

LEARNING THE HOST NATION LANGUAGE WHILE LIVING ABROAD AS A
MILITARY ADOLESCENT, A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

High mobility in students has been shown to have a negative effect on academic achievement. Military children relocate six to nine times before graduating high school, with at least one of these moves being overseas. This transcendental phenomenology described the lived experience of military-affiliated students who learned the language of their host culture while living overseas. The theory guiding this study was Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory. This study focused on the importance of self-determination for academic attainment, which is thought to be achieved through a feeling of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Through criterion sampling, 11 participants, ages 18 to 23, who had taken the host nation language to fulfill their high school foreign language requirement while living overseas, were recruited. The study's setting was an Army base in Italy, where all participants attended high school. Data were collected online through one-on-one interviews, reflective essays, and a focus group discussion while simultaneously being analyzed using Epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. The themes identified were disappointment in self, support, home, goals, and outlook. The findings led to the conclusion that military-connected students do not acculturate much, if at all, during their stay in a foreign country due to being surrounded by military culture and thus do not easily acquire the host nation's language. Not meeting the participants' basic needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness could be a factor that contributes to this. Additional qualitative and quantitative research would be helpful to shed more light on this phenomenon.

Keywords: military-affiliated students; overseas; foreign language learning; high mobility; self-determination

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, from whom all good things flow!

Above everyone else, I want to thank my husband, Jim, who always believed in me even when I got super sick and couldn't move. You are my rock! I also want to thank my two daughters, Jessica and Sophie, who have supported me through this journey by helping me with the household chores and personal doubts. I also want to thank Eddie, a dear friend who encouraged me to start this program but passed away too soon.

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List of Abbreviations

Department of Defense (DoD)

Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA)

First Language (L1)

Permanent Change of Station (PCS)

Second Language (L2)

Third Culture Kids (TKS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Frequent relocation is one of the trademarks of a military lifestyle (Engdahl, 2014). Military families can expect to move about every three years, either within the United States or abroad (Sullivan et al., 2019). While living in foreign countries, military and military-related families live the lives of so-called sojourners, a term that describes a person "residing temporarily in foreign environments" (Pedersen et al., 2011, p. 881). Being away from the parents' home culture for a longer duration during developmental years was found to change children into Third Culture Kids (TCK), which is a phrase that applies to children who are from the United States but whose parents were working and living abroad for an extended period of time (Long, 2020). Several research studies in the past have focused on the negative impact that a military and TCK lifestyle have on military dependents (Elliott, 2019; Long, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2019). This research study explored how military youth feel about learning a foreign language while living in the country where this language is spoken. In this chapter, I will discuss the historical, social, and theoretical background, the empirical, theoretical, and practical significance of this study, the problem statement, the purpose statement, and the research questions used to guide this study.

Background

Due to recent conflicts and wars with Iraq and Afghanistan, more researchers have been paying attention to and found interest in the development of military children (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2016). Even before these wars had started, military children had endured additional hardships to the regular developmental and emotional changes caused by childhood (Engdahl, 2014). The stressors caused by a military lifestyle include but are not limited to

frequent moves, separation from extended family members and friends, as well as short-term separations from one or both parents due to military training (Cole, 2017; Coleman, 2021; Engdahl, 2014). Constant exposure to these stressors has been found to make military children more vulnerable to lower educational attainment and put them at higher risk for mental and behavioral issues compared to children whose parents are not affiliated with the military (Cole, 2017; Cramm et al., 2019; Engdahl, 2014).

Historical Context

After World War II, permanent US bases were built all over Europe and other countries to allow US soldiers to remain overseas for several years at a time (Maulucci & Junker, 2013). As early as 1946, the US military command decided to allow family members, also called dependents, to accompany their soldier spouses while away from home (Alvah, 2007). This decision aimed to increase morale and reestablish everyday family life for military families who had previously endured years of separation (Alvah, 2007; Maulucci & Junker, 2013). The benefit of the arrival of American families was instantly notable as the relations between the German public and the American soldiers improved dramatically, and crime rates declined (Lemza, 2016). Schools were added to the bases, and American teachers were moving overseas to provide education for the children of military families (DoDEA, 2019). Within three years after WWII ended, the Department of Defense had established over 100 schools for military dependents worldwide (DoDEA, 2019).

In the 1960s, these schools were divided into three geographical areas (DoDEA, 2020). Each location was operated by and received funds from the following military organizations, the US Army, the US Navy, and the US Air Force (DoDEA, 2020). The US Army controlled all schools in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East; the US Air Force operated schools in Japan,

Taiwan, the Philippines, Korea, and Midway Island (DoDEA, 2020). At the same time, the US Navy oversaw the remaining schools in Iceland, Labrador, Newfoundland, Bermuda, Cuba, and Antigua (DoDEA, 2020). The Department of Defense Overseas Dependents School System (DoDDS) managed the staffing part of all these schools regardless of which military service the schools belonged to. In the early 1990s, all schools were unified and have since been supervised by the Department of Defense under the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), which had its headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, when this study was completed (DoDEA, 2020).

Military families did not only live in foreign countries to accompany their military spouses; instead, they were also expected to act as ambassadors of the United States and representatives of democracy (Maulucci & Junker, 2013, p. 122). Military children and spouses were encouraged by their base commanders to embrace and immerse themselves in the host culture around them (Alvah, 2007). The purpose of this interaction was that "frequent contacts between American children and residents of an occupied nation purportedly could make an occupation seem less militant and more humane" (Alvah, 2007, p. 201). At their DoDEA schools, American children were taught the host nation's language to show the local nationals that Americans intended to understand the people of the countries they occupied and work beside them rather than against them (Alvah, 2007). Learning the language of the host nation was also seen as a way to "make a quicker and more adequate adjustment to the life in the [foreign] community" (Alvah, 2007, p. 212). Between 1946 and 1964, 62% of all DoDEA high school students were learning the foreign language of their host nation, while enrollment in a foreign language class in the US was only around 22 % (Alvah, 2007).

After 1964, student enrollment in overseas Department of Defense schools plunged from

160,000 to 70,000, which could be blamed on the switch from the draft system to an all-voluntary force (AVF) (DoDEA, 2019). Since then, the enrollment number has remained steady at around 65,000, with the most recent enrollment reported at 66,492 as of May 2020 (DoDEA, 2020). The role of the military family as ambassadors of democracy and anti-communism was adjusted due to a change in politics, which transformed the position of the USA from being an occupational force to a joint force with the various host nations (Maulucci & Junker, 2013). The political importance of encouraging contact between military families and host nations ceased to exist (Maulucci & Junker, 2013). Nevertheless, Alvah (2007) noted that the interaction between American military dependents and citizens of a host nation, whether superficial or more involved, should still be considered significant and positive engagements for mutual support between different nations.

Although pressure from command for military families to get involved in the host nation has vanished, every DoDEA school located in a foreign country continues to offer the host nation language as a high-school-level class or a host nation program for elementary or middle school students (DoDEA, 2018). These host nation programs focus on instructions in the host nation's languages and teaching about the multi-facets of the host nation's culture (DoDEA, 2018). They were designed to help "students participate in activities that build appreciation and understanding of the culture of the country in which they are located" (DoDEA, 2018).

Social Context

The typical military family relocates every three years while being part of the military forces (Frain & Frain, 2020). For this reason, almost every DoDEA student switches schools during the same time frame. Out of more than 1,000 US bases, approximately 800 are located overseas, which makes it normal for military children to not only move six to nine times but also

to move abroad at least once before graduating high school (Elliott, 2019; Frain & Frain, 2020). According to Frain and Frain (2020), military children are not the only ones on the move. Military children live in fluid environments, where friends, health care providers, and teachers move as frequently as the students themselves, and rarely do these moves go in the same direction. This highly mobile situation adds to the instability of every member of the military system (Frain & Frain, 2020).

Although moving to a foreign country might sound exciting and intriguing, having to leave a familiar and well-functioning social network behind can often cause a sense of loss and cultural homelessness in military families (Elliott, 2019). Pedersen et al. (2011) found that adjusting to a host nation can impact their academics and psychological well-being, which may include their self-esteem. Drummet et al. (2003) suggested that international moves isolated military children geographically from their friends and remote family members, which added to the mental vulnerability of these children. Pedersen et al. (2011) noted that dealing with and learning to understand the foreign language of a new location was identified as one of the most critical factors contributing to acculturation. Understanding the language and having the ability to communicate with people from the surrounding environment influenced the perception and the quality of interaction between an individual and the host nation (Pedersen et al., 2011).

After arriving at a new duty station, military children have to find their place in a new school and are expected to perform and fit in within a matter of weeks, if not days (Cole, 2017). With 42 states following the common core state standards, the DoDEA schools adopted the Common Core Standards in 2012 to help smooth the transition from public schools in the United States to federal DoDEA schools (Richmond, 2015). Although "geographic moves did not significantly correlate with anxiety or depression in those studied," according to Sullivan et al.

(2019), moving was one of the greatest struggles reported by military teenagers and related to academics (Roughton, 2013).

Frequent relocation has been reported to be one of the main stressors for military youth (Cramm et al., 2019). Moving to a different country where a foreign language is spoken can create additional challenges and frustrations for a military family (Cramm et al., 2019; Elliott, 2020). One study suggested that military-connected students experience less stress from relocation than their civilian counterparts due to the structured environment the US military provides for military families (Drummet et al., 2003). Some students live in base housing, a military community inside a base; yet, most families have to live outside the military base in the local economy, which is the civilian community of the foreign country (Clever & Segal, 2013). The Department of Defense provides each base with at least one grocery store called the commissary and a department store referred to as the Post or Base Exchange (PX or BX). In addition, military families have the possibility to go shopping in the local economy (US Army, 2019). Most military bases overseas are equipped with a library, movie theatre, post office, bowling alley, and an art and crafts center, enabling families to stay within their American community (US Army, 2019). It is possible to avoid going outside the base and live comfortably. Still, there are plenty of opportunities to immerse oneself in the foreign culture since one only has to step outside the base, which allows one to enter the foreign country.

Even though frequent moves could be disruptive to a child's education and personal life, some research suggested that high mobility could have positive outcomes since it supports stronger family cohesiveness and increased child resilience (Jensen et al., 1991). Though moving to a foreign country is more demanding than a regular relocation within the United States due to the need for cultural adaption, Clever and Segal (2013) suggested that overseas moves could

"offer excitement and adventure (...) to have the opportunities to live in foreign countries, learn new languages, and experience different cultures" (p.29).

Theoretical Context

Various research was done on the importance of motivation regarding studying foreign languages in institutional settings without at least partial interaction with the target community who speaks the language (Kang & Ghanem, 2016). Mangubhai et al. (2004) stated that foreign language teachers had to ensure that students understood that the foreign language was real since most foreign language teachings were happening in a barren classroom environment. Research has found that an extreme need existed for an instrumental motivational subsystem if the learning environment was sterile (Ryan & Deci, 2020). According to Ryan and Deci (2020)'s self-determination theory, students can become self-determined and thus motivated if they feel autonomous, competent, and have a sense of relatedness. Although DoDEA students who have recently arrived in a foreign country might experience cultural homelessness, as Elliott (2019) mentioned, exposure to a foreign environment for foreign language learning could help achieve the feeling of autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The late Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky defined learning as a social process accomplished through social interaction. In his theory, Vygotsky suggested that a learner's thinking process is related to speaking and connecting with information from one's environment through interaction with others (Holbrook & Hafiz, 2020). The emphasis on interconnectedness supports the idea that one's learning environment significantly impacts how much and fast one can learn. Thus, relocation interrupts this interconnectedness with the learning environment, which military-connected students must rebuild after each move. Recreating connections within a new learning environment requires making new social contacts. Resituating oneself was a

factor for decreased academic achievements and "associated with feelings of depression, loneliness, and social alienation" (McGuire & Steele, 2016, p. 262).

Research has found that exposure to natural speakers could enhance a learner's learning experience (Goldoni, 2013). This theory is supported by R.C. Gardner's socio-educational model, which states that learning a second language needs to include a cultural context (Bower, 2017). In this model, Gardner suggested that foreign language learners would have to enjoy and be interested in the culture and its people to feel motivated to learn the second language (Bower, 2017). Kozhevnikova (2014) posited that language and culture were interconnected and that successful foreign language teaching would be directly related to "exposure to the target language and culture" (p. 4462).

Problem Statement

The problem that this study addressed is that frequent relocation has a negative impact on a student's psychological and social behavior as well as academic progress (Cole, 2017; Cramm et al., 2019; Frain & Frain, 2020; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2016; Sullivan et al., 2019). Research has found a negative correlation between the frequency of moves and student academic progress, which might result in "lower test scores, increased grade retention, and higher rates of school dropout" (Welsh, 2017). Approximately 73,000 American students were living abroad as military dependents in 2019 and attending one of 164 Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools in 11 countries worldwide (DoDEA, 2020). Military children, who relocate on average every three years, commonly move and live at least once overseas before graduating high school (Elliott, 2019).

Research on the overall well-being of military children has increased in the recent decade due to the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Sullivan et al., 2019). It was found that in

addition to deployment, military youth also suffers from other military-related strains such as frequent moves and separation from extended family. These additional stressors have been shown to cause an increase in behavioral problems such as anxieties, depression, aggressive behavior, suicidal tendencies, and a decrease in academic performance (De Pedro et al., 2011; Elliott, 2019; Frain & Frain, 2020). Although frequent relocation has, in general, been found to have a negative impact on a student's academic progress (Welsh, 2017), some studies discovered that military children were more resilient than their civilian counterparts (Bradshaw et al., 2010) and that moving and studying abroad was beneficial in foreign language proficiency, cultural understanding, and global citizenship education (Goldoni, 2013; Kang & Ghanem, 2016; Kishino & Takahashi, 2019; Trower & Lehmann, 2017). Thus, this study explored the lived experience of military youth who moved to a foreign country and were learning the foreign language of this country while living overseas and described how these students experienced and felt about their foreign language learning endeavors.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe the lived experience of DoDEA students learning the language of their host culture. The foreign language learning experience in American students living abroad was generally defined and compared to foreign language learning while studying abroad (Kim & Cha, 2017). Military youth living abroad were considered sojourners (Elliott, 2019). The theory guiding this study was the self-determination theory (STD) by Ryan and Deci (2000), which states that students become self-determined and internally motivated when they feel competent, autonomous, and secure in their learning environment. According to McEown and Oga-Baldwin (2019), this theory provides a solid framework for understanding student motivation, demotivation, and amotivation in foreign

language learners based on the three psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Significance of the Study

With almost two million military-connected children, who might get stationed with their parents at least once during their childhood years in a foreign country, there is an opportunity to learn more about the possibilities that exist for these children regarding global citizenship education as well as foreign culture and language acquisition while living abroad (Easterbrooks et al., 2013).

Empirical

The topic of military children and their challenges has drawn attention since the Gulf region wars required soldiers to deploy longer and more frequently. More researchers have become interested in finding out about the challenges that school-aged children affiliated with the military face and how and in what ways their academic achievements are affected by their particular lifestyle. This study adds to the existing literature by exploring how living abroad due to parental military commitment involves academic progress, particularly in foreign language learning. More insight is provided on how military adolescents feel about transitioning to foreign countries and how frequent moves, one of the main stressors mentioned by military-connected children, influence their academic attainment (Sullivan et al., 2019). Elliott (2019) noted that a need exists for more literature on "how sojourning abroad can impact military families" (p. 126). This study adds to the existing literature by giving military youth a voice, so scholars and other readers can understand how living abroad is perceived by military children and how their foreign language learning is affected by living abroad. Furthermore, this dissertation attempted to open doors for future studies on the effects of living abroad.

Theoretical

During their stay overseas and life among local nationals for three years, DoDEA students have the opportunity to learn the language of their host nation for a foreign language credit in schools on military bases located in foreign countries. Although high mobility has been found to have a negative effect on academic performance and possibly cause a feeling of cultural homelessness (Elliott, 2019; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011), other studies showed that a move to a foreign country could also be helpful with growing resilience, establishing new bonds, building cultural awareness, and becoming global citizens (Kishino & Takahashi, 2019; Roughton, 2013). Following the self-determination theory developed by Ryan and Deci (2020), this study explored whether the students' feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness could be observed and to what extent these feelings were helpful for academic achievement.

Practical

This research could be helpful to foreign language teachers, regular classroom teachers, counselors, and school administrators, as well as the Department of Defense headquarters since it gives them an insight into what DoDEA students experience while relocating to an overseas location and living there for three or more years and how their academic performance in foreign language learning is affected. After understanding more about the personal experience of these students, DoDEA teachers could adjust their teaching, DoDEA school administrators could adapt the curriculum, and the Department of Defense could develop support programs. In addition, existing support programs could be reviewed and improved based on new findings to help DoDEA students overseas become more self-determined and gain the most out of their stay abroad.

Research Questions

The following research question guided this research study. The sub-questions were directed by Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory, which states that self-determination and one's learning experience are maximized if students have a feeling of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in their learning environment.

Central Research Question

How do DoDEA students describe the lived experience of learning the language of their host culture? Much research has focused on the impact of studying abroad on foreign language learning. Schenker (2018) found that students who studied abroad outperformed students who studied the same language domestically in formal classrooms. Since DoDEA students live on average for three years in their host nation, the research question asked how living in the host nation affects foreign learning language progress.

Sub-question One

How do DoDEA students describe their feelings of competence while studying a foreign language? According to Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, the feeling of competence is one of three conditions that must be met for a student to be successful in their foreign language learning endeavor (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Although moving is one of the number one stressor for military children, moving to a foreign country could also be considered adventurous and exciting (Clever & Segal, 2013). A sense of success and competence can be achieved by having good grades and being able to complete assignments. Still, DoDEA students who live overseas have an additional opportunity to gain a sense of competence by being able to communicate with the native speakers around them.

Sub-question Two

How do DoDEA students living and studying abroad describe their feelings of autonomy while studying a foreign language? A feeling of autonomy can be achieved through being able to make decisions independently. According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), "students' autonomy can be supported by teachers' minimizing the salience of evaluative pressure and any sense of coercion in the classroom, as well as by maximizing students' perceptions of having a voice and choice in those academic activities in which they are engaged" (p.139). Since the target language is primarily used outside the school and not only in the classroom, the question arose of how this circumstance might influence the learner's perception of autonomy.

Sub-question Three

How do DoDEA students living and studying abroad describe their feelings of relatedness while studying a foreign language? Taylor and Ali (2017) stated that both "immediate and distal environmental influences" (p.35) affected a learner and that a holistic perspective needed to be adapted to fully understand the impact of a learner's environment, which includes not only the country in which they currently live but also the country that they left behind. This perspective should be adapted for DoDEA students since they often leave friends and teachers behind, which can significantly impact a student's well-being according to Clever and Segal (2013).

Definitions

1. *Autonomy* – refers to "the capacity to take charge of and regulate one's learning independently" (Lou et al., 2017).
2. *Competence* – is defined as a student's confidence in their abilities (Joe et al., 2017).

3. *Demotivation* – does not mean that the learner has lost their motivation completely but is the stage of decreasing motivation (Maciu, 2011).
4. *Department of Defense Education Activity* – An institution that provides education to more than 100,000 eligible military and civilian students from preschool through grade 12 in 224 schools in the United States and overseas (Wright, 2000).
5. *Department of Defense Education Activity student (DoDEA student)*- This term refers to a student who attends a school that is part of the Department of Defense Activity school system (Smrekar & Owens, 2003).
6. *Extrinsic motivation* – is defined as a motivation that derives from a person's external environment (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991).
7. *Intrinsic motivation* – is a type of motivation that occurs when an activity is done out of personal interest without any external incentive (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991).
8. *Military Base* – is "a facility installed to support military logistics and operations" (Duman, & Ferlengez, 2018, p.97).
9. *Relatedness* –is defined as a student's "mood, emotions, or climate sense" about their environment (Joe et al., 2017, p. 135).
10. *Self-determination theory* – A theory of human motivation and well-being that states that if basic psychological needs are met, intrinsic motivation is activated (Joe et al., 2017; McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019)
11. *Sojourner* – is someone "residing temporarily in foreign environments" (Elliott, 2020; Pedersen et al., 2011, p. 881).
12. *Student mobility* – "is the movement of students from one school to another" (Welsh, 2017, p. 475).

13. *Third culture kids* – are children who "are raised outside of their parents' home cultures and move across geographical boundaries because of their parents' employment" (Kwon, 2019, p. 113).

