



Vaasan yliopisto  
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

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## **Third Culture Kids: Citizens of everywhere and nowhere**

Benefits of growing up global

School of Management  
Master's thesis  
Master's Degree Programme in  
International Business

Vaasa 2021

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**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA****School of Management**

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<b>Title of the Thesis:</b>	Third Culture Kids: Citizens of everywhere and nowhere: Benefits of growing up global	
<b>Degree:</b>	Master of Science (Economics and Business Administration)	
<b>Programme:</b>	International Business	
<b>Supervisor:</b>	Olivier Wurtz	
<b>Year:</b>	2021	<b>Number of Pages:</b> 70

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**ABSTRACT:**

Children who grew up in a country other than their parent's culture are known as Third Culture Kids (TCK) (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Common reasons for this may be the parents' occupation or their desire to move. TCKs are exposed to three cultures based on ethnicity, birthplace, or place they were raised. This background can describe them as citizens of the world. The purpose of this research was to study some of the benefits of growing up global and the skills relevant to the experience. Some benefits and positive effects that are relevant to Third Culture Kids are having intercultural competence, creativity, open-mindedness, resilience, and high performance. The research was carried out as a qualitative study by interviewing six individuals whose background corresponded to a Third Culture Kid. The results were supported by literature, which showed that not only are there benefits to being a TCK, but also several positive influences that are visible in adulthood.

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**KEYWORDS:** Third Culture Kids, culture, diversity, multicultural, creativity, performance, openness, resilience, intercultural competence

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# 1 Introduction

Today's world is becoming more global every day, providing opportunities for people to interact with individuals from different cultures. Globalization and interaction with diverse cultures are increasing and there can be several benefits to having an international upbringing, which will be introduced in this research. Childhood experiences can influence how one behaves as an adult in different environments and the skills developed can impact performance, creativity, openness, and resilience as an adult.

The author chose the following topic because of her personal experience growing up in multiple cultures, as well as noticing the influences as an adult. Multicultural experiences from a young age can transform and change how an individual carries themselves and behaves and having a diverse background can bring opportunities and prosperity once the person decides to settle in one location. Research suggests that positive beliefs on diversity are well known to support members of different backgrounds and take advantage of their differences, for example by reducing conflicts and increasing collaboration. (Homan et al., 2007)

This research paper will focus on Third Culture Kids and some positive outcomes of the individual's experiences. Pollock et al., (2017) defined Third Culture Kids as someone who has spent many years of their childhood away from their parents' culture. For example, the author of this research was born in Finland with both parents being Iranian and having spent childhood between the ages 5- 15 in China, Taiwan, and United Kingdom. Children who are categorized as TCKs are influenced by their parent's culture and the culture they have been raised in. Once they move to a new country with a different culture, this becomes the "third" culture for the child. The TCK forms connections to all the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. According to Kim (2001), "with physical and psychological distance from familiar milieus, strangers are awakened from their taken-for-granted assumptions with a heightened sense of self".

When one steps out of their comfort zone, great development can occur, both personally and professionally.

Studies have also found that multicultural experiences, such as living or studying abroad can enhance creativity. Although this research paper focuses on the experiences of TCKs, multicultural experiences are relevant to these individuals as well. When one interacts with diverse backgrounds, it inspires them to think out-of-the-box and be innovative. According to Maddux and Galinsky (2020), those who have lived abroad could carry out certain creative tasks in comparison to those who did not have abroad experiences. Openness and being willing to become familiar with a foreign culture are also related to enhancing creativity.

Cross-cultural experiences can influence an individual's performance and personal development from a professional perspective. Although this is an advantage, repatriation can be challenging. Other research has also shown that personal development is enhanced after students have spent time abroad as well as boosts their self-confidence, communication skills, ability to think critically, and tolerance for ambiguity. (Hensley and Sel, 1979)

When it comes to Third Culture Kids, the influences can vary as these individuals have often spent a significant amount of their childhood and adolescence in different countries. The cross-cultural outcomes, such as a sense of belonging can become more visible in their adult years. According to the study by Bytner (2012), many adult TCKs have the urge to move frequently instead of staying in one place. This research aims to achieve an in-depth insight into the lives of TCKs, some benefits and positive outcomes of cross-cultural experiences, and how they influence TCK's creativity, performance, and openness. Other benefits and advantages will also be discussed.

There is limited previous research on TCKs which focuses on the different perspectives, advantages, disadvantages as well as the physical and emotional changes that individuals with a global upbringing go through. As international schooling and a global career attract many young adults or those with a background of living in multiple countries, it is essential to gain a deep understanding of the qualities, behaviours, and skills these individuals develop. Schools, employers, and parents with an international career can then understand these individuals better and support their future aspirations.

According to Smith (2019), TCKs are culturally intelligent and open-minded. Additionally, she states that they are adaptive, communicative, exceptional team players and leaders, as well as have the ability to create value. Pollock (2009) has examined that TCKs are sensitive to diversity and inclusions. These individuals are able to put their focus on similarities rather than differences. Strong interpersonal skills are also skills that TCKs develop and use in a diverse work environment. Other skills that Kruse (2012) states in a Forbes article are creativity and flexibility, which are two of the top traits that CEOs look for. This shows how beneficial and appreciated these skills are.

It has been researched that TCKs are adaptive and have a high tolerance for ambiguity. They “can generally approach various changes in their life circumstances with some degree of confidence because past experience has taught them that given enough time, everything will fall into place. This sense that they’ll be able to manage new situations often gives them the security to go take risks others might not” (Pollock et al., 2017). This is closely related to the skill of being resilient, which will be discussed further in this research.

Although previous research has been carried out on TCKs, there is no prior information on the benefits and positive outcomes of growing up global and how these skills are essential in a multicultural environment as adults. The in-depth positive influences are

examined through approaches such as culture and creativity, openness, as well as performance. The above outcomes are selected because they are relevant and relatable to the author, appropriate to measure as well as valued by employees as mentioned earlier.

### **1.1 Research problem**

The need for studying Third Culture Kids is closely related to parents who move to multiple countries due to employment and the effects and transitions their children face. The experiences that TCKs go through during childhood will create their characteristics and skills as an adult. It is important to understand the impact of the TCK phenomenon on an individual and collective level as well as the significance of multicultural experiences. Additionally, the study aims to help younger generations comprehend the advantages that could be gained from growing up globally. Finally, understanding the personal and professional benefits of being a TCK is essential, both the working life as well as in social settings.

### **1.2 Research gap**

Since relocating around the world continues to be a trend, it is essential for employers, managers, teachers, parents, and colleagues to understand the background of TCKs and be able to utilise the value they can add and their diversity of thought. There has been an increase in globalisation and the possibilities to travel (James, 2014) as well as schooling options have become broader, to offer better choices and international curricula in more places (Tanu, 2015). Communication methods have also increased leaving TCKs the possibility to keep in contact with friends who live in any part of the world.

The skills that TCKs acquire may not be recognized domestically nor globally, as many are not familiar with the term “Third Culture Kids” and their backgrounds. Although previous research provides relevant information, it is important to have recent research on the topic. As there are previous studies on the concerns of TCKs, loss, grief, identity development as well as repatriation (Sellers, 2011), this leaves scope to focus on the



advantages and benefits. There is minimal prior research on the benefits and positive outcomes for children with a global upbringing and on those who are categorized as TCKs. With this study, the aim is to provide more understanding and knowledge on TCKs' experiences and how they have had an influence in their adult lives. In this research, several approaches are combined with in-depth literature.

### **1.3 Purpose and objectives**

The importance of this topic can be perceived from the increasing interest in people wanting to experience multiculturalism. People may want to relocate for career or studying opportunities, a desire for change, and a passion for traveling. Globalization and the competence that comes with it are highly valued by employers. Thus, understanding culturally diverse individuals is essential.

