, the reason why her perspective had shifted about the idealised West; she declared:

"...I have more appreciation for my culture honestly, in fact, once coming back, I realised that our culture is not that bad. In fact, our culture is better. However, I do have some reserves and some disagreements with the way certain things are done.... Previously, I was just whining about it, but once you go and you see how much limitations exist there, in terms of either financial, or political things. Here, there is potential. I value the country more. I have more appreciation for the country..."

As James mentioned, Algerian youth used to complain about their country and could see only the negative side, but once they left and experienced life elsewhere, their eyes became wide open and they could see clearly the reality. Previously, they thought that only their country had struggles or problems, and the West was like a *paradise*. Nevertheless, Camille unexpectedly found limitations she had not imagined their existence before. As a case in point: financial difficulties, political constraints, and challenges or lacks that were not obvious from afar, then she realised that her home country was full of potential. This explained the shift that all participants confessed that they appreciated their homeland more than before, because no matter what one did abroad, they would always be considered as outsiders. They felt that their

love for their country had grown, and their sense of nationalism had increased, even beyond their expectations.

In contrast, informants felt a slight sense of belonging to the communities they were in, especially in academic settings. Eliana, a young university lecturer who spent 5 years studying in the UK, admitted:

“...When it comes to the feeling of belonging, I would say that to some extent, I felt that I would never belong to the UK community. you can never, ever belong to the UK community, because of the set of values that you need to have, but in the world of academia, I mean university, I felt a level of belonging...”

The experience of Eliana reflects a different kind of belonging, in which she mentioned that the UK was never truly home, but within the world of academia, things were different. She found herself at ease in that place, and being a student or a thinker reduced the level of displacement, as they were all alike in terms of their status. In addition to their different backgrounds, the university represented a culturally diverse, inclusive space for them where they were comfortable, especially when they had a mutual academic goal: seeking knowledge. Thus, there was no problem of nationality; on the contrary diversity was not only expected but also accepted.

2.9 Isolation and Self-reflection: Questioning and Reconstructing the Self

Isolation refers to the state of being separated from one's own family or environment. Self-reflection often involves questioning one's identity, values, and life choices. When combined, individuals reconsider or reconstruct their sense of self. Students who studied abroad, after noticing the social and cultural differences, started self-reflection and found themselves caught in a spiral of identity crisis resulting from isolation, confronting and negotiating diverse cultural values. As a result of these new cultural influences, they began to reconstruct their self-awareness. Anaïs, an Algerian student who spent 5 years in the UK, described this internal conflict by saying:

“...The consequence of the isolation and the experience as a whole was that I started questioning who I was, everything about me, so I experienced identity shock, then a culture

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shock. I had to go through some kind of self-questioning stuff, and that included religion, studying, and the purpose of my life, I can call it an existential crisis...”

She further added:

“ ...Before my journey and before isolation, I was a totally dysregulated person, a person who has residues of all the people that met from years, so I needed to reflect and go back to my childhood and traumas, relationships, toxicity, and without the isolation, I wouldn't think of myself as someone who was reborn again because of the shift from the before and the after, and it's like it's a continuous journey. But I'm incredibly thankful to that shift, it's due to isolation, because isolation leads to reflection...”

What Anaïs experienced not only reflects a shift but a rebirth. what began as a simple scholarship to fulfil her goal turned into a confrontation with the self in which she found herself asking questions like: who am I? and why are we here on this earth? At first, her experience was unsettling, as she found herself in a new country with new people, speaking all the time with a language different from her mother tongue. This provoked an identity shock followed by a culture shock, as she mentioned. Next, she revisited all her relationships and childhood traumas. At this point, she made a decision not to live as a victim or adopt a victim mindset, but to reconstruct herself from the beginning. The isolation and being far from distractions forced her to reflect on herself, something she would never have lived or reached in Algeria. Anaïs noticed that her identity had shifted remarkably, and she became much prouder because she found herself and understood everything related to her identity. This transformation was due to isolation, believing that in isolation human beings meet themselves more precisely and concisely find their true selves.

2.10 Re-thinking Perceptions

Re-thinking perceptions involves reassessing one's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of the world. It is the process of critically analysing one's existing worldviews in response to new lived experiences. The lived experience overseas was fruitful for all participants, particularly as it has broadened their perceptions of themselves and others. On one side, they became more aware of who they were and what they wanted. On the other side, they became tolerant to the differences expressed by others even when coming back home. James said: of

“...I think I reaffirmed my belief system. When I went to Spain, I knew exactly what I wanted from life. Before I wanted to go overseas, I wanted to see what it's like, so some people might find it good, but when I came back, I think I reaffirmed them. I was like, this is exactly how I'm going to do it. So, I started working towards it...”

In this instance, James described his self-awareness based on his lived experience abroad. He had a clearer vision of his life goals as an Algerian, Muslim individual after his meaningful connection with the external world.

2.10.1 Openness

It is the willingness to accept or appreciate diversity in thoughts, beliefs, and cultures without judgment. It enables one to embrace change and adapt to new environments. During their time abroad, participants were exposed to diverse cultures, beliefs, and ethnicities. As a result, their perceptions of others changed. This change triggered the acceptance of people's diversities in every aspect of life. Therefore, coming back to Algeria they become more open to different perspectives. Arines stated: *“...So I can say that it makes me open minded, in a way, I can work flexibly with men better than women. So, I feel that, because I travelled, I can deal with everybody. Many things have changed in terms of the way I look at things...”*

Similarly, Sophia's perception of others had broadened as she accepted differences, as long as it did not affect both sides. She said: *“...I'm open to different cultures, different beliefs. I was judging a lot, but because everyone has their own backgrounds, I don't judge. I just accept and I'm more tolerant with people. Yes, I have my own opinion, and you have your own opinion, so I just accept it...”*

Similar to Arines and Sophia, Eliana also mentioned a crucial point about openness. She noted that living in a society, referring to her community, with fixed cultural expectations means that nearly all individuals are expected to have the same mindset and perceive things in the same way. This led to not accepting diversity, both within the same society and across different cultures. She asserted:

“...I always speak about the aspect of openness and being very tolerant... we need to learn how to tolerate the differences. And that's actually the very big problem among Algerians, which is not learning how to accept the differences and how to tolerate them. We have to embrace the differences so that can be a strong point to alter the other rather than a weakness...”