Summary

The United States has 4,127 military installations, many located in different countries (Clever & Segal, 2013). The DoDEA overseas has 164 schools in 11 foreign countries that provide education for military-affiliated students outside the USA due to their parent's military commitments (Elliott, 2019). In 2020, there were 28,899 DoDEA students enrolled in schools in European countries; 22,331 DoDEA students were enrolled in schools in Japan, South Korea, and Guam (DODEA, 2020). Living abroad allows DoDEA students to study the foreign language inside the DoDEA classrooms while living with the language and being able to practice the language outside their military community. Although research on frequent relocations has shown a decrease in academic performance and moving abroad and life as a sojourner has shown to be the cause of cultural homelessness among military children, this study aimed to explore how learning a foreign language is experienced by DoDEA students who spent three or more years abroad. Research has found that studying abroad can support foreign language fluency and cultural awareness (Schenker, 2018). This research study described the phenomenon of learning a foreign language while living as a military adolescent and a sojourner in a foreign culture.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

More than 1.2 million school-aged children are affiliated with the US military and thus live the so-called military lifestyle (De Pedro et al., 2011). Statistics show that this lifestyle requires children to endure separations from family members, relocate homes, and switch schools six to nine times within the United States and possibly abroad before graduating high school (Elliott, 2019). Although high mobility has been found to have negative effects on a student's mental health as well as their academic progress, the impact on academics of students who move outside of the United States due to parental military obligations has yet to be investigated since this field is vastly understudied (Conforte et al., 2017). This research study focused on the mental, cultural, and academic adjustments that DoDEA high school students have to make when arriving in a foreign country and how moving abroad and being forced to reorganize their lives affects their foreign language learning endeavors. In this chapter, the theoretical framework that guided this study was introduced. In addition, existing literature on this topic was reviewed to help the reader understand who military children are, the challenges and benefits that moving abroad create for military adolescents, what might motivate them, how their foreign language learning is affected, and what type of support systems exist that help military-related students adjust to living abroad.

Theoretical Framework

Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (SDT) was the guiding framework to help me understand how DoDEA students adapt when they arrive in the host country, from what they gain their motivation to do well in their academics, and how moving to a foreign country affects their motivation to learn the foreign language of that country. The self-determination theory by

Ryan and Deci (2000) focuses on two forms of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These types of motivation are fueled by satisfying three innate psychological needs, which are the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The degree to which these needs are met will influence the type of motivation a person will have and display and how strongly a person will be motivated. To ensure these innate psychological needs are met, external support is required (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

A feeling of competence is reached when a certain degree of mastery is accomplished. Perceived competence occurs when one believes that one has the ability to perform a specific task and is content with one's skills regarding that task (Clark et al., 2013). Autonomy is experienced when an individual has an understanding of the value of an action and has a sense of ownership over these actions (Clark et al., 2013). The feeling of autonomy is achieved through providing respect and honoring opinions, minimizing pressure, and giving meaningful tasks and rationales behind these tasks (Clark et al., 2013). Maciu (2011) suggested that offering logical explanations to allow a person to make connections helped increase motivation by fostering a feeling of autonomy. The third need is the need for relatedness. When an individual is able to connect with and feels part of their environment, the motivation to do what is expected by the group or the leader of a group is increased due to the desire to please the people around them (Clark et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Although Ryan and Deci (2000) suggested that purely intrinsic or purely extrinsic motivation rarely exists on their own, they can still exist. Usually, however, one of the two forms of motivation is the leading one when completing a task. Meeting the three psychological needs is thought to affect either type of motivation or both together (Clark et al., 2013). Even though all three psychological needs are essential for motivation, autonomy has been found overall to

provide the highest level of motivation (Clark et al., 2013). Ryan and Deci (2000) proposed that if the three needs were adequately satisfied, a person could internalize the need for tasks to be completed and become motivated to perform these previously uninteresting tasks (Clark et al., 2013).

The two forms of motivation influenced by meeting the three innate needs are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019). Intrinsic motivation is based on personal interest, whereas extrinsic motivation relies on rewards and punishments to a certain extent or even entirely (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000). A person is intrinsically motivated if they have a genuine interest, enjoyment, and inherent satisfaction from doing a specific task without any encouragement or persuasion (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is purely internal, which means it comes from the inside without any influence from someone within a person's environment. Sansone and Harackiewicz (2000) suggested that rewards, which are found to increase and are the motivational factors for extrinsic motivation, could have a negative effect on a person's intrinsic motivation if the feelings of autonomy and competence are reduced. Intrinsic motivation produces the most sustainable results when working on a task or completing a project. Therefore, it is considered the most effective form of motivation (McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

Extrinsic motivation is a form of motivation that arises due to an expectation for an external reward or punishment (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000). Extrinsic motivation can be entirely external, meaning it can be solely based on external forces, but it can also be partially internal. For this reason, Ryan and Deci (2020) distinguished four subgroups to identify the degree of intrinsic motivation that accompanies a person's extrinsic motivation. The first type of extrinsic motivation is called external regulation, in which motivation relies purely on external

rewards and punishment, compliance, and reactance (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This type of motivation was found to be the least effective one among the extrinsic types of motivation.

Introjection, the second type of external motivation, is governed by external motivators similar to external regulation. Still, the difference is that a person's ego is involved in the motivational process since a person is trying to gain approval from others or oneself (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The third type of external motivation, identification, is less dependent on external factors than introjection, making it a more autonomous external motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Ryan and Deci (2020) defined the characteristics for identification to be "personal importance, conscious valuing of activity, [and] self-endorsement of goals" (p. 2). The fourth and last extrinsic type of motivation, mainly influenced by internal motives, is called integration. Integration is the most similar to intrinsic motivation and is also considered an autonomous motivation. For this type of motivation, a person sees the importance of an activity and/or shares common core values with this activity (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Since the two types of autonomous external motivation, identification and integration, are similar to intrinsic motivation when it comes to a person showing interest in doing a task and having a personal interest in performing this task, they are considered the more desirable extrinsic motivations since they are more effective than external regulation and introjection (McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

Research showed that purely extrinsic motivation leads to lower quality results, whereas autonomous external and intrinsic motivation were found to lead to higher and longer-lasting achievements (McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019). Intrinsic and autonomous external motivation is fueled by meeting the basic psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Consequently, the self-determination theory states that the more these basic psychological needs are met, the more self-determined a person will feel, which in turn will lead

to an increase in this individual's intrinsic and/or autonomous extrinsic motivation and will result in better performance as well as higher and more sustainable achievements (Vallerand, 2000).

The last emotion, which also belongs to the category of motivations, is actually the opposite of motivation and is called amotivation (Deci et al., 1985). Amotivation is the absence of motivation, which occurs when a person is continuously demotivated, which will cause this person to enter the stage of amotivation eventually. Deci et al. (1985) posited that people would become demotivated when their competence was constantly questioned, making their feeling of being incompetent permanent. It is suggested that a person who receives only negative feedback from their environment about their competence would eventually fall into a state of amotivation. Deci et al. (1985) cautioned that not only negative feedback but also task-noncontingent rewards could put a person into a state of impaired effectiveness. A person unable to connect a particular behavior with the desired outcome and who feels that they have no control over a specific outcome eventually would not want to display this desired behavior any longer (Pelletier et al., 1999). Not understanding the connection between one's behavior and the desired result was suggested to be the cause of learned helplessness, which is a root cause of amotivation (Pelletier et al., 1999).

DoDEA students are confronted with several unique stressors caused by the military lifestyle they are exposed to. At the same time, they are also struggling with the regular developmental aggravation expected during childhood. The US Military is an all-voluntary force, but military-connected children did not sign up for this type of life; nevertheless, they "must deal with frequent moves and school transitions and they do so with courage and grace" (Engdahl, 2014, p. 135). The self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci (2000) was used for this study to explain what and how military youth perceives and conquers the stressors that military life puts

upon them and how their academic achievements are affected, particularly in the field of foreign language learning.

The sub-research questions of this study were constructed based on Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory focusing on academic progress and how it is achieved through satisfying the basic needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. How military students accomplish this and to what degree this theory can be applied to military students after moving to a host nation were tested and evaluated in this study. It is indisputable that being part of the military has tremendous benefits, such as safe employment, steady income, and almost free health care, which means that these military-connected students' physiological and safety needs are generally met. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, these are the basic survival needs that have to be satisfied to enable students to grow psychologically and academically (Freitas & Leonard, 2011). Frequent relocation, however, is not what military-connected students have asked for, and having to relocate often results in them being discouraged since they have to leave their friends and extended family members behind (Engdahl, 2014).

This study explored how military-related students perceive moving abroad and studying the foreign language of the host country. For data analysis, the data were viewed through the lens of the self-determination theory. I was looking for reoccurring themes related to the three basic psychological needs, namely competence, autonomy, and relatedness. It was examined whether a correlation exists between meeting these needs and the participants' academic progress and mental and behavioral well-being.

Related Literature

In this section of the literature review, I synthesized existing literature to help the reader understand who military children are, the concept of experience abroad, cultural identity,

resilience and self-efficacy, Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) overseas, how foreign languages are taught in the DoDEA system, and the support system that exists for military-connected children, Due to a lack of existing literature on the effects that transitioning abroad has on foreign language learning and academic progress of students who attend a DoDEA overseas school, this literature review focused on two bodies of literature, namely high mobility in general and the effects that studying abroad have on foreign language learning. Furthermore, the different types of foreign language learning methods that have been used throughout history and the types of motivations that support or hinder academic success were reviewed to understand how these components might affect military students who live in a foreign country due to parental military commitment.

Third Culture Kids

Culture derives from a person's ecology, resources, and the people they are surrounded by (Matsumoto & Juang, 2012). Although there are many different definitions of culture, for this phenomenological research study, culture was defined as the guidelines that are acceptable for interactions within a community and passed on from one generation to the next (Matsumoto & Juang, 2012). Therefore, culture is something that has to be known and is accepted as a norm by all members of a group of people (Dillon & Ali, 2019). Children, who live outside of their parents' home cultures during some of their developmental years, are referred to as Third Culture Kids (Dillon & Ali, 2019; Kwon, 2019). The term third culture was first introduced in the 1950s (Kwon, 2019). It derives from the idea that the first culture is the one of a child's parents, the second culture is the culture of the environment that a child grows up in, and the third culture is then considered a combination of these two previous cultures, which is the culture of the child (Kwon, 2019; Long, 2020). Due to a continued increase in globalization, the number of TCKs is

expected to increase, and once TCKs reach adulthood, these grown-up children are referred to as adult third culture kids (ATCK) by academic literature (Kwon, 2019, p. 113).

Living in a foreign culture for an extended period of time during developmental years can be challenging as well as rewarding (Gillies, 1998). TCKs were found to be more diverse and culturally knowledgeable than children who have never left their home country (Kwon, 2019). TCKs are also thought to be more flexible since they tend to adapt quickly to their new environments and are therefore often referred to as "cultural chameleons" (Miller et al., 2020, p.416). TCKs had, in general, "a global mentality, second language competence, cognitive flexibility, open-mindedness" (Miller et al., 2020, p. 415). Although Kwon (2019) also purported that most TCKs were raised bi- or multilingual, Dillon and Ali (2019) cautioned that some stereotypical expectations for TCKs were not always true. Since TCKs could be children from expatriates, missionaries, refugees, military personnel, diplomats, or other international workers, TCKs should be expected to be very diverse based on their very different backgrounds as well as the reasons why they were living away from home (Dillon & Ali, 2019; Gillies, 1998; Kwon, 2019). However, what they do have in common is that they have been exposed to and lived with more than one culture during their developmental years (Dillon & Ali, 2019).

Although growing up as a TCK might seem to have many advantages, there are also problems associated with such an upbringing. Children who live away from their parents' cultures and in highly mobile environments were more at risk for loneliness and tended to be problem avoidant since they believed their problems would eventually go away through another move (Gillies, 1998). Long (2020) agreed with Gillies (1998), adding that the issues of loneliness and lost identity often followed these kids into adulthood. Gillies (1998) captured the immediate problems of cultural loneliness that international mobile children experience while

living away from their parents' culture, while Long (2020)'s study focused on the long-term effects of having lived the life of a TCK and how adulthood is affected. Long (2020) found that most TCKs continued living a nomadic lifestyle once they entered adulthood and sought employment in the global market. Sterle et al. (2018) posited that TCKs were building connections with both cultures but could not form a clear relationship with either culture, which caused them to miss a sense of belonging and develop multicultural identities. The three authors acknowledged the benefits of living abroad, such as exposure to different cultures, people, and foods, and opportunities to become globally educated, but they also cautioned that a nomadic lifestyle could take a toll on the psychological well-being of these children (Gillies, 1998; Long, 2020; Sterle et al., 2018).

Military Brats

About 5 % of today's adults in the US are military brats (Geppert, 2017). Children affiliated with the military have earned themselves this title, often referred to as a word of endearment (Dillon & Ali, 2019; Ender, 2005). Depending upon their parents' affiliation, they can also be referred to as 'Army brat, Navy brat, or Air force brat,' a stereotypical label that can be perceived positively or negatively (Engdahl, 2014). They are also categorized as Third Culture Kids since most of them spend part of their developmental years at overseas military duty stations (Gillies, 1998). The expressions 'military, army, navy, or air force brat' are not limited to race, nationality, gender, or any other demographic characteristic; instead, they are terms used to describe a child or youth living a particular lifestyle, namely the one of a military dependent (Schertz & Watson, 2018).

About two million children are currently affiliated with the US military (Frain & Frain, 2020). According to Ender (2005), these children are a hidden population, similar to minority

groups. They are "a little-understood group in America's society, based on their social experience growing up in an organizational context" (Ender, 2005, p. 39). After Operation Desert Storm, which followed longer than usual and more frequent deployments, military-connected children have received additional attention from researchers interested in understanding the effects these deployments had on these children's mental and physical well-being (Sullivan et al., 2019). The Department of Defense has recently started to acknowledge the toll that the recent wars have taken, and studies and programs have been created to help military-related children cope more efficiently (Geppert, 2017).

The uniqueness of the situation for military brats is that they face the same developmental stressors as regular children and teenagers, in addition to the ones caused by the military lifestyle. Some examples of these stressors are the deployment of one or two parents, injured parent(s), whether psychologically or physically, and frequent relocation, which can be to an international location and which this study focused on (McGuire & Steele, 2016, p. 259). Despite the benefits that the military offers, such as stable pay with health care as well as guaranteed housing, military work hours are less predictable and can range from a few hours a day to weeks and months without breaks (Elliott, 2019).

Being part of the military means interruption in family time and having to be ready for expected and unexpected separations due to training exercises or war-related deployments (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2016). A key term within military communities is family readiness. Family readiness is defined as "the state of being prepared to effectively navigate the challenges of daily living experienced in the unique context of military service" (Menestrel & Kizer, 2019, p. 55). Frequent relocation, change of schools, dealing with war-related worries, as

well as the concerns of other family members are part of the items on the list of stressors that military life has to offer (Frain & Frain, 2020).

The average military child changes schools about six to nine times from Kindergarten to high school (Elliott, 2019; Frain & Frain, 2020; Schertz & Watson, 2018), and once they start feeling comfortable in a school environment, it is usually time to move again (Russo & Fallon, 2015). Welsh (2017) found that high mobility, also called non-promotional school changes, in civilian children who are not related to the military has shown to be "general detrimental to student achievement" (p.499). The same was reported by Eodanable and Lauchlan (2011) and Masten (2013), who found that student mobility negatively affected academic attainment and that transferring credits could hinder opportunities for participation in scholastic programs. Although studies on high mobility have reported that mobility was one of the main factors for dropping out of school (Isernhagen & Bulkin, 2011), Rumberger (2002) cautioned that mobility alone should not be blamed but instead the personal, family, and social situation of the affected students needed to be examined as well.

Spencer et al. (2016) compared the effects of frequent relocations of military-related students and civilian students. They reported that military youth were found to show fewer behavioral problems than their civilian counterparts (Spencer et al., 2016). The authors suggested that this could be based on the fact that military families have more social support available than non-military families (Spencer et al., 2016). Clever and Segal (2013) noted that a supportive military environment prepared and helped military-related students and their families move, reducing moving-related stressors. Research on military families suggested that moving could be considered routine for most military families and children, who have shown remarkable resilience to the military-related stressors, and that they had acquired skills to cope well with the

military lifestyle (Russo & Fallon, 2015; Sullivan et al., 2019; Weber & Weber, 2005). Since the start of the war on terrorism, many additional resources, such as additional mental health care providers, support groups, hotlines, and websites that are supposed to help families cope with the military-related stressors and ease transitions between schools, have been found helpful in improving and strengthening the resilience of military families (Frain & Frain, 2020).

Resilience and Self-Efficacy

Resilience is defined as "a dynamic process that strengthens an individual's coping skills and helps balance stress and adversity" (Russo & Fallon, 2015, p. 408). The more successful the adaption to difficult situations, the higher the degree of a person's resilience is expected to be (Masten, 2013). Although it is not entirely clear how resilience is developed, a direct correlation between factors such as challenges, strengths, vulnerabilities, and opportunities was found and the building of resilience (DeGraff et al., 2016). Masten (2013) suggested that the degree of resilience in children was based on the support systems in their lives. Although resilience is not considered a trait, a person's resilience is related to their biological and cultural development (Masten & Barnes, 2018). Chiang et al. (2018) distinguished three coping strategies to stress that influenced resilience in a person. These strategies were task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidant-coping. The first was found to increase a person's resilience, whereas emotion-oriented was noted to lower resilience, and avoidant coping was thought to be detrimental to one's mental health (Chiang et al., 2018, p. 74).

Although some research studies have shown that military families and military children score high on resilience and appear to adapt more quickly and efficiently to life changes than their civilian counterparts (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Ruff & Keim, 2014; Sullivan et al., 2019), McGuire and Steele (2016) cautioned that military families and youth are and will continue to be

at risk due to the constant exposure to military stressors. DeGraff et al. (2016) identified the loss of a parent, whether temporary or permanent, as one of the main factors that trigger difficulties for children. Temporary parental loss is not uncommon for military children whose parents have to go away on deployments for months at a time, which supports the assumption that a positive correlation between parental well-being and attitude and military adolescence's resilience exists (DeGraff et al., 2016). Military personnel experienced higher rates of mental illness due to heavy workloads while on duty. Stress suffered by military personnel was found to affect the entire military family, children included (Chiang et al., 2018). While frequent moves and longer and more frequent deployments were the main stressors, Clever and Segal (2013) posited that more moves appeared to increase family cohesiveness, positively affect children's relationships with their mothers, and, overall, positively impact the children's resilience.

Even though relocating was identified as one of the most potential stressors to military adolescents (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Elliott, 2019; Ruff & Keim, 2014), McGuire and Steele (2016) reported that moving was found to have a positive effect on resilience for military children. Their study found that frequent moves had no lasting negative impact and did not negatively influence the development of military children in the long run; instead, they appeared to be helpful with the development of resilience (McGuire & Steele, 2016). Similar, Johnson et al. (2018) claimed that geographic moves did not seem to be the cause of mental issues such as depression or anxieties among military youths that they studied, with Weber and Weber (2005) reporting a negative correlation between the numbers of relocation and school-related problems in military children. Weber and Weber (2005) shared findings that suggested that moving had a positive effect on military youth. Relocating allowed them to get a fresh start since they could move away from problems they might have had in their old environment (Weber & Weber,

2005). Frain and Frain (2020) disagreed with the findings by Weber and Weber (2005), noting that switching schools and moving away from an environment where one felt comfortable to an unknown new environment, in general, would more than likely hurt a student's self-esteem and overall well-being due to instability and uncertainty in a student's life.

A research study by Clever and Segal (2013) reported that military families were very diverse, meaning that their needs and issues could be very different and thus not easily comparable, which seems to validate the contradictory findings by other researchers on this topic. Therefore, issues arising due to frequent moves could most likely not be solved with one-size-fits-all solutions and require that any general assumptions regarding military families be made with care. McGuire and Steele (2016) cautioned that more research was needed on the effects of frequent relocation of military youth and academic and behavioral problems to understand the true impact of high mobility and moves abroad since previous research on this topic had come to conflicting results. Although some research insisted that frequent moves were harmful to military youth (Frain & Frain, 2020), other researchers suggested that numerous relocations increased resilience and self-efficacy (Weber & Weber, 2005).

Researchers are not exactly sure what causes the increase in resilience, but it is suspected that resilience is built through internal forces such as high efficacy and high self-esteem and external forces like a supportive environment (Wulandari & Istiani, 2021). Self-efficacy is defined as "the expectations and convictions that an individual holds toward what he or she can accomplish successfully in given situations" (Kim & Cha, 2017, p. 671). Self-efficacy influences an individual's emotions, motivation, as well as behavior and was found to have a direct relation to academic progress (Ruff & Keim, 2014). Clever and Segal (2013) stated that while frequent

moves were stressful, they were also a source of strength for military children since moving helped with the development of "a strong sense of self and comfort with the unfamiliar" (p. 29)

Kim and Cha (2017) identified the four sources for strengthening self-efficacy, namely mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and bodily and emotional states. Arriving overseas and moving to a foreign country can affect a student's self-efficacy positively but also in negative ways, depending on a person's outlook and also depending on their skill set. It was found that by mastering the foreign language and communicating with the local community, a person could adapt more quickly to living in a new country (Pedersen et al., 2011). The ability to adapt more rapidly to a new environment was also seen as a way to boost one's self-efficacy (Schwieter & Ferreira, 2020). As self-efficacy increases, the motivation to do well within the new culture would be expected to increase as well as the desire to learn about that culture and the language spoken by that culture.

Although the stress of frequent moves might cause a decrease in self-efficacy in some individuals, for military families, high mobility is part of their lifestyle, which they are acquainted with and have adapted to (Russo & Fallon, 2015). Researchers noted that military families often seemed to enjoy being highly mobile and that "most children in military families were generally satisfied with military life" (Russo & Fallon, 2015, p. 411). By embracing this unique military lifestyle that comes with deployments and frequent moves, self-efficacy and self-esteem increase, which supports resilience. Weber and Weber (2005) also discovered that while military parents' perception was that moves during high school years were detrimental to their adolescent's development, the students exhibit fewer behavioral problems than those found in civilian students who move frequently.

