Short-Term International Experiences in Language Teacher Education: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis

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Short-Term International Experiences in Language Teacher Education: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis

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Abstract: Short-term international experiential learning opportunities can foster language teachers' multidimensional development. Even though such experiences are considered beneficial for language teachers' development, educational reviews have scarcely concentrated on a comprehensive synthesis of the impact of such experiences on language teachers. This meta-synthesis of qualitative research analyzed the role of international experiential learning in the multidimensional development of pre- and in-service language teachers. Besides presenting a number of research patterns in the literature, this synthesis of 25 qualitative studies reported main outcomes of short-term international experiences for language teachers. These outcomes were synthesized under three main headings: (1) professional, (2) linguistic, and (3) intercultural. Based on this analysis, further research and practice directions regarding international language teacher education emerged. These emerging research agendas concentrated on the critical role of peer circles, host communities, program types and structures, preparation and post-program components, and guidance and supervision.

Introduction

Teachers are expected to grasp global interconnectivity, global nature of societal dynamics, respect diversity, and embrace social justice (Phillion & Malewski, 2011; Sleeter, 2008). Researchers in the field of teacher education conceptualized this broad set of skills with different terms such as *intercultural/global competence* (Sercu, 2006; Zhao, 2010), *global teacherhood* (Karaman & Tochon, 2007), and *culturally responsive teaching* (Gay, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). With all these conceptualizations, teachers are encouraged to embrace diversity in their classrooms and foster democratic learning environments. However, in order to help teachers to develop intercultural/global skills, theory would not suffice. There must also be experiential learning opportunities within diverse contexts (Zhao, 2010), as different contexts are known to bring on different kinds of teacher learning (Putnam & Borko, 2000). This has resulted in a number of teacher education programs around the world integrating temporary study abroad or cultural immersion opportunities into their program components (Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). Such programs may provide their participants with international student teaching experiences and thereby could be an optimal way to foster intercultural/global and teaching skills. These programs, particularly, can help language teachers explore complex issues around language learning and teaching and develop more confidence toward interculturality, language use, and professional development (Isabelli-García, Bown, Plews, & Dewey, 2018). International programs may, overall, enhance knowledge base and practical repertoire of both pre- and in-service language teachers in

terms of language skills (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006), sociocultural tenets (Johnson, 2009), interculturality (Dervin, 2016; Quezada & Alfaro, 2007) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) in addition to their multidimensional personal growth (Willard-Holt, 2001).

Although international experiences (an umbrella term that is used in this study to cover all types of international experiential learning) are thought to be beneficial for a broad range of areas in language teacher education, (Wernicke, 2010), a comprehensive synthesis of the extant literature is needed to analyze complex and multidimensional role of short-term international experiences on developmental processes of pre- and in-service language teachers. Besides this main motivation, this study aims to present main research patterns in the literature by scrutinizing short-term international experiences in language teacher education.

To date, to our best knowledge, there is no meta-synthesis or analysis conducted that combines these two outcomes. Although Smolcic and Katunich (2017) investigated the impact of cultural immersion field experiences on teachers' intercultural development, they did not have a specific focus on language teachers' experiences. This study aims to fill this identified gap. A meta-synthesis of qualitative research on the topic seeks out answers for the following research questions to gain insight into the complex and multidimensional role of short-term international experiences on language teachers:

- What did the studies focus on?
- What were the profiles of the participants who engaged in international experiences?
- What type of programs were designed and how long did they last?
- What type of qualitative data sources were utilized?
- What were the major gains and challenges for the participants?
- What are the potential issues for further research and practice directions?

Methodology

This meta-synthesis focuses only on qualitative findings due to the individual and multidimensional emphasis of recent study abroad research and theorization (Coleman, 2013; Isabelli-Garcia et al., 2018; Kinginger, 2015). Additionally, quantification strategies through quantitative methodologies often do not suffice in depicting the value and nature of short-term international experiences (Bodycott & Crew, 2000). Although postmodernists critique knowledge generation and believe a synthesis would sacrifice particularities in qualitative research (Sandelowski, Docherty, & Emden, 1997), the synthesis of existing qualitative research is a worthwhile effort because an isolationist approach may risk the benefits of accumulated qualitative findings (Walsh & Downe, 2005), especially in the field of study abroad which has predominantly included qualitative research in recent years (Coleman, 2013). This synthesis effort aims to reveal new interpretations with "the least damage" (Sandelowski et al., 1997, p. 370) to particularities. In addition, this study designs an environment where individual qualitative studies are synthesized into a more abstract level (Zimmer, 2006) in which one can find more than a single qualitative study can provide (Hammersley, 2001).

For the identification of the studies to be synthesized, a number of systematic steps were followed (see Figure 1 for a summary of the selection process). First, in order to locate and select relevant studies for the study aims, we generated a list of possible keywords. The targeted experiences in this study were non-degree seeking, short-term international experiences through which pre- or in-service language teachers were supposed to spend a temporary period in another country at a different institution or school. Therefore, such

experiences could be in different forms such as short-term study, teaching practicum, and field and immersion experiences.
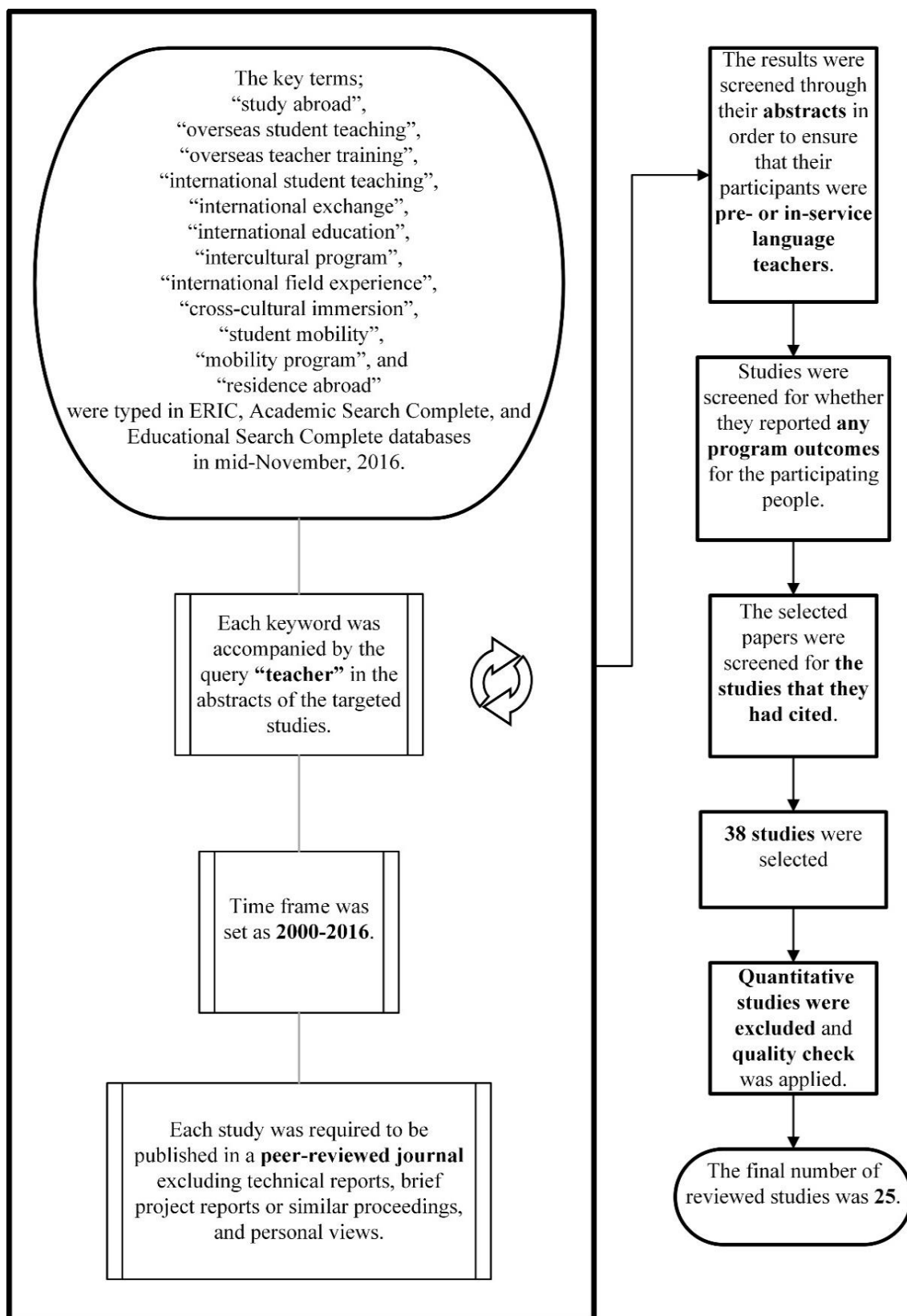
The key terms;
"study abroad",
"overseas student teaching",
"overseas teacher training",
"international student teaching",
"international exchange",
"international education",
"intercultural program",
"international field experience",
"cross-cultural immersion",
"student mobility",
"mobility program", and
"residence abroad"
were typed in ERIC, Academic Search Complete, and Educational Search Complete databases
in mid-November, 2016.