These excerpts better illustrate participants' openness, as they became less judgmental and more tolerant of the differences displayed by people of their own culture. They also became receptive to new experiences or perspectives.

2.11 Individualism vs. Collectivism: Negotiating Personal and Social Identities

This theme explores two cultural ways of living: one is individualism, which entails independence in doing one's own things. The other is collectivism, which involves interdependence and placing group's needs over personal ones. Algeria has always been a collectivist country, where people should always prioritise the interests of the group and make decisions based on their communities. According to Chikhi (2017), the collective spirit is strong in Algeria. Unlike Europe or Western countries in general, where individualism is more prevalent and people bear their own responsibilities. Students, upon living abroad, noticed this difference between the two communities' ideologies; some of them even adopted the host country's individualist ideology and implemented it into their identities for their benefit. Arinés reflected on her experience and highlighted this contrast when she stated:

"...When I was in the UK, I was independent, I could take my decisions by myself, traveling alone to other countries without convincing my family, I was bearing my own burden and minding my own business but directly after returning home if I want to do something or to go somewhere I had to care about the opinion of my husband, my parents and the big family..."

She continued: *"...here lies the difference to the point that I recommended my friend not to come back home..."*. This is referring to the mentality of being oriented and directed by other people's opinions and conforming to their expectations. It can be said that Arinés appreciated the independence she had in the UK. She had experienced a life in which her decisions were made independently, such as booking a flight, changing her plans without giving justification. She was simply living by herself and for herself, but once she came back home, she faced a different reality in which every major or minor decision became a collective matter. It was not only about asking for permissions, seeking approvals, or giving justifications. It was more serious than that, it was about the obligation to care about what others might think or say, as she explained, she started negotiating instead of accepting things as they were. The recommendation she gave to her friend was not because she hated her country; rather, she was

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against that controlling mentality that limits personal choices. For Arines, the hardest part of coming back home was not readaptation to the home country but knowing that a different way of living and of seeing things existed, but she had to leave it behind. Additionally, Arslane, who is considered an identity shifter, confirmed that too by saying:

“...As far as collectivism and individualism are concerned, I found myself individualist, specifically that I was single. It was like one year living by myself, so I felt that when I came back, I was more individualistic than collectivist... I started to respect the privacy of others, not getting my nose into their lives, I started also defending the privacy of others. We come from a collectivist culture where sometimes we even wrongly use the religion to justify our trespassing of the limits...”

When Arslane had an independent life abroad, away from his native environment's orientations, he found himself comfortable with that privacy, as there was a space for him only to think and to make decisions. Therefore, he deduced that privacy is not selfishness but a right. Upon coming back home, he adopted this mindset in his life. He did not interfere in people's private matters, because he witnessed another way of living abroad. Hence, the things that seemed natural before -interfering with people's lives- became intrusive and unjustified. Arslane, then, was criticised by his own cultural community; people had a different view of him being foreignised, as he mentioned: *“...If I defend someone's choices, people will point at you being 'Americanised', whereas I found that even in religion, we're supposed to respect the privacy of people...”*.

Anaïs also supported the idea of individualism and added:

“...When you go to live there, you find yourself at your own peace, no one would approach you, so when I was there, I had that peace of mind. But when I came back home, I found that I needed to tend to my father's needs to my siblings needs to my neighbour's needs, and you feel their influences Because when you withdraw from something and then you go back to it, you feel the influences that you didn't see before. So, when I came back, I hated it, because I needed to care about trivial things that should be other people's stuff...”

Anaïs did not realise how much she had changed until she returned home. Previously, she was holding a heavy burden, but then, she experienced a life where she could move freely from social obligations. However, coming back was like stepping into a world she no longer fit into. She found herself tending to her family's needs, something that she did not notice until

she experienced living abroad alone. All the previous excerpts of participants demonstrated their observations of the shifts to new perspectives on privacy after experiencing a new way of life, with new people. They favoured individualism even though it was challenging in a collective society.

2.12 Identity Readjustment

This theme tackles the process of re-evaluating oneself after intercultural exposure. It involves participants' negotiations between their original cultural identities and the new values they encountered overseas. After confronting so many ideologies in the host country, Algerian returnees began to negotiate their identities and rethink them. Some of them reported that their identities remained intact, unwavering, and were not affected by the new life, rules, and behaviours. In contrast, the majority were affected, highlighting that this is human nature; they affect and get affected. Some others relatively made a self-constructed identity leading to a hybrid identity formation which contained both local and foreign qualities; Eliana for instance, illustrated this by saying: “...*I learned how to find a balance, it's about finding the gaps in my own culture and then trying to fill them with another value that I learned from another culture, which can still be tolerated, doesn't hurt anyone and it's not against my religion...*”

Arslane, also had the same standpoint when he stated:

“...To take from this culture and this culture to build your own personal coding. I took from the American culture what I felt could help me situate myself in this world. It's not because you want to be this person. It's a culture. This is an inheritance that comes to you, but the fact that it's dynamic, you are also supposed to choose from what fits you more, depending on the situation you are in. So 'from being to becoming'...”

He viewed identity as a dynamic system within which people can selectively take values, practices, or behaviours that best align with their personal growth as well as ethical navigation in a globalised world. From both extracts, Eliana and Arslane deduced that identity is not static, it can be reshaped and reconstructed, noting that they have added new perspectives without changing their core identity. It was not about rejection of one's background but refinement. It is all about finding the balance between the two cultures, which are not seen as opposing but as complementary, each offering something valuable. Arslane confirmed that he did not take from another culture to become someone else, but he took what helped him navigate the world in a

way that felt right and did not harm anybody else, or which was against the religion as described by Eliana.