The primary purpose of the research paper is to introduce a theoretical framework on Third Culture Kids and some benefits and positive outcomes of childhood cross-cultural experiences. In order to succeed, it will require evaluating different effects and cultural approaches. Additionally, existing studies will be examined thoroughly. This leads to the following research question:

*“What are some benefits of growing up globally for Third Culture Kids?”*

Research objectives are set to provide direction and clarity. The objectives will assist in answering the research question in more detail. Additionally, they will help the reader understand the theme of the research paper. The following objectives have been set:

1. *To identify the qualities and characteristics of TCKs.*
2. *To determine creativity, performance, intercultural competence, resilience, and openness-related benefits for TCKs.*
3. *To analyse the findings of the TCKs interviewed and how the positive impacts are visible now during their adult lives.*

4. *To assess whether the interviews support the theoretical framework.*

To find a solution to the research question, the research paper will study and assess the theoretical framework based on benefits and positive outcomes of growing up global. TCKs and the influences of their multicultural experiences are studied in-depth focusing on different elements. The theoretical framework will consist of approaches related to physical and emotional changes and transitions.

## 2 Literature Review

The theoretical part of the research paper will consist of several approaches. The first part will focus on Third Culture Kids, followed by intercultural competence. The study on culture and creativity by Maddux and Galinsky will also be examined. Lastly, performance, openness, and resilience will be included. The emphasis will be on the impacts and benefits that cross-cultural experiences have on TCKs.

Firstly, the concept of *Third Culture Kids* will be discussed and defined in depth based on relevant theory. This will provide an overview and the characteristics of the main topic of the research paper.

*Intercultural competence* and concepts such as the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) are examined, which focuses on how people experience cultural differences. The theory of the concept will be studied in detail in order to understand TCKs better and how they manage to develop the skill of intercultural competence during their experiences abroad. There are six stages in the model which are, denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. (Cushner et al., 2012) The concept and its relevance to TCKs will also be discussed.

The next concept examined is *culture and creativity* by Maddux and Galinsky (2020). It has been researched that multicultural experiences enhance creativity. To gain a deeper insight in this paper, TCKs and the effects of foreign experiences on creativity will be studied based on theories.

Another important factor related to TCKs is *openness and resilience*. The terms will be defined and discussed how the experiences of TCKs lead to openness and the ability to be resilient in their adult years.

*Performance* and its impact on TCKs is the last element discussed with supporting literature.

## 2.1 Third Culture Kids

The background of the term Third Culture Kids comes from John and Ruth Hill Useem in the 1960s when they saw American expatriate families living in India. They discovered that children developed a third culture that was created from the culture of the home country and the second culture, the culture of the host country. It is common for TCKs to move from country to country and not stay in one place. They grow up assuming to return to their passport country (Cockburn, 2002).

The parents of TCKs have different career backgrounds which lead to having a mobile lifestyle. TCKs are categorized according to their parent's occupation. They are also known as military brats, government kids, meaning diplomat brats, missionary kids, and expatriate brats. (Byttner, 2012) For this reason, many who are TCKs may not be familiar with the term but their background and upbringing indicate them as belonging to this group of people.

There are many components in a child's life that affect their growth, development, and progress. Education is one example. The education of TCKs is international and continuous transitions in changing schools are part of the process. The schools they attend are usually private British or American international schools where TCKs often do not learn the local language (Byttner, 2012). TCKs have the privilege of achieving a unique education through experience. Classrooms and books cannot teach a child in the same way as learning a language or culture in the streets, shops, and being surrounded by it daily. Moreover, TCKs may not realise that they are gaining an education and deep knowledge on many aspects of their lives with only having an international upbringing.

Once a TCK is an adult, they are referred to as Adult Third Culture Kids. (Pollock et al., 2017). There are limited studies on how adult TCKs understand the influences that change in place, culture, and languages have on them when they become adults (Fail et al., 2004; Selmer & Lam, 2004).

However, previous research states that adult TCKs tend to follow the career paths of their parents or become expatriates, giving them the opportunity to continue living globally (Selmer & Lam, 2004). Although, the results from research made by Cottrell and Useem (1999) show that not many TCKs followed their parent's career paths. It can be a natural transition to move around the world as adults since global mobility is often built in for these individuals.

The characteristics of TCKs who have grown up in different cultures include being open-minded, adaptable, accepting towards dissimilarities, as well as strong language skills (Choi et al., 2013). An example of a TCK is former U.S. President, Barack Obama. He was born with an American mother and a Kenyan father and went to an International School in Indonesia for some time. Obama represents a person who has great global awareness, is socially adjustable, intellectually adaptable, has different thinking skills, and is partly restless (Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009). Any TCK can develop these same skills through multicultural experiences during childhood. Although multicultural experiences and skills can be developed during adult years as well, the long-term influences may vary from a person who has been brought up globally since childhood.

There are different characteristics and coping strategies for TCKs. It is common for TCKs to become "global nomads" and continue to relocate as adults, finding a place to call "home". The concept of "home" becomes broader, people become home rather than locations. Another characteristic is patriotism, referring to TCKs feeling global and connected to multiple countries and cultures. Moreover, as they are influenced by many languages, they usually become bilingual, which is a trait that is beneficial during adult years anywhere in the world. Lastly, TCKs have the cultural chameleon skill, they can adapt to new cultures and behave accordingly. (Crosman, 2016)

Moving to multiple countries and familiarising with different cultures during childhood has many advantages as well as challenges from which TCKs can develop and grow. Advantages include having an expanded worldview, cross-cultural enrichment, adaptability, less prejudice, early maturity, and living in the moment. The challenges they may face include confused loyalties, being misunderstood, having a painful view of reality, judging others, delayed adolescence, rootlessness, and restlessness. (Pollock et al., 2017)

Pollock et al., (2017) explain the importance of mobility and why it matters. The benefits of TCKs mobility include the opportunity to travel, independence, many friends, broad options, language skills, and a sense of confidence. Other benefits that TCKs develop are having an expanded worldview, meaning that they understand how people from different cultures view life from a philosophical and political perspective. Another benefit that Pollock et al., (2017) state is that TCKs have a three-dimensional view of the world as well as cross-cultural enrichment. This means that they have experienced the world in many ways and gained deep knowledge on being multicultural through hands-on experiences from a young age.

TCKs develop practical skills during their years in different countries. These include cross-cultural, observational, social, and linguistic skills which are developed and practiced. Although new friendships can bring challenges since changing locations leads to leaving friends and making new ones, the Internet has been the tool for TCKs to keep in contact with friends around the world. (Pollock et al., 2017)

When individuals are surrounded by many cultures from childhood it can lead them to be more inclusive towards differences and accept diversity. Children who are involved in culturally approachable education lead them to build self-confidence, increase awareness and appreciation as well as high academic achievements (“Cultural Diversity”, n.d.).

## 2.2 Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is an important skill when interacting with multicultural people, whether in one's country of origin or abroad. Deardorff and Hunter (2004) describe intercultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes”. Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) refer to intercultural competence being the skill to cooperate with people who have a different language and culture.

Research by de Waal et al., (2020), shows that that TCKs had more optimistic diversity views than non-TCKs. Furthermore, TCKs presented better intercultural sensitivity, communication, and commitment than those who are not TCKs. Throughout the years of childhood and adolescence, TCKs have faced diverse perceptions because of living overseas than have most non TCKs with the experience of just one culture.

The following chapter will discuss three intercultural competence models. The first is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) created by Bennet (1986-1993), the second is the Intercultural Communicative Competence model (ICC) by Byram (1997), and lastly the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) model by Earley and Ang (2003). The concepts and their relevance to TCKs will also be discussed.

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is a relevant theory to the research topic as it consists of six stages regarding experiencing cultural differences. The first three phases are ethnocentric: denial, defense, and minimization. The other three stages are ethnorelative: acceptance, adaptation, and integration. (Bennett, 2017)

*Denial* refers to the denial of cultural differences. This occurs when individuals who prefer stability are in a situation where they must become aware of others, who may be foreigners or minorities. They are not interested in intercultural communication. The second stage in the ethnocentric category is *defense*, which refers to defense against cultural differences. These people are usually critical of other cultures and blame cultural

differences for the troubles of society. They view “us” as superior and “them” as inferior. Resolving the defense stage can be achieved by focusing on factors that the two cultures have in common such as, equal humanity as well as shared values. The third stage is *minimization*, which refers to tolerating some cultural differences. Individuals in this stage accept similarities and tend to deny differences. (Bennett, 1986, 2017)

The next three stages are ethnorelative, meaning all cultures are considered equal. *Acceptance* is the fourth stage in the DMIS theory and refers to people being curious and respectful towards other cultures. Cultures are not categorized into being “good” or “bad” but rather different. The fifth stage is *adaptation*. In this stage, people tend to be empathetic and expand their worldview to adapt and behave in a culturally correct way. The last stage is *integration*. Individuals at this stage have achieved cultural sensitivity and are multicultural. Bennet (1986) states that these people “experience difference as an essential and joyful aspect of all life.” (Bennett, 1986, 2017) The DMIS model allows one to understand worldviews and the change that happens with cross-cultural experience.