Each keyword was accompanied by the query **"teacher"** in the abstracts of the targeted studies.

Time frame was set as **2000-2016**.

Each study was required to be published in a **peer-reviewed journal** excluding technical reports, brief project reports or similar proceedings, and personal views.

The results were screened through their **abstracts** in order to ensure that their participants were **pre- or in-service language teachers**.

Studies were screened for whether they reported **any program outcomes** for the participating people.

The selected papers were screened for **the studies that they had cited**.

38 studies were selected

Quantitative studies were excluded and **quality check** was applied.

The final number of reviewed studies was **25**.

Figure 1. The selection process for the final identification of the reviewed studies

Second, we searched for each listed query within whole texts on different educational databases. Following each search, the results were screened in order to ensure that their participants were pre- or in-service language teachers. Here, language teacher means teachers of second or foreign languages. From this point on, both pre- and in-service language teachers are referred to as 'language teachers'. If a need emerges to differentiate them, the descriptive labels (i.e. pre- or in-) are added. Studies were also screened for whether they reported any program outcomes for the participating people. After completing the search with all the queries, the selected papers were screened for the studies that they had cited. Following all these searches and screenings, 38 studies were selected to be synthesized.

Since qualitative meta-synthesis of qualitative research aims to synthesize qualitative findings, the current study focused only on pure qualitative studies or studies that privileged qualitative perspectives in mixed method designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Even though consensus is difficult to reach in terms of appraisal criteria due to the different positions taken among qualitative researchers (Barbour, 2001), this synthesis also excluded the studies which were too short to be a qualitative report or lacked indications for rigorous and transparent data collection and analysis procedures (Walsh & Downe, 2006). Following both the quality check and exclusion of quantitative studies, 25 studies were selected for the final analysis, for which an analytic table (see Appendix A) was created in order to reach patterns in terms of extant research. The following categories were outlined in the analytic table: 'study focus', 'type of the program', 'duration of the international experiences', 'profile of the language teachers', and 'type of the qualitative data sources'. Major findings of the studies were also included as data in order to synthesize the role and impact of international experiences. The main outcomes were coded through a template analysis (Au, 2007; King, 2004). Two templates were employed: *initial template*, main outcomes were classified under four headings that were offered by Teichler (2004): academic (ACA), cultural (CUL), linguistic (LIN), professional (PRO), and extracurricular (EXTRA) gains. As different codes emerged, we added new sub-codes and formed a *final template* through which we re-checked all the previous coded segments.

In the final template, since any growth can be interrelated with professional development (Hamza, 2010), the code PRO was replaced with pedagogical (PED) and the code EXTRA was replaced with personal (PER) to code any type of personal growth that was not exclusively linguistic, intercultural, and pedagogical. Furthermore, the code ACA was deleted from the main code list because these four main codes with their sub-codes in the final template sufficiently synthesized all the outcomes reported: CUL, LIN, PED, and PER (see Appendix B for the whole code list with frequencies of coded segments).

As the studies reported also a number of challenges that their participants experienced, the final template was applied to the challenges as well. In this way, the final themes were presented with a synthesis of both positive and negative aspects. The whole coding, analysis, and synthesis procedures were conducted collaboratively on a qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA. At the end, the whole process yielded an *analytic and (critical) story* of the literature under a number of broad themes.

Findings

Findings of this meta-synthesis are reported under two main headings: 'research patterns' and 'a synthesis of qualitative findings'. Under the former heading, the readers can find research patterns presented under different sub-headings. In the latter heading, the readers can find a synthesis of major findings that emerged from the reviewed studies.

Following these two main headings, a critical discussion of the literature is offered with a number of recommendations for further research and practice.

International Experiences and Language Teachers: Research Patterns
Foci of the Studies

In essence, most studies aimed to investigate outcomes of international programs for participating teachers by either picking a particular type of research focus or concentrating on overall program outcomes. 19 of the studies concentrated on gains and challenges in terms of language ability and awareness, intercultural awareness and competence, personal growth, and pedagogical development. Although the remaining studies also covered the program outcomes or lived experiences, they had a number of particular foci. These were:

- the types of language and culture strategies which were used by student teachers in study abroad contexts (Ma, Wong, & Lam,2015);
- the impact of international experiences on curriculum innovation and change in language education (Li & Edwards, 2013);
- the role of international experiences on articulation and questioning of language teaching pedagogies (Hepple, 2012);
- the role of international experiences on the development of empathy skills (Marx & Pray, 2011);
- teacher identity construction during international experiences (Trent, 2011);
- conceptualization of *global teacherhood* through analyzing two contrastive cases (Karaman & Tochon, 2007)

Due to its relevance to this section, Table 1 lists the journals in which the reviewed studies appeared. The numbers in the parentheses indicate the number of the reviewed articles that were published in that journal.

Asia Pacific Journal of Education	Pedagogy, Culture and Society
Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education	Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development
Australian Journal of Teacher Education (2)	Race, Ethnicity and Education
Critical Inquiry in Language Studies	RELC Journal
Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching (2)	Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research
Foreign Language Annals (2)	Signo y Pensamiento
International Education Journal	System
Journal of Education for Teaching	Teachers and Teaching
Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research	Teaching and Teacher Education (3)
Language Teaching Research	The Qualitative Report

Table 1. The list of journals (alphabetically ordered)

Profile of the Language Teachers

Among those participating people, there were differences in terms of their teaching status and the languages they were teaching or preparing to teach. First, a total number of 317 people participated in all 25 studies. Among those language teachers, the number of pre-

service English language teachers was 173 (15 studies), and the number of in-service English language teachers was 70 (five studies). These numbers show that almost 77% of the participants were either teaching English as full-time teachers or preparing to teach it upon their graduation. The remaining participants were 56 in-service French language teachers (Allen, 2010, 2013); three pre-service Spanish teachers (Karaman & Tochon, 2007, 2010); and 14 pre-service Chinese language teachers (Tam, 2016).