2.12.1 Shifting Cultural Beliefs and Religious Consideration

While trying to adjust to the cultural norms abroad, participants repeatedly highlighted the centrality of religion. They emphasised the fact that changing identity or cultural beliefs cannot be reached as long as religious convictions remain intact. Thus, they all claimed that one can never belong to a European community unless they change their religious beliefs, which was non-negotiable for them. Eliana said, “*...If you want to live in another country, you need to find that balance. So, it's all about balance. It's not about forgetting your beliefs, but rather, it's about finding the balance when it comes to the experiences...*”

Building on Eliana's narration, which was similar to other participants, data showed that their adoption of the host country's cultural elements was selective and guided by religious considerations. Accordingly, when coming back home, they kept their Algerian identity with some cultural nuances from the host country. Therefore, they expressed a sense of pride in their own culture and, more specifically, religion (Islam), yet they still had a willingness to embrace other cultural diversities.

2.13 Discussion of The Main Findings

A. In what ways does studying abroad shape/reshape students' relationship with language as a tool of identity, cultural negotiation, and thought?

The theme, which discussed the role of language, revealed interesting insights that align with various theories provided by scholars in the subfields of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. Firstly, participants recognised the functional role of language as it facilitated their daily interactions and helped in building connections with people in the host country. This relates to Gardner's Socio-educational Model of Language Acquisition (1985) that emphasises two types of motivation learners often need to learn a new language, one is instrumental; it involves learning a language for practical utility. The other motivation is integrative; it involves learning the language to be integrated within its culture and community. Secondly, besides being a tool of communication, language indicates a symbolic power which connects with Blommaert's approach in his work “*The Sociolinguistics of Globalisation*” (2010). Some participants perceived English, in particular, as being more prestigious or “legitimate” than others. They were marked as globally competent or modern individuals, i.e., it influenced how they were received socially. In addition to that, participants used language for self-

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representation as Muslim Arab people within foreign settings, in order to be socially present and accepted. This aligns with Norton's work on language and identity (2000), which describes learners' "investment" in the target language to negotiate their identities as well as power relations within social structures.

To continue with the role of language in regards to shaping cultural beliefs, participants acknowledged that their perspectives and self-expressions were broadened due to speaking different languages. However, it never altered their core cultural and religious beliefs. Sapir Whorf highlighted this in his Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis (1956), where he emphasised the idea that different languages lead to differences in perceptions. Conversely, participants' reflections suggested that while language affected their expressions and ways of perceiving the world, it did not seem to completely shift those deeply seated cultural values they carry with them.

Furthermore, speakers can choose what language to use based on self-comfort and function depending on interlocutors, context, and purpose, as was reflected in Grosjean's Complementary Principle (2010). The principal highlights bilinguals' selectiveness of the languages they use in different domains and for distinct functions. Some participants raised an important perspective of not gaining cultural efficiency when learning a language without living in the target environment.

Language also serves as a social identifier, as it was described by participants when they were in both host and home countries. In the host country, speech patterns and language variations influenced the way students were perceived and treated. Their mixed linguistic words and pronunciations marked them as outsiders. In their home country, similarly, their hybrid linguistic identity triggered their reintegration to their community. Participants were perceived as foreigners for adopting words from the target language even when their core cultural and national identities remained intact. This aligns with Geeraerts' *Cognitive Sociolinguistics* approach (2006).

Lastly, language is tightly tied to cognition. Participants acknowledged the influence of different languages on their inner thoughts to varying degrees. This notion of shifting cognition depending on language use can be driven by Lev Vygotsky's (1962) Sociocultural Theory, where he views language as a cognitive tool of thought affecting individuals' reasoning and problem solving. He identifies three stages of language use: social speech (external communication), private speech (self-directed speech for thinking), and inner speech (internalised thoughts). In contrast, the other opposite perspective of informants challenged the

idea of language shaping thoughts, asserting that language is merely a tool of expression. This was highlighted in Pinker's Mentalese Theory (1994), who believed that thoughts are independent from languages; they are rather represented in the Mentalese, which serves as the medium of reasoning and problem solving shared among humans regardless of their spoken languages.

B. How do cultural beliefs shift during studying abroad experiences?

Research findings suggest that participants were divided into three categories: those who experienced a culture shock abroad, those who did not, and those who experienced a reverse culture shock in their country of origin. Bennett's (1986) Model of Intercultural Sensitivity which says that individuals generally experience ethnocentrism, specifically the first stage: denial, in which people when they are first exposed to a new environment, they start viewing their own culture as the standard and the superior one. In addition to Oberg's (1960) Cultural Shock Theory in which, in the previous instance of Arines, she first linked formal titles with politeness but then going abroad she was shocked by the omission of Dr or Mr noticing that they prioritise equality and they minimise social distance, her shock started to diminish and her view shifted in which what she initially saw as lack of respect turned into a different way of expressing academic relationships. Second, the example mentioned by Eliana is a good instance of reverse culture shock of Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), more precisely the W-Curve Model of Cultural Adaptation, which is the extension of Oberg's (1960) Culture Shock. The theory explains how individuals feel comfort when returning home but then they struggle when it comes to the re-adaptation to their environment, living disconnection, this is best described in the saying of Eliana: "*...I didn't actually learn how to belong again to my culture and to my community...*" (see figure 1.1 p.19) which summarises what has been discussed.

The experience of each participant entails that although they spoke positively about the Western environment, their assumptions have changed compared to what they believed in before going there. This can be related to a stage of Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986) in which each individual experienced ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism differently starting from denial to reaching integration with the other culture with the exception of one participant who experienced a reversal stage in which he had a positive experience there, and then he adopted the view that other cultures are superior to their own culture. The participants' experiences are summarised in Bennet's scale (see Figure 1.3, p.14). Correspondingly, participants have shown their assimilation to the host country's behavioural norms, which occurred gradually after observing and comprehending the

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communities' practices while being exposed to it not only during their sojourner but also after returning home. However, once returning home, some foreign behaviours were not associated with participants' native cultural standards. They had to make efforts to readapt. This relates to Young Yun Kim's Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory (2001), in which participants adapted cultural nuances through actively engaging in the host country, resulting in behavioural transitions. In the long run, they had to conform again to their native community where they were perceived differently due to some of their non-native behaviours. Thus, they sought social acceptance within their in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Accordingly, participants assumed a feeling of tension experienced upon coming back when trying to adjust their newly shaped personal identity to the expected social identity. Furthermore, participants' experiences reflect a cultural shift from collectivism to individualism. Thus, the best theory that can be mentioned here is Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (2001) in which according to Hofstede cultures can be categorised as either individualistic like the UK or collectivistic like Algeria, the participants being there in a foreign country experienced autonomy i.e. they made independent decisions, they minded their own life and developed a sense of self-reliance without the interference of others, when returning home -which is a collectivist country- they noticed the difference because they experienced individualism so it was a return to societal pressure and interconnectedness.

