Third-Culture Kids
in early childhood education

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This paper's purpose is to introduce the Third-Culture Kid (TCK) phenomenon and seek the significant aspects of a highly mobile lifestyle, focusing on their impact on young children learning in the early childhood education programme. Such features include the potential positive and negative consequences of growing up in a multicultural environment. Furthermore, this study dissects the question of whether young children should be directly exposed to cultural awareness at a young age, thereby highlighting educators' crucial role in achieving culturally responsible pedagogy in the preschool context. Triangulation was used based on three methods of data collection. A quantitative survey positioned the voices of 140 Adult Third-Culture Kids (ATCK) in the forefront in order to examine their TCK experience. A qualitative interview focused on ten professional childhood educators' practical knowledge. Finally, a qualitative case study exploring a TCK experience completed the survey. This research offers both a conceptual framework and practical understanding of the complex influence of the TCK lifestyle on children participating in early childhood education.

Keywords: early childhood education, Third-Culture Kid (TCK), cultural awareness, culturally considerate classroom, educators' role, globalisation

Introduction

A study that analyses young Third-Culture Kids (TCKs) is increasingly vital in childhood pedagogy. Research focusing on the impact cross-cultural upbringing has on the personality development of TCKs already exists and has gradually increased over the past few decades. However, current studies seem to emphasise general characteristics of the TCK lifestyle and lack investigation regarding young TCKs just beginning their cross-cultural adventure. Since TCK research is still in its infancy, this paper may provide relevant information for future studies in early childhood education. It can also guide educators, parents, and others interacting with young TCKs to create an environment suitable for acquiring culturally rich experiences.

The study is structured into two main sections: the theoretical background and the empirical research. The theoretical discussion outlines the central notions and concepts that will often be used throughout the paper in connection to the main topic before briefly overviewing the TCK character profile analysis with a focus on the four primary areas of high mobility, cultural exposure,

language acquisition, and relational patterns. Each theme is reviewed based on both the childhood perspective and the consequential negative versus positive outcome this aspect may have on the adulthood identity. The theoretical background also highlights the practical question of cultural diversity in the early childhood programme by covering different approaches and methods.

Our empirical research examines and evaluates the TCK character profile and the practical framework for applying culturally considerate techniques in the early childhood classroom. The study uses the method of triangulation for data collection and features a questionnaire, interviews, and a case study based on the hypotheses and the research questions. The quantitative survey positions the voices of 140 Adult Third-Culture Kids (ATCK) in the forefront with the aim of examining their TCK experience. The qualitative interview focuses on ten professional childhood educators' practical experiences. Finally, a qualitative case study of a TCK experience completes the survey.

Theoretical background

Definitions / Terminology used

Culture is a notoriously complex and challenging term to define. Much of this difficulty is rooted in the many ways it has been used both worldwide and throughout history. A range of possible interpretations arise within the literature, but given its transformative nature, it remains a relative notion for many respected experts (Apte, 1994).

The sociologist Ruth Useem was the first to coin the phrase *Third Culture* and *Third Culture Kid*. Useem referred to the TCKs' home culture or the place they came from as "first culture"; the host culture in which they were currently living was termed the "second culture". As for the region in between, the unique way of life adopted and shared by the expatriate communities, the "culture between cultures" was eventually specified as the "third culture".

Adult Third-Culture Kids or ATCKs are those third-culture kids who are at least 18 years old. However, despite the alteration in the term, it is not uncommon to come across the belief that once a TCK, always a TCK.

As Pollock and Van Reken (2009) defined the phenomenon, a *Cross-Cultural Kid* (CCK) has interacted with two or more cultures for a distinct period of time during their childhood. Unlike in the case of TCKs – who are also considered CCKs – the definition does not require individuals to live outside their passport countries. Rather, they receive cultural exposure experience by interacting with different cultures within their environment. Subsequently, CCKs represent any and all nationalities, ethnicities, and economic groups (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

While cross-cultural understanding compares various cultures, *intercultural learning* is established upon the interaction of two or more cultures. It strives to answer the critical aspects of what this intersection conjures (Atamaniuk, 2014). Intercultural competence means being able to open to another way of thinking and learning to communicate with people from different cultural

backgrounds. It is a complex process that requires participants to create a joint base upon which cultural differences are manifested and reconstructed into a cross-cultural medium. *Multiculturalism* is often associated with names such as "salad bowl" and "melting pot", referring to the concept of different cultures integrating with one another. As a descriptive term, this can be viewed as what Webster's College Dictionary explains as "the existence, recognition, or preservation of different cultural identities within a unified society" (2010, 3rd definition). Overall, the different concepts of a *cross-cultural*, *intercultural*, *multicultural*, or even a "new kind of" individual essentially all strive to define someone "whose horizons extend significantly beyond his or her own culture" (Adler, 1977, para5). These terms will often be used throughout the study when interpreting different aspects of the TCK phenomenon.

