Homesickness in First-Year Students at a Costa Rican Public University

Añoranza del hogar en estudiantes de primer ingreso en una universidad pública en Costa Rica

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Abstract

During the first year of university, students from rural areas in Costa Rica might have to leave home and settle down in a different city to attain a higher-education degree. These students go through diverse challenges due to the changes they have to face during the adaptation to this new life. One of the major aspects that students cope with is the phenomenon of homesickness since it can affect their emotions, motivation, and, subsequently, their academic achievement. The purpose of this study was to explore this phenomenon among first-year students enrolled in the majors of English as a Foreign Language, Computer Sciences, and Business Administration, study plans offered by *Universidad Nacional* (UNA) at *Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela*, in Costa Rica. During the first term in 2019, the researchers diagnosed the level of homesickness in this population. Through a mixed method approach, the likeliness, level, and traits of homesickness were determined. First, a demographic

questionnaire informed on what regions these students came from and place of residence back then. On a second research stage, the students who had to move far from home completed a self-report scale to measure their level of homesickness; also, these students were interviewed to gather data on the strategies implemented at a personal level and social support given by university agents. Main findings revealed that all students changing their place of residence to start university studies were more likely to display some degree of homesickness. Results suggest that more emphasis on the phenomenon and follow-up of students' cases is suggested to prevent and approach academic failure and eventual dropping out.

Keywords: homesickness, academic achievement, higher education, students from rural areas

Resumen

Durante el primer año en la universidad, el estudiantado proveniente de zonas rurales en Costa Rica podría tener que abandonar su hogar y establecerse en una ciudad diferente para obtener un título en educación superior. Dicha población atraviesa diversos desafíos, debido a los cambios que debe afrontar durante la adaptación a esta nueva vida. Uno de los principales aspectos que el alumnado tiene que enfrentar es el fenómeno de la nostalgia por estar lejos de casa, lo cual afecta sus emociones, motivación y, posteriormente, su rendimiento académico. El objetivo de este estudio fue explorar este fenómeno entre el estudiantado de primer año matriculado en las carreras de inglés como lengua extranjera, informática y administración de empresas, planes de estudio ofrecidos por la Universidad Nacional (UNA) en la Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela en Costa Rica. Durante el primer ciclo lectivo en el año 2019, el equipo investigador diagnosticó el nivel de nostalgia en esta población. A partir de un enfoque mixto, se determinaron la probabilidad, el nivel y los rasgos de nostalgia. Primeramente, un cuestionario demográfico informó de la zona del país originaria y de residencia actual del estudiantado. En una segunda etapa de investigación, el grupo en estudio que debió vivir lejos del hogar completó una escala de autoinforme para medir su nivel de nostalgia; además, este grupo fue entrevistado para recopilar datos sobre las estrategias implementadas en el nivel personal y el apoyo social brindado por parte de agentes institucionales. Los principales hallazgos revelaron que el grupo de estudiantes que cambió su lugar de residencia para comenzar los estudios universitarios fue más propenso a demostrar cierto grado de nostalgia. Los resultados del estudio sugieren un mayor énfasis en el fenómeno y seguimiento de los casos para prevenir y tratar el fracaso y la eventual deserción.

Palabras claves: nostalgia, rendimiento escolar, educación superior, estudiantes provenientes de área rural

Introduction

As it is known, almost anyone who leaves their home feels a certain degree of homesickness, but there is a fine line between missing home and feeling emotionally distressed when being away. This two-sided scenario was approached by Urani, Miller, Johnson, and Petzel (2003):

> The transition to university life is often looked upon as a positive event. However, the changes that result can at times be stressful for the student, as he or she leaves existing sources of social support behind. Commonly, this stress creates feelings of homesickness and the intense desire to return home. While initial feelings of homesickness are obviously common for most, if not all, new students, prolonged feelings often prove to be problematic. (par. 2)

Therefore, students who commute to university usually feel greatly attached to home. However, homesickness can develop for those students who change their place of residence to attend school far away from home. In Costa Rica, this group of students, who usually come from rural areas, become afflictive because it is their first year at university, implying that transition can be uncertain and overwhelming. The *IX Informe del Estado de la Educación Costarricense* (Programa Estado de la Nación, 2023), an official report about the achievements and limitations of higher-education in this country, informs:

> En 2022, la escolaridad promedio de la población de 24 años en Costa Rica era de 10,7 años frente 7,8 en 1991, una ganancia de tres años en tres décadas (el promedio apenas se acerca a secundaria completa). Este promedio nacional convive con amplias desigualdades territoriales, especialmente entre la región Central y el resto. En todas las regiones periféricas, la escolaridad promedio es menor que en la Central, especialmente en la Pacífico Central, Brunca y Huetar Atlántica, cuyo indicador es casi un año menos. (p. 269)

This report also states, "La probabilidad de que las personas jóvenes sigan estudiando al concluir secundaria en la región Central es significativamente mayor que en el resto del país" (p. 270). Even though universities in Costa Rica offer their programs in different parts of the country, students often find more career opportunities in the central campuses. For instance, the major students have chosen might not be available in the university branch closer home. Then, a life decision as moving out of their hometown for school pursuits may imply transitions. In other words, moving out for academic purposes implies making changes in lifestyle, building new relationships, and adapting to a different culture. These adjustments may lead students to experience homesickness.

Overall, homesickness can be associated with two main constructs: separation and distress; in fact, a person feels separated from something familiar (i.e., place of origin or family) or distressed due to negative feelings when being away from home ("College Students Homesickness," 2016, p. 2). Thus, it can be inferred that most people miss something or feel separation from their most immediate aspects in life when surrounded by unfamiliar environments; nonetheless, not everybody experiences

distress because of these circumstances. In the same vein, research by Thurber and Walton (2012) suggested,

> The transition from living at home to living away from home represents a significant transition for first-year college or university students. For many students, the experience is a stimulating adventure, both socially and intellectually. For other students, the experience is overwhelming and distressing. (p. 415)

The focus of the present study is to approach the characteristics of the latter group in relation to the phenomenon of homesickness. The researchers have narrowed down the concept of homesickness as a byproduct of cultural and social adaptation to a non-familiar environment in which students can feel alienation, anxiousness, depression, rejection, hopelessness, powerlessness, among other feelings.

According to Lijadi and van Schalkwyk (2017), "Changes to the university environment, university routines, diets, geographical setting and academic demands might induce intense homesickness, and support from universities is necessary for adjusting" (p. 315). This study addresses the phenomenon of first-year university students who had left their home to study at *Universidad Nacional*, on the *Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela* (*SIUA*) campus; this site is located within the metropolitan region of Costa Rica, and it welcomes students from different provinces of the country, including rural areas. The changes of residence from a non-urban to an urban location might determine the likeliness to cause homesickness. Specifically, the inquiry was about the students'

learning experiences in the first academic level during the first academic term in 2019 at *SIUA*, and it attempts to reveal challenges that the students were facing after moving out from their hometowns to attain higher-education goals. In the light of little research done in this field and particularly in this country, this study posed the following questions:

1. How does the change in the residence of students predict the likeliness of developing homesickness?
2. Which traits determine evidence of having caused homesickness during the first year at university?
3. To what extent do homesickness traits affect academic performance and student's retention in school?
4. What kinds of strategies have been implemented by students or university agents to cope with the phenomenon of homesickness?

Literature Review

Higher education students are expected to make important decisions to adjust to a world full of novelty; they have to get accustomed to a target or given culture, start building different relationships, and even become independent while leaving aside customary routines. All these adaptations might generate a great impact in students' emotional and academic aspects. In their desire to be accepted, students may feel the need to make the necessary adjustments to overcome the grief derived from homesickness. When this phenomenon is seen as a personal loss, the study conducted by Denovan and Macaskill (2013) clarified,

> A common response amongst students who left home was homesickness. Participants appeared to grieve for and miss home, the way their life was and the relationships they had. The separation influenced negative emotional reactions and feelings of distress initially. Having strong relationships with friends and family intensified feelings of homesickness. (p. 1009)

It is essential to understand the phenomenon as an expected process in which people create an emotional attachment to previous life aspects, increasing in turn homesickness. In other words, students might frequently want to be in contact with family and friends or feel sad whenever they visit home and have to come back to their new residence. Over time, students could resort to strategies to help them alleviate the stress caused by longing for home. Specifically, strategies implemented at a personal level can rise or diminish the impact homesickness can provoke on students' college life. In particular, Landa, Bono, and English (2020) referred to this process as the implementation of mood regulation strategies and pointed out that "There is a diverse range of strategies people can use to regulate their mood, such as sharing good or bad news with a friend, withdrawing oneself from an upsetting situation, exercising to reduce tension, and temporarily distracting oneself" (p. 56). Other scholars have proposed a series of strategies to help students deal with homesickness. For example, Messina (2007) indicated that for preventive purposes, analysis sessions are necessary to detect certain students' behaviors related to homesickness; for reducing effects out of the phenomenon, this author also suggested organizing events (i.e., network support groups) where students can share aspects from their hometowns.