In contrast, returnees revealed that they were both detached and attached to the host country and to their homeland. They maintained emotional, social, and cultural ties to both countries. To explain more, the sense of belonging and appreciation for the homeland can be deeply tied to the theory of Transnationalism of Vertovec (2001) where international students or migrants, in general, maintain a strong emotional connection to their homeland even when adapting to a new country. However, this can result in a feeling of displacement rather than belonging. Berry's Acculturation Model (1997), as well, can be mentioned here because it describes how migrants navigate between host culture adaptation and maintaining ties to their home culture. The separation phase of Berry's Acculturation Model (1997) is another concept that can be associated with these examples, since they were in a situation where they felt disconnected from the host community or culture and did not belong to it. On the parallel side, they retained their original culture and got attached to it, this is best understood in Berry's conceptual diagram (see figure 1.2, p.12).

Participants' reflections on the aspects of self-definition and openness to diversity establish a link between psychological and sociocultural theories. First, the overseas environment encouraged students' exploration of themselves. It also guided their future ambitions. This vibrates with Erik Erikson's Identity Development Theory (1968), which sheds light on the complexities of self-definition navigated by adolescents in different social contexts. Second, students' exposure to diverse worldviews promoted openness to diverse cultural perspectives, which is related to Bennett's work, particularly his Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1993) that describes how individuals move from judging others to accepting and respecting cultural differences.

C. What factors contribute to identity transition?

The findings revealed that participants reconstructed two types of identity: cultural and personal. As a case in point, Eliana's identity reconstruction can be associated with the social identity theory of Tajfel & Turner (1979), in which, before studying abroad, her in-group norms were connected to her home culture. However, after living and adapting to the UK's norms, she started adjusting her culture, and her identity shifted. This experience produced a struggle in her environment after returning home. Giddens' concept of Reflexivity (1991) corresponds to the example she mentioned of not accepting anything as it is, in which she was refusing anything that does not align with her acquired cultural norms, for instance, administrative dealings, i.e., she started critically evaluating her home culture. The third sub-theme of no culture-shock includes examples that can be related to the Culture Shock Theory of Oberg (1960), where the crisis phase is skipped due to their prior knowledge of the host culture. Nicola's case explains the concept of biculturalism or bicultural identity (Algerian and French) of Bhabha (1994) that he had, as he acknowledged, meaning that bicultural individuals do not experience culture shock, unlike those who have a singular cultural background.

The experience of Anaïs can be viewed from the identity formation perspective of Erikson (1968), which says that isolation can provoke an identity crisis (Erikson, 1968), leading to a confrontation with the authentic true self, giving rise to self-awareness and personal growth. This was best expressed in Anaïs's example (see theme 7). Participants' negotiations of certain aspects of their identity were driven by stereotypes. This aligns with cultural essentialism of Holliday (2010) which is putting all individuals of a certain culture under one umbrella, and categorising them as a group of one culture sharing the same traits, the best examples that can be mentioned here are the woman's assumption that all Muslims dislike dogs due to religious beliefs, the Tunisians view of Algerian women as very religious and the view of Europeans, in

general, to people with warm-toned complexion as coming from underdeveloped countries. However, some stereotypes can be erased by communication, as Flora did with her supervisor; this confirms the Contact Theory of Allport (1954), which says that stereotypes and prejudices can be reduced by meaningful interaction.

The plurality of our participants ended up with a hybrid identity. Their identities included both values and behaviours from both cultures, simply because they saw that some aspects needed to be changed by different tolerable ones. This is explained in Bhabha's (1994) Bicultural Identity and the concept of cultural hybridity, which says that individuals, after experiencing living abroad or confronting two cultures. They do not entirely reject or neglect their native culture, nor do they assimilate into the new one, instead, they combine features from both cultures to create a new version of identity.

2.14 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

While this research provides knowledge contributing to the understanding of the impact of studying abroad for a long term on the individual's identity and behaviours, it has certain limitations, among them, all participants had studied in Western countries except one participant who studied in an Arab country. It means that the data gathered along with the results of such a case cannot fully represent experiences in the Levant countries or cultures. Additionally, all participants had an experience of more than one year, so this research focused more on the long-term sojourn and not short-term experiences. Taking into consideration the aforementioned limitations, future research can deepen the understanding of identity reconstruction and cultural beliefs transitions in a globalised interconnected world. It is important to highlight that Code Switching is a crucial aspect that can be investigated in this field for future research.

2.15 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the second chapter represented the practical part of investigating the impact of studying abroad on Algerian returnees' identities and cultural beliefs in Tlemcen. The study followed an inductive reasoning and adopted one research tool complemented by a qualitative method to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. It utilised semi-structured interviews to collect data. The gathered data were analysed integrating both a thematic analysis, to uncover meaningful patterns, and a narrative analysis to dive deeply into personal experiences. Accordingly, the designed research methodology tackled clearly the

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research questions and sought answers for them. Overall, the results provide valuable insights into the shifts in identity, cultural beliefs, the factors and the role of language in shaping meanings behind such cultural, psychological and social experience.

General Conclusion

In the age of globalisation, scholarships are imposing themselves on the world of academia. Hence, to cope with this, Algerian Ministry of Higher Education adopted exchange programs in universities to encourage students pursuing their studies abroad and fulfilling their academic goals. Consequently, sojourners entail not only academic achievements but also identity shifts. Indeed, studying abroad and experiencing life in a culturally distinct country play an important role in readjusting identities.

This dissertation contributes to the research literature, providing new and original knowledge about the shifts that occur in individuals' identities and cultural beliefs after studying abroad, besides the factors that play a significant role in making the transition. This study focused on Algerian sojourners' experiences in intercultural diverse countries by using their narratives to investigate their identity shifts upon returning to their home country. It was divided into two chapters. In the first one, key theoretical foundations alongside a review of relevant literature on language role, cultural identity, intercultural experiences, and the dynamics of identity change were critically analysed. Additionally, the Algerian case of students abroad was described to provide the reader with a clearer understanding of the context from which the participants originate. The second chapter, on the other hand, investigated the cultural values and identity shifts of returnees through both thematic and narrative analysis of their accounts. It highlights perspectives from both participants' experiences abroad and reflections upon their return.