Research studies found that despite long deployments and other military-related stressors, "approximately two-thirds of children in military families are coping well" (Engdahl, 2014, p. 121). Weber and Weber (2005) posited that military families were more resilient than their civilian counterparts. Chandra and London (2013), however, suggested that there were not enough data on military children to make any long-term conclusions since military families are difficult to "track for follow-up, given the fact that service members move frequently" (p.195). Nevertheless, Weber and Weber (2005) concluded that the more resilient a military school-aged child became, the more likely this child would continue having high efficacy and low impact on academic achievement when faced with moving abroad (Weber & Weber, 2005).

Student Motivation

The self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci (2020) identified two types of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic. Extrinsic motivation can further be divided into four subgroups ranging from least to most autonomous. In addition to these types of motivations, Ali and Pathan (2017) identified a third type of motivation called demotivation. Demotivation is defined as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivation basis of a behavior intention or an ongoing action" (Ali & Pathan, 2017, p. 81). External factors can be the cause of demotivation. When this type of motivation occurs in an educational setting, it usually has a negative impact on learning and academic achievements. For foreign language learning, Ali and Pathan (2017) identified the following as factors that can be sources of demotivation, namely teachers and their teaching styles, the school or facility where the language acquisition is happening, the resources that are being used for teaching, as well as the attitude of the student.

The last state of motivation is called amotivation, which is defined as a state where no motivation exists at all, often described as "the absence of any kind of motivation" (Joe et al.,

2017, p. 134). Motivation is necessary to achieve long and short-term goals, and the best type of teaching would not be able to compensate for an absence of motivation (Green, 2016). Students can become easily demotivated if the teacher does not keep students interested and engaged. In addition, goals set too high or too low can also cause students to give up on learning (Green, 2016).

"Teachers have to continuously interact closely and effectively with their students, be alert to the feedback provided by them, and constantly improve their methods of teaching a second language by staying connected with all the innovations in the field" (Maciu, 2011, p.128). Following these guidelines will help avoid students from becoming first demotivated and ultimately amotivated (Maciu, 2011). Demotivation was also detected in highly mobile students who are at risk of developing an achievement gap caused by frequent relocations (Isernhagen & Bulkin, 2011). Such learning and achievement gaps for students who constantly have to adapt to a new environment tend to increase with every move, which could negatively impact their motivation (Isernhagen & Bulkin, 2011).

Motivation is essential for the academic success of any student, regardless of what kind of background or situation they are currently facing. Clark et al. (2013) found that a person's surroundings contribute significantly to motivation. Therefore, schools should be supportive not only to help with academic success but also to ensure psychological growth (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Although external motives, such as rewards and punishment, can be motivating, they were found to produce minor long-term achievements (McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019).

Through the support of the three psychological needs, namely relatedness, competence, and autonomy, extrinsic motivation is enhanced and can be improved to the highest level of extrinsic motivation, namely integrated motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020), with autonomous

reasons being the motives to promote the highest level of extrinsic motivation. In a study, Martela and Riekkı (2018) found that once the three psychological needs were met, a person also detected meaningfulness in a task, which helped find intrinsic reasons to complete a task. McEown and Oga-Baldwin (2019) reported that for younger foreign language learners at the elementary level, autonomous reasons correlated with higher achievement, while for older students who attended secondary school, the peer environment was more influential on student achievement.

Cultural Identity

When a military child is asked about their home, the answer will likely be a question, such as 'do you mean where I was born, where I lived last, or what my parents call their home of record (Miller et al., 2020). Besides the usual lifestyle of a transit population, military children often spend several childhood years in different countries (McGuire & Steele, 2016). Moving abroad and living outside one's own culture was found to be one of the most significant stressors for military dependents (Elliott, 2019; McGuire & Steele, 2016). The amount of stress that transitioning to a new culture might cause an individual varies depending on nationality, age, previous cultural experience, and knowledge about the language spoken in the foreign country (Church, 1982). "Adaption to life in a foreign environment" could be best described with "the term acculturation" (Pedersen et al., 2011, p.882). Through the process of acculturation, individuals are likely to try to maintain their own culture while adjusting to the new culture around them (Pedersen et al., 2011).

Moving to and living in different countries during childhood can lead to cross-cultural identities in which an individual does not truly identify with one culture. This can be seen as a problem as childhood is when a person learns how to identify with the society they are

surrounded by. Social cues, rules, and behavior get adopted, which is vital to surviving socially, according to Hoersting and Jenkins (2011). Frequent moves between cultures before becoming of age, which was defined by Hoersting and Jenkins (2011) as a cross-culturally nomadic childhood, puts adults at risk for cultural homelessness and identity crisis during the years to come, which have negative effects on a person's self-esteem and emotional security (Eodanable & Lauchlan, 2011).

Nevertheless, the study by Hoersting and Jenkins (2011) also found that individuals who experienced different cultures before reaching adulthood "spoke more languages and held more citizenships" (p.28). Furthermore, while living and gaining experience abroad was a cause of certain discomfort among the participants in a study by Kishino and Takahashi (2019), the participants reported after they returned back to the United States, they felt that they had become global citizens and were identifying themselves as such.

Experience Abroad

Studying abroad is a concept or program in which a student lives abroad either in a dorm or with a host family, receives daily foreign language instructions, and interacts and participates in cultural events and outings (Schwieter & Ferreira, 2020). Studying a language abroad has been found to have "more benefits for students than studying domestically in developing specific language skills such as oral proficiency as well as conversational or pragmatic competence" (Kang & Ghanem, 2016, p. 819). It is considered "one of the major vehicles for helping language learners to become translingually and transculturally competent, open-minded and tolerant individuals" (Goldoni, 2013, p. 359). Exposure to authentic material and native speakers was helpful in developing a foreign language learner's intercultural communicative capability (Reid, 2015).

While living abroad as a DoDEA student is very similar to studying abroad, there are some key differences. Students who study abroad usually live with a host family, while DoDEA students live with their own families. Another difference to studying abroad is the safety net that military bases provide for military youth. One of the main challenges to studying abroad was identified as a change overload due to a different school atmosphere, unknown social norms, as well as language barriers (Fülöp & Sebestyén, 2012). Since military bases overseas resemble small American cities that provide all services and a decent amount of entertainment, DoDEA students can withdraw from the unfamiliar host nation and choose to remain on the American bases rather than engaging in the foreign culture (Elliott, 2019).

Similarly, American students who study abroad can choose to stay alone or take "refuge in their American cohort group" (Goldoni, 2013, p. 365). One major difference between students who study abroad and military teenagers who have to move overseas is that the military children did not volunteer to move to their host nation; instead, they had to move there due to a parental military obligation (Frain & Frain, 2020). This might have a negative effect on the anticipation of moving to the host nation and their perception of it.

While military children and adolescents live with their families, their dwellings will typically be located within the local economy. Although there is some housing available on most military installations, many soldiers and their dependents, as well as the civilian component and their families, live off post in either government-leased quarters or private rental units, which families are made aware of before they arrive in the foreign country (Military Installations, 2021). Military bases are built like miniature cities and typically include essentials such as a church, a grocery store, a gym, a department-like store, as well as a library, and sometimes even facilities like a movie theatre, a swimming pool, and/or bowling alley (Wenner, 2003), which

allows military dependents to stay on post and never set foot in a shop on the local economy. However, the options and choices are basic, requiring military families to venture outside to fulfill any additional needs. Living in a host nation allows military families to shop in the local economy, eat at local restaurants and ice cream shops, visit local museums, and events, and use all the services available in the host nation. By doing so, military families are able to experience the culture of the host nation daily, but also, they are confronted with issues such as different cultural behaviors as well as language barriers, which have been found to be frustrating (Elliott, 2020).

Foreign Language Learning Methods

The grammar-translation and the communicative language teaching approach, also known as the direct method, are the primary methods used for foreign language teaching worldwide (Zhou & Niu, 2015). In the United States, the direct method has been used as the primary teaching method for foreign languages since the beginning of the 21st century (Zhou & Niu, 2015). The DoDEA schools adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2012 as their curriculum standards (Griffin, 2012). Under the Common Core State Standards, which align with the American Foreign Council of Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL), 90% of classroom time is expected to be taught in the target language, following the direct method teaching approach (LeLoup et al., 2013).

Grammar-Translation Method

The grammar-translation method also referred to as the classical method has been used since the times of the Roman Empire in formal as well as informal settings (Vega, 2018; Zhou & Niu, 2015). Peter the Great was the founder of many schools that would not only teach state officials and sons of the nobles but also workers such as seamen, builders, and such, to teach

them Latin and ancient Greek (Kuznetsova, 2015). Until the end of the 18th century, foreign language teaching focused on teaching how to translate written language since it was considered the reflection of the true language (Kuznetsova, 2015). Under the grammar-translation method, the emphasis lies on teaching grammar and vocabulary (Vega, 2018). This approach neglected to teach fluency; its primary focus was reading and writing accuracy (Vega, 2018). A student's native language is used as the "medium of instruction" (Cerezal Sierra, 1995). The main goal of the grammar-translation method is to teach grammar and vocabulary while disregarding oral production (Zhou & Niu, 2015). Although this teacher-centered method is still used by a few classrooms worldwide, it has gradually been replaced in most schools since the end of the 19th by different teaching approaches (Cerezal Sierra, 1995; Kuznetsova, 2015).

Audio- Lingual Approach

The audio-lingual approach, also called the Army method, became increasingly popular in the 1950s (Kakunta & Kamanga, 2020). It was developed due to the United State's involvement in WWII, which increased the demand for foreign language speaking and understanding among American government employees and military personnel (Kakunta & Kamanga, 2020). This oral-based approach differed from the grammar-translation method since it focused on imitating and copying to learn and acquire foreign language skills (Kakunta & Kamanga, 2020; Zhou & Niu, 2015). The audio-lingual method is instructor-centered and follows Bandura's theory of cognitive development (Moeller & Catalano, 2015). Rather than teaching grammar and vocabulary, students were expected to remember automatic responses that would be helpful during conversations. This method became unpopular once researchers such as Noam Chomsky and BF. Skinner publicly declared that the "human mind is involved in deep

processing of meaning rather than in memorized responses to environmental stimuli" (Moeller & Catalano, 2015, p. 327).

Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the importance of the social environment for foreign language learners in addition to the innate abilities of a learner-led teaching style which is the current approach of teaching known as the communicative language teaching approach. According to Vygotsky, "active engagement in social dialogue is important. Learning is regarded as intentional, goal-directed, and meaningful and is not a passive or incidental process but is always conscious and intentional" (Moeller & Catalano, 2015, p. 328). While the audio-lingual method focused on rote learning and repetition of common phrases, Kakunta and Kamanga (2020) argued that its loss of popularity is unfounded since the goals and techniques of this teaching method were very similar to the approach that it was replaced by, namely the direct method, which is the next method that will be discussed. The audio-lingual method is still used in today's classrooms, but for the most part, it is used in combination with other methods (Kuznetsova, 2015).

Communicative Language Teaching Approach (Natural Method)

The natural method was first introduced at the end of the 19th century as a reaction to the grammar-translation and audio-lingual approach (Vega, 2018). Rather than using one's first language (L1), the target language (L2) became the dominant language for teaching (LeLoup et al., 2013). This method started in a somewhat experimental matter with different approaches by different schools, such as neogrammarian and logical schools (Kuznetsova, 2015; LeLoup et al., 2013). The leading advocates were two prominent psychologists, H. Steinthal and W. Wundt, who considered "a man's consciousness as an integral product" while speaking a foreign language (Kuznetsova, 2015, p. 248). Instead of focusing on memorizing grammar rules or key

phrases, the communicative language teaching approach saw communication as the primary means for acquiring a foreign language (Cook, 2016).

With the communicative teaching method, students are required to talk to one another and learn the second language through two-way communication (Cook, 2016). Maximilian Berlitz, a German linguist, was the first who suggested that the best way to learn a foreign language was the natural way, which he described as the omission of one's first language while communicating solely in the target language during language lessons, which he also called a foreign language immersion process (Kuznetsova, 2015). Communicative competence is the primary goal of this method at the expense of teaching grammar; thus, some opponents claim that too much emphasis is being put on fluency at the expense of accuracy (Cerezal Sierra, 1995; Zhou & Niu, 2015).

Foreign Language Learning for Military Students Overseas

Many research studies on studying abroad as well as military youth abroad have mentioned that the degree of being able to understand the host language was one of the significant factors for making an overseas experience meaningful or pointless (Goldoni, 2013; Kim & Cha, 2017; Schwieter & Ferreira, 2020). While one of the primary motivators for choosing to study abroad was found to be the desire to learn a foreign language, language acquisition was not always automatically achieved to the highest level through this method (Isabelli-Garcia et al., 2018). The situation differs for military youth since military children do not choose to move to a foreign country to study a foreign language, nor do they generally attend one of the host nation's schools. Military youth must transfer to various duty stations with their families, including ones located in a host country (Elliott, 2019).

During their time abroad, military-connected children are integrated into one of the many DoDEA schools which operate like a typical American public school. Foreign language learning is optional for them since they continue to follow an American curriculum in an American-like school. While they are getting used to the new school, they also have to adapt to a new living environment in the host nation where a different language is spoken. Adapting to this new environment and switching to a new school were considered the most significant military stressors that military children and military youth mentioned in a survey, next to parental deployment (Ruff & Keim, 2014). Cole (2017) recommended that students be supported in this transition and that schools should be a refuge and offer support. According to numerous research studies on studying abroad, being able to enjoy the experience abroad and making the experience meaningful requires a certain amount of foreign language skills (Goldoni, 2013). In addition, Schwieter and Ferreira (2020) found that there appeared to be a virtuous cycle between foreign language skills and social positioning, influencing how individuals act, behave and see themselves.

“Speaking a foreign language represents one of the essential requirements of today’s society. Based on my work experience, I can confirm that knowing a foreign language is a necessity for everyone” (Jabbarova, 2020, p. 1). While this sentence seems to be true for most of the world’s citizens, it might not necessarily apply to individuals whose first language is English, including US military adolescents. English has been unofficially declared the ‘lingua franca’ (Hessel, 2019), which Jenkins et al. (2011) define as “the contact languages used among people who do not share a first language” (p.281). Since English is considered the lingua franca, more than 80% of all European adults have learned and are able to speak at least one other language (Eurostat, 2021). English is also considered the pop-culture language, which seems to motivate

non-English speaking teenagers to learn this language (Chambers, 1999). While many Europeans are considered bilingual, only about 20% of Americans were reported to know at least one other language besides their first language (Eurostat, 2021).

For anyone living abroad, whether a student affiliated with the military or a student who studies abroad, the skill of being able to communicate within the host nation was one of the main factors that made the time abroad meaningful (Pedersen et al., 2011). In their study, Pedersen et al. (2011) identified four factors that were critical to the success of studying abroad. One of them was “language development and use,” while the others were “social interaction with host nationals, cultural understanding, and participation, (...) and host culture identification” (Pedersen et al., 2011, p. 882). Pedersen et al. (2011) posited that all of these factors indirectly required some understanding of the foreign language. In her study, Elliott (2019) recommended that the sojourner adjustment to a host nation was easier if some language proficiency existed. To make living abroad meaningful and joyful, acquiring the host nation's language can thus be considered significant.

Although many overseas study consultants and overseas study programs claim that studying abroad is “one of the best investments for second or foreign language learning” (Kim & Cha, 2017, p. 670), one should not expect that by living in a foreign country, foreign language acquisition will happen automatically (Goldoni, 2013). Two factors that were seen to prevent foreign language learning were “social interaction with co-nationals [and] homesickness and/or the feeling out of place” (Pedersen et al., 2011, p. 883). Even though military adolescents are usually living among the residents of the host nation, the school, extracurricular activities, as well as services like movie theatres and youth centers are located on American bases, which are used by other Americans who are in the situation (Menestrel & Kizer, 2019; Wenner, 2003). All

essential services on post enable military personnel and their families to avoid contact with the host country if they choose (Frain & Frain, 2020).

Foreign Language Teaching and Learning in DoDEA Schools Overseas

DoDEA operated 160 schools worldwide as of 2020 (DoDEA, 2020). One hundred and eleven of these schools are located overseas, 64 in Europe, 33 in Japan, eight in South Korea, four in Guam, and one in Cuba as of 2020 (DoDEA, 2020). DoDEA schools can be found in Belgium, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, and Turkey (DoDEA, 2020). DoDEA schools are almost identical to regular public schools in the United States (DoDEA, 2020). According to Wenner (2003), each of these schools is a “distinctly American institution with a stateside curriculum and co-curriculum” (p.429). According to federal law, all core teachers and administrators have to be American citizens hired stateside. In contrast, local nationals whose native tongue is the host nation's language are employed as foreign language teachers who teach the foreign language of the host nation (Svan, 2014).

Each elementary and middle school DoDEA school offers a host nation program for K-8, while the DoDEA high schools offer world languages as an elective class. The host nation program and the world language program for nine-12 both follow the college career readiness standards based on the 5 C's, namely “Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities” (DoDEA, 2018). It was noted that the intercultural programs offered to younger military children K-8 were more plentiful than those students attending high school (DoDEA, 2018). Rather than attending events and learning about the host nation in a playful way, the DoDEA high schools participate in exchange programs periodically with local schools from the host nation. During these visits, American students are paired up with students from the

host nation, allowing them to interact with one another for a day or sometimes even for an entire week (Ciccotti, 2015).

For everyday foreign language instruction, the DoDEA schools follow the Common Core Curriculum, which was adopted in 2012 to help ease students with transitioning. This curriculum has also been adopted by forty-one states, the District of Columbia, and four territories, so when students transition stateside, they are more likely going to find themselves using the same curriculum (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2021). The teaching method used for foreign language classrooms is the natural or direct method, which is the same used in most US classrooms today (DoDEA, 2018). It follows the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) recommendation that focuses on communication and requires the foreign language instructor to use the target language at least 90 % of the classroom time (LeLoup et al., 2013).

Although DoDEA schools are expected to “enrich its total program by drawing upon its unique host nation environment” (Wenner, 2003, p.431) and although many military parents have voiced that they wanted their children to learn about the culture and the language of their host country, Wenner (2003) found that all DoDEA schools overseas showed little effort to reach out to the host nation and appeared to prefer to be “part of a self-contained American community” (p.443). Despite the existence of programs such as the host nation program to reach out to the host nation (DoDEA, 2018), any attempts appear to be “obstructed by barriers of language, differing cultural traditions, and ethnocentric preferences (...) [which ultimately leads] to maintain these community boundaries” (Wenner, 2003, p. 443).

A study by Baird and Boyle (2012) examined the mental well-being of refugees who arrived in the United States, which put them into a process of transitioning. Three different types

of transitioning were identified among these refugees, namely self-support, liminality, and hope for the future (Baird & Boyle, 2012). The group identified as the liminality group, which means living between cultures, was the most vulnerable since that group was found to be disconnected, disoriented, and with a sense of loss (Elliott, 2019). While students will not live in the host nation forever, and their time there is limited to three years, a state of liminality should be avoided to ensure that students have the possibility to progress developmentally and academically (Baird & Boyle, 2012). Since their school is usually found inside the military bases, a sense of security and stability is provided. Nonetheless, many parts of the students' lives happen outside the military bases which require support as well (Baird & Boyle, 2012).

Other Available Support

A White House report from 2011 stated that military families were suffering due to the military lifestyle, particularly due to longer than usual separations from the sponsor caused by the wars with Iraq and Afghanistan (Rossiter et al., 2016). After this report was completed, "The Joining Forces Campaign" was created, which focused on "the healthy development of military children" (Rossiter et al., 2016, p. 486). Even before this initiative was launched, military families depended on support from the military and the military culture as a support system (DeGraff et al., 2016). Military culture is defined as living among other military members, utilizing military health care and clinics on military installations, and using military facilities as places to socialize (DeGraff et al., 2016). Rossiter et al. (2016) reported that "military families tend to live in close proximity of each other and socialize with other military families" (p.486). As support, military bases provide many free services and events for military families, enabling them to socialize with one another and helping newly arrived military community members make connections quickly, which is uncommon for civilian communities (Rossiter et al., 2016).

“Service members reported positive family relationships as a source of resilience” (Park, 2011, p. 65). Research studies have found that a positive correlation existed between military personnel's perception of support and mental well-being and their dependents, which extended to military children's psychological and academic well-being (DeGraff et al., 2016). It can be said that it is in the interest of the US Military to ensure that the dependents of soldiers are taken care of since stress at home has been found to have an impact on a service member's well-being and their ability to complete the mission (Conforte et al., 2017). The better the military supports the military families, the superior the general military life contentment perceived by military families will be; through offering adequate support, the overall efficiency of a service member was found to be increased (Conforte et al., 2017; DeGraff et al., 2016).