Having a mobile life is not a new occurrence. Correspondingly, TCKs are not a new phenomenon either. Families have migrated and travelled to different parts of the world since the beginning of time. However, their low representation in contrast to the vast majority has made them seem almost invisible until recently (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). There is, however, a global shift. *Globalisation* or the accelerated development of human interaction through a vast network of interconnections (Tomlinson, 2006) is ultimately creating the sense of a shrinking world, where it has become common for people to pursue the experience of a culturally mixed environment (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 28). Not only is the number of people following this way of life increasing, but as many experts in the field, including Useem (2009), have claimed, the relevance of their experience is becoming the more significant aspect. However, experts have yet to map out the exact outcome of today's increased cultural fusion and to be able to conclude the consequences of our globalising world (Pollock & Reken, 2009, p. 5).

Third-Culture Kid characteristics

This next part of the study highlights some of the TCK character profile's shared traits, including high mobility, cultural exposure, language acquisition, and relational patterns. Each section describes its key features, along with a focus on early childhood manifestation and a consequential positive and negative outcome it can likely lead to.

High mobility

One of the main characteristics of a TCKs' life is high mobility; hence, the common term, "global nomad," is often used to describe individuals who are always on the move. High mobility can be interpreted in several ways. Some TCKs move to different countries every two or three years, while others stay in the same host country from birth until they graduate. Whichever the case, it can be said that "all TCKs experience mobility issues at one level or another" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 64). High mobility is not only restricted to geographically changing homes within a short time but can also mean simply returning to the given passport country for summer break. In other words, either the TCKs are

coming and going or those around them (Moore, 2011, p. 28). Every single leave means the same thing for a TCK: having to say goodbye to friends in the host country, hello to friends and relatives in the passport country, then another goodbye and another hello again. (Pollock & Reken, 2009). To a young TCK, the constant change of home is standard in their experience (Moore, 2011, p. 28) and as much part of everyday life as is anything else. To quote Bolon, "When one is born eight time zones away from one's passport country, how can being overseas possibly appear difficult?" (Bolon, 2012, para7).

However, despite having the ability to integrate quickly into new environments, children, especially at a younger age, can falsely lull their parents into the impression that there is no problem. One of the main *challenges* of a highly mobile life is that it can drastically influence the child's home and nationality concept (Hayden, 2006, pp. 48-49) due to the constant change in environment and a range of geographically bound experiences. Downie (1976) attributes this influence to the still ongoing developmental process, ultimately causing a sense of *rootlessness* and inability to grasp the concept of home or create the necessary network of relationships crucial for self-definition. The younger the child, the less involvement he has outside the family, the more influential the parents' role in adjusting to a move is. Something as simple as taking the time to talk about the day's activities when they return from school may also help transitional periods.

While living a life of frequent mobility can be a challenge for TCKs, it also provides them with a range of *positive benefits*. With time, many TCKs can overcome the challenges that come with high mobility, thriving instead of the rich memories, and established special bonds with people from all over the world (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 78). This type of lifestyle also enables them to develop *flexibility and adaptability*. As Vyhmeister (2015) explains, TCKs are used to dealing with problems and used to change; therefore, it does not scare them as much as it should.

Cultural exposure

A highly mobile life brings exposure to a variety of different countries and cultures. Although children may notice fundamental differences in spoken language, visual differences or climate change, they often only have a vague sense of connection between geography and those differences they encounter (Lambert & Klineberg, 1967 and Weil, 1951). Ramsey mentions that it is also not uncommon for children to "sometimes overgeneralise" their cultural observations and be likely to construct specific images representing an entire group based on that attribute alone (Ramsey, 2004, p. 115).

Although children cannot understand culture on a conceptual level, the above statement proves that changes in cultural environment ultimately influence qualities – including "language, behaviour, interactional styles and social expectations" (Ramsey, 2004, p. 116) in young TCKs' development, even if on a subconscious level. Subsequently, studies show that early childhood is a critical time for using young children's flexibility in perspective as a means

of developing competencies that dispose of bias against unfamiliar cultures and instead promote a positive attitude towards those of different cultural backgrounds (Ramsey, 2004, p. 116). However, large amounts of exposure towards other cultures can also result in a subsiding level of heritage later on during the developmental years.

Although TCKs absorb knowledge from each destination, they unfortunately often lose sight of their heritage. As a result of the highly mobile life that they live, TCKs have no choice but to adjust to each cultural environment and adapt a "chameleon-like" quality (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). It is also not uncommon to experience some level of grief due to the deficiency or even nonexistence of certain experiences and relationships in the place where the individual grew up (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 100). It may cause a "longing to experience what others in the 'home' culture had." In the identity crisis that may occur within the TCK, this tension "gives rise to a dynamic, passionate, and critical posture" (Adler, 1975, p. 7), along with a range of further self-defining *positive attributes*. Through the first exposure of a second culture at an early age, the development of a *bicultural competence* arises in TCKs that develops knowledge of the values and beliefs represented by both cultures later on in the personal development, with a generally positive attitude towards each group and a significant skillset in *intercultural communication*. Moore attributes this latter competence to the diverse cross-cultural exposure TCKs experience, through which they are also able to gain *high adaptability* (2011, p. 35). Adaptability, which in this sense is a vital skill for citizens of the future to have as it may offer solutions to global problems people cannot even think of.