Data were drawn from different informants who are considered returnees. The collected data from semi-structured interviews revealed that participants, after studying abroad, would inevitably undergo similar stages of identity transition or readjustment, but with some nuances. For instance, most informants experienced culture shock in the host country, then a reverse culture shock when returning home. Another common phenomenon among returnees was the experience of a similar process of adaptation, going through phases of stress, adjustment, and eventual growth as they navigated the host culture. This trajectory was evident across the majority of participants' narratives, suggesting a shared experience of intercultural development. The shift occurred due to some factors, including isolation, which led to

General conclusion

reflection, in addition to the constant interaction with multicultural individuals; these factors yield identity transition and answer the third research question. Moreover, while some participants retained the identity they had developed abroad, even after returning to Algeria. Others gradually reverted to a more locally grounded sense of self, though often integrating certain enduring elements from the host culture. This variation highlights the differing degrees to which identity shifts persist post-return.

Finally, several caveats need to be addressed regarding the present study. First and foremost, conducting interviews with different people means dealing with different personalities and mentalities. Some of the respondents were stressed; they did not want to reveal their experiences, even when mentioning that their participation is anonymous. Others merely responded with 'yes' without being sure of their answers. Another challenge encountered during the investigation was the interdisciplinary nature of this study, as it required theories and perspectives from different fields such as intercultural studies, social psychology, linguistics, and education. This complexity demanded careful navigation to ensure coherence, avoid conceptual overlaps, and maintain methodological consistency through the research process.

In fact, this research paves the way for various future investigations into how study abroad experiences shape or reshape personal and cultural identity across diverse contexts, taking into consideration students who went to study in Middle Eastern countries, in order to analyse whether shifts occur in a culturally similar environment. Future studies may consider adopting a comparative approach to explore how gender influences identity transformation during study abroad experiences. Investigating the role of gender may reveal nuanced dynamics in how individuals negotiate cultural differences and reconstruct their identities along with cultural values. Additionally, further research could focus on assessing the impact of the exchange programs on Algerian students' identity development, intercultural competence, and reintegration process upon return. This would offer valuable insights into the specific influence of structured academic mobility programs. Lastly, it is recommended that future investigations conduct a comparative analysis of student experiences across different host countries, such as the United Kingdom and France since informants revealed that the experiences are different in such countries. Examining how distinct cultural, linguistic, and educational contexts shape identity transformation would contribute to a more contextualised understanding of the study abroad experience.

General conclusion

To conclude, the findings offer strong evidence that throughout their time abroad, these returnees experience significant changes in their identities regardless of their background. These findings not only advance the existing body of research on this topic but also foster interdisciplinary collaboration among domains such as education, intercultural studies, migration studies, sociology, psychology, and linguistics. Thus, more attention can be given to individuals who studied abroad to develop policies to support returnees as a source of knowledge and social change in their communities, enabling them to use their experiences effectively.

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Appendices:

Appendix A: Participant's information sheet in English

Democratic and popular republic of Algeria
Minister of higher education and scientific research
University of Abou Bakr Belkaid
Faculty of languages and literature
Department of English



Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title:

Crossing borders, shifting beliefs: how studying abroad reshapes cultural beliefs and identities?

Invitation:

You are being invited to take part in a research project conducted by CHIKHI Manel and GHORZI Marwa from the University of Abu Bakr Belkaid. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.'

What is the project's purpose?

This research project aims to investigate how studying abroad reshapes cultural beliefs and identities by providing an all-encompassing inspection about cultural shifts during and after crossing borders, demonstrating the factors that led to identity transformation and whether cultural and identity shifts persist after returning home.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited to participate because as a returnee and as experimenter of studying abroad in France, as University Assistant Professor in the department of English at Tlemcen University in Algeria and as a previous researcher who conducted a similar study entitled "language attitudes and identity among Algerian immigrants in France" you will have knowledge about research data and help us with your experience in this field.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire which we estimate will take you 15 minutes. You may also wish to agree to a follow-up interview to find out more about your approach.

What do I have to do?

Please answer the questions in the questionnaire and give us your time to do the interview. There are no other commitments or lifestyle restrictions associated with participating.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. The procedures involved do not pose any physical, psychological, or legal risks to participants.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate personal benefits for those people participating in the project, your involvement will contribute to valuable research on how studying abroad has an impact on the individual's attitudes and beliefs aiming at providing a comprehensive view of this issue.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All information collected during this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity will not be disclosed, and any data you provide will be anonymized before analysis. While your participation will remain confidential, the data collected may be used in future research, academic articles, reports, and publications. However, no personally identifiable information will be included in any publicly available material.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The findings may be published in journals, conferences, reports, etc. but your identity will remain anonymous unless you provide explicit consent.

Will I be recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

Contact for further information:

If you have any questions or require further information about this study, please feel free to contact:

Researcher's Name: CHIKHI Manel/ GHORZI Marwa

Phone Number:

Email: chikhimanel29@gmail.com/ marwaghorzi13@gmail.com

Appendix B: Consent form in English



Faculty of Languages and Literature

Department of English

22, Rue Abi Ayad Abdelkrim, Fg Pasteur, B.P 119, Tlemcen, Algeria

13000

University of Abou Bakr Belkaid

CONSENT FORM

Study Title: crossing borders, shifting beliefs: how studying abroad reshapes cultural beliefs and identities?

Name of researcher: CHIKHI Manel & GHORZI Marwa

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated (to be inserted) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I understand that data collected during this study, *could* be requested and looked at by regulatory authorities. I give my permission for any authority, with a legal right of access, to view data which might identify me. Any promises of confidentiality provided by the researcher will be respected.

4. I understand that the results of this study may be published and / or presented at meetings or academic conferences. I give my permission for my anonymous data, which does not identify me, to be disseminated in this way.

5. I consent for the observation to be audio recorded. The recording will be transcribed and analysed for the purposes of the research.