Types of Programs and Their Durations

Similar to what the foci of the studies suggested, most of the studies (N=20) broadly aimed to help participants develop personally and professionally in international settings. Since the government in Hong Kong sponsors and encourages language teachers to participate in overseas language, culture, and school immersion programs (Hepple, 2012), these types of programs from Hong Kong (N=8) were the most visible ones in the literature. In addition, there was one transnational language teacher education program (i.e. Macalister, 2016) in which pre-service English language teachers followed a sandwich model of international experience. They, first, received education in Malaysia for 18 months, and then they maintained their teacher education in New Zealand for two years. Finally, they returned to Malaysia to complete the program and receive a teaching degree. There were also two other studies (i.e. Aydın, 2012; Kızılaslan, 2010) concentrating on the lived experiences of Eurasian exchange students who participated in the Erasmus exchange program, which is the largest international credit mobility framework for student mobility within the Europe. Lastly, there were two studies (i.e. Viafara Gonzalez & Ariza Ariza, 2015, 2016) in which participants received no institutional support but registered for different types of study abroad programs for different periods. An important point regarding the components of the programs was that they mostly included homestay (N=15) and school experience or student teaching (N=15) components.

Hong Kong and the United States (the US) were found to be the top-sending countries. Figure 2 presents the rest of the sending countries and their frequencies.
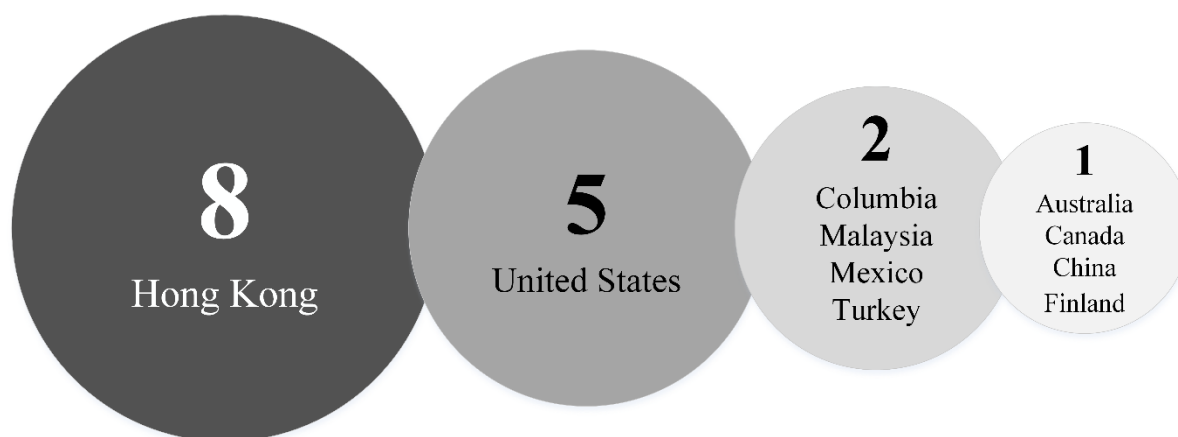
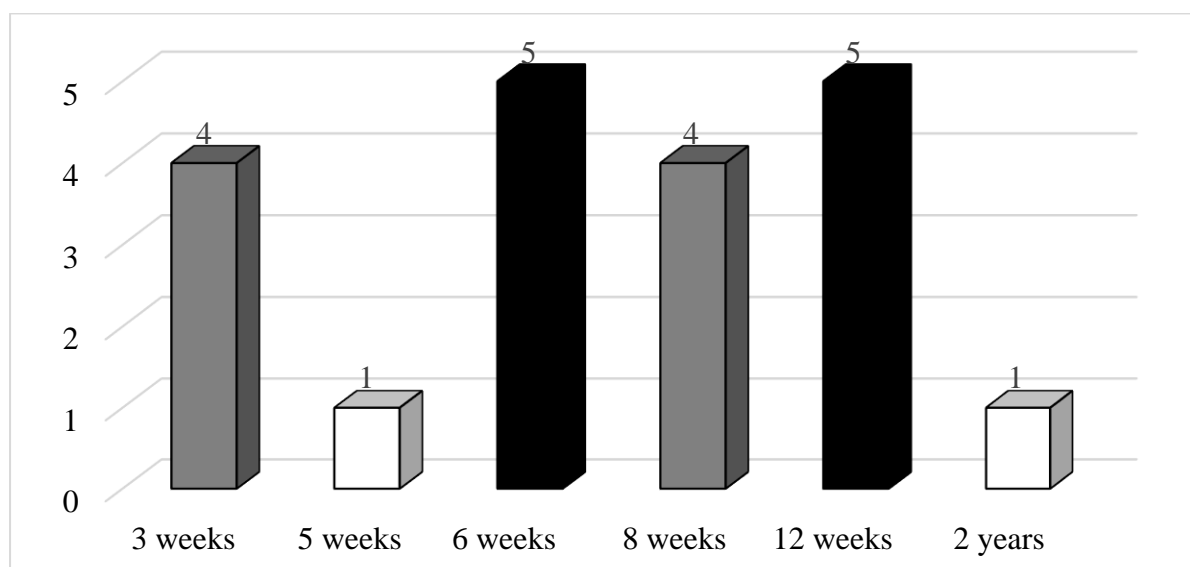**Figure 2. Frequency distribution of sending countries**

When examining the receiving/host countries (see Figure 3), it is clear that the main countries are English-speaking countries. This preferential attitude reflects the *language* emphasis of the sending countries that were mainly Asian. An important point to note is that Hong Kong-New Zealand partnerships (N=5) were the most frequently reported, which could be associated with the Hong Kong government's efforts to increase international experiences

in language teacher education (Bodycott & Crew, 2000; Lee, 2009). Hong Kong also established partnerships in two cases with Australia.
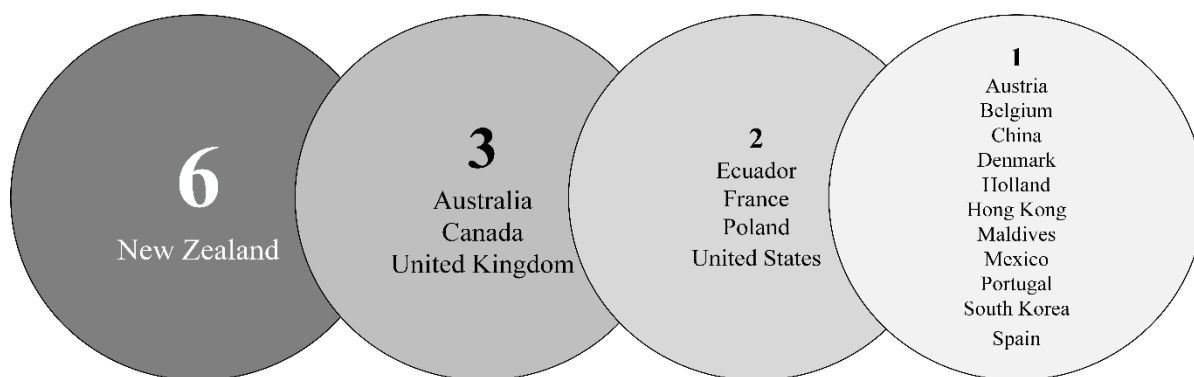
Figure 3. Frequency distribution of receiving countries