Language acquisition

Children that are exposed to new environments are likely to face particular linguistic *challenges*. While this can manifest in learning the host country's language, *holding on to the mother tongue* while lacking the linguistic environment to use it can also be an issue for TCKs (Fukui, 2005, p. 27). Language retention can be challenging and confusing when the primary focus should be on adapting to the new geographical and social circumstances (Fukui, 2005). Difficulty may also arise from the limited proficiency in the language used in the host country's school, which can ultimately lead to *problems with coping academically and socially*. Despite these mentioned aspects, however, the literature seems to hold a much larger palette for the significant *benefits* of being exposed to different linguistic environments. One of them is that a TCK upbringing can provide the skillset to gaining *fluency in one or more languages* (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 118).

Relational patterns

A highly mobile life inevitably affects the formation of relationships. Melles and Frey (2014, p. 352) speak of the *challenge* that can be manifested in the form of "*parentification*", in which many children are expected to "take on roles or perform them at a level inappropriate to the child's level of emotional,

intellectual, and physical development". Such roles most often manifest in the frequent *loss of friendships* and adaptation to letting go of deep, emotional bonds. With time, this can lead to children feeling a lack of validation in terms of their emotional needs, ultimately learning to ignore their feelings, or even losing touch with them (Melles & Frey, 2014, p. 352).

In the long term, challenges may arise in maintaining *long-lasting relationships.* TCKs learn to adopt a kind of emotional detachment in terms of saying goodbyes in the moment of leaving. Vyhmeister (2015) explains this form of "*quick release*" to be a coping mechanism in response to the complex process, pointing out, "We've done it so many times, it hurts to drag it out" (10:00–10:10). The experience of these relational patterns gives TCKs the false impression that their relationships will continue to end in such ways even in adulthood. Consequently, many ATCKs become guarded, protecting themselves from further pain (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009), and therefore focusing more "on the inevitability of relationships ending rather than on relational growth, which limits establishing authentic relationships" (Melles & Frey, 2014, p. 353).

Despite having to overcome frequent challenges, the *benefits* that arise in terms of relationships should also be mentioned. On the one hand, TCKs' mobile lifestyle enables them to build a *rich network of friendships* throughout the world, which can be "useful for all sorts of things – from finding cheap room and board while travelling to setting up business connections later in life" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 132). In contrast to the many friendships that come and go in a TCKs' life, and the difficulties they face overcoming loss, it can be said that TCKs go to greater lengths than some people might consider normal to nurture relational ties with others. It is especially true to those they have shared a common lifestyle with, giving them a sense of connectedness. Furthermore, due to their cross-cultural experience and the constant change in environment, they learn to adapt to a range of different situations and people, giving them excellent *communication and diplomatic skills* (Duvalle & Padmanabh). As has been demonstrated, the TCK character profile brings with it many advantages and drawbacks. Children who embark on a life of high mobility enable flexibility, intercultural competence, and a rich network of friends. However, they also have to face the difficulty of loss, the instability of identity and a constant sense of impermanence due to frequent change.

## *Creating a Culturally Considerate Environment*

Raising cultural awareness

To create an environment in which children are motivated to adopt positive attitudes, *educators' roles* must be defined. Educators bear the prime responsibility of manifesting the ideal culturally considerate model themselves. *Self-awareness* is the "foundation for multicultural awareness and cultural competency" (Anderson & Davis, 2012, p. 11). According to this view, educators have to reflect on their personal views, thoughts, and feelings to shape their professional practice. Anderson and Davis (2012, p. 11) understand

that this does not happen independently and have created a model to display personal and professional growth (See Figure 1.). The first stage concentrates on acknowledging the particular bias (*self-examination*), which – according to Anderson & Davis – is one of the most challenging steps of becoming culturally considerate educators. We are then "forced to admit what we don't know we don't know" (*reflection*). A process of cognitive restructuring follows (*integration*), after which we can begin learning various strategies and building the skills (*actualization*) necessary for ultimately placing them in practice (*equity/social justice*).

Figure 1
Model of personal and professional growth
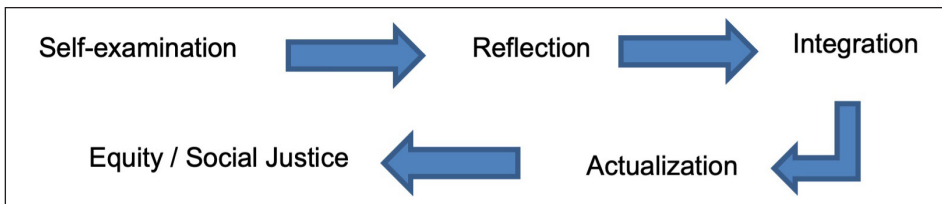
Celebrating cultural diversity

Equipment and material give children the most visible connection with cultures and provide the best means of celebrating cultural diversity (Baldock, 2010, p. 62). Ramsey believes in the importance of providing plentiful opportunities for children to experiment with different cultural elements. Showing photographs of people from different cultures engaging in similar activities – such as cooking, eating or going to school – but in different ways; introducing toys, materials, and tools that represent diverse cultural groups can all be an exciting experience for children (Ramsey, 2004, p. 117). Furthermore, music, dance, children's literature, and any other cultural activities can be valuable resources in connecting positive experiences to different cultures (Baldock, 2010, p. 64).