Appendices

6. I consent to verbatim quotes being used in publications; I will not be named but I understand that there is a risk that I could be identified.

7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of Person taking Consent:

Date:

Signature:

Appendix C: Participant's information sheet in Arabic



الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية

وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

جامعة أبو بكر بلقايد

كلية اللغات والآداب

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

نشرة معلومات للمشارك

عنوان مشروع البحث:

عبور الحدود، تغيير المعتقدات: كيف تعيد الدراسة في الخارج تشكيل المعتقدات والهويات الثقافية.

دعوة:

أنتم مدعوون للمشاركة في مشروع بحثي يجريه شيخي منال و غزوي مروة من جامعة أبو بكر بلقايد. قبل اتخاذ قراركم، من المهم أن تفهموا سبب إجراء البحث وما الذي تتضمنه المشاركة فيه. يُرجى أخذ الوقت الكافي لقراءة المعلومات التالية بعناية ومناقشتها مع الآخرين إذا رغبتُم في ذلك. لا تترددوا في طرح أي أسئلة إذا كان هناك شيء غير واضح أو إذا كنتم بحاجة إلى مزيد من المعلومات. خذوا وقتكم لاتخاذ القرار المناسب لكم. شكرًا لكم على قراءة هذا.

ما هو هدف المشروع؟

يهدف هذا المشروع البحثي إلى دراسة كيفية تأثير الدراسة في الخارج على إعادة تشكيل المعتقدات والهويات الثقافية من خلال فحص شامل للتحويلات الثقافية أثناء وبعد عبور الحدود، مع تسليط الضوء على العوامل التي تؤدي إلى تحول الهوية وما إذا كانت هذه التحويلات تستمر بعد العودة إلى الوطن.

لماذا تم اختياري؟

لقد تمت دعوتكم للمشاركة لأنكم شخص عاد من تجربة الدراسة في الخارج، مما يعني أنكم تمتلكون معرفة بالموضوع محل البحث. يمكن لتجربتكم أن تساعدنا في استكشاف كيفية تأثير التعرض لثقافات وبيئات جديدة على المعتقدات والهويات الشخصية. وبالتالي، فإن رحلتكم الفريدة تمثل جزءًا أساسيًا من السرد الذي نحاول استكشافه. من خلال المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، ستساهمون في بحث مهم حول كيفية تأثير الدراسة في الخارج على التحويلات الشخصية والفهم العالمي. قصتكم ذات أهمية، وستساعد في تسليط الضوء على التحديات والتغيرات والنمو الذي يختبره الأفراد عند عبور الحدود ومواجهة طرق حياة جديدة، وكذلك التأثير طويل الأمد عند العودة إلى الوطن.

هل يجب علي المشاركة؟

الأمر متروك لكم تمامًا لتقرر ما إذا كنتم ترغبون في المشاركة أم لا. إذا قررتم المشاركة، ستحصلون على نسخة من هذه النشرة للاحتفاظ بها، وسيُطلب منكم توقيع نموذج موافقة. يمكنكم الانسحاب في أي وقت دون الحاجة إلى إبداء سبب، ودون أن يؤثر ذلك على أي حقوق أو امتيازات قد تكون لكم.

ماذا سيحدث إذا قررت المشاركة؟

إذا قررتم المشاركة، فسيُطلب منكم الموافقة على إجراء مقابلة متابعة لمعرفة المزيد حول وجهة نظركم وتجربتكم.

Appendices

ما الذي يتوجب عليّ فعله؟

نطلب منكم تخصيص بعض الوقت لإجراء المقابلة التي ستُعقد مرة واحدة، ولكن يرجى ملاحظة أننا قد نحتاج إلى إجراء مقابلة ثانية إذا دعت الحاجة. لا توجد أي التزامات أخرى أو قيود على نمط حياتكم مرتبطة بالمشاركة في البحث.

ما هي العيوب والمخاطر المحتملة للمشاركة؟

لا يُتوقع أن تسبب المشاركة في البحث أي إزعاج أو إشكالات لكم. فالإجراءات المتبعة لا تشكل أي مخاطر جسدية أو نفسية أو قانونية للمشاركين.

ما هي الفوائد المحتملة للمشاركة؟

على الرغم من أنه لا توجد فوائد شخصية مباشرة للمشاركين، إلا أن مشاركتكم ستساهم في تقديم رؤية قيمة حول تأثير الدراسة في الخارج على مواقف ومعتقدات الأفراد، مما يهدف إلى تقديم فهم شامل لهذه القضية.

هل ستبقى مشاركتي في هذا المشروع سرية؟

سيتم الحفاظ على سرية جميع المعلومات التي يتم جمعها خلال هذه الدراسة بشكل صارم. لن يتم الكشف عن هويتكم، وسيتم إخفاء أي بيانات تقدمها قبل تحليلها. وعلى الرغم من أن مشاركتكم ستظل سرية، إلا أنه قد يتم استخدام البيانات التي تم جمعها في أبحاث مستقبلية أو مقالات أكاديمية أو تقارير أو منشورات. ومع ذلك، لن يتم تضمين أي معلومات شخصية تحدد هويتكم في أي مادة متاحة للجمهور.

ما الذي سيحدث لنتائج المشروع البحثي؟

قد يتم نشر النتائج في مجلات أكاديمية أو مؤتمرات أو تقارير، ولكن هويتكم ستظل مجهولة ما لم تعط موافقة صريحة على الكشف عنها.

هل سيتم تسجيل المقابلة وكيف سيتم استخدام التسجيلات؟

سيتم استخدام التسجيلات الصوتية لأنشطتكم أثناء البحث فقط للتحليل وللتوضيح في العروض التقديمية بالمؤتمرات والمحاضرات الأكاديمية. لن يتم استخدامها لأي غرض آخر دون إذنكم الخطي، ولن يُسمح لأي شخص خارج فريق البحث بالوصول إلى التسجيلات الأصلية.