To help ensure high productivity of the service members and increase military family morale, the Department of Defense offers several support programs that directly target military-related stressors, including relocation in general, relocations overseas, and school transitions. Almost every military installation hosts a family support center (FSC) operated by the Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Command. These centers were developed in the early 1970s to boost family morale (Brouker, 2012). This service has different titles depending on the branches that it serves. The US Army installations call their family support centers Army Community Service (ACS), title Airman and Family Readiness Center (A&FRC) is used on US Airforce installations, while the US Navy calls their family support centers Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC) (Conforte et al., 2017; MilitaryOneSource, 2021).

While the titles of the organizations differ slightly depending on the military branches they serve, the services these organizations provide are similar, if not identical. The available services include but are not limited to relocation counseling, information for special needs,

employment workshops, volunteer coordination, parenting classes, counseling, personal finance management, foreign language classes, education support programs, deployment support, and family life education (Lawhorn et al., 2016, p. 191). Most of the assistance seems to target the needs of military spouses, such as the employment readiness program, financial readiness, and consumer advocacy services, but there are also a few programs that target the needs of children and youth. The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) supports family members with special needs. To qualify for this program, a military-connected family member has to have continuous mental, health, or educational needs (National Military Family Association, 2021). This program was developed in the 1980s to support the approximately 16% of military family members who deal with mental, physical, physiological, or educational issues (Brouker, 2012).

The Child and Youth Services (CYS) include hourly, part-time or full-time daycare, preschool, and after-school care, as well as a teen center. The CYS also offer after-school activities and host seasonal and cultural events to target the needs of the diversity of military families. Furthermore, at least one school liaison officer is available to families at each military installation (Lawhorn et al., 2016). Moreover, a vast collection of online support has been developed over the last years, with many available on the MilitaryOneSource website (Lawhorn et al., 2016).

In addition to the Department of Defense's programs directly offered, the DOD has partnerships with private and nonprofit organizations that developed programs and services meant to support and show their support for soldiers and military dependents (Conforte et al., 2017). Despite an abundance of programs, many of these programs are not very well-known and appear not often utilized by eligible recipients (Conforte et al., 2017). Brouker (2012) reported that finding the appropriate service was often the most challenging issue for military dependents

and service members. Besides not being well-known and being poorly publicized, many programs were found to overlap and be poorly organized, with little or no coordination among them.

Due to the direct correlation between parental attitude and the resilience of military-related children identified in several research studies, the Department of Defense has therefore increased funding for additional support in the last decades, but the effects are still not apparent (DeGraff et al., 2016; Geppert, 2017). Nevertheless, one can assume that the increase in the military support systems offered to military families ultimately should have affected military children's psychological and academic well-being. However, academic support for transitioning children has been an ongoing concern of several researchers who studied military children, and these studies have alerted the Military Interstate Educational Compact, which has been trying to offer additional support to transferring military youth (Chandra & London, 2013). While there are many programs available, some have questioned the effectiveness and efficiency of these programs. More research is needed in this field to better understand these programs' overall benefits.

Sonethavilay et al. (2018) issued a comprehensive report after conducting a survey. The researchers recommended that educational gaps caused by relocation still existed and that additional support such as online educational programs or extra training for school staff was needed to alleviate problems that arise during the transition period. The Department of Defense appears to be aware of the harm done to military-related youth and the importance of military families' well-being to its soldiers' mission readiness (Geppert, 2017). Thus, more and more services appear to be offered. While there are very little data available regarding the effectiveness of military support, and the coordination of the support seems to be limited or

almost non-existing, these programs appear to cause counterproductive confusion among beneficiaries (Conforte et al., 2017).

Each post also has a Family Morale Welfare Recreation (FMWR); this service provider oversees and offers activities for families, children, and youth to help them adapt, get integrated, and stay involved in the community (US Army MWR, 2021). One of the programs provided to adolescents who have recently arrived in Italy is Teenvenuti, which is a 5-day workshop that consists of several field trips to cities close to the military base and some basic foreign language instructions (Lucas, 2013). Other programs that are helpful for integration to the American base include Club Beyond, a club that is not affiliated with the US Army but provides support for spiritual well-being, Boy and Girl Scouts of America, and extracurricular activities that are sponsored by the DoDEA schools, which are similar to those that can be found in the United States (DoDEA, 2021; U.S. Army MWR, 2021). While such programs are not directly run by MWR or ACS, they are sponsored and supported by the Department of Defense, with the primary goal of community building (Huebner et al., 2009).

Summary

“An unhappy child never learns as well as a happy one” (Eodanable & Lauchlan, 2011, p. 34). Research studies on high student mobility revealed a negative correlation between frequent moves and academic achievement among high mobile students. For military children, frequent relocation and moving overseas where a different language is spoken was identified to be one of the most problematic stressors. Military children have also been found to be more resilient compared to civilian students who move frequently, and fewer behavioral, psychological, and academic problems have been identified among that population. The effects

of moving overseas on military student academics have not been discussed in the current literature.

Furthermore, no literature exists about the impact of living abroad on learning the host nation's language of military-connected youth. Research studies on studying abroad identified a positive correlation between foreign language fluency and communication skills and spending time abroad. Military students who move overseas are provided with a unique learning environment that cannot be found anywhere else. The purpose of this study was to determine how moving and living in a foreign country affects the foreign language learning of military students and how these students perceive learning the language of their host nation while living.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenology examined the lived experience of DoDEA students who are studying the host nation's language while living abroad. Research in the past has found that studying abroad has a positive impact on foreign language learning, but a negative correlation has been detected between high mobility and academic achievement (Frain & Frain, 2020; Schenker, 2018). No research exists that has been completed examining how DoDEA students perceive living overseas for an extended period while learning a foreign language (Fryer & Roger, 2018). Studying abroad is often limited to one semester, whereas DoDEA students generally spend three years in a host country (Sullivan et al., 2019). The more defined purpose of this study was to examine the effects that living in a foreign country for three years or more have on the foreign language learning of DoDEA student. Chapter Three focuses on the transcendental research design, the setting, the selection methods of the participants, who they are, and how the data was collected, analyzed, and synthesized. Finally, all necessary considerations to ensure trustworthiness, dependability, and ethical considerations are discussed in detail.

Research Design

The design for this study was a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design. Individual experiences and emotions triggered in individuals by living through certain events cannot be quantified, which supports the use of a qualitative research design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenologies are the best option for studies involving personal emotions and subjective perceptions of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This research design was developed by German philosopher Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the 19th century (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl stated that "the pure essence [of an event] can be exemplified intuitively in the data of

experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35). In this design, intuition is used over deduction, as science-based studies often fail to consider the lived experiences of humans (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental phenomenologies, also referred to as descriptive phenomenologies, are used to understand how someone experiences a phenomenon on a deeper and personal level, without including any previous knowledge or bias by the researcher and to empty one’s mind (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). Husserl called this practice *Epoche*, which is also often referred to as bracketing (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). *Epoche* is a phenomenological process in which researchers purposefully set aside all their previous knowledge to be able to “concentrate fully, to listen and hear the participants’ presentations without coloring it with (...) own habits of thinking, feeling and seeing” (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p.20). *Epoche* helps researchers understand a human experience “through unclouded glasses” (Sheehan, 2014, p.10).

The use of transcendental phenomenology was the best approach for my research study since my goal was to describe the lived experience of DoDEA students who studied a foreign language while living abroad. Data were collected from in-depth interviews, reflective letters, and focus groups. These data helped capture the lived experiences of DoDEA students while they were living abroad and studying the host nation’s language. Each student’s perception and perspective on their foreign language learning experience is unique and primarily subjective. I was looking for common themes and patterns that could be used to find an answer to the research questions.

Research Questions

The study attempted to answer these research questions in order to understand what and how the DoDEA students are experiencing learning the host nation's language while living abroad.

Central Research Question (CRQ)

How do DoDEA students describe the lived experience of learning the language of their host culture?

Sub-question One (SQ1)

How do DoDEA students describe their feelings of competence while studying the language of their host culture?

Sub-question Two (SQ2)

How do DoDEA students describe their feelings of autonomy while studying a foreign language?

Sub-question Three (SQ3)

How do students living and studying abroad describe their feelings of relatedness while studying the language of their host culture?

Setting and Participants

All of the interviews, focus group meetings, and document analysis data collection were done online via the use of Zoom, but the setting for this study was a US military base in Northern Italy, where all the participants experienced the phenomenon. Foreign language learning of military-connected adolescents could occur at any base located in any foreign country. My research study focused on this particular base. The focal point was to recruit 12 students who attended and studied Italian at a particular DoDEA high school located at this military base.

Setting

The setting chosen for this study was Caserma Ederle, a US military base that is located in Northern Italy. Caserma Ederle is an Italian military base that is actually under Italian leadership (U.S. Army, 2021). While the base is technically under Italian leadership, it is operated in the same manner as other US Army bases that are located overseas. The base hosts “the U.S. Army Africa Headquarters (also known as the Southern European Task Force), elements of the 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), the 21st Theater Sustainment Command-Italy, the 509th Signal Battalion, the U.S. Army Health Clinic Vicenza, the Vicenza Dental Clinic, AFN Radio, and Television and other units and organizations” (U.S. Army, 2021). Due to this complex structure, the leadership of this base is divided between the Italian base commander and the US Army Garrison Italy Commander (U.S. Army, 2021). The total American population of this military community consisted of 15,875 people in 2018 (US military bases, 2018). This number includes all personnel, dependents, and retirees who remained in the host nation after leaving the service. This base is also the home of three DODEA overseas schools. One of them is the Vicenza high school, in which the participants of this study had taken the host nation's language to fulfill their foreign language credit for graduation (DoDEA, 2019). In 2020, 315 students were enrolled at the Vicenza High School (DoDEA, 2020). The Vicenza High school is the only high school available to students who arrive in this area with their families. The alternatives to sending a student to this school would be homeschooling, enrollment in the international school located about 35 miles away from this base, or enrollment in a local school where students face a significant language barrier.

Caserma Ederle was chosen as the setting because it is where all Americans stationed on this base meet, and all study participants went to school. All the necessary facilities such as a

department store called the post exchange, a grocery store called the commissary, a hairdresser and barbershop, a post office, recreational facilities such as a gym, swimming pool, bowling alley, and movie theatre, as well as DoDEA schools can be found on Caserma Ederle (US military bases, 2018). This location is an optimal setting since it is the home away from home for most Americans, who live overseas, and the site where the shared experience occurs.

Participants

The participants in this study were 11 former high school students, as the number is within the appropriate range for a transcendental phenomenology, according to Creswell and Poth (2018). These participants, who attended the DoDEA high school on Caserma Ederle, a military base in Northern Italy, had taken at least one semester of Italian as their foreign language class at the Vicenza High school. The age of the recruits ranged from 18 to 23. No other demographic limitations existed. The participants were recruited via an announcement in several public Facebook Groups using criterion and snowball sampling.

Researcher Positionality

A researcher's philosophical worldview assumption or paradigm determines the research design a researcher chooses for their research study. The four most common paradigms for qualitative research are "postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 6).

Interpretive Framework

This particular research study was viewed through a post-positivistic lens; thus, the framework followed the paradigm called postpositivism. Postpositivism states that "there is an external, objective reality, but they are susceptible to the complexity of this reality and to the limitations and biases of the scientists who study it" (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 17).

Postpositivists believe that there is one truth that can be found and that specific causes affect certain outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). DoDEA students who study the target language of their host nation have very complex and diverse backgrounds. There is much to be learned about each student as a whole in order to understand how well they learn the target language and what factors could possibly motivate or demotivate them. I was trying to understand the causes of the particular outcomes, which might cause students to do well or not so well in their academic endeavor to learn the foreign language. Understanding how the world works is the basis of this philosophy. Once the reality about something is understood, changes for improvement can be made. That is why I believe it is crucial to understand how the students perceive their situation, how they see themselves, and how they feel about their support system (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

The three philosophical assumptions, ontology, epistemology, and axiology, are important paradigms that influence research studies—the ontological and epistemological approaches combined to determine the paradigm used for a research study.

Ontological Assumption

Ontology attempts to answer the question of what reality is (Bisel & Adame, 2017). Different ontological assumptions address this question, such as if there is only one reality or multiple realities. For this study, the paradigm identified when looking at the combination of what one believes and how knowledge is understood is post-positivism. My belief is that a social reality exists, and while such a reality can be measured, it is not easily done. Bisel and Adame (2017) acknowledged that post-positivists believe that social reality is measurable but challenging. Data must be collected and analyzed following an “intellectual enterprise with a logical coherence” (Bisel & Adame, 2017, p.1).

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology “is the philosophy of knowledge or how we come to know” (Krauss, 2005, p. 758). There are two distinctly different epistemological approaches to epistemology; one is a social approach used for qualitative while the other is an analytical approach used for quantitative research (Given, 2008). Data analysis is independent of the researcher for quantitative research since the collected data are measurable. In qualitative data analysis, on the other hand, the data undergo a meaning-making process before they can be used and evaluated (Krauss, 2005). Researchers are active participants since they are the ones who work through this meaning-making process that assigns meaning to the data that were collected (Krauss, 2005). According to Krauss (2005), conceptualization occurs through the interaction of the researcher and the participants, which allows the researchers to construct meaning in their participants’ lived experiences. Due to the nature of this research study, the social approach was used to understand how DoDEA students experience learning a foreign language while living abroad.

Axiological Assumption

Axiology is the study and the theory of values (Given, 2008). For qualitative research, bias and researcher subjectivity can influence the outcome of a study. Post-positivists are aware of their own bias and subjective point of view. Thus, they have to distance themselves from their previous knowledge and any prepositions they might have to understand the true meaning of what is being studied. For the purpose of transcendental phenomenologies, Moustakas (1994) pointed out the importance of the use of Epoche, sometimes also referred to as bracketing, which is the act of removing one’s prepositions and ignoring one’s knowledge about a particular topic (Bednell, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). Although some researchers use the terms bracketing and Epoche interchangeably, other researchers explained that Epoche is usually applied throughout

the entire research study and considered an “ongoing analytic process” (Patton, 1999, p.408), while bracketing only occurs when a researcher is gathering and analyzing data (Bednell, 2006). The axiological assumption for this research study is that Epoche and bracketing were employed to help remove my personal judgmental values and subjectivity, so the true meaning of what the participants experienced when studying a foreign language while living abroad can be discovered.

Researcher’s Role

For any qualitative research study, the researcher becomes the instrument for data analysis and synthesis since the ultimate decisions on what information will be coded, what data will be included, and how these data will be categorized and labeled (Nowell et al., 2017; Xu & Storr, 2012). As the researcher, I created this study's interview questions, the reflective essay, and focus group prompts. As the human instrument, I analyzed and synthesized the data once they were collected in order to shed light on “chaos and confusion (Patton, 2014, p. 432) while bracketing my own experience and engaging in Epoche, as mentioned by Moustakas (1994).

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of military adolescents who learned a foreign language while living abroad. I have been an Army spouse for 26 years and have lived with my family in four different countries due to my spouse’s military commitments. Our children have attended three different DoDEA schools overseas and were taught the host nation's language each time. During the past 13 years living overseas, I have been a DoDEA employee and worked at different DoDEA schools overseas. My positions were and continue to be an AVID tutor, substitute teacher, as well as special education aide. I have worked with many high school students in their foreign language classrooms. My experience helps me serve as the human instrument for this study since I can relate to the participants (Xu & Storr,

2012). My children went through the process of learning the host nation's language, and I have taught the host nation's language to military-connected students who lived in Italy, so I have been an observer of this phenomenon from the outside. I disclosed to the participants my interest in becoming a foreign language teacher and that I have worked as a foreign language teacher at Vicenza High school for a short time. Some of the participants knew me from that time. My personal interest was the driving force for this study since I am very interested to understand the motivational factors for foreign language learning. As a future foreign language teacher, I intend to learn more about how students perceive foreign language acquisition and whether location makes a difference, whether positively or negatively.

Procedures

Once IRB approval from Liberty University was received, I started the recruitment process, after which data collection started almost simultaneously. Once received, the approval notification was added to the appendices (see Appendix A). The participants were taken from a pool of volunteers who replied to a recruitment post in several public Facebook groups. The participants were selected based on their attributes, which followed the rules of the purposive sampling method. The first step in data collection was in-depth individual interviews with the participants. These interviews were held via Zoom. I video-recorded and transcribed all interviews with the application provided by Otter to ensure that no information was missed. At the end of each interview, I gave each participant instructions on how to write the reflective essay, which they shared with me via Google docs. The prompts are provided (see Appendix C). I simultaneously started with the initial data analysis after the first interview was completed. I developed prompts for the focus group meetings from the codes and common themes from the first interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The focus group should have consisted of six to

seven students. The purpose of the focus group session was to discuss the common themes of the phenomenon.

Data collection proceeded as follows. In week one, I met the participants via Zoom and conducted 35 to 45 min in-depth interviews. After each interview, I took approximately five minutes to explain the document analysis activity to each participant, which was writing a reflective essay in which they should describe their expectations and motivations when they first arrived at the host nation. This essay should be completed and shared with me via Google docs within a week after the interview. The recommended length for the essay was five to seven sentences for each of the three questions. After four weeks of interviewing, the focus groups met. The focus group meeting was 40 min long. After all of the data were collected, the participants received an email with the transcript of their interview attached. The participants were informed that this was the member check process and that they should notify me if they disagreed with any parts of the transcript. The validity of qualitative research studies is increased through member checking (Given, 2008).

Permissions

While the setting was considered Caserma Ederle, a military base located overseas, the participants had only been there, and contact with the participants was made via public Facebook groups. There is no other connection made with this setting than the fact that the phenomenon was observed there. The participants received an informed consent form and were asked to sign and return this form. The IRB approval requires that each participant sign an informed consent form for the study to be valid.

Recruitment Plan

The sample size for this study consisted of 11 former DoDEA students, which is within

the suggested range suggested for qualitative research studies and, in particular, phenomenologies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Klenke, 2016). This number allowed me to attain a rich and thick description of the common phenomenon that the participants experienced. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the appropriate sample size for transcendental phenomenologies should be between five-25 participants. Klenke (2016) suggested that two-25 participants should be selected to achieve saturation.

Sample adequacy is more important for qualitative research studies than the sample size (Bowen, 2008). According to Bowen (2008), the best sample consists of participants with the most significant knowledge and experience about the topic being researched. Therefore, criterion sampling, one of many purposeful or purposive sampling strategies, was employed to select participants. The sample was taken from several public Facebook (FB) groups. The participants were recruited via a virtual flyer posted on FB on different sites that host former and current students from the DoDEA high school located on the Caserma Ederle. Participants were selected purposefully, which ensured that they were more likely to be able to provide information that was rich and thick and could maximize efficacy compared to participants who would have been selected through random sampling (Palinkas et al., 2013). There were specific criteria that the participants had to meet (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For qualitative research, data saturation is not based on the number of participants but rather depends on the “depths of the data” (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). For that reason, Fusch and Ness (2015) warned that researchers should select participants who are able to provide rich and thick data. In general, it can be said that data saturation is reached when additional data do not elicit any new themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Thus, data were collected until no other themes were identified besides those already found, and additional data became redundant and replicated (Bowen, 2008). Since recruitment of

participants was insufficient due to low interest, the snowball sampling method, an alternative to convenience sampling, was employed (Creswell, 2012). Participants, who had contacted me through the first sampling method, were asked to help recruit others who met the qualifications and might be interested in participating. This method is used to reach members of a group who are difficult to reach but who are also interconnected and know each other (Check & Schutt, 2012). Between the two methods, I was able to recruit 11 volunteers.

The criteria for the participants were as follows. Each volunteer had to be between 18 and 23 years old. They had to be either finished with high school or still high school students at the time of the interviews. They had to have taken the host language for their high school foreign language credit for at least one semester. They had to be stationed with their family at Caserma Ederle in Northern Italy at one point within the last seven years. There were no restrictions except that they could not belong to a protected population for IRB purposes. After posting a recruitment flyer and receiving responses, I emailed the respondents to ensure that all the criteria were met. While 12 participants were my target sample to protect this study from a decreased validity due to possible attrition, I was able to recruit 11 volunteers. Once the participants were selected and agreed to participate, I sent them the informed consent form (Appendix F) with the request to sign and return it to me via Email. Simultaneously, I scheduled interview times.

Data Collection Plan

Once the IRB approval was obtained from Liberty University, I started the recruitment process. Before beginning the official interviews, a small pilot study was completed to ensure that my data collection instruments were adequate to produce data that would answer my research questions. For this pilot study, one volunteer who met the requirements was selected. This person did not participate in the final study. A pilot study “is conducted to identify potential

problem areas and deficiencies in the research instruments and protocol prior to implementation during the full study” (Hassan et al., 2006, p. 70). During the pilot study, I conducted the semi-structured interview using the interview guide and asked the mock participant to write a reflective essay. I asked the participant for feedback that might help improve the study (Hassan et al., 2006).

Once the pilot study was completed and adjustments were made, the data collection process began. Epoche was employed and maintained shortly before and throughout the data collection process by writing into a reflexive journal. Epoche is defined as “setting aside prejudgments and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence” (Moustakas, 1994, p.180). For this purpose, I wrote everything I knew about the topic in a reflexive journal before meeting with the volunteers. Epoche, also referred to as bracketing, is a critical process in my case since I have witnessed this phenomenon from an outsider’s perspective. Keeping a reflexive journal is a strategy that is recommended by Tufford and Newman (2010), who state that through self-reflection, a researcher can minimize the effects of one’s own bias by becoming aware and looking beyond one’s “own preconceptions” (p.82). This process was found helpful in gaining a clearer insight and better engagement with the data (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

The data for this study was collected from three sources. These sources included in-depth interviews, reflective essays, and focus group meetings. The one-on-one interviews were the first method to collect data. The interviews were conducted via Zoom. They were semi-structured in nature, informal, and lasted between 35 min to 40 min. Informal interviewing and the use of open-ended questions with the help of a loose interview guide is recommended, so the

participants feel at ease, open up to the interviewer, and provide rich information about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

At the end of each interview, I instructed the participants to answer the three questions in a shared Google document. The participants were asked to take no longer than one week for this task since the focus groups would meet the following week. The focus group meeting lasted 40 minutes and was conducted via Zoom with five participants. Before the focus groups met, I again engaged in the Epoche process by writing about my thoughts in my personal journal, which helped create an open-minded atmosphere. Data from at least three types of different sources are necessary to increase the validity of a study, which is referred to as triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After all the data were evaluated, the participants were contacted via email to review the interview transcripts I conducted with them. I asked the participants to review the transcripts and inform me of any errors. This procedure, called member check, has also been found to increase a qualitative research study's validity since misinterpretations by the researcher can be eliminated (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Individual Interviews (Data Collection Approach #1)

The purpose of in-depth interviews is to enable participants to open up about a phenomenon and reconstruct how they have experienced a particular phenomenon (Seidman, 2006). Moustakas (1994) advised using Epoche before starting the interviews, setting aside all prejudgments to allow the researcher to become an active and unbiased listener. For qualitative research, semi-structured interviews are the best way for novice researchers to gather data since they provide enough structure due to the use of an interview guide, but they also allow the researcher the flexibility to ask additional questions if needed and the interviewee to offer information beyond the original interview questions (Galletta & Cross, 2013; Moore, 2013).

Broad questions should allow the participants to fully disclose their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). All questions from their interview guide should be asked, but they do not have to be asked in the order they are written to allow the interview a more natural flow (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). If other questions arise from the conversation, then more questions can be asked in addition to the original questions (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Semi-structured interviews offer an unfolding interaction in which researchers learn “to understand the world from the subject’s point of view” (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019, p.2).

The following questions were the open-ended one-on-one interview questions that participants were asked during individual Zoom meetings. A copy of these questions is also available under Appendix B. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewees were reminded that the interviews would be recorded to ensure that none of the verbal information would get lost. Recording interviews and focus groups were found to improve the overall data management quality since it allows the interviewer to concentrate on the interview and not be preoccupied with taking notes, which ensures a higher accuracy during the data analysis process (Tessier, 2012). Each interview was between 35 to 40 minutes long, except for one that took almost 80 minutes. The following questions were listed in the interview guide:

1. Please introduce yourself to me and tell me how you felt when you arrived in Italy. CRQ
2. Would you please tell me about the place you call home and all the places you have already lived before arriving here in Italy? CRQ
3. How did you feel about having left your previous home because your family had to move to Italy? SQ3
4. What are your impressions about living here, the country itself, and the Italian people? SQ3

5. What are the most significant differences between your previous school and this school?
SQ3
6. Why did you choose to enroll in Italian rather than another foreign language? SQ2
7. What struggles have you had previously with foreign language classes, and why? SQ1
8. What are your personal goals and expectations for learning the host nation's language?
SQ2
9. How important is it or was it for you to study Italian compared to your other classes, and why? SQ1
10. How have your views on Italy and the Italian language and culture changed since you arrived? CRQ
11. How has your motivation to learn Italian changed since you arrived? SQ1
12. What factors have had the most significant influence on your foreign language learning endeavor? CRQ
13. What do you think is important or unimportant about learning this language? CRQ
14. What language learning strategies are you planning to use in order to help you learn this language? SQ1
15. How often do you go off-base per week, and what type of activities do you do when you are not in the local economy? SQ3
16. When you meet Italians, how do you communicate with them? SQ2
17. How do your family members like Italy, and how do they communicate with Italians?
SC2

Interviews used as data collection tools for phenomenologies are similar to informal, friendly conversations, except that one person asks the questions while the other provides the information

(Evans, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The questions are divided into three parts. The first questions of a semi-structured interview should be broad and establish a good rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. (Bolderston, 2012) Questions one through five allowed the interviewee to open up and talk about him or herself, which is supposed to make the interviewee feel valued (Bolderston, 2012). The information for these questions should be easy to answer for the interviewee since they only have to talk about themselves. By offering this information, the participants should start feeling at ease and overcome any fears or reservations that might exist (Evans, 2018). Semi-structured interviews should be like flowing conversations (Evans, 2018). Questions can be asked out of order, but the researcher has to ensure that each or at least most of the questions are answered to ensure saturation. The answers to questions one through five helped me understand each participant's unique situation, whether they have lived in a foreign country before, and how familiar they were with the military lifestyle.

The middle part of an interview consisted of questions used to answer the research questions (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). After setting the rapport and winning the interviewee's trust, the core questions should be asked (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Thus, questions six and seven were more in-depth questions about foreign language learning, the participant's personal goals, and why they decided to take the host nation's language as a foreign language class in high school. Question eight through 10 asked more about the student and their personal feelings about the new school, life in the new country, and taking the language class, which helped answer the sub-research questions about feelings of autonomy, belonging, and competence. The following questions continued to focus on the research questions, which asked the student about their intrinsic motivational factors and the support that they receive from the school, home, or elsewhere, which would be extrinsic motivation. All the core questions should be asked after the

interviewee feels safe to open up and is more willing to share sensitive information (DeJonckheere, & Vaughn, 2019). The last question returned to the interviewee's narrative and about the interviewee's personal interests. The interview should make it back to the interviewee's story by asking them what type of plans they have and what they might be doing in the future (Galletta & Cross, 2013).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of data analysis is to make “sense out of data” and find answers to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 202). To analyze the data collected from the individual interviews, I used phenomenological reduction to attain a textual description to gain an understanding of what was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction “is not only a way of seeing but a way of listening with a conscious and deliberate intention of opening ourselves to phenomena as phenomena, in their own right, with their own textures and meanings” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 92). Data analysis happened simultaneously with data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). While interviewing other participants, I visited and revisited completed interviews and reread the transcripts generated by Otter to ensure that no statement was unheard while conducting more interviews.

Furthermore, I tried to identify any possible nonverbal cues that might be important, as non-verbal data can be used to help provide a richer description of what has been found (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Through horizontalization, each statement was given equal value and grouped into themes, also referred to as textural descriptions. The next step was imaginative variation, a process that produced structural descriptions from underlying meanings found in the textural descriptions through applying imagination and intuition. I did this for every single

interview. After completing this process, I obtained individual textural and structural descriptions for each interview.

Document Analysis (Data Collection Approach #2)

A reflective essay, similar to journals and diary writing, was employed as a reflective data collection method (Stamper, 2020). These collection methods are helpful as the possible loss of important information due to limited recollection of events by participants is avoided (Bolger et al., 2003). The advantages of journal and essay-writing are that participants are not pressured by time as they are in an interview and focus group session; in addition, participants were found to have a greater feeling of autonomy and anonymity (Meth, 2003; Stamper, 2020). According to Bolger et al. (2003), reflective essays are especially beneficial when the research goal is to obtain “reliable person-level information” (p.582). While reflective letter-writing could be an emotional and painful process, this method is nevertheless helpful in deepening “engagement with these emotional dimensions and gaining insight into (...) others' lived research experiences” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012, p.40). Stamper (2020) cautioned that the participants must find value or enjoyment in this particular activity since it requires a certain amount of effort by the participants. For this study, the participants were asked to answer three questions with five to seven sentences that acted as a reflective essay about their motivation and how it changed from when they first arrived in the foreign country to the day they left.

Reflective Essay Prompt

After the individual interviews were completed, the following prompt was given to the participants. The following prompts can also be found in Appendix C. How would you describe when you first arrived, what expectations you had, and how they changed while you lived in Italy? How would you reflect on your time in Italy regarding your academic achievements,

mainly foreign language studies? How did your motivation to learn the host nation's language change from the moment that you arrived to now and what influenced changes that might have occurred?

Reflective Essay Data Analysis Plan

The data was analyzed following the three steps mentioned by Moustakas (1994), Epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. While setting aside any prejudice, in the process of Epoche, the information provided was read and reread to identify units of meaning, which Moustakas (1994) referred to as horizons. After horizontalization, these found horizons were grouped into themes. From this process, I got the textural descriptions of the phenomenon, which is what was perceived by the participants. Imaginative variation required internalizing in order to identify possible meanings from the textural descriptions, which were then clustered into structural themes. The result was individual structural descriptions of how the participants perceived the phenomenon.

Focus Groups (Data Collection Approach #3)

Focus groups were helpful to participants since they were able to share in a group what they experienced. Some reports from others helped trigger another participant's memories (Check & Schutt, 2012). In focus group meetings, a "variety of perspectives and explanations" about a particular phenomenon can be gathered in a single session (Pickard, 2013). The researcher moderates the discussion after starting with a prompt and ensuring no one dominates the conversation (Edward & Holland, 2013). Similar to interviews, a researcher should engage in the process of Epoche prior to the focus group session to eliminate any biases and abstain from judgment (Moustakas, 1994).

Pickard (2013) suggested that after a short initial brief, the researcher should “say as little as possible” (p.246) to allow silent moments and permit the discussion to be as natural as possible. The format for focus groups is similar to an unstructured interview approach as it is an interview with more participants involved (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). There was one focus group with five participants. Fusch and Ness (2015) recommended that focus groups be between six to 12 members since focus groups need to be small enough to allow each member to participate yet large enough to provide enough diversity. Due to the geographical differences, only five participants were able to attend. The focus group session was held via Zoom after most interviews had been completed and most reflective essays had been written. Setting a date for the focus group was a struggle, as most participants lived in different parts of the US or outside the US. While seven participants had initially agreed to meet, one canceled the day before, and another one dropped out last minute. The length of the focus group meeting was 40 minutes long.

Focus Group Questions

As Patton (2014) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended, the focus group prompts were derived from themes and aspects identified after the initial data collected from interviews and reflective essays were evaluated. After several interviews were completed, I developed the following focus group questions. What would you identify as the most positive aspects about living in a foreign country for three years, a country where a foreign language is spoken? What would you identify as the most significant struggles that you encountered while living abroad for three years? How did living abroad affect how you view different languages and cultures? How did living abroad affect the way you think about foreign language learning?

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis for the data attained from the Focus Group began with the engagement of

Epoche, the setting aside of any prejudice or bias, which continued throughout the data analysis process (Moustakas, 1994). Once the focus group meeting was completed, I visited and revisited the transcripts provided by Zoom to familiarize myself with the data. From the transcripts, statements were identified and given equal value through horizontalization to find textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, the themes were analyzed for structural meaning from which structural descriptions were developed through “clustering structural qualities into themes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 181).

Data Synthesis

After the data from the three different sources, namely the individual interviews, reflective essays, and focus groups, were collected and separately analyzed, subthemes and themes were constructed. The separate themes, namely the individual textual and structural descriptions, were combined during data synthesis. The data synthesis process for this research study was guided by Moustakas's (1994) data synthesis model. Data synthesis is defined as “the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). When the textural-structural descriptions were combined intuitively and reflectively to form the composite textural-structural descriptions, the true essence of the phenomenon revealed itself as experienced by the group of participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be achieved through the presence of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Quality control for qualitative research can be determined through a research study's credibility, transferability, dependability,

and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Studies, which score high on these elements, can thus be considered to fulfill the requirement of trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility is based on three elements: the quality of the data collected, the credibility of the researcher, and the philosophical belief in the value of the research study (Patton, 1999, p.1190). Triangulation of data sources is used to ensure that this study's credibility is high. Triangulation is achieved by combining and cross-checking data from three different sources, which is used to check for data consistency (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation allows researchers to gain deeper insight using different perspectives from different data sources (Moore, 2013). Inconsistencies should be noted and isolated so they can be further investigated, hopefully understood, and finally incorporated into the findings (Moore, 2013).

For the purpose of this study, the three different sources of data were in-depth interviews, reflective essays, and a focus group. To guarantee data saturation, 11 participants were employed rather than five to 10, which was found to help reach saturation. Saturation is achieved through using an adequate sample which for phenomenology is considered a minimum of five and a maximum of 25 (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, all interviews and the focus group were recorded. These recordings are stored for three years since having recordings available for external audits increases a study's validity (Tessier, 2012). After all the data were collected, I emailed the interview transcripts to the participants, which is a process referred to as member checking. This process is a strategy employed to increase the credibility of a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The time in the field is another aspect mentioned by Creswell and Miller (2000) that can effectively increase the credibility of a study. The data collection process took six weeks to complete. Researchers have to determine when data saturation is achieved and continue

collecting data until saturation is reached (Creswell & Miller, 2000), noticeable after five to six interviews for my research study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to “the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents” (Korstjens & Moser, 2017, p. 121). A study is highly transferable if it can be generalized and transferred to another setting or context. Whether a study can be transferred to another context and/or setting is determined by the reviewer and/or reader. Transferability is achieved when research findings are consistent and replicable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For that reason, all prompts for document analysis and focus groups, as well as the interview questions, are made available in the appendices at the end of this dissertation. While the interviews are semi-structured in nature for phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), all interview questions from the interview guide were asked.

Dependability

Dependability shows that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which can be demonstrated through an effective description of the procedures undertaken for the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “dependability and confirmability are established through an auditing of the research process” (p. 256). To ensure dependability for this research project, all notes were kept and available to be audited until the research study was completed, reviewed, and successfully defended. The outline of the different steps taken during the research process was available for review as recommended by Korstjens and Moser (2017). An inquiry audit for this study was completed by reviewing the entire process and the products of this research study by the Liberty University dissertation committee and the Qualitative Research Director.

Confirmability

When there is a clear relationship between the data collected and the findings reported by the researcher, a study can be considered to have a degree of confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Confirmability is achieved through a rich and thick description of what was heard, observed, and learned, so other researchers can come to the same or similar findings as the researcher who conducted the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The following chapters of this research study contain detailed, thick, and elaborate descriptions of the face-to-face interviews, focus groups, and essays that the participants wrote, so readers can decide whether this study can be transferred based on shared similar experiences. Furthermore, data analysis and data synthesis were explained in great detail, which is essential information in order to be able to compare this research study to others that were conducted in the same or similar matter (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

Each research study poses ethical challenges for researchers during the research process. These challenges include “anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, researchers’ potential impact on the participants and vice versa” (Cheraghi et al., 2015, p.1). Ethical considerations for human subjects who participate in research studies should always follow the existing ethical principles and guidelines (Mohd Arifin, 2018). In addition, the safety and well-being of the participants in qualitative research studies could be considered more delicate due to the in-depth nature of the inquiries being conducted (Mohd Arifin, 2018). An IRB approval from Liberty University was obtained before any participants were approached or any data collection process was started. While the degree of vulnerability of participants in research studies varies, all participants had completed an informed consent prior to participation.

Researchers have to ensure that the participants are aware that they can leave the research study at any time and that participation is entirely voluntary. The participants of my research were reminded before each data collection that their participation could be ended at any time and that any information they provided up to that point would be destroyed. In addition, the interviews and focus group meeting did not interfere with classroom time. The identity of the participants was not revealed, and each volunteer received a fictitious name (Check & Schutt, 2012). All information asked was related to the research questions, and the purpose of the research study was only to protect the anonymity of the participants (Cheraghi et al., 2015). Following the recommendation by McCrae and Murray (2008), any information regarding this study was kept in a locked fireproof safety box until the dissertation was completed and successfully defended and destroyed afterward. Audio and video recordings remained on the researcher's password-secured laptop for three years for possible external auditing.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to examine the impact that living overseas has on the foreign language learning of DoDEA students. In this chapter, I discussed the methodology and the design that will be used for this study. This study focused on 11 students affiliated with the military who had taken the host nation's language for high school credit while residing in a foreign country. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, reflective essays, and a focus group discussion, the experience of these students was captured. Data triangulation was achieved by using three different types of data sources, which increased the credibility of this study. A textual and structural description was developed first for each participant during the data analysis, and then combined during data synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). Through intuitive integration of the composite textural and structural descriptions, the overall

essence of the studied phenomenon was obtained, and answers to the research questions were found. This study's overall trustworthiness was enhanced by attaining IRB approval, the process of Epoche, triangulation, and member checking.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research study was to describe the lived experience of military-connected adolescents who learned a host nation's language while living abroad. Chapter Four contains a brief description of each participant, such as their demographics and home environment while living in the foreign country. Furthermore, the themes and subthemes that emerged through the data collection processes and data analysis are listed and described briefly. The reader is also made aware of outliers that were identified throughout the data collection process. Finally, the research questions are revisited, and each question is provided a short answer to give the reader a preview of what to expect in Chapter Five.

Pilot Study

Once the IRB approval was received, I conducted a pilot study with one individual who met the recruitment criteria for this study. First, I scheduled a Zoom meeting to ensure that the software was working correctly and that I had a good handle on the software applications. My location, which was Italy at the time of the data collection, did not provide very reliable and stable Internet connectivity. For the focus group meeting, I thus made the plan to ask all participants to turn off their cameras to avoid any unwanted interruptions.

While asking my interview questions, I realized that many of my questions were compound questions. I did not change the interview guide found in Chapter Three and the appendix, but I made notes to divide these questions, giving the interviewee more time to answer each part of the question separately. The interview time was less than I had initially expected. I also realized that some answers received were without deeper explanations. I added notes to my

interview guide to ask for examples of events that should increase the data's richness and thickness, as well as the interview time.

After the pilot study interview, I realized I needed to find a transcription application as Zoom only provided real-time subtitles. It was also possible to record, listen to, and rewatch Zoom meetings, but the software did not provide transcriptions. A transcription was available for purchase, but due to its limitations, this transcription was not suitable for my research study. Thus, I decided to subscribe to and use the transcription software Otter, which can be found at <http://otter.ai>.

To complete the pilot study, I asked the pilot study participant to write a 300-word essay. After looking at the final product, I noticed that not all questions given in the prompt were answered as anticipated. Thus, rather than having three questions bundled together as one prompt, I divided the prompt into three separate sections, allowing space between each question. I decided to use Google docs instead of asking the participants to email me a Word document, which would allow me to keep track of who had worked on the essay and who had not. The pilot study participant let me know that asking for a 300-word essay made the task seem labor intense. Instead of calling the reflective writing a 300-word essay, I changed the wording and only asked the participants to answer the three prompt questions with five to seven sentences. I could not perform a pilot study for the focus group since there was only one person in the pilot study, and no themes had yet been revealed that were necessary for developing the prompts for a focus group meeting.

Participants

I had initially hoped to obtain a sample size of 12 - 15 participants. The final number of participants I was able to recruit in a one-month recruitment period was 11 volunteers. While I

had several other individuals, who had originally shown interest in participating in this study, some of them either never responded after receiving the informed consent form or told me they did not have enough time after they learned that they needed to participate multiple times in different activities rather than in one single interview.

The participants were recruited from several private social media Facebook groups. Snowball sampling helped with recruiting three of the recruits. Of the 11 volunteers participating, seven were female and four were male. The age range was between 18 and 23, and all participants had graduated high school. Only one of the participants was still living in Italy at the time the interviews were conducted. The other volunteers, who had moved back to the United States, were either attending college, working, taking a gap year, or had joined the US Military. During their time in Italy, seven of the 11 participants had a parent on active duty, three were dependents of a government civilian, and one participant's father had been a contractor at Caserma Ederle.

All volunteers participated in a Zoom interview and answered the prompt questions on the shared Google document before the focus group meeting. Due to different locations, time differences, as well as personal commitments, only seven participants had agreed to attend the focus group meeting at one given time. One participant cancelled one day before the focus group met while another one dropped out a few hours before the meeting started, resulting in a focus group of five participants. During the time of the focus group, which was held via a Zoom meeting, the participants were located in France, Utah, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Ohio, and Italy. The following table illustrates the demographics and parental status of each participant, as well as the number of household members living with the participants during their time in Italy.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

| Name | Age | Gender | Ethnicity | Time in Italy | Parents | Siblings |
|--------|-----|--------|--------------------|------------------|--|---|
| Blaire | 20 | Male | White/ Hispanic | 4 years | Father: Active duty Mother: Homemaker | One older brother, One younger sister |
| Janine | 18 | Female | White | 3 years | Father: Active duty Mother: Homemaker | One younger brother |
| Tina | 22 | Female | White | 4 years | Father: Active duty; Mother: Homemaker last year teacher | One younger brother, one younger stepsister, one older stepsister |
| Steven | 18 | Male | White | 3 years | Father: Contractor; Mother: Italian, but stayed in the USA | 1 younger brother who stayed in the US with the mother |
| Hannah | 22 | Female | White | 2 years | Father: Active duty; Mother: Homemaker | Younger sister |
| Fred | 18 | Male | White | 6 years +4 years | Father: Government Employee Mother: Homemaker | One younger brother, one younger sister |
| Lisa | 22 | Female | White | 3 years | Father: Government Employee; Mother: Homemaker | Two older sisters who lived in the US |
| Ester | 20 | Female | Black | 4 years | Father: Government Employee; Mother: Part-time at USO | Three younger sisters |
| Kate | 21 | Female | White | 2.5 years | Father: Active Duty Mother: Homemaker | Younger brother |
| Anna | 20 | Female | Hispanic | 3 years | Stepfather: Active Duty Mother: Full-time Sales Associate | Older sister and younger brother |
| Bobby | 23 | Male | White | 4 years | Father: Active Duty Mother: Homemaker | Two older brothers and one younger sister and brother |

Blaire

Blaire is a 20-year-old Hispanic male who lived in Italy with his stepfather and mother. His biological father lived in Columbus. Blaire had left Columbus to join his mom when she remarried and lived for several years as a military child due to the stepfather's profession. He moved to an army base in Georgia while he was in elementary school, then to North Carolina, next to Italy, and finally back to Georgia in his sophomore year. After graduating high school, he moved back to Columbus to be with his biological father and attend college. His mother and stepfather continue to be on active duty and move around. Blaire arrived in Italy while he was in middle school and remained there for a total of four years.