Another important point to highlight regarding the profile of receiving countries is that all the European countries except the United Kingdom (UK) were Erasmus destinations at which only language teachers with Turkish origin were placed (i.e. Aydın, 2012; Kızılaslan, 2010). As for the duration of the international experiences, the most preferred periods were six (N=5) and twelve weeks (N=5). However, there were a significant number of other studies that engaged their participants in international experiences for periods such as three (N=4) and eight weeks (N=4). Lastly, 5-week (Gleeson & Tait, 2012) and 2-year periods (Macalister, 2016) were preferred only once. Figure 4 shows the frequency distribution for the duration of the international experiences.
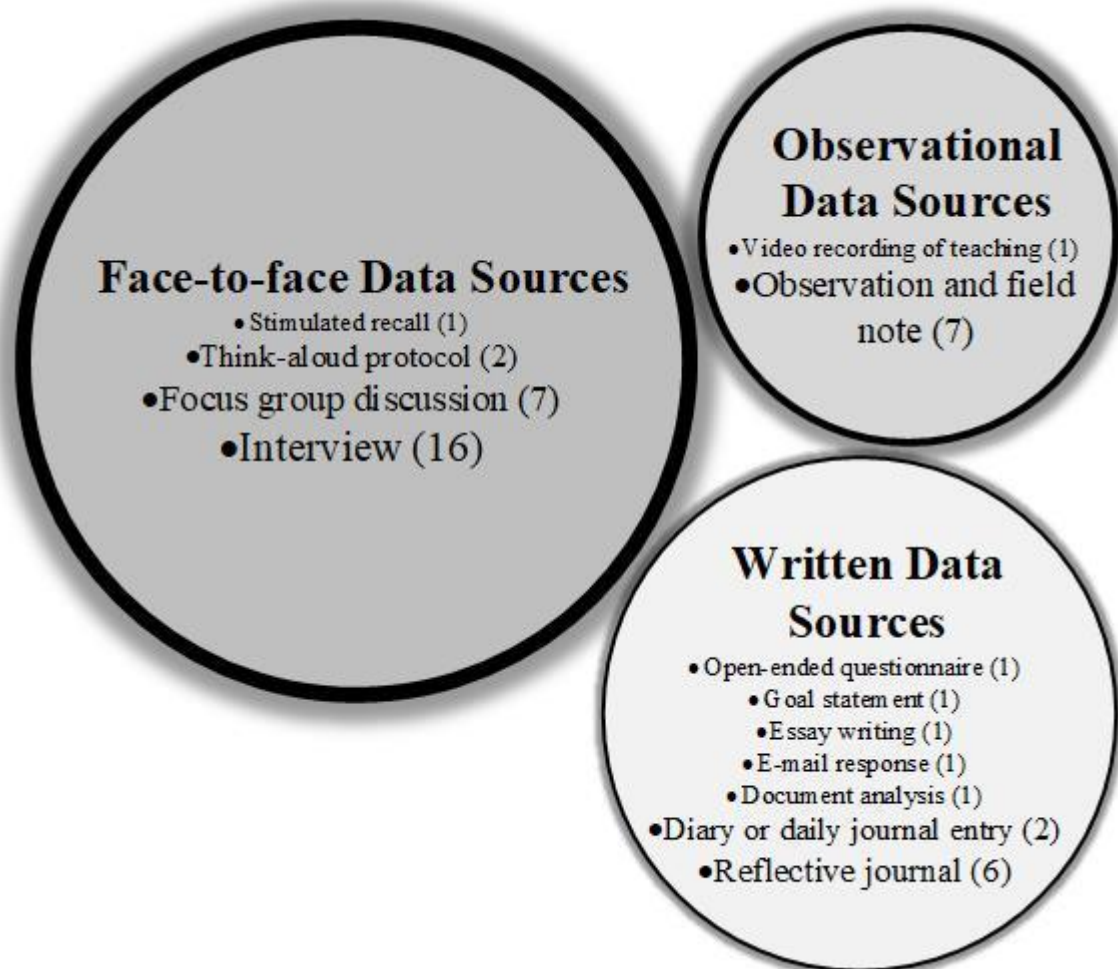

Figure 4. Frequency distribution of program durations

In addition to the time periods given in Figure 4, Viafara Gonzalez & Ariza Ariza (2015, 2016) studied the participants who had different types of experiences that ranged from one month to two years between 2004 and 2011. Aydın (2012) provided no data for the program duration; however, his participants were previous Erasmus exchange students who usually spend one or two semesters abroad. Larzén-Östermark (2011) shared the duration for her two participants as seven and eight months. In Kızılaslan's (2010) study, the international exchange period ranged from two weeks to a semester.

Qualitative Data Sources

Another critical issue that guided this study was the mediums through which participants' thought patterns, lived experiences, and program outcomes were revealed. The most frequent medium was face-to-face data sources. The written and observational forms of data followed these face-to-face forms respectively in terms of the frequency of use (see Figure 5). 15 of the studies used more than one tool to counter concerns about relying on only one source. For a similar reason, nine studies also included pre- and post-program questionnaires in order to enhance qualitative data with the descriptive quantitative measures. However, there was still one salient issue in the literature: a heavy dependence on self-reports.

Face-to-face Data Sources
- Stimulated recall (1)
- Think-aloud protocol (2)
- Focus group discussion (7)
- Interview (16)

Observational Data Sources
- Video recording of teaching (1)
- Observation and field note (7)

Written Data Sources
- Open-ended questionnaire (1)
- Goal statement (1)
- Essay writing (1)
- E-mail response (1)
- Document analysis (1)
- Diary or daily journal entry (2)
- Reflective journal (6)

Figure 5. Frequency distribution of qualitative data sources

Another implicit *qualitative* issue was the scarcity of established qualitative methodologies that have their own distinct and purposeful data collection and analysis procedures (Creswell, 2012). Although the literature benefited from a *qualitative flexibility*, they, with some brief sentences, referred to established data analysis procedures such as grounded theory (N=7), narrative research (N=4), case study (N=2), phenomenology (N=1), qualitative content analysis (N=1). The remaining 10 studies did not address their qualitative orientation and data analysis procedures with particular references to research approaches. This situation might have emerged due to word limitations imposed by the journals, or the researcher(s) avoided an unconditional loyalty to one single methodology. Nevertheless, there were two novel approaches to data analysis and interpretation. Karaman and Tochon (2007)

constructed an ecosystemic framework to theorize *global teacherhood* concept within an international student teaching program. The same authors utilized a computer-assisted discourse analysis methodology as well as correspondence analysis to approach international student teaching with a more complex, systemic, and dynamic orientation, and thereby exploring linkages among narratives of experiences before, during, and after student teaching abroad (Karaman & Tochon, 2007, 2010).

International Experiences and Language Teachers: A Synthesis of Qualitative Findings

In this section, main qualitative findings are synthesized under three overlapping sub-headings: professional, cultural, and linguistic outcomes. Since every developmental pattern can contribute to a language teacher's professional development (Hamza, 2010), all international program outcomes can conceptually fall under the professional development category. However, in this section, only personal and pedagogical outcomes are treated as sub-categories of professional outcomes. The cultural and linguistic outcomes are discussed under different headings in order to highlight their saliency as conceptual categories. In the final template, linguistic category corresponds to 61 coded segments. This most frequent code is followed by cultural (N=46), personal (N=34), and pedagogical (N=31) outcomes. Since personal and pedagogical gains and challenges are reported under the professional outcomes (N=65), this category has the most coded segments and deserves to be the leading theme in this part.

Professional Outcomes

Thanks to the period spent in an international context, language teachers reported a number of benefits in terms of personal growth and pedagogical improvement. Before elaborating on those benefits, one of the most crucial and frequent warnings in the literature needs to be underscored: "You learn a lot if you want" (p. 64), as one of the participants highlighted in the study conducted by Plews, Breckenridge, Cambre, and Fernandes (2014). Active engagement or human agency was a critical factor in the quality and outcomes of the program experiences (Plews, Breckenridge, & Cambre, 2010; Viafara Gonzalez & Ariza Ariza, 2015, 2016). However, explaining all the varying outcomes only with the power of human agency would be an incomplete analysis. Other potential reasons behind differential individual outcomes could be given as language proficiency levels (Tam, 2016), cultural differences (Marx & Pray, 2011), attitudes of people in the host contexts (Plews et al., 2010, 2014), presence of peers from the same country of origin (Karaman & Tochon, 2010), and design or structure of the international programs (Viafara Gonzalez & Ariza Ariza, 2015, 2016).

