

MILITARY DEPLOYED PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE
EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Eder G. Bennett

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. The research question was: What are the perceptions of deployed military parents regarding active participation in their child's education? The methodology included using a qualitative phenomenological research design, applying Epstein's theory regarding the triangle relationship between parents, teachers, and the community to help explore and make sense of the stories and experiences of parents who have or are currently experiencing challenges associated with military deployment. Data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. Data were analyzed using open coding, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and comparison. The setting for this study was Fort Rapture. The sample consisted of 12 personnel currently deployed or previously deployed within the past two years, who have pre-K-12 school-aged children currently in school.

Keywords: parental involvement, military deployment, deployed parents, soldiers as parents, phenomenology

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List of Abbreviations

Master Resiliency Training (MRT)

Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA)

REsilience and Activity for every DaY (READY)

Stress Management and Resilience Training (SMART)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. The study aimed to provide a foundation of understanding for educational stakeholders and the military community in order to fill the void in a child's educative experience created by a deployed parent. This chapter provides a framework for the research; discusses why the problem necessitated research; provides an overview of previous research; identifies the importance for stakeholders in education, including military personnel, families, teachers, and community members; and introduces the research questions.

Background

Deployment involves temporary relocation of a military unit within the United States or in overseas locations (Alfano, Lau, Balderas, Bunnell, & Beidel, 2016). Deployment has three phases: pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment. Though all three phases are challenging for military personnel and their families, the deployment and post-deployment phases appear most severe (Alfano et al., 2016). As the military parent prepares to leave, the children are emotionally affected (Alfano et al., 2016). It is important to note that the specific responses to deployment depend on various factors such as age, gender, maturity, pre-existing parent-child relationship, and the coping strategies and skills provided through interventions.

Children of military parents undergo tremendous challenges, especially during their parent's deployment. These challenges are mainly psychological strain, which often manifests in poor academic performance (Nicosia, Wong, Shier, Massachi, & Datar, A., 2017). Due to actions taken by the United States military in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, extended deployment has become a reality for children of military parents. The standard deployment time

for the Army is 12 months, but this could extend to 18 months. During this time, research findings have shown that the academic performance of military children decreases in a noticeable way (Bello-Utu & DeSocio, 2015; Nicosia et al., 2017). The academic performance of children of military parents on long-term deployment, which can be as much as 18 months or even more, is lower than children without deployed parents (Moeller, Culler, Hamilton, Aronson, & Perkins, 2015).

Deployment and the period after deployment affect children's learning and academic performance because it creates instability in the lives of a student and their environment (Conforte, Bakalar, Shank, Quinlan & Stephens, 2017). Children of deployed military parents become stressed students due to the absence of their parents and the shock and pressure of adjusting to the new normal. The stress associated with an absent parent cause problem in concentrating, learning new academic concepts, and in controlling their emotions and expressions (Conforte et al., 2017). The exact way such stress manifests depends on the individual child. Still, some common responses include becoming quiet and withdrawn or, conversely, hyperactive, disruptive to classroom etiquette, and lack of ability to concentrate on a single activity.

There is a growing body of research on possible interventions that can be provided through policy, community, and schools (Epstein, 2011; Epstein et al., 2018). However, there is not much research on the views of military parents in this context, especially their requirement to leave their children to serve the country. Yet, like any reasonable and non-military parent, they want to be involved in their children's education. This study, therefore, seeks to research and highlight the perceptions of military parents' involvement in their children's education. To this

end, the historical, social, and theoretical contexts in which this problem exists are discussed further below.

Historical

The problem of the effects of deployment on children's education is one that researchers have only recently begun to examine. Alfano, Lau, Balderas, Bunnell, and Beidel (2016) showed that the impact of a parent's deployment could harm children's education. According to DePedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty, and Berkowitz (2018), there is sufficient evidence to indicate a need for schools to accept and address the challenges faced by children of a deployed parent in order to reduce the likelihood of them veering off the academic path. Over time, the problem of deployed parents and the ramifications of their deployment on their children's education has become more transparent, which is why this recent research has emerged. The United States government has gone so far as to put together a booklet to assist parents facing deployment and explain some of the challenges that their families and children might face.

Per the *Educator's Guide to the Military Child During Deployment* (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008.), the stressful effects of deployment impact not only the family members but also the service member. Once a military parent deploys, regardless of the deployment period, the family members that remain behind must readjust and redistribute their roles to compensate for the absence of the deployed family member. The research to date indicates that for young families, there is an increased tendency to return to the location of their origin to reduce costs and as a measure to add to psychological support sources needed for the family to keep going (U.S. Department of Defense, n.d.).

Moreover, researchers at the RAND Corporation have shown that children of deployed parents face academic challenges because of the disruption of their home life structure (RAND

Corporation, 2012). Some of the critical points identified by the RAND Corporation are that children whose parents have been deployed for more than a year tend to achieve statistically different academic results compared to the scores of students who have never experienced a parental deployment (RAND Corporation, 2012).

Theoretical

The theoretical underpinnings of this research problem involve the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement, which has been well documented (Trautman & Ho, 2018). Epstein's parent-teacher-community theory emphasizes the parent-child role. Hirschi's social bond theory and Sampson and Laub's life-course theory support the idea that strong families and support systems lead to more positive outcomes as children progress into adulthood. Therefore, it is reasonable to posit that the extended absence of a parent combined with the stress associated with military deployments on children has a profoundly adverse effect on young learners' academic achievement. Moreover, concern over this adverse effect can negatively impact deployed parents' morale and well-being, perhaps even to the extent that their job performance is affected. Although military service is inherently a dangerous enterprise, causing service members to be concerned for their safety, parents serving in combat may also experience stress over concerns for their families back at home. The extent to which service members are negatively affected by these concerns may impact their ability to achieve their mission.

Social

One of the more significant findings of the RAND Corporation's (2012) study into the negative ramifications of deployment on children's academic progress is that parents tend to suffer most from the deployment, which adds a burden to the child's mind and can distract from

school or add to the child's worries and anxieties. Thus, a holistic approach to this problem needs to be developed to provide deployed parents, their spouses or intimate partners, their children, and other members and friends the knowledge and resources required to address every facet of the issue. One way to develop this holistic approach is to obtain a better understanding from parents about their experience. Because so much of their experience translates to the child's experience, it is most helpful to gain this understanding first. As Castro et al. (2015) pointed out, a parent plays a pivotal role in the child's academic development. If the parent is not actively involved due to being deployed or because their spouse is deployed, the child may receive less support and engagement from the parent than under normal circumstances.

The social aspect of this problem extends beyond the family. Teachers must find ways to cope with the child's home challenges and the community, as the child's potential to develop could impair the community's future (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016). As noted by O'Neal, Mallette, and Mancini (2018), community connections are essential for military parents who are looking out for the well-being of their children. Children are part of families, who are, in turn, part of wider communities, and those communities provide support for families, and that support extends to the child. Therefore, a clear and definite social relationship must be explored in this issue to see whether deployed parents are utilizing the support of their communities to help their children develop adequately.

Situation to Self

I am a United States Army officer and an Instructor with the United States Army Recruiting and Retention College. I have more than thirteen years of military service, spanning various positions and assignments. I consider myself a member of the population I am studying because I am familiar with their issues and experiences. That is the precise reason I have chosen

to conduct this research. By better allowing the deployed parent's perspective to be understood, better solutions can be devised. My assumption is that the nature of the lived experiences of deployed parents is characterized by an overarching perception that their deployment, military occupation, and geographic distance from their family members represent the main obstacles in assisting in their child's educative process. This assumption is based on an ontological view. According to Creswell (2013), researchers embracing ontological views believe that phenomena hold multiple realities. These realities require various forms of evidence and can be discovered through investigation. I also believe that the knowledge one learns can be communicated effectively to others and that this reality, as understood by the individual, can be reported to others regardless of the subjective values and biases that the researcher might possess.

The research paradigm by which I view this study is constructivism; this paradigm suggests that learning is an active, constructive process wherein the learner constructs the information or creates subjective representations of objective reality (Amineh & Asl, 2015). I expect that participants in this study have been as honest as possible. The meaning they constructed for themselves can help create better approaches to help their children academically.

This research paradigm comes with limits. The memory of individuals may differ from the facts, which could lead to a participant's recollections and meaning construction seeming to be unreliable (Gardner, 2001). However, even if the memories shift, the creation of meaning that the participants provide is essential because this feeling and sense of things are what has stayed with them.

Problem Statement

It is important to note that the deployment of military parents can disrupt the educational and academic progress of their children. As pointed out by De Pedro et al. (2018), children who

go a considerable period (a year or more) without a parent in their lives because of deployment are at higher risk of suffering academically. Currently, there are no clear guidelines available for parents or teachers to help develop children of deployed military parents. The United States government has provided the *Educator's Guide to the Military Child During Deployment* (U.S. Department of Defense, n.d.). Still, it is brief and designed to alert parents about what to expect, but it does not give much in-depth information about possible interventions.

The problem is there are no clearly defined protocols, or persuasive strategies that deployed parents could employ to assist in their efforts to be involved in their children's education (De Pedro et al., 2018). This gap, however, represents an opportunity for new research. To date, there has been some research concerning the effects of deployment and the possible corrective measures. Still, this research has focused only on children, school, and society without parental perspectives (Bello-Utu & DeSocio, 2015; De Pedro et al., 2018). With the understanding that deployment affects military service members and their children and family members, it is therefore essential to focus on parental perspectives.

That is why the theoretical approach provided by Epstein et al. (2018) can assist primary stakeholders—parents, teachers, and community—to come to the aid of children who have a deployed parent. What is necessary is the development of efficacious interventions that directly address this problem (De Pedro et al., 2018). To develop such interventions, one must first understand the parents' perspective because they are the ones who experience an immediate impact (RAND Corporation, 2012). I believe that this phenomenological research design has helped uncover this perspective and presented the information in a meaningful way that assists in developing appropriate interventions using Epstein's parent-teacher-community theory.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their children's education. This study provides a foundation of understanding that can assist educational stakeholders and the military community in filling the void created by a deployed parent with the goal of helping the student of the deployed parent. At the outset of the research, the perceptions of military parents were defined as the experiences, attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about being absent from home. At the same time, their child attempts to go through the educative process and what they could do to help. The theory that guided this research was Epstein's (2018) parent-teacher-community theory, which highlights the importance of the relationship between these three stakeholders in shaping the child's academic progress.

Significance of Study

Though many Americans profess to support the troops, it is clear that the needs of many deployed military parents are being overlooked. Therefore, the significance of this study relates to filling this gap by identifying optimal strategies that would help deployed parents actively participate in their children's education without creating detractions from their occupational performance. For example, Cozza et al. (2018) noted that more research into the relationship between military parents and their children is needed. Likewise, Alfano, Lau, Balderas, Bunnell, and Beidel (2016) have found that military deployment puts the academic progress of children of deployed parents at risk.

This study provided a foundation of understanding that can assist educational stakeholders and the military community in filling the void created by a deployed parent with the goal of helping the student of the deployed parent. Alfano et al. (2016) noted that there is still a need for researchers to examine, in detail, the relationship between and among the academic

development of the child, the role of the deployed parent, and other contextual factors such as community, teacher role, and so forth. However, since the RAND Corporation's (2012) examination of the effect of deployment on military children, there has not been a significant review of the data regarding parents' perception of this challenging issue or contextual factors.

Theoretical Significance

This study helped to explore Epstein's parent-teacher-community theory on academic success from the standpoint of military deployment and parent-absence. By showing how parent absence might impact the student's academic achievement, this study could provide additional insight into the applications or limitations of Epstein's theory. It may also help to reinforce Hirschi's social bond theory and Sampson and Laub's life course theory. Although these latter two deal primarily with deviance, the findings of this study could facilitate their application to academic challenges for students as well.

Practical Significance

This study aimed to build on the study by the RAND Corporation (2012) and incorporate the insights or more recent studies such as that conducted by De Pedro et al. (2018) to focus the phenomenological study and guide the interviews and focus groups that were used for obtaining the data on parents' perceptions. This study can help to improve the academic progress of children of deployed parents by giving stakeholders a better sense of challenges, options for overcoming these challenges, and real-life stories about what works, what does not work, and what might work. In addition, hearing the experiences from the people involved can help give a better sense of the reality of the situation. Therefore, this study explored and examined these parents' perceptions and the contextual factors that impacted their lives and contributed to

developing a fuller understanding of how the military community can better assist parents, teachers, and the community.

Empirical Significance

This study aims to provide a foundation of understanding for educational stakeholders and the military community in order to fill the void in a child's educative experience created by a deployed parent. By listening to military parents' lived experiences, challenges, and success stories in coping with lengthy deployments, fresh and vital insights were obtained that would have otherwise gone unidentified. These empirical observations and experiences can help inform efforts to develop the individualized interventions that are necessary to support deployed parents and their families in ways that draw on demonstrated successes and opportunities

Research Questions

This study used a transcendental phenomenological research design to explore military deployed parents' perceptions regarding their involvement in their children's education. The theoretical framework that guided this study was the theory of parental involvement supplied by Epstein (2011) regarding the relationship between parents, school, and community. To address the central research question and sub-questions, this researcher collected and analyzed data from military parents who were (at the time) currently deployed or were deployed in the past two years (Creswell, 2013).

Central Research Question

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education?

This question provided insight into parents' experiences as they attempted to negotiate their deployment with their duties and responsibilities to their children. As Alfano et al. (2018)

previously demonstrated, it was crucial to understand the broader contextual factors of this issue in order to arrive at an effective solution to the problem. Therefore, this question served as the primary focus.

Sub Research Question One

How do military parents describe their involvement in their children's education while deployed?

This question was used to gain insight into the parents' sense of whether they play a factor in their child's academic performance. If parents did not see themselves as a contributing factor in the child's academic progress, this could impact how an intervention or solution would be affected (Cozza et al., 2018). Parents play a vital role and are one of the leading players aside from teachers and the community in establishing the child's well-being and level of academic outcomes (Alfano et al., 2016). Thus, it was essential to know what perception of their role a parent has.

Sub Research Question Two

How do military parents perceive the impact of their deployment on the family and their child's academic performance?

This question was important because it addressed whether parent absence was a factor in a child's academic performance. It also discussed whether deployment (absence by order rather than personal choice) was viewed as problematic by the deployed parent. Some research has shown that absence engagement in the child's academic performance depends on the parent's sense of what the child is going through (Castro et al., 2015). Thus, this research question helped clarify whether deployed parents see their absence in good, neutral, or negative terms. If the parent was not in touch with what was going on in the child's life, there was likely to be some greater need to educate the parent about the need to be more engaged.

Sub Research Question Three

What challenges do military parents who are deployed face from their communities while trying to stay involved in their children's education?

This question was crucial because even if deployed parents and their spouses possessed a desire to be involved in their child's academic development, they might have encountered challenges within the community or school environment (Benner et al., 2016). Understanding these challenges and conditions can help formulate recommended approaches that parents and stakeholders can utilize in the future. Conversely, if the obstacles are not recognized, no adequate intervention can be implemented.

Definitions

For this study, the perceptions of military parents were defined as the experiences, attitudes, feelings, and beliefs about being absent from home. At the same time, their child attempts to go through the educative process and what they could do to help.

1. *Attitude*: According to Project Implicit (2018), an attitude is "your evaluation of some concept (e.g., person, place, thing, or idea). An explicit attitude is the kind of attitude that you deliberately think about and report." Attitude for this study refers to the evaluations made by military parents and their feelings and beliefs.
2. *Deployment*: The most precise use of this term is the movement of military personnel from home station to another location (usually outside the continental U.S. and its territories) to support a specific training exercise or combat operation. +(VA, 2020).
3. *Educative process*: This refers to any learning environment where one can engage in a learning process (Glassman & Kang, 2016).

4. *Environment*: This refers to the three agencies by which a person's behavior is shaped: one's peers (family, friends, and community), organizations, and media (Bandura, 2018). This definition helps understand how the three stakeholders of Epstein's theory contribute to making up the learner's environment.
5. *Life-course theory*: This theory posits that events in one's early life determine one's life course, and if one is derailed through some traumatic event from a normal, supportive upbringing, it can set one on a path for crime (Siegel, 2018).
6. *Parental involvement*: When parents participate and share communication with the school, parents gain active participation in the educational process. Parental involvement may include parents volunteering in classroom activities and school events (Epstein, 2018).
7. *Parent-teacher-community theory*: This theory posits a triumvirate of assistance among parents, teachers, and community members to assist in a child's education (Epstein, 2018).
8. *Perception*: This is the combination of experiences, attitudes, feelings, and parents' beliefs about being absent from home while their child attempts to go through the educative process and what they could do to help (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Benner et al., 2016).
9. *Social bond theory* posits that people refrain from committing negligent acts of deviant behavior because they have strong social ties or bonds with others. When those bonds do not exist, people have no reason to refrain from opposing, abnormal, or self-destructive behavior (Siegel, 2018).