Most studies about homesickness have been done with student populations pursuing higher education in the United States, either in international students (i.e., in scholarship programs) or local students (those who move to a different part of the country to go to school). Indeed, Wu, Garza, and Guzman (2015) asserted that international students in US universities have to overcome certain constraints such as

> (…) language difficulties, difficulties adjusting to the academic culture, misunderstanding, and complications in communication with faculty and peers; stress, anxiety, feeling of isolation, social experiences, culture shock, financial hardships, lack of appropriate accommodation, isolation and loneliness, and any adaption in their daily life. (p. 2).

A similar process is undertaken by local students who have moved into a place near campus in other countries. Transitioning to university can be favorable if students accept that being away from home implies other derived gains such as personal growth, autonomy, success, and goal-orientation. When individuals avoid facing the phenomenon or deny feeling homesick, they can undergo other related consequences like social withdrawal, anxiety, or even depression. As illustrated in the study by Denovan and Macaskill (2013), "Acceptance was a functional coping response which enabled students to come to terms with the reality of the situation at hand and accept that their life is changing" (p. 1009).

Additionally, cultural and social differences embody a series of adjustments for a homesick student to experience. Acculturation is approached in several studies as a process faced by students far away from home and a factor linked to homesickness. In this respect, Perry (2017) claimed,

> Homesickness, discrimination, and language skills appear to be linked. Students who failed to become accustomed to their surroundings were less likely to persist and a student's acculturation was linked to feeling accepted by others. When many students had poor English skills, they were more likely to feel discriminated against and less accepted by their domestic peers. Students who felt discriminated against were more likely to feel homesick, which prevented persistence and completion of a degree. (pp. 25-26)

It can be argued that learners might be culturally shocked when dealing with unknown contexts. Traditions, customs, festivities, food, and the language per se, for instance, are some of the aspects that differ from the students' place of origin to the ones found in the new surroundings.

Moderate levels of homesickness are expected for students away from home, but excessive levels of homesickness have been determined by scholars as detrimental to school achievement. Thurber and Walton (2012) revealed some side effects of such distress:

> At its most intense, homesickness can lead to withdrawal from school. Indeed, homesick students are 3 times more likely to drop out of school than those who are not homesick. Other clinical sequelae include difficulty concentrating, memory lapses, neurotic behavior, and social isolation. (p. 416)

Furthermore, Burt pointed out there is "(...) a relationship between homesickness and a greater number of cognitive failures, poor concentration, handing in work late, decrements in work quality, and higher scores on anxiety and depression measures" (as cited in Stroebe *et al.*, 2002, p.150). As can be discussed, one of the main concerns that homesickness literature informs on is how this condition can negatively permeate students' life, and hence, their academic achievement remains a focus of homesickness literature. Thus, a greater interest in detecting, reducing, and treating homesickness in students should be promoted, especially to those who experience their first time in higher education. Such interest has been suggested by Sun *et al.* (2016),

> Because homesickness has a considerable influence on students' well-being, it is critical for college administrators and educational practitioners to gain a better understanding of its impact on new college students so that appropriate prevention and intervention programs can be developed for a smoother transition to college. (p. 945)

Considering homesickness-related implications that could negatively affect academic success, the students on their own with support of teaching staff, counselors, and other school administrative instances should work together when the traits of the phenomenon become detrimental. In a study carried out with first-year students at Iowa State University, Sun (2015)

provided a series of recommendations to prevent homesickness stress, and these have been summarized according to the university processes which learners go through when entering university for the first time, below:

–   *Before enrollment:* Universities can start contact with newcomers through social media to be assisted, and they join possible support groups (Thurber and Walton, 2012, as cited in Sun, 2015, p. 100).

–   *Before changing residence:* Coaching by school personnel is required to equip new students with those skills that could guarantee success when facing challenges within a non-familiar academic context (Sun, 2015, p. 100).

–   *Once establishing the new residence:* Students might need guidance to become acquainted with current environments like being oriented into services, facilities, social connections, staff, among others (Sun, 2015, p. 101).