Although there were oftentimes significant differences among participants' gains, they had usually a chance to reflect on their *new* experiences. Consequently, these people were endowed with an opportunity to analyze their inner personal dynamics, thus felt a personal growth following reflexive thought processes (Larzén-Östermark, 2011). Their personal growth eventually enabled them to feel more independent, self-confident, and mature (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Lee, 2009, 2011; Viafara Gonzalez & Ariza Ariza, 2016). Since they also had to adapt to new working cultures or new educational settings, they improved their adaptation and survival skills (Aydın, 2012; Kabilan, 2013). However, their increased survival skills did not come with no cost. Some participants reported problems related to socialization (e.g. contact with host families, local people, and students) and

homesickness (Aydın, 2012; Marx & Pray, 2011; Lee, 2009). Those who took initiatives and were persistent in professional development resisted socialization challenges and achieved to expand their social and professional network that contained host family members, teachers, students, and local people (Allen, 2010; Plews et al., 2010, 2014).

International experiences, overall, helped a number of participants renew their passion toward language teaching profession (Kabilan, 2013) and helped them understand what characterizes a good teacher identity (Larzén-Östermark, 2011). Trent (2011) similarly revealed that immersion experiences contributed to pre-service language teachers' identity (re)construction with gains in teaching repertoire, cultural knowledge, and language proficiency. However, Plews et al. (2010, 2014) showed that recognition of the teacher identity or non-recognition played a crucial role for participants' varied experiences. Plews et al. (2010), therefore, claimed that language teachers in short-term international contexts should be recognized as legitimate teachers, not as guests.

In addition to the personal growth, the participants in most of the studies availed themselves of pedagogical opportunities. The most salient trigger for their pedagogical development was the comparison of educational issues in home and host contexts. Taking several academic courses and having a school or student teaching experience in another international setting provoked the participants to compare educational systems, explore distinct aspects of different systems, and learn different teaching strategies and methodologies (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Gleeson & Tait, 2012; Yang, 2011). Furthermore, such deeper reflective comparisons helped several participants develop tolerance toward different teaching ideas and awareness and toward different educational philosophies and ideologies that are embedded in different country contexts (Kabilan, 2013; Karaman & Tochon, 2007).

With the influence of international experiences, language teachers, for example, from Hong Kong critically reconsidered their home educational system and kept their eyes open for different teaching practices in order to enhance their teaching repertoire (Hepple, 2012; Lee, 2009, 2011; Trent, 2011). The same participants were impressed by student-centered approaches in host countries and planned to try them out in their home country where they thought that teacher-centered approaches dominated. Similarly, Li and Edwards (2013) found that teachers from China exhibited many examples of transition from authority to facilitator, guide, and motivator as they were trained for constructivist principles at a British university during their transnational experience. Regarding this expansion in student-centered teaching repertoire, Aydın (2012) also showed that previous Erasmus exchange students from Turkey increased their awareness toward contemporary learner-centered approaches. Overall, the international experiences in different educational contexts encouraged language teachers to move closer to contemporary constructivist approaches (Macalister, 2016).

As well as developing an increased awareness of constructivist principles, participants utilized the affordances for practicing their teaching skills, hence expanded their repertoire of teaching activities through both teaching practices and observations of their cooperating teachers and different classes (Kabilan, 2013; Plews et al., 2010, 2014). The role of cooperating teachers was important because their effective feedback facilitated participants' learning (Viafara Gonzalez & Ariza Ariza, 2016; Plews et al., 2010; Yang, 2011). On the other hand, some participants believed that the authentic artifacts and documents that they had collected from host environments would help them enliven their language teaching activities back in their home context (Allen, 2010; Plews et al., 2014). Lastly, Harbon (2007) and Kabilan (2013) approached their own studies with a critical eye and stated that teachers may have acquired the same gains in a regular language class in their home country. However, when they delved deeper into their participants' perspectives, they found that immersing in a different "habitat" enabled the participants to reside in a constant reflexivity

state in terms of language learning and teaching practices as well as cultural differences and similarities in home and host contexts.

Linguistic Outcomes

Since language teachers generally needed to draw on various linguistic resources while communicating abroad, most of them reported improvements in their language skills (Allen, 2010; Kızılaslan, 2010; Lee, 2009; Plews et al., 2014). When the studies inquired into specific types of language improvements, they found that participants mostly developed their speaking and listening skills as well as vocabulary repertoire (Aydın, 2012; Lee, 2011; Viafara Gonzalez & Ariza Ariza, 2016). Furthermore, they expanded their repertoire of classroom language thanks to their observation of different language teachers (Lee 2009, 2011). Likewise, participants reported a growing confidence in experimenting with languages (Allen, 2010; Kabilan, 2013; Marx & Pray, 2011; Larzén-Östermark, 2011).

Along with developing confidence in drawing on their various linguistic resources, participants demonstrated a growing awareness toward the essential role of vocabulary repertoire (Allen, 2013), comprehensible pronunciation of words (Lee, 2009), different varieties and accents of English (Aydın, 2012; Harbon, 2007; Lee, 2009), and the vital role of context in intercultural communication (Allen, 2013). They also developed a deeper awareness of language learning processes, teacher talk, learner characteristics, and language teaching strategies (Harbon, 2007). One promising novel approach in tracking language development in *micro* terms was the investigation into the language strategies that were used by the participants (Ma et al., 2015). The most frequent speaking strategy was to seek out interactional opportunities. The same participants also learned to nod and smile more, to use formulaic language more, and to initiate familiar topics to facilitate their communication in English (Ma et al., 2015).

It is also important to explore whether there was any difference among the gains of people with different language proficiency levels. Even though participants with high proficiency levels tended to benefit more (Larzén-Östermark, 2011; Plews et al., 2010; Tam, 2016), most self-reports revealed that participants from all proficiency levels benefited from the programs in terms of language improvement. However, as underscored before, human agency and other critical sociocultural factors might have played a key role in varying experiences and gains. One of the reasons for differing individual gains could be given as the potential drawbacks of peer circles that may act as barriers to language improvement. This *solidarity* issue could be observed in the studies conducted by Karaman and Tochon (2010), Lee (2009), Tam (2016), and Viafara Gonzalez and Ariza Ariza (2016). Barkhuizen and Feryok (2006), likewise, found that their participants were treated as a "discrete group" since most activities and social outings were discretely designed for that particular cohort.

While peer socialization abroad is reported to have drawbacks, some studies drew attention to some facilitative functions that peer groups performed abroad. For example, participants formed a transitory community among themselves and confronted challenges together (Lee, 2009). Gleeson and Tait (2012) argued that participants should be encouraged to form a "strong transitory community of practice" with home country colleagues, as they can more easily adapt to their new unfamiliar roles as non-expert English speakers and newcomers in a new environment. Likewise, one participant from another study usually felt better after talking to one of her peers as she found comfort in talking to someone from a similar background (Karaman & Tochon, 2010). One should also note that this participant had no one in the host family close to her age, so the characteristics of the host family also had a critical role in shaping access to *language* resources.

Host families' perceived impact on the participants was another significant factor on the quality of language gains. If it was not homestay experiences, some participants might not have experienced any deep communication with locals (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006). Similarly, Lee (2009) reported a significant impact of homestay experiences on participants' language improvements since such experiences enhanced their English repertoire. However, one participant complained about varying profiles of the host families some of whom were of immigrant origin and, according to the participant, did not have a sufficient proficiency level of the target language (Lee, 2009). Another interesting point was that some teachers of English offered English practice opportunities to host families in return for their homestay service (Harbon, 2007). Therefore, it is not unusual to observe a symbiotic relationship between participants and host families. However, some participants sometimes had communication problems with locals, instructors, and other students (Aydın, 2012), perhaps due to a low contact (Lee, 2009), a low language proficiency (Tam, 2016), and a low familiarity with the topics (Allen, 2013). Nevertheless, the challenges related to communication, adaptation, and survival helped a significant number of participants develop empathy skills toward the needs of language learners (Harbon, 2007; Marx & Pray, 2011).