The Intercultural Communicative Competence model (ICC) by Byram (1997) is made up of four competencies: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and intercultural competence. The model includes five Savoirs: Savoir, Savoir Être, Savoir Comprendre, Savoir Faire/Apprendre, and Savoir S’engager. The term *savoir* is a French term that means knowledge and understanding. Savoir is the knowledge of self and others as well as the process of interaction in different cultures. Savoir-être refers to having a curious and open approach towards cultures. Savoir Comprendre means the skills of interpreting documents or concepts of another culture. Savoir Faire/Apprendre refers to the skills of discovery of a new culture and interaction abilities. Lastly, savoir s’engager refers to critical cultural awareness and acting accordingly. (Byram, 1997, Byram et al.,2002)



The results of a research made by Szuba (2016) show that young children with a multi-lingual education present skills, attitudes, and knowledge related with Intercultural Communicative Competence. Therefore, the concept of ICC is significant to children and not only adults.

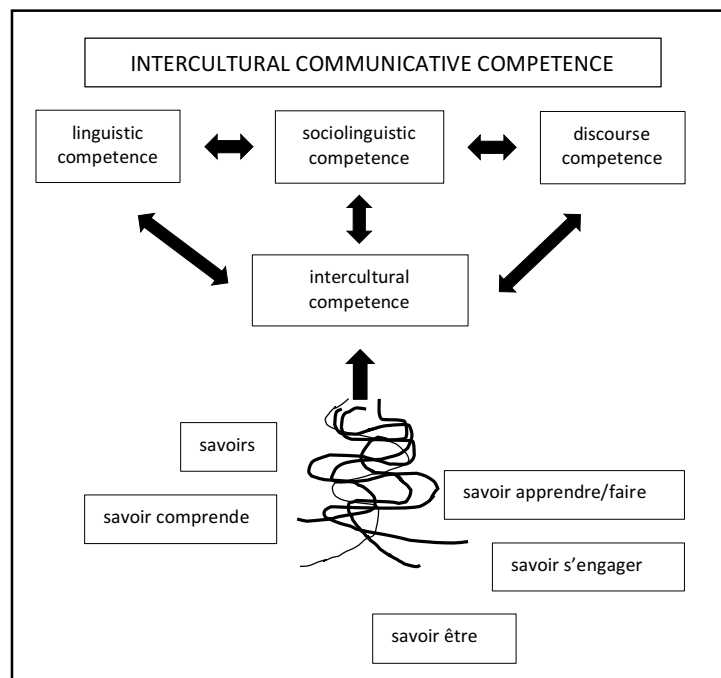


Figure 1: Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997)

The third significant concept is the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) model, by Earley and Ang, (2003). They defined the term as a person's ability to effectively adapt to new cultural surroundings. Ang et al. (2007) explain the CQ as a four feature model with metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural cultural intelligence. Metacognitive CQ refers to the mental skill to obtain and comprehend cultural awareness. Cognitive CQ focuses on knowledge about cultures and cultural differences. The third factor, motivational CQ refers to the interest and effort in performing effectively in intercultural situations. Lastly, behavioural CQ refers to the flexibility of an individual in intercultural settings.

There are differences between cross-cultural experiences and TCKs. Cross-cultural is defined as “dealing with or offering comparison between two or more different cultures or cultural areas” (Merriam-Webster. (n.d.)). Any individual can have cross-cultural experiences whereas TCKs are children with a cross-cultural upbringing. The experiences of TCKs lead them to be cross-cultural individuals.

Intercultural competencies and experiences are relevant to TCKs because they go through different stages when moving around different countries at a young age and are continuously put into new cultures and surroundings. According to Sellers (2011), TCKs share perspectives that are relevant to intercultural awareness from their childhood abroad, including knowledge of different cultures, understanding of cultural influences, and understanding cultural differences. Lam and Selmer (2004) found in research that TCK participants are more likely than monoculture participants to accept international awareness.

Kim et al., (2006) state that developing intercultural competence in childhood is created by increasing consciousness of the diversity of cultures and facing multiculturalism daily. Additionally, discussions on cross-cultural differences support children’s ability to recognize situations in which they can act with more sensitivity towards other cultures DoBroka (2012). Furthermore, the early development of the mentioned skills not only strengthens the identity and knowledge of children's cultures but also advances the development of openness and sensitivity towards others. These are important advantages since stereotypes and prejudices are visible even in very young children (Powlishta et al., 1994).

### 2.3 Culture and creativity

Vygotsky (2004) describes creativity as a “human act that gives rise to something new is referred to as a creative act, regardless of whether what is created is a physical object or some mental or emotional construct that lives within the person who created it and is known only to him”. Maley (2003) describes creativity as “making something new”, “perceiving old things in new ways,” “finding new connections”, or “evoking pleasurable surprise”. Culture is defined by Matsumoto, (1996) as “ the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next”.

When an individual is surrounded by multiple cultures, studies have shown that this increases one’s creativity. According to Maddux and Galinsky (2008), creativity is boosted when individuals live abroad and learn about new cultures. When one is exposed to many cultures it leads to various perspectives (Maddux et al., 2009). Furthermore, people who are more open to experiences value diverse interactions and sustain a positive attitude towards them, which leads to gaining knowledge from these experiences and becoming creative (Leung & Chiu, 2008).

Research also suggests that in early childhood bilingualism leads to enhanced creativity (Leikin & Tovli, 2014). Maddux et al. (2010) discovered that profound knowledge about new cultures was also a key indicator of increased creativity following living abroad experiences. TCKs are evidently in this category of constantly learning about new cultures and developing innovativeness in various ways.

Multicultural interactions influence positively divergent and creative thinking as the skills and knowledge required for creative thinking and performance are established through cultural relationships (Glăveanu, 2010). Additionally, students who had the experience of studying abroad also performed better on creativity tasks (Lee et al., 2012).

Once a TCK is an adult and steps into the working world, they have had the benefit of developing creative skills during their childhood, therefore they fulfil the requirement of being able to be innovative in a position and bring more value into the organization. According to Wrede and Dauth (2020), companies and organizations with international top management teams resulted in higher levels of firm innovativeness compared to firms with only local top management teams. This is another indication of how creativity is a significant part of multicultural experiences.

Creativity is fundamental for increasing professional and personal success (Cheng & Leung, 2012). Furthermore, employees with broad experience in multicultural environments enable them to understand other cultures' views and ways of thinking as well as create new ideas practically and have the ability to solve problems efficiently (Wang & Wang, 2018). One reason why creativity is included in this study is that in a workplace creativity is considered the main success factor for a business (Liu, 2018). Additionally, diversity in the workforce can improve individual and group creativity in comparison to less diverse organizations (Han et al., 2011 & Hoever et al., 2012).

Creativity is relevant to TCKs is because when children are exposed daily to perspectives of two different cultures, they learn that there are often many ways to solve a problem (White, 2015). Furthermore, Shao et al., (2019) state that no one can live well and be creative without the association of culture. This is an indication that creativity and culture can be linked in some way. Lastly, a recent study by Aytug et al., (2018) discovered that multicultural interactions were associated with creativity.

## 2.4 Openness

According to Fuertes et al., (2000) openness to diversity is viewed as “an awareness and potential acceptance of both similarities and differences in others”. This can be shown by expressing beliefs, feelings, and behaviours. Openness is defined as “the quality of being able to think about, accept or listen to different ideas or people” (Oxford University Press, 2021).

TCKs have a strong international experience and exposure to diversity during their upbringing as well as bilingual traits, family diversity, and the personality trait of openness to experience. This may lead to having the curiosity to learn and interact with new cultures in their developmental years, which is coherent with past research on TCKs which suggested that international experiences during childhood can offer skills that today’s employers require.

According to Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000, 2001), there are five dimensions of multicultural competence. These are cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, social initiative, and flexibility. Cultural empathy means to be able to “empathize with the feelings, thoughts, and behaviours” of people from a different culture. The second dimension which is open-mindedness indicates an open and unbiased approach towards different members, norms, and cultural values. Emotional stability is another multicultural competence dimension and is related to the ability to stay calm in stressful situations vs. learning to show feelings in stressful settings. Social initiative refers to approaching social circumstances actively and taking the initiative to speak, lead or interact with other people. Lastly, flexibility suggests the skill to accept uncertainty and adjust behaviour to new situations (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000). All mentioned dimensions are skills that TCKs practice throughout living in multiple cultures and are needed in during their professional life.

Openness to experience is one of the qualities in the five-factor model, also known as the Big Five personality traits. The term refers to individuals who are open-minded and are eager to experience new things (LePine, 2003). They are also described as being imaginative, curious, unconventional, socially tolerant, and fascinated with visual experiences such as art and music (Costa & McCrae, 1992; John & Srivastava, 1999).

A study by Sparkman et al., 2016 confirms that individuals who are exposed to different cultures were rated higher in Openness to Experience as well as showed less prejudice towards cross-cultural groups. Chiu and Cheng, (2007) state that reaching cultural diversity is a “profoundly enriching process that opens minds to new experiences”.

Researchers claimed that individuals with a high tolerance for ambiguity tend to be efficient and manage the stress followed by rapidly changing, uncertain environments, and to be more adaptable and receptive to change (Judge et al., 1999). Moreover, individuals who have spent their childhood in various cultures tend to be more open, accepting, and globally-minded.

When it comes to the traits of TCKs, the typical profile of a TCK is “...someone with a global perspective who is socially adaptable and intellectually flexible. He or she is quick to think outside the box and can appreciate and reconcile different points of view.” It is also stated that TCKs can think diversely and would fit in with the global challenges. (Ruth Van Reken, 2008)

## 2.5 Resilience

Resilience is also a quality that is developed during childhood and among TCKs. There are many factors that can influence a child's resilience, such as the relationship with their family, teachers, friends, as well as stress. According to Grotberg (1995), resilience can be defined as a universal ability that enables individuals, groups, or communities to avoid, reduce or overcome the destructive effects of adversity. Cloninger (2013) describes resilience as having the "strength to survive stressful situations; being able to bounce back from stress which contributes to emotional well-being". Additionally, there are qualities in being resilient that promote successful adjustment and transformation despite risk and adversity.

Some Reasons why TCKs can come across as more resilient than non-TCKs are that they "adapt, find niches, take risks, fall and pick themselves up again" (Useem, 1963). TCKs do not choose their circumstances, as all changes that occur during their developmental years are due to their parents' decisions. Therefore, developing resilience can happen naturally and TCKs learn to accept the challenges they face.

From a cross-cultural perspective, the perception of resilience suggests the ability to "bounce back" from difficulties (Rayner & Montague, 2000). Morano & Cisler, (1993) state that children with social support, strong relationships, and a sense of inclusion, are more resilient. As TCKs build many relationships during their years abroad in various schools and environments, they are exposed to developing the skill of becoming resilient. Gunnestad (2006) states that culture is a resource in resilience and developing skills in children is an effective way of improving their self-image.

Grotberg's Model of Resilience (1995) is made up of three categories which are, ('I HAVE'), ('I AM'), and ('I CAN'). In the table below these are explained in more detail. The following actions promote resilience and can be carried out during different stages of childhood and their development.

<b>'I HAVE'</b>	<b>'I AM'</b>	<b>'I CAN'</b>
Trusting relationships	Loveable	Communicate
Structure and rules at home	Loving, empathic, and selfless	Solve problems
Role models	Proud of myself	Manage feelings
Encouragement to be independent	Independent and responsible	Assess the temperament of myself and others
Access to health, education, welfare, and security services	Hopeful, with faith and trust	Seek trusting relationships

Table 1: Grotberg's Model of Resilience (1995)

Resilience is relevant to TCKS because of their ability to manage change and obstacles and face new people and environments quickly becoming a norm. When an individual is living in a new environment with a different culture, it requires them to adjust to unfamiliar settings. This can lead to uncertainty and stress. Resilience is developed during times of adversity. According to Brooks & Goldstein (2004) resilience is when one is dealing effectively with mistakes, seeing them as “experiences for learning and growth”.

A resilient person is someone who has power over their own experiences, using the ability to reflect on challenges as a basis for further development. Once skills are developed during childhood, they tend to stay during the adult years. Moreover, when TCKs become open and resilient during their years abroad, they carry the skills with them into their lives when they are grown up.



Children who are resilient tend to be empathetic and able to understand the feelings of others. They are often good communicators who can resolve problems as well as have an interest in education and learning new things. They want to reach their goals and are optimistic about future endeavours. Lastly, resilient children tend to have a stable relationship with one or more adults (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007).

## **2.6 Performance**

Performance is defined as “the act of doing something” or “how well an activity or job is done” (Cambridge University Press, n.d). Previous research suggests that CEOs with international experience perform better in multinational organizations, particularly in highly internationalized organizations (Daily et al., 2000; Carpenter et al., 2001).

Positive outcomes that TCKs have when they are an adult is an increase in their performance level either professionally or generally. Their international experience and exposure to multiple cultures in childhood create a cross-cultural competence in them that leads to their success if they follow an expatriate’s path as an adult. (Selmer & Lam, 2004; Caligiuri et al., 2009).

According to Biemann & Braakmann (2013), multicultural experiences influence positively individual performance. Those who have worked abroad have resulted in having higher salaries than those who have not. Although, these individuals are adults working abroad, the possibilities for TCKs to work globally when adults are likely. Additionally, research confirms that multicultural experiences affect firm performance.

When it comes to job performance, it is evaluated depending on the requirements of the job, the firm’s goals, mission, and beliefs about the behaviours that are most valued. Performance refers to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and motivation towards the given roles job responsibilities (Sonnentag et al., 2008). Research shows that job performance is a multidimensional concept that consists of Task performance, meaning that all actions

and activities of an employee must be formally performed during the work based on knowledge and facts of the principles relevant to the job performance. (Bess, 2001).

Contextual performance refers to non-job aspects of the job, such as relationships with nationals from the host country (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004), and lastly, Assignment specific performance, relates to a specific assignment (Caligiuri, 1997).

Intercultural competencies are valued in a workplace and seen as an asset. Research suggests that the success of global leaders' actions was affected by experiences with strong interactions in cross-cultural leadership development. Additionally, they found that intercultural experiences impacted positively one's professional or personal life by being more flexible and tolerant of ambiguity. (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2009, 2012, 2016) Research shows that individuals with higher Cultural Intelligence (CQ) are likely to perform their job more successfully as they are more capable of adjusting themselves to new cultural situations (Tsai and Lawrence, 2011; Ramalu et al., 2012).

Research confirms that diversity increases innovation, fosters higher quality decisions, and boosts economic growth. This lets multicultural groups react effectively to dynamic contexts and unexpected challenges (Page, 2007). Another outcome of performance is that multiculturalism helps individuals present greater work engagement (Plaut et al., 2009) and accomplish higher academic results (Walton & Cohen, 2011).

Lam and Selmer (2004) mention that adult TCKs can offer skills in a workplace that other employees may not be able to. When it comes to an expatriate career, a company tends to offer cross-cultural training and assists the employee for life overseas, and ensures cultural awareness. However, it is challenging to know if the training and lessons are fulfilled to the standards in practice. This would not be an obstacle for a TCK, as they have the experience of adapting quickly to new cultures. If a firm hires a former TCK, companies and international offices would benefit from their experiences and skills brought to the team and this will enhance firm performance. This is also a way to decrease a firm's expenses when cross-cultural training is not necessary.