Janine

Janine, who was 18 years old at the time of the interview, arrived in Italy at the age of 13. Her mother's nationality is German, but Janine does not consider herself bilingual, and English is her first and primary language. Even though Janine was born in Germany, she reported that she had never lived in Europe before arriving in Italy. She did mention that she had visited Germany several times. Her father was on active duty during her time in Italy. Before the family moved to Italy, Janine had lived in Alaska, North Carolina, and Missouri. She said that she would typically move every three to four years. She attended the last year of middle school in Italy and left the country at the beginning of her junior year at high school level, meaning she spent about three years in Italy.

Tina

Tina was 22 years old at the time of the interview. She arrived during her last year of middle school in Italy after her mom married an active-duty soldier. She moved with her mom and her younger brother to a home in Italy where her stepfather had already lived for at least a

year prior to her arrival, together with her two new stepsisters. She had never left her hometown in Utah before and had never been part of the military before this. Her mom was a stay-at-home mom, but she spent a lot of time as a volunteer at their local church. Tina remained in Italy for four years and returned to her hometown, where her stepfather retired from military service. According to Tina, her hometown offers very little demographic diversity, with most of the population being white and speaking only English.

Steven

Steven was born and raised in Italy. His mom, who is Italian, is originally from Florence, while his father is American and works as a US military contractor. His family left Italy and moved to the states when Steven was five. Besides visiting Italy on vacation, he did not live in Italy until he returned at age 15 with his father, who had followed an employment opportunity. His mother and younger brother remained in the United States. Steven attended the Vicenza High school from 10th to 12th grade. Upon graduation, he moved back to the United States to live with his mom and brother while his father remained in Italy. During his time in Italy, there were restrictions due to COVID-19, resulting in him studying online from home for almost two years.

Lisa

Lisa arrived in Italy the summer before the start of her junior year. Both of her parents are of German descent but became American citizens. Despite her parents' background, Lisa's first and primary language is English. She understands and speaks German, but she feels more comfortable speaking English. Her father had retired from the military, and while they lived in Italy, he worked as a government civilian in Italy. Her mom was a homemaker. Lisa had moved five times within the United States prior to coming to Italy, and while she had visited Germany many times, she had never lived in Europe. Lisa has two older sisters who remained in the states

while the family moved overseas. She lived in Italy for two years, and after graduating high school, she returned to Texas, where she originally came from, to live with one of her sisters. A year later, her parents also left Italy to move to Germany for another assignment.

Anna

Anna's mom remarried before she moved to Italy. Her biological father had also been on active duty, so military life was nothing new to her. Her stepfather and her mother are both Hispanic. She has an older sister and a younger brother, who both moved to Italy with the family. Anna arrived in Italy as a middle school student and left shortly before she finished 10th grade. She speaks fluent Spanish but considers English to be her primary language. While living in Italy, her mom worked full-time at the Post Exchange on base. Anna and her family lived in Villaggio, a U.S. Army housing complex, which was part of the military base and not accessible to Italians. Her middle school was within walking distance because it was located on next to the housing complex. After their time in Italy, the family moved to Alaska, where Anna graduated from high school. At the time of the interview, Anna was attending an Australian university online and was planning to move to Australia for the following semester with the plan to possibly start a life there.

Katie

Katie arrived in Italy from Texas when she was 14 years old. She had just finished middle school and started her first year of high school in Italy. She has one younger brother who was 11 years old and attended elementary school. Her father was on active duty, and her mom was a homemaker while living in Italy. Katie's family resided on Villaggio, the American housing complex located on the military base. All her neighbors were Americans. Katie's family had to return to the United States after 2.5 years during her senior year since her father had to

retire from the military unexpectedly due to medical reasons. She moved to Texas, the place her parents called their home. Katie ended up repeating half of eleventh grade and graduating a year later due to this move.

Hannah

Hannah arrived in Italy when she was 15 years old. She had just finished her first year in an American high school before she arrived, and after completing her sophomore and junior year, she returned to her previous high school for her senior year. Her father was on active duty, and her mom was a homemaker while living in Italy. Hannah had a younger sister who also lived with the family. They occupied a house on the economy. Hannah was actually born in Italy. Her parents had been stationed in Vicenza at the time of her birth, and after they left Italy while she was a baby, they had kept in touch with their landlords. Her mom is originally from Colombia and is fluent in Spanish and French, in addition to speaking some Italian. Hannah was not able to finish high school in Italy due to the needs of the army, and the family returned to the place they had come from during her senior year, which allowed her to graduate from the high school where she had been originally a freshman.

Fred

Fred had arrived in Italy at the beginning of ninth grade. His father was a government employee, while his mom was a homemaker. His mom comes originally from Colombia and speaks multiple languages, including Italian. Fred has two younger brothers. Previous to this arrival, Fred had already arrived in Italy when he was six years old. Back then, his parents decided to enroll him in an Italian elementary school that he attended for four years. For sixth and seventh grade, he went to the DoDEA middle school in Vicenza before moving back to the United States for two years. After that, Fred returned to Vicenza for grades 10-12. The parents

were still in Italy at the time of the research study, while Fred, who had graduated high school in 2021, was attending college in the states. The family lived in a private rental on the economy and Fred and his siblings had attended an Italian elementary school. According to Fred, everyone in the family besides his father was fluent in Italian. During the interview, he was in Italy, visiting his parents for the summer.

Ester

Ester arrived in Italy at the beginning of her junior year. She expected to leave after graduating high school but ended up staying. She was working on Caserma Ederle as a contractor during the time of the interview; it was her fourth year living in Italy. Her father was a government service employee and her mom a volunteer at the United Service Organizations (USO), an organization that provides free supportive services to soldiers and their families. Ester lived in the Italian economy with her parents and two younger sisters during the time of the interview. She was the only one in the family who was interested in studying Italian. Her sister chose Spanish for her foreign language credit. Ester mentioned during the interview that she was hoping to leave Italy the following year to finally be able to attend college in the USA.

Bobby

When Bobby arrived in Italy, he was 14 years old and had no expectations or ideas of what life would be like. It was his first time living in a foreign country. Before moving to Italy, he had lived nine years in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where he had attended the DoDEA school system. Since Bobby had studied Spanish at the Fort Campbell middle school, he continued with Spanish during his first year in high school after his arrival.

After living in the local economy in Italy for a year, however, he decided that it would be good to be able to speak the language and started taking Italian for the remainder of his high

school years. Bobby moved to Italy with his parents and four siblings, two older brothers, one younger brother, and a younger sister. None of his siblings studied Italian in school. Only his mother shared an interest in learning the Italian language. After Bobby graduated from high school, he moved back to the states to attend college and eventually joined the military. During the time of the interview he was stationed in Colorado. He said that he was trying to get stationed in Italy

Theme Development

Once the IRB approval was received, I posted my recruitment flyer on several public Facebook websites. After a few volunteers responded, I scheduled interviews. During and after these interviews, I started coding. The interview process continued for four weeks, in which I found codes that turned into subthemes and themes. By the time I had 10 participants, I scheduled the focus group meeting. Due to geographical constraints, only five participants were able to attend. After the focus group was completed, an extra person contacted me, who I only interviewed and shared the essay prompts. All except three participants answered the essay questions before the focus group meeting.

The entire data collection process lasted six weeks. Table 2 demonstrates what codes were identified repeatedly. These codes were combined to form subthemes, from which the following themes emerged. The themes that materialized from the subthemes were (a) Disappointment in Self, (b) Support, (c) Home, (d) Goals, and (e) Outlook.

Table 2*Theme Development*

| Themes | Subthemes | Codes |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Disappointment in Self | Expectations Anxiety | Unrealistic Want to speak fluently upon arrival Excitement Not good at learning languages Embarrassment Self-Perception |
| Support | Family Military Community Local Nationals | Mother Siblings Teacher Landlord Friends School Neighbors |
| Home | Culture Shock Fresh Start Life on Base | Homesickness A feeling of being left out Strange habits Excitement Adaption |
| Goals | Speaking with the Italians Get By Good Grade | Communicate with the locals Be able to order in a restaurant Be able to go shopping Self-defense Make friends School |
| Outlook | Global Awareness Loss of Interest | Requirement to graduate Moving back to the states Living in isolation Wait and stay on post |

Disappointment in Self (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)

This particular theme was the strongest one, becoming apparent in basically all interviews. All participants expressed a sense of regret that they did not learn the host nation's language better while living in Italy. None of the participants blamed any factors around them; instead, they only blamed themselves. This theme directly answers the central research question by telling the reader how the participants felt about the phenomenon, which was learning the host nation's language while living abroad. Hannah asserted:

So, yeah, my goals were definitely to be able to speak to other people in that language.

And I honestly don't think that I met those goals. But I can't really say that that's the fault of the classroom itself. I had to pin the blame on someone, I would say it was my fault.

Expectations (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2)

Many participants reported that they expected to learn Italian quickly when arriving in Italy. Lisa stated, "Yeah, I mean, I think that was something that I kind of fantasized around was moving over there. I was like, Oh, I'd be able to talk to them, you know?" Hannah explained the reason for her taking Italian was

I think that, honestly, my main motivator to enroll in Italian was that I was in Italy. And I thought to myself, 'Well, I would be foolish not to do that, you know, because I wanted to learn the language of the country that I was living in.' Now, whether or not I did that successfully is a different story.

Anxiety (CRQ, SQ1)

Anxiety was fueled by embarrassment and nervousness, which were mentioned mainly by the female participants but also by one male participant. There was a great worry about how

the Italian people might perceive the participants. Embarrassment and anxieties were mentioned when they were asked about using their learned Italian in public. Katie said that

But I was also, I don't know, nervous about how I was going to be like seen or like how it's going to come across to like Italian people or like, just like people in general. So, it made it kind of hard to be excited when I was nervous all the time.

This feeling seemed to become more profound among some participants, and it increased the longer they had already lived in Italy.

Tina stated, “That was generally the last two years of living in Italy. I kind of stopped because I'm like, oh, that's embarrassing.” Hannah admitted:

“Because I didn't I was, I still am very shy about practicing the language. But when I was in high school, I was very, very, very shy. And so, I didn't want to make any mistakes.” This statement could show that there was a lack of the feeling of relatedness with the learning environment, inside and outside the classroom, which is an answer to sub-question three asking how the students felt about relatedness.

Support (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3)

Support was identified as a theme that correlates with the sub-research questions two and three. These sub-questions asked whether the participant perceived that had a sense of autonomy and whether they felt like they belonged to their surrounding while learning the foreign language overseas. The perception of receiving support for learning, whether from within or outside the classroom was found to increase learning achievement. The participants mentioned several different types of support systems that helped them with their foreign language learning acquisition. Nine of 11 noted that the primary support came from family members who were also studying Italian, while others mentioned that the school provided special events not available

when studying a foreign language domestically. Few stated that members of the Italian community provided help. Tina remembered, “My mom was very persistent about that she labeled the house with words. So, she was trying to be very proactive about it, and trying to understand and telling she'd speak to the guards at the base gate.”

Family (SQ3)

Ten of 11 participants mentioned that either one or more family members were interested in learning the host nation’s language, which supported them. The majority of participants noted that their mothers were the ones who tried to learn the language and showed interest in helping with homework. Janine mentioned, “I guess my mom sort of wanted me to learn Italian really bad, so she would try to help me sometimes if I had like, homework and stuff, but that's the only other person I can think of.”

While this was helpful with gaining a feeling of relatedness, Hannah admitted to the following, “I was so scared to practice. And I relied on my mom to speak for me.” By relying on her mom to get by in the economy, she gave up part of the autonomy over her own situation, which is answering sub-question two for my research study. This subtheme also is useful to answer questions about the student’s feelings about competence which is sub-question one.

School (CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3)

The DoDEA school provided support for foreign language acquisition and for studying in general. The participants agreed that the size of the school helped them feel connected. There were other advantages like being able to make field trips into the foreign culture by just going outside the base. Katie remembered,

we had, like, Italian students come in, come to school and like, learn with us and teach us stuff. And then we also went out to like, the city and stuff and like, learned; we were out

there. And that's something that we had the privilege of being able to do that, like a lot of other schools might not be able to, because I can't just go to like Spain or something or France and be like, Whoa, we're here. Let's learn on the fly, you know?

The size of the school, which was mentioned by all the participants, also made it possible for the students to make friends and feel a sense of belonging within a short period of time. Hannah stated “The smallness definitely helped.” Anna even mentioned that she found American friends quickly, and that there was “no need to make friends outside.”

Local Nationals (SQ1, SQ2, SQ3)

Although the participants reported that they did not have regular contact with Italian locals very much, there were some instances of encounters that were positive experiences and seemed to be helpful in learning the language. Anna remembered the following.

My mom had made a really good friend, Italian friend. Her name is Lorenza or something like that. I would call her Laurie. And a few times, my mom would pick me up from school, and then we go over to her for dinner, and she would help me with Italian homework. Okay, it was like, a handful of times, but she was pretty helpful.

Bobby mentioned that his landlord was his greatest support.

So honestly, my landlord that we had was the biggest help, he really truly was, he had two daughters, and a son at the house. Because right down the road from my house was a small little park with a couple of soccer nets. Or I guess football, as you guys call it. Yeah. Because his kids would be able to translate initially. And so, talking to them, and interacting with them kind of helped me like, get out of the mindset of, I am only going to know Americans here.

Home (SQ3)

When the participants were asked about what place they consider their home, they unanimously answered that this was a ‘very difficult question’ to answer. Even though Hannah mentioned that she was homesick when she first arrived in Italy, her answer to what she considered to be her home was,

That’s a very difficult question. Um, I would say, I would say that where I live now in Virginia is kind of where I'd settled down. Of course, living with a military family kind of everywhere becomes your home, right?

Fred made a similar statement during the focus group: "I don't want to say things for other people. But like, I feel like everyone else somehow feels like families where family is where your home is, you know." Katie on the other hand mentioned in her interview “You know, nothing feels like home.”

Culture shock (SQ3)

The differences in habits, customs, and lifestyles were often mentioned during the interviews and the focus group meeting. While some of these differences were small, might have been small, they were still in the minds of all of the participants. Tina pointed out that the language barrier added to the culture shock.

Since we were living off base, it was kind of jarring to have someone who doesn't understand me. So that was an interesting moment and kind of a culture shock in general, just kind of getting to used to everything after living in the United States for such a long time.

But it was not only the different language that was confusing to the participants. Hannah noted that one culture difference made her feel ill at ease, but that she understood that it was a different

culture. She remembered “Italian people tend to be a little bit more touchy feely than American people.” Blaire posed during the focus group that “it's mostly just like, the culture around everyone. And like, just learning certain things that are normal in the states that aren't normal in Italy, like, tipping in restaurants is not a thing in Italy.” At that moment in the meeting, all the focus group participants either said yes or nodded in agreement.

Fresh Start (SQ3)

While one participant mentioned homesickness, most participants reported being excited to move to a new place. Every single participant stated that they were excited about their move to Italy and did not have negative feelings about moving there. Tina asserted

I was very happy because Utah, especially in small towns in the state, they tend to be very cliquey, and everyone who like grows up, they kind of don't know anything else than that little place. And especially Cache Valley, Utah. It's the province kind of area where I lived. Everyone just kind of lived here and dies here.

Life on Base (SQ3)

Despite the fact that all participants were living in a foreign country, the military base provided a place similar to their home country, America, and the students all seemed to take advantage of this place. Blaire recounted,

I love the culture of food is amazing. I, actually, I didn't spend much time actually, like out there. I didn't really spend much time out on like the economy of Italy. I spent most of my time actually on base.

Tina wrote in her reflective essay, “being in a little bubble of American culture made it difficult to learn the language by immersion.”

Goals (SQ1, SQ2)

The goals upon arrival seemed similar for most of the participants. The majority reported that they wanted to be able to communicate with the local people, make friends with Italian teenagers, and understand what was going on when being outside the military base. For most participants, these goals had changed slightly or more drastically after having lived in the host country for a while. Lisa remembered

When I first got there, I think that there are some times that we would go downtown as a school. And I would hope that maybe I could speak to some Italians or meet some Italians that were my age, or just generally being able to, like go to a supermarket and be comfortable in the area and not have to worry about, oh, I'm an American, I'm not going to be able to, you know, communicate my needs or find what I'm looking for.

Anna quipped, "I figured if I'm in Italy, I'd want to get to know like, maybe talk to some people or at least understand when I'm being asked at a restaurant or something." Katie remembered, "I was a little like overzealous when I first made my goals because I was like, oh, I'm gonna learn Italian, and I'm gonna be fluent. And I'm going to, like, I don't know, it was very unrealistic."

Speaking with the Locals (SQ1, SQ2)

Few participants were more motivated, and their goal stayed the same, which they identified as being able to speak with the locals. The three participants were all male and had slightly different reasons. For one of them, speaking to locals became a goal after living there for a few months for his own protection. Bobby remembered that when he had learned some Italian "it was really, really helpful to be able to verbally defend myself." Another participant wanted to be able to talk to relatives who lived in Florence, while the one who had attended elementary school in Italy wanted to relearn the Italian he had forgotten.

Get by (SQ1)

That seemed to be most participants' main goal once they settled into their new living environment. Getting by was the most common goal for most participants who had never lived in a foreign country before arriving in Italy. While some participants voiced that they originally wanted to be able to make friends and be able to talk, all settled for this goal as a minimum achievement.

Good Grade (SQ1, SQ2)

Attaining a good GPA was in the mind of all of the participants. Nevertheless, while Italian was initially chosen as the foreign language to acquire the skill of speaking Italian, the focus eventually switched to having a good grade. Lisa asserted:

So, learning a whole new language was a little challenging. And there I was like, I realized there would have to be a lot more energy put into it and memorizing everything. And it was easier just to get an A, without actually, you know. Yeah, it kind of became more about the grade.

Outlook (CRQ, SQ1, SQ3)

Most of the participants did not expect to return to Italy. While some of the participants were enthused about Italy and its beauty, they did not mention an intention to return to this country. No one said anything negative about the country and its citizens; some participants said they missed the food. Hannah raved,

And then Italy is a country, the area that I was in Vicenza was beautiful. I, I loved the mountains and the hills. And I mean, it was real. I would go into my backyard, or I would open my window, and I couldn't believe that that was the view from my yard. It felt like

someone had placed a green screen in front of me and was just projecting this beautiful view. But it was real.

Global Awareness (CRQ, SQ1)

Most of the participants mentioned that living in Italy helped them broaden their minds. It was said that some of the habits appeared strange. Furthermore, it also helped them be more grateful for their own culture. Bobby remembered, “In my mind, you have to be thankful for some of the things I have now, such as air conditioning.”

Loss of Interest (CRQ, SQ3)

Most all the participants showed a loss of interest in learning the host nation’s language at one point in their stay, which did not always recover. Anna admitted

when I figured out that I was moving like, a month before I was actually going to move? I kind of was less motivated because I was like, I'm moving anyway. And I don't think anyone's gonna know Italian in Alaska. So, I kind of worked less hard, I would say.

Katie mentioned that

I felt like we were having our own like private world. And like a little bubble. And then like, you'd be okay. Like, you wouldn't have to, like, go out and like do this thing, or like, force yourself to speak Italian or anything like that. Like, it wouldn't be necessary for you to like live, like, you could just like, kind of hideaway and do what you needed to do until you went back to the States.

Janine wrote in her reflective essay, “If I had stayed in Italy a little longer, I would have continued the course, but I did not think it was necessary to force myself to continue learning something I already struggled in.”