To take these actions sets prevention in the likeliness to homesickness from developing. In terms of personal traits, Poyrazli and Devonish (2020) concluded that "The more individualistic a person was, the less homesickness they experienced" (p. 16). Indeed, social support from the school and other domains surrounding the students is considered quite meaningful. In this sense, Zulkarnain, Daulay, Yusuf, and Yasmin (2019) emphasized,

> Social support plays a significant role in reducing homesickness and increasing student well-being. Social support

from friends in the new environment can change student perception of a stressor into something that can be dealt with and resolved. Students often need social support from other people, such as family, friends, and neighbors, in dealing with challenging situations. Social support has a role in helping students adapt better and make experiences in new environments more positive. (p. 143)

Promoting bonding between new students and the university community could make newcomers feel socially accepted and institutionally integrated. The preparedness and the approach from the university might lessen homesickness. Although school support occurs, the possibility that some individuals become homesick can exist since the phenomenon is expected to develop inevitably, and every student can respond differently upon being away from home. Particularly, this study intends to provide some distinction between those students whose degree of homesickness can be understood as expected or normative, and those who need greater attention among school practitioners.

Methodology

-Research Design

Homesickness was approached qualitatively and quantitatively within a phenomenological research design. As stated by Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa, and Varpio (2015), the purpose of this kind of design is "To describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who experienced it so as to understand the meaning

participants ascribe to that phenomenon" (p. 670). This study attempted to reveal whether students away from home developed homesickness and to what extent the phenomenon impacted their academic achievement. In order to present the personal accounts of informants, the researchers also implemented an illustrative method, in which "(…) a researcher applies theory to a concrete historical situation or social setting, or organizes data on the basis of prior theory" (Neuman, 2007, p. 338).

-*Participants*

Students participating in this study were informed via a consent form about the research purpose, and they all agreed to be part of it. As the different instruments were administered, the researchers used a purposive or judgmental sampling process which, according to Neuman (2007), intends to "Get all possible cases that fit particular criteria, using various methods" (p. 141).

The number of participants reduced as the different instruments and research stages were carried out. A total of 109 first-year university students comprised the original sample, belonging to four groups. The first one consisted of 26 students enrolled in an English major while the remaining 83 distributed as follows: two groups from the major in Computer Sciences (54 participants) and one last group from the Business Administration major (29 participants). The final sample embodied 10 participants, who represented the population who had left their home to come to the university. These participants answered the self-report scale, which revealed that

this 9,17% of the original sample presented some degree of homesickness.

-*Instruments*

Since students leaving their hometowns to pursue academic goals deal with new endeavors, it is predictable that they also struggle with adapting to that novel environment. Consequently, a first instrument (see *Appendix A*) was designed to detect students who had left home and had started living in a new place during their first year at university. This instrument collected demographic data as the place of residence before entering university and during the time they were studying. Distinctly, the campus at *SIUA* does not offer dormitory facilities, so all students lived off-campus. Once all the students completed the demographic questionnaire, the researchers selected those who were more likely to develop homesickness, meeting one criterion: currently living in a place different from the one they had lived before starting university studies.

Moreover, a second and a third instruments were applied only to those students more prompt to develop homesickness. First of all, it was essential to determine whether or not students who had left their home displayed any kind of traits of such phenomenon. Only students under this condition completed a 4-point Likert-type scale, in which the items were scored from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 4 (*completely agree*). The self-report scale designed for this study (see *Appendix B*) was based on the *Homesickness Vulnerability Questionnaire* developed by Scopelliti and Tiberio (2010). The original scale developed by these scholars

takes into account several factors to predict homesickness like geographical differences (i.e., weather conditions) and other cultural variables (i.e., changes in gastronomy or language and accents). Nonetheless, the researchers selected only those variables more likely to be found in the specific population and more applicable countrywide: attachment to family and friends, hometown relationships, loneliness, personal decisions, academic performance, and adaptability. The adapted scale for the present study was validated by selecting another group of students in their last level at university to provide feedback about the variables included in the items as to avoid omitting important aspects from the original scale. Rating the items allowed classifying students and confirming four categories: *not homesick*, *somewhat homesick*, *homesick*, and *extremely homesick*. Further information was confirmed using an in-depth interview; in other words, only the students ranked in the last three categories proceeded for the interview (see *Appendix C*). This instrument informed on the following homesickness

aspects: general academic difficulties, strategies implemented by the students, and support given by university entities.