Lam and Selmer (2004) state that “former TCKs may be close to the ideal business expatriates” because of their experience in other countries before becoming an adult. Lastly, performance is relevant to TCKs because it is developed through cultural interactions (Glăveanu, 2010).

Students with diversity in their education have an influence on their performance (“Benefits of Diversity in Schools”, n.d.). Additionally, the performance of students who attend racially integrated schools is significantly higher than those students from racially segregated schools (Massey & Fischer, 2006).

## 2.7 Propositions

From the literature review and theories presented, it can be assumed that due to a multicultural upbringing, Third Culture Kids are positively influenced by culture and creativity, level of performance, intercultural competence, openness, and resilience. Thus, the following propositions are created.

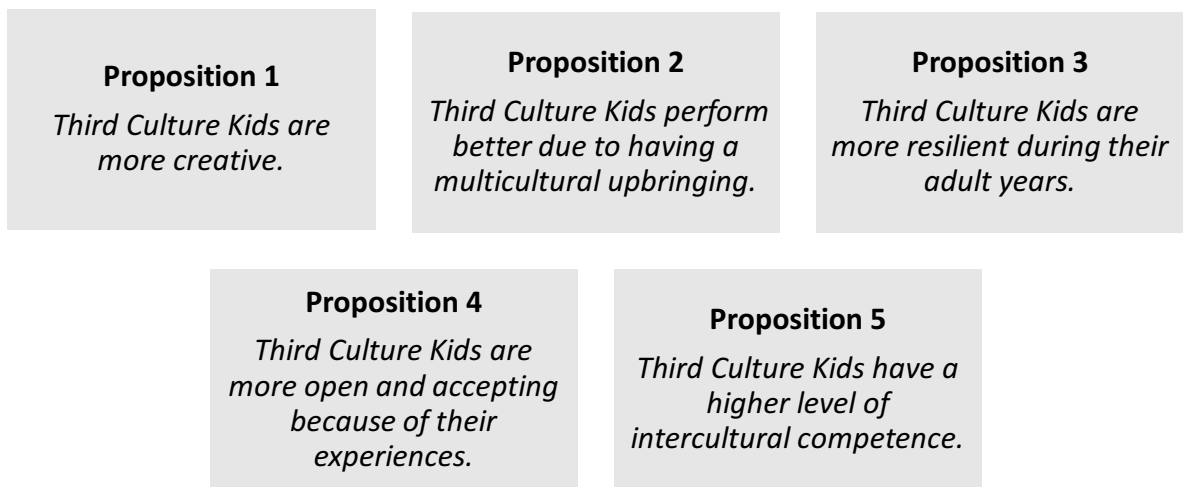


Figure 2: Propositions

### **3 Methodology**

The following chapter will focus on the research philosophy, approach, and strategy, and the method chosen followed by the data collection, data analysis, and lastly on the reliability and validity of the study.

There are different research methods and the two most common ones are qualitative and quantitative methods. A qualitative research method consists of collecting data from respondents built on their personal experiences and outlooks. A quantitative research method can be used when there is prior data on the research topic which can be measured. Generally, qualitative research aims to describe data using words, whereas quantitative research measures data numerically and cause-and-effect relationships of different aspects in a phenomenon. (Kumar, 2011)

#### **3.1 Research philosophy**

When conducting research, there are choices and approaches needed to be selected. Saunders et al., (2007) created a research onion that has of six layers. The first layer is about the research philosophy. Then it focuses on the different research approaches, research strategy, choices, time horizon, and lastly techniques and procedures.

Research philosophy is important to have in mind when selecting a method. According to Saunders et al., (2007), research philosophy is defined as a term associated to the development and nature of knowledge. The three types of research philosophy are epistemology, ontology, and axiology. Epistemology is based on assumptions and human knowledge. Ontology is based on the realities encountered and lastly, axiology is based on one's beliefs that impact the research method. Each view also has different philosophies attached to it. These are positivism, interpretivism, realism, and pragmatism. Positivism is fact-based and generally used in quantitative research. Realism can be used in qualitative and quantitative research and focuses on a scientific approach. Pragmatism is based on multiple methods and finding practical solutions to a

problem. In this research, the selected philosophy is interpretivism, which focuses on one's thoughts and views and the influences of social and cultural factors. The knowledge is based on one's interpretations. In this philosophy, the researcher is also part of the study. (Saunders et al., 2007) Interpretive philosophy is related to qualitative research since the researcher needs to understand the subjective and socially constructive meaning of the phenomenon studied. The reason for selecting interpretivism for this study is because the experience, views, and opinions of the participants interviewed will help answer the research question.

### **3.2 Research approach and strategy**

The research approaches are deductive and inductive. In a deductive approach, a theory and hypotheses are developed with a research strategy where the hypotheses are tested. In this study, the approach is inductive, which refers to collecting data commonly in a qualitative way and analysing the data to form a theory. Observations are included in this approach. (Saunders et al., 2007)

The research strategy in this study is exploratory. Saunders et al., (2007) explain the exploratory study as a valuable means to ask open questions to achieve insights on an area of interest and to understand an issue or problem. An advantage of exploratory research is that it is flexible and adaptable to change. Additionally, exploratory research can have a broad focus but then become narrower as the research progresses. As this research is exploratory, semi-structured interviews are a useful method to gain a deep insight into the explanations and decisions the interviewees have, as well as to comprehend the reasons for their shared opinions. Semi-structured interviews provide the interviewer with the opportunity to explore further with open-ended questions.

Since the goal of the study is to understand TCKs and their benefits of growing up global, this research paper will be carried out as qualitative research, with semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Semi-structured interviews will allow flexibility and the responses of

every individual give a deep insight into their experiences of growing up globally in multiple cultures.

### **3.3 Data collection and analysis**

The data collection method was carried out as face-to-face semi-structured interviews with adult TCKs during August 2021. The length of the interviews was from 20 minutes to 60 minutes. The participants selected for the interviews were some of the author's friends and others were contacts found through a friend. As the author has an international background, finding and recruiting participants for the interview happened naturally without complications. The interviewees were approached either through social media or email to schedule an interview. The criteria for the selection of these interviewees were that they had to be exposed by three different cultures from their childhood, either by having parents from two different countries and having been raised in a different country or by living in several countries that were different to the ethnicity of their parents.

Six individuals, five female and one male whose background confirmed them being adult TCKs were interviewed to get their insight on how cross-cultural experiences have influenced on them while growing up as well as the benefits of their global background. These individuals were all located in different parts of the world. The interview questions were prepared in advance, but not sent to the interviewees as the discussion is aimed to be natural. When some close-ended questions were not elaborated, the author asked the interviewees to explain in more depth. Some preferred to share ideas and perspectives in more detail whilst others kept answers shorter. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and then transcribed exactly into text for the data analysis.

The author sorted the collected data into a table to simplify general information about the interviewees. From the table below, the background of the participants confirm that they are TCKs. After this, the author categorized similar themes and observations and included interviewees' quotes under each theme.

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Age</b>	28	29	31	30	25	27
<b>Birth country</b>	Botswana	Scotland	USA	South Africa	Canada	USA
<b>Passport country</b>	Botswana	British, Canadian	USA	Australia, South Africa	Canada	USA
<b>Parents ethnicity</b>	Iranian	Iranian & Scottish	Syrian	South African & Indian	Iranian	Iranian
<b>Current career</b>	Civil engineer	Principal in Global Technology and Services (Consulting)	Architect	Lawyer	Medical graduate	Architectural intern
<b>Places lived in parental care</b>	Botswana, Australia	Taiwan, Singapore, Canada	USA, Abu Dhabi	South Africa, Australia	Canada, Taiwan	USA, Abu Dhabi
<b>Languages spoken</b>	English, Farsi	English, Farsi	Arabic, English	English, Zulu	Farsi, English, Mandarin	Farsi, Arabic, English

Table 2: Participants of the research



### **3.4 Limitations, reliability and validity**

The research aims to provide new perspectives and approaches to existing literature, however, there are limitations in this research. The main limitation is research bias since the author is a Third Culture Kid and she can use her background and personal views. Another limitation is that only six individuals were interviewed therefore results cannot be generalized. Additionally, in interviews, individuals understood questions and terms differently, which can lead to scattered or unclear answers.