The celebration of various festivals is widely shared in early childhood settings in order to promote cultural diversity. It can provide not only recognition of the children's heritage but also develop an "initial [positive] response" towards unfamiliar cultures in general (Baldock, 2010, p. 73). However, it is essential to "incorporate aspects of those other cultures throughout the day and the year, not just on one holiday". Morning meetings can be an ideal platform for building this kind of cohesion within the group where children can share stories and thoughts with one another. Furthermore, *involving family members* and other professionals in children's learning is vital in early childhood education.

To conclude this part of the study, it can be said that children gain the most valuable knowledge from the interactions and experience through which they can construct positive connections towards cultures other than their own. By always starting from "something with which the children are familiar" (Baldock, 2010, p. 74), educators can achieve not only cultural awareness but understanding and ultimately respect on a high level.

Empirical Research

Description of the Research

The research was conducted to grasp certain connections between the distinguished theoretical findings and the inquiry results. In order to stay true to the study topic, two specific aims were placed in focus.

Table 1
Research questions

Research question #1: Do ATCKs see their upbringing as more positive or negative overall?	Hypothesis: Being a TCK is far more of a rewarding and beneficial experience, and therefore we assume that the majority of the affected feel the same way.
Research question #2: Should cultural awareness be raised in the early childhood program? What is the crucial role of educators working with TCKs?	Hypothesis: Cultural awareness should be raised in the early childhood programme to familiarise young TCKs with cultural diversity. The educators' role in this process is to provide a stimulus-rich environment and promote the benefits of being different.

For the research, triangulation was used based on three methods of data collection. *The quantitative survey* positioned the voice of 140 ATCKs in the vanguard in pursuit to examine their TCK experience, centralised around areas such as general geographic inquiries, family, social life, education, and a concluding self-reflection section. *The qualitative interview* focused on ten professional childhood educators' practical experiences, consisting of open-ended questions, and the content of the questions were adjusted to the literature. Finally, the *qualitative case study* of a TCK experience completed the survey.

Research Findings

Questionnaire results: General overview

Of the approximately 200 questionnaires sent out, 140 responses were received. The high response rate confirms the interest participants showed in the topic. 54% of the ATCK respondents were females, and 46% were males. All respondents were anonymous and completed the survey electronically due to the geographical distance between participants. The youngest respondent was 18 years of age, and the oldest was 34.

To verify participants' understanding of the term at hand, a question targeted a few labels to see whether they could associate themselves with. These included: Third-Culture Kid (113), Cross-cultural Kid (60), Missionary Kid (4), Pastor's Kid (1), Domestic Cross-cultural Kid (10), Corporate or Diplomatic Third-Culture Kid (20), Child of immigrant (0) and High mobile or Globally nomadic (11).

It is important to compare the age from which each individual began their TCK experience. Based on the responses, most participants were born into their

TCK lifestyle, with a slightly decreasing rate followed with later ages. This result is significant because the age factor plays a decisive role in defining the TCK experience (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Subsequently, it can be noted that a large portion of the participants represent the TCK phenomenon in essence.

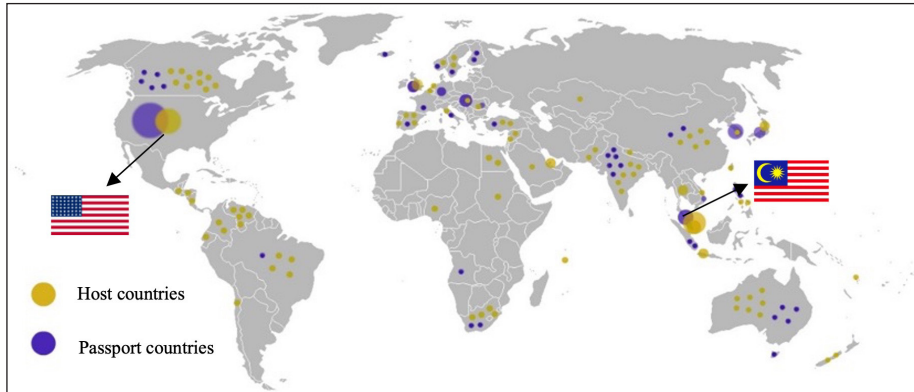**Figure 2**
Distribution of Passport and Host Countries

Figure 2 presents the distribution of the participants' passport and host countries, the size and number of dots symbolising the estimated representation. Figure 3 shows the ten most common host countries, without including Malaysia, due to almost all participants having spent a portion of their life there. According to the graph, the second most common host country is the USA, which calls for a sure evaluation concerning this question's phrasing.

