

Exploring the Perceptions of Elementary School Teachers' Recruiters concerning Teachers' Study-

Abroad Experiences

Bart A.A. van den Elzen

University of Utrecht

Abstract

The multicultural classroom increasingly becomes the standard classroom in the Netherlands and requires a higher level of teaching than is usually found among teachers. Alongside this multiculturalism in schools, internationalization becomes increasingly important in teacher education. Research has shown positive effects of study-abroad experiences on the personal and professional development of teachers. Furthermore, study-abroad experiences have positive effects on the employability of students in many occupations. However, no prior research has been done concerning the perceptions of recruiters of elementary school teachers regarding study-abroad experiences for teachers when hiring or rejecting personnel. This exploratory study investigated the perceptions among recruiters of elementary school teachers in the Utrecht area regarding study-abroad experiences for teachers. Results indicated that elementary teachers' recruiters value the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to study-abroad experiences. However, student teachers have to demonstrate a degree of reflection and recalibration on their own actions in order to pinpoint what has been learned through these study-abroad experiences.

Keywords: Internationalization, teacher education/development, study-abroad experiences, teacher employability, elementary education, multicultural education

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Out of the almost 17 million citizens in the Netherlands, 3.5 million are born outside the Netherlands or have parents who were born in other countries (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2014). Consequently, the multicultural classroom, characterized by a variety of cultures, religions, ethnic backgrounds, and languages (Ben-Peretz, Eilam, & Yankelevitch, 2006), increasingly becomes the standard (Van Tartwijk, Den Brok, Veltman, & Wubbels, 2009). To meet the needs of the 21st century, teachers need to be prepared to teach many more students with a rapidly increasing diversity of backgrounds while preparing these classes for a more complex and more interdependent world (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). The rise of the multicultural classroom leads to a greater need for intercultural communication skills among teachers as it comes with risks of conflict, disappointment, and misunderstanding (Van Oord & Den Brok, 2004). Teaching these multicultural classes is regarded more difficult and stressful than teaching classes where the school population is mainly homogeneous (Van Tartwijk et al., 2009). Ting-Toomey (1999) states that teachers who want to teach multicultural classrooms need a higher level of communicative skills than the average level that is usually found with teachers. However, many teachers lack the ability necessary to teach the contemporary, multicultural classroom due to ethnocentric worldviews (Cushner, 2007; Mahon, 2010) which may negatively affect the educational experiences of students (Gay, 2000; Irvine, 2003).

Alongside the upcoming multicultural classroom in the Netherlands, internationalization of teacher education becomes increasingly important. In a review of the literature on internationalization, Knight (2003) proposes a definition of internationalization as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2003, p. 2). Sanderson (2008) adds an extra level, the level of the individual teacher, in which he states that internationalization can be seen as a means through which the professional and personal development of teachers can be stimulated. To become authentic teachers, teachers must understand their

self, which is defined as a set of preferences, values, basic nature, and the influence of past experiences. The development of the teachers' *self* gets more potential through experiences abroad and the development of cosmopolitanism (Sanderson, 2008). This is in line with earlier research studies (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Paunescu, 2008; Stronkhorst, 2005) which stress the growing importance of the development of more than solely academic skills. Internationalization through study-abroad experiences is widely accepted as a preferred method in the development of globally competent graduates (Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009) and one of the most powerful educational techniques for internationalization in higher education (Kaufmann, 1992). In this study, the definition of a study-abroad experience (SAE) is used, which is defined by Williams (2005, p. 3) as: "a stay for at least four months within a university setting or academic context outside the home country in order to earn academic credit and eventually meet degree requirements". Examples of SAE's for teachers are studying at a foreign university, teaching abroad through internships, international minors or research studies (Van Dijk & Grootsholten, 2009).

Based on a twenty-year study and experience arranging international teaching programs, Kissock and Richardson (2009) urge for the need of SAE's in teacher education in order to bring a global perspective into schools. SAE's are needed for future teachers to help them reflect on their own cultural identity, learn about other cultures, and examine the socio-cultural aspects in teaching (Marx & Moss, 2011). These immersion experiences help teachers reflect upon ethnocentric worldviews and guides them towards culturally responsive teaching (Cushner & Brennan, 2007) and is essential to their intercultural development (Marx & Moss, 2011). Concerning the reflection upon ethnocentric worldviews, SAE's are more helpful than domestic placements in multicultural settings, because the dominant home culture hegemony is often not questioned and implicitly well understood (Marx & Moss, 2011). The immersion experience in another culture than their own is essential for future teachers to guide them towards culturally responsive teaching and can be achieved through international experiences (Cushner & Brennan, 2007; Heyl & McCarthy, 2003; Marx & Moss, 2011; Quezada, 2004; Stachowski & Mahan, 1998; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996).

In Table 1, many different research studies conducted concerning the effects of teachers' SAE's are presented. Klarenbeek and Beekwilder (2000) found in their research that internationalization significantly contributes to the quality of the teaching force. Professional knowledge, empathy, collaboration in a team, planned action, self-reflection, innovation power, and dealing with differences are competencies for teachers in which significant growth has been achieved through experiences abroad (Klarenbeek & Beekwilder, 2000). Accordingly, Mahon and Cushner (2007) found in their research that a SAE positively affects student teachers as they reached a higher level of personal confidence, professional knowledge, and an increased understanding of diversity, both global and domestically, compared to teacher students who didn't go abroad. Williams (2005) investigated the effects of a SAE on intercultural communication skills and found that students who studied abroad reached a higher level of intercultural communication skills than those who stayed at home, competencies clearly mentioned by Ting-Toomey (1999) and Van Oord & Den Brok (2004) as skills of great importance when the contemporary classroom comes into the picture. These complex intercultural communication skills are defined as skills of people who effectively deal with the psychological and emotional stress that may occur in unfamiliar situations, their increased level of empathy, their effective way of communicating with people with a diversity of cultural backgrounds, and their effective way of dealing with miscommunication (Giles, Coupland, Williams, & Leets, 1991).

Table 1

Effects of Study-Abroad Programs on Student Teachers' Professional and Personal Development

	Knowledge/skills/attitudes	Authors	Year
Professional development	Intercultural communication skills	Giles, Coupland, Williams, and Leets	1991
		Marx & Moss	2011
		Williams	2005
	Reflect on own cultural identity	Marx & Moss	2011
		Cushner & Brennan	2007
		Heyl & McCarthy	2003
		Benett	2004
	Culturally responsive teaching	Cushner & Brennan	2007
		Heyl & McCarthy	2003
		Marx & Moss	2011
		Gay	2002, 2010
	Learn about other cultures	Gay & Howard	2010
Stachowski & Mahan		1998	
Examine socio-cultural aspects in teaching	Marx & Moss	2011	
	Cochran-Smith	2005	
	Grant & Gillette	2006	
Intercultural development	Elola & Ozkoz	2008	
	Mahon	2003	
	Merryfield	2000	
	Paccione	2000	
Professional knowledge Collaboration in a team Self-reflection and learning capacity Empathy	Klarenbeek & Beekwilder	2000	
	Understanding, acceptance and awareness of diversity	Klarenbeek & Beekwilder	2000
		Cushner and Mahon	2002
Confront ethnocentric worldviews	Marx & Moss	2011	
	Hall	1998	
Personal development	Personal confidence	Mahon & Cushner	2007
	Sense of self-awareness	Cushner & Mahon	2002
	Sense of self-efficacy		

While seeking for opportunities for students to address the need to educate teachers who are prepared for their future jobs, teacher education institutions also increasingly become aware of the

importance and effects of SAE's on the professional development for their student teachers. The importance of internationally oriented competencies for teachers are stated in documents by, for instance, the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE):

One of the goals of this standard is the development of educators who can help all students learn and who can teach from multicultural and global perspectives that draw on the histories, experiences, and representations of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. (. . .) candidates need to understand the role of diversity and equity in the teaching and learning process (. . .) and understand the influence of culture on education and acquire the ability to develop meaningful learning experiences for all students. (NCATE, 2008, p. 34)

Dutch teacher education institutions stress the importance of internationalization of teacher education. The Center for Internationalization of Teacher Education forms a network of 29 teacher education institutions in The Netherlands and has the purpose to stimulate internationalization of teacher education in order to better prepare future teachers for their professional field as they state that an international and intercultural orientation should not be missing, while elementary education increasingly becomes more international and intercultural (CILO, 2013). Although the importance of SAE's for teachers are recognized and stated in documents, the percentage of student teachers abroad remains limited with only 4% (Nuffic, 2010) due to unfamiliarity concerning the possibilities of studying abroad and a lack of information by teacher education institutions (Arbeidsmarktplatform PO, 2013).

Trooboff, VandeBerg and Rayman (2008) investigated the value employers attach to SAE's for graduates. The researchers found that a SAE can have a major positive impact on students' employability. Employers clearly value the skills associated with SAE's (Teichler & Janson, 2007; Trooboff et al., 2008). Although the actual value is also still questioned by some as one's own perspective regarding a SAE plays an important role (Kissock & Richardson, 2009). Hyser (2005) states in his research that prejudices of people regarding SAE's glorified as academic tourism affect their perspectives regarding SAE's. Furthermore, Ryan and Twibell (2000) found in their research that emotional blocks such as

anxiety, loneliness and depression may affect learning outcomes in a negative way. Students suffering from these emotional difficulties may not benefit as much from their SAE as their peers who do not experience these emotional blocks (Hunley, 2010). While people experienced abroad may have experienced different degrees of emotional difficulties, it may influence their perceptions on the impact of SAE's as well.

Hiring decisions are normally based on academic standards (Tuross, 2010). Furthermore, students who participated in many work-related activities, such as volunteer, co-curricular and leadership activities have an advantage over other students (NACE, 2008). These activities support the employability of students (Tuross, 2010). This additional work-experience is a key-factor in hiring decisions for employers (NACE, 2008). Next to this work-experience, employers clearly value the competencies in candidates related to personal characteristics, such as self-confidence, friendliness, interpersonal skills, tactfulness, initiative, strong work-ethic and adaptability and flexibility (NACE, 2008). Furthermore, professional competencies valued by recruiters were related to verbal and written communication, organization and analytical skills and the ability to work in a team (NACE, 2008). However, most importantly, these competencies, according to the recruiters, can be achieved through valuable activities characterized by their variety (Tuross, 2010). SAE's offer students the opportunity to participate in this variety of activities (Tuross, 2010).

Trooboff et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of the data concerning the perceptions employers attach to SAE's because it enhances our understanding concerning these experiences, and describes the steps to be taken to reinforce the connection between student learning abroad and effective employment afterwards (Trooboff et al., 2008). This is in line with the research study of Tuross (2010) in which she states that if students want to be prepared for the job market, they have to gain insight in recruiters' views about a successful candidate. Although employers clearly value the competencies associated with SAE's concerning many occupations, a knowledge gap still exists concerning the perceptions employers of elementary school teachers have regarding SAE's for teachers, because no prior research has been done in

this field. While a great part of the research studies focus on the effect of study-abroad programs on teacher development, far less is known about the value placed on SAE's by employees (Franklin, 2010). Traditional recruiting decisions in elementary education are based on the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA's) regulated by law and stated in the collective labor agreement for elementary education (CAO PO, 2014). Only qualified teachers may apply for a job as a teacher and candidates must submit a certificate of good conduct. The profiles of qualified teachers are based on the SBL-competencies for teachers in elementary education (Wet BIO, 2015). These competencies describe the KSA's a qualified teacher must meet. The role of internationalization and a SAE is not explicitly described within these competencies, although the knowledge and implication of the cultural aspects of teaching are marginally described as professional KSA' teachers must command.

Regardless the documented profiles for qualified teachers, hiring procedures and practices differ substantially across schools (Rivnik, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). Teacher selection procedures that might function as a blueprint for other schools and organizations remain scarce (Peterson, 2002). Every selection committee has the freedom to create a profile and decide about the content of the job vacancy and about the specific requirements the candidate should meet (Werving en Selectie document, 2014). However, increased levels of professionalism may encourage recruiters of elementary school teachers to hire teachers who possess the necessary skills needed to teach the contemporary classroom. Especially in the Dutch urban areas, where the school population exists of a variety of cultures and backgrounds, schools may benefit from teachers who are experienced through SAE's. But how do recruiters of elementary school teachers view SAE's for teachers? Are they aware of its impact regarding teachers' personal and professional development? And to what degree are the effects recognized? The purpose of this exploratory study is to investigate the perceptions recruiters of elementary school teachers have concerning the role of a SAE when hiring or rejecting personnel thereby differentiating between schools with divers school populations in order to contribute to hypothesis formation for future, more definitive, investigation.

Research questions.

What are the perceptions of recruiters of elementary school teachers in the Netherlands regarding a study-abroad experience for teachers when hiring or rejecting personnel?

Sub questions.

What competencies are stated as important competencies for teachers by the recruiters?

How do these competencies relate to study-abroad experiences?

What role is attached to study-abroad experiences within the decision making process of hiring or rejecting teachers?

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, it is important to notice that these research sub questions were subjected to modifications during the process of research in order to better fit the research under study (Boeije, 2005).

Method**Research design**

An exploratory qualitative research design was applied through the use of semi-structured interviews. The choice for this research design was made because no prior research has been conducted on recruiters of elementary school teachers, which are: principals, teachers/supervisors and members of the Representative Advisory Board.

By interviewing different stakeholders, validity was attempted to improve (Baarde, de Goede, & Van der Meer, 2007). Data triangulation was applied by asking participants with different perspectives and interests within a school. To interview principals, teachers, and members of the Representative Advisory Board (Dutch: MR), various perspectives were investigated. The official rules and regulations of the MR state that they have the authority to advise regarding the application of new personnel (AVS, 2014). Officially, the MR only has the authority to advise for the application of the principal of the school, but in actual practice they are often asked to advise when hiring or rejecting teachers as well.

Interviewing is a good way to assess opinions and experiences (Plooij, 2011) and as this study aimed to investigate perceptions, interviewing was an appropriate way to do so. In order to ensure people could talk freely, recruiters were interviewed separately. Participants may be willing to speak more freely and disclose things to the researcher that would not occur when their superior or colleagues are present. There's no possibility to be corrected or contradicted when conducting individual interviews (Taylor & De Vocht, 2011).

Participants

The Appointment Committee is responsible for the hiring or rejecting of new personnel (Algemene Vereniging Schoolleiders (AVS), 2014). The Board is responsible for the hiring of new personnel, but mandates the principal of the school (AVS, 2014). Therefore, the first one responsible for the hiring of new personnel is the principal (AVS, 2014). Six principals, three members of the MR and six teachers (three of them with supervisor roles next to teaching tasks), all experienced in hiring personnel, participated in this study (12 women, four men, $M_{age} = 40.1$, $SD = 6.7$, age range: 26 – 49 years). The level of education differed between Higher Vocational Education and Science Master degrees. Most participants have worked for many years for the Foundation of Elementary and Public Education Utrecht (the Netherlands). This choice has been made because of the accessible connections the researcher has concerning these schools.

Sample. The participating schools have been chosen because of the variety of backgrounds and school populations. Schools are located in the Utrecht area.

Basisschool Het Zand (Leidsche Rijn): 432 students, 29.7 % of the students has a Non-Dutch background (PO raad, 2015).

Dalton basisschool Pieterskerkhof (Binnenstad): 212 students, 4 % of the school population has a non-Dutch background (PO raad, 2015).

Montessori basisschool de Meander (De Meern): 535 students, 13.8% of students has a Non-Dutch background (PO raad, 2015).

Basisschool de Panda (Kanaleneiland): 195 students, 75.9% of the students has a Non-Dutch background (PO raad, 2015).

Prinses Margrietschool (Zuilen): 263 students, 34.8% of the students has a non-Dutch background (PO raad, 2015).

Instruments

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, no questionnaire or survey will be used, the researcher is the instrument (Boeije, 2005).

Interview technique. The interview scheme was based on the order of the research sub questions. The first part of the interview focused on competencies recruiters value as important competencies for teachers, the second part of the interview focused on their understanding and comprehensibility of internationalization and teacher education abroad in particular. Furthermore, this part focused on the relation between the important competencies mentioned by the recruiters and the role of a SAE within the development of these competencies. The third and final part explicitly focused on the role of a SAE within the process of hiring and rejecting teachers.

The interview method used was based on the STAR-method as respondents may have a tension to embellish the real situation (Boeije, 2013). Socially desirable answers can seriously distort data (Millham & Kellogg, 1980). The STAR-method has the purpose to provide an accurate view of someone's perceptions by questioning the experiences and the behavior a person showed as well as the context in which the behavior occurred (Kraal & Van Den Heuvel, 2012). STAR is an acronym for Situation, Task, Action, Results.

Procedure

Participants were recruited by asking them in person or by e-mail. A non-random convenience sample was used. In person or via the principals of the schools the researcher got in contact with members of the MR, and teachers, all experienced in hiring or rejecting personnel.

Sixteen in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes and took place at the schools and in quiet and enclosed spaces to ensure the interviewee could speak freely. Answers were processed anonymously. All interviews were recorded as recording of interviews contributes to the transparency of the research and the possibility to be verified by others (Boeije, 2005). Before the interviews took place, participants were asked about their own SAE('s). Eight out of the 16 recruiters were experienced abroad, mainly through internships.

Analysis. Data were analyzed through the steps of content analysis, as shown in Figure 1, in the computer program MEPA (Erkens, 2005). The choice for qualitative, inductive content analysis has been made because when there is a lack of knowledge regarding the subject matter, an inductive content analysis approach will be most appropriate (Lauri & Kyngäs, 2005). The steps of content analysis consist of a preparation phase in which the unit of analysis is established, and an organizing phase, including open coding and creating categories. Coding was based on meaningful units in the data. This choice has been made because the elements were to be studied on their quality as a unit; their significance and essential features (Chenail, 2012). After open coding, categories were grouped under higher order headings (Burnard, 1991) which resulted eventually in a reporting phase in which a general description of the research topic was provided through abstraction of the categories. A code was only maintained when it was mentioned by at least two recruiters.

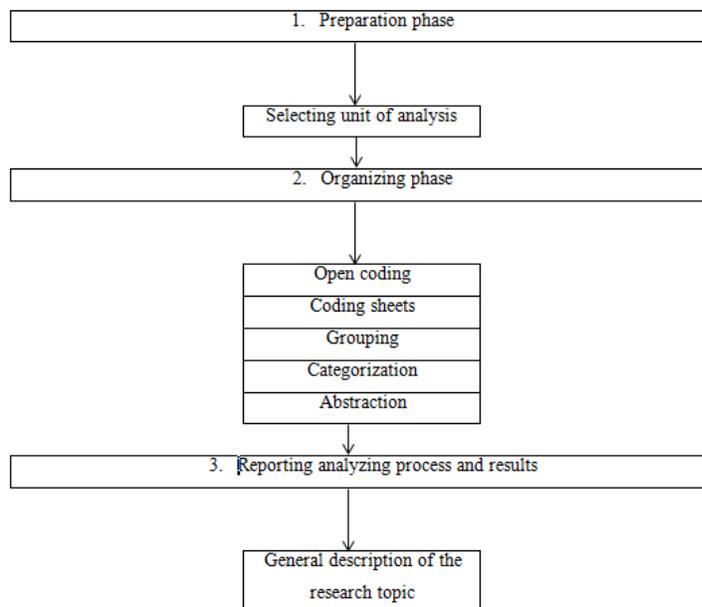


Figure 1. The steps of the content analysis approach.

To assess the quality of the study, member-checks were conducted to increase internal validity. After each interview a report of the interview was sent to the interviewee in order to check for the authenticity of the interview. No member check was eventually corrected by one of the participants.

Furthermore, the auditing procedure (Akkerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2008) was used. In this study, an audit trail was made by the researcher and checked by an auditor on three generic criteria during analysis and data gathering in order to account for validity and reliability. An outsider, who had affinity with the subject matter, questioned the researcher on the choices he made and eventually wrote a quality report of her findings with the help of standardized guidelines. Visibility (the explication and communication of research decisions), comprehensibility (substantiation of decisions) and acceptability (are the substantiated decisions adequate according to the values and standards in the field of research) are the three generic criteria used to determine the quality of the research decisions (Akkerman et al., 2008). Although this was still not an objective, standardized measure for reliability, it obviously increased the accuracy of the procedure. The way the original data and notes of the researcher were examined by the auditor, made it a thorough approach and a more comprehensive method, because this structured and systemized process of auditing focused on the research study as a whole.

Results

Based on meaningful units extracted from the interviews, 52 codes were distilled from the data. These codes were in-vivo codes, words or small phrases the participants actually used, or constructed codes, codes derived from sensitizing concepts from the literature. The code tree was established in cooperation with a second, independent researcher. Five codes were eventually excluded, because they appeared only once, 47 codes remained.

Three out of the 16 interviews were coded by a third researcher (18,75%). The Cohen's Kappa was .68, which is sufficient (Evers, Lucassen, Meijer, & Sijtsma, 2010). After consultation about the allocation of the right codes to the right fragments, the Cohen's kappa increased to .85, which is good (Evers et al., 2010).

Nine main categories emerged from the data, which are; Personal development due to SAE's, professional knowledge, skills and attitudes due to SAE's, personal development irrespective of SAE's, professional knowledge, skills and attitudes irrespective of SAE's and the overall value of SAE's for teachers (See Appendix). These main categories were attached to the different codes in cooperation with a second researcher, according to the definitions the recruiters gave to the codes they mentioned.

In this section, the results of every main category are discussed, with representative example fragments used during the interviews by the recruiters. Subsequently, the overarching principle will be discussed.

Personal development due to study-abroad experiences (Pddse)

As shown in Table 2, the value recruiters attached to SAE's for teachers when hiring or rejecting personnel focused on an expanded conceptual framework developed by the teacher who went abroad. Because of this broader perspective on the world in general and the world of education in particular, teachers are more able to think from a school perspective instead of merely their own perspective. "Teachers who went abroad have a broader perspective and conceptual framework on education and children. They had the opportunity to compare completely different school concepts and school systems. They are better able to think from different perspectives and not only from their own perspective, which is a big plus in a school team." (*School principal*)

Table 2

Pddse and Example Fragments

Main category	Example fragments
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Personal development due to SAE's	<p>“These people are people who look further than their own perspective, face up new challenges and that's something that you're looking for” <i>(Teacher)</i></p> <p>“So I think that in terms of mindset all nice when people say; I did an international internship or I have been working one year abroad; it means you dare to take responsible risks and you have a focus on your own development and I think that's perfect.” <i>(School principal)</i></p>
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Professional knowledge/interest due to study-abroad experiences (Pkidse)

As presented in Table 3, the professional knowledge developed by teachers who went abroad was related to a more than average interest in other cultures than their own and knowledge of these cultures. This interest and knowledge was valued because of the diversity of backgrounds and cultures that can be found in the contemporary classroom as well. As a teacher, according to the recruiters, you have to have knowledge of the backgrounds of the school population. This professional knowledge strengthens the bond between teacher and child as well as the bond between teacher and the parents of the child. This is closely related to the understanding, acceptance and awareness of diversity in which Cushner & Mahon (2002) state that teachers must have international knowledge in order to meet the needs of their students. “Where does your school population come from? If you know where your school population comes from, you can deliver better performances and better feel for those children, you'd be better able to connect, it certainly adds value.” *(School principal)*

Table 3

Pkidse and Example Fragments

Main category	Example fragments
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Professional knowledge / interest due to SAE's	<p>“Yes, that they (teachers, ed.) know and understand what type of children they have to work with in order to develop some kind of sensitivity for that.” <i>(School Principal)</i></p> <p>“A demonstrable interest in; where do these people come from? Which means that if you deal with people who come from a dual culture: the mission must not only be a kind of empty words, but must also be real interest and the will to fine-tune.” <i>(School Principal)</i></p> <p>“Yes, and still, if I see parents and I say “we were in Morocco”; you have already gained a lot of goodwill.” <i>(School Principal)</i></p>
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Professional skills due to study-abroad experiences (Psds)

Many codes were allocated to Psds. In Table 4, the most frequently mentioned are discussed. The creativity of teachers who worked with limited resources in countries, for example, in Africa was mentioned as an important skill which is developed abroad. Professional knowledge is, according to the recruiters, a prerequisite for the development of professional skills like creativity. “You will be thrown back on core qualities as knowing your educational curriculum; knowing what you have to teach, because we are provided here with a lot of tools and methods and lots of information. They do not have that, so to speak. Then it is the expertise you have as a teacher that carries you and which is, in my view, important to carry out.” *(School principal)*

Furthermore, reflection was often mentioned by the recruiters. Teacher students who choose to study-abroad are forced to reflect due to the more complex and very different circumstances abroad: “I think it reinforces reflection because it is more extreme, so to speak, so different than what you’re used to.(...) when you go abroad, it is even more different, so to say and you still have to learn to deal with it.” *(Teacher)*

An important code which was mentioned by the recruiters was labeled as intercultural skills.

These skills, described by Giles et al. (1991) as skills of effectively dealing with people of different cultures and backgrounds, was also mentioned by the recruiters: “I think it's important, in general, that every culture is different, and how small differences seem to be. And I spent a year in England and Western Europe seems to be all the same, but even there are small cultural differences. (...) And that you're aware of these differences en know how to deal with it.” (*Member Representative Advisory Board*)

Table 4

Psdse and Example Fragments

Main category	Example fragments
Professional skills due to SAE's (Creativity)	<p>“I can imagine, as a teacher abroad, you must develop lessons and you're not a slave of the teaching method. So you have to consider what children need to learn. And then you can use the method as a basis, but please skip the things that are not effective. Change a method when you think; this works better.” (<i>School Principal</i>)</p> <p>“Be creative, because if you have limited resources, then you still need to make something out of it.” (<i>Teacher</i>)</p>
(Reflection)	<p>“This includes reflection. What is my position? What works here, in this environment? Am I able to make the switch?”</p> <p>(<i>Teacher/supervisor</i>)</p>
(Intercultural skills)	<p>“In anthropology two kinds of cultures are described; hot and cold cultures, so to speak. It has to do with the fact that the collective is more important than the individual .. As a teacher, you have to be aware that in some groups and in some cultures it works that way, that's it. I think it might really help you in many situations.”</p> <p>(<i>Teacher/supervisor</i>)</p>

Professional attitudes due to study-abroad experiences (Padse)

As presented in Table 5, recruiters also value professional attitudes which are developed through SAE's. The main themes that emerge from the data are related to the flexibility of teachers who went abroad. According to the recruiters, this flexibility is needed in every classroom where situations may rapidly change from one moment to another. "You have to have a certain flexibility in order to teach in a different culture. The Dutch are obviously enormously stubborn. Sometimes we are, sometimes we aren't, but in the way we act when traveling abroad.... What I've read, I think it is important as a teacher abroad you first have to wait until the dust has settled and be flexible on how people interact and what you can do for them. Do not just immediately do your own thing as usual." (*School principal*)

An open attitude towards other cultures and backgrounds was mentioned by the recruiters as an important competency developed abroad: "Well, if someone comes to work here, I would at least expect that someone has a certain open attitude to the multicultural situation here, and I would like to see it supported too. That is not just aspirational; "it seems so nice to teach foreign kids" but it really has to be substantiated." (*School principal*)

Table 5

Padse and Example Fragments

Main category	Example fragments
Professional attitudes due to SAE's	<p>"I think if you look at this school (...) I do think that the open attitude which you will bring with you when you have such an experience, it can be very crucial when you work at this school." (<i>School Principal</i>)</p> <p>"And if that is obviously an open-attitude (which comes along with a SAE, ed.), I think those teachers would definitely have an advantage." (<i>School Principal</i>)</p>

Next to professional knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA's) and personal development which were directly related to study-abroad experiences by the recruiters, KSA's that were not related to study-abroad experiences but were seen as important skills for teachers were mentioned. These KSA's irrespective of study-abroad experiences focused on different aspects which are discussed in the next section.

Personal drive to develop irrespective of a study-abroad experience (Pdiose)

As shown in Table 6, teachers' personal drive to develop was mentioned as an important issue in recruitment. Recruiters were looking for teachers who share their personal motivation, or drive, to work in elementary education: "To make a comparison; if you have an iceberg; The top does not interest me much. So what you can show, I've done this and that, I think so and so on; it's something you can learn. But what are your personal motivations? Your personal drive, motivation to work in elementary education. How do you see education? What do you think is good education? Then you are deeper digging into that iceberg. And if you do so, you get to the core values of a candidate." (*School Principal*)

Table 6

Pdiose and Example Fragments

Main category	Example fragments
Personal drive/development irrespective of SAE's	<p>"The drive to develop yourself. The moment you think; I know it all, you should not be working here." (<i>School principal</i>)</p> <p>"But of course you're also checking what a candidate wants at the time he's actually applying for a job. If you notice with a candidate: "OK, I have to, because my school is lifted but I actually do not feel like doing this anymore, then I would ask: "What are you looking for? Is this what you really want?" (<i>Member Representative Advisory Board</i>)</p>

Professional knowledge irrespective of a study-abroad experience (Pkise)

As displayed in Table 7, this professional knowledge focuses on the perspectives of a teacher regarding education and whether this professional point of view and knowledge fits the school concept, the perspectives or the priorities of the school. “Keeping our Dalton school in mind, I think that someone must have Dalton experience and if they haven’t, that he or she is striving to achieve so, because I think once you work here in the team it’s important to implement this perspective in class but also in the team.”

(Teacher)

Table 7

Pkise and Example Fragments

Main category	Example fragments
Professional knowledge irrespective of SAE’s	<p>“This school, and that is why I have chosen for this school as a parent, uses the more classical, old-fashioned system, so to say, with modern influences. But we have deliberately chosen not to go to Montessori and that is something that I think that you choose as parents ... (...) ... and if you notice a teacher does not like to teach that way, then you’d better go to another school that better suits your ideas.” <i>(Member Representative Advisory Board)</i>.</p> <p>“And in terms of job applications in this school I would again ... I think it's very important that they (the candidates, ed.) are really concerned with language education. At this school we are very concerned with language education, vocabulary expansion. Thereto, I would really pay attention.” <i>(Teacher)</i></p>

Professional skills irrespective of a study-abroad experience (Psise)

The skills that were valued focused on many aspects; didactic skills, ability to work with different levels in the classroom, educational quality, the ability to reflect, collaboration, and working in a team. Next to educational and pedagogical quality, the quality to work in a team was mentioned often by the recruiters, while recruiters often seek a right balance of personalities in a school team, as shown in Table 8. “When there is a job vacancy, you first go to see what type of teacher you want to have in your team? My mission is trying to find a variety of persons because the variety, in my opinion, ultimately brings specialism and expertise together. Seeking for all the same kind of persons I personally find dangerous, because it creates a situation of blindness. People with different perspectives make the blind spot as small as possible.” (*School principal*)

Table 8

Psise and Example Fragments

Main category	Example fragments
Professional skills irrespective of SAE's	<p>“Because every child is unique, you must also ensure that every child feels safe in the classroom. The moment the child is feeling well, he will also learn, because every child wants to learn and I think if you are able to manage your pedagogical skills, you're good at it, the learning will always come. I think it's perhaps the basis of what education should be, in my opinion.” (<i>School Principal</i>)</p> <p>“I would like to hear from those candidates whether they follow the steps of the teaching instruction manual or is this candidate looking at the instruction manual, looking for some matching materials, or is he/she choosing for a conversation with the children in the classroom? So do something more.” (<i>Teacher</i>)</p>

“Yes, they come to work in a team.... (...) I know the team quite well, but that is something that emerges clearly in a job interview and the principal may provide a good view of the team and the supervisor is there to say something about it but you’ll notice whether it’s a kind of person who likes to work in a team.” (*Member Advisory Board*)

Professional attitudes irrespective of a study-abroad experience (Paise)

As presented in Table 9, the professional attitudes focused an open attitude and a strong personality. This personality is needed to teach the 21st century classroom, while children need guidance and a person who provides leadership by standing firm in front of a classroom. "Because I think you should stand strong and confident.... not because these children are so bizarre but these kids are asking for someone who knows what he wants one of our pedagogical competencies that we have in our top eight is "say how you want it." And if you do not know how you want it, you can't say it either." (*School principal*)

Interesting to notice is that this confident attitude is explicitly not linked to SAE's by the recruiters, but terms like self-efficacy, sense of self awareness and especially personal confidence are in the literature explicitly linked to the effects of study-abroad programs on teachers' development (Mahon & Cushner, 2007; Cushner & Mahon, 2002). According to the authors, through facing the challenges abroad which are more challenging than life in the home country (students have to make choices abroad if they are to be successful), a growth of self-confidence and esteem is noticed.

An open attitude was also mentioned often. The teacher is called approachable; makes eye contact, and reduces the distance to the other by showing informal behavior: "Open your mouth if something fails or maybe just umm, yeah just be curious, open to ideas and tips, do have an open attitude." (*Teacher*).

Table 9

Paise and Example Fragments

Main category	Example fragments
Professional attitudes irrespective of SAE's	<p>“Often I check whether somebody stands firmly, so to say ... Yes, you have to be someone I think. (...) it happens that I am in a job interview and when we shake hands I think; “Well, turn around again.” (<i>School principal</i>)</p> <p>“Do not think; okay, my door will close, and this is my domain, no, you cannot do that.” (<i>Teacher</i>)</p>

Overall value of study-abroad experiences for teachers

At the end of each interview the question was asked whether the recruiter had the tendency to prevail a teacher with a study-abroad experience over a teacher without study-abroad experience. Some recruiters perceived these SAE's of teachers as a disadvantage. “I must say; I am very critical. It might be a bit weird because I work here in an international setting, but it was actually more pragmatic; I think you only have four years of teacher training, which is already short. I know what you actually really need to do to be qualified if you end the teacher training; so much has to be learned which is actually impossible to learn in four years. It's almost 100% sure; you're probably going to work in the Dutch educational system. The experience you gain will undoubtedly bring you a lot but you'll be missing half a year in in the Netherlands and how we work at schools in the Netherlands.” (*School Principal*)

Recruiters also mentioned merely positive effect of SAE's for teachers when applying for a job: “I would absolutely recommend anyone to do that once. (...) and I think especially when you work in a school like this, it surely can have many advantages.” (*School principal*)

However, by far most of the codes were allocated to the opinion that a SAE for teachers adds value, but it depends largely on personal characteristics what KSA's are gained and valued. Professional

development may also be reached through internships in the Netherlands, so the setting abroad isn't a necessity as commented clearly by a recruiter: "No, it can have added value and in that sense I stimulate going abroad; because you can develop well, but it is not true that if you don't go, you can't develop. So it's not a necessity, but it definitely adds value." (*School principal*)

Within this overall value of a SAE, the place where the SAE took place was also mentioned, as presented in Table 10. This code could be identified as of importance (+) or of no importance (-).

Table 10

Influence of Place on the Value of a SAE

	Example fragments
Place +	"It makes little sense to go, well let's say, to go to a school somewhere in France or England. England has a fairly tightly Government controlled system and fortunately, we haven't. So why would you have a look at a school over there?" (<i>School principal</i>)
Place -	"If you talk about open minded I guess it does not matter where you've been, because I think that you develop by just spending time out of the townhomes atmosphere; so it does not matter." (<i>School principal</i>)

In order to get a sense of the importance of the different categories, a mind map, as displayed in Figure 2, was developed in which the main categories are clustered to an overarching principle which was mentioned very often in almost all interviews. The guidelines of Boeije (2005, p.107) were used, *characteristics of a core category*: to seek for an overall principle which could be related to the main categories.¹

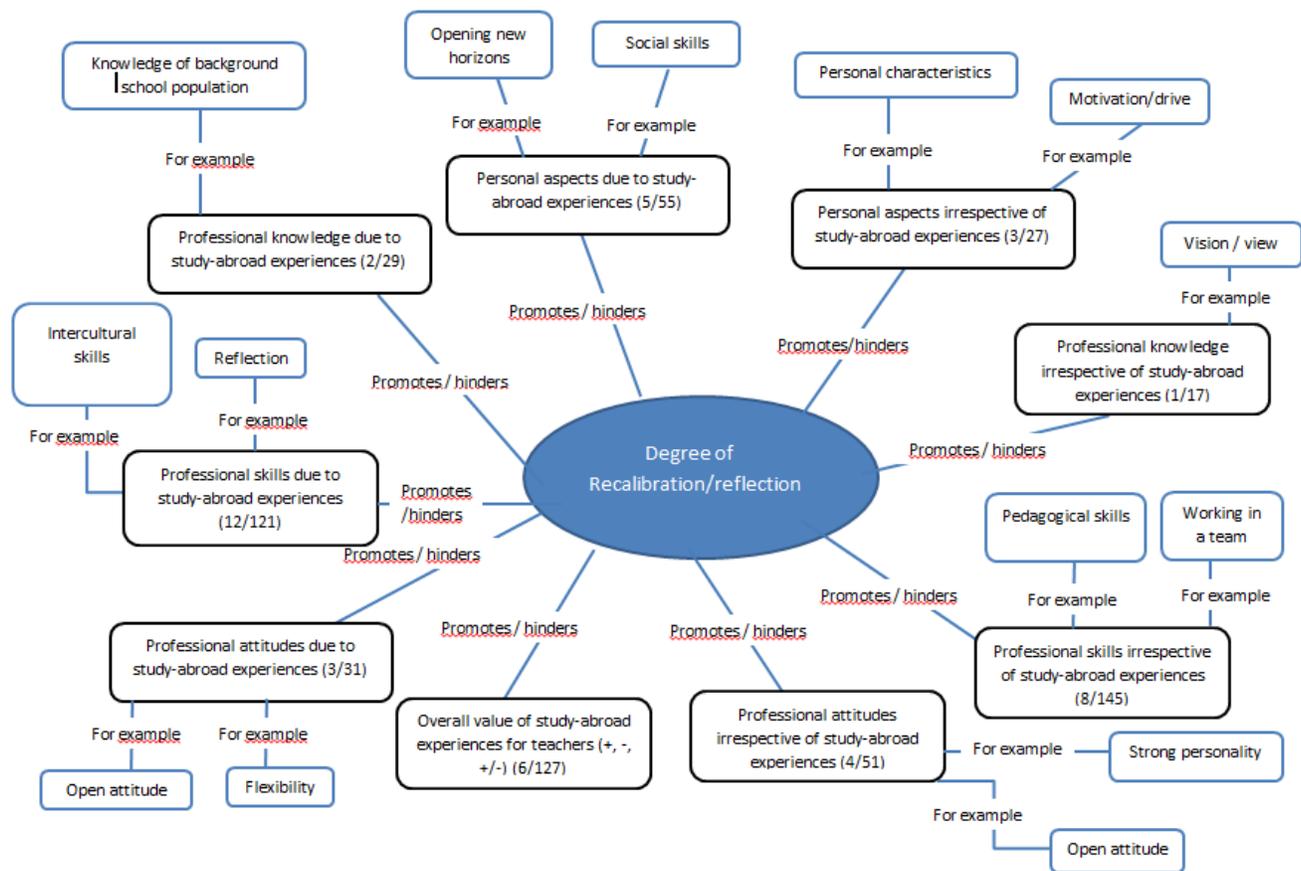


Figure 2. The overarching principle which relates to the main categories.

In brackets is first placed the number of different sub themes related to this main category and second, how often the different sub themes were mentioned by the recruiters. The overarching principle which often returned in the data, was degree of recalibration/reflection. The degree to which student teachers are able to recalibrate and reflect on their own actions, largely determines whether the aspects, which are linked to SAE's of teachers, are promoted or hindered. According to the recruiters, a teacher must have the skills to reflect and recalibrate in order to benefit from the SAE. And subsequently, the teacher must have the ability to explain to the recruiters in what way the school benefits from these SAE's and how what is learned will be applied in the classroom. Irvine (2003) and Sleeter (2001) also found in their research that students have to be provided with guided reflection in order to learn, because without

this reflection the persistence of existing beliefs may be encouraged, stereotypes may be reinforced, and student learning hindered. This reflection triggers transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990). It depends on personal characteristics whether the teacher brings out the absolute best of a SAE.

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the perceptions of elementary school teachers' recruiters in order to get a sense of the value recruiters attach to SAE's when hiring or rejecting teachers. Several authors have linked SAE's to the development of 21st century skills a teacher needs to possess in order to be capable to teach the contemporary classroom. The findings suggest a more specific hypothesis which competencies related to SAE's seem to matter. Recruiters diagnose specific personal development, and professional KSA's in order to emphasize which competencies they find important to have in their schools. There is an obvious difference made by recruiters between what Biggs (2003) calls *academic Susan* and *non-academic Robert*, teacher students who have different personal characteristics concerning the approach to learning. Where Susan is more committed than Robert to learning, she is also better able to teach herself. She doesn't need much help from others, is intrinsically motivated and reaches a higher level of deep-level learning. In contrast to non-academic Robert who is less motivated, has a surface approach to learning, and needs a lot of help to reach the same level of learning. The ability to learn from SAE's and to clarify what has been learned by reflection and recalibration is stressed as an overall important aspect for student teachers to make sure the competencies linked to SAE's by the recruiters are actually valued and can be substantiated. Because of the importance of recalibration and reflection in order to develop the ability to make the best out of SAE's, this is a rather complex issue and the competencies mentioned are not as straightforward as it might appear at first glance. Although the effects of SAE's shown in Table 1 are recognized by the recruiters, most of the codes were allocated to professional skills, such as reflection and intercultural (communication) skills, as presented in Figure 2. Far less attention was given to professional knowledge and attitudes and personal development. The competencies found in the literature are therefore to a greater or lesser extent confirmed by the recruiters.

What is indicated here, is that a SAE for teachers has value, provided that candidates are able to recalibrate and reflect upon their development and add value to the point of view and the priorities of the school organization, as well as the backgrounds of the school population.

Although the results of this exploratory study suggest that recruiters value specific skills due to SAE's, there is no agreement on the role of a SAE within teacher education. This suggests that even though the recruiters are able to describe main categories of KSA's they relate specifically to SAE's for teachers and they actually value too, the relation between the true value of these experiences and the value that is attached to these experiences is more complex and also related to the ability of the candidates to specify what has been learned abroad and the ability to promote themselves during job interviews. Or as one of the recruiters commented:

“Yes, job interviews are always for that matter ... yes something special (*laughs*). Look, some people may be very good at talking about what they think and what they do, but you haven't seen them acting in actual practice. And vice versa, people may be very good teachers, but lack the ability to sell their story. It really has a lot to do with presenting yourself and your skills and the ability to sell your story.” (*Teacher/Supervisor*)

This indicates that there are other intervening variables important; such as the ability to communicate well and make the right impression, and accordingly, the subjective impressions of the members of the Appointment Committee. It may be interesting to see what influence SAE's have on the ability to promote yourself. While personal development, self-efficacy, self-awareness, personal confidence and interpersonal skills are related to SAE's, it might help in job interviews as well, or as one of the recruiters would put it: “If you have a proportional number of people with and without experience abroad, then your experience abroad might make it just a little easier to talk and then it's like: ‘OK; both candidates have the skills; the teaching is fine and then I'd just choose to go for the right connection.’” (*Teacher*)

Limitations and directions for future research

Despite the contribution of the present study to the understanding of the perceptions of recruiters concerning SAE's for teachers when hiring or rejecting personnel, it is important to notice that this was a first attempt to understand the views of the participants under study, but needs more investigation.

It is also important to bear in mind that these recruiters were selected because of the accessible connections the researcher has concerning these schools. Future research might put together a larger sample to explore the differences between the perceptions of the different members of the appointment committee. Furthermore, future research could address the role of school population more. It would be interesting to see the results of investigation on the perceptions of recruiters of elementary school teachers who work with a great majority of minority students and to compare the results.

Furthermore, it was also a limitation that recruiters sometimes were contradicting in interviews and gave examples that not always came up to its promise which makes it difficult to judge whether their opinions were sufficiently substantiated. Recruiters drew examples from their own experiences, what they had seen and heard by others, but as memory is not always a very reliable part of the brains, and the impossibility to check the examples, makes it more sensitive to bias.

Conclusion

This exploratory study investigated the perceptions of 16 elementary school teachers' recruiters. I carefully conclude that the recruiters attach value to a SAE for teachers in terms of personal development, and professional KSA's. Nevertheless, the overall value and role attached to SAE's has to be investigated more profoundly, as this was a first exploratory attempt to better understand the effects of SAE's for future teachers in their professional career.

Words: 7977

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Footnote

¹The core category has a number of characteristics; The core category prominently emerges from the data (1), is central (2) (connected with many categories), (3) has clear relationships with other categories, facilitates the analysis (4) and explains the variation observed in a phenomenon (5) (Strauss, 1987; Boeije, 2010). The characterization that the core category can be formulated abstract, which enables application in other fields of science (Strauss, 1987; Boeije, 2010), which was not used here, because application on different science fields is outside the scope of the research study.

Appendix

Tabel 11

Axial Codeerschema

Hoofdcodes	Subcodes	Aantal codes / interviews
Personal development due to study-abroad experiences	1. Sociale vaardigheden/ontwikkeling	15 / 4
	2. Blik verruimen	14 / 7
	3. Waardering NL/relativeringsvermogen	10 / 4
	4. Avontuurlijke, ondernemende instelling / lef	9 / 6
	5. Mindset	7 / 4
Personal drive to develop irrespective of a study-abroad experience	1. Persoonlijke eigenschappen	16 / 8
	2. Persoonlijke ontwikkeling	15 / 7
	3. Persoonlijke motivatie / drijfveren	11 / 3
Professional knowledge due to study-abroad experiences	1. Kennis van schoolpopulatie / achtergrond leerlingen	26 / 9
	2. Interesse/kennis andere culturen	3 / 3
Professional skills due to study-abroad experiences	1. Reflectie	23 / 7
	2. Interculturele vaardigheden	18 / 5
	3. Communicatie	14 / 6
	4. Creativiteit	11 / 7
	5. Delen van ervaringen	10 / 3
	6. Interpersoonlijke vaardigheden	10 / 6
	7. Didactiek en vakinhoudelijke ontwikkeling	9 / 6
	8. Kunnen werken met beperkte middelen	9 / 5
	9. Organisatie +	6 / 4
	10. Initiatief nemen	4 / 4
	11. Pedagogische vaardigheden	4 / 3
	12. Samenwerking (Sam.buit)	3 / 3
Professional attitudes due to study-abroad experiences	1. Flexibiliteit	17 / 8
	2. Open houding door buitenlandervaring	9 / 3
	3. Wereldburgerschap	5 / 2
Professional knowledge irrespective of a study-abroad experience	1. Visie	17 / 7
Professional skills	1. Pedagogische kwaliteit	39 / 7

irrespective of a study-abroad experience	2. Werken in een team	23 / 7
	3. Interpersoonlijke vaardigheden ₂	23 / 5
	4. Reflectie	21 / 5
	5. Differentiëren	17 / 6
	6. Didactiek/vakinhoudelijke ontwikkeling	10 / 3
	7. Inlevingsvermogen / empathie	7 / 6
	8. Samenwerking	5 / 2
	Professional attitudes irrespective of a study-abroad experience	1. Krachtige persoonlijkheid
2. Open houding		17 / 6
3. Zelfstandigheid		10 / 4
4. Flexibiliteit (Flex2)		3 / 2
Value of a study-abroad experience	1. Meerwaarde +/-	41 / 12
	2. Plaats –	19 / 9
	3. Speerpunten algemeen	19 / 7
	4. Meerwaarde –	18 / 6
	5. Plaats +	18 / 5
	6. Meerwaarde +	12 / 5
Other	1. Proces sollicitatie	34 / 10
	2. Bestuursafspraken	5 / 4

Note. De code *Afstemming/herijking* valt onder meerdere hoofdcodes.