-Procedures

The data gathered from the experiences of homesick students were anonymously coded and transcribed. To illustrate possible scenarios and conditions learners undergoing this phenomenon may display, the researchers theoretically sorted and summarized the traits, strategies, and other personal accounts related to homesickness as reported by the informants.

Results

-Demographic Questionnaire

Through the first instrument, the researchers intended to identify students' changes in residence before and during higher-education years as a factor that might predict the likeliness of developing homesickness. *Table 1* shows the original and the current place of residence by the time the study was conducted.

Table 1. Participants' changes in residence before and during studying at university

Participant	Before		During	
	Province	Canton	Province	Canton
1	Alajuela	Naranjo	Alajuela	Alajuela
2	Alajuela	San Ramón	Alajuela	Alajuela
3	Alajuela	San Carlos	Alajuela	Alajuela
4	Alajuela	Los Chiles	Alajuela	Alajuela
5	Alajuela	San Carlos	Alajuela	Alajuela
6	Cartago	Paraíso	San José	Goicoechea
7	Limón	Siquirres	Heredia	San Pablo
8	Limón	Talamanca	Alajuela	Alajuela
9	Limón	Guácimo	Alajuela	Alajuela
10	San José	Dota	Alajuela	Alajuela

Source: Own elaboration from demographic survey to students at *Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela*, Costa Rica, 2019

Following the premise by Thurber and Walton (2012), who claimed that "Indeed, nearly all people miss something about home when they are away, making homesickness a nearly universal experience" (p. 415), it was expected that students who had moved to a different place for studying purposes would be more likely to present some traits of the phenomenon at a fast pace. Out of 109 participants, 9,17% (10 students) started living in another province or in a different canton.

In terms of distance, *participant 1* had lived in Naranjo, Alajuela, being the shortest distance: 35 kilometers (23 miles) from the original place of residence to the campus; on the contrary, *participant 8* represented the student who moved the longest distance, having originally lived in Talamanca, Limón which is located 233 kilometers (145 miles) from the campus. All of these ten participants decided between living with relatives in a house or renting an apartment nearer to the campus. The remaining 99 students were not considered to take part in further research stages since they kept living in the same place when they started university. Even though this number of students shared certain university newness-related feelings with those who had moved out from home, they were left out of the study following the literature consulted.

-Self-Report Scale

During the second stage of the study, the group of learners that were more likely to display any trait of the phenomenon was asked to complete a scale that informed if they could be considered as homesick students. They had to rank the level of agreement with a series of statements related to

being attached to family and friends, having bonds to their hometown, feeling lonely, making personal decisions, dealing with academic performance, and adapting to new school conditions. Upon ranking these aspects, the researchers classified the ten participants into four categories. All of them ranked the items and obtained more than the minimum score to be considered as being somewhat homesick (n=3), homesick (n=3), and extremely homesick (n=4). It is vital to explain that homesickness is a cyclical, recurring, and even fluctuating experience that individuals undergo as an adaptive manner to new environments (Holmbeck and Wandrei, 1993, as cited in Tognoli, 2003, p. 46), so participants clearly developed homesickness to some extent. Determining homesick students is just a starting point for school practitioners to take measures to help this population overcome the challenges associated with the phenomenon. Since individuals might react differently to homesickness, the process of dealing with it and the help offered by school agents might differ, as well.

-In-depth Interview

Even though participants displayed some traits of homesickness, it was essential to inquire how students were coping with overwhelming situations derived from the new endeavors as university students while living away from home. Therefore, they were asked a series of questions that revealed what Tognoli (2003) described as possible scenarios: avoiding, experiencing, or denying homesickness (pp. 42-46). The first item collected data on participants' feelings for living away. Below, their answers have been classified according to the category reported from the scale designed for this study:

– *Somewhat homesick students*
  - *"I always miss home, but generally, I'm fine."*
  - *"In general fine, sometimes when some problems happen some kind of homesickness comes to my head."*
  - *"I feel homesick and enthusiastic at the same time, but my parents are proud that I'm studying and that makes me happy."*

– *Homesick students*
  - *"I feel a little bit sad because whenever I have a problem or I feel bad for not achieving a goal I used to tell my parents, and they encouraged me by telling me that I was going to make it."*
  - *"Sometimes I feel homesick from being away, and I want to go back home."*
  - *"A little bit sad."*

– *Extremely homesick students*
  - *"Sad, lonely, I feel like this was an obligation, not an opportunity."*
  - *"Normal, I'm not too close to my family perhaps a little bit with my mother but not too much."*

- "It's a unique and very challenging experience and even so I feel happy to be here."
- "Excited about experiencing new things but hard at the same time due to the fact of being away from home." [sic]

As can be inferred from the participants' insights, most of them reported feelings of homesickness to the extent of experiencing it as a process. There are some attempts to either avoiding or denying the phenomenon. The way of dealing with homesickness can vary from person to person. The data gathered confirmed that even extremely homesick people, based on the scale taken for this study, might acknowledge that they are going through a process. On the contrary, students who suffer some traits of longing for home (i.e., somewhat homesick students) can either avoid or deny such feelings.