Table 3*Themes, Research Questions, and Evidence*

| Theme | RQ(s) | Evidence |
|------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Disappointment in Self | CRQ, SQ1, SQ3 | Katie “I was also excited to make friends with Italian students. However, it was a lot more difficult for me to learn the language than I had expected. While I was still able to learn, it wasn’t at the level I was hoping for.” |
| Support | CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3 | Hannah “And I honestly don't think that I met those goals. But I can't really say that that's the fault of the classroom itself.” Bobby “I learned that many host nations' peoples are very understanding and seemed to enjoy having someone try to learn their language.” |
| Home | SQ3 | Thomas “My family in Italy helped relearn most of my Italian, especially because I was stuck with them during the lockdown.” Katie: “Nothing really feels like home, you know? Because I moved around so much. So, I never really got to establish like, establish myself in a certain place.” |
| Goals | SQ1, SQ2 | Tina: “Being in a little bubble of American culture made it difficult to learn the language by immersion.” Janine: “My goal was just to know basic like vocabulary to have like a normal like real conversation. But I don't think I've really met that goal.” |
| Outlook | CRQ, SQ1, SQ3 | Katie: “Once I arrived I bought an Italian to English dictionary. When I was in the Italian class through my school things got a bit more difficult.” Blair: “I wanted to get by, really, I wanted to be able to just go out on the economy and be able to talk to people, but I wouldn't say like, being fluent in Italian was ever really my goal, because I knew I was going to leave Italy. And I wasn't going to spend like my entire life there.” Ester: I realized that a lot of Italians speak English too. This was true especially around the Military base because there were so many Americans in the area. So, I gave up learning it for a while since I didn’t really need it to communicate |

Outlier Data and Findings

Some participants reported slightly different impressions about their stay in Italy than the majority of the volunteers who participated in my research study. These differences can be explained due to specific circumstances that were unique for those participants.

Outlier #1: Implication of Previous Knowledge of the Italian Language

One participant in the study had lived in Italy when he was younger and had attended an Italian elementary school for several years. This participant felt more at home in Italy than any other participant. To him, relearning Italian seemed very easy when he arrived for the second time during his high school years. He still had friends from his time in elementary school when he returned to Italy. He had lived in Italy for almost 12 years in total. There was a two-year break in the stay. During this time, he attended middle school in the United States. He identified himself as an Italian when he was living in the US. During the Focus group meeting, Fred proudly quipped, “I grew up here, like, I’m the American in the friend group. But like, when I’m in America, I’m the Italian to the friend group. So, it’s like, kind of like, I don’t know, culturally, I do prefer the Italian one.”

Outlier #2: Implication of Being Fluent in Spanish, a Language Similar to Italian

One participant whose parents were Hispanic and were fluent in Spanish reported that her knowledge of the Spanish language helped her with her Italian language acquisition. Since none of the other participants was fluent in another language, especially not in one similar to Italian, this fact stood in contrast to what other students who had previously learned Spanish reported. While Anna stated, “I was fairly familiar already because of my knowledge in Spanish. So, I couldn’t really think of any struggles,” Ester and Hannah noted that having a little bit of Spanish knowledge caused some confusion. Hannah said, “I would kind of substitute a Spanish word

instead of thinking in Italian. And so, in some ways, it helped me to learn Italian, but in other ways, it was a little bit of a hindrance.”

Outlier #3: Implication of the Pandemic Caused by COVID19

The pandemic caused by the Corona Virus caused many students to have a different experience living and learning the language overseas since they were not allowed to attend face-to-face classes, not allowed to go outside their homes for several weeks due to Italian regulations, and finally, even after the lockdown was partially lifted, life in Italy was not the same due to the many regulations such as social distancing, mask mandate, and curfews. The DoDEA school was unable to provide the additional support that had been mentioned by the other participants. Steven explained, “Well, I mean, I can't really say for the field trips because of the fact that COVID happened. Also, I think we weren't planning trips, though. It's just that COVID kind of interrupted them.” Steven had arrived in the winter of 2019, just before COVID started. Since he only stayed in Italy for less than two years, he left Italy before the school went back to face-to-face classes. Thus, he spent most of his time studying as a distant learner. While living in Vicenza, he was unable to leave the house due to Italian restrictions. Steven confirmed, “Right after some break, we went online. Yeah. And then it just stayed online the whole time.”

Research Question Responses

The following section provides brief answers to the research questions supported by in vivo quotes from the participants.

Central Research Question

How do DoDEA students describe the lived experience of learning the language of their host culture? The participants reported that learning the language was more complicated than expected. Most participants recounted that they anticipated acquiring that particular language

more quickly by living in the country where it was spoken. While most of them arrived in Italy with high internal motivation to learn this language and, for that reason, enrolled in the Italian language class at the DoDEA high school, the participants' personal goals changed from speaking with Italians to being able to get by and also to get a good grade. Katie wrote in her reflection

I expected to be able to pick up the language quite easily. I had hopes of being able to translate for my family when we went out on the economy. I was also excited to make friends with Italian students. However, it was a lot more difficult for me to learn the language than I had expected. While I was still able to learn, it wasn't at the level I was hoping for.

Lisa admitted:

So, learning a whole new language was a little challenging. And there I was like, I realized there would have to be a lot more energy put into it and memorizing everything. And it was easier just to get an A, without actually, you know.

Sub-Question One

How do DoDEA students describe their feelings of competence while studying a foreign language? Most participants did not seem to feel very competent speaking Italian, as reflected in the theme Disappointed with Self. While they found that they could understand enough Italian to go shopping in the economy, all the participants, with one exception, reported that they could and should have reached a higher competency level in speaking and understanding the language. The change in their original goals seemed to have been fueled by the feeling of lack of competence. Tina recounted,

I just was like, there's other things that I could be doing more important. So, I think that was the biggest thing was like, I wanted to focus on school and get good grades, because I was getting closer to graduating.”

This led to the theme Outlook, which explained how participants dealt with the lived experience and how they adjusted their behavior to prepare for the future.

Sub-Question Two

How do DoDEA students living and studying abroad describe their feelings of autonomy while studying a foreign language? The feeling of autonomy was present when they arrived as participants reported that they were ready to learn and reached out to find help. Certain statements during the interviews showed that the participants perceived a degree of autonomy when they could get by in their daily lives. Landon recounted, “Learning Italian also benefited my family greatly as we traveled around Europe since I was able to help translate on many occasions such as in Rome, Pisa, or down in Naples.” Since the foreign language skills of nine of the eleven participants were not enough to form any sort of friendships with the local teenagers, most of the participants ended up spending their free time either in their own homes or on the military base. Blaire noted, “I didn't really spend much time out on like the economy of Italy. I spent most of my time actually on base.”

Sub-Question Three

How do DoDEA students living and studying abroad describe their feelings of relatedness while studying a foreign language? The participants connected well with and felt supported by their DoDEA school, which was identical to a typical American school, their families, and other military-connected youths on the military base due to the commonality they shared. The majority of the participants (10 of 11) did not seem to feel a close connection with

the host nation, and it was never genuinely perceived as their home. Learning the host nation's language while living abroad was similar to learning a foreign language domestically. The experience differed from students who studied abroad and felt immersed in the foreign culture despite the amount of time that was spent abroad. Janine wrote in her reflective essay,

With the help of my teacher and a few classmates, I managed to learn the most basic Italian. My biggest struggle was my fear of talking. I constantly had difficulty speaking to locals because I felt self-conscious about my Italian.

Summary

Chapter Four of this transcendental phenomenology described the demographics and backgrounds of the 11 volunteers who participated in this study. The participants were four male and seven female former high school students who all attended the DoDEA high school on Caserma Ederle in Vicenza, Italy. These participants ranged from 18 to 23 years, and all had taken at least one semester of Italian while living abroad. All the volunteers were still in high school and living with their parents or guardians during their time abroad. Of the 11 participants, two lived in military housing, while nine lived in the Italian economy. All except one participant had moved back to the United States when interviewed for this research study.

The themes and subthemes that emerged from the data collection and data analysis were discussed in this chapter. The themes were found through coding the data from the different data collection tools and merging the codes into subthemes. From these subthemes, the themes for this study were derived. These themes were (a) Disappointment in Self, (b) Support, (c) Home, (d) Goals, and (e) Outlook. After explaining the themes and subthemes, the outliers that had been noticed were discussed. These outliers were caused due to extraordinary occurrences such as attending an Italian elementary school, being able to speak Spanish, and the pandemic caused

by COVID, which interrupted the lives of many. Finally, the research questions were restated and answered to prepare and give the reader a brief insight into what to expect in Chapter Five, where the findings will be described and explained in great detail.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research study was to describe the lived experience of military-connected adolescents who learned a host nation's language while living abroad. Chapter Five starts with a discussion of the findings by summarizing and interpreting the themes that emerged from the data analysis. The data received through the data collection process described in Chapter 3 is combined with knowledge gained from the literature review presented in Chapter Two. From there, thematic analysis and synthesis were completed to confer implications for policy and practices. Outliers were identified and discussed. Additionally, this chapter contains the study's theoretical and empirical implications, limitations, and delimitations. Finally, recommendations for future research were made, and a summary was provided.

Discussion

For this phenomenological research study, I interviewed 11 volunteers who had been studying the host nation's language while living abroad as a military-connected student and attending a DoDEA high school overseas. I met with five of these volunteers in a focus group and received a reflective essay in which they each answered three questions via Google Docs. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to capture the experience of these volunteers and describe how they lived through this phenomenon. This section of Chapter Five provides an interpretation of the findings in light of the developed themes used to answer the research questions.

Interpretation of Findings

The following five themes surfaced after analyzing the individual semi-structured interviews, reflective essays, and the focus group meeting with the participants. These themes provide insight into how the participants perceived the phenomenon of learning the host nation's language while living abroad. The themes that emerged were (a) disappointment in self, (2) support, (3) home, (4) goals, and (5) outlook.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The summaries of the thematic findings are presented in the following section. These thematic findings emerged by looking at the data through the lens provided by Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory.

Disappointment in Self. During the data collection process, the participants were asked how they felt about their accomplishments. Most participants took a break before answering as they were sighing. While most of them said they were grateful for the opportunity, they mentioned multiple times that they could have and maybe should have explored the Italian culture more deeply and should have learned the Italian language better. All participants lived in Italy for a minimum of two years and were in close proximity to Italian people during that timeframe. All participants seemed to have felt a certain pressure and expectations from others about their knowledge of the Italian language. Even during recruitment, many potential recruits who had voiced interest in participating told me they would probably not be very helpful because their Italian was bad. Some even declined to join the research study after they realized that this study's focus was foreign language learning.

An interesting distinction between the answers of male and female participants was noticeable. All of the female participants in this study said that speaking Italian had triggered a

sense of insecurity and anxiety, which hindered them from trying to talk with local nationals. The seven female participants mentioned that they feared how people would perceive them if they started speaking and practicing Italian in public. They reported that they barely used the language skills acquired in the classroom due to fear of embarrassment. All female participants mentioned that speaking Italian triggered their anxieties. A study by Alamer and Almulhim (2021) suggested a negative correlation between self-perception of competence and social anxiety. Social anxiety might occur more frequently in language arts classes than in other classes since they require students to communicate (Alamer & Almulhim, 2021). In the 1980s, academic anxiety was mentioned for the first time (Trang, 2011). Researchers started to see that different fields of academics caused different types of anxieties; among those anxieties was foreign language anxiety (Trang, 2011; Yu, 2022). Both findings were noticeable in my study. The female participants noted that they felt not very competent in speaking Italian, which could be a reason for their increased anxiety.

Yu (2022) asserted that negative emotions could hinder or weaken one's foreign learning competence. The anxiety that the participants mentioned might have been foreign language anxiety, which is different from regular anxieties by definition (Alamer & Almulhim, 2021). The anxiety increased as their stay in Italy became longer. According to Djafri and Wimbari (2018), "foreign language anxiety is a situation-specific anxiety arising from the uniqueness of the formal learning of foreign language, especially in low self-appraisal of communicative abilities in that language" (p. 2). This anxiety is mainly triggered during speaking exercises, making learners feel vulnerable to judgment from others, which is different from trait anxiety rooted in someone's personality (Djafri & Wimbari, 2018). As their stay in Italy became longer, the situations where the participants were expected to speak became more frequent. This finding

could be the cause of the reported increase in anxiety correlating with the amount of time spent in the country.

Yu (2022) mentioned that many factors could influence foreign language anxiety. Demographics, including gender, were one of the mentioned factors, with females being more anxious and unconfident than males (Elkhafaifi, 2005). This finding agrees with the results of my research study. All female participants mentioned anxiety and embarrassment during the interviews, while the male participants seemed more frustrated and regretful about their inability to speak. One participant complained that his Italian language skills were never better than that of a toddler. The same participant who had taken three years of Italian said he wished he had taken the next higher Italian class because that was the class where the teacher would have spoken Italian to the students. Since there were no classroom observations possible for this study, it is unclear whether the natural or grammar-translation teaching method was used in the Italian classroom and if the anxiety the participants felt was also present inside the classroom. While none of the male participants mentioned anxiety or nervousness, all mentioned that they had experienced frustration and dissatisfaction with their skills.

After arriving in Italy, 10 of 11 participants reported they were excited and motivated to learn the host nation's language. Djafri and Wimbari (2018) posited that increased motivation to learn a foreign language was correlated with higher foreign language anxiety. This assumption fits well with my findings. One participant recalled that she had purchased a dictionary with her own money before leaving the United States, which she had with her when she left the airplane. But when she entered Italy and met people, she was afraid to say anything.

Deci and Ryan (1985) stated that if a genuine interest in doing a specific task exists, then the motivation behind doing or wanting to do this task could be considered intrinsic or

integrated. Integrated regulation, the highest form of extrinsic motivation, is similar to and equally effective as intrinsic motivation (McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019). At the time of their arrival, 10 out of 11 participants had internalized the idea of wanting to learn the host nation's language. The desire to learn the host nation's language was derived from their internal interests and personal motives, such as wanting to be able to talk to Italians and make Italian friends, which made their motivation integration or at minimum identification (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

This motivation started to decrease when they became frustrated and disappointed with their abilities to learn, which is their competence after taking Italian at school and living in the host nation for a while. The fact that their foreign language skills did not improve after a certain amount of effort was put into learning the language caused their motivation to decrease. Eight participants reported that learning the language was more difficult than expected. The Italian language differed drastically from English, the first language for most participants. According to Pelletier et al. (1999), the inability to connect a task, which was learning the language in this case, with the desired outcome, would cause individuals eventually not to want to perform the task anymore. Studying the Italian language at school did not seem to have the desired result of being able to communicate.

Ali and Pathan (2017) asserted that external factors such as teaching style, resources used for teaching, and the classroom setting, could also cause demotivation. Several participants reported that what was learned in class did not match what was needed outside the classroom. One participant said he wished he could have taken Italian four because, in that class, the Italian teacher was actually speaking Italian inside the classroom, while another participant complained about the seemingly useless vocabulary words taught to them. The learning did not seem to

happen for them, which caused them to have self-doubt in their abilities. Most female participants said in their interview that they were just not good at learning foreign languages.

When looking back at their experience, most participants appeared regretful and admitted that they had not taken enough advantage of the fact that they had lived in Italy, where they could have practiced their language skills. All participants acknowledged that the opportunity to learn a foreign language while living abroad should result in better learning outcomes. All except one noted they had hoped to attain a higher level of understanding which would have helped them to better connect with the country they were in. In fact, 10 of 11 participants recognized that they had failed to establish a connection with the Italian environment and had spent most of their time on post.

According to Ryan and Deci (2020), the lack of feeling related to one's environment can cause the motivation that one initially displayed to decrease. As the participants had two environments to choose from, namely the base or the host nation, they chose the one which was easier to relate to, namely the base where they were familiar with the military culture and where the knowledge of the host nation was not a requirement.

Support. There were different support systems that the participants mentioned. As discussed in the literature review, military children belong to the category of third culture kids who move to foreign countries with their parents or guardians (Dillon & Ali, 2019; Kwon, 2019). Due to this lifestyle, these children are often close to their families (Elliott, 2019). As expected, the number one support that came to their minds was their family members. Most participants, with one exception, reported that at least one family member had shared their interest in learning the host nation's language, from which they drew help and motivation. One participant mentioned that his older brother would tease him, which forced him to work harder, while

another student said upon their arrival, her mom had put sticky notes on all the furniture and items in the house with the Italian word written on them. Nine participants reported that their moms usually helped with the Italian homework to help and learn Italian themselves. These moms were also mainly stay-at-home moms.

The second support mentioned was the Italian teacher and the Italian classroom. The fact that the teacher was a native speaker, which is what the DoDEA schools overseas aim to provide for foreign language classes, was perceived as positive by some since the teacher's expertise and credibility were understood to be high (Svan, 2014). However, the overall perceived support from this source was mixed. Some students reported that the Italian they learned was not meeting their needs to meet the goal of speaking with Italians. Others noted that the Italian 101 and 102 classes were too easy and that they had catered to the purpose of getting a good grade for a foreign language credit rather than teaching Italian for communication outside the base. It was mentioned that classes with Italian students from Italian schools in the surrounding areas visited the Vicenza high school. While the participants seemed to think this was neat, none reported that they actually spoke with these students or that it helped them make connections or form friendships (Ciccotti, 2015). Instead, these arbitrary and unplanned visits seemed to increase the anxiety among some participants about not being able to speak enough Italian.

The last support, which was not mentioned by the participants as support but seemed to be supportive, came from Italian locals who they met either on the base or outside. Some Italians showed either interest in the participants or their parents. This type of support seemed to be the most motivating and provided the most encouragement since it involved making contact with Italians. One participant reported that the landlord was always trying to engage and talk to him whenever the landlord came by their home and that this landlord sometimes brought his children

with him. The participant recalled excitedly several occasions where he talked Italian to the landlord during the interview. Another participant remembered that her mom's Italian friend had helped her a few times with her Italian homework while eating dinner. Both reported that while this happened only a few times, these moments were remarkable. When they retold these accounts, there was excitement in the participants' voices.

Home. Military-related children have difficulty answering the question about where they consider their home to be. When asked, all the participants had to think for a while, and most said that answering this question was not easy. Finally, some offered vague answers such as one of their parents' homes of record, the place they were at the time of the interview, or the place they had lived before coming to Italy. None of the participants considered Italy their home. One participant whose mother was from Germany named Germany her home despite having never lived there. Home to the participants seemed to be a place they longed to have but had not yet found. This finding agrees with the existing literature. Frequent relocation and changing schools numerous times are part of the unique lifestyle of military-connected students (Drummet et al., 2003; Frain & Frain, 2020; Pedersen et al., 2011). Frequent moves can lead to what Elliott (2019) called cultural homelessness, which was apparent among the participants in this research study.

According to Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, one of the essential components to maximize learning is a feeling of belonging and relatedness within one's learning environment. This assertion is valid for all types of learning, including foreign language acquisition. The study participants reported that the DoDEA school they attended while living in Italy had made them feel safe and that they especially enjoyed the small classroom sizes compared to regular American high schools. One of the participants mentioned that the base was

like their ‘little bubble,’ and one could stay there and wait until it was time to return to the states. While military-connected children are part of the third culture kids, most children from this category have to adapt to the foreign country they move to and live in, which is referred to as acculturation (Pedersen et al., 2011).

Military children have the possibility to avoid having to undergo this acculturation process since they are generally part of the military society which offers them opportunities to live like US citizens. The DoDEA schools provide extracurricular activities while there are enough activities, entertainment, and stores available on the military bases, making it possible for military personnel and their families to avoid outside the base altogether (DoDEA, 2020). However, having this possibility appears to nullify the advantages Schwieter and Ferreira (2020) mentioned about studying a foreign language while living abroad. While the participants were exposed to authentic material and native speakers, and experienced closeness to the foreign culture, they also had the opportunity to withdraw from the foreign culture completely, which hurt their opportunity to learn the host nation’s language through immersion (Goldoni, 2013; Kang & Ghanem, 2016; Reid, 2015).

Goals. The participants mentioned different goals and hopes for their foreign language acquisition. They all started with similar dreams during the first months after their arrival: to be able to speak with locals, possibly make friends, and understand what was happening in their surroundings. Italy is among the most prestigious international tourist destinations in the eyes of U.S. citizens, and many romanticize it for its beauty, history, art, and more (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001). Due to its popularity, one of the participants mentioned that she enjoys telling people that she used to live in Italy just to impress them. Most participants remembered that they had felt great excitement and anticipation about moving to this particular country.

After they started taking Italian classes, this goal changed for many, as they realized that learning the language was more challenging than expected. Since the motivation to learn the foreign language had not purely intrinsic but instead integrated and was fueled by the exterior motive, which was being able to talk to people around them, the learning itself did not give them pleasure or welcome challenge. Instead, it was an effort. Once the effort was seen to be too much, a motivational decline was apparent.

The goals were adjusted since the participants were unwilling to put more effort into achieving the original goals. Some participants suggested that their original plan had not been realistic, and thus, they had to adjust their goal. The new goal was less strenuous and seemed more rational. Instead of being able to talk to people, the goal for most participants turned to being able to order food in restaurants and go shopping in stores on the economy. Maintaining a good grade in the Italian class was equally significant for all participants throughout their stay. The third adjustment was made when participants were notified that they would move away from Italy. Most participants' motivation to learn more of the host nation's language turned to almost zero. It was reported that after finding out they were leaving, they did not expect ever to use the Italian language again; thus, they lost all interest in studying the language and worked for a grade until it was time to leave. Working for a grade is considered the lowest form of extrinsic motivation, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), which is external regulation. While the participants initially thought of the Italian class as a support system to meet their goal of learning to speak Italian, this class turned back to being a regular class in high school. Their motivation to do well was directly related to their stay and perception of the country as their temporary home.