Figure 3
*Most common host countries (not including Malaysia)*
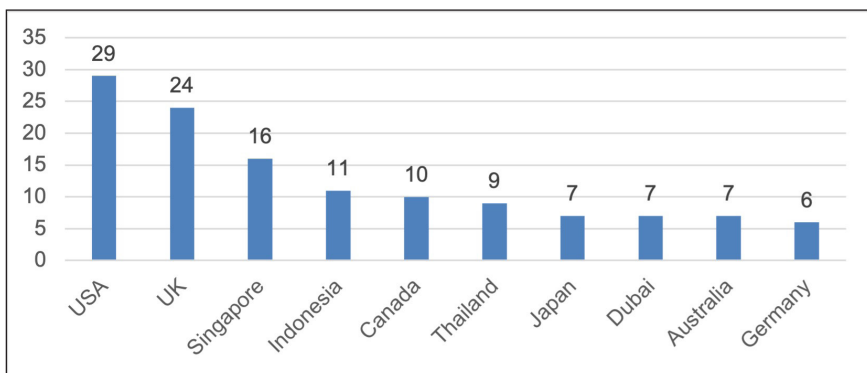
In terms of the total amount of host countries participants lived in, the average number was one, listed by 44 respondents. Thirty-two participants lived in two countries, followed closely by 29, having lived in three host countries. Expanding the number of host countries, 27 participants listed six or more countries. One

person spoke of having lived in nine countries. This assessment is interesting in determining the respondents' sense of home and self-evaluation.

Figure 4
Years spent in vs. outside the passport country
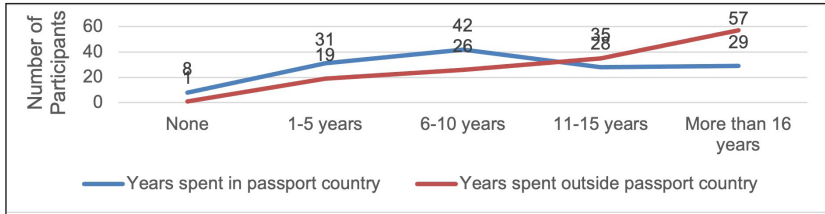
It was interesting to compare the ratio of time spent in the passport country instead of time spent outside. As Figure 4 demonstrates, most participants have spent between 6 and 10 years living in their passport county. A clear cross-over can be seen in the 11–15-year section, from which the time spent in one's passport country is overtaken by the time spent in other countries. This data shows a correlation between the overall number of host countries mentioned earlier.

Figure 5
Frequency of visitation to passport country
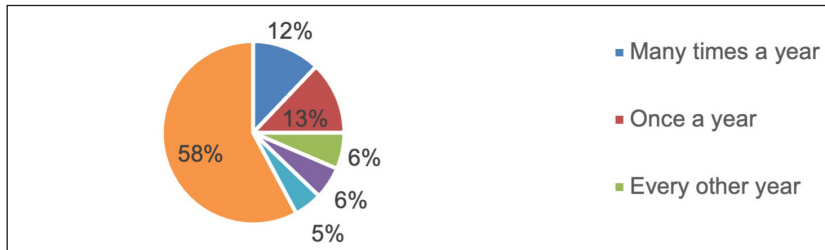
Currently, a surprising 80% of the survey participants are living in their passport countries. 35% visit their homeland at least once a year, while 7 participants go back less than every four years or not at all.

Family and language use

As was explained in the literature review, globalisation today is a current and ongoing process. The accelerated connectivity of the modern world increases the tendency to adopt a culturally diverse and mobile lifestyle. It was exciting to assess whether the theory was true only to the survey participants' generation or whether their parents have experienced a cross-cultural lifestyle earlier in their lives.

The results show that although most respondents (77%) have parents from the same nationality, 34 participants are of mixed heritage, which is relatively notable compared to the total number. Furthermore, 24 individuals stated that either one or both of their parents also had a TCK upbringing. Upon comparing the

two results, there is approximately a 50% correlation between the parents' TCK experience and their choice to devote themselves to a cross-cultural marriage.

In terms of language use, Figure 6 shows that most of the respondents have acquired an average of two and three languages to date. As the data shows, 64 ATCKs have managed to pick up three or more languages. The number of most spoken languages was six. It is also interesting to note that this particular participant also lived in the most host countries, nine to be exact.

Figure 6
Number of languages spoken
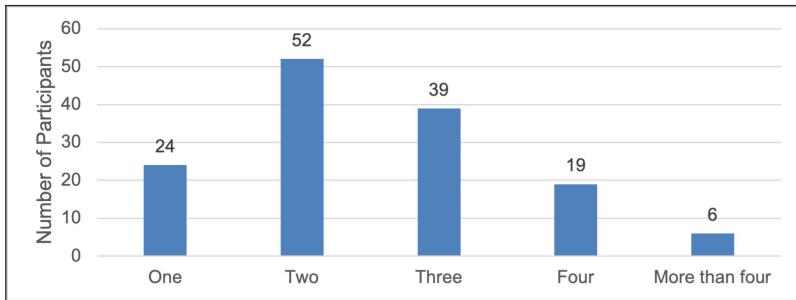
As Figure 7 shows, 65% of respondents use the language of their passport country at home. An additional 19% supplement their mother tongue with English, and 8% use a different language besides their passport country's language. It adds up to a totalled 90% of ATCKs that maintain their linguistic heritage around family members. Only 14 participants have listed languages differing from their mother tongue as the standard choice within the family. It may be the result of various reasons. The family might have found it practical to switch to the host country's common language, chosen to adjust to the ease of communication within a multilingual family or for any further reason not mentioned.