The interview also gathered specific information about both the participants' strategies and their perceptions about perceived university support to cope with homesickness. The following table summarizes such findings:

Table 2. Students' strategies to cope with homesickness

Personal strategies	Perceived university support
- Improving study routines - Keeping good eating habits - Projecting future goals - Having communication with or visiting family - Finding entertainment options for leisure time - Socializing with new friends or roommates - Demonstrating academic effort	- Talking with academic counselors about being homesick - Receiving guidance from academic gatherings to adjust to university life - Attending orientation and support sessions about study strategies - Being helped and encouraged by professors while sharing personal issues

Source: Own elaboration from in-depth interview to students at *Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela*, Costa Rica, 2019

These results showed that students and university personnel seemed to deal with homesickness, which could be cyclical and fluctuating as any other human behavior. In this regard, the results of this study agreed with the findings provided by Sun (2015),

> (…) our results further suggest that academic self-efficacy and life stress play significant roles in forming students' integration experiences as well as homesickness. Lower academic self-efficacy and higher life stress are associated with lower degree of academic integration, social integration and institutional commitment, yielding an intensified homesick distress. (p. 101)

Thus, pertinent support is expected and needed to strengthen academic success when the degree of homesickness is harmful to students.

Conclusions

As noted, leaving home to attend school can be a challenging and rewarding opportunity for students. However, starting university life can also be overwhelming and turn into an unpleasant experience. Students undertake changes while transitioning to university and starting to live away from home, and these unknown contexts demand adjustments. At a personal level, students might have overcome grieving over what they are missing. Students begin feeling distressed about their academic conditions when resorting to strategies to become accepted, integrated, and capable for school demands. The process of adjusting that students face when studying away from home may turn into an aggravating situation. Severe homesickness derived

behaviors arise; hence, students might experience anxiety, eating and sleeping disorders, lack of concentration, and decision-making difficulties.

The findings from this study confirmed that participating students who had left home were more likely to develop homesickness. Some of the behaviors expressed by them were reported as missing parents, struggling to achieve academic goals, showing a desire to go home, and feeling forced to stay. As concluded by Thurber and Walton (2012), "Because many college and university students attend school away from home, healthy adjustment to separation is essential for maximizing the educational and social benefits of the experience" (418). This necessary adjustment proposed by these authors can be analyzed in the strategies implemented by the students and the actions taken by the university to cope with the phenomenon. Firstly, the present study shed light on students' reactions toward the phenomenon, which demonstrated how diverse individuals' responses can be to the same phenomenon. As revealed through the interviews, participants showing lower and higher levels of homesickness traits might avoid, deny, or experience the phenomenon. Moreover, participants reported that they had encountered challenges during their first year at university mainly because they had found it difficult to focus on academic goals while thinking about what they missed the most from home. During data collection, none of the students considered as homesick dropped out of school. It is essential to clarify that data related to retention and dropping-out rates would have implied a follow-up process over the first

year at university, bringing these facts out of the scope of the study.

Therefore, a longitudinal research is suggested to track whether homesick students would overcome the effects of the phenomenon over time or to establish homesickness as determinant for students to decide not to continue with their studies.

Furthermore, results revealed that participants implemented some strategies to reduce the impact of homesickness. Among these plans of action, they mentioned taking on different ways to improve study routines. Also, they recognized the importance of good eating habits and setting future goals. Equally important, they communicated with their family at home and socialized with their new friends and roommates. According to the literature, support from different sources like family and other social circles might enhance overcoming homesickness. At an institutional level, the university community, which includes teaching staff, administrative personnel, and counseling officers, must be aware that this phenomenon does not exclusively happen to international students facing acculturation or language barriers. This study informed on homesickness undergone from the perspective of local Costa Rican students who might have the possibility to visit their relatives and friends in the same country but still long for their home, especially during the first year at university.