The reliability and validity of this research have been evaluated to understand the quality of the research. Reliability refers to “the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings” (Saunders et al., 2007, p.149). Saunders et al. (2007) state that there are four dangers related to the reliability of research which is “subject or participant error, subject or participant bias, observer error, and observer bias”. Furthermore, to ensure reliability in research it is essential to have trustworthiness and quality (Golafshani, 2003). Interviews were carried out through Zoom and interviewees’ names were not published, so participants could freely express their opinions.

The validity of research “is concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about” (Saunders et al., 2007, p.150). The threats to validity are “history, testing, instrumentation, mortality, maturation, and ambiguity about causal direction” (Saunders et al., 2007). As only six interviews were conducted, this could impact the validity of the results. However, the theory used in this research is adequate and in-depth. Validity was also ensured by presenting the topic of this research to the interviewees beforehand as well as using clear questions during the interview. Additionally, evidence of the findings is included in this study.

## 4 Findings

The following chapter will provide the results and analysis of the semi-structured interviews. The background of the participants is presented in a table in chapter three. The findings will be based on the research question and objectives are presented in themes to give a clearer understanding of the responses given by the participants. Additionally, the propositions made in chapter two will be briefly overviewed. Although the participants are TCKs based on their background and upbringing, the term was unfamiliar to some. For this reason, the concept of Third Culture Kid was explained at the beginning of each interview to ensure clarity. One similarity between all participants was that their parent's ethnicity was different from the places that they had spent their childhood. The aim achieved was to find individuals who have been exposed to three cultures or more from childhood. The next parts will include quotes from the interviewees and an analysis of their responses.

The findings are divided into seven themes based on the responses from the interviewees.

- Benefits and advantages of being a TCK
- Developed intercultural competence
- Improved creativity
- Developed openness
- Becoming resilient
- Professional performance
- Positive impacts

#### 4.1 Benefits and advantages of being a TCK

Some benefits and advantages of being a TCK include ability to be adaptive, interact easily with different cultures, be more open-minded, empathetic, bilingual and have high communication skills ("The benefits of being a third culture kid", n.d.). In an article by Poornima (2018), other benefits of being a TCK are feeling at home anywhere in the world and not experiencing culture shock. Furthermore, research shows that TCKs are four times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than non-TCKs as well as 40% of TCKs earn advanced degrees compared with 5% of non-TCKs (Useem & Cottrell, 1999). This shows that TCKs find education and developing academically important.

From the interviews, participants revealed that there are plenty of benefits and advantages of being a TCK and how the experience has brought opportunities, perspective, and skills during their adult years. Responses were similar between the participants and concepts used in the literature review such as openness and resilience were mentioned before asking about them separately during the interview.

Friendships and wider networks around the world were another benefit mentioned that has had an influence during adult life. The ability to handle emotions from a young age was also a skill that was developed. TCKs manage to show social patterns of being less emotional, keeping distance in social settings, and moving quickly without creating intimacy (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, Stultz, 2002).

*"I now have friends that live all over the world, which I think is such a benefit. Whenever we go traveling there's people that I know in different countries. I also think you have much more of an appreciation to other cultures. I think also you are probably more resilient as an individual because at a young age you get used to your friends moving to different countries and you do become more resilient and less emotional, you just get so used to it. " – Interviewee 2*

*“It gives you a lot of perspective on the world. It definitely adds some flavour to life. I am spiritually enlightened and financially I’m ok and most importantly my attitude is positive.” – Interviewee 1*

Language skills were a significant benefit for some of the participants. They mentioned that they can translate as well as interact with more people in several languages. This has led to succeeding in their career now as an adult and having strong communication skills. TCKs have a bigger view of the world since they have been exposed to more countries than most individuals. Additionally, they have a perception of international matters, are communicative and are generally self-sufficient, disciplined, independent, and can speak many languages (Perkins, n.d.).

*“I’ve had opportunities to be helpful. If I need to translate across languages or communicate, I could use my language skills. I’ve also been able to understand people better and communicate.” – Interviewee 6*

*“You get exposed to more cultures and you are more open minded. I get to get more friends because you can speak more languages so you can talk to more people. It also helped me get my current work place.” – Interviewee 3*

Another important benefit mentioned was gratitude and determination. When one is exposed to many cultures from a young age and sees the world from different viewpoints, it helps them understand cultures and build relationships as well as accomplish their goals.

*“I would say my social and cultural literacy is really strong. I’ve had a good perspective and understanding of gratitude. I don’t take little things for granted. My level of determination to succeed and it has helped me create connections with a lot of people.” – Interviewee 4*

The ability to have the flexibility and not be ignorant during adulthood and thoughts on how one can teach their future children these skills were benefits mentioned by one participant. These are skills that can help unite individuals from different cultures and backgrounds.

*“So many benefits. It helped me gain a more holistic view of reality of and the world, and see the differences in cultures and elements that are the same and bring us together. The opportunities are really endless, the world is your oyster. You have the flexibility of moving anywhere. You can offer raising your children this way, not being ignorant.” – Interviewee 5*

## **4.2 Developed intercultural competence**

Intercultural competence was a term that had to be explained before the interviewees could respond to the question. Once they understood the definition, they stated that it was a skill that they considered helpful and assists them to be open, accepting, and understanding towards different cultures. This skill has been developed through their TCK experiences according to the interviewees' responses.

Based on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) model, the interviewees of this research have assimilated the ethnorelative stages, which are acceptance, adaptation, and integration due to their multicultural experiences and backgrounds. Those without the experience or background of a TCK may be more ethnocentric, which includes denial, defense, and minimization against cultural differences. From research made by Choi and Luke (2011), TCKs were ethnorelativists, showed acceptance and awareness to diverse values and worldviews, empathized with people who were culturally different, as well as demonstrated flexibility in diverse cultural settings with their intercultural communication skills. The participants interviewed understand and accept different cultures better because of their international upbringing. Additionally, the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) model, which includes metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural cultural intelligence are visible in the responses of interviewees.

As one of the participants who lived in Asia during her childhood, she is extremely familiar with the culture and understands what is acceptable and what is considered offensive. The benefits of having lived in Asia are visible during her current position in her career.

*“Yes, Definitely. Even little things, like we have clients based in Japan and I know that hierarchy is really important there and face is important there but my peers don’t know that.” – Interviewee 2*

*“When you are from different backgrounds and different cultures you develop a sense of understanding. You have to adapt. You have to be accepting and mindful of other cultures.” – Interviewee 1*

When one has intercultural competence, they can relate to cultures, be accepting, open, and have the knowledge of different traditions and people’s outlooks. This is needed especially if one’s career is global or they work in an international team or organization. The literature on intercultural competence discussed earlier is closely applied to the responses of participants on having developed the skill of being interculturally competent.

Selmer and Lam (2003) indicated that TCKs were more open than the non-TCKs when it comes to internationally relocating, following an international career, traveling, and having an interest in different languages. TCK’s international focus was more relevant to intercultural competencies. This was also confirmed by interviewees.

*“For sure, accepting towards different cultures. Open to cultures, more accepting, their traditions and views. I can relate to many cultures.” – Interviewee 6*

*“I really enjoy learning about different cultures. I would say all cultures have some kind of similarities.” – Interviewee 4*

Even though the skill of being interculturally competent is gained from being a TCK, it is yet a skill that should be developed also during adult years. One of the participants attended international schools where people were from different cultures. This leads to having the desire to comprehend others.

*“Yes. It’s a skill everyone needs to continue to work on. I went to an international school where I had many identities, so it was easier to relate to people from different cultures. Also, just wanting to understand more about other people.” – Interviewee 5*

### **4.3 Improved creativity**

When it came to creativity, participants considered themselves creative due to their multicultural upbringing and experiences. Some mentioned working in a creative field, which also shows that being a TCK may enhance creativity.

Creativity is a wide concept and can be understood in many ways. One participant mentioned being creative with problem-solving and innovative with ideas. This is a skill that is appreciated by many employers and is considered beneficial (Craig, 2017). When employees and students from different cultural backgrounds are brought into the same team, it leads to a multicultural experience that can make individuals effortlessly become better at creative problem solving (Leung et al., 2008).