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study focused on exploring the perceptions of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. Currently, there are minimal guidelines available for parents or teachers to help develop children of military deployed parents. This created a need to understand what parents go through during deployment to arrive at a better understanding of how stakeholders can more comprehensively address the issue of helping the children of deployed parents achieve academic success during the stressful period of deployment. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their children's education. This study used the theory of Epstein (2018) regarding the triangle relationship between parents, teachers, and the community to help explore and make sense of the stories and experiences of parents who have dealt with this challenge in the past. In addition, by using interviews and focus group discussions, this study aimed to provide more insight into the issue of how to help the children of deployed parents.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review examines the theoretical framework used in this research study and a review of the literature relevant to the overall topic. The theory of parental involvement developed by Epstein (2011) is used as the framework to contextualize this literature review. The theory focuses on the support-relationship that is ordinarily and inherent between parents and their children and the support system available from schools and the entire community as it relates to students' academic progression. It is especially important to consider this framework in the light of parents who are deployed to foreign wars or services and who are largely absent in their child's education. The parent makes up a significant part of the Epstein framework, so consider what happens when the parent is absent.

Parents' perceptions of missing their children's lives and not being there as their children make educational decisions are also hard on parents, as the literature has shown. The literature review focuses on the experience of parents in supporting school children, the difficulties they face when deployed, and the ways that support can be provided from communities and schools while parents are absent. Very few researchers consider the perspective of parents, which creates the need to take a closer look at the phenomenon. This chapter discusses the impact of deployment on children, types of community support available, the importance of resiliency training, the role of technology, and the role that teachers play, both in and outside of the classroom. The parent perception of these topics is provided when available. The literature used provides insight into how these issues play a role in children's academic lives of deployed parents. In the final analysis, the military family suffers when one or both parent is deployed. This outcome is more so the case as it relates to children's academic life.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the theory of parental involvement supplied by Epstein (2011) regarding the relationship between parents, school, and community. In accordance with the theory, parents play a pivotal role in providing the guidance and support children need to achieve their academic goals. The six types of involvement identified by Epstein (2011) are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. In all six types of involvement, the parent plays a pivotal role. The stronger the parent's involvement—including setting high expectations for school achievement—the more likely the child is to pursue identified goals (Castro et al., 2015). Numerous research studies have validated this relationship between parental support and student academic achievement and are recognized as a universal phenomenon in various cultures (Benner, Boyle & Sadler, 2016; Mahuro & Hungi, 2016; Nunez et al., 2015).

The application of the theoretical framework to this study provided the contours for analysis. This theoretical framework shows where to look and what supports should be in place to determine the challenges, obstacles, benefits, and solutions to how military parents can support their child's education while deployed, Epstein et al. (2018) compiled this information into a helpful theory that delineates the partnerships that schools, families, and communities can have to improve academic outcomes for young learners. Epstein et al. (2018) provided substantive evidence of the positive impact of parental and community involvement on academic achievement and performance in schools (Slavin, 2019). They concluded that this collaborative approach could also improve educator morale and enhance the reputations of schools in the community. By exploring how deployed parents perceive the effects of their absence on their

child's academic performance and whether those parents see any assistance coming from the community or school, they may obtain a sense of what challenges remain for this population.

Related Literature

Various studies (e.g., Alfano et al., 2016; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Pexton, Farrants & Yule, 2018; Trautmann, Alhusen & Gross, 2015) have demonstrated that the education of children is affected by the military deployment of their parents. Further review of the literature indicates the relevance of consistency cannot be overstated when properly managing the various adversities they encounter, particularly during the early stages of their development (DeVoe, 2017). Towards this end, it would be prudent to highlight not only the community's supportive role in this endeavor but also the role that other factors play, such as technology and parental resiliency, in addressing the diverse needs of learners from households where parents have been deployed.

Impact of Military Deployment

A study by Alfano, Lau, Balderas, Bunnell, and Beidel (2016) showed the negative impact of military deployment on children, particularly their education. These impacts could create a need for these children to require mental health treatment because they lack the consistency and stability most children have in a typical nuclear family. Furthermore, DePedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty, and Berkowitz (2018) point out that schools can significantly alleviate some of the negative symptoms children experience when parents are deployed in the military. School climate is an essential factor in lessening the severity of students' mental health issues while one or more parents are deployed (DePedro et al., 2018). As Pexton, Farrants, and Yule (2018) observed, the family unit cannot come together cohesively without support from

schools, as one parent is away for a while, and the child may not receive enough support or consistency from the other parent.

In this regard, Nicosia, Wong, Shier, Massachi, and Datar (2017) indicated that children need consistency in their lives to manage the problems and adversity that come their way during the growth and development phases of their adolescence. Without this consistency, they are at risk of lacking adequate academic skills and follow-through (Nicosia, Wong, Shier, Massachi & Datar, 2017). Furthermore, a series of deployments and the process of reintegration that follows deployment may interrupt this developmental process (Knobloch-Fedders, Yorgason, Ebata & McGlaughlin, 2017). Therefore, consistency is of great relevance in ensuring that a child's learning process is not hampered in any shape or form. In some instances, transfers from one school to another could be a complex undertaking. This example is particularly the case where credits are not transferrable between institutions – effectively meaning the learner risks starting all over again. Therefore, lack of consistency can have an unfortunate effect on the student, and both parents and teachers should be aware of the trial students experience due to military deployment (De Pedro et al., 2018).

Lester et al. (2016) discovered that the impact on children resulting from war-related deployment of parents was significantly negative. They showed that parents who experience depression or PTSD during or after deployment also negatively impact their children's lives and affect their ability to socially and emotionally adjust to their environments. Thus, deployment has impacts beyond a mere absence; when parents return, they do not always return in the same mental and emotional state they were in when they left. They may be bringing back psychological baggage or trauma that, in turn, impacts the child even after the deployment has ended. There are residual effects of deployment that must be considered when assessing how

children of military parents are affected by war. They indicate that the military community must be more mindful and supportive of military families where children are involved, as they are vulnerable and at risk.

Turner, Finkelhor, Hamby, and Henly (2017) supported the findings of Lester et al. (2016) with their study, which compared two groups—children of deployed parents and children of non-deployed parents—to see whether one group showed signs of adversity, trauma, delinquency, or victimization. Their cross-sectional surveys conducted over six years from a total sample of more than 13,000 participants showed that the children of deployed parents demonstrated more vulnerability to adversity, delinquency, trauma, and victimization than children of non-deployed parents. Turner et al. (2017) revealed that a deployed parent who is involved in a mission abroad would likely be absent in the home. Upon returning, the parent may be back and able to provide a physical presence, but the mission overseas can take its toll on the parent's mental health. Thus, making the situation at home all the more tense and stressful for the child, who sees the parent as the same but does not understand the psychological change that has taken place on the parent. In many cases, the parent is unaware of the trauma, even though signs may be there that something has changed (Turner et al., 2017).

Similar to Brownfield and Thompson (1991), earlier studies provided evidence that suggested no relationship among youths, families, and delinquency, positing that social learning and social control theories were inadequate theoretical frameworks for explaining adversity among children and adolescents. However, other researchers, such as Koon-Magnin, Bowers, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, and Arata (2016), used self-control theory and social learning theory to explain why adolescent girls and boys deviate into delinquency, later countered their study.

Nonetheless, both studies indicate that there is a relationship between family and child behavior, with parents acting as a moderating force.

Trier, Pappas, Bovitz, and Augustyn (2018) conducted an important case study of a six-year-old child diagnosed with global developmental delay and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder following the deployment of his father and the death of his mother. The father reported feeling unprepared and overwhelmed by the task of raising the child alone when called back home by the military (Trier et al., 2018). He felt cognitively and emotionally unready for the responsibility; moreover, he was suffering from emotional issues stemming from both the effects of war-related deployment and the loss of his wife. The combined effect of these stressors also spilled over to impact his six-year-old child. In addition, the father reported feeling isolated from his community and cut off from others, as though there were something wrong with him. Trier et al.'s (2018) case study showed that the impacts of deployment on the child can be deeply felt and can be one of several factors that prevent development from progressing appropriately. The study also illustrates the challenges deployed parents face after returning home, which are entirely different from the challenges one encounters on the battlefield and require a completely different set of skills, especially when the child is young.

The case study by Trier et al. (2018) supported the model of development put forward by Erikson. Erikson's eight stages of development theory helped to explain even what children go through as they age. Although the eight stages cover all life up to death, the first five stages cover childhood, from infancy to young adulthood (Shriner & Shriner, 2014). Furthermore, each stage is defined by the psychosocial conflict that characterizes that specific development stage. In other words, at each stage of development, the child (and later the adult) experiences conflict,

and in order to move successfully on to the next stage of development, the conflict needs to be resolved.

The first stage of Erikson's model is called the Trust vs. Mistrust stage, and it is typically experienced between the ages of zero and two (Trier et al., 2018). The second stage of Erikson's model is the Autonomy vs. Shame stage, which is usually experienced from ages two to three. The third stage is the Initiative vs. Guilt stage, and the child passes through it between ages three to five. The fourth stage is the Industry vs. Inferiority stage, which occurs from ages five to twelve. Finally, the fifth stage is the Identity vs. Role Confusion, which lasts from ages twelve to eighteen (Shriner & Shriner, 2014). As can be seen, the very first stage of development is the Trust vs. Mistrust stage, and the child needs a nurturing caregiver to develop a trusting relationship.

Each stage of Erikson's model is a span of learning, interacting with surroundings, and gaining experience and knowledge to shape the child's outlook for years to come (Trier et al., 2018). That is why it is important to make sure the child's environment is happy and healthy. For example, if a parent is deployed during this time, the long-term adverse effects can be significant, as shown in the case study by Trier et al. (2018). In such cases, the child must be taken back to the earlier stages, psychologically speaking, so that the conflict of that stage can be faced and overcome (Perry, 2006). Taking such actions shows the seriousness of making sure all the child's needs are met at these crucial developmental levels.

In terms of research that suggests that children who face adversity are not necessarily disadvantaged, Tough (2013) shows that children need to be challenged to develop their resiliency and grit. Tough (2013) argues that grit and resilience are what will inevitably assist the child in overcoming the challenges they will face as they grow—all of which will become

harder and harder if they are not pushed to become resilient as children. Tough (2013) explicitly states that "when kindergarten teachers are surveyed about their students, the biggest problem encountered, is not children who are unaware of their letters and numbers; it is children who do not know how to manage their tempers or calm themselves down after a provocation" (p. 17). He claims that children must be trained to control themselves, which is where self-control theory often comes into play for the proponents of allowing children to develop grit. By challenging children or allowing them to be challenged, they can learn what it means to pick themselves up and put in the effort to overcome the obstacle.

The study by Von Culin, Tsukayama, and Duckworth (2014) also suggests adversity is helpful for children, as it teaches them the value of cultivating grit and resiliency and teaches them to learn self-determination, self-efficacy, confidence, and perseverance. Academic success, the building up of social capital, and the successful attainment of goals have also been attributed to cultivating grit and resilience. Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2014) and Perkins-Gough (2013) state, "grit predicts success over and beyond talent. When you consider individuals of equal talent, the grittier ones do better" (p. 16). According to these authors, success is mediated by one's level of determination and ability to overcome adversity.

Additionally, according to Eskreis-Winkler, Duckworth, Shulman, and Beal (2014), "the tendency to sustain passion and perseverance for long-term goals, is a domain-general trait that promotes 'showing up' across diverse life contexts" (p. 37) and is determined by the development of one's grit and capacity for resilience. In short, "grittier students [are] more likely to graduate from high school" and succeed in reaching their goals in life (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014, p. 36). Each of these studies suggests that to worry too much about children facing diversity as a result of a deployed parent may be to deny them the bit of adversity they need to go through in

order to develop resiliency in life. These arguments could potentially reduce some of the stress and guilt that deployed parents may face as they struggle with knowing that they are not there at home for their children. Accepting these arguments would allow the deployed parent to accept deployment more readily and expect the family at home to accept it as well. A little adversity, after all, could be considered suitable for one in the long term.

Thus, the research suggests a need to find a balance between over-analyzing the harmful effects of deployment on a child and emphasizing the positive impact of a child who receives the opportunity to experience adversity and gain resilience through it. The child who never gets pushed, challenged, or tasked with facing the difficulties of a demanding situation could end up lacking resilience and grit and thus face increased adversity later in life. On the other hand, the child who faces adversity and is challenged to dig deep within himself to overcome obstacles is more likely to succeed.

The Supportive Role of Community

Research performed by O'Neal, Mallette, and Mancini (2018) emphasized the need for community support for military families. It is also essential for families to be open to community support, as their unfavorable opinion of the community they live in can harm the child or student's development (O'Neal et al., 2018). Communities play an extra-familial role in assisting children's development and helping students cope with moving, transferring from one school to another, and finding a place outside the home where they can make friends and develop their support network. Unfortunately, parents sometimes struggle to recognize the value of their communities. When parents are disengaged from the community or have an unfavorable opinion of a community, it can harm their child's progress (Castro et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2018). Parent perspectives reveal that they can feel helpless in providing support for their children

academically and socially. They do not always trust external environments to be good for them either because of the possibility of bad influences, such as drugs or pre-marital sex (Kelley et al., 2016).

In order to understand how communities and environments can be impactful in people's lives, it is helpful to consider Bandura's (2018) assessment of how the environment impacts people's behavior. Bandura (2018) explained that the cognitive development and behavior of people are affected by three main factors or agencies—media, peers (family, parents, and friends), and groups (such as schools and churches). Parents thus play a significant role in advocating for and supporting their children, but peers, groups, and media all play a part in that as well (Cheng & Huang, 2018). When dealing with deployment, parents may struggle as they make adjustments in new communities or seek ways to fill gaps in their lives that were filled by a parent who is now gone. To address this issue, communication can be a vital tool, particularly as it relates to various social media platforms. Since people are highly influenced by media (Bandura, 2018), using social media tools can help reduce some of the communication gaps in families where deployment has occurred. In addition, school administrators and teachers can also effectively use social media platforms like Facebook to communicate with parents (Ellison & Evans, 2016).

Communicating with parents and families is essential in maintaining a stable and core relationship with students and families. The research shows that parents prefer social media as a communication method and would like to see more teachers use it, as it is the most convenient and most often checked message system utilized throughout the day (Thompson, Mazer & Flood Grady, 2015). Thus, teachers should go out of their way to provide parents with email updates and text messaging to keep them abreast of developments in the school. However, not every

family will have access to cell phones or computers, so there must be an alternate means of communicating available (Graham-Clay, 2009).

Social media has become the dominant mode of communication in the 21st century. Parents and teachers can use it to coordinate, collaborate, communicate and assist one another in the educative process (Thompson et al., 2015). A crucial point for parent-teacher relationships that facilitate the student's success is to implement a plan that connects parents and families by communicating through social media and written letters when social media is not useful for families. Another key is to obtain feedback from parents on culture; this means teachers should develop cultural competency in line with Leininger's (2008) theory of transcultural care.

Another way in which communities can become more assertive is through community works, whether they are theater projects such as plays and musicals or public tasks like cleaning up parks. The point is they should be social in nature and orientation. As Bandura (2018) points out, children learn from peers and groups—those are the two primary learning sources for children aside from media. So, when children see peers and groups devoting themselves to something positive in the community, they naturally respond by joining in. The effort by the community shows the child that the community members are committed, which helps to reinforce behavioral expectations for the child, as explained by Bandura (2018). Efforts by the community also show the child that their parents and other adults in the community care about their development, and even though a parent may be deployed, the child is not alone. Additionally, the family is encouraged whenever there is outreach made by community members, whether it be a teacher or a principal, or a coach. Whenever individuals of this role visit the home, it helps to bridge a gap between that social world and the homeworld and thus strengthen the overall support system of the child (Stetson et al., 2012).

Another option is for the community to offer intervention programs like those used for early starters, i.e., children at risk of future delinquency. These intervention programs would be a preventive measure to reduce the risk of future problems stemming from parent deployment. One specific treatment option is trauma-informed care, as recommended by Espinosa, Sorensen, and Lopez (2013). Espinosa et al. (2013) show that many young people who venture into delinquency do so because they suffer from some form of trauma that prevents them from adjusting socially to their environment. The way they argue to address the situation is through trauma-informed systems, in which all programs and agencies "infuse and sustain trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into their organizational cultures, practices, and policies" (p. 1833). The military community that adopts a trauma-informed system with children of deployed parents would make sense from the perspective of Espinosa et al. (2013).

One of the benefits of a community-based trauma-informed approach to helping children is that attention is focused on the child's mental health issues rather than on the child's problems at home, in school, or the community (Lester et al., 2016). The aim is to provide support for the child to cope with the trauma likely lying at the heart of his actions and likely stemming, in the case of children of deployed parents, from the deployment and its effects on the parents (Lester et al., 2016). The purpose is to provide understanding, nurturing, and helping aids to children to develop and reach their potential, which otherwise might be stymied by the effects of parental deployment (Espinosa et al., 2013; Lester et al., 2016). Since the approach promotes and fosters the child's mental health, and many children usually do not have this kind of support when left independently, there are few potential drawbacks (Espinosa et al., 2016).