The self-determination theory states that the feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for motivation when it comes to learning, including foreign language

learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This theory can be applied well to the phenomenon these military-connected students faced during their time in Italy. Most of them lacked and seemed to have had insufficient help to gain these three components shortly after their arrival.

Outlook. Military-connected students live a nomadic lifestyle and are well aware that time at a particular location is limited (Long, 2020). Consequently, they have to mentally prepare themselves for what is next once they are informed that it is time to move, which usually happens every three years (Elliott, 2020). Military-connected children are said to be resilient since they appear to cope well and adapt quickly to moves and new environments. Chiang et al. (2018) identified three coping strategies. The authors posited that only task-oriented coping is genuinely beneficial while relying on emotion-oriented and avoidant-coping skills could negatively affect a person's life (Chiang et al., 2018).

Several students asserted that they understood that they would live in the host nation for only a certain amount of years, even though they weren't sure how many years that would be. Knowing this made it acceptable to them not to become fluent in the host nation's language. While the original desire had been present, eventually, they settled for what they thought was attainable since they understood they would be moving again. This theme is closely connected to the theme home, an undefined concept for most participants. Although the outlook was equally unsure, the following place location would be a place where the host nation's language would not be needed. As their life in Italy was coming to an end, the focus became getting a decent grade in the Italian class rather than learning a skill they had intended to use for living. Instead, they decided to spend the remaining time on the military base while waiting to leave the host nation. By receiving a good grade, the feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness were fulfilled, and the participants were ready to return to the USA.

Implications for Policy or Practice

According to Masten (2013), the degree of resilience that military children display is based on the support systems in their lives. Furthermore, it was determined that a person's resilience is built during their biological and cultural development (Masten & Barnes, 2018). The most significant support system mentioned by the participants was their family. The second support system directly related to their foreign language learning was the Italian teacher and the Italian classroom operated by the DoDEA. DoDEA schools are located on the base and under the guidance of the US military (DoDEA, 2018). Changes in policy and practice should therefore be made in these areas to help improve the situation for military-connected youth arriving in Italy interested in learning the host nation's language.

The US military provides support for families who move to foreign countries due to military assignments (US Army, 2019). While the US military does not directly interact with military-connected youth before or during a move, it reaches out to the soldier or government employee when providing assistance. One participant mentioned that the family was notified six months before entering Italy that this would be their next duty station. While not everyone might receive a six-month notice before a permanent change of station (PCS) move, there is a specific minimum time in which families can get prepared. Welcome material is available online (US Army, 2019), but preparing the families with foreign language learning material might be helpful to prepare them for the possible culture shock mentioned by some participants. Engaging the entire family seems appropriate, as the participants mentioned that their family was their number one support system. The goal is to improve and strengthen the support system. One participant said that she was so worried about not understanding anyone when coming to the new country that she was afraid to speak anymore at all.

When a child is ill at ease, so is the parent. As mentioned in the literature review, a soldier's productivity is directly related to the quality of his or her family life (Conforte et al., 2017; DeGraff et al., 2016). Reducing the stress level within the family by easing the transition and minimizing the culture shock effect by preparing them for the language barrier would be helpful in allowing the soldiers to work at their highest potential when arriving at their new duty station. The same is true for civilian workers. Currently, there are welcome programs such as Teenvenuti and Benvenuti for arriving children and spouses (Epner, 2017). While these programs are three days long, more support is needed to help overcome the language and culture barriers that military children face when moving to a foreign country.

Implications for Policy

Policymakers, in this case, would refer to the US military and DoDEA schools. The US Military and the DoDEA schools could put policies into place which could help overcome a possible culture shock that families of military personnel face when moving to a foreign country.

During and after WW2, the US Military realized the need and importance for their soldiers to understand the foreign language of the countries that they invaded and even developed a new foreign language teaching method that was supposed to speed up the process of foreign language learning (Kakunta & Kamanga, 2020). Family members who accompanied their military sponsor were seen as US ambassadors who were encouraged to reach out to the host nation, and thus foreign language learning was mandatory for these family members (Alvah, 2007; Maulucci & Junker, 2013).

Although the role of today's military dependent has changed, the need of the soldiers to complete their mission is still the highest priority. Military spouses are still responsible for the soldier's family life, including taking care of the home and children. Completing a move and

being responsible for the new home requires communication skills. Understanding the language and culture of one's surroundings is essential to being productive and efficient. The same is true for military adolescents who often help their parents. Intensive foreign language and culture classes should be offered to military dependents, including their children, already upon arrival. Foreign language learning material could be offered to them once a family receives their orders to the new duty station. While some resources are currently available, none are intensive, which would be necessary to truly prepare the families for settling down and living in a foreign country.

The DoDEA schools could reach out to Italian schools in order to foster relationships between the Italian students and military-related students. Currently, there is little effort from the DoDEA school to form partnerships with the host nation schools to offer military-connected students a possibility to meet local adolescents. While some Italian students visit the DoDEA high school for a day at a time, these visits are arbitrary and not organized to form any lasting connections between students. DoDEA schools changed from reaching out and promoting contact with the local nationals to becoming schools comparable to American high schools that have minimal contact with Italians in the attempt to make transitioning back to the United States once the overseas tour is over easier for students (Alvah, 2007; Maulucci & Junker, 2013). The administration of the DoDEA schools could reach out to the host nation schools, develop scheduled and regular exchanges, and promote contact with the host nation so that the students from both schools could benefit linguistically and psychologically.

Implications for Practice

While the US military and DoDEA schools are policymakers, teachers, guardians, and caretakers directly involved with military-connected youth, implications for practice should be

applied in this area to provide support that could help maximize learning the host nation's language while living abroad.

Host nation teachers are the ones who can make foreign language learning more meaningful by giving the students more autonomy in their learning. Since classroom observations were not possible due to DoDEA IRB restrictions, the only information known about foreign language teaching is the information provided by the participants and what the DoDEA websites publish. From what the participants remembered, not all students who take Italian as a second language are eager to learn how to communicate. Offering different levels of Italian classes would allow the teacher to better meet the individual student's goals.

During the interviews, it was discovered that positive feedback from local nationals motivated the participants. Encouragement from Italian speakers seemed to be very meaningful. More contact with the local economy could be useful, such as frequent field trips, coordinated connections, and writing or physical exchange programs with Italian students that last over several months. Zoom and other internet tools allow people to meet, even when social distancing is required.

Understanding the student's goal is another important aspect of teaching. The goals and expectations for students seemed to change and vary among the students. While some of the students' primary goal was to receive a good grade, other students reported that they wanted to learn the language to communicate. One of the participants pointed out that the teacher did not make a difference between the students' goals and did not use the host nation's language while teaching in the lower-level classes. Another student lamented that the classes were not about learning to communicate. Hannah complained, "I was learning it from the ground up, and I was like, Oh, why are they teaching me baby words? Like, I want to be able to use this." As

mentioned by all participants, DoDEA schools are much smaller than public schools. These class sizes are small compared to regular American high schools, allowing more interaction between teachers and students. The host nation's language teachers could ask the students at the beginning of their foreign language learning journey about their goals and expectations to diversify teaching and better support the individual student reach these goals.

Teaching the different needs would also help students who might suffer from foreign language anxiety. Several female participants mentioned anxiety. Students who suffer from foreign language anxiety are afraid to participate in speaking activities because they fear that they will be perceived negatively (Djafri & Wimbari, 2018). Supporting students and helping them to decrease this anxiety inside the classroom would be essential to motivating them to use their Italian language skills outside the classroom.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The following theoretical and empirical implications were identified through thorough thematic analysis and synthesis of the collected data.

Theoretical

The theoretical framework used for this research study was based on Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory. My research findings corroborate the assumption that by nourishing a learner's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the learner's motivation is strengthened, and the internal desire to do well is increased (Ryan & Deci, 2000). While all participants voiced that they were highly motivated when they arrived, none of their motivation was intrinsic, which made it subject to decrease. Purely intrinsic motivation occurs when a person has a genuine interest and enjoys completing a task. The participants were highly motivated, but their internal reward was extrinsic, namely talking with

Italians. As they struggled with reaching this goal, nine of 11 participants were unable to feel competent. Even earning a grade in the classroom did not seem to help them achieve this feeling.

Throughout their stay, the participants seemed to lose autonomy over their learning. While they were initially in charge of their learning, they gave the autonomy over their learning away by joining the Italian class, which they believed would help them reach their goal. Few students reported that they used any strategy or software on their own to help themselves with learning the language. Once the classes began, they relied on the Italian class, through which they seemed to have lost this feeling of autonomy. Since no classroom observations were possible, it is unclear how far the Italian language teacher helped the students satisfy the feeling of autonomy.

Last, the feeling of relatedness was present in the school and classroom, usually considered the learning environment. However, the environment they lived in and wanted to use the foreign language in was not only the classroom, but also and mainly the host nation country. As a result, the motivation to learn Italian decreased. Little or no external support helped them feel related to the Italian culture and environment they lived in. The few encounters with native speakers (e.g., speaking with the landlord or doing homework with an Italian friend) providing positive feedback were rare but helped spark motivation. Once the participants were informed that they would move, the internal motivation to speak Italian vanished for most of them. External regulation, the weakest extrinsic motivation, remained as their goal turned into earning a grade.

The self-determination theory states that external support is required to help learners meet their needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This phenomenon was seen through the eyes of the students. From the data collected, little external support was noticeable for the participants to have the

feeling of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This fact might explain the loss of interest caused by a continuing decrease in motivation to learn the host nation's language based on the self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci (2000).

Empirical

The wars in the Middle East after 9/11 have demanded more extended and more frequent deployments from US military personnel (Sullivan et al., 2019). These deployments caused more frequent and prolonged separations between soldiers and their dependents. Researchers became interested in how these separations affected the families, including military children, which also sparked interest in other challenges that military children faced, such as frequent relocations, including moves to foreign countries.

The purpose of my study was to describe how military-connected adolescents experience learning a foreign language when living overseas. Frequent relocation was found to be one of the main stressors in the lives of military children, which was correlated to negative effects such as increased anxieties and lower academic performance (Frain & Frain, 2020; Sullivan et al., 2019). My study did not explore whether relocations overseas have a negative impact on a student's academic performance, but my findings were in accordance with Frain and Frain's (2020) assumption that frequent moves cause uncertainty and instability in the life of military students, as my participants mentioned anxiety and a feeling of homelessness despite not being able to tell me where their home really was. While moving seemed to be a stressful event for them, they reported excitement and a feeling of adventure, which Clever and Segal (2013) posited in their study. My study did find that despite the fact that military children are considered to be a subcategory of Third Culture Kids in the existing literature, they do live in their parents' own culture, the military culture, due to the closeness to a military base, which prevents them from

having to have to acculturate with the host nation's culture. Thus, military children do not fit exactly the picture of a third culture kid in the traditional sense, according to the findings by Kwon (2019), who suggested that these kids grow up in the host nation's culture and are typically raised bi- or multilingual.

My study showed that most military children choose to live and spend most of their time on the military base, representing their parents' culture despite its size and limitations, until it is time to move back to the United States. My study shows that military kids, aka military brats, should be their own separate category. In academics, the students all showed motivation to do well in school, especially in foreign language learning.

Although my study did not examine the effects of moving overseas on the overall academic performance of military-connected high school students, the participants did not mention any academic challenges or distress caused by moving abroad, which confirms Engdahl's (2014) statement that most military children cope well with relocations. DeGraff et al. (2016) suggested that the resilience and self-efficacy seen in military children were based on parental support, which my study supports. Whenever parents showed support, the motivation to do well was high. In addition, DeGraff et al. (2016) posited that the military culture, which includes the life on base and the attitude of the military people, was support for military children. This condition was evident since several students said one could simply stay on the military base until it was time to move, and one would be fined for doing that. This fact made military children's lives different from those of students who study abroad and other third culture kids. My study gave insight into the lives of military students who, despite living for several years in a foreign country, do not acculturate. Due to the military culture that surrounds them, it is not necessary to learn about the host country's culture and language while living abroad.

Limitations and Delimitations

The following factors were beyond my control, which caused my study to have limitations. Initially, I had hoped for 12-15 participants. However, I was only able to recruit 11 participants. This number was still within the appropriate range given by Creswell and Poth (2018), which is was five to 25 people (p.149). The participants were located in different time zones during the data collection process. The participants were located in Utah, Washington State, Pennsylvania, Texas, North Carolina, Ohio, Florida, Italy, and France, making a focus group meeting difficult. As a result, only five participants actually attended. The age range was from 18 to 23 due to IRB restrictions, which meant that the experienced phenomenon could have been experienced up to five years before the interview, reflective essay, and focus group, and therefore not fresh in everyone's mind. During the interviews and focus group, several participants preferred not to turn on their cameras, which made it impossible to notice nonverbal cues. For the focus group, I asked everyone to turn off their cameras due to Internet instability which occurs quite frequently in Italy.

Delimitations used in this study were created to make this study feasible and yet meaningful. The DoDEA schools did not grant any IRB approvals during the time this research study was conducted (Research Education Accountability Staff, 2022). For that reason, students who were currently attending the DoDEA school could not be recruited directly. To avoid conflicts, I limited the participants who had graduated and left the DoDEA school system. Furthermore, I chose the age group 18 through 23, so their memory of the phenomenon was still fresh and avoided that too much time had passed since the participants had lived overseas and had participated in the Italian classes. I also limited the participation to students who had attended the DoDEA high school in Vicenza to ensure that the foreign language learned was the

same for all participants and that the military lifestyle, which was the US Army lifestyle, was the same. While there are other military bases in Italy where Italian is taught as a foreign language, these bases are either Air force or Navy bases.

Recommendations for Future Research

My research study explored how military-connected high school students described the lived experience of studying a host nation's language while living abroad. During my research, I found what other researchers had previously mentioned: that military-connected students generally are grossly understudied due to the restrictions made by the DoDEA system and the Department of Defense (Bugaj, 2013; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013). For this research study, I explored the effects of living abroad on their foreign language learning. Little if any literature was found on the impact of living overseas for several years on military children. More research is needed to understand how living in a foreign country for an extended period of time affects military-connected children. For my topic, which focused on the effects on foreign language learning, I found that foreign language anxiety was present only among the female participants of my study. More research could be done in this field to understand how and if demographics such as gender, age, or even ethnic backgrounds might be responsible for foreign language anxiety in military-connected students.

In addition, students who are currently studying might be able to provide fresher and more valuable data. Classroom observations were impossible since DoDEA schools granted no IRB approvals when my research was done (Research Education Accountability Staff, 2022). Classroom observations would be helpful to gain more insight into the phenomenon, as for this research study, only information from the DoDEA websites and the data provided by the participants was available.

The life of military children is still very much misunderstood. Furthermore, military children are a rather diverse group from different backgrounds. While some researchers have determined that military-connected children are more resilient than their civilian counterparts, how this resilience is built remains a mystery. Furthermore, the question of whether this observed resilience is actual resilience or possibly a form of silent resignation might also be argued. More qualitative research has to be done to comprehend the challenges that these children face, not only in general but also based on their demographics as well as the branch of military service, and how these challenges are overcome in order to be able to provide more support.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to answer the central research question: How do DoDEA students describe the lived experience of learning the language of their host culture? In addition, I added three sub-questions based on Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, which states that motivation depends on the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. My literature review demonstrated that not much research has been done to understand how overseas moves affect military-connected adolescents psychologically, socially, and academically. More research has been done to understand how to support military adolescents' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to help them succeed in their academic achievements. Five themes were identified from the data collection process: disappointment in self, support, home, goals, and outlook. These themes corresponded well with existing literature. Military-connected students live a nomadic lifestyle, but military bases make it possible for them to form and belong to their own personal tribe (Geppert, 2017). While literature labeled them as a subcategory of third culture kids, they are, in reality, very

different as they have the military bases that provide for them. Thus, when they move to foreign countries, they continue living the same way and do not need to acculturate with the foreign culture despite living among local nationals in the host nation's economy.

Similarly, there is no real need to learn the host nation's language. Schools on military bases are operated like American schools, and foreign languages are taught the same way they would be taught in the United States. While my study participants reported that they arrived in Italy highly motivated to learn the language and find friends among the Italian people, their motivation soon changed. Without proper external support, they started to believe that learning the host nation's language was challenging, caused them to have anxieties, and was unimportant since their time in Italy was limited. Weber and Weber (2005) suggested that a pattern existed among military-connected children for being conflict avoidant as they retreat until either the problem or they themselves move away. The limitations and delimitations of the study were discussed. Finally, recommendations for changes to current practice and policy that would support students to feel autonomy, competence, and relatedness were given in this chapter as well as recommendations for future research possibilities.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

May 18, 2022

Simone Sweatman
Justin Necessary

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-749 LEARNING THE HOST NATION LANGUAGE WHILE LIVING ABROAD AS A MILITARY ADOLESCENT, A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Dear Simone Sweatman, Justin Necessary,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) 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(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification

submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Interview Guide (Data Collection Approach #1)

1. Please introduce yourself to me and tell me when you arrived in Italy. CRQ
2. Would you please tell me about the place you call home and the places you have already lived before arriving here in Italy? CRQ
3. How did you feel about having left your previous home because your family had to move to Italy? SQ3
4. What are your impressions about living here, the country itself, and the Italian people? SQ3
5. What are the most significant differences between your previous school (where you lived before you arrived in Italy) and the DoDEA school in Vicenza? SQ1
6. Why did you choose to enroll in Italian rather than another foreign language? SQ2
7. What types of struggles have you had previously with foreign language classes or with learning languages in general and why did you have these struggles? SQ1
8. What are your personal goals and expectations for learning the host nation's language? (SQ2)
9. How important is it or was it for you to study Italian compared to your other classes, and why? (SQ1)
10. How have your views on Italy and the Italian language and culture changed since you have arrived? (CRQ)
11. How has your motivation to learn Italian changed since you arrived? SQ1
12. What factors have had the most significant influence on your foreign language learning endeavor? CRQ
13. What do you think is important or unimportant about learning this language? CRQ

14. What language learning strategies are you planning to use in order to help you learn this language? SQ1
15. How often do or did you go off-base per week, and what type of activities do or did you do when you are or were visiting the local economy? SQ3
16. When you meet or met Italians, how do or did you communicate with them? SQ2
17. How do or did your family members like Italy, and how do did they communicate with Italians? SQ2
18. Do you want to add anything? CRQ

Appendix C: Reflective Essay Prompts (Data Collection Approach #2)

1. How would you describe when you first arrived, what expectations you had, and how they changed while you lived in Italy?
2. How would you reflect on your time in Italy regarding your academic achievements, mainly foreign language studies?
3. How did your motivation to learn the host nation language change from the moment that you arrived to now and what influenced changes that might have occurred?

Appendix D: Focus Group Prompts (Data Collection Approach #3)

1. What would you identify as the most positive aspects about living in a foreign country for three years, a country where a foreign language is spoken?
2. What would you identify as the most significant struggles that you encountered while living abroad for three years?
3. How did living abroad affect how you view different languages and cultures?
4. How did living abroad affect the way you think about foreign language learning?

Appendix E: Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

Learning the Host Nation Language While Living Abroad as a Military Adolescent, a Transcendental Phenomenology

- Are you between the ages of 18 and 23?
- Have you studied Italian at the Vicenza High School at Caserma Ederle for at least one semester?

If you answered **yes** to each of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate how high mobility and living overseas affect the foreign language acquisition of military-connected high school students.

Participants will be asked

- to participate in one 35 to 45-minute long individual interview that will be held online via Zoom,
- to write a 350-word reflective essay, to be part of a 45 to 60-minute long focus group, which is also online via Zoom, and
- to review all responses in a process called member checking (15 to 20 min).

If you would like to participate, please direct message me on Facebook via Facebook messenger or contact me at [REDACTED] for more information about the time frame for this study and other requirements such as the consent form.

This consent document will be emailed to you once you agree to participate. This consent document will have to be signed and returned to the researcher via email no later than the time of the interview.

Simone Sweatman, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study. **Please contact Simone Sweatman at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] for more information.**

Appendix F: Consent Form

Title of the Project: Learning the Host Nation Language While Living Abroad as a Military Adolescent, a Transcendental Phenomenology

Principal Investigator: Simone Sweatman, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be between the ages of 18 and 23, and have taken Italian as a foreign language class for at least one semester at the Vicenza High School in Italy. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of living overseas on the foreign language learning of military youth. Former research has shown that high mobility has a negative impact on academic performance. This research wants to see how foreign language learning is affected by moving and living overseas.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things, which will happen over four to five weeks:

1. Participate in a video-recorded virtual interview with the researcher. This should take about 35 minutes to 45 minutes to complete.
2. Write a reflective essay. This should take about 30 minutes to complete.
3. Participate in a video-recorded virtual focus group. This should take about 45 minutes to 60 minutes to complete.
4. Review the data that you provided to ensure its accuracy. This should take about 15 minutes to 20 minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include improvements in support for military youth while living overseas and improvement in foreign language classes taught by Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools overseas.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal risk, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and might be used in future presentations. Hard copy data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. All hard copies will be shredded upon the study's completion
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide 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 choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be 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.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Simone Sweatman. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Justin Necessary, at [REDACTED]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date