(Inter)cultural Outcomes

As teachers were away from their familiar surroundings abroad, they often reported negotiating their worldviews and cultural understandings. In that regard, there was no guarantee that every sojourner would necessarily leave their ethnocentric views of cultures and adopt an ethnorelative lens, thus individual differences were again prominent in (inter)cultural learning. For example, two participants in Karaman and Tochon's (2007) study differed in terms of negotiating differences: one of them did not resort to a monological view and realized partiality of perspectives among different human groups through her longer conversations with local people and the cooperating teacher. However, the other participant limited both her reflection and contact with locals. Even though individuals differed to a certain extent in terms of their cultural gains, an important number of self-reports showed that they increased their cultural awareness, tolerance toward differences, and respect for diversity (Allen, 2010; Kızılaslan, 2010; Lee, 2009; Ma et al., 2015; Plews et al., 2014).

The *reality shock* was another observable phenomenon. Two participants in the study conducted by Larzén-Östermark (2011) de-dramatized their views of the host environment and acquired a more realistic and complex attitude toward the people who lived in the UK, thus progressed toward becoming an *intercultural speaker* with a more open-minded approach to cultural similarities and differences. Another intriguing point was the reflection directed at participants' own cultural background. For instance, Finnish participants reflected on their own personal trajectories and on the things that they had taken for granted in their daily lives (Larzén-Östermark, 2011). Likewise, Australian teachers learned more about their own cultural practices through reflecting on the stereotyped Australian image that was prevalent in South Korea (Harbon, 2007). Turkish participants similarly changed their perspectives both toward the European countries and toward their own home country (Aydın, 2012). Although most participants grew awareness toward cultural issues rather than remaining ignorant, participants are also likely to complete an international program with reinforced stereotypes, faulty generalizations, and ethnocentric views.

In one particular study, a number of North American student teachers of English reinforced their stereotypical views of Mexicans (Marx & Pray, 2011). However, the same participants faced stereotyped attitudes toward their own origin as well; as a result, they started to question their pre-established views of "outsiders" in their own country (Marx &

Pray, 2011). Therefore, a dialectical tension is likely to emerge between stereotyped views of host and hosted people. Turkish participants also suffered from negative judgments of their backgrounds (Aydın, 2012; Kızılaslan, 2010). Interestingly, some of those Turkish participants reinforced their national identities upon confrontation with negative judgments (Kızılaslan, 2010). Coming from a different country context, therefore, may attach *an invisible classifying label* to participants since they may represent their stereotyped home country image. However, some turned this into advantage for language learners in the host setting by integrating more complex cultural elements from their home environments into language instruction thus made lessons more enjoyable and motivating (Harbon, 2007; Plews et al., 2014).

In addition to their important role in personal and linguistic outcomes, the host families had a critical role in shaping intercultural perspectives and modifying worldviews (Karaman & Tochon, 2010). The host families were particularly effective in helping participants solve problems or misunderstandings related to cultural differences (Ma et al., 2015). Likewise, with positive host family experiences, participants were able to fight the challenges that were brought by the adjustment period to a new environment (Marx & Pray, 2011). Overall, an increasing importance has been attached to the role of host families and cooperating teachers for intercultural journeys since they seem to have a remarkable impact on intercultural experiences.

Discussion and Recommendations

This meta-synthesis investigated how short-term international experiences contributed to language teachers' ongoing development. In that regard, all the developmental areas were conceptually subsumed under the main category of professional development since this synthesis study acknowledges that any developmental pattern as part of *the whole person* can contribute to a teacher's professional acts (Hamza, 2010). As the sub-developmental categories meet and interact in dynamic, non-linear, and unpredictable ways, the professional development emerging from international experiences can be viewed as a complex system, which self-organizes within the active, reflexive agent who experiences the world (Dervin, 2016; Henry, 2016). Based on our findings and interpretations, Figure 6 presents the professional development as the main dynamic category that hosts the sub-developmental categories. The figure also demonstrates the common positive outcomes of international experiences that we synthesized under different categories.

We acknowledge that many questions may be drawn from Figure 6. While the international programs clearly offer opportunities for personal, pedagogical, linguistic, and intercultural development, such specific areas of growth are yet to be confirmed with sufficient evidence in the literature. Figure 6, therefore, is just a modest attempt to conceptualize professional development through short-term international experiences in language teacher education and to help further studies conduct more systematic as well as complex and dynamic inquiries. Further, researchers and practitioners may also need to consider larger societal, cultural, political, and economic conditions including hierarchical power relations in both host and home contexts, which are mentioned rarely in the studies reviewed here but can have a significant impact on the acting agent. By including these larger and possibly constraining conditions, researchers can attend dialectical tensions between structural determinacy and individual agency (Block, 2013; Shim, 2012). Otherwise, a heavy dependence on the rational and free agent could yield in a reductionist approach that would ignore a "critical reasoning" (Tochon & Karaman, 2009). Informed by these complex and critical ways of framing, the following points of discussion highlight key issues arising from

the meta-synthesis with recommendations for future research and practice.
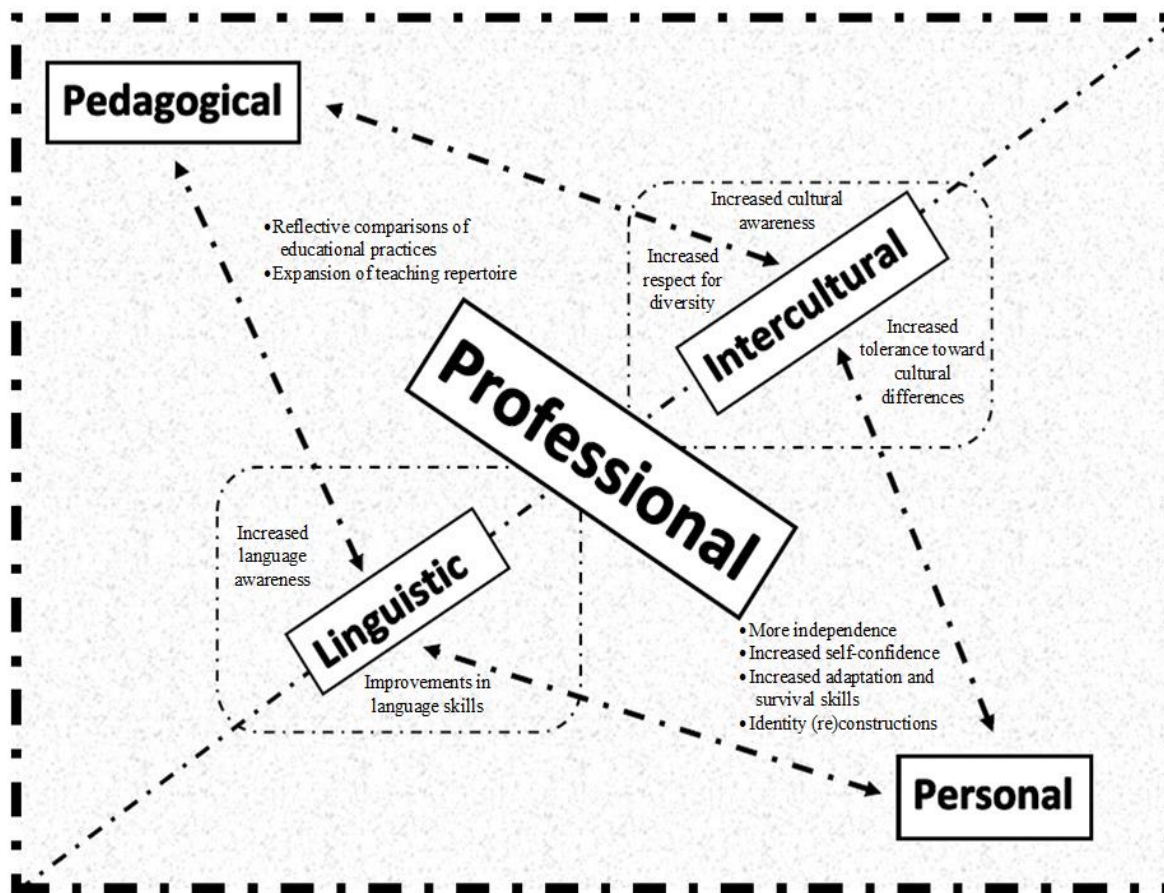
Figure 6. An overview of the developmental categories and positive outcomes of short-term international experiences in language teacher education

Most studies reviewed within the meta-synthesis relied on self-reports in order to document program outcomes. Even though such reports opened a window to the representation of international programs in participants' lifeworlds, these reports are still subject to suspicion due to their potentially highly subjective nature. For example, it is still possible for a participant to have an ethnocentric perspective even if this participant reports becoming a 'world citizen'. Therefore, future qualitative studies need to triangulate data sources that make possible thick descriptions of each participant's or cohort's profile and experiences. These studies, therefore, would need to document more detailed and richer reports for the changes in language skills, interculturality, and personal growth by considering broader social, political, economic, and cultural conditions as well. However, pure qualitative methodologies may not fully be able to inquire into these complex developmental processes. Therefore, future research designs would also benefit from diverse and innovative investigations of complex gains or changes (De Costa, Rawal, & Zaykovskaya, 2017; Riazi, 2016). Innovative mixed-methods designs may help the field progress in comprehensive ways and allow us to explore some larger patterns.

Another new intriguing research focus could be on long-term effects of international programs on the lifeworlds and teaching practices of the participants, as most studies seem to have lost contact with participants after they completed the programs. For example, some participants appreciated student-centered models in the host educational settings and planned to try them out in their own classes in the home country. We found that there is a need for follow-up studies to explore whether these teachers made any changes in their language

instruction or not. In that regard, using a complex systems framework could offer sophisticated analyses of changes in a participant's life and teaching practices over different timescales (e.g. Henry, 2016) such as pre-program, re-entry, first years of teaching, mid-career, and so on. Such a longitudinal analysis may enable researchers to analyze changes in nonlinear connections to other major episodes in language teachers' lives including previous/ongoing international experiences.

On the other hand, since the attitudes of host communities could also be a significant force in positioning of sojourners in a new sociocultural setting (Jackson, 2016; Plews et al., 2014), it is important to identify how participants are viewed by the host communities and how participants position themselves in those new settings. In that regard, a community of practice framework (Gleeson & Tait, 2012) could be of help in qualitatively demonstrating the integration or marginalization processes in communities abroad (Jackson, 2016). While explicating the role of communities in international settings, studies should also include the voices of multiple parties such as host families, cooperating professionals, stakeholders, program administrators, and so on. Among those *significant* people, host family members draw a particular attention. More studies need to be invested in this area with an aim of reaching an optimal homestay environment.

One of the salient themes in the literature was a tendency toward forming groups of people who shared similar backgrounds during international experiences. As Karaman and Tochon (2007) noted, pre-service language teachers formed "peer-circles" abroad. While such a tendency sometimes eased adaptation challenges, it also caused participants to limit their interactions with people from local communities. Therefore, some future studies may explicate further the role of peer circle in sojourner learning, thus may offer new perspectives on how program administrators can optimize its role. One novel approach could be mapping of different individuals' social networks and interactions throughout their sojourn period. In this way, a more complex picture of the relationship between social networks and program benefits could be offered within an innovative mixed-methods design.

Program types and structures can have significant impact on the interactions in a new sociocultural setting and on the gains as well. Clearly, program structures need to be in harmony across home and host institutions. This cooperation/collaboration between the institutions should incorporate a *team spirit*. Programs may not always include homestay and student teaching components; however, such experiential components would help participants develop a deeper understanding of different views and experiences of the world, educational systems, school cultures, teaching methods, and learning styles (Marx & Pray, 2011; Yang, 2009). Programs may also provide participants with a chance to observe teaching practices also in the home contexts prior to or after their international experiences as Kabilan (2013) explored in his study. By doing so, participants may reflect on and compare different educational systems on a meaningful basis by experiencing the two.

One should also not forget the dynamic and complex nature of international programs, and leave some room for flexibility. Otherwise, participants may not experience their personal goals and may perceive the program as a *work abroad program*. Furthermore, having strict assessment components may put participants under stress, and they may not experiment freely (Harbon, 2007). Participants need to encounter less stress emerging from academic tasks because they already grapple with the adjustment and intercultural challenges abroad. Program designers should also pay attention to the timing and duration of a program, which could also be an important factor in creating opportunities for the interaction with locals.

Systematic preparation prior to an international experience, which was not a common practice in the reviewed studies, is another critical component to be considered in order to help participants develop clear goals and expectations (Plews et al., 2014), grasp the

opportunities during their international experiences, cultivate a reflective mindset toward new challenging experiences (Larzén-Östermark, 2011), and avoid stereotypes (Çiftçi & Karaman, 2018; Marx & Pray, 2011). Post-immersion debriefing sessions are also recommended in order to help participants reflect constructively on teaching and learning in different country contexts (Karaman & Tochon, 2010; Yang, 2011). Ongoing guidance, supervision, and scaffolding throughout a program are also needed to prevent superficial understandings of *language*, *culture*, and *pedagogy* (Hepple, 2012). Under effective guidance, the participants can develop critical understandings of educational systems, environments, and the Self and Other (Ogay & Edelmann, 2016). Overall, programs need to ensure "critical intercultural professional development" not "uncritical teacher tourism" (Plews et al., 2010).

Conclusion

Language teachers are key agents for change in an increasingly interconnected world that seeks effective ways to increase communication, address diversity, and ensure social justice. Short-term international experiences, in fact, can significantly contribute to language teachers' multidimensional development as discussed in this meta-synthesis study. Even if it seems as an impossibility for all language teachers to experience an international context, the increased efforts that document the substantial benefits and challenges associated with short-term international experiences can increase the possibilities for more funds. Hence, one day such programs could become a regular component of language teacher education worldwide. From another perspective, future studies may provide evidence discrediting the value of such programs. To assess both arguments, further research and practice are needed. The question, therefore, should be: do short-term international experiences deserve to be a part of mainstream language teacher education? If yes, why and how should researchers convince funding institutions and policy makers? Nevertheless, taking into account the promising findings in the literature, national and supra-national bodies need to invest more funding in such international efforts in language teacher education.

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Appendix:
Appendix A: Analytic Table

Study (chronologically ordered from the newest to the oldest)	Focus	Duration	Participants	Type of the qualitative data sources	Type of the program (From… to…)
Macalister (2016)	The impact of a trans-national language teacher education programme on classroom practice	18 months in Malaysia (home country); 2 years in New Zealand, final year back in Malaysia	Two pre-service English language teachers	Observation and field notes in the classroom and interview afterwards, document analysis for lesson plans and teaching materials	A trans-national language teacher education program that included classroom observation, too. (From Malaysia to New Zealand)
Tam (2016)	Pre-service language teachers' beliefs about benefits of a short-term study abroad program	Three months	14 pre-service teachers of Chinese	Pre- and post-program semi-structured interviews and reflective journals during the sojourn	Putonghua Study Abroad Program that aims to strengthen the Putonghua proficiency of the pre-service teachers. The program included homestay and classroom observation components. (From Hong Kong to China)
Viafara Gonzalez & Ariza Ariza (2016)	Student teachers' self-reported gains in terms of their language ability and pedagogical development	From one month to two years within 2004-2011	16 pre-service English language teachers	(Mixed design) A semi-structured interview	No institutional support; participants made their own program decisions (From Colombia to the United States)
Ma, Wong, & Lam (2015)	The language and culture strategies which were used by the student teachers in study abroad contexts	Three months	10 student teachers majoring in English language education	(Mixed design) Three semi-structured interviews	A study-abroad English immersion program. The program included a homestay component. (From Hong Kong to one of these destinations: the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Canada)