There are also after-school programs, which are a primary level prevention program as they "focus on the conditions that could lead to delinquent behavior such as truancy, poor

parenting, and prenatal exposure to toxins" (Listwan, 2013, p. 5). Secondary-level programs might be more productive, such as Big Brother and Big Sister programs. These programs are geared towards youths who lack adult role models and would fit well suited for children whose parents are deployed. Such children need guidance more than others, and these secondary programs could aid in developing the child. Children tend to receive positive support and can build their confidence from these programs, though, as Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, and McMaken (2011) point out, the success rate is not always sustainable.

Resiliency

Resiliency is further considered a helpful strategy and tool for military parents who are deployed and who must care for their children despite their deployment (O'Neal et al., 2018). The military already focuses on resiliency through the Army's Master Resiliency Training program, which focuses on helping military personnel maintain positive attitudes in the face of obstacles. Resiliency is something that military parents can utilize to help bring positivity to their children's lives, especially during the chaotic times of stress when deployment and relocation occur. Spitzer and Aronson (2015) noted three areas of positive psychology. The first key area is awareness of self. Awareness is necessary for the second strategic source, self-regulation; this involves monitoring and regulating emotions and thoughts and being willing to express oneself in a healthy way. Third, one must be able to see the good in things while being realistic about what one can control, and this is what is meant by optimism. Mental agility is also required, and it refers to the ability to be flexible and follows from one's ability to be optimistic. Finally, one needs strength to overcome obstacles and build relationships and make connections with people by putting himself in another's shoes.

Military parents can find positive psychology to strengthen their relationships with their children. Helping military parents develop the positive psychology needed to cope with the wide range of challenges and obstacles left behind by deployed parents. Such challenges and obstacles include helping young people with their academic pursuits as well as assisting adolescents during this transitional and uncertain period in their lives (Sandoz & Moyer, 2015). Besides helping military parents, Spitzer and Aronson (2015) also noted that teachers might use these same strategies to help promote positivity among students who are struggling due to military deployment or some other destabilizing influence in the home or community.

Once the aforementioned areas of positive psychology are understood, parents can also focus on identifying triggers—events or thoughts that trigger a particularly adverse reaction. When patterns appear, individuals can begin to see the trend in their thoughts or feelings that push them into negative moods or the desire to seek escape in an unhealthy manner (Spitzer & Aronson, 2015). Other areas military parents could focus on are simple breathing exercises, which can help one regain composure in a stressful period, problem-solving, and developing the ability to show gratitude (Bennett, 2018). In its positive psychology training, the military teaches on resiliency that members should learn how to recognize counterproductive thoughts by owning them and taking responsibility for them. The errors that people make in trying to stop negative thoughts is that they try to reduce the noise they make by ignoring them—or they might try to justify why they have them—or they may simply try to deny the thoughts exist at all (Spitzer & Aronson, 2015).

A military parent knows that reality must be dealt with head-on, so, in the event of negative thoughts, the key to overcoming them is to acknowledge them, own them, and assume responsibility for them by addressing them directly. This process is an important consideration

to keep in mind as parents try to cope with what their children are experiencing at home. As Alfano et al. (2016) point out, military parents are in a challenging situation regarding their children. While many of them are aware of the difficulties, they do not often consider how their military training can be used to help their family members cope with the deployment back home. Resiliency does not only play a part in the lives of the deployed parents, but it also plays a role in their children's lives. Therefore, Liebenberg and Ungar (2015) show that social supports are a significant factor in developing resilience, self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of self-worth among young children. If children have no strong social support, they are less likely to develop these characteristics.

Ensuring the child of a deployed parent has other support options outside the home can be an excellent way to help develop their resiliency. However, it is not always going to be a matter of obliging the child to make it alone or to overcome obstacles without assistance. Tough (2013) argues that obstacles and challenges are necessary for children to learn grit and resiliency. Still, Theron et al. (2015) show that a robust social support system can facilitate the development of grit and resiliency. Grit and resiliency are also the perspectives of Webster and Rivers (2018). They find that the conventional notion of a child overcoming adversity by himself, which is often associated with the development of grit and resiliency, is simply unrealistic. Instead, Webster and Rivers (2018) suggest that children require a supportive environment. Their suggestion correlates with Erikson's theory of development, particularly in the earlier stages of development wherein most children need at least love and some form of nurturing from a parent to face the conflicts of each of them in the early development stages.

Tempski et al. (2015) point out that "resilience has been considered as a process, where an individual, to be considered resilient, must have those personal characteristics tested in an

objective or subjective adversity" (p. 1). Resiliency is defined by Tempuski et al. (2015) "as the result of the interaction among the individual, his/her social support environment, and the adversity, including his/her subject values, cultural, social, and ethical influences" (p. 1). Like Theron et al. (2015), Tempuski et al. (2015) note that resilience is not something one develops on one's own but instead through the negotiation of moving parts. The child is at the center while the adversity seemingly surrounds him—but piercing through adversity are the encouragement and positive motivation of the child's support environment.

Positive psychology plays a significant role in developing resiliency for both parents and children and even for developing relationships. Building on Adler's principles of psychology, themselves rooted in the humanistic tradition, positive psychology emphasizes the ability of the person to become healthier by focusing on what it takes to be happy. It has been used to help promote the idea of resilience and grit (Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007), and one particular model is Seligman's (2018) idea of PERMA, a happiness model developed by one of the leading advocates of positive psychology in the field.

PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) is Seligman's (2018) theoretical model of happiness, named after the qualities that define or promote happiness. Positive emotion is used to connect a person to happiness. Engagement is used to focus the person on something enjoyable, a hobby, a work activity, or an activity to stay active and in a good place. Relationships are recommended because they help to maintain social interactions and healthy support systems. Meaning is one of the most important aspects of positive psychology as it serves as the foundation, the purpose of life. Without meaning, many are lost and directionless. Accomplishment helps to develop a sense of achievement through enhancing overall well-being and motivation in a positive direction. (Seligman, 2018).

One popular method of achieving PERMA is using prospection (Roepke & Seligman, 2016; Vaillant, 2000). A prospection is a tool of positive psychology that can help summon positive energy to confront challenges. It refers to the art of seeing oneself in the future and imagining how one's future self-attained the place where it is in one's mind. By merely having a positive mental picture, one can imagine ways to achieve success by disabling negative thoughts. Prospection is a technique that is recommended by positive psychologists like Roepke and Seligman (2016) to counter stress and anxiety. It could be especially useful in helping deployed parents to cope with stressors and issues as they struggle to find a balance between deployments and being a parent from a distance.

Deployed parents should not wait for problems to find them; instead, they can engage in preventive maintenance in order to maintain a positive mindset from a position of resilience through programs like READY. READY (REsilience and Activity for every DaY) is a resilience program used in many different organizations and settings to promote everyday psychosocial well-being for individuals (Burton, Pakenham & Brown, 2010) by focusing on nurturing a positive view of oneself. This concept can help individuals create better environments for the future. Rather than waiting for problems to happen and then addressing them through psychiatry, positive psychology through READY focuses instead on preventing problems in the future by creating great, positive working environments in places where stress and anxiety typically take over. READY also uses prospection to help individuals see their positive future selves and take steps to achieve those selves. It is thus another option that deployed parents and teens could both use to engage with the adversity of deployment in a positive manner and stay focused on achieving success.

The military promotes positive psychology through its Master Resiliency Training (MRT). The Army thus uses a positive psychology program to help leaders support soldiers dealing with anxiety and depression (Reivich, Seligman & McBride, 2011). The MRT program aims to create a more resilient soldier. It indicates that future military leaders will focus on positivity and mindfulness to assist in personal challenges and promote the attainment of goals. There is also the SMART (Stress Management and Resilience Training) program, which focuses on reducing a person's anxiety levels and being more focused on staying positive (Loprinzi, Prasad, Schroeder & Sood, 2011). It enables people to identify their anxiety triggers and develop various methods that can help them avoid their anxiety triggers or even counter the triggers with positive thoughts. The ways to achieve a positive state in the SMART program are to focus on Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Optimism, Mental agility, Character strengths, and forming connections. By focusing on these areas, one can then pursue the 6-step plan to help implement positive psychology at the societal level. Each of these steps reflects prospecting and PERMA: seeing one's future self, keeping a positive attitude, pursuing happiness, building relationships, having meaning, achieving goals, and sharing with others (Seligman, 2018). The goal of these programs is always to nurture a positive view of oneself and nurture positive thoughts.

Nurturing positive thoughts has been shown to play a vital role in negotiating adversity, which is useful in understanding how deployed parents deal with parenting challenges, particularly related to their efforts to assist their children in maintaining a degree of academic success. The six-step plan recommended by Seligman (2018) is to, first, adopt a positive perspective by seeing your best future self; second, find the things that make one happy; third, focus on building positive relationships; fourth, search for meaning; fifth, savor accomplishments; and sixth, share with others. According to Seligman (2018), positive emotion

is maintained through a sense of appreciation, peace, and hope, while engagement is maintained by fully immersing oneself in one's work. Additionally, relationships are maintained by developing authentic relationships in both work and play. Meaning is maintained by being mindful of helping others by volunteering at least one hour each week, and a sense of accomplishment is maintained by achieving daily personal goals. This model could be applied between parents and their children, with both coordinating on implementing the model despite the distance they experience during deployment. This model would be harder to implement with a deployed parent of a younger child. Still, the parent at home could likely facilitate the implementation by maintaining the right level of mindfulness throughout the deployment and providing assistance and guidance.

How Technology Plays a Part

Technology is another option that can be considered helpful in addressing the needs of learners who are in a military family with one or more deployed parents. Technology can help in several ways. Today, technology exists to instantly put students in contact with people on the other side of the world. In addition, deployed parents can maintain a closer connection with children while deployed, thanks to streaming services that allow for face time through the Internet. However, technology can also connect older students with additional schooling opportunities—such as online schooling (Thompson et al., 2015).

Technology has long been viewed as an efficient tool in the university classroom because it provides greater ease of access to learning for students who are digital natives (Henderson, Selwyn & Aston, 2017). The use of technology can reduce students' need to transfer or relocate to a new campus, as all education is taken online. In addition, students can tap into the enormous library of information on the Internet. They can pull up manuscripts and primary sources that

have been uploaded to servers somewhere on the planet, which allows everyone to see. What was once contained in a library is now readily available with the click of a few buttons.

Because technology is so attractive to digital natives and interactive, it is inherently an active learning tool that educators can use to engage students more fully and create opportunities for them in class. The technology exists for streaming films shared on YouTube, uploading feedback for students and their parents via web portals like Blackboard, distance learning, and more. The fact that students can now take classes online without ever having to set foot on campus is a significant innovation that is a startling reminder of just how far technology has come—and the extent to which it has advanced the educational system. Parents are not often cognizant of the opportunities to help them with their children, but awareness of digital technology must be developed more thoroughly (Epstein et al., 2018). Parents, communities, and students can achieve a higher support synthesis by opening their eyes to what new technology can do. Technology can even be used to help students in destabilized families like those where military parents are deployed, as Chang (2017) has shown. Chang (2017) identified the secret to her success at rejuvenating her school district via the incorporation of more technology into the classroom:

Students who struggle are often more dependent on technology to learn. More affluent kids are used to lots of technology because they can afford it. We could afford the same technology. For disadvantaged students, their access to technology needs to increase in order to close the opportunity gap. (Chang, 2017, p. 12)

In short, by bringing digital technology into the classroom, educators can help struggling students achieve their potential. Unfortunately, parents too often are unaware of the positive role that technology can play in their children's lives, and one of the ways that they can help their

children is to give them positive self-images and to provide them with ways to enhance their self-image (Spitzer & Aronson, 2015).

Teachers especially can play a role in enhancing students' self-image to empower them to take ownership of their academic careers (Yeager & Walton, 2011). These exercises are not often ones that parents are aware of, and they are as simple as asking children to imagine what they would like to be or what they would like to do for a career. The point of these exercises is to get students to think more imaginatively about their lives, so they are not overburdened by the present, which may be difficult considering the disadvantageous nature of their home life (Spitzer & Aronson, 2015).

However, if students, parents, and teachers collaborate in bringing positive psychology into students' lives, military parents could see benefits in the lives of their children's academic careers. Although technology has its challenges, it should not be ignored (Prensky, 2001). Despite military deployed parents and their children being in different geographical locations and time zones, it can be a useful tool to enable them to remain connected. Alternatively, technology may be difficult for some military parents, given their circumstances (Chang, 2017). Therefore, some evaluation of the circumstances is needed to understand whether technology is a convenient solution to keep parents and children connected. In addition to being useful in a school environment, technology can help open up new worlds for the student (Prensky, 2001).

There are dangers to exposing children to too much technology, particularly with the rise of social media and its influence on and popularity among adolescents today. Teens can be exposed to personalized advertisements that play on their impulses (Chester & Montgomery, 2008). They can also be exposed to negative impressions that arise from jealousy or envy at another's social media account (Appel, Gerlach & Crusius, 2016; Freberg, Graham, McGaughey

& Freberg, 2011). The more exposed to social comparison via social media, the more likely the child or adolescent will experience envy, anxiety, and depression. Thus, too much media can cause the individual child or teen to regress and lose whatever positive momentum was gained from earlier positive usage of technology in a controlled or monitored environment—i.e., with a parent or teacher.

The Role of the Teacher

Communication through technology such as email, text messaging, and social media usage are methods that teachers can use to coordinate and collaborate with parents more effectively. In fact, parents prefer these methods: "an increase in parents' preference for frequent email communication as well as for emerging modes of parent-teacher communication such as text messaging and social media" are the primary modes of communication that parents wish teachers would use more of (Thompson, Mazer, & Flood-Grady, 2015, p. 187). Facebook can be used to schedule face-to-face meetings or to share information. However, it is often underutilized as a tool in parent-teacher communication (Thompson et al., 2015).

Another solution is to enhance the role of the teacher. Parents are often unaware that teachers can make home visits to provide additional support to learners (Stetson, Stetson, Sinclair & Nix, 2012). One way to get teachers and parents working together to provide community support for children of deployed parents is for teachers to make home visits to the houses of these students throughout the year. Nothing shows families going through a difficult time, such as deployment, that teachers care more than when the teacher makes a home visit (Wright & Shields, 2018).

A teacher is generally thought of as the person who provides lessons on whatever subject the student is expected to learn—but if the teacher appears to the student as a real live human

being who exists outside of the classroom, it gives the student more context and a greater appreciation for who the teacher is (Stetson et al., 2012). Furthermore, it shows the student that the teacher cares for him and wants him to succeed. Seligman (2018) identifies this type of support as part of the PERMA model for happiness, including a healthy amount of engagement. The teacher can assist the student in prospection, helping the student form a vision of a future self. Thus, while the deployed parent is away, the teacher helps fill a gap, which aligns with the Epstein (2018) theoretical framework.

Additionally, when families see teachers showing a vested interest in the lives of their students beyond the classroom, it can motivate both parents and students to become more invested in their education (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). For that reason, Whyte and Karabon (2016) recommend home visits for teachers looking to promote the value of education, especially in communities suffering from destabilized families and lack of leadership. The teacher is able to fill a gap in the leadership in the community, and the home visit is an excellent way for that to happen.

However, the parents must be on board with teachers making home visits (Stetson et al., 2012). The role of parents in the education of children cannot be underestimated. If teachers are the educators setting the example in the school, parents are the educators setting the example in the home. Teachers and parents must work together and be on the same page to provide students with consistent examples and continuity in their educative experience (Wright & Shields, 2018). The school always strives to reflect the values of the community and work with parents to define those values. As Bolles and Patrizio (2016) demonstrated, military parents already have the sense of discipline and hierarchy ingrained into their mindsets, so it makes sense that they should seek to develop an interdisciplinary approach to providing support for their children by working

long-distance with teachers to make home visits or to provide some form of extra-curricular support for their children.

The teacher also must be mindful of culture. Culture holds a particular significance in education because it provides the foundation and background of a student's experience; it gives the foundation of their ideas and beliefs. It shapes the lens that views the student's outlook (Doge & Keller, 2014). By considering culture, a teacher can better connect with students and provide an atmosphere in the classroom that is conducive to sharing, responding, and learning (Saifer, 2011). Educational attainment requires that students engage with the information presented to them in their lessons. One of the best ways to get students to engage is to connect the lesson to their backgrounds and cultural experience (Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Richards, 2006).

The role of culturally responsive teaching in educational attainment is to be the pathway towards cultural diversity. The teacher helps students define the learning goals, question traditional concepts, understand student diversity, engage with the material, and effectively work towards knowledge acquisition through participation (Kea et al., 2006). Numerous factors can affect the educational attainment of students. The culturally responsive teacher must address these factors to remove all the issues that might affect a student's learning capacity. It is important to note that developing cross-cultural competency and sensitivity is a continuous rather than a static enterprise that demands ongoing commitment on the part of teachers (Dahlman, 2014).