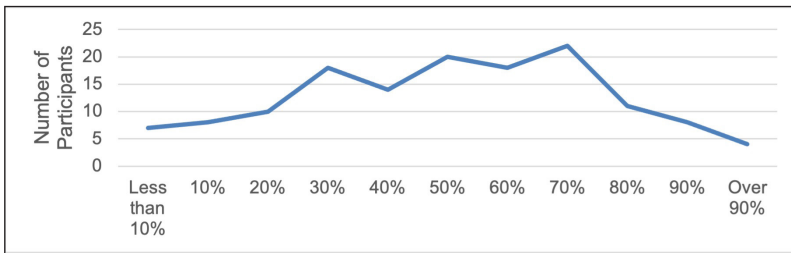**Figure 7**
Language use at home
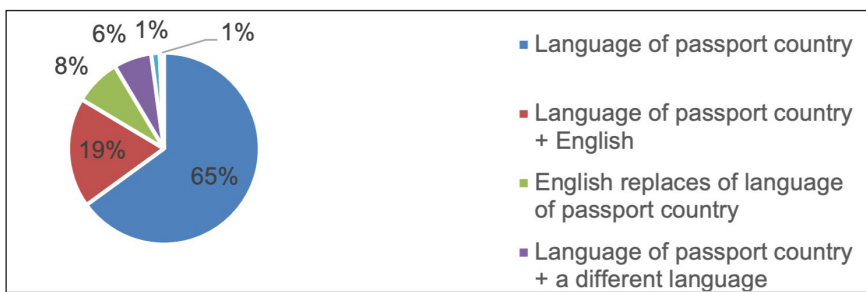
As high mobility is a common characteristic within all TCKs, it is crucial to evaluate the effect mobility has on ATCKs' communication with family members as adults. Respondents maintain primarily face-to-face communication only with their parents and siblings, the statistical emergence of which is scarcely

higher than that of the telephone as a means of keeping in touch. It can be seen that the use of social media is poignant, whereas more dated communication platforms, such as email or even letters, are far less common. It was positively surprising that only 1% of the participants had no communication with their family members.

Social life

Internationally mobile families often choose to admit their children into International Schools (the exact ratio of schooling concerning this survey's participants will be seen in more depth in the Education section). As a result, TCKs consequently find themselves among many others who share the same lifestyle. Participants were asked to estimate the percentage of their TCK friends. As Figure 8 demonstrates, this amount ranges most often between 30 and 70%, which can be considered a reasonably high value considering many of them have resided in their passport countries.

Figure 8
Percentage of TCK friends

Participants were also asked to list the number of countries in which their close friends are located in. Figure 9 shows an evident correlation with Figure 8 regarding the percentage of friends and their distribution worldwide. The results illustrate that the participants with a low percentage of TCK friends listed fewer countries than those with more. In contrast, those ATCKs who have a higher percentage estimated their friends to be in a wider array of locations.

Figure 9
*Number of countries ATCKs have close friends in*
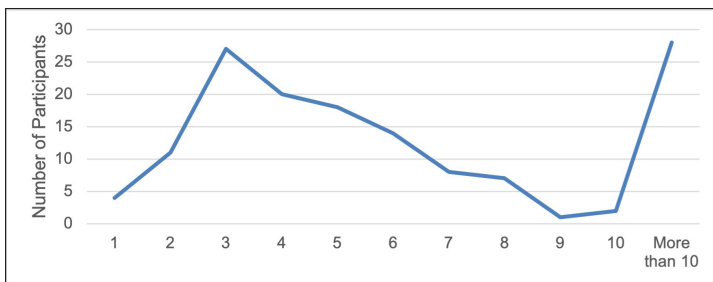
No respondents have general face-to-face communication with their TCK friends. While this result can be seen as somewhat of an apparent consequence of the TCK lifestyle, it can also lead to difficulty forming new relationships throughout adulthood. Based on the findings, most participants admitted to having difficulty with commitment issues.