About the measures and protocols to attend newcomers, participants expressed that they had received support from university agents, from the faculty to the administration. It is well-known by the researchers as professors at *Universidad Nacional* that efforts are made at the institutional level to support students not only academically but also socially and emotionally during different events like orientation week. Within this period, an induction process is provided at the beginning of the university programs, so students receive pertinent guidance about university services, facilities, and processes; students at UNA have recently been offered the possibility to take optional courses to set the foundations and develop skills necessary for each one of their studies, working as a transitional opportunity from secondary to tertiary education. Moreover, it has been observed by the researchers that most students interact with professors and other students from different school levels, which enhances a sense of belongingness and creates stronger social integration. From the interviews, it was also confirmed that when needed, students take advantage of counseling and psychology services aside from their teachers' guidance.

Results suggest that severe homesickness needs to be treated as a crucial factor that could affect school performance and determine whether students decide to continue or not their higher education studies. More awareness should be raised on this phenomenon at a class level; for instance, professors can have students relate aspects from their hometowns when addressing certain contents. Sharing and learning from experiences in which students integrate their own social and cultural backgrounds are suggested: students can show the class personal accounts about their

place of origin, family, and friends to fulfill a given learning objective. More activities for relationship building and social networking need to be organized to promote a sense of belonging to the university community. First-year students are expected to create bonds among their peers, so homesick students can benefit when meeting new people to whom they can resort for social interaction purposes. Learners can be referred to student clubs and unions, and professors might survey the level of homesickness of their students and address mood regulation strategies (Landa *et al*., 2020). Finally, creating support groups aimed at this kind of population can help students to express their specific feelings and share about strategies to cope when missing home.

Homesickness is a reality, so students undergo processes while adapting to a different environment, meeting new friends, missing family and hometown, living with roommates, and other unknown endeavors. Mere nostalgia can become severe and lead to feelings of loneliness and depression. Therefore, it is necessary to create support programs for homesick students. Even though missing home when studying away is inevitable and school aids are enhanced, awareness of the phenomenon in first-year university students is required: strategies must be developed and adjustments ought to be made to deal with homesickness, reducing the effects of such phenomenon in students' personal life and academic achievements.

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Appendix A
Demographic Questionnaire

Universidad Nacional
Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela
Researchers: M.A. Ligia Espinoza Murillo & M.A. José David Rodríguez Chaves

Description: This instrument is part of a study that aims at collecting information about the homesickness phenomenon in first year students at *Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela*. The researchers appreciate your collaboration. All data collected will be handled confidentially.

Student's full name: _____ (for research purposes)

Instruction: Complete each item with the information requested.

1. Last residence place before entering university:

Province _____ Canton _____ District _____

2. Current residence place during school days:

Province _____ Canton _____ District _____

3. Current residence place during non school days (i.e., weekends, vacation periods)

Province _____ Canton _____ District _____

Cuestionario Demográfico

Universidad Nacional
Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela
Académicos: M.A. Ligia Espinoza Murillo y M.A. José David Rodríguez Chaves

Descripción: Este instrumento es parte de un estudio que tiene como objetivo recolectar información acerca del fenómeno de "homesickness" (nostalgia por estar lejos del hogar) en estudiantes de primer año en la Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela. El equipo investigador agradece toda su ayuda al brindar información, la cual será manejada de manera confidencial.

Nombre completo de la persona estudiante: _____
(para uso de la investigación)

Instrucción: Complete cada ítem con la información solicitada.

1. Último lugar de residencia antes de ingresar a la universidad:

Provincia _____ Cantón _____ Distrito _____

2. Lugar de residencia actual durante los días lectivos:

Provincia _____ Cantón _____ Distrito _____

3. Lugar de residencia actual durante los días no lectivos (fines de semana, período de vacaciones, otros)

Provincia _____ Cantón _____ Distrito _____

Demographic Questionnaire Coding by Researchers

ACCORDING TO THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, THE STUDENT MIGHT DISPLAY CHARACTERISTICS RELATED TO HOMESICKNESS.

o YES   o NO

Appendix B
Self-report Scale

Universidad Nacional
Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela
Researchers: M.A. Ligia Espinoza Murillo & M.A. José David Rodríguez Chaves

Description: This instrument is part of a study that aims at collecting information about the phenomenon of "homesickness" in first-year students at *Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela*. The researchers appreciate all your help in providing information, which will be handled confidentially.