*“I wouldn’t say I am a creative person but I think where it has helped me is in problem solving and thinking about situations in different perspectives whether that be from different culture or thinking about new ideas and how to fix something.” – Interviewee 2*

*“Absolutely, a lot of ways. It could start with just having a simple conversation. You have to approach it from a creative angle because this person is used to something different than you are. My mind has been exposed to different places so it inspires you to be more creative just from observations.” – Interviewee 1*

Multicultural experiences increase creativity in many ways. It allows people to become free from their preferences (Chiu & Leung, 2007). According to Baumgartner (2010), “diversity is the key to creativity” and multicultural teams produce more creative results than teams that are from the same culture. Both Interviewees 3 and 6 work in the architectural field and consider their experiences of being a TCK to improve their creative skills. Another participant mentioned having a creative hobby. These are all examples of how a multicultural upbringing enhances creativity during adult years.

*“Yes, definitely. I’m more open to other cultures and I am an artist so I’m creative in nature. I’m able to integrate different cultures into my life. I don’t feel like I’m from one place, I feel like I’m from everywhere.” – Interviewee 6*

*“Definitely, I work now in a creative industry.” – Interviewee 3*

*“Yes, I write poetry as a hobby. I think I do have a really strong influence because I’ve grown up overseas, that awareness of the human experience.” – Interviewee 4*



#### 4.4 Developed openness

Most participants considered that their experience as a TCK has developed openness. Additionally, skills such as, ability to be accepting, inclusive and understanding were mentioned. The skill of openness for some participants meant having the ability to have empathy and learning to enjoy other cultures. Rockson (2015) also confirms that TCKs are more open-minded with different cultures.

Embracing differences in cultures demands strength of character, knowledge about openness to the other and action that is driven by respect and interest in those who are culturally different. Individuals who enjoy learning about the worldview of culturally diverse people tend to show more openness. (Fowers & Davidov, 2006)

*“Being able to empathize with people, regardless of gender, position in life, class, religion. I’m more accepting and inclusive because I am from so many places.” – Interviewee 6*

According to McAllister and Irvine (2002) empathy can possibly promote openness, attentiveness, as well as positive relationships.

*“I have a really strong sense of empathy from my upbringing. I can talk to different cultures, I enjoy celebrating cultural festivals and learning about them, which comes from my experience.” – Interviewee 4*

Leaving comfort zones is a skill most TCKs learn because of moving to different places with different cultures from a young age. They learned to pursue new experiences with an inclusive attitude. When one is comfortable with people from different cultures, it does not suggest abandonment of one’s background. It is the capability to value one’s own culture as well as be comfortable with those who do not share the same opinions (Fowers & Davidov, 2006).

*“Definitely, you learn the good qualities of cultures and you have an understanding why people behave in a certain way. You get this attitude of wanting to be inclusive, leaving your comfort zone and expanding your horizons.” – Interviewee 5*

From a study by Leung et al. (2008), it was found that to achieve a creative benefit from multicultural experiences, it is significant for individuals to not only be exposed to different cultures but to also make specific rational and behavioural adjustments as well as be open and welcoming to new experiences.

## 4.5 Becoming resilient

Gunnestad (2006) states that some children who grow up with many risk factors may not do well as adults, while others could develop and live comfortably despite all the risks they were exposed to as children. Additionally, Gunnestad (2006) claimed that “those who master the rules and norms of their new culture without abandoning their own language, values and social support seem more resilient than those who just keep their own culture and cannot adjust to their new culture or those who become highly acculturated”. Resilience is essential to children’s and adolescents’ well-being because with resilience one is more skilled to overcome hardships and difficult life situations as well as growth-related challenges (Clauss-Ehlers & Lopez Levi, 2002).

Most participants considered being resilient because of their background of being a TCK. Some mentioned the skill being beneficial in the working place and having the ability to move around the world as an adult without it feeling overwhelming. Handling uncertainty indicates the ability to appreciate uncertainty and the complexity of multicultural surroundings as a prospect for personal development (de Waal et al., 2020).

*“I think it’s the biggest benefit, is resiliency. You realise the value that now that I have been working. I have been able to progress really quickly throughout my career and get promoted but I think its because I am so resilient and it stems from the environment I have grown up in and being in uncertain places and moving to new cultures. Third Culture Kids have more so than anymore, hands down is the trait of resiliency. And you really benefit from when you are an adult and working.” – Interviewee 1*

*“Yes very much so. When you are exposed to different cultures, you always need time to adapt and adjust so you then become more patient especially with yourself.” – Interviewee 2*

For some, the skill of resilience was not chosen but rather it happened forcibly from the situations they were put in during childhood. Moving around and adjusting to new cultures can naturally improve one's resilience. From childhood, TCKs acquire to be resilient and adapt to new conditions because of going to several different schools (Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2014). Although for most interviewees resilience was developed because of the experiences from childhood, research suggests that for a child to be resilient, the family or community must be resilient as well (Ungar, 2006).

*"Yes, I think there was a lot of resilience that came forcibly. It wasn't voluntary." – Interviewee 4*

*"Yes. I can be put into different situations and be ok with it. And moving to a complete new country is not as daunting now as an adult." – Interviewee 5*

## 4.6 Professional performance

Performance felt like a broad concept to some participants, however, it was specified to professional or personal performance, and that assisted with answering the questions on developing performance. Responses were similar and interviewees felt that their experiences and schools lead them to perform better now as an adult.

International schooling can influence one's performance as the schools were demanding with high expectations from students. This led to one of the participants having the desire to do well in the working environment. The upbringing of a TCK can have a strong impact on how they succeed in their careers as adults and consider their childhood and schooling experience the reasons for the benefits of high performance. Moreover, a study by Buriel et al. (1998), shows that biculturalism contributed positively to academic performance.

*"I think it has really benefited my performance but it's a result of living quite a privileged Third Culture life. Going to really good schools where the bar is very high and having lots of opportunities. The schools that I went to demanded great results essentially so I now see that more so being working in a professional career for five years, my expectations and how I perform is much higher than maybe some of my peers. I do think it's from the environment that we grew up in."- Interviewee 2*

*"Knowing more languages has been helpful and people have been impressed with that."  
– Interviewee 3*

*"You pick up qualities and characteristics from different cultures. For example, Taiwanese students are very disciplined and going to Europe to study where people are very free and sitting in front of a desk is a struggle, I had the advantage to be able to sit through lectures." – Interviewee 5*

## 4.7 Positive impact

TCKs can adapt to new situations quickly with high confidence as well as develop strong communication and diplomatic skills ("Third-Culture Kids", n.d.). A guide created by Rockson (2014) shows the positive qualities of being a TCK. Some examples of the below aspects are explained as TCKs are adventurous because of their ability to accomplish tasks that may be difficult for others and that they have the potential to make an influence. Additionally, TCKs being rich culturally refers to the wealth of the multicultural experiences which are more worthy than money. Another example is the aspect of being well-rounded. This refers to TCKs being able to multitask and be an expert of many things (Rockson, 2014). These are all positive impacts of being a TCK with diverse cultural experiences.

Adventurous	Balanced	Curious
Diplomatic	Entrepreneurial	Friendly and free
Gracious	Helpful	Impressionable
Joyous	Leader	Mysterious
Nomadic	Open-minded	Rich culturally
Passionate	Self-assured	Tactful
Vigilant	Well-rounded	Zealous

Table 3: Positive qualities of being a TCK by Tayo Rockson.

At the end of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to add anything else relevant to the above-mentioned benefits and the positive impacts related to being a TCK. Overall, most participants appreciate their diverse background and upbringing and the opportunities it has lead them to.

*“I’m now very passionate about mentoring others and that’s because of my appreciation to different cultures. I’m a very big advocate of people taking new opportunities and I try to support that as much as I can. It does stem from the experiences that I’ve had. I feel like my best memories and opportunities have come from my upbringing.” – Interviewee 2*

The advantages of having a TCK background were many. Examples mentioned included being able to be more accepting, approachable, understanding, appreciative, and grateful for opportunities. Another interesting comment made by one of the participants was that in the future there will be fourth and fifth culture kids as the world is becoming one.