School and education

It has been mentioned in the previous section that TCKs generally attend international schools in the host countries that they live in. According to the questionnaire participants, around 80% attended international schools. As geographical relocation is a common occurrence in many TCKs' lives, so is the process of changing schools. Based on Figure 10, the ATCK participants have attended an average of four schools during their upbringing, with a few exceptional individuals doubling this number.
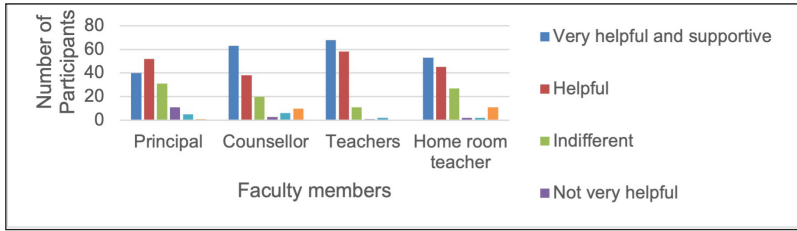
Figure 10
Number of schools attended
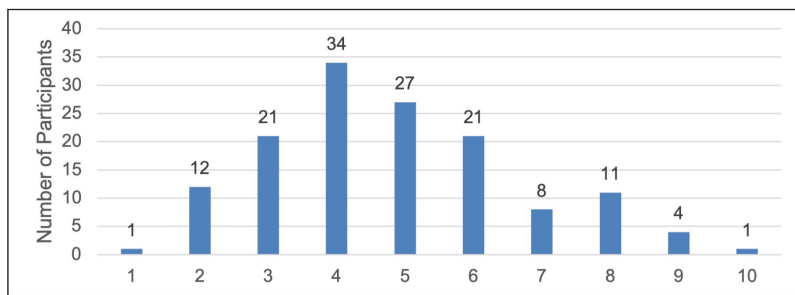
The process of changing schools can be a difficult time for TCKs. Most of the participants claimed to have found the transitional period challenging but quickly adjusted to their new surroundings. Fifty-five respondents did not find any difficulty in adapting to their new school. Among these individuals, some explained this as a result of being very young, while others were even excited about the new experience. Altogether, 20 participants felt significant difficulty in terms of adaption, three admitting that they never felt comfortable in their school.

Figure 11 shows the satisfying result, according to which most participants found their schools' faculty members to be helpful and supportive. While others may have found certain members to be indifferent towards them, very few indicated the feeling of receiving no help or even discouragement. The results of the above data show that most schools were successfully able to provide the necessary attention and support the target ATCKs sought at the time. The high attendance to international school environments may also significantly impact the participants' attitude toward faculty members. International schools are professionally equipped and prepared systematically for students that live a highly mobile life. By understanding the quality of their lifestyle, such professionals may emphasise the integration process by differentiating and approaching their educational strengths based on their unique TCK experience.

Figure 11

Experience with the Host country's school faculty

Another inquiry made in connection to schooling was the presence of cultural consideration in the curriculum. It was surprising to compare the results of two fairly related questions. On the one hand, Figure 12 reveals that 85% of participants were provided with the opportunity to showcase their home culture in their host countries' schools through holiday celebrations and other events. It validates the general view that international schools emphasise promoting cultural diversity and building positive attitudes towards differences. On the other hand, however, many respondents felt this practice of showcase to lack integration with the daily classes they attended and, with it, the chance to learn and talk about their TCK lifestyle.

Figure 12

*Cultural consideration in the curriculum*
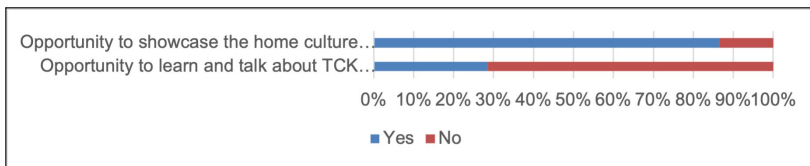
In regard to the previous question, the target ATCKs were asked whether they feel it is essential to raise cultural awareness in school, referring to any aspect of cultural consideration, such as projects, discussions or celebrations in general. 86% of the respondents claimed that raising cultural awareness is vital. Roughly half of the participants believe cultural awareness-raising should be introduced as early as possible, in preschool or at least before second grade.

Participants' self-reflections

This last section aims to portray participants of this survey as they assess certain aspects of their over-all upbringing. As Figure 13 demonstrates, the majority of the participants have successfully overcome most difficulties of the TCK lifestyle. However, two areas remain that many still find challenging: saying goodbye and keeping in touch with friends and family. As adulthood is the time when childhood experiences are cultivated into the settled mentality, the researcher prompted the participants to rate the different areas of their character profile on a scale of 1 to 5. The reason for this was to test the theoretical findings based on the specific benefits and drawbacks of the TCK life that accumulate and influence the developed personality of ATCKs.

Figure 13
Ability to cope with aspects of the TCK life
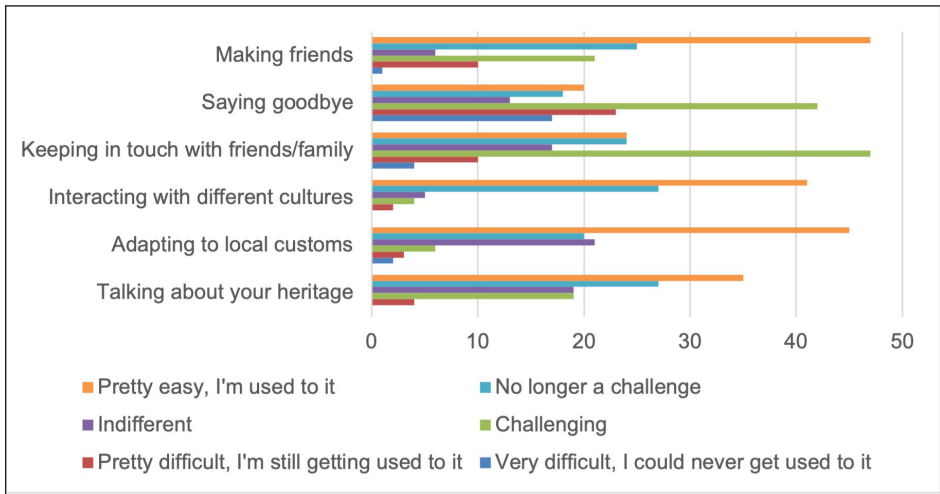
The results seen in Figure 14 show that ATCKs have adopted several positive traits such as flexibility, lack of prejudice, independence, adaptability, and an even greater sense of open-mindedness through interaction with different cultures. However, their feeling of rootlessness due to the often high mobility level has consequently led to a 50% ratio of restlessness, the need to be on the move, visit new places, otherwise feeling out of place upon not doing so.