Three factors that can affect the child of the deployed parent's educational attainment are (1) socio-economic background, (2) parental involvement, and (3) school structure (Thompson, Corsello, McReynolds, & Conklin-Powers, 2013). These factors can influence students in

various ways. First, as each student is different, teachers will need to know their students and understand their own unique, personal needs. One way to do this is to make "home visits," which can facilitate and foster strong relationships between and among students, their families, and the teacher (Stetson et al., 2012). By making such visits, the teacher can also develop a better sense of the student's socio-economic background and the level of parental involvement. Finally, the third factor (school structure) may be outside the teacher's control but will have an impact, nonetheless.

Socio-economic status can affect educational attainment by causing stress for students if the socio-economic life of the student is subpar (Thompson et al., 2013). This factor can be determined by the neighborhood in which the student lives, the family status of the student, the family's income, the family's place in the community, and so on. If these elements contribute positively to the student's life by providing stability and support, they can benefit educational attainment. Conversely, if they are lacking, these same factors may serve as obstacles.

Parental involvement is another factor that can affect educational attainment. The level at which parents involve themselves in their child's life will affect their success in school (Perna & Finney, 2014). Involvement can include listening to the child, offering advice or guidance, helping with development issues, teaching the child to have an ethical base or moral sense, and being emotionally supportive. Parental involvement could also be assessed via parental attendance of PTA meetings, class or school events, responses to teacher emails or notes, and so forth. Further, as Vijaya, Vijaya, and Rajeshkumar (2016) observe, parental involvement in education could take the form of "providing encouragement, arranging for appropriate study time and space, modeling desired behavior (such as reading for pleasure), monitoring homework, and actively tutoring their children at home" (p. 11). It is important to note that when a parent is

actively involved in the educational process, their children's achievement is further enhanced due to the impact that the said involvement has, not only on classroom behavior but also on their self-concept and attitude.

Educational attainment affects students in the long term because education sets the stage for the student's future life. A student who fails to achieve academic success will find it harder to obtain a good-paying career in the future because not having an education limits one's opportunities and choices when it comes to finding a job (Perna & Finney, 2014). A student's human and social capital might suffer as a result. The student could be caught in a poor socio-economic state with no way out because education was never achieved. This suboptimal outcome can have corresponding social, economic, and psychological effects on the student over the long term.

The teacher should be viewed as a pillar, not just in the classroom but also in the community. For that reason, the teacher should be willing to make home visits to establish batteries that are needed to foster good and healthy relationships. These relationships are required to ensure that educational attainment is possible (Perna & Finney, 2014). It is about investing in one another, giving time to one another so that students can realize their potential and see that they have a strong support system that will help them overcome whatever obstacles they may be facing (Perna & Finney, 2014). The teacher can make this happen by being visible support for students and connecting to their families to establish a bond. The relationship of trust is very important in education because it sets the tone for students and gives them a way to open and engage with the material that they might otherwise never fully engage with in the first place. In other words, establishing a meaningful rapport with parents can help teachers provide them with the guidance and feedback they need to actively participate in their children's education.

Today's teacher should use scaffolding to build on what the learners have learned in the past, as this is the most natural and effective way to continue and promote the learning process. Yet, students need to know that what they have already inside them in terms of knowledge supports moving forward and obtaining new knowledge. The challenge that one might encounter with implementing this approach is that not all students in a classroom will be at the same level internally. Some will require more imaginative play than others, and some will be ready to process more information more quickly than others. Each student may require a degree of individual attention or special instruction—but having a studio-style classroom, for instance, can help to overcome this challenge. As Rosa and Montero show, Vygotsky claimed that "development occurs through equilibrium with the environment" (Moll, 1990, p. 71). It was also this claim that got him into trouble with the Soviets, who believed that "the individual capacity for autonomous action [was] independent of environmental influence" (Moll, 1990, p. 71). Vygotsky certainly made the case that "psychological processes have a cultural origin" (Moll, 1990, p. 79). In other words, there is no way to divorce or separate the individual's cognitive development from the environment. To argue that such was possible was to ignore the social character of human nature and to imagine that human beings could simply be programmed like computers and not rely upon interaction with the environment in any way.

Teachers should permit students to interact with one another to help each other learn and process information. In this manner, they share ideas and get on the same page more quickly, naturally, and effectively. Again, it is part of the normal socialization process, which, as Vygotsky points out in the zone of proximal development, allows children to learn and develop. This supports Epstein et al.'s (2018) theory of the parent-teacher-community relationship in helping students reach their academic goals: students need community life to grow and develop.

Learners can do a great deal of developing independently and rather rapidly, as long as they are provided the time and space to engage with one another and with the materials on their own.

The teacher should always be there to guide and support when necessary. Cultural mediation can come into play here, as Cole points out; cultural mediation alters the structure of human psychological functions (Moll, 1990). Thus, in formal schooling, the challenge is taking individuals out of their natural habitat and placing them in an artificial setting, which essentially requires them to navigate two worlds simultaneously.

Summary

In summation, the military family is likely to suffer from a parent's deployment, especially as children are concerned. Children's academic life will face disturbances, and as Epstein (2011) indicates, the best way to examine this type of situation is through the three-fold relationship of parents, school, and community. This literature review has examined those three fields in detail to show how each plays a role in advancing the student's concerns when a deployment disrupts home life. The research offers a variety of options and opinions on the matter.

Some researchers believe that a little adversity is good for the child and can teach the child to develop grit and resilience (Tough, 2013). Others believe adversity itself is not educative by itself. For resiliency to be developed, the child needs a strong support system, whether that be from peers, groups, or others in his life (Webster & Rivers, 2018). The implication is that there should be a balance between allowing the child to face the challenge of parental deployment and leaving the child to face it independently (Theron et al., 2015). Shielding the child should not be the aim, but rather inviting the community to provide support

for the child will have a positive impact in terms of helping the child to realize he has a support system.

Some of the possible scenarios researchers have identified include the teacher's role in enhancing students' lives through connectivity outside the classroom (Epstein et al., 2018). Another is the role of the community being enhanced by filling gaps in the learner's life that would be otherwise filled by a parent who is deployed (Alfano, Lau, Balderas, & Beidel, 2016). Additionally, there is the role of the parent using some of the training in positive psychology picked up in the military and applying it in the child's life to keep the child-focused and upbeat about options for the child's future (Alfano et al., 2016). To date, most of the research has focused primarily on the child, the non-deployed parent, and the community to identify support strategies for the children with a deployed military parent (Alfano et al., 2016). Research on military deployment has not effectively or adequately addressed the aspect of the parent, even though the effects of deployment in the military affect not just the children and the family members left behind but also the service member on duty. Each parent's desire, including the military parent in deployment, is to undertake their parental roles, including being involved in their children's education (Turner et al., 2017).

There are various ways, especially in the age of technology, for parents, regardless of their location in the world, to get in touch with their children. For example, enhancing the child's positive self-image is something that teachers can also do as they work with parents to coordinate a possible strategy to help them think about long-term ideas for the future. Another possibility is using technology to help students access more learning options, such as online schooling or connectivity with deployed parents. Unfortunately, the deployed parents are not

always aware of these options and need to be better informed. Therefore, in the final analysis, parents' deployment effectively creates a void in the familial setting.

This study explored the perceptions of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. Education happens to withstand the worst of the resulting disruptions. In addition to shedding more light on the perceptions of deployed parents concerning their influence on their children's academic achievement, the present study provides a useful assessment of the effects of military deployment on parental involvement. This assessment is important because the absence of a parental sense of a child's academic performance is likely to harm parental participation in the learning process. Indeed, as pointed out elsewhere in this text, the relevance of parental involvement in a child's academic life cannot be overstated.

The overall approach of positive psychology runs through much of the literature on this subject. A positive attitude towards the challenge of diversity and a model like PERMA can assist stakeholders in staying focused on where they need to be mentally and emotionally to provide the best level of support for the child. The more positive parents, whether deployed or not, teachers, coaches, ministers, community members, peers, and groups can be, the more likely the child is to develop a sense of grit and determination and face academic challenges and overcome them (Seligman, 2018).

The next chapter discusses the methodology used for this study by describing the design, research questions, the setting, and the participants; the procedures for collecting data; the role of the researcher; what data collection instruments were developed or utilized; how the data was analyzed and how trustworthy the study was. The following chapter also provides ethical considerations.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. This chapter presents the procedures, research design, and data analysis of the research study. This chapter also discusses the research design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the role of the researcher, data collection methods and instruments, data analysis, the trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations.

Design

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research design is ideal when the research seeks to answer "how" and "why" research questions (McMillan, 2012). Qualitative research facilitates the exploration of a problem and allows the researcher to work towards a hypothesis. As this study was concerned with exploring perceptions, the qualitative method was most appropriate. Additionally, a transcendental phenomenological design/approach is ideal when the researcher seeks to obtain an in-depth understanding of a subject who has experienced a phenomenon, which allows the researcher to arrive at a socially constructed meaning (McMillan, 2012; Yazan, 2015). The justification for this design can be found in the positivist doctrine, which posits that research cannot be objectively conducted from the outside but rather only from the inside (Husserl, 1999). The objective is to see, understand, explain, and clarify the reality faced by military parents who are deployed and their experiences as they attempt to stay involved in their child's education.

In order to see what the participant sees and to understand what the subject understands, one has to stand where the subject stands and experience what the participant experiences; the researcher, in a sense, must become the subject—not literally—but rather figuratively (Husserl,

1999). As the researcher places themselves in the shoes of the subject, the researcher is able to see the participant's own experience more clearly and objectively (Husserl, 1999). Thus, according to the phenomenological discourse, the transcendental approach is the most valid way of conducting qualitative research.

Phenomenology is a natural fit with qualitative research when the focus is on individual perceptions that the researcher can experience directly. Creswell (2007) stated that the "basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (p. 58). From this perspective, the main focus of the phenomenological approach is to have an appropriate method for seeing more clearly how the particular relates to the general; it is about coming to an understanding of the universals by way of the personal and the particular. The universal essence that describes the general common experience of human beings can be distilled through an in-depth examination of the lived experience of one's subject, which in turn can best be done by way of the phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2007). For this study, the more the researcher immersed himself into the world of the military deployed parent, the more ability he had to gather all the relevant data that determines the parameters of the participant's experience. To discern these parameters from abroad, the researcher must see closely and be close by, and be exposed to the same experiences that are being researched. Thus, the researcher can understand what the participants feel because the researcher has felt the same things.

Moustakas (1990) noted that in order to research the essence of things fairly, the research design must center on a simple inquiry or question. The phenomenological design facilitates this inquiry by planting a sense of inquiry in the experience of the participants. At the same time, an understanding of the inquiry must be maintained by adhering to the research question. The

question serves as the guiding hand through phenomenology while the researcher immerses himself in the participants' world (Moustakas, 1990). To keep from becoming lost in countless sensations and in the world of the subject, the researcher maintains tethered to the act of research by way of the research question; everything becomes oriented towards answering that question in the end.

Silverman (2016) has shown the purpose of such research is to provide precise information on a specific situation to help others understand what is taking place without relying on statistical data. In addition, the phenomenological approach allows the researcher to uncover universal themes that can facilitate future research and better understand the participants' experiences as seen, felt, and expressed through their own eyes and words (Silverman, 2016). These themes can also be used to help promote greater understanding among stakeholders.

As the situation under question is specific and focused, the transcendental phenomenological approach fits best as it provides a focused example of the phenomenon. Thus, this study offers military parents who are or have been deployed the opportunity to express and describe their experiences in their children's education (Lester et al., 2012). This qualitative design was intended to provide the framework in which several data collection methods could be applied, including the use of semi-structured interviews. In addition, questionnaires, focus groups, and artifact analysis were used to develop informed answers to the study's central and sub-research questions.

Research Questions

The focus of this study centered around one research question. The central research question was: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents

regarding active involvement in their child's education? To interpret future the perception of the military deployed parents, the researcher used the following three sub-questions:

1. How do military parents describe their involvement in their children's education while deployed?
2. How do military parents perceive the impact of their deployment on the family and their child's academic performance?
3. What challenges do military parents who are deployed face from their communities while trying to stay involved in their children's education?

Setting

The setting for this study was U.S. Army installation, Fort Rapture (pseudonym), located in the northeastern part of the United States. At the time of the study, the installation had an estimated population of 71,000, of which almost 42,000 were active-duty soldiers. The rest were family members, employees of the Army, and Air Force Exchange Service, volunteers, and other employees (Powers, 2018). The percentage of the 42,000 active-duty service members at Fort Rapture that were deployable at any given point in time was classified, but they all had access to the family support services provided by the U.S. military for deployed parents.

There were 27 elementary schools, eight middle schools, four high schools, and four special campuses on Fort Rapture. This selection site was suitable because it was the participants' permanent duty station when not deployed. The organization here was of hierarchical structure and provided safety and order for the participants. A select location and time were chosen for conducting interviews and focus groups after securing permission from participants.

Participants

The population of this research study was U.S. military parents of schooled-aged (Pre-K-12) children who resided in the United States and were in school. According to Creswell (2003), “long interviews with up to 10 people” (p. 65) is appropriate for a phenomenological study. As such, a sample size of 12 respondents was utilized for this research. The demographics of the participants are provided in Table 1.

Table 1:

Demographics

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Race	Branch	Rank	School age Children
Mike	Male	40	Caucasian	Army	LTC	2
Christopher	Male	42	African American	Army	SGM	1
Johnathon	Male	38	Hispanic	Army	1SG	2
Zac	Male	30	Caucasian	Army	SSG	2
James	Male	36	Caucasian	Army	Major	3
Billy	Male	44	African American	Army	SGM	3
Tim	Male	34	African American	Army	1LT	3
Brian	Male	34	African American	Navy	LT	5
Janice	Female	32	African American	Air force	SSG	3
Tammy	Female	43	Hispanic	Army	CW2	4
Thomas	Male	26	Caucasian	Marines	CPL	1
Terry	Female	30	African American	Air force	TSgt	2

A combination of criterion-based, snowball sampling methods, and purposeful sampling was used to recruit study participants. Criterion-based sampling was used to identify prospective

participants based on specific criteria. Snowball sampling was used to recruit additional participants based on referrals by individuals who enrolled in the study. In order to become a study participant, the prospect had to be deployed or previously deployed within the past two years; anytime longer, and their memories may have begun to fade (Gardner, 2001). Additionally, they were required to have pre-K-12 school-aged children in a school outside of the home. Other criteria included a willingness to participate in an interview and online focus group, consent to the use of an audio recording of the interview and focus group, and desire to share journals, letters, and email correspondence with teachers pertaining to their children while deployed.

According to Kuper, Lingard, and Levinson (2008), purposeful sampling methods are helpful in research, as only specific individuals with the phenomenon under study are appropriate participants for this research. Recruitment began by contacting the Fort Rapture public affairs offices regarding the policies and procedures for placing recruitment flyers on bulletin boards across the installation (Appendix B). The same flyer was posted on Facebook and other online networks such as LinkedIn and Instagram. Prospective participants were provided an Informed Consent letter that explained the purpose of the study and participation requirements (Appendix C). Additionally, participants were asked to refer other potential participants just in case the desired sample size was not reached. A recruitment letter was emailed or mailed directly to each referral (Appendix D).

Procedures

The first step in the procedure for conducting this research was to obtain IRB approval from Liberty University (see Appendix A). Once IRB approval was granted, the next step was to recruit participants, using the methods previously discussed actively. Prior to participating in

interviews, participants were required to review and sign an informed consent form (Appendix C) that details the nature of the study, purpose, risks, and withdrawal rights. The next step was to collect data.

Four methods were used to collect data: Questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and artifact analysis. Once I received the participant's consent to participate in the study, a questionnaire was sent to gather preliminary demographic data, such as age, race, military affiliation, and years of service (see Appendix E). The questionnaire consisted of three open-ended questions that allowed participants to prepare and reflect on their thoughts and feelings about the research question. Once questionnaires were returned, I then contacted each participant to schedule an interview (see Appendix F), which was conducted in a predesignated location chosen by the interviewee.

Each interview lasted for approximately 45-60 minutes. Each interview was conducted using semi-structured interview questions. In case of any arising issues, follow-up questions were used for clarification. During the interview, I took notes to document appearance, gestures, and unspoken communication that could help understand the meaning of the participants' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each interview session was audio-recorded, professionally transcribed, and sent to participants for member-checking purposes to validate or clarify responses if needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, prior to attending the interview session, interviewees were asked to carry any artifacts representing or signifying their experiences as deployed military parents.

Requested artifacts included participants' journals, letters, and email correspondence with teachers pertaining to their children while deployed. During the interview, participants had an opportunity to explain their artifacts. This process helped provide insight into the interactions

between parents and teachers and was used to support or challenge what the participant remembered or recalled during the focus group. The last data collection method used focus groups (see Appendix G). Selected participants were gathered in an online forum for 45-60 minutes using videoconferencing software (Zoom). The researcher recorded, downloaded, and professionally transcribed the online session. After transcription, participants were allowed to participate in member checking to verify the accuracy of their responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In all four methods used for data collection, no identifying elements were collected, and only pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants. Before conducting each interview and the focus group, I introduced myself, welcomed the interviewee(s), and stated the purpose of the study.

The Researcher's Role

As the human instrument in this study, the researcher's role was vital to ensuring the quality of data collected and the ethical collection procedure (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, my relationship with the participants was explained to them so as to be completely transparent and to bracket out bias (Allen, 2015). One way to reduce the risk of bias is to use the bracketing technique by stating upfront the researcher's expectations and then accepting the data that is produced by the research (Smith & McSweeney, 2017, p. 292). Therefore, it was stated to participants that I am a United States Army officer and an instructor with the United States Army Recruiting and Retention College. I told them that I had over 13 years of military service in various positions and assignments. Although I did not have direct authority over the participants, I pointed out that I could be considered a member of the population I was studying based on my experiences and knowledge of the issues. I noted that by better allowing the deployed parent's perspective to be understood, improved solutions could be devised. My assumption was that

deployed parents perceive themselves as having a minimal impact on their child's life and that they view their deployment, job, and distance as the main obstacles in assisting in their child's educative process.

It was expected that participants would be as honest as possible in their responses to the questionnaire, interview, and focus group questions; however, this assumption did come with limits. The memory of the events may have differed from the actual event, making a participant's responses unreliable. The study reviewed one side of the story and one perspective. However, each individual's encounter was unique.

Data Collection

The data collection methods used for this study were questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and artifact analysis. This section describes the procedures for these four methods in detail.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was the first data collection method and was designed to obtain demographic information and capture the perceptions and experiences of participants using open-ended questions (Dalati & Gomez, 2018). Questionnaires are helpful as a data collection instrument, especially when used alongside other instruments, such as artifact analysis, which was the case with this study (Giordano, Piras, Boschini & Falasconi, 2018). This questionnaire focused on what it is like for the participant to be a parent while deployed overseas in the military (Appendix H).

This questionnaire was employed through Survey Monkey after participants signed a consent form. Questions 1-12 were used to gather necessary demographic information and military affiliation. Question 13 consisted of three sub-questions. Participants were asked to

provide written reflections on their experiences, thoughts, and family situations with regard to being a deployed parent in the military.

Interviews

The interview method is particularly well suited for qualitative research because it allows the subject to provide answers organically (Turner, 2010). The interview protocol comprises a set of questions that the researcher could ask participants in a structured or semi-structured manner; it helps to probe the participants' experiences to find answers to the research questions, which have to be developed ahead of time. One way to develop an effective interview protocol is to pilot the interview questions first (Neuman, 2008). This way, one can ensure the questions asked help to obtain the required data. Piloting a protocol involves testing the interview questions on an individual before employing them in the study. The interview protocol was piloted with two individuals who had experience with the phenomenon but were not included in the study. Based on information gathered from the pilot, the researcher revised interview questions to develop more in-depth, rich responses by the participants (Appendix I).

The interview protocol was constructed as follows: Questions one through five were knowledge questions used to obtain information about the participant. Questions six through 13 were designed to elicit the interviewee's perspective on the topic of the research questions. Questions 14 through 18 were used to gain insight into the participants' perceptions of the problem, i.e., the challenges faced by deployed parents as they attempted to assist in their children's education. As Rosenthal (2016) noted, getting the interviewee's perspective is essential in qualitative research. The way to do that is to ask direct, open-ended questions that relate to the research question.

Artifact Analysis

Artifact analysis was limited to documents used and in possession of the participants (Peters et al., 2015). The specific artifacts that were collected were participants' journals, letters, and email correspondence with spouses or teachers pertaining to their children. In place of such artifacts, participants were also given the option to choose an artifact representing their experience as a military deployed parent. Such options included photographs, written recollections of conversations with spouses during deployment, videos that the participant watched, or books that the participant read that were relevant to the research topic. Artifacts were obtained with permission from the participants and were observed as a whole or a larger part of a total experience or situation. The purpose was to make sense of what the artifact represented for the individual, both historically and socially. It was assumed that these artifacts would provide further insight into the experiences of deployed military members with regard to their child's education or, at the very least, what their thoughts were at the time and what they were focusing on as a deployed parent. This information was used to help guide the focus group discussion.

Participants who could not produce artifacts that fit previously stated categories had the option to provide artifacts, so long as it related to their time spent as a deployed parent. Artifacts, no matter what their kind, are helpful in revealing information about people, places, and times and allow for a deeper understanding of a phenomenon that cannot be obtained solely through interview analysis (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Shankar, Hakken & Osterlund, 2017). These artifacts also helped to show the recurring themes in the messages sent by the parents and the frequency of these themes in the various correspondences. In addition, in case the correspondence originated from the teachers, it was important for these artifacts, as they showed the concerns and the needs for parent participation from the teacher's perspective. By interacting

with these artifacts, it was found helpful for enhancing the researcher's perspective because it helps bring the researcher into the context and real-life status of a military parent. The essence of these artifacts was to assist in contextualizing the parent's frustrations, if any emotions, if any, and their desires and goals within the various artifacts.

Focus Group

A focus group is a vital qualitative data collection method as it provides the researcher the opportunity to pose a series of questions that help gain insight. A Focus group was used here to gain information about military parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's education while deployed. Because a focus group represents the target population, it provides consistent insights with those of the broader population (O Niemba et al., 2018). The focus group adds to the quality of the data collected, as the researcher is able to obtain clear ideas and feelings that might not be typical in an interview setting (Carey & Asbury, 2016). Moreover, a focus group allows the moderator (who, in this case, was also the principal researcher) to observe the raw dynamic among the group members as they express their opinions.

The focus group questions (Appendix J) were oriented towards opening a new perspective on the matter, which is essential to gain insight, as Hoffding and Martiny (2016) show. The questions were geared towards getting the focus group to discuss these issues together and pull information from one another. They engaged in group thinking to arrive at new ideas that helped answer the research questions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Moustakas' (1994) seven-step process for phenomenological reduction. The interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. By disassembling the data through phenomenological reduction and then using imaginative

variation and intuition to construct the meaning, the data were interpreted with less noise interference and more objective scrutiny (Neuendorf, 2016). Interpreting the data included conducting imaginative variation, which was used to identify key themes, correlate the key themes to the literature, and construct them within the conceptual framework (Gandy, 2015). Themes were entered into Excel for easier compartmentalizing.

Moustakas' (1994) seven-step process for phenomenological reduction was also used. Prior to initiating this process, the researcher had to "bracket" ideas. The purpose here was to remove as much individual bias from the research as possible; thus, the researcher stated any preconceived notions in this step (Creswell, 2018). The basic framework for the Moustakas (1994) model is to follow a strategy that starts with immersion and ends with creative synthesis. Immersion is the stage wherein the researcher immerses himself in the world of the subject and in the experiences of the participants. Incubation is the stage wherein the researcher takes time to allow himself space for understanding what he has collected from the immersion stage. Illumination occurs when the researcher actively engages the material in order to deepen and expand his knowledge and understanding of the subject. Explication is the stage wherein the researcher reflects on the experience and allows patterns to emerge. Creative synthesis is the stage wherein the researcher identifies the patterns that emerge from the reflection process and describes the patterns to show how relationships between variables are formed within the overall phenomenon of experience. This entire process is what Moustakas (1994) refers to as Epoche: phenomenological reduction plus imaginative variation results in the derivation of the essence. The steps of this process are described in the figure below.

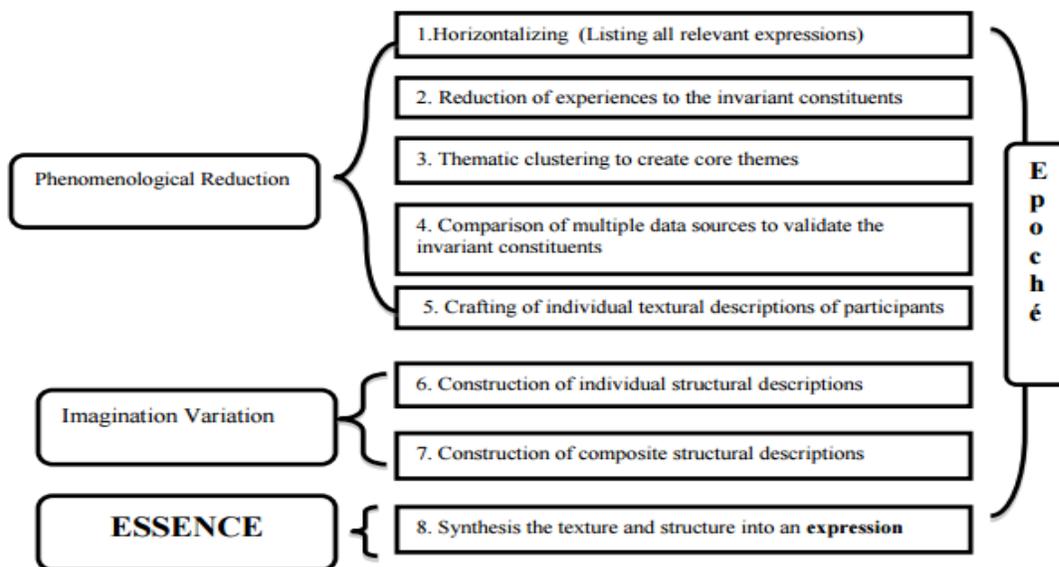


Figure 1. Theoretical Frameworks, Methods, and Procedures (adapted from Yıldırım & Yüksel, 2015).

Horizontalizing

Horizontalizing was the process of listing all relevant statements and grouping them according to qualities they possess (Moustakas, 1994). Reduction and Elimination—i.e., the process of eradicating the noise (also known as eidetic reduction)—is where the experiences are reduced to their invariant constituents. Clustering of like invariant constituents into themes, i.e., creating clusters of meanings, is where the basic core data points are categorized thematically. During this process, I used the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, to help develop a coding system to make the transcribed data more manageable. Statements were clustered into categories based on their relevance to the research questions. This produced a framework for organizing and describing what was collected (Patton, 2002). Creating individual textural descriptions for each participant was the final step in this process.

Imagination Variation

Constructing individual structural descriptions was the process where imaginative variation is operationalized, and eidetic reduction is used again to distill the essence of meaning for the individual participants and to help distill the meanings that are communicated (Katsirikou & Lin, 2017). Creating the composite is where reassembling the data can be conducted. During this step of the analysis, I identified structural qualities within the textural themes of the phenomenon. By using imagination, rather than using software, I was then able to develop a description of how the experience of the phenomenon came to be (Moustakas, 1994). As synthesis occurred, meaning and theory began to take shape holistically (Rule and John, 2015).

Essence

The essence was distilled when the texture and structure were described and synthesized into one whole organic product. Patton (2015) stated textural descriptions describe *what* the participants experienced, and structural descriptions describe *how* they experienced the phenomenon. The essence clarified and made plain the holistic meaning, which was produced by considering the various parts of the data and the associated context. This consideration provided an understanding of the phenomenon, supported by critical thought, to identify the fundamental meaning of the analysis (Katsirikou & Lin, 2017). Once both descriptions were complete, I was able to synthesize the meanings and essences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Variability and reliability are two important concepts when it comes to establishing several critical factors in qualitative studies. Analyzing the themes that emerge is essential to attaining trustworthiness (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The relevant factors

addressed individually below included credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Member checking is the best way to ensure the credibility of qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). This technique allowed interpretive and descriptive validity to be a part of the study; it called for the participants to check the researcher's report in order to check for the authenticity of the work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The members' feedback served as a check of the viability of the interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following the constant comparison analysis, participants were asked to review the study's findings before completing them to enhance credibility.

Dependability and Confirmability

Data triangulation helped to ensure dependability (Yin, 2014). A triangulation of data sources was used to ensure the data was rich. Data sources included questionnaires, interviews, artifact analysis, and focus group data. The researcher had another researcher with no connection to the project examine the process and product in order to gain their view of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process increased the reliability of the study because an external auditor looked at the study with fresh eyes, not slanted by involvement in the research or relationships formed with the participants.

Transferability

As it relates to this study, transferability refers to whether or not the findings of this study were used to assist other studies that are similar in nature (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The researcher described in detail the perceptions of the military deployed parents with regard to their involvement in the educative process of their children. A thick description technique was used to

give rich, concrete details about how data was collected, describing the setting, the social contexts, and anything else that could help a reader understand the experience, which Anney (2014) shows is most helpful in ensuring transferability.

Ethical Considerations

IRB approval was obtained prior to data collection. Participants' anonymity was maintained at all times. In this case, pseudonyms were utilized on data artifacts to protect the participant's identity. Information obtained by the researcher was obtained only for the purpose of research, and participation was voluntary. By signing the consent form, participants proved their voluntary participation in the research, and participants were informed that they could refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence. Consent forms were stored in a locked office only accessible to the researcher. Upon completing the research project, all data will be transferred to an external hard drive and stored in a locked file cabinet for five years. After five years, all data and associated documents will be permanently destroyed or deleted.

Summary

This qualitative research design used questionnaires, interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups as the primary means of collecting data. The transcendental phenomenological approach was utilized, as the researcher sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of the perception of deployed military parents and their involvement in their child's education while deployed. Data were analyzed using the phenomenological reduction approach. The interview and focus group questions were used to gain perspective to answer the research questions. The trustworthiness of data was ensured by using member checking, external auditing, and a detailed description technique. In addition, the research sought to adhere to all ethical issues by obtaining informed consent and ensuring participants' anonymity.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. The research began with an examination of the experiences of the 12 participants as revealed through questionnaires, interviews, artifacts, and focus groups. It then identifies the three themes that emerged through analysis of the data collected. Finally, these themes are developed with references to the participating sources, with the aim being to answer the central question and the three sub-questions of this study. The central question was: What are the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education? The three sub-questions were:

1. How do military parents describe their involvement in their children's education while deployed?
2. How do military parents perceive the impact of their deployment on the family and their child's academic performance?
3. What challenges do military parents who are deployed face while trying to stay involved in their children's education?

This chapter provides a brief description of the participants and describes the findings.

Participants

The participants' demographics were as follows: of the 12 participants, half were deployed, and the other half were not. Nine of the participants were male, and three were females. The median age of the participants was 35.75. The average number of children per adult participant was 2.5. Four participants were Caucasian, six were African American, and two

were Hispanic. In terms of education, four had attained only a high school diploma, five had earned a bachelor's, and three had earned a Master's. Eight participants were in the Army, one was in the Navy, one was in the Marines, and two were in the Air Force. Participants' rank ranged from Corporal to Major. The sample of participants thus demonstrated suitable diversity reflective of the overall character of the military in terms of race, gender, rank, and branch. However, with the median age of participants being 35.75, the sample did skew towards older service members.

For confidentiality reasons, the names of the participants have been changed to protect their identities. The following section gives a brief description of each participant, identified by a pseudonym, based on the data collected.

Mike

At the time of this study, Mike was a 40-year-old, Caucasian, male Army officer. He holds an M.A. degree and had obtained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (LTC). Mike was married with two children, one in high school and one in middle school. His perspective on being involved in his children's education while deployed was that it is a challenge for logistical reasons. According to Mike:

The biggest challenge I would say is not being able to communicate with my kids at a convenient time. Unfortunately, due to time zone difference, they're normally asleep when I am up, so in order to communicate, I would have to stay up late or ask them to stay up late, neither was ideal, but I think we did our best to make it work.

To overcome the challenge of distance, Mike felt it was important to have a strong support system in place. He viewed financial and social support systems as helpful for reducing tension and anxiety that might otherwise arise for his family during his deployment.

On the behavior of children, Mike explained that “they seemed to be more independent, and you feel like you’re not really a part of that movement or process.” By viewing his children as increasingly autonomous, Mike was able to reduce his own sense of anxiety with respect to being there for their educational needs during deployment. He identified different means of communication as crucial for staying in touch and keeping channels of dialogue open: “Internet, email, Instagram, social media. Face Time. Phone calls. All that stuff. Sometimes they like to send letters to keep it fun.”

Mike explained that during deployment, he relied on the support of his wife to help the children with school. At the same time, he admitted this was no replacement for him being away because the kids "don't like that I am away, and I don't like that I can't be there for them, I think it makes it hard for all of us."

Christopher

Christopher was a 42-year-old, African American, male, Army enlisted service member. He holds a B.A. degree and had obtained the rank of Sergeant Major (SGM). Christopher was recently divorced, and he shares custody of his only child with his ex-wife. While being interviewed, Christopher noted he is a very “hands-on” person. One of the challenges he encountered while deployed was not being able to interact with his son physically. Being divorced also adds certain limitations to when and how often he could interact through other means. As it relates to the educative process while deployed, Christopher explained that he relies a great deal on his child’s teachers for guidance and support, stating, “I think teachers in military schools tend to be a little more empathic towards students with deployed parents.” On the perceptions that parents have regarding deployment, Christopher stated:

Just trying to have the time to sit down and be there for my son. It makes it hard when one person doesn't want to help, and then if you're deployed, it's like you don't even have that opportunity, so...I would say parental involvement is exactly what it sounds—being involved.

Christopher also noted that because of the unstable nature of home life, when one parent is deployed, the child inadvertently ends up relying on the non-deployed parent, which sometimes undermines or takes away opportunities for the deployed parent to be involved. “Being divorced only compounds these issues. Since my divorce, everything seems kind of upside down in terms of being involved in my son’s life...things are always tense and uncertain, whether I’m deployed or not. In some ways, it almost feels like being deployed is easier.”

