

Colombian Rural College Students' Perceptions of an International Internship Experience in Agricultural Science

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Introduction

- Colombia is developing an international focus on higher education and engaging college students in global learning opportunities (Nehrt, 1993).
- Colleges of agriculture should consider studying abroad as an experience for all students that allow the students to understand other cultures and the worldwide vision (Brooks, Frick & Bruening, 2006).
- Agricultural education should be aligned with global topics such as cultural awareness, personal growth, social capacities, and respect for differences (UNESCO, 2015).
- Agricultural education in Colombia should integrate entrepreneurship and leadership into the higher education curriculum. This integration will help the students to connect knowledge with their local communities.
- The Colombian government has sponsored the Nexo Global Program in collaboration with a Colombian agricultural university to provide a group of rural college students a 6-month internship at a U.S. land-grant university.
- The immersive international learning experience aims to help college students grow in their cultural and technical competence and develop business plans they could implement when they return to Colombia.
- The purpose of this study was to describe Colombian rural college students' perceptions of personal, cultural, and career development during a 6-month international internship

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework



Methods & Procedures

- Participants in this study were dual-credit programs students in agricultural sciences enrolled at Caldas University – Colombia.
- These students started taking college credits as high school students and started an entrepreneurship business plan as part of the dual-credit program.
- Eighteen students participated in the 6-month internship at the U.S. university.
- They engaged in cultural, social, and education activities to help them grow and develop a plan for their agricultural entrepreneurship project.
- During the first week of the internship, the researcher provided information about photovoice methodology and ethics.
- The PHOTO prompts (Graziano, 2014) help participants write narratives about the pictures. The students could use their phones or other equipment to capture the images.
- Reflections were translated from Spanish to English.
- Data analysis followed qualitative guidelines, including descriptive and in vivo coding to identify significant statements and patterns supporting the visual evidence (Creswell, 2012; Saldaña, 2013).

Results

Career Development

The international experience allows watching the world and their work areas from another perspective



"The internship offered me the opportunity to learn completely new things, processes that I probably would never have seen or learned."



"I learned how to carry out research, which will open the door to new knowledge and opportunities."



"Now I have the basic knowledge of how to carry out research. Now I must take this knowledge and apply it in my home."

"I learned to value what we have in our country and identify our potential."

"This internship opened my mind to pursuing a master's or doctorate. It is not impossible."

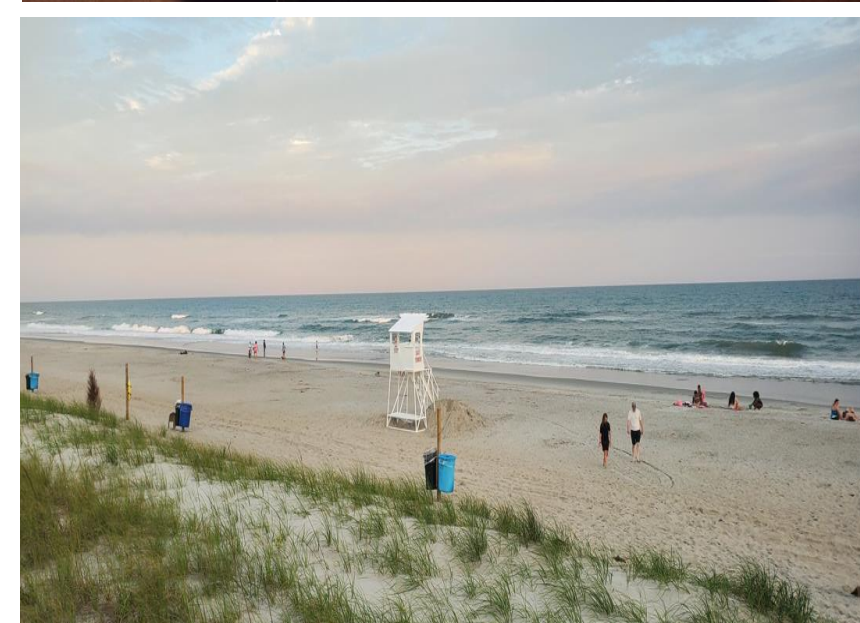


Cultural Perceptions

The internship opened their minds to new experiences



"The contact with families in the USA allowed sharing experiences and learning more about the culture of this country."



"The internship allowed me to know the beach and the sea, with people that accepted me without any problem and have allowed me to share perfect moments with them."



"The painful experiences that the people of the U.S. have served for people to take ownership of their country. We must do the same to change our reality in our country."