للتواصل لمزيد من المعلومات:

إذا كانت لديك أي أسئلة أو تحتاج إلى مزيد من المعلومات حول هذه الدراسة، لا تتردد في الاتصال بنا:

اسم الباحث: شيخي منال / غرزي مروة

رقم الهاتف: []

البريد الإلكتروني: chikhimanel29@gmail.com / marwaghorzi13@gmail.com

اسم المشرف: د. فرقاش سارة منال

البريد الإلكتروني: sarramenal.ferkache@univ-tlemcen.dz

Appendix D: Consent form in Arabic



كلية اللغات والآداب

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

، شارع أبي عياد عبد الكريم، فج باستور، ب.ب 119، تلمسان، الجزائر 22

13000

جامعة أبو بكر بلقايد

نموذج الموافقة

عنوان الدراسة: عبور الحدود، تغير المعتقدات: كيف تعيد الدراسة في الخارج تشكيل المعتقدات والهويات الثقافية؟

اسم الباحث: غزوي مروة / شيخي منال

1. أؤكد أنني قرأت وفهمت ورقة المعلومات الخاصة بهذه الدراسة ولقد أتيت لي الفرصة للنظر في المعلومات، وطرح الأسئلة، وتلقي إجابات مرضية عليها.

2. أفهم أن مشاركتي طوعية، وأنه يمكنني الانسحاب في أي وقت دون الحاجة إلى إبداء أي سبب.

3. أفهم أن البيانات التي تم جمعها أثناء هذه الدراسة قد تطلبها السلطات التنظيمية للاطلاع عليها. أعطي الإذن لأي سلطة لديها الحق القانوني في الوصول إلى البيانات التي قد تحدد هويتي، وسيتم احترام أي وعود بالسرية قدمها الباحث.

4. أفهم أن نتائج هذه الدراسة قد يتم نشرها و/أو تقديمها في اجتماعات أو مؤتمرات أكاديمية. أعطي الإذن باستخدام بياناتي المجهولة، التي لا تحدد هويتي، في هذا السياق.

5. أوافق على تسجيل الملاحظة صوتيًا، على أن يتم تفريغ التسجيل وتحليله لأغراض البحث.

6. أوافق على استخدام الاقتباسات الحرفية في المنشورات؛ لن يتم ذكر اسمي، لكنني أفهم أن هناك خطرًا قد يؤدي إلى التعرف علي.

7. أوافق على المشاركة في الدراسة المذكورة أعلاه.

Appendices

التاريخ:

اسم المشارك:

التوقيع:

التاريخ:

اسم الشخص الذي حصل على الموافقة:

التوقيع:

Appendix E: Participants information sheet in French



République Démocratique et Populaire d'Algérie

Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique
Université Abou Bakr Belkaid
Faculté des Langues et Littératures
Département d'Anglais

Fiche d'information pour les participants

Titre du projet de recherche :

Franchir les frontières, changer les croyances : comment les études à l'étranger transforment-elles les croyances culturelles et les identités ?

Invitation :

Vous êtes invité(e) à participer à un projet de recherche mené par CHIKHI Manel et GHORZI Marwa de l'Université Abou Bakr Belkaid. Avant de prendre une décision, il est important de comprendre pourquoi cette recherche est réalisée et en quoi consiste votre participation. Veuillez lire attentivement les informations suivantes et en discuter avec d'autres si vous le souhaitez. N'hésitez pas à nous poser des questions si quelque chose n'est pas clair ou si vous souhaitez obtenir plus d'informations. Prenez le temps nécessaire pour décider si vous souhaitez participer ou non. Merci d'avoir lu ceci.

Quel est l'objectif du projet ?

Ce projet de recherche vise à étudier comment les études à l'étranger modifient les croyances culturelles et les identités, en offrant une analyse complète des changements culturels avant et après le franchissement des frontières. Il met en lumière les facteurs ayant conduit à une transformation identitaire et examine si ces changements culturels et identitaires persistent après le retour dans le pays d'origine.

Pourquoi ai-je été choisi(e) ?

Vous avez été invité(e) à participer car, en tant que personne ayant étudié à l'étranger au Royaume-Uni, Professeur Assistant à l'Université de Tlemcen et superviseur de notre travail, vous possédez des connaissances précieuses pour notre recherche. Nous comprenons que votre rôle de superviseur et de participant pourrait soulever des questions éthiques, mais nous vous assurons que notre objectif est d'obtenir une perspective experte et non de détourner vos contributions. Votre double rôle représente une source d'enrichissement pour notre étude. Vos réponses seront traitées avec la même confidentialité et rigueur que celles de tout autre participant.

Dois-je participer ?

La décision de participer vous appartient entièrement. Si vous décidez de participer, cette fiche d'information vous sera remise et un formulaire de consentement vous sera demandé. Vous pouvez vous retirer à tout moment sans avoir à fournir de justification, et ce, sans aucune conséquence sur les droits ou avantages auxquels vous avez droit.

Appendices

Que se passera-t-il si je participe ?

Si vous choisissez de participer, vous serez invité(e) à un entretien de suivi afin de mieux comprendre votre expérience.

Que dois-je faire ?

Nous sollicitons votre temps pour un entretien unique. Cependant, il est possible qu'un second entretien soit nécessaire. Aucune autre exigence ou restriction de style de vie n'est associée à votre participation.

Quels sont les éventuels inconvénients ou risques liés à la participation ?

La participation à cette recherche ne devrait entraîner aucun inconvénient ou inconfort. Les procédures impliquées ne présentent aucun risque physique, psychologique ou légal pour les participants.

Quels sont les avantages éventuels de la participation ?

Bien qu'il n'y ait aucun avantage personnel immédiat pour les participants, votre contribution enrichira la recherche sur l'impact des études à l'étranger sur les attitudes et croyances des individus, offrant une vue globale de cette problématique.

Ma participation à ce projet sera-t-elle confidentielle ?

Toutes les informations collectées seront strictement confidentielles. Votre identité ne sera pas divulguée et les données seront anonymisées avant leur analyse. Les données collectées pourront être utilisées dans des recherches futures, des articles académiques, des rapports ou des publications, mais aucune information personnelle identifiable ne sera incluse dans les documents accessibles au public.

Que deviendront les résultats du projet de recherche ?

Les résultats pourront être publiés dans des revues, présentés lors de conférences, ou inclus dans des rapports, etc., mais votre identité restera anonyme, sauf consentement explicite de votre part.

Serai-je enregistré(e) et comment les enregistrements seront-ils utilisés ?