Overall, Christopher felt that deployment denied him a chance to participate in his child’s education in a close manner. He described his effort at communicating with his child’s teachers as minimal: “My interaction went from one to two times a month to zero...because of the time zone difference; it just wasn't possible.” According to Christopher, the best solution for deployed parents who are concerned about their child’s education is to ensure that they have the support of families and educators.

Johnathon

Jonathon was an Army Noncommissioned Officer, male, Hispanic, 38, holding the rank of First Sergeant (1SG) with a high school diploma and two children, ages 6 and 10. For him, the main challenge of deployment was the lack of constant communication. Although he had nearly two decades in the military, he stated that it’s always a challenge for him to leave his family due to deployments. However, he had complete faith and trust in his wife, who he stated had more education than he did, so he did not feel too overwhelmed or concerned by his

children's education during deployment. Overall, he felt fortunate to have his wife there at home to support his children's educational process.

In terms of the effects on the spouse and how his relationship with his wife was impacted, Jonathon explained that their relationship was good no matter what because they had been through it all and knew how to handle the ups and downs of deployment. He pointed out that his wife was dedicated to ensuring that the children received the best education, even in his absence. He noted that when away, speaking to the children via phone or Instant Messaging could encourage them because it let them know he was still involved in their lives, thinking of them, and that he expected great things from them. He emphasized the importance of constant communication to support his children's education and proactively address issues that could surface due to his physical absence.

Overall, because of his trust in a supportive wife at home, he felt that deployment did not significantly affect the academic performance of his children. The only challenge he observed was when traveling across different locations where it becomes a problem of maintaining constant communication with the children and checking their assignments. Although distant communication has some rewards, Jonathon explained that phone communication is less ideal than face-to-face time. Jonathon explained that the best way to stay involved is to maintain constant communication with your spouse and children as best as possible.

Zac

Zac was an Army Noncommissioned Officer, male, Caucasian, 30, married, holding the rank of Staff Sergeant (SSG), with a high school diploma and two children, ages 12 and 15. While deployed, Zac stated he was able to communicate fairly often with his children. Overall, he felt satisfied with the role that everyone played in helping in the education of his children during his deployment: "I think it's a combination of all of the above. Family, educators, and

selected members within my community played a major role in assisting my children's education while I was deployed. Of course, I did what I could from afar, but these key players stepped in and filled in where I couldn't, and I'm extremely grateful for that.”

Zac relied on his wife for information about his children’s academic progress during his absence. At the same time, he also noted that it was not easy for his wife to handle parenting responsibilities independently; he felt she endured enormous pressure, mainly related to overseeing the children’s progress in school. For that reason, Zac stated he was grateful that the teachers and people in the community were there to help give a positive example to the children. He indicated a strong belief in having a support system of teachers, community, and family as critical to mitigating potential issues that could lead to a child’s regress in their academics. Zac felt his children understood the challenges of his deployment in the sense that “it makes it hard for everyone to cope, and that they too have to increase their focus on their education.” The presence of a supportive wife and mother, coupled with his efforts to communicate constantly, was the biggest advantage that helped to address daily challenges and sustained his efforts in staying connected. Overall, Zac explained that the major challenges throughout his deployment process came mostly in the pre-deployment stage, which resulted from anxiety about not knowing what was to come—but once it arrived, it didn’t seem as bad because everyone found a way to work through the challenges as they occur.

James

James was an Army officer, male, Caucasian, 36, married, holding the rank of Major, with an M.A. degree and three children. In order to cope with the challenges of deployment and ensure his children stayed focused on their education, James stated he relied heavily on his faith in God. He further explained that his experience throughout deployment had been both good and bad; however, his family and church community played a crucial part in his ability to put things

in perspective, which helped him establish and maintain a balance between all aspects of his life. Upon reflecting on the challenges of deployment, James stated communication was a major challenge for him:

Not being able to communicate as often and as much as I would like was a challenge, not just for me but also for us. Our family is pretty tight-knit; my wife and I have always encouraged our kids to communicate with us about any and everything. Unfortunately, while deployed, I was unable to provide my kids with that opportunity.

Despite not being able to communicate as often as preferred, James found ways to adjust to the new conditions; he did what he could, whenever possible. Although he preferred being physically present and involved with his children, he acknowledged that “parental involvement in children’s education does not mean having to be there at all times. A parent can provide care through other means such as financial, spiritual, and emotional support. From a spiritual standpoint, James noted that he leaves everything to God, making it easy to address multiple challenges. Thus, he has taught his children to find solutions to challenges by turning to God for support, whether deployed or not. For that reason, he noted that despite his deployment, his children seemed to be more responsible and continued to accomplish the things that were expected of them.

Throughout the interview, it was clear that being away from his family was the biggest challenge for James; however, he didn’t allow it to deter him from staying connected or from playing a part in his children’s educative process. He did this by having conversations with his wife about how their children were doing in school. These conversations often took place after engagements with educators or receipt of quarterly report cards. The overarching point James wanted to relay was that “a strong family support system, grounded in faith, and enforced

through constant communication, is very important to coping with the challenges of deployment, particularly as it relates to being away from the family and staying involved in children's education."

Billy

Billy was an Army Noncommissioned Officer, male, African American, 44, holding the rank of Sergeant Major (SGM) with a B.A. degree and three children. Billy had no complaints about deployment, stating, "it is part of the job." He did not believe one should view it as an excuse not to be engaged in the education of one's children. At the same time, he noted that he had a large extended family that he could rely on for support: "I have a pretty big family, and for the most part, we were in a pretty good financial state, so those two factors played a major role. I would say that the strong bond I share with my wife and kids made things go smoothly." Billy noted that the main challenge was that more was expected of his wife while he was away: she had to serve as both mother and father for the children, i.e., act as nurturer and as disciplinarian (a role he typically filled when at home). For Billy, parental involvement in his children's education involved establishing rules, attaining consistency, and providing oversight to hold the kids accountable. Personal accountability was the number one lesson Billy aimed to teach his children so that they would know to manage their affairs at school without being prodded by a parent.

During deployment, Billy explained that the method of parental involvement in a child's education changes. Disciplining them becomes challenging, and it only means that they have to hold themselves and, equally, rely on his wife to step in when they fail to do so. Fortunately, Billy's stating his wife has all the skills to handle numerous situations relating to the children and rarely asks for his assistance or input. As alluded to by other participants, Billy stated the

challenges he incurred mainly were related to communication difficulties due to network failure and in regions with extremely different time zones.

Tim

Tim was an Army officer, male, African American, 34, married, holding the rank of First Lieutenant (1LT) with a B.S. degree and three children. While being interviewed, Tim explained that, during his deployment, he was concerned about his children's education, in terms of his ability to assist, when needed. Many of Tim's concerns originated from feeling overwhelmed with his deployment task, coupled with the geographical distance and difference in time zone between him and his family, which he stated, made it difficult to communicate. To alleviate some of the communication challenges, Tim only made calls during the weekends; that way, he did not interfere with his children's school requirements during the week.

For Tim, parental involvement did not just focus on academic development but also moral development. He viewed it as his duty to provide moral, emotional, and financial support. He stated his definition of parental involvement did not change while he was deployed; however, he acknowledged that deployment does create some limitations, especially as it relates to being able to interact with his children's teachers:

The biggest difference so far is not being able to check in with teachers as much as I would like. Most schools are now virtual because of the COVID-19 pandemic, so that does help because I could access my kid's progress online, but if I have any questions, I'm not always able to contact the teachers for quick responses because of the time zone difference.

To cope with the limitations in communication, Tim utilized WhatsApp and other social media platforms to enhance interactions. By connecting in this way, he stated he could reduce his

anxiety, which would often result from being apart from his children and not knowing what was happening back home. Staying in touch was seen by him as very important for everyone, especially when maintaining a sense of normalcy. Tim emphasized that, for deployed parents to maintain a sense of balance and involvement in their children's education, they must create schedules for predictability and set flexible and realistic expectations.

Brian

Brian was a Navy officer, male, African American, 34, married, holding the rank of Lieutenant with a B.S. degree and four children. While being interviewed, Brian expresses uncertainty about the effects of deployment on his children's education, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. He stated that while deployed, his wife played the role of keeping the family together, which subsequently allowed him to focus almost entirely on his deployment task. In terms of his role in his children's education while deployed, he stated it was minimal at best but alluded to geographical separation as a major contributing factor:

My biggest challenge thus far is being in different time zones from my children. This has prevented me from being able to correspond with teachers in person and attend school functions, such as parent-teacher engagements. Coincidentally, due to the ongoing pandemic, the option for face-to-face interactions has been deferred.

Additionally, Brian revealed that his deployment had created several inconveniences, especially in instances of network communication failures, which made it difficult for him to maintain an open dialogue with his children. Despite these inconveniences, Brian took solace in knowing that his wife was there to keep everyone together. This gave him a sense that his children would continue to fulfill their academic obligations. According to Brian, "maintaining an open line of communication with your children" is the most important thing a deployed parent could do to stay involved while separated.

Janice

Janice was an Air Force Noncommissioned Officer, female, African American, 32, married, holding the rank of SSG with an MBA and three children. As a former military child, Janice had a great understanding of what it is like for a child to have a deployed parent. For that reason, she didn't attempt to do too much on her own: instead, she relied upon her husband and other relatives to play a crucial role in supporting her children's education. The biggest challenge for Janice was maintaining communication because it required her to align her schedule with that of her children. This was important to her because, in her view, parental involvement includes being present at all times. Though physical presence was not possible during deployment, she recognized that children still need emotional, financial, and spiritual support. Thus, she focused on ensuring that these needs were met even in times of physical separation.

Janice explained that it was difficult to monitor her children's education while deployed. Still, she had confidence that her husband and in-laws would make up for the roles she could not fulfill while deployed. She could trust them to do so because her family knew how important her children's academic progression meant to her. Additionally, she noted that she felt the deployment positively affected her children because it made them work even harder to make her proud.

The deployment stage was the most challenging for Janice because of the lack of physical interactions with her children. However, she viewed the post-deployment stage to be challenging as well due to the process of having to reintegrate herself into a new routine created in her absence. Her advice to military parents is to be proactive and prepare children for what things will be like during deployment to reduce anxiety.

Tammy

Tammy was an Army officer, female, Hispanic, single mother, 43, holding the rank of Chief Warrant Officer (CW2) with a B.S. degree and four children. Being a single mother made deployment difficult for Tammy because she had to seek help outside the normal support channels. Tammy was deployed during the time of this study and stated:

The kids are currently staying with my mother; she has been an enormous help and support system for us over the years. I'm not sure how I would be able to do what I do without her help. I'm extremely grateful for her. I also hire a tutor to assist because my mother isn't always able to understand their school assignments.

For Tammy, the major obstacle to her involvement in her children's education was distance and the barriers it created in communication. In her view, she would like to be more actively involved in her children's education, but deployment made it nearly impossible. Regarding the effects of deployment on children's behavior, the children demonstrated mixed reactions, and sometimes Tammy felt that her children were not doing their best because of her absence. In addition, she stated that her communication options were limited, which made her rely even more on the inputs of her mother and other relatives.

Without a full support system in place, Tammy had no choice but to take the children outside their normal approach to life and school. This disruption prevented them from focusing on school the way she would have preferred. However, as a single mother, she stated she did the best she could, under deployment conditions, but was grateful that her mother was there to compensate in the areas she couldn't.

Thomas

Thomas was a Marine Noncommissioned Officer, male, Caucasian, married, 26, holding the rank of Corporal (CPL) with an H.S. diploma and one child. According to Thomas, being deployed as a young parent scared him: he worried that his child's education would be significantly affected. For Thomas, the only support in his absence came from his newly wedded wife and relatives, especially in relation to their studies. This made it difficult for him to know what to do, as he lacked experience in helping his child with education while being deployed. Deployed at the time of this study, he noted:

The major challenge is that I find it difficult to engage with teachers and educators as I would love to. It is bad for me because I am still new in parenting, and now, the pandemic has hit the world. Most schools are now virtual because of the pandemic, so that does help because I could access my kid's progress online, but if I have any questions, I'm not always able to contact the teachers for a quick response because of the time zone difference.

However, Thomas also explained that he wanted to believe that the process would go on as best as possible. He did not want to be negative about any of it because that might make it harder for his family at home. He believed that so long as everyone accepted the situation, it would work out in the end. He stated: "I just wish we had more understanding of how to do this—but we are both new to this, so we are kind of learning on the go." Having the help and understanding of teachers from his point of view was crucial: without their help, he did not think it would go well for his child to make academic progress. For that, he was grateful.

Terry

Terry was an Air Force Noncommissioned Officer, female, married, African American, 30, holding the rank of Tech Sergeant (TSgt) with an H.S. diploma and two children. At the time of this study, Terry was anticipating deployment. Her main concerns were that she would need to rely on support from her husband and relatives to help make certain the children were staying focused on schoolwork. She also anticipated the communication and distance barriers as being a problem, but she hoped that she could maintain an open line of communication with her children via social media. One of the main reasons she was hopeful, too, was that she had taught the children to be self-motivated, and she knew that they could be trusted to stay the course. However, with one parent away for a sustained period, anything could happen—that was her fear. With changes in schooling due to pandemic constraints, Terry pointed out that “given these new changes, I would say my interaction with teachers has been altered but more so because of the pandemic and not necessarily because of deployment.” She noted that she trusted the system and the process and stated that the school, her husband, the children themselves, and relatives in the community would all have to be accommodating in her absence. She did not like that she had to put this on them, but as a military servicewoman, it was out of her hands. She knew that one reason she could do her job effectively without worrying too much about her children’s education was that the support from the school, home, and the community was sufficient to ensure that help would come as needed.

Results

The data described below were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups. Analysis of the data led to the generation of three themes that could consistently explain the experiences of deployed parents with respect to their

children's education: job satisfaction, the importance of communication with one's family/social support system, and the need for trustworthy teacher/school support. Each of these major themes also contained subthemes essential in understanding the experiences of the participants.

Theme Development

Themes were established by applying Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological method and coded using NVivo software nodes. The main themes and subthemes with associated coding are tabulated below.

Table 2

Identified Themes and Related Codes

Theme	Theme Codes	Subtheme	Total Subtheme codes	Aggregate Coding References
Job satisfaction	36	Dependency	10	57
		Shared Experiences	17	
Education support	48	N/A	N/A	48
Communication/social support system	12	N/A	N/A	12

Job Satisfaction. In the data collection phase, it was evident that the participants were satisfied with the nature of their military jobs. All the participants indicated that the nature of their work was not challenging but that difficulties arose when deployment took place. When deployment occurred, the parents looked for ways to address issues. This became difficult only when support systems were not in place. Those participants who were divorced or single parents expressed the most anxiety about deployment. Those with support systems expressed less anxiety and maintained an overall positive view of their work.

When asked about his military experience, Brian stated, “I really enjoy my experiences in the military thus far; I don't think there's any other career field with the same number of opportunities as the military. I initially joined for the benefits but continued to serve because of people and the organization”. Benefits and the opportunities available were seen as a conduit to job satisfaction for Brian. On the other hand, Billy had a different perspective on job satisfaction; for him, being in the military was “like any other job; you can complain about it or embrace it.” For Billy, being satisfied with a job was an internal matter within oneself and depended upon a person’s disposition. One can either make peace with the fact that he has to work or fight it. Billy’s satisfaction with his work stemmed from a place of inner peace and resolve, which corresponds with the peace that some participants described as maintaining through the support and aid of family members.

Christopher acknowledged that satisfaction does not mean there are never challenges, and he described deployment as a challenge. While reflecting on his time in the military, Christopher stated, “overall, my experience in the military thus far has been good but sometimes challenging, especially in moments like this, when I'm deployed and away from my family.” His views were also shared by Janice, who stated her experience in the military so far has been good. She enjoys her job, and she felt the benefits are great, especially the medical. Similar to Christopher, her only downfall is being away from her children for an extended period.

Through a high level of job satisfaction, many participants continue to pursue their careers by furthering their education in order to hold higher ranks. By advancing their own education, they felt better situated to tend to the needs of their children even if they did not have a clear plan in mind. As a Staff Sergeant in the Army, Zac stated, “I'm looking forward to being promoted soon. My goal is to go back to school in order to continue my education; not sure for

what yet. I'm married, and I have two amazing children for who I would do anything for”.

Despite Zac's lack of certainty about his educational plans, he made a clear association between getting back to school and his own children's happiness.

Like Zac, most of the participants did not give any negative information about their military environment regarding how they were structured. Negative views of the military were thus not an apparent reason for why children's education might be negatively affected.

Participants instead observed that separation from families was itself the main challenge that leads to reduced participation of military parents in the education life of their children. For instance, Billy maintained that he loves the soldiers he interacts with during different missions and that they have become like family to him. In addition, his positive regard for his work gave him an optimistic view of the challenges that resulted from parenting and guiding his children through school from a distance.