Figure 14
Personality traits on a scale of 1 to 5
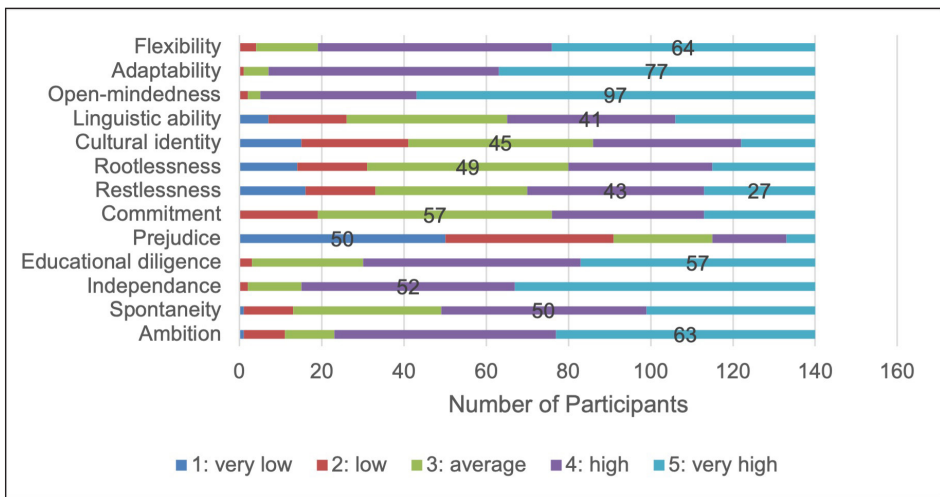
ATCKs' definitions of home

Table 2
ATCKs' definitions of home

Themes	Definitions
Connectivity and interaction with family, friends and loved ones (52)	"where my family is" / "where my parents are located at the time (36)
	"where I have people that care about me" (2)
	"the place where my friends are always there and where everyone knows me and I know everybody" (14)
Feelings based on memories, comfort, security and emotions (57)	"where the heart belongs" (12)
	"not a matter of geography, it's a state of mind" (12)
	"where the air reminds you of your childhood" (2)
	"where you feel safe and comfortable" (24)
	"where you feel you belong" (4)
	"where I'm happiest" (3)
Geographical place based on the current location, country of birth and most time spent (18)	"where my mail goes" / "wherever I'm currently paying rent"
	"any place where I am currently living" (9)
	"where I was born" (2)
	"where I have spent the most time" (6)
Others (12)	"everywhere and nowhere" (3)
	"wherever you make it" (3)
	"where I'm not"
	"something I may have in the future"
	"extremely difficult to define"
	"where your journey takes you"
	"So many different things. It's all of the places I grew up, it's where my parents live, it's where I currently live. It's the world (2)." / "this Earth"

ATCK participants were asked to define their unique understanding of "home". The answers provided in this table are organized into four different themes according to the responses. While many respondents attributed their definitions to certain connections to people – family, friends, loved ones – it can be seen that the most common descriptions revolved around an abstract notion of feeling rather than a matter of geography.

Table 3
Overall evaluation of the cross-cultural upbringing

The best part about being a TCK	The worst part about being a TCK
Exposure to diversity, acquiring intercultural communication skills (65)	The feeling of rootlessness, lack/loss of identity, or heritage (36)

Change of perspective, acquiring an open mind (46)	Difficulty fitting in, feeling like an outsider, reverse culture shock (34)
A network of friends worldwide (36)	Goodbyes, leaving friends/family behind, keeping in touch (33)
Unique life experience, lasting memories (23)	Instability, impermanence from constant change, starting over (20)
Traveling the world, seeing new places (18)	Difficulty with commitment (16)

As a follow-up question, participants were asked where they specified their home to be. The results show that a total of 58 respondents chose their passport countries as their idea of home. A further 46 participants listed a host country or their current place of residence. As for the remaining 25 individuals, a variety of responses came up, either expressing difficulty in tackling such a question or providing a complex approach based on their perspective.

Finally, to conclude, participants were asked to give an overall evaluation of their cross-cultural upbringing. With 94% dominance, it is clear that almost all ATCK participants of this survey valued their experience to be a positive one. Examples listed in the "other" field included mixed emotions and one participant who explained that the TCK life is the only life they had ever known, causing an inability to compare it to anything else.

The general statement can be made that the results show clear relevance to the theory regarding the TCK character profile and the outcome of the assessed statistics. Moreover, a solid collective opinion among the majority underlines that the ATCK participants see the genuine worth in the memories and skillset they have gained and have grