

***Quality of Education:
Faculty Staff***



Culture shock or shocking culture: An exploration of the main obstacles encountering Syrian newly returned academic staff from abroad

Rami M. Ayoubi¹
Hiba K. Massoud²
Hanan A. Al-Maghout³

Abstract

This study explores and empirically investigates and classifies the major reverse culture shock aspects, difficulties that Syrian returning academics encounter once they come back to their sending universities, and their previous cultural exposure when they studied abroad. The data is collected using a questionnaire developed for the purpose of this study and distributed to more than one hundred academics who returned within the past 49 months to Damascus University. Seventy eight academics responded. From the perspective of newly appointed academic staff, the questionnaires basically investigate the extent of study abroad exposure, aspects of reverse cultural shock, and major difficulties academics face from the date of returning until the date of being a full member of academic staff. A cross-sectional comparative analysis based on personal information is accomplished. To further investigate the three dimensions of the study, both factor and cluster analysis are employed. The results are presented in a three dimensional grid models. This study is the first analytical study in this field in the Syrian higher education sector. However, it is limited to data collected from only one public university in Syria. Implicitly, the study highlights the importance of maintaining academic staff at their institutions. It also provides suggestions and recommendations to university managers for better elimination of the high risk of brain drain in developing countries.

¹ Coordinator of Tempus Programme in Syria based at the Ministry of Higher Education, and Lecturer at the Faculty of Economics, University of Damascus, Syria. Held PhD in Strategic Management and Globalization from the University of Nottingham, UK, 2006. Dr Ayoubi could be contacted on ntosyria@scs-net.org

² Lecturer at the Faculty of Economics, University of Damascus, and Advisor to some EU and UNDP Projects, Syria. Held PhD in Corporate Social Responsibility from the University of Nottingham, UK, 2006. Dr Massoud could be contacted on massoudhiba@hotmail.com

³ Lecturer at the Higher Language Institute, University of Damascus, Syria. Held MA in TEFL from Reading University, UK, 2003, and MBA from HIBA in Syria, 2008. Miss Al-Maghout could be contacted on maghout@gmail.com



I. Introduction

By the end of 2008, thousands of Syrian governmentally funded students were studying abroad, consuming hundreds of millions of Syrian pounds of the national income. In line with the national development map for the higher education sector, the main aim is to provide public institutions, particularly universities, with their staff capacity needs. A considerable number of those students return back home holding the capacity qualifications required for appointment at the institutions that delegated them. However, most of them encounter several kinds of obstacles and difficulties causing some to leave the country after returning as well as causing others still abroad to think of not returning to Syria.

In order to identify the factors that could lead to high risks of brain drain, the study explores and empirically investigates these difficulties and their relations with reverse culture shock aspects and previous exposure to foreign cultures during study abroad. Based on the results of analysis, the study also aims at providing useful recommendations to university managers highlighting the importance of maintaining academic staff at their institutions. The study tries to fill the gap of reverse culture shock literature in two ways: first, it addresses the issue of reverse culture shock in an Arab country where this phenomenon has not previously been studied; and second, by its dynamic nature of analysis that links the exposures to the country of study culture, the difficulties reverse culture shock brings to academic life, and the symptoms of reverse culture shock.

This paper is organized as follows; a review of the main features of the Syrian higher education and the Syrian government efforts towards capacity building of the academic staff is presented in section II. Section III reviews the related literature and provides the theoretical framework of the paper. The method, difficulties, and techniques of data collection and analysis are described in section IV. The findings of this study are illustrated in section V. Finally, section VI discusses the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

II. Features of the Syrian higher education, and the capacity building of Syrian academic staff

The Syrian Government has responsibility for the supervision and control of the Higher Education System in Syria. This is achieved through the Ministry of Higher Education and the Higher Education Council. There are six public universities (Damascus University, Al Baath University, Aleppo University, Tishreen University, Al-Furat University, Syrian Virtual University), with a plan to expand to ten universities by 2010. There are thirteen private universities, and eleven more which are under construction. There are also six higher institutes, and a huge number of intermediate vocational, professional and technical training institutions that are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education. The most influential legislation for higher education in Syria since 2000 was the Presidential Decree No. 36 of 2001, which governs the work of private universities in Syria. The other legal framework that governs and regulates higher education in Syria is Law No. 6 of 2006, called "The University Regulation Law", which governs the work of public universities in Syria. This Law is an amendment of the previous Law. The new law gives more autonomy to universities, particularly with regard to staff appointments and promotions.

The Ministry of Higher Education is aiming to set priorities, devise executive plans to implement them, and continue the process of modernization of the sector. To fulfil its goals, the Ministry of Higher Education is cooperating with national (public and private) and international partners. In





line with the modernization and upgrading projects planned and carried out nationally with the various programmes of the European Union and UNDP, the Ministry has set out the following as immediate reform priorities:

1. The establishment of new institutions, faculties and programmes within the existing institutions.
2. New admissions policy consistent with academic standards, potential students' needs, and national development needs.
3. Developing existing curriculum and implementing dynamic flexible rules for their continuous revision in response to social and market needs.
4. Continuing the process of establishing a Quality Assurance and Accreditation System.
5. Drafting executive plans for the purpose of upgrading the skills of academic staff.
6. Upgrading the enabling environment through providing up-to-date facilities such as: labs, modern libraries, network connectivity.
7. Revamping academic research and graduate studies programmes.
8. Upgrading vocational and educational training institutes.
9. Sector restructuring to enhance governance and introducing updated management information systems.
10. Establishing an effective statistical matrix which is important for planning at the strategic and policy level.

One of the major shortcomings of Higher Education in Syria, and the Arab region in general, is the lack of relevance of programmes and curricula to development needs and to the labour market. The Council of Higher Education in Syria is conscious that there is a need for major reform and diversification of the Higher Education programmes in Syria to meet development needs, and has asked the universities in the country to reform and modernize their programmes. It has also eased the regulation governing curricula development and made them more decentralized and flexible.

A government committee called the "University Admission Committee", which is headed by the Prime Minister, determines the number of students to be admitted to the Higher Education system each year and their distribution. The Syrian government is committed to the policy of equal access to higher education. In principle, each student passing the General Secondary Education Exams (The Baccalaureate) is eligible for a place in the Syrian Higher Education system. This "Open Door" Policy was adopted by the Syrian government in the early seventies, and still being practiced.

Following the open door policy and in order to respond to the huge number of students recruited each year, the Ministry of Higher Education in consultation with the universities, and applying the measures of quality assurance, is looking to enhance capacity building among academic staff, particularly teaching assistants, both qualitatively and quantitatively. This is mainly done through international capacity building programmes funded by the government, where hundreds of teaching assistants are sent every year mainly to western countries to study for their PhDs to enable them to fulfil the requirements of appointment at their sending institutions.

By the end of 2008, there were more than four thousands Syrian governmentally funded students studying abroad, consuming hundreds of millions of Syrian pounds of the national income. Most of these students were students reading for their PhD degrees. More than half of them were appointed as teaching assistants at the Syrian universities prior to leaving to the receiving country. The Syrian governmental policy towards studying abroad was majored by western receiving countries including Germany, France and Britain (see Table 1).



Table 1: Number of current governmentally funded Syrian teaching assistants studying abroad

Hosting country	Number of teaching assistants studying abroad on 29/Jan/2009	%
France	833	41.88
Germany	567	28.51
UK	404	20.31
Egypt	91	4.58
Other countries	94	4.73
Total	1,989	

Source: Department of Academic Staff Affairs, Ministry of Higher Education, Syria

Considerable numbers of these PhDs holders come back every year to Syria to start their new career as full academic members at their faculties. However, most of them, after spending a relatively long period of time in the country of study, and being exposed to the academic environment at their hosting institutions may encounter difficulties in coping with the new academic culture at their sending institutions. The aim of this study is to investigate the difficulties that are encountering Syrian newly returned academic staff from abroad in relation to their exposure to their study abroad culture and environment and to the major symptoms of reverse culture shock.

III. Relevant previous studies and theoretical framework of the study

1. The dilemma of brain drain

A review of the literature on reverse cultural integration in the home country of Syria and in the Arab world reveals a great lack of such studies. However, this is not only the case in the Arab Region, as Furnham (2004) argues, such studies are comparatively new. There is a lack of large scale, multi factorial, longitudinal studies that can help policy makers to identify the problems of increasing numbers of returning students the world over. For policy makers, this issue is of great importance as it may lead to the brain drain of an important class of the society, i.e. the academic staff. However, it will always be difficult to stop very skilled workers from emigrating. Miyagiwa (1991) emphasizes that conventional policies designed to stop a brain drain may succeed only in retaining those who are mediocre professionals while the brightest continue to emigrate.

The demand for better opportunities and better academic and professional environments lead highly skilled academics to emigrate. Li and Bray (2007) investigated the push–pull factors and motivations of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau, and found that that flows of mainland Chinese students are driven by both excess and differentiated demand. Tremblay (2005) argues that in the context of increasing internationalization of education, academic mobility is a potential source of qualified workers from the host countries' perspective, either during their studies or through subsequent recruitment. Studying abroad can be part of a deliberate emigration strategy from the perspective of students. Major notable reasons for the emigration of highly skilled academic staff and students relate to the uncomfortable culture in the sending countries. In a study on the major challenges faced by Russian academics, Smolentseva (2004)

found that Russian higher education and its academic staff face the challenges of adapting to financial constraints, improving appointment and evaluation procedures, and the formation of a faculty with a younger generation. Halici and Kasimoglu (2006) in a study on the level of discrimination against academic staff in a Turkish and an Azerbaijani university, found that such discrimination leads to thoughts about emigration.

Academics have proposed different solutions to the dilemma of brain drain. Gonzalez (2004) proposes different solutions for brain drain and overseas employment in the Philippines. For oversubscribed professions, overseas employment is a viable option; it is a source of foreign exchange and a natural way of population control. For undersubscribed professions he proposes a system of incentives tied to a period of mandatory service, after which the beneficiary may exercise his/her options. Hendriks and Sousa (2008) investigated how universities in the Netherlands approach the need and means for motivating university researchers through their management practices. They found how individual and organizational understandings of work assessment, work processes and work context connect to the social mechanisms borrowed from the broader epistemic, discipline-specific communities outside the university are factors that should be investigated further by university management. In the same context, Meyer and Evans (2008) suggest that universities must proactively investigate policies and strategies to motivate and enhance their developing professoriate, and not doing so will lead inevitably to limits on the institution's capacity to attract, retain, and nurture those with the essential qualifications, academic ability, and commitment necessary for higher education to perform its unique role in society.

2. The exposure to the hosting culture

The theory suggests that most of those who are more exposed to the culture of the country of study, and specifically the organizational culture at the hosting academic institution, are more likely to suffer from reverse culture shock. In a study on a group of American students who participated in an honour program in the UK and a control group of students who stayed home, Bates (1997) suggest that those who participated in the study abroad programme showed personal development as well as an increase in their world-mindedness. In the same context, in a survey of participants in programs run by the New Jersey State Consortium for International Studies from the Fall of 1997 to the Summer of 2002, Hadis (2005) found that the experience of studying abroad has a very positive impact on university students who return more worldly than before, are more interested in international affairs, read newspapers more often than before going abroad, increase their fluency in other languages, acquire a more solid knowledge about their host countries' societies and culture. They also show definite signs of personal development: they are more independent, more outgoing, more friendly toward people from other countries, more self-assured and uninhibited about travelling to countries where English is not the first language. Cannon (2000) investigated the outcomes of an international education for Indonesian graduates, and found that the outcomes derived from an international overseas education are a complex mix of professional, affective, cultural and career advantages mediated by the nature of the environment in which they work and the nature of the work they do. The author found that most graduates believe the advantages of an overseas education are more important than the disadvantages. In a comparative study of intercultural adaptability and intercultural sensitivity to study abroad students with students who stay on campus, Williams (2005) found that students who study abroad exhibit a greater change in intercultural communication skills after their semester abroad than students who stay on campus. This indicated that exposure to various cultures was the greatest predictor of intercultural communication skills.

Sussman (2002) explores the relationship between culture identity and repatriation experience among 113 American teachers who studied in Japan. Results indicated that overseas adaptation and repatriation experiences are not directly associated. Rather, strong home culture identity inversely predicted repatriation distress with repatriates experiencing high distress reporting weak culture identity. Repatriation experience is related to shifts in culture identity. Increased estrangement from American culture (subtractive) or feeling “more” Japanese (additive) following a visit are correlated with high repatriation distress. Employing an interpretive case study of a group of masters’ degree students in Singapore taught by an Australian university in partnership with a local provider, Pyvis and Chapman (2005) found that international students studying in their home country with an overseas institution may also experience culture shock as an effect of this engagement. Cannon (2000) indicated that there are important disadvantages of exposure to a receiving culture such as difficulties with re-entry, work relationships, and the development of appropriate professional networks. However he found that the exposure will cause more important changes in intellectual abilities, attitudes and culture perspectives than on narrower career advantages such as salary and promotion, which may actually suffer as a consequence of an international education.

3. The aspects of reverse culture shock and disintegration

Research has shown that some of the symptoms of culture shock include challenges to sense of identity, frustration, anger, withdrawal, depression, exhaustion, and numbness. If left unresolved, culture shock can result in a premature return to the home culture, functional difficulties, and prolonged psychological distress (Swagler & Jome, 2005). Oberg (1960) has identified six distinct aspects of culture shock:

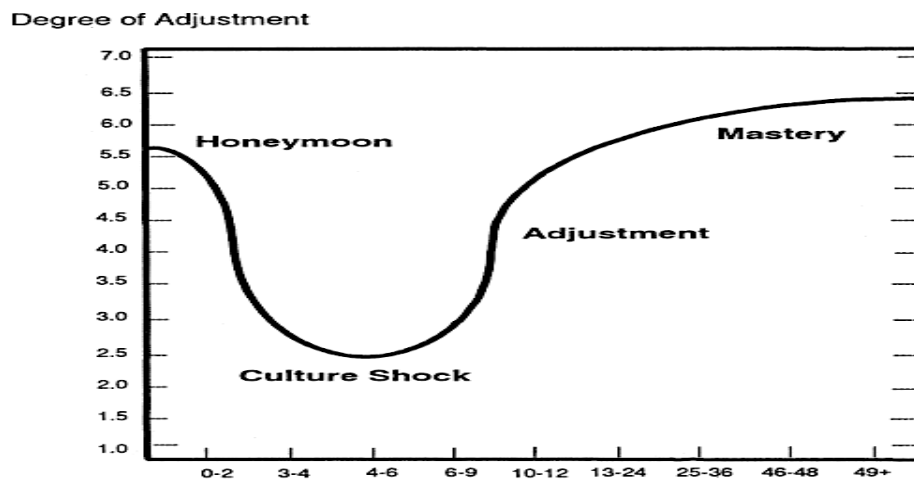
- a. Strain due to the effort required to make necessary psychological adaptations
- b. A sense of loss and feelings of deprivation in regard to friends, status, profession and possessions
- c. Being rejected by and/or rejecting members of the new culture
- d. Confusion in role, role expectations, values, feelings and self-identity
- e. Surprise, anxiety, even disgust and indignation after becoming aware of culture differences
- f. Feelings of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment.

In an investigation on the aspects of reverse culture shock in American students returning from overseas, Gaw (2000) found that returnees experiencing a high level of reverse culture shock were more likely to report personal adjustment and shyness concerns than were returnees experiencing a low level of reverse culture shock. The author also found a negative correlation with regard to reverse culture shock and student support service usage; as reverse culture shock increased, service usage decreased. In a study to notions of transitions of re-entry through the experiences of East Asian tertiary international students who had studied in New Zealand, Butcher (2004) found that these transitions centre on expectations, a longing to belong, identity crisis, and a sense of homelessness and loss, as well as various social responses and other general transitions. Butcher argues that the reintegration of identity and place is crucial in ameliorating some of the re-entry difficulties, which also provides a useful conceptual framework to understand re-entry. Miyamoto and Kuhlman (2001) identify the variables that may predict the level of culture shock and anxiety level over returning to Japan among 240 Japanese expatriate students living in southern California. They found that the students attended an American school on the weekdays and a Japanese supplementary school on Saturdays. The study showed that the most effective predictors for the mitigation of culture shock and anxiety over returning to Japan

were, respectively, the perceived favourableness of the relationship with American teachers and friends, perceived favourable relationship with their Japanese teacher, and a favourable perception of their father's English language proficiency.

Pedersen (1995) proposes five stages of culture shock as follows, the honeymoon stage, the disintegration stage, the reintegration stage, the autonomy stage and the interdependence stage. In the same context, according to two major dimensions, degree of adjustment to the culture and the period of adjustment, Black and Mendenhall (1991) draw up a U-Curve of Cross-Cultural Adjustment based on four major steps of reintegration (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Black and Mendenhall's (1991) U-Curve of Cross-Cultural Adjustment



4. The study questions

Based on the theory of culture and reverse culture shock, most studies describe the psychological symptoms of academic returners. However, there is a lack of dynamic analysis of the associations between exposure to the culture in the country of study, the academic life difficulties resulted from reverse culture shock, and the symptoms of reverse culture shock. This study aims to investigate the main academic difficulties and obstacles encountering Syrian newly returned academic staff from abroad by responding to the following research questions:

- To what extent were the Syrian newly returned academic staff exposed to the culture and environment in the country of study?
- What major aspects of reverse culture shock are the newly returned Syrian academic staff experiencing? And to what extent are the aspects of this shock reflected in their daily academic life?
- What are the major academic obstacles that they face, and to what extent are they facing such obstacles?
- To what extent is there compatibility between study abroad exposure, reverse culture shock symptoms, and the academic occupational difficulties of newly returned academic staff?

IV. Methods, difficulties and techniques of data collection and analysis

1. Methods of investigation

The investigation was based on a descriptive survey. The study examined the occupational problems of PhD-holders returnees to Damascus governorate governmental Higher Education University and institutes. Data were incorporated to explore the exposure to the other culture when studying abroad, aspects of reverse culture shock, and occupational difficulties faced upon returning to Syria. The subjects were 60 PhD-holders returnees who had been selected by the government to study for a PhD degree abroad. The number of qualified participants is in the range of participants in similar studies. For example 66 participated in the Gaw (2000) study; 113 participated in the Sussman study (2002); 95 in the Hadis (2005) study.

2. Criteria of participants

Academic staff at Damascus University, who met the following inclusion criteria at the time of the study were asked to participate in the investigation: (1) holding a PhD degree; (2) completing the PhD degree outside the Syrian Arab Republic; and (3) final returning to Syria within the past 49 months. These criteria were selected following a study of the culture shock literature and performing some initial pre-sampling tests. The maximum period of 49 months for final return to Syria as a condition for participation in the study was based on the U-Curve theory of culture shock and the stages suggested by Black and Mendenhall (1991) which suggests that it usually takes an individual around 49 months to complete the cycle of adjustment. To test the validity of this cut-off point, 36 questionnaires were distributed equally over two groups of PhD-holding staff from the above mentioned higher education bodies. The first group of staff arrived back in Syria more than 49 months ago (at the time of the study) while the other group included returnees who had been living in Syria for 49 months or less. A t-test was performed to investigate whether there is a difference between the means of the percentages of the neutral answers⁴ to all answers in the two samples. The test results which appear in Tables (2a and 2b) show Levene's test is significant ($P < 0.05$) suggesting unequal variance, and the t-test is also significant suggesting that the mean of the percentage of neutral answers in the first group (returned more than 49 months ago) is significantly higher than its counterpart in the second group (returned less than 49 months ago). Therefore, the t-test results support the choice of the cut-off point built on the U-Curve theory.

Table 2a: Group Statistics

	Arrival	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Percentage of neutral answers	more than 49 months ago	18	.4804	.32502	.07661
	49 months or less	18	.2386	.10430	.02458

⁴ Neutral answers are those that do not give a clear opinion either because they are not applicable to the respondent or because he/she is not able to form a decision about an answer for the question

Table 2b: Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Percentage of neutral answers	Equal variances assumed	15.646	.000	3.006	34	.005
	Equal variances not assumed			3.006	20.464	.007

3. Data collection and difficulties of data collection

To collect data, several visits were made to all faculties at Damascus University and the other higher institutes at Damascus University to collect contact information about all academic staff who returned during the past 49 months. The survey packet contained a cover letter explaining the study and the survey. 25 surveys were sent by email, although respondent rate was very low for this method of data collection (only three completed surveys were returned). The researchers were informed that the survey contains personal information and were advised to send and collect the surveys using mail boxes. 100 surveys were distributed using the mail boxes and respondents were asked to complete and return the mailed survey immediately. 78 questionnaires were collected in this way, although after filtering procedures only 60 of these were considered as qualified (usable). A variety of issues were encountered while collecting the data. The first was to identify the sample for the study based on accurate information on the exact dates of the participants' final return to Syria. Another was the geographical distribution of faculties at Damascus University. As mentioned above, for confidentiality and anonymity reasons, the majority of participants preferred not to fill in the questionnaire electronically and this meant that longer time had to be spent in distributing and collecting the questionnaires. In general, the participants showed a high degree of co-operation, as many said 'the questionnaire pinpoints their concerns and highlights their problems'. However, a considerable number of participants were irritated by certain items on the first part of the questionnaire and considered them too personal and irrelevant to the research. Hence, some refused to fill in the questionnaire, while others completed it only after time spent persuading and clarifying. In order to avoid the refusal of participants to fill-in in the first part of the questionnaire, the answers were elicited indirectly following prolonged conversations with participants. Furthermore, some participants commented that they felt uneasy filling in the second part of the questionnaire.

4. Questionnaire design and techniques of data analysis

This investigation employed a survey consisting of three areas; the exposure to foreign culture during study abroad, reverse culture shock, and the main occupational difficulties facing the returnees. Demographic components in the survey included age, sex, marital status, and number of months lived abroad. The first group of questions assessed the participants' degree of exposure to foreign culture during their study abroad. These eleven items investigated issues ranging from personal (such as having a partner) to work experience. The second group assessed the participants' degree of reverse culture shock based on the six culture shock aspects mentioned in the study by

Oberg (1960). This was a sixteen item, 5-point Likert-type scale developed from previous culture shock and reverse culture shock research (e.g., Mumford (1998). The third component of the survey investigated the main difficulties facing the new comers. This was an eighteen item, 5-point Likert-type scale representing 4 groups of difficulties; financial, personal, academic and research related, and organizational. In order to meet the three major dimensions of the study identified in the research questions, i.e. the cultural shock, the level of exposure to culture in the country of study, and the occupational difficulties, the authors used the factor analysis technique to obtain one factor for each of the previously mentioned dimensions. The method used to extract the factor is the Principal Components method (see Bryman and Cramer, 1999, p. 274). As this analysis aimed only at one factor for each dimension, no rotation techniques were needed. The aspects of cultural shock, level of exposure to the culture in the country of study, current occupational difficulties factors were estimated using the relevant items identified in the previous paragraph. The scores of the three factors were calculated using the Regression method to count factor scores. The previous steps of this analysis were conducted by using the SPSS statistical package.

V. Findings

1. Sample description

Participants were in the 31 to 45 age range; the average age was 36 (S.D. =2.6) and most of the participants were aged 37 (the mode). Thirty nine males and twenty one females participated. At the time of the study, this sample had been back in Syria for an average of 23 months, with a range of from less than a month to 49 months. Respondents studied in eight different countries. The majority were in France, UK and Egypt. The distribution of participants according to the country of study was: 25 in France, 20 in the UK, 8 in Egypt, 2 in USA, 2 in Russia, and one in each of Italy, Germany and Japan. The average stay was around 74 months with a range of 40 to 213 months. Twenty seven of the participants were single, one was a widow, one was divorced, and thirty one were married. Three of the married participants (two males and one female) were married to foreigners. Eight were married before leaving to study abroad, another eight married during the period of study abroad, seven got married after finishing study abroad, and the rest preferred not give information about the date of their marriages.

2. Descriptive analysis (responding to research questions 1, 2 and 3)

This study assessed the degree of exposure to foreign culture, reverse culture shock, and occupational difficulties experienced by a sample of 60 Syrian higher education governmental bodies' academic staff who received their PhD degrees from abroad. The study then examined the compatibility between these three researched areas for newly returned staff. This section provides a descriptive analysis of the participants' responses to the questions representing the three research areas.

a. Exposure to foreign culture

Tables 3a and 3b provide the response percentages of the sample across the exposure measurement variables. Table 3a shows the responses to the yes/no questions. The table shows that less than 7% of the participants had partners and/or been married to foreigners. However, most of them (over 90%) were exposed to other social activities or experience. Table 3b shows the responses to other nonparametric questions. This table illustrates that over 55% of the participants were highly exposed to the culture of their countries of studies via residency, tourism and working abroad. The participants' exposure through problems faced and academic research however was relatively low (less than 39% of the participants).

Table 3a: The exposure to foreign culture during study abroad responses (yes/no variables)

Exposure Item	Yes	No
Married to a foreigner	5.0	95.0
Having a partner	6.7	93.3
Visiting to foreign families	90.0	10.0
Having contacts abroad	98.3	1.7

Table 3b: The exposure to foreign culture during study abroad responses (other non-parametric variables*)

Exposure Item	Lower		Middle		Higher
Residency	8.3	26.7		33.3	31.7
Tourism	3.3	41.7		36.7	18.3
Work experience**		33.3	8.3	56.7	
Work motivations**	26.7	10.0		1.7	60.0
Problems faced	58.3	13.3	1.7	16.7	10.0
Research experience***		66.7	25.0	1.7	

* No category values represent no such category for the variable

** One missing value

*** Three missing values

Table 3c shows the participants' response statistics of the parametric question (the duration of stay abroad). The minimum stay was 40 months while the maximum was 213 months with a mean of 74 months (around 6 years) and a standard deviation of 25 months suggesting that the variable's entries are highly dispersed.

Table 3c: The exposure to foreign culture during study abroad responses (parametric variables)

Exposure Item	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Duration of stay abroad (by months)*	40	213	74	25

*Three missing values

b. Aspects of reverse culture shock

Table 4 provides the response percentages of the sample across the culture shock aspect subscale. Items were sorted by respondents as; neutral (not applicable/do not know), strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree. Some questions in the questionnaire were structured in a negative form (referring to the existence of the culture shock aspect examined), while others were structured in a positive form. For the purpose of factor analysis, answers for the positive questions were transformed to be presented in the same direction of the negative questions (indicating the existence of culture shock aspects (see Table 4).

Table 4 shows that more than 86% of the participants often make comparisons between the faculties where they worked/ studied abroad and the ones they are working at in Syria and notice the gaps between organizational cultures when comparing between the two. Interestingly, about 60% of the participants have the feelings of deprivation with regard to profession and over 75% prefer to write using the language they used to study their PhD degree. Approximately 12% of the participants think that faculty staff members reject them for who they are although 60% were cautious when dealing with the faculty staff members.

Table 4: Reverse culture shock aspects subscale responses

Culture Shock Item	Neutral answers	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Feelings of deprivation in regard to academic skills.	10.0	10.0	20.0	25.0	35.0
Feelings of deprivation in regard to research skills.	6.7	8.3	11.7	23.3	50.0
Preference to write using the language of PhD graduate study.	18.3	0	6.7	36.7	38.3
Feeling uncomfortable with the general atmosphere in the faculty.	30.0	3.3	18.3	28.3	20.0
Inability to understand plenty of things that take place in the faculty.	30.0	1.7	5.0	40.0	23.3
Feeling different compared to other academic staff members.	41.7	3.3	15.0	23.3	16.7
Feeling the gaps between organizational cultures when comparing organizations in the two countries.	6.7	0	5.0	30.0	58.3
Cautious when dealing with the faculty academic staff members and/or employees.	16.7	1.7	15.0	41.7	25.0
Often compare between the faculty I worked/ studied at abroad and the one I am at in Syria.	8.3	0	5.0	30.0	56.7
Feelings of deprivation in regard to development and success opportunities.	10.0	1.7	21.7	28.3	38.3
Feeling afraid of being misunderstood by academic staff or employees.	30.0	3.3	18.3	35.0	13.3
Think that academic staff members and employees reject me for who I am.	33.3	6.7	48.3	11.7	0
Feeling that academic staff members and employees might not accept the way I look and that I was accustomed to when I was abroad.	48.3	10.0	23.3	10.0	6.7*
Feeling being discriminated against because of being younger.	31.7	5.0	25.0	23.3	13.3*
Feeling shocked by certain things that happen at the faculty.	25.0	1.7	5.0	41.7	26.7
Strain to cope with the new work environment.	30.0	1.7	28.3	31.7	8.3

* One missing value

c. Current occupational difficulties

Table 5 provides the response percentages of the sample across the occupational difficulties subscale. Items were sorted by respondents similar to the culture shock items ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questions that were formed in a positive way were transformed similar to the explanation earlier (so that they refer to the existence of the occupational difficulties instead of referring to the nonexistence of the difficulties). Table 5 demonstrates that financial difficulties came on the top of the difficulty scale (over 85% of the participants agreed that university payments were insufficient). Organizational difficulties came next where over 80% of the participants stated that the appointment procedures at university were difficult and inflexible, 75% of them agreed that participating in conferences and workshops held abroad is

difficult, and over 68% stated their agreement that university has not provided them with a clear job description. However, it should be mentioned that on the faculty level, organizational difficulties were not of considerable importance (see items referring to management and staff support). Academic and research related difficulties were also given significant weight as more than 70% of the participants agreed that academic and library facilities available at the faculty were unsatisfactory and that keeping in touch by e-mail with colleagues or students at the faculty was inconvenient. Personal difficulties came last.

Table 5: Occupational difficulties subscale responses

Occupational Difficulties Item	Neutral answers	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Insufficient payment from university.	8.3	1.7	5.0	46.7	38.3
Obstacles with my main university duties due to working in other academic institutions.	38.3	10.0	21.7	20.0	10.0
Facing real academic affairs problems/difficulties with colleagues.	26.7	1.7	28.3	38.3	5.0
Facing real academic affairs problems/difficulties with superiors.	31.7	3.3	28.3	30.0	6.7
Facing real academic affairs problems/difficulties with students.	25.0	18.3	36.7	15.0	3.3*
Head of Department is not supportive.	15.0	13.3	65.0	3.3	3.3
Faculty administration is not supportive.	30.0	11.7	41.7	13.3	3.3
Faculty employees are not supportive.	33.3	13.3	50.0	1.7	1.7
Inability to conduct research of the same quality compared to research done when abroad.	10.0	18.3	15.0	21.7	35.0
Inability to manage time with the same efficiency when abroad.	15.0	8.3	13.3	33.3	30.0
Academic facilities available at the faculty are unsatisfactory.	13.3	1.7	13.3	21.7	50.0
Library facilities available at the faculty are unsatisfactory.	13.3	6.7	8.3	26.7	43.3*
Keeping in touch by e-mail with colleagues or students at the faculty is inconvenient.	16.7	10.0	23.3	26.7	21.7*
Difficulties to participate in conferences and workshops abroad.	10.0	5.0	10.0	20.0	55.0
Appointment procedures at university were difficult and inflexible.	10.0	0	8.3	23.3	56.7*
Teaching subjects that are unrelated to area of specialization.	8.3	20.0	56.7	10.0	5.0
University has not provided me with a clear job description.	18.3	0	13.3	30.0	38.3
Not expressing personal opinion freely during meetings and forums.	23.3	16.7	36.7	16.7	6.7

* One missing value

3. Advanced analysis (responding to research question 4)

In response to research question 4 on how compatible the three dimensions are, the participants were categorized according to the three dimensions; their exposure to the culture in the country where they studied, the degree of their culture shock, and the occupational difficulties faced by them. The 3D visual scatter plot appears on a 3 two-dimension basis (Figures 2, 3 and 4).

While Figures 2, 3, and 4 show 8 categories, Table 6 shows the frequency of cases in each of these categories and the percentage to the total sample. Table 6 also illustrates that groups 1, 4 and 8 contain the highest number of participants and make 56.6% of the total sample. The first group (group 1) representing participants who experienced high levels of exposure to foreign culture, showed clear aspects of culture shock and faced more difficulties compared to the other groups. This group alone forms 30% of the total sample. The last group (group 8) representing participants who experienced low levels of exposure to foreign culture, showed less clear aspects of culture shock and faced less difficulties compared to other groups. This group forms 13.3% of the total sample. Group 4 is of equal weight as group 8. It represents participants who experienced low levels of exposure to foreign culture, showed more clear aspects of culture shock and faced less difficulties compared to other groups.

Figure 2: (Culture Shock-Occupational Difficulties) Grid

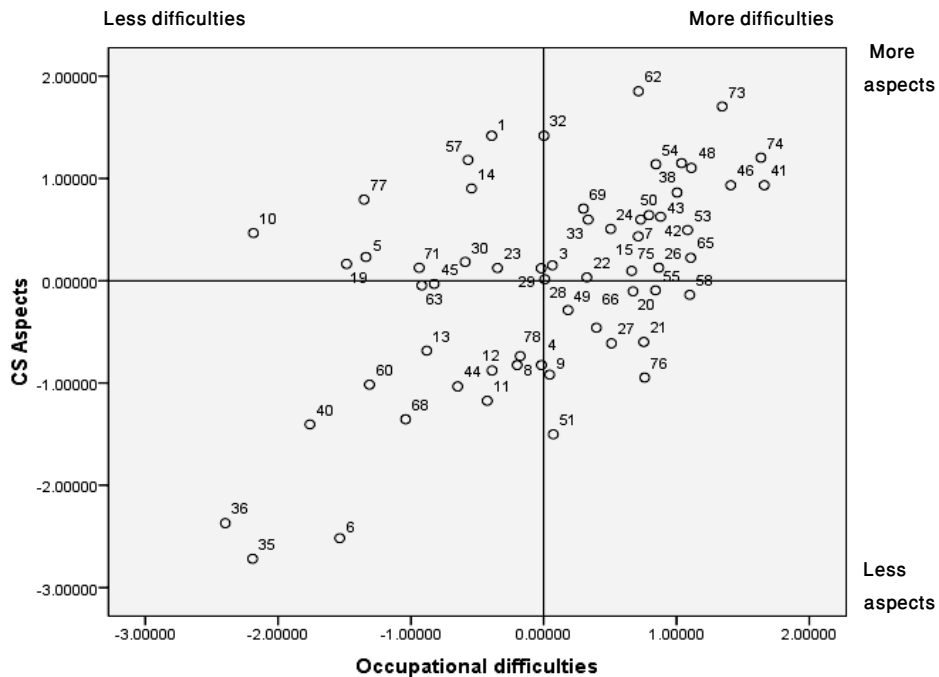


Figure 3: (Culture Shock-Exposure to Foreign Culture) Grid

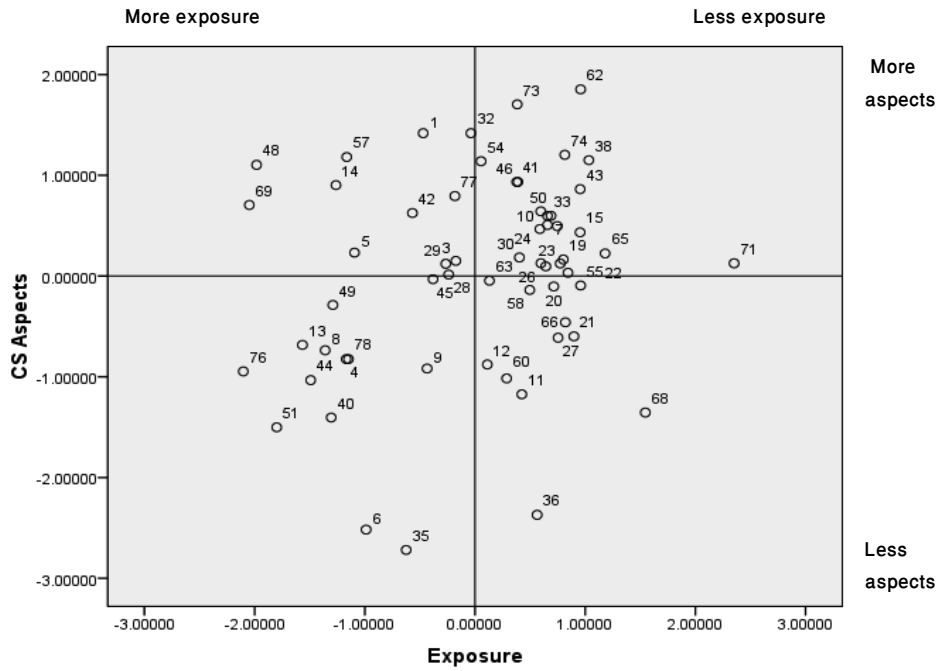


Figure 4: (Occupational Difficulties-Exposure to Foreign Culture) Grid

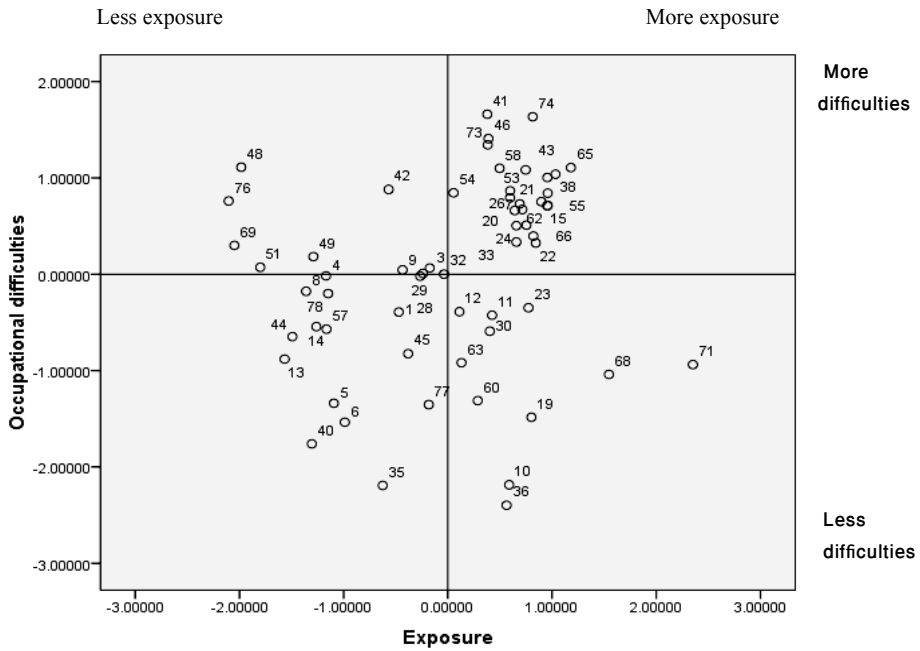


Table 6: Groups' Size

Group	Number	Percent
1	18	30.0
2	4	6.7
3	5	8.3
4	8	13.3
5	6	10.0
6	5	8.3
7	6	10.0
8	8	13.3
Total	60	100.0

Table 7 demonstrates a summary of the group analysis. It can be noticed that the first four groups of participants that showed clear aspects of culture shock were all graduates from the USA and West European countries. With the exception of the third group which is ending 'the honeymoon' with the least difficulties reported, it may be also be due to them experiencing the least average waiting time for appointment, while the rest were mostly in their third stage of culture shock, the adjustment phase.

Table 7: Groups Description

Group	Group Char.*	%	Av. Age	Av. Waiting	Time spent in Syria	Countries %							
						UK	USA	Ger	Fr	Egy	Ru	It	Jp
1	HHH	30	34.5	14	10- 24	44.4			44.4				
2	HHL	6.7	35.67	17	>24	50			5.				
3	HLH	8.3	35.40	7	3- 9	60			40				
4	HLL	13.3	36	8	10-24				7.5				
5	LHH	10	36.67	13	10- 24	33.3	5.6		50				
6	LHL	8.3	35.4	10	10- 24	40			40	20			
7	LLH	10	36	17	10- 24	33.3			16.7	16.7			
8	LLL	13.3	37	9	10- 24	12.5	12.5	5.6	12.5	75	33.3	12.5	16.7

* H: High, L: Low

* The first letter refers to culture shock aspect, the second refers to occupational difficulties faced and the third refers to the degree of exposure

VI. Conclusion

This study investigated the extent to which newly arriving PhD academic staff members at one public higher education institution are facing reverse culture shock, the degree of their exposure to foreign cultures while studying abroad and the occupational difficulties they faced during their early years of arrival. Quantitative data were collected and analyzed by the use of some statistical methods.

Data analysis showed that a considerable number of them (over 58.3% of the participants) suffered reverse culture shock, particularly those who studied in the USA and Western Europe. More than half of the staff members sampled experienced middle to high exposure to foreign cultures while studying abroad. In aggregate, more than half of all participants leave their country of study after some years of study-related work experience. 55% of the respondents suffered different levels of occupational difficulties. These occupational difficulties come in various categories, with financial and organizational difficulties being the most significant.

The analysis showed eight main groups of participants according to the degree of reverse culture shock, the degree of exposure to foreign cultures while studying abroad and the occupational difficulties. However, the most critical group of them all is the one that makes the combination that could lead to higher risks of brain drain. This is the group that contains staff members who faced high levels of exposure to foreign culture, showed clear aspects of culture shock and faced more difficulties compared to other groups. The criticality of this group comes from two sources. First, this was the biggest group making up thirty percent of the sample. Second, the fact that staff in this group are able to quit if they are not able to manage the adjustment phase. This is due to their high level of exposure and the difficulties hindering them from making a professional and academic contribution.

The study results highlight the importance of maintaining academic staff members in the critical group at their institutions. These staff is valuable assets that could revive the institutions they work within. University managers should seek ways of helping them be attached to their universities by the improving organizational culture and regulations as well as helping them to improve their professional skills, both nationally and internationally. By doing so, the risks of brain drain might be reduced or even eliminated. Notwithstanding, university managers should take brain circulation into consideration when planning their academic staff, bearing in mind the temporary absence of their qualified academic staff members as a trade-off. In this regard, the study opens the door for further intensive research on this group of staff members and their requirements.

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