On the other hand, Christopher was dealing with divorce and felt that his relationship at home impacted everything else around him in a negative way. He felt generally unhappy no matter what the situation or environment was. In this respect, Christopher's case stands out as an outlier among the rest of the participants and suggests that the family bond may be the most significant factor.

Within the theme of job satisfaction, multiple subthemes help to answer the research questions. For instance, on sub-question three on the challenges that military parents face when trying to remain active in the education life of their children, the sub-theme of **dependency** became evident. It was clear that military parents primarily addressed the challenge by relying upon their spouses or close relatives. It was also clear that for this reason, military parents who

were single or divorced applied different techniques to ensure that their interaction with their children remained positive—even if this was easier said than done.

Various factors played a crucial role in deployed parents' ability to stay involved in their children's education. For Billy, a supportive family and being financially stable were the two main factors to balance his deployment while staying engaged with his family. This was evident in the following statement,

I have a pretty big family, and for the most part, we were in a pretty good financial state, so those two factors played a significant role. In addition, I would say that the strong bond I share with my wife and kids made things go smoothly.

Like Billy, Tim also credited his wife and relatives for being very supportive in raising and helping his children with their studies. Unlike many of the study participants, Tammy's situation was slightly different. She was a single mother who did not have a spouse at home to fill in on her behalf and therefore had to rely on her mother to burden most of the heavy lifting. Tammy stated,

The kids are currently staying with my mother; she has been an enormous help and support system for us over the years. Not sure how I would be able to do what I do without her help. I'm exceptionally grateful for her. I also hire a tutor to help out as well, being that my mother isn't always able to understand their school assignments.

Participants also expressed shared experiences regarding how they proceeded in establishing involvement in their children's education. They adopted technological methods that aided in sealing the gap created by a lack of physical presence and distance (often turning to social media). They aspired to deliver affection and support in the same amount they did when not deployed, regardless of how they were channeled. This was evident in Tim stating,

I'm usually active and engaged with my kids' education while not deployed.

Unfortunately, due to the distance between us, things have changed slightly. Some methods I've learned so far are communicating through FaceTime, WhatsApp, and other social media networks.

Like Tim, several other participants also gravitated towards social media as a primary means of staying connected with their children; unfortunately, this method proved to be unreliable due to frequent network connection failure. For instance, when asked about some of the communication challenges, Billy stated, "I can't think of a specific time, but generally, communication, network issues, and time zone differences made it hard to communicate." Similarly, Tim recalled several times when his unit experience network connection failure; he stated, "when network failure occurred, we could hardly communicate with our families back home." Due to the unreliability of social media, participants also relied on other modes of communication such as emails and postal services. According to Johnathon, he tried to communicate as much as possible through phone and FaceTime, but he stated, "that wasn't always enough, so, at times, I would also send emails or mail letters home." This approach was shared by Zac, who stated, "when I'm not deployed, I talk with them about everything, and when I am deployed, I try to do the same through phone calls, emails, and letters." The correlation derived from the participants was consistent with the Epoche approach, i.e., the method by which phenomenological reduction plus imaginative variation results in the derivation of the essence.

Education Support. On this theme, military parents used all the available methods to ensure that they could participate in their children's education. Despite their deployment, some parents reviewed assignments with their children, while others maintained constant communication with educators to ensure that their children demonstrated the appropriate

educational progress. When asked to reflect on her conversation with teachers while deployed, Janice stated, “the experience was reassuring; I got the impression that they were staying on top of their schoolwork, plus I've emailed their teachers a couple of times, and the feedbacks were positive.” Unlike Janice, Christopher’s interaction with his children’s teachers wasn’t as frequent. He felt he could have made more attempts. In retrospect, he stated, “I probably should have emailed them more often, but at the time, it just didn't seem very personal...I would probably say my interaction went from one to two times a month to as needed.” According to Christopher, the distance and time zone difference made it almost impossible for him to communicate with teachers while deployed.

Tim commented that the most effective way for him to participate in his children’s education was through Skype or instant messages; however, when unable to do either because of time zones differences, Tim stated, “I ask them to email me their assignments, so I could review them for errors when I’m available.” This was not the most direct approach for Tim, particularly because he considered himself a hands-on person, but all things considered, he stated, “there weren’t many other options available.” Hence, he made the best of it. Mike, on the other hand, had similar challenges but took a different approach. Rather than sending emails back and forth, he felt that direct and instant feedback was the most effective approach, even if it created inconvenience. According to Mike, “the children are generally asleep when I'm up, so to communicate, I would have to stay up late or ask them to stay up late.” Neither was ideal, but Mike stated they did their best to make it work. Unlike Tim or Mike, Tammy relied more on her support systems to assist in her children’s education. For example, she stated, her kids were currently staying with her mother, “who has been an enormous help and support system for us

over the years.” In addition to her mother’s help, she stated, “I also hire a tutor to assist, being that my mother wasn’t always able to understand the children’s school assignments.”

Communication /Social Support System. This theme sheds light on participants’ views about deployment challenges and the different ways used to stay involved in their children's education, despite their perceived challenges. For example, the question of the most challenging stage during deployment resulted in various answers even though these military parents operated in nearly similar environments. The only explanation for such diversity is the notion of personal resolutions and how different parents prepare to address possible challenges. In response to the previous question, Bill stated, “all three stages of deployment are hard, but I think the deployment phase is the most challenging because I don't get to be around them as much as I would like.” Brian, on the other hand, believed the pre-deployment stage was the hardest “because of all the anxiety and stress of mentally preparing to be away from my family.” For Brian, this created a lot of stress on his family, particularly his younger kids. Janice had a similar view as Brian; she stated, “deployment phase is the most challenging because you cannot physically be there for your children.” She commented that the post-deployment phase would likely be just as challenging because it requires retuning parents to integrate themselves into a routine that was created in their absence.

A similar assessment on how military deployed parents engaged their spouses also illustrated the diversity in how parents approached family/social support systems. Just about all participants expressed regret of not being able to do more to assist their families back home, despite the inherent limitations of their deployments. According to Billy, the big challenge for him was not being able to support his spouse with the household responsibilities. He states, “It

was tough because I hate knowing she had to play both roles (mother and father).” Although he wanted to help, he acknowledged there was only so much he could have done from afar.

For this reason, Christopher stated, “I had to rely more on my spouse and other family members to cover down on most responsibilities,” even though it was not what he preferred. Both Zac and Thomas felt being deployed was hard for their spouses. Zac tried not to put too much pressure on his wife; instead, he stated, “I just told her to do the best she could and let me know how I could help.” Conversely, Thomas was currently on his second deployment and felt his wife was better prepared this time around to take on more responsibilities in his absence. He mentioned that he had also established a network of family and friends willing to assist his wife if she got overwhelmed.

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child’s education.

Central research question. The central research question of this study was, “what are the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education?” Based on this question, data revealed that participants perceive the journey in their children's education as challenging because of deployment. They play other roles just like a general parent, but they are often separated, and they must look for alternative methods that would help strengthen the level of interactions. However, the exact response and descriptions derived from the phenomenological studies can only be presented by responding to the sub-questions.

Sub-question one response. The first sub-question of this study was “How do military parents describe their involvement in their children's education while deployed?” The involvement took a mixed direction based on the participant. Still, the correlation was common among six participants who explained that the journey was sometimes challenging and that they felt as if they were not giving the best to the children.

When asked about deployment challenges, Janice stated, “I would say deployment phase because you cannot physically be there for your children. She also stated she could imagine that the post-deployment phase would be just as challenging because she would have to reintegrate herself into a new routine that was created in her absence. Similarly, Christopher noted that not being able to be there physically for his son was hard. Being divorced also made it difficult for him because he did not have a supportive partner. Conversely, Tim, who had a supportive partner, noted that his “experience in the military thus far has been good but sometimes challenging,” especially in moments when deployed and away from his family. Unlike Christopher, Tammy described her experience as mixed. She generally enjoys the military but stated, “as a single parent, it could be quite challenging if you are deployed.” Luckily for Tammy, her children were now a little older, which made them more self-sufficient. Thomas described all three stages of deployment as pretty hard. Still, he felt the deployment phase was the most challenging because the physical separation did not allow him to be around his children as much as he preferred. This created much anxiety for him, to the point of stating, “I’m always anxious that my kids' education will decline due to my deployments.” On the other hand, Mike explained that he hates being away from his children; he stated, “they don't like that I'm away, and I can't be there like I want to be, and they feel that I think.” This made it hard for him because he felt that his Children struggled without him.

Although most participants described their involvement in their education while deployed as challenging, many had some of their challenges significantly reduced through assistance from relatives and spouses' involvement in their children's education. Without this assistance, the challenges likely would not have been overcome to the extent that they were. Using the synthesis approach and borrowing from Moustakas' methods, it is viable to conclude that military parent involvement would be an extremely daunting task (Moustakas, 1994; Rule & John, 2015).

Sub-question two response. The second sub-question of this study was “How do military parents perceive the impact of their deployment on the family and particularly on their child's academic performance”? Many military parents acknowledge that deployment can have detrimental effects on their children's education, especially when no support is given to families. If the parent fails to make prior preparation, children are likely to face psychological problems that can lead to poor grades—and participants generally seemed aware of this. The advice given by the participants on how military parents should address the challenges provides a clear illustration of their perceptions. For example, Johnathon's advice was to “communicate with your spouse and children as often as possible, no exceptions,” Christopher recommended a strong “family support system that supports you and is on the same page,” Zac stressed the importance of learning “how to balance work and family obligation prior to being deployed,” and Tim emphasized the importance of a consistency schedule by recommending that families “find consistencies, develop a schedule for phone calls and video chat.” The other eight participants all had similar advice, all of which, to one extent or another, highlighted the importance of setting realistic expectations, remaining flexible and adaptable in order to manage

changes as they occur, and maintaining an open line of communication to keep everyone informed at all times.

Sub-question three response. The third and final sub-question of this study was “What challenges do military parents who are deployed face while trying to stay involved in their children's education”? One of the significant challenges that all the 12 participants shared was communication. Military parents were deployed in different regions across many time zones, and this affected communication. They also failed to offer available support forms, such as physical contact and face-to-face engagement, when not deployed. For instance, Christopher noted he’s a very hands-on person; as such, it was very frustrating for him not to be able to be there to demonstrate certain things to his children physically. He stated, “there are certain things I was able to teach or instruct over the phone or through FaceTime, but it wasn't the same as being there in person, so that was a challenge for me.” The biggest challenge for Mike was not being able to communicate with his children at a convenient time. Unfortunately, due to time zone difference, he stated they were “generally asleep when I’m up, so in order to communicate, I would have to stay up late or ask them to stay up late; neither was ideal.” Johnathon’s communication challenges were more geared towards failure in communication networks and mission requirements. In reflecting on the previous months during his deployments, Johnathon recalled that “the network signals were always unreliable, and mission requirements sometimes took priority over calling home to chat with the kids,” especially as it related to their school assignments. In general, all 12 participants had similar views and experiences with communication issues, all of which were echoed (but not limited to) in the aforementioned statements made by Christopher, Mike, and Johnathon.

The Essence of Lived Experience

One of the most critical themes to emerge from the assessment of the essence of the lived experience is the need to involve family and extended family members whenever possible in providing educational support for children during parental deployment. When a parent is away, there is a noticeable gap that needs to be filled. In the case where a parent's support from family is limited for whatever reason, perhaps because of a divorce, it makes overseeing the child's education all the more difficult. But in cases where a parent's family members can provide help while the parent is away, it gives military parents a feeling of reassurance, comfort, and stability in knowing that their children's education is not being neglected. Being a deployed parent takes a toll on everyone involved. Teachers have to make an effort to stay engaged with the deployed parent; family members may be requested for assistance, and spouses can feel overwhelmed by the additional burden placed on them in having to fill two roles with one parent gone. However, these are all challenges that can be overcome through patience, communication, and the passing of time, allowing everyone to see clearly what needs to be done so that their children's education is not interrupted or disturbed negatively.

Summary

The chapter provided brief descriptions of the participants and findings obtained through analysis of the collected data. Next, it described the role of military parents in their children's education through results as categorized by the nature of the three major themes: job satisfaction, education support, and communication with family/social support. Finally, it responded to the central and the sub-questions that formed the basis of this phenomenological research and ended by discussing the essence of participants' lived experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological research aimed to assess the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. This chapter discusses the findings described in the previous chapter and summarizes what has been understood. It also discusses both the practical and empirical implications of the research. In addition, it identifies both the limitations and delimitations of the research, provides recommendations, and concludes with a final summation.

Summary of the Findings

Data collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups provided the basis for identifying and developing the three themes, which were job satisfaction, education support, and the need for communication with one's family/social support system. Each of these major themes contained subthemes essential in answering both the central and sub-questions.

The central research question explored the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. In my response to this question, I explained that the participants perceived the journey in their children's education as challenging because of deployment. This was primarily because they played other roles like a general parent, but they were often separated. As a result, they had to look for alternative methods that would help strengthen the level of interactions. At the same time, participants did not view the challenge as stemming directly from the nature of their jobs in the military. Participants generally had favorable views of their job and elected not to correlate Job satisfaction as a factor in their perception of deployment as it relates to its challenges. Equally, all 12 participants acknowledged that military parent faces challenges when addressing their

children's educational needs. To better understand these challenges, the sub-questions of this study provide the best starting place for discussion.

The first sub-question asked participants to describe their involvement in their children's education while deployed? In my response, I explained that the involvement took a mixed direction based on the participant. Still, a connection was common among eight participants who explained that the journey was sometimes challenging, and they felt as if they were not giving the best to their children. Although the responses had some variation depending on how the military parents viewed their education role in their children's lives, it was clear that they acknowledged that they had a role to play in their children's lives, even while deployed. This role was just as important to them as the job they performed during deployment. Thus, the main challenge was not that they were deployed but rather that they had to do two jobs at once, one of which was made more difficult because of distance.

The second sub-question explored how military parents perceive the impact of their deployment on their family and particularly on their child's academic performance. I indicated that many military parents acknowledged that deployment has detrimental effects on their children's education, especially when no support is given to families. In addition, if the parent fails to make prior preparation, children are likely to face psychological problems that can lead to poor grades. The advice given by the participants on how military parents should address the challenges provides a clear illustration of their perceptions. All the participants agreed that deployment has some effect on the academic performance of children. However, the effect varies based on the measures that parents put into reducing the ripple effects of the deployment. In general, spouses and relatives were instrumental in determining the performance of children during the deployment period.

The third sub-question explored the challenges military parents who were deployed face while trying to stay involved in their children's education. I responded by indicating that one of the major challenges that all 12 participants shared was communication. Military parents were deployed to different parts of the world, which affected the viability of regular communication channels. In response to this challenge, parents sought other possible alternative methods to connect with their children in order to assist them through the educative process. Unfortunately, this was never an easy task for them, and they were forced to use spouses, teachers, or educators to learn more about their children's performance.

Discussion

This discussion section aimed to examine the findings by reflecting on the theoretical concepts in chapter two. First, the study's basis was inspired by theoretical concepts in the literature review that offered insights into the existing research and possible bridges to close research gaps. Overall, the research was found to support the discussion on the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education.

Theoretical Literature

The theoretical literature that formed this study's basis was informed by the theory of parental involvement supplied by Epstein (2011) regarding the relationship between parents, school, and community. According to the theory, parents play a crucial role in providing children's guidance and support to achieve their academic goals. The six kinds of involvement identified by Epstein (2011) are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. These six kinds of involvement formed

the basis of designing the research questions to ensure that all the aspects were incorporated in the research.

In all six types of involvement, the parent plays a pivotal role: The more robust the parent's involvement—including setting high expectations for school achievement—the more likely the child is to pursue identified goals (Castro et al., 2015). This relationship between parental support and student academic achievement was validated by numerous research studies and is recognized as a universal phenomenon in various cultures (Benner, Boyle & Sadler, 2016; Mahuro & Hungi, 2016; Nunez et al., 2015). In light of this revelation, the study analyzed how parental supports play a role in determining children's academic performance.

My study came at an interesting time when military parents' challenges harmonized with the education sector's challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Communication challenges brought about by distance were a similar theme for each. However, as with teachers during COVID closures, deployed parents sought to use technology to close the distance gaps between themselves and their children.

Other literature also showed that military deployment affects the academic performance of children. For example, a study by Alfano, Lau, Balderas, Bunnell, and Beidel (2016) identified the negative impact of military deployment on children, particularly related to their education. This impact could create a need for these children to require mental health treatment because they lack the consistency and stability most children have in a typical nuclear family. In this view, the study revealed some psychological reasons that affect children's performance during the deployment phase. This is evident in the experiences of Mike, Zac, Tim, and Billy. It is a clear illustration that at times of challenges, the education of children is highly affected.

Considering Tammy's case, who is a single mother, and Christopher, who is divorced, the parental involvement becomes more challenging due to a lack of family/social support systems.