*“I’m more accepting and approachable. I can relate to many cultures and people can relate to me and I’m able to understand both perspectives. I’m more flexible. I believe that the world is becoming more and more as one world. The barriers and borders are becoming physically more, but realising how closer we are. Even though I’m a third culture kid, very soon there will be fourth and fifth culture kids. The important thing is to appreciate the diversity of the human family. So, accepting people for who they are regardless of they choose to live their lives.” – Interviewee 6*

*“Everyone finds me intriguing. I look white, I don’t look Persian or Chinese. Being able to speak 3 languages, understand certain cultures, nuances of certain behaviours and read reality. I’m willing to interact and it’s a very positive and great experience.” – Interviewee 5*

*“I’m grateful for the opportunities I have.” – Interviewee 4*

#### 4.8 Summary of the findings

The title of this research states that “Third Culture Kids are citizens of everywhere and nowhere”. This was noticeable from the participants because of their background of living in various countries. For example, Interviewee 6 mentioned “*I don’t feel like I’m from one place, I feel like I’m from everywhere.*” Benefits of growing up global were revealed and these included developed intercultural competence, improved creativity, developed openness, becoming resilient, developing professional performance as well as positive influences that have been valuable during adult years. All six interviewees had many similar responses, which showed the advantages and positive outcomes of being a TCK. Although their cultural background differed, their global upbringing, experiences and worldviews were alike.



## 5 Discussion and conclusion

The following chapter will summarise the main results found as well as the relevance to existing literature. Firstly, the focus will be on the research question and objectives and how they are answered. This will be explained by whether they were confirmed or contradicted. The chapter will end with a conclusion.

The results of the interviews were as predicted and are in correlation with the literature review. The responses of the participants on the benefits of growing up globally as Third Culture Kids were positive and many benefits were revealed. Additionally, the answers from the interviewees extended what the literature stated.

The first objective of this research was to *identify TCKs qualities that are increased from a global upbringing and cross-cultural interactions*. Diverse language skills were revealed from the interviews and Smith (1996) also suggests in her research that many TCKs can use two or more languages to communicate. Resilience was one of the themes relevant to TCKs. Simonsen (2007) discusses the term intercultural resilience and mentions that it is related to being forced to adapt to changes and grow from them. One interviewee mentioned that the skill of resilience was not voluntary but developed forcibly. This also is confirmed through interviews and literature.

Intercultural competence was also a skill that was increased because of the global upbringing of the interviewees. According to a recent study by de Waal et al., (2020), the results indicated that “early cross-cultural life experiences help individuals to develop intercultural competencies and positive diversity beliefs. Equipped with these competencies and beliefs, TCKs can add value to organizations and society”. Moreover, the literature supports the results of the interviews on intercultural competency.

The second objective was to *determine creativity, performance, and openness-related benefits for TCKs*. A high level of professional performance was a clear benefit for some interviewees. According to Smith (1996), one significant achievement is the careers of

TCKs. She states that “one of the most notable characteristics of adult TCKs is their high occupational achievement. Their occupational choices reflect a continued love of learning, interest in helping, and desire for independence and flexibility”. This was also revealed in the research with the interviewees. As all participants are well educated, it has led them to the positions they are currently working in. Additionally, the findings revealed that they enjoy helping others in different ways. Moreover, their level of performance in their career was mentioned to be higher due to their global upbringing. Flexibility was also a skill learned according to the interviewees mentioned in chapter four.

Another quality developed that was mentioned amongst the interviewees was appreciation and ability to adapt. Simonsen (2007) states that “keeping an open mind to new experiences and ways of living may capacitate us to benefit and use the intercultural experience as an enriching learning experience”. Openness was also a quality that was discussed and was considered to have been developed due to being a TCK.

When it comes to creativity-related benefits, one interviewee mentioned being creative with problem-solving skills and coming up with new ideas and solutions due to their experiences as TCKs. This is supported by literature as Ju Lee et al., (2007) states that “creative problem solving is crucial for children faced with growing up in cultural transition”.

The third objective was to *analyse the findings of the TCKs interviewed and how the positive impacts are visible now during their adult lives*. Recruiters may look for employees who have already gained the experience of being global before starting at a new position. Selmer and Lam (2004) state that “one such option for globalizing firms could be to focus on expatriate candidates who already have acquired a global mindset. A potentially promising source of recruitment of such persons could be former third-culture kids”. Many of the interviewees considered their experiences as TCKs to be the reason for their successful careers and position. The literature and interview results confirm that there are positive impacts that are visible in the adult years of the TCKs.

Another positive impact mentioned by the interviewees was the ability to be accepting, understanding and open towards different cultures. This also supports literature, as Selmer and Lam (2003) mention that “TCKs' third-cultureness may give them a feeling of belonging to the world at large, showing agreement and openness to other cultures in general”.

The last objective was to *assess whether the theoretical framework supports the characteristics of TCKs interviewed and evaluate the approaches*. The answer to this objective is that the theoretical framework does support the TCKs interviewed. Bonebright (2010) states that TCKs can handle change by being open and accepting towards diverse cultures as well as understanding the differences. This is supported by the responses of the interviewees, as most of the participants considered themselves open, accepting, and understanding due to being a TCK. Lastly, Moore and Barker (2012) conducted research on TCKs and the results showed “that they are competent intercultural communicators and perceive their experiences as mainly beneficial”. This was agreed by interviewees as well.

To conclude, the interview results support the literature review used in this research. All concepts were confirmed and extended from previous studies. Moreover, the propositions on this research made are therefore confirmed. This study provided evidence that there are many advantages and benefits of growing up globally with a background of a Third Culture Kid. The positive outcomes confirmed were being creative, a high level of performance, openness, and resilience. Intercultural competence was also confirmed, as all interviewees considered themselves able to interact with different cultures and be accepting towards them.

## 6 Managerial implications

The following chapter will provide advice for organizations, employees, managers as well as teachers and parents based on the results of this study. This study contributes to the literature on linking Third Culture Kids with benefits and positive outcomes of a multicultural childhood. Actions that can benefit organizations and companies include hiring multicultural employees and ensuring diversity. Additionally, diversity training to employers could be valuable in order to understand the positive impacts of having multiculturalism in a team. This would broaden their knowledge on cultural diversity and the advantages that come along with it. Furthermore, employees could make use of the skills that TCKs have, as from this research it is evident that they can bring a lot of value and competencies into a team. Managers could give challenging tasks and responsibilities to TCK employees and utilize their knowledge and skills. The measurement of professional performance between TCKs and non-TCKs could also be evaluated to get an insight on their capabilities.

Gunnestad (2006) states that “in a world with a lot of interaction, movement of people and cultural change, it is important to understand the role of culture in the well-being and survival of people. More especially, this is important for teachers dealing with children who are in the process of accepting and recreating their own culture”. This is significant when it comes to developing the skill of resilience.

Another essential implication that could be practised include schools, institutions, teachers, and parents becoming educated on the topic of Third Culture Kids. Particularly family expatriates who relocate because of their career must understand the concept that their children will face and grow up with.

## **7 Future research suggestions**

The last chapter of this study will discuss suggestions for future research. As only Third Culture Kids were interviewed in this research, one suggestion for future research could be a comparison amongst non-TCKs and TCKs and evaluate whether TCKs have more benefits from the experience in their adult years than non-TCKs. Another suggestion is to interview current expatriates with families and what impacts they have noticed in themselves and their children whilst living a mobile lifestyle. Additionally, the positive changes and other benefits could be researched.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions

1. Where were, you born?
2. What is your passport country?
3. Where are your parents from?
4. Where have you been raised?
5. What languages do you speak?
6. What is your current position?
7. What kind of benefits have you noticed or learnt from being a TCK?
8. Has it improved or developed your creativity?
9. How has being a TCK affected your performance professionally?
10. Have you developed openness by being a TCK?
11. Do you consider yourself resilient due to your experiences of being a TCK?
12. How have these been an advantage to you now during your adult life?
13. Have you developed intercultural competence from your experience?
14. How has this influenced your career during your adult life?
15. Do you believe your experience of being a TCK been beneficial and had a positive impact to you during your adult years?
16. Anything else you would like to add?

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