Viafara Gonzalez & Ariza Ariza (2015)	Student teachers' professional and intercultural development in connection to their experiences abroad	From one month to two years within 2004-2011	16 pre-service English language teachers	(Mixed design) A semi-structured interview	No institutional support; participants made their own program decisions (From Colombia to the United States)
Plews, Breckenridge, Cambre, & Fernandes (2014)	Lived experiences of student teachers	One semester (three months)	Two English language teachers who taught Spanish at a university and in public schools	Two think-aloud sessions, formal and informal interviews	An international second language teacher professional development program in Canada. The program included homestay and classroom observation and teaching components. (From Mexico to Canada)
Allen (2013)	Teachers' beliefs about developing their own proficiency in French	Three weeks	30 secondary school teachers of French	Diaries	A three-week summer institute held in France. Teachers spoke only French; stayed with French families, attended French classes, visited places of interest. They were also required to research a cultural topic through interviewing the locals. (From the U.S. to France)
Kabilan (2013)	Perceived professional gains as a result of an international teaching practicum program	Six weeks	Six pre-service English language teachers	Open-ended questionnaire, reflective journals	An international teaching practicum program in which participants were placed in three Maldivian schools with a mentor assigned. (From Malaysia to Maldives)
Li & Edwards (2013)	The impact of a UK-based professional development program on curriculum innovation and change	Three months	48 English language teachers	Interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations	A British university offered 3-month courses for English language teachers in collaboration with a Chinese non-profit organization. The program included homestay and classroom observation

					and teaching components. (From China to the UK).
Aydın (2012)	Student teachers' perceptions of the contributions of the Erasmus exchange program to their development and the problems they experienced throughout their international experiences	No data were provided.	23 pre-service English language teachers	(Mixed design) Interviews, essay writing, focus group discussion	The Erasmus exchange program (From Turkey to Denmark, Spain, and Poland)
Hepple (2012)	The role of a transnational school-based experience on the articulation and questioning of language teaching pedagogies	Eight weeks	16 pre-service English language teachers	Video-recordings of the pre-service teachers' classroom performances, a focus group discussion, a stimulated recall interview	A government-sponsored language immersion program during which the participants had also school-based experiences. (From Hong Kong to Australia)
Gleeson & Tait (2012)	Language teacher professional development during a short study-abroad program	Five weeks	Nine English language teachers	Pre-program and post-program goal setting templates and pre and end-of-program focus groups	A five-week immersion experience commissioned for the experienced teachers (From Hong Kong to New Zealand)
Larzén-Östermark (2011)	The effects of international experiences on the participants' intercultural, linguistic, and professional competence	Seven-eight months	Two pre-service English language teachers	Semi-structured in-depth interviews	A language practice abroad program (From Finland to the UK)
Lee (2011)	The benefits of international field experiences	Six weeks	15 postgraduate English language student teachers (Only six of these students participated in an individual interview)	(Mixed design) Reflective journals, individual structured interviews	A six-week language immersion program with a host family. The program included classroom observations and teaching practice in a primary school. (From Hong Kong to New Zealand)

Marx & Pray (2011)	The experiences of American student teachers of English in Mexico and the impact of these experiences on their empathy skills	Three weeks	Nine English as a second language teachers	(Mixed design) Daily journal entries, instructors' observations	A three-week summer study abroad experience at an intensive Spanish language school. Participants lived with host families and took a language teaching methodology class and Spanish-language classes. (From the United States to Mexico)
Trent (2011)	Teacher identity construction	Six weeks	Eight pre-service English language teachers	Semi-structured interviews	A six-week immersion program in Australia with a host family. The program included classes on teaching English, cultural visits, and a 2-week teaching placement at a secondary school. (From Hong Kong to Australia)
Yang (2011)	Student teachers' perceptions toward an overseas field experience	Eight weeks	Seven pre-service English language teachers	Semi-structured interview in the form of a group interview, fieldwork logs	A partnership between a Canadian university and a teacher training institute in Hong Kong. Participants taught either at a primary school or at a secondary school, and they shared accommodations in an apartment. (From Canada to Hong Kong)
Allen (2010)	The impact of study abroad on the professional development	Three weeks	26 French language teachers	E-mail responses	A 3-week sponsored summer institute that took place in France. The participants stayed with host families. (From the United States to France)

Karaman & Tochon (2010)	International student teaching within the narratives of a pre-service language teacher	Eight weeks	One pre-service language teacher of Spanish	Semi-structured interviews, observations, focus group interview	A university-based international student teaching program that involved teaching English and conducting interactions in Spanish. The participant stayed with a host family and worked with cooperating teachers. (From the United States to Ecuador)
Kızılaslan (2010)	Student teachers' perceptions and descriptions of their experiences	From two weeks to a semester (four or five months)	10 pre-service English language teachers	Semi-structured interviews	The Erasmus exchange program (From Turkey to Poland, Holland, Portugal, Belgium, and Austria)
Plews, Breckenridge, & Cambre (2010)	Lived experiences of student teachers	One semester (three months)	Two English language teachers	Two think-aloud sessions, formal and informal interviews	An international second language teacher professional development/Spanish language monitor program. The participants taught Spanish at a university and in public schools and lived with a Canadian colleague or family. (From Mexico to Canada)
Lee (2009)	The multidimensional impact of an overseas immersion program on student teachers	Six weeks	15 pre-service English language teachers	(Mixed design) Mid-program evaluation, field observation, reflective journals	A 6-week immersion program. The program consisted of academic studies, field experiences, homestay, and sociocultural activities. (From Hong Kong to New Zealand)
Harbon (2007)	The value of a short-term international language teaching experience for teachers' professional development	Three weeks	12 pre-service English language teachers	Reflective journals, focus group discussion	A three-week international language teaching and homestay experience during which pre-service language teachers taught

					conversational English to college students. (From Australia to South Korea)
Karaman & Tochon (2007)	Theorization of *global teacherhood* concept through analysis of two contrastive cases who participated in an international student teaching program	Eight weeks	Two pre-service teachers of Spanish	Semi-structured interviews, observations	A university-based international student teaching program that involved teaching English and conducting interactions in Spanish. The participant stayed with a host family and worked with cooperating teachers. (From the United States to Ecuador)
Barkhuizen & Feryok (2006)	Student teachers' perception of a short-term international experience	Six weeks	15 pre-service English language teachers	(Mixed design) A reflective journal	A short-term international experience program, which had four main components: academic, school experience, social activities, and homestay. (From Hong Kong to New Zealand)

Appendix B: Code System (Final Template)

Main and Sub-Codes	Code frequency
LIN (Linguistic)	**61**
Increased language proficiency	14
Peer-circle and language	13
Homestay and language	11
Increased language awareness	6
Mentors or cooperating teachers and language	6
Increased confidence in communication	5
Increased empathy toward language learners	3
Language-related challenges	3
CUL (Cultural)	**46**
Increased (inter)cultural awareness	12
Homestay and culture	11
Stereotyping or discrimination	7
Mentors or cooperating teachers and culture	6
Increased cultural knowledge	5
Increased tolerance toward different cultures	3
Challenging worldviews	2
PER (Personal)	**34**
Human agency and gains	10
Individual differences	4
Teacher identity construction	4
Increased adaptation and survival skills	3
Expanding professional network	3
Increased self-confidence	2
Adaptation challenges	2
Renewed passion	2
More independence	1
Increased empathy skills	1
PED (Pedagogical)	**31**
Comparison of educational systems	14
Improving teaching repertoire and skills	7
Benefiting from authentic documents	3
Mentors or cooperating teachers and teaching skills	3
Embracing constructivist principles	1
Increasing students' motivation	1
Integration of culture	1