Reflecting on the earlier literature in chapter two, Nicosia, Wong, Shier, Massachi, and Datar (2017) indicated that children need consistency in their lives to manage the problems and adversity that come their way during the growth and development phases of their adolescence. Without this consistency, they are at risk of lacking adequate academic skills and follow-through (Nicosia, Wong, Shier, Massachi & Datar, 2017). Such consistencies are better achieved when both spouses are available to the children and are supportive. When the military parent, who is supposed to play both mother and father's role, is missing, the presence of necessary academic guidance is limited. In addition, a series of deployments and reintegration processes that follow deployment may interrupt this developmental progress (Knobloch-Fedders, Yorgason, Ebata & McGlaughlin, 2017).

Consistency is of great relevance in ensuring that a child's learning process is not hampered in any shape or form. In some instances, transfers from one school to another could be a complex undertaking. This example is particularly the case where credits are not transferrable between institutions – effectively meaning the learner risks starting all over again, which can have an unfortunate effect on the student. Therefore, parents and teachers should be aware of the trials students experience due to military deployment (De Pedro et al., 2018).

Most of the participants had years of service in the military, which means they were more experienced in handling deployment cases and attaining some balance. However, it must be acknowledged that all of them had a starting point, like in the case of Thomas, who stated:

The major challenge is that I find it difficult to engage with teachers and educators as much as I would like to. It is bad for me because I am still new in parenting, and now, the

pandemic has hit the world. Most schools are now virtual because of the pandemic, so that does help because I could access my kid's progress online, but if I have any questions, I'm not always able to contact the teachers for a quick response due to the time zone difference.

His statement implies that parental involvement in children's education requires prior preparation. Without the necessary preparation, parents can easily be subjected to feeling depressed or anxious, which can result in poor academic performance on the part of the children, as they are affected by parental actions or inactions, which affects morale. Indeed, the literature indicates that those parents who experience depression or PTSD during or after deployment also negatively impact their children's lives and affect their ability to socially and emotionally adjust to their environments (Lester et al., 2016). Thus, deployment has impacts beyond a mere absence; when parents return, they do not always return in the same mental and emotional state they were in when they left. They may be bringing back psychological baggage or trauma that, in turn, impacts the child even after the deployment has ended. Therefore, there are residual effects of deployment that must be considered when assessing how children of military parents are affected by deployment (Lester et al., 2016).

Empirical Literature

This study expounded on the existing literature by giving insights that will aid in closing the research gaps related to military parent involvement in children's education. However, most of the findings in this research added to what already existed but lacked support. For example, existing research indicated that children's performance is affected by increased anxiety and stress when parents go to war. (Lester et al., 2016). Interactions with other family members were also seen as important tools in improving the children's academic performance. For example, earlier

studies, like Brownfield and Thompson (1991), provided evidence that suggested no relationship among youths, families, and delinquency, positing that social learning and social control theories were inadequate theoretical frameworks for explaining adversity among children and adolescents. Christopher's response hinted at how families and communities view children from military families:

Teachers were a significant factor, especially being in the military. In my opinion, I think teachers in military schools tend to be a little more empathic towards students with deployed parents because they themselves or in a military household or have experienced other students in the same scenario.

This reveals the need for the connection that Epstein calls for in her theory of community-parents-teachers in providing guidance for learners.

However, other researchers, such as Koon-Magnin, Bowers, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, and Arata (2016), used self-control theory and social learning theory to explain why adolescent girls and boys deviate into delinquency, later countered their study. Nonetheless, both studies indicate that there is a relationship between family and child behavior, with parents acting as a moderating force. In this view, some of the elements concerning the education of children still require more examination. Everything is not tied to the parent's role in enhancing academic performance, like aiding in their assignment. They must appreciate the other effects that have an indirect contribution to the performance of the children.

Most of the participants explained that family members played a pivotal role in the education of their children. It implies that integration is vital in children. The effects can be explained by reflecting on the case study by Trier et al. (2018) that supports the development model put forward by Erikson (Shriner & Shriner, 2014). Erikson's eight stages of development

theory helped to explain what children go through as they age. Although the eight stages cover all life up to death, the first five stages cover childhood, from infancy to young adulthood (Shriner & Shriner, 2014). Each stage is defined by the psychosocial conflict that characterizes that specific development stage. These stages require parental and familial involvement. For these reasons, we find that military parents like Tim and Christopher, who have served for many years, appreciate families' needs in children's academic lives.

Parental involvement, as discussed earlier, goes beyond assignments. Children must be trained on how to handle challenges such as the ones faced during military deployment. Tough (2013) showed that children need to be challenged to develop their resiliency and grit. Tough (2013) argued that grit and resilience would inevitably help the child overcome the challenges they will face as they grow, which will become harder and harder if they are not pushed to become resilient as children. This notion was also found in the data analyzed for this study: for instance, Janice stated, "I believe that my children attempt to work even harder at their studies, as a way of making me feel proud of how well they're doing; although I'm not there." This happened because she had trained the children to behave in her absence and turn challenges into opportunities.

Equally, Tough (2013) explicitly stated that "when kindergarten teachers are surveyed about their students, they say that the biggest problem they face is not children who are unaware of their letters and numbers; it is children who do not know how to manage their tempers or calm themselves down after a provocation" (p. 17). He claimed that children must be trained to control themselves, where self-control theory often comes into play for the proponents of allowing children to develop grit. The 12 participants engaged with their children even during pre-deployment. It was during this phase that Tough's recommendations should come into play. By

challenging children or allowing them to be challenged, they can learn what it means to pick themselves up and put in the effort to overcome the obstacle.

This study sheds new light on the pivotal role that family support systems play during parental deployment when it comes to assisting children's education. Parents who were deployed and lacked such systems felt much more strained and incapable of meeting the demands of staying involved with their children's education. Conversely, parents who had support from extended family were very grateful. This suggests that external support systems should be developed and maintained as an important foundational and societal element in the rearing of military deployed children.

Implications

This section aims to provide empirical, theoretical, and practical implications related to this research. Recommendations are provided for the stakeholders, the U.S. Army departments, and students who wish to advance this research.

Empirical Implications

This research aimed to address the gaps in the current studies that failed to examine the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education (De Pedro et al., 2018). Despite the military being a common area of interest in many governments and research programs, the focus has always been on the soldiers' trauma after participating in different missions (DeVoe et al., 2017). Furthermore, research fails to address the implications on the immediate family members like children, specifically regarding their education (Bello Utu & DeSocio, 2015). Therefore, the themes and subthemes explained in this study open a new chapter on areas that require an in-depth exploration.

The literature examined in chapter two acknowledged that deployment affects children, causing some to become violent. However, the psychological implications transferred to those children's academic performance were not explored in prior research. For example, O'Neal, Mallette, and Mancini (2018) research emphasized the need for community support for military families. They noted that it is also essential for families to be open to community support, as their unfavorable opinion of the community they live in can harm the child or student's development (O'Neal et al., 2018). This research provided more details about such concerns and provided actual data to help develop solutions to address the challenges.

Furthermore, Benner et al. (2016) and O'Neill et al. (2018) noted that it is especially important for a community to offer support for children to reach their potential. As illustrated throughout the research, parents felt best when they had family and community support. Without these support networks, parents felt isolated and overwhelmed in trying to navigate their parental roles.

Theoretical Implications

This research's findings have some theoretical implications when assessed in view of Epstein's observations. The main implication is that deployed parents should have a strategy for intertwining a community, teachers, and family support system to help guide children while a parent is deployed. This study bears out the worthiness of Epstein's theory and provides support for applying that theory in the military for families dealing with deployment. It shows that families of deployed parents rely on the support of extended family members, teachers who remain actively involved, and a community (extended family in most cases) that provides additional help to carry the load left by the missing parent. Epstein's theory is thus corroborated fully in the findings of this research.

Practical Implications

The first practical implication is for military parents. It serves as an aid in helping them prepare their children and families for deployment. Military parents can easily relate to the findings, which implied that their planning outcomes are significant. For educators and teachers, the findings can help them understand the children from military families. Hence, they will better understand what such children go through and will intern aid in developing plans to enhance their academic performance (O'Neill et al., 2018).

For students, the research provides information that forms the basis of advancing research to cover possible gaps presented in this research. For the U.S. Military, the study will offer insights on possible programs for parents that will enable them to address the challenges they face due to deployment.

Limitations

Limitations are potential vulnerabilities of the study that cannot be controlled, although maximum variation in sampling was attempted to reinforce the transferability of results (Polkinghorne, 1989). There were several limitations that impacted the scope and depth of this study, one of the most notable being the population size and sampling method. There were only 12 participants interviewed, nine were males, and three were females. This is a significant limitation to the research study as it is a very small fraction of a percent of the number of military parents who were deployed, let alone all military who had ever deployed. The use of snowball sampling was useful in this context; however, it did limit the study in that participants were requested to join and therefore were not randomized at all. Using snowball sampling may have also led to the lack of diversity within the population of participants. This was evident in the median age of participants being 35.75, which meant the sample skewed more towards older

service members. It is likely that the original participants found to join the study were from similar demographic backgrounds because people frequently interact with others who are similar to themselves. Another limitation was that the study used only three female participants. This disparity affected the transferability of the findings, especially in creating solutions that affect female military parents. A sample that gives an even distribution would be preferred. Besides, more races should have been included to assess a possible effect on how different races tackle deployment issues.

Delimitations

Delimitations are deliberate decisions made by researchers to limit or define the boundaries of a study (Patton, 2002). The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their children's education. Although I could have selected any military parent who had deployed, I delimited the study group to parents who were still actively serving and were currently deployed or had been in the past two years; anytime longer, and memories of their experience could have begun to fade (Gardner, 2001). The various ways in which data was collected—interviews, focus groups, and sharing of stories—helped to ensure that enough information was obtained to shed light on this significant issue. Additionally, delimitation of racial and ethnic discrepancies to enhance transferability was done as much as was possible by including as many different people as possible of different ethnic backgrounds, different ranks, and experience levels.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the study's findings and limitations, future research should use a more inclusive sample that eliminates the wide gender disparity. Equally, a larger sample that reflects

the large numbers of military parents in the United States should be used. Such a small sample is likely to introduce bias leading to questionable findings. Various deployment lengths and locations can also be seen as factors affecting outcomes and should be focused on more in additional research on this topic. Missions that are at sea or on-land can lead to very different experiences for personnel based on logistics alone but also based on perceived threat levels and opportunities for communication back home. There is the difference between officers vs. enlisted personnel, which could be viewed as a potential factor that could be examined more in depth. Those with greater access to communication vs. those with limited access to communication are similarly an issue that could affect outcomes and would be an opportune area for more exploration. Epstein (2011) saw involvement has a three-fold relationship between parents, school, and community; as such, a final recommendation for further research would be to employ the same research design but expand the target population to explore the perceptions of teachers, spouses, and family members of the deployed parent. Insights from such individuals could provide a more holistic view of how deployment impacts the academic performance of children whose parents are deployed.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to examine the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. Data collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, artifact analysis, and focus groups developed the themes of interactivity in the military environment, education support, and personal and organizational resolutions. Through analysis of the responses and artifacts of the 12 participants, the study revealed that military parents hold different perceptions concerning their children's education, mostly due to the challenges that come with deployment. For example, they

lack ample time to engage with their children, which adversely affects their children's academic performance. To address these challenges, strong family bonds are essential together with prior planning to avoid stressful conditions.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 30, 2020

Eder Bennett
James Eller

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY20-21-241 MILITARY DEPLOYED PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Eder Bennett, James Eller:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: December 30, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB.

These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT FORM

MILITARY DEPLOYED PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Eder G. Bennett
Liberty University
School of Education

General Overview of Study: You are invited to be in a research study investigating the perceptions of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently deployed or previously deployed and have pre-K-12 school-aged children currently enrolled in school. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Eder G. Bennett, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. This will provide a foundation of understanding that can assist educational stakeholders and the military community in filling the void created by a deployed parent with the goal to help the student of the deployed parent.

Procedures: If you consent to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete a questionnaire that includes preliminary demographic data, such as age, race, military affiliation, and years of service. The questionnaire will also consist of three open-ended questions and should take approximately 30 minutes to complete
2. Participate in a face-to-face or online interview with the researcher. Interviews will be conducted in a predesignated location (chosen by you). Each interview will last for approximately 45-60 minutes. Interviews will be audio-recorded, but pseudonyms will be used to maintain confidentiality.
3. Participate in an online focus group through which several prepared questions will be answered. Participants will be gathered in an online forum for 45-60 minutes using video conferencing software such as ZOOM. The online session will be recorded for transcription. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain confidentiality.
4. Provide relevant artifacts for analysis: You will be asked to provide (if available) artifacts such as journals, letters, and email correspondence with teachers pertaining to your children. These

artifacts will be analyzed to gain further insight into the issues that deployed parents face. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain confidentiality.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal and are no more than what participants encounter in everyday life. If you experience discomfort while taking part in this study, you may choose to stop participating at any time.

Benefits: The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study will be understanding the perceptions of other deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. Though your participation may have potential benefits to education and the military community, you may not receive any direct benefits from your involvement.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the artifacts. I may share data I collect from you in future research studies or with other researchers; however, in such an event, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable.

1. Procedures will be taken to protect the privacy of all participants, including the use of assigned pseudonyms and interviews conducted in locations where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
2. Data will be stored on a password-protected computer, and all documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Data may be used in future presentations.
3. The researcher will transcribe interviews. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
4. I cannot assure participants that other members of the online focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your positions in the military. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed

immediately and not included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Eder G. Bennett. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. If you would like to address questions or concerns to someone other than the researcher; **you are encouraged** to contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. James Eller, at (440) 319-1794 [REDACTED].

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. Therefore, I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Fall 2020

Dear Service Member,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. Therefore, I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the perceptions of military parents deployed regarding their active involvement in their child's education. You're eligible to be in this study because you have been identified as having some experience with this issue.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will partake in a face-to-face or online recorded interview, take part in an online focus group, and be asked to provide relevant artifacts (if available) for analysis. You should be able to complete your participation in approximately two to three weeks, with it taking four to five hours to complete all procedures. Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please respond to my email with your desire to be a possible participant. Following your response to participate, I will then contact you for an interview and provide the consent form for you to sign. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

Sincerely,

Eder G. Bennett
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX E: QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education. This questionnaire is designed to obtain demographic information and to capture your perceptions and experiences of being a parent while deployed overseas in the military.

1. Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Ethnicity: _____
4. Branch of Service: _____
5. Rank: _____
6. Age of spouse: _____
7. Spouse current profession: _____
8. Highest degree earned _____
9. How many school age children currently in your household: _____
10. How many times have you been deployed: _____?
11. If currently deployed, what is the duration of your deployment: _____
12. If not currently deployed: When was your last deployment and how long _____

13. Reflect on your experiences of being a parent while deployed in the military. Please provide a brief written response to each question.

1. What word best describes your initial thought about deployment as it relates to your ability to be involved in your child's education. Please explain
2. What support (familial, financial, experience) has aided in maintaining a sense of involvement in your child's education
3. What is the number one challenge (aside from a distance) that hinders your ability to participate in a child's education?

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Semi-Structured, Open-Ended Interview Questions

Central Research Question:

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education?

Opening Questions

1. Please introduce yourself, describe yourself and your family
2. How long have you been serving in the military?
3. In the past two years, how many times and for how long were you deployed
4. What is the age and gender of your school-age child or children?
5. Please explain your experience in the military thus far

Questions relating to participants perceptions

6. What is your definition of parental involvement, particularly as it relates to education?
7. In what way (if any) does your definition of parental involvement change while deployed
8. How would you compare your role in your child's education when not deployed and while deployed?
9. What changes have you experienced in your child's behavior, focus, and attitude towards learning while deployed?
10. What are some ways or methods used to participate in your child's education while deployed, and how do they differ from the technique used when not deployed?
11. How has your deployment impacted your spouse, particularly as it relates to their ability to be involved in your child's education

12. Reflect on the first time you spoke with your child about their education when you were deployed. What was that experience like?
13. Reflect on your child's education. What is your perception of your child's sense of how your deployment impacts their learning?

Questions relating to participants' perceptions of challenges

14. Describe a time (while deployed) when you encountered a barrier or challenge that prevented you from being involved in their education?
15. Describe a time when you felt that you could be more involved in your children's education while deployed. Were you able to come up with a solution? If so, please describe it.
16. How does being deployed alter your interactions with your child's teachers and other educators
17. What stage of deployment (pre-deployment, deployment, post-deployment) do you believe creates the most challenges in attempting to stay involved in your child's education? Please explain
18. What advice would you give a military parent who is deployed or may deploy in the future

APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDE

Semi-Structured, Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

Central Research Question:

What are the perceptions and lived experiences of deployed military parents regarding active involvement in their child's education?

Opening Questions:

1. Will everyone, please state your name, your military branch, and length of service

Questions Relating to Challenges Parents experience while Deployed:

2. As a parent, how would you describe your overall experience of being separated from your family while deployed
3. What would you identify as the most challenging aspect of being a military deployed parent?
4. From a parental standpoint, what are some examples of challenges you encountered while deployed, and how have you overcome them

Questions Relating to Participants involvement:

5. How has your deployment affected your child's performance in school?
6. How often and in what way do you interact with your child's teachers or educator, what types of feedback have you received