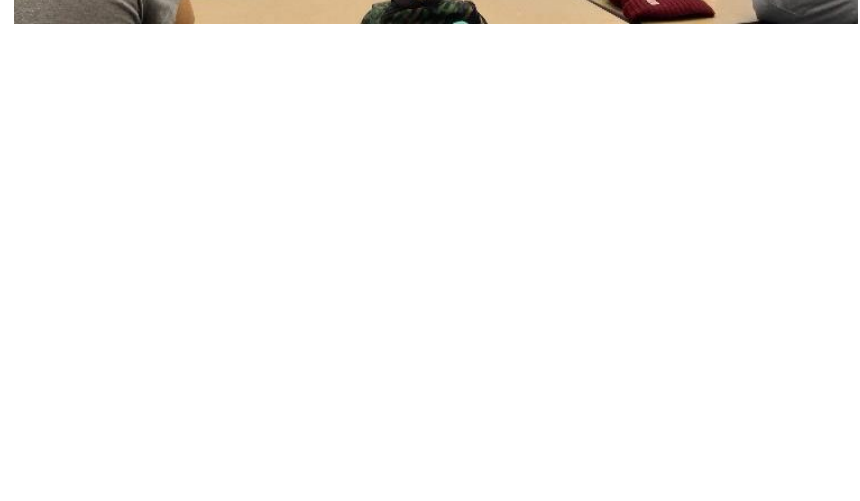
"We can integrate and live regardless of the cultural, political, social or religious differences."



Personal Development



"We have the ability to learn things that we have never seen, and the opportunity to be in a laboratory with the availability of high-tech equipment."



"It was a challenge to make a presentation in English; we can achieve everything we set out to do with effort and motivation."



"Interacting with many people and learning about their experiences motivates me because despite being a rural youth, I have a great opportunity. Today, many young people in my community see me as an example and a motivation to strive and access higher education."



"I am a person who discovered something different through study. I am here in the U.S. because I tried hard to win this opportunity since entering a Dual-credit program."

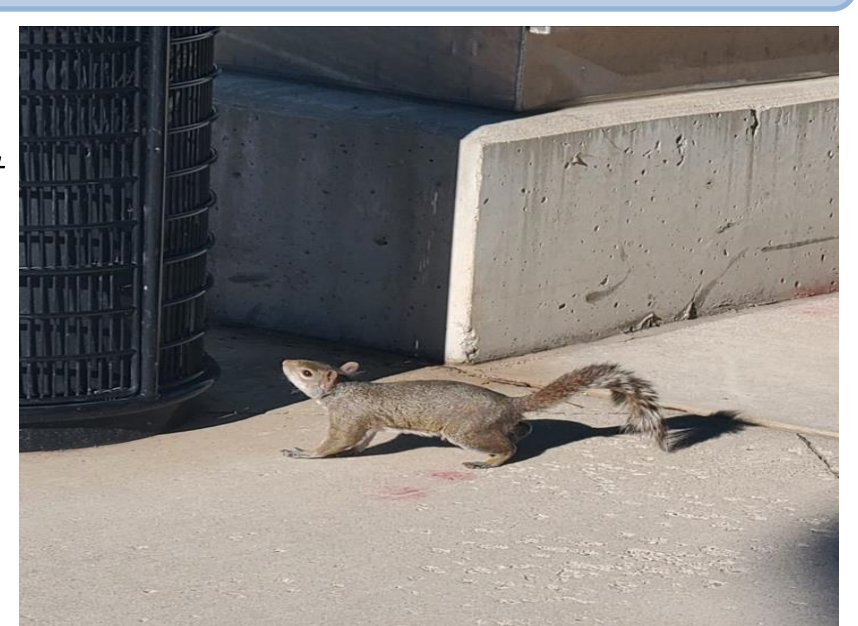


Negative Aspects



"Nothing achieves to make me feel good in the culture of the U.S., except being able to go out and meet animals daily, which filled my soul, made me smile, and I felt much better."

"This image represents my sadness at being in this country because it goes against all my principles, ethics, and purposes in life."



"Any day is a good day to allow ourselves to remedy mistakes. I believe that returning to Colombia will begin this since we need to have a greater sense of belonging to the territory."

Conclusions

- The photovoice method helped students reflect deeply on their own culture (Baseli et al., 2016) and confirmed the academic importance of the international internship for college students and, more important, for rural students to access knowledge, compare situations, and experience situations.
- Students expressed that the main contributions of the internship were cultural aspects, personal growth, improvement in personal trust, and perceiving themselves to be capable of interacting in new cultures and another language (Marrero, Mohamed & Xifra, 2018).
- Students indicated a solid intention to adapt, interact and learn for personal growth and develop their entrepreneurship project.
- Photovoice can be a valuable tool to help college students tell their stories and express their thoughts and feelings, supporting communication and innovation processes that increase the people's participation (Jones, Glenna & Weltzien, 2014; Gervais & Rivard, 2013).
- This study provides preliminary evidence that an international internship may be an effective strategy for developing rural communities' human capital.

Limitations

This exploratory study is limited due to the small number of participants. Future studies should continue to include more participants and use mixed methods to determine if these preliminary results are causal, generalizable, and transferable.

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