Les enregistrements audio réalisés dans le cadre de cette recherche seront utilisés uniquement à des fins d'analyse et pour illustrer des présentations lors de conférences ou des cours. Ils ne seront utilisés à aucune autre fin sans votre autorisation écrite, et personne en dehors du projet n'aura accès aux enregistrements originaux.

Contact pour plus d'informations :

Si vous avez des questions ou si vous souhaitez obtenir plus d'informations sur cette étude, n'hésitez pas à contacter :

Nom du chercheur : GHORZI Marwa/ CHIKHI Manel

Numéro de téléphone : [REDACTED]

Email : marwaghorzi13@gmail.com/ chikhimanel29@gmail.com

Nom de l'encadreur : Dr. Sarra Menal Ferkache

Email : sarramenal.ferkache@univ-tlemcen.dz

Appendix F: Consent form in French



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Université Abou Bakr Belkaid

FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT

Titre de l'étude : Franchir les frontières, changer les croyances : comment les études à l'étranger transforment-elles les croyances culturelles et les identités ?

Noms des chercheurs : CHIKHI Manel & GHORZI Marwa

1. Je confirme avoir lu et compris la fiche d'information concernant l'étude mentionnée ci-dessus. J'ai eu l'opportunité d'examiner les informations, de poser des questions et d'obtenir des réponses satisfaisantes. ☐

2. Je comprends que ma participation est volontaire et que je suis libre de me retirer à tout moment, sans avoir à fournir de justification. ☐

3. Je comprends que les données collectées au cours de cette étude pourraient être demandées et examinées par des autorités réglementaires. J'autorise toute autorité ayant un droit légal d'accès à consulter des données qui pourraient m'identifier. Les promesses de confidentialité faites par les chercheurs seront respectées ☐

4. Je comprends que les résultats de cette étude pourront être publiés et/ou présentés lors de réunions ou de conférences académiques. J'autorise la diffusion de mes données anonymisées, qui ne permettent pas de m'identifier, dans ce cadre. ☐

5. Je consens à ce que l'observation soit enregistrée audio. L'enregistrement sera transcrit et analysé dans le cadre de la recherche. ☐

Appendices

6. Je consens à ce que des citations textuelles soient utilisées dans des publications ; mon nom ne sera |
pas mentionné, mais je comprends qu'il existe un risque que je puisse être identifié(e).

7. J'accepte de participer à l'étude mentionnée ci-dessus.

Nom du Participant:

Date:

Signature:

Nom de la personne recueillant le consentement :

Date:

Signature:

Appendix G: Interview template

The interview

1-Demographic Questions

- Where are you from?
- What country did you study abroad in, and for how long?

2- Experiences Abroad and Cultural Exposure

- Can you describe a moment that made you rethink your cultural beliefs while studying abroad? why
- Were there any cultural challenges or shocks that you faced? If so, how did you handle them?
- Did you adopt any new customs or habits from the host country?
- How would you describe the role of language in your cultural identity after going abroad?
- Do you feel that using a different language influenced your personal or cultural identity? If so, in what ways?

3- Post-Study Abroad Reflection

- How has studying abroad changed your perception of your own culture?
- Do you feel that your cultural identity has shifted? If so, in what ways?
- Have your beliefs about your own country changed compared to before you went?
- do you think the experience made you more open to different perspectives? If yes, how?
- Did you find yourself thinking differently when speaking the host country's language compared to your native language? how
- Do you now feel more connected to a global identity rather than just your home culture? why?
- Have you continued using the host country's language after returning home? Why or why not?
- How did your relatives react?

أدرج نظام التعليم العالي الجزائري برامج المنح والتبادل من أجل توفير فرص تعليمية ذات جودة عالية للطلبة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم نظرة شاملة حول تأثير تجارب الدراسة طويلة المدى في الخارج على هويات الطلبة وتصرفاتهم من خلال فحص العوامل التي تؤثر وتؤدي إلى إعادة التكيف وإعادة بناء الهوية. أنجزت الدراسة بجامعة تلمسان عبر مختلف أقسامها وخارجها. تم استخدام مقابلات شبه مهيكلية لاستنطاق روايات وتجارب المشاركين. وقد تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام التحليل الموضوعي والمقاربة الاستقرائية. وأظهرت النتائج أن الطلبة العائدين تأثروا، بطرق متعددة، بالثقافات المختلفة التي عاشوا ضمنها، مما أدى إلى حدوث تحول في هوياتهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدراسة في الخارج، برامج المنح، برامج التبادل، تجارب طويلة المدى، إعادة بناء الهوية، التأثير الثقافي، تحول الهوية.

Summary

The Algerian higher educational system has integrated scholarships and exchange programs to provide students with opportunities for higher quality learning. This study aims at providing a comprehensive overview regarding the impact of long-term study abroad experiences on students' identities and attitudes, examining factors that influence and lead to the readjustment and reconstruction of the identity. It was conducted in Tlemcen university within its different departments and beyond. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit participant's narratives and experiences. The data were analysed using thematic analysis and inductive approach. Results showed that returnees were through different means influenced by the different cultures they were living within and their identities shifted.

Keywords: Study abroad, scholarships, exchange programs, long-term experiences, Identity reconstruction, Cultural influence, Identity shift.

Résumé

Le système de l'enseignement supérieur algérien a intégré des programmes de bourses et d'échanges afin d'offrir aux étudiants des opportunités d'apprentissage de meilleure qualité. Cette étude vise à fournir un aperçu global de l'impact des expériences d'études à l'étranger de longue durée sur les identités et les attitudes des étudiants, en examinant les facteurs qui influencent et mènent au réajustement et à la reconstruction de l'identité. Des entretiens semi-directifs ont été utilisés pour recueillir les récits et expériences des participants. Les données

ont été analysées selon une approche thématique et inductive. Les résultats ont montré que les étudiants de retour au pays ont été influencés, de diverses manières, par les cultures dans lesquelles ils ont évolué, ce qui a entraîné un changement dans leurs identités.

Mots clés : Etudes à l'étranger, Bourses, Programmes d'échanges, Expériences de longue durée, Reconstruction de l'identité, Influence culturel, Transformation de l'identité.