Student's full name: _____ (for research purposes)

Instrucción: Select the box that corresponds to the degree of agreement of each statement.

Statement	Totally disagree	Disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1. I constantly think or dream about my family and friends.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
2. I can not focus on academic work due to my desire to be home.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
3. I try to visit my home as often as possible.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
4. I need to communicate with friends and family at home frequently.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
5. I miss being home.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
6. When I go home I would like to stay there.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
7. I feel identified when I meet or talk with people who come from my hometown.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
8. I feel lonely for being away from home.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
9. I feel homesick when I go home and have to come back to attend school.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
10. I regret having left my house.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
11. It has been difficult to adapt to the place where I am now.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
12. I feel I have left part of my life in my home.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4

Escala de Auto-Reporte

Universidad Nacional
Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela
Académicos: M.A. Ligia Espinoza Murillo y M.A.José David Rodríguez Chaves,

Descripción: Este cuestionario es parte de un estudio que tiene como objetivo recolectar información acerca del fenómeno de "homesickness" (nostalgia por estar lejos del hogar) en estudiantes de primer año en la *Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela*. El equipo investigador agradece toda su ayuda al brindar información, la cual será manejada de manera confidencial.

Nombre completo de la persona estudiante: _____
(para uso de la investigación)

Instrucción: Seleccione la casilla que corresponda con el grado de concordancia de cada enunciado.

Enunciado	Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1. Pienso o sueño constantemente en mi familia y amigos.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
2. Me desconcentro de mis labores académicas por mis deseos de estar en casa.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
3. Trato de visitar mi hogar tan a menudo como sea posible.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
4. Necesito comunicarme con amigos y familiares en casa con frecuencia.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
5. Extraño estar en casa.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
6. Cuando voy a casa quisiera quedarme ahí.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
7. Siento identificación cuando conozco o hablo con personas que vienen de mi lugar de procedencia.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
8. Siento soledad por estar lejos de casa.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
9. Siento nostalgia por el hecho de visitar mi casa y tener que regresarme.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
10. Me arrepiento de haber salido de mi casa.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
11. He encontrado dificultad para adaptarme al lugar donde estoy ahora.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4
12. Siento que he dejado parte de mi vida en casa.	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4

Self-Report Scale Coding by Researchers

ACCORDING TO THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, THE STUDENT MIGHT DISPLAY CHARACTERISTICS RELATED TO A DEGREE OF HOMESICKNESS.

O 12-20 points: THE STUDENT IS NOT HOMESICK (DEGREE 0)

O 21-29 points: THE STUDENT IS SOMEWHAT HOMESICK (DEGREE 1)

O 30-38 points: THE STUDENT IS HOMESICK (DEGREE 2)

O 39-48 points: THE STUDENT IS EXTREMELY HOMESICK (DEGREE 3)

Appendix C
Interview

Universidad Nacional
Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela
Researchers: M.A. Ligia Espinoza Murillo & M.A. José David Rodríguez Chaves

Description: This instrument is part of a study that aims at collecting information about the phenomenon of "homesickness" in first-year students at *Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela*. The researchers appreciate all your help in providing information, which will be handled confidentially.

Instrucción: Answer each of the following questions as concisely as possible.

1. Describe how you feel about studying away from home.

2. What academic difficulties have you experienced due to homesickness related feelings?

3. What strategies have you implemented to cope with your homesickness?

4. Have you received any type of support from the university to deal with homesickness? Explain

Entrevista

Universidad Nacional
Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela
Académicos: Ligia Espinoza Murillo, M.A., y José David Rodríguez Chaves, M.A.

Descripción: Este cuestionario es parte de un estudio que tiene como objetivo recolectar información acerca del fenómeno de "homesickness" (nostalgia por estar lejos del hogar) en estudiantes de primer año en la *Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela*. El equipo investigador agradece toda su ayuda al brindar información, la cual será manejada de manera confidencial.

Instrucción: Responda las siguientes preguntas con la mayor exactitud posible.

1. Describa cómo usted se siente por el hecho de estar estudiando lejos de casa.

2. ¿Cuáles dificultades académicas ha tenido provocadas por la nostalgia originada por la lejanía del hogar?

3. ¿Cuáles han sido las estrategias implementadas por usted mismo para sobrellevar su situación de nostalgia?

4. ¿Ha usted recibido algún tipo de apoyo para mejorar su situación de nostalgia por parte de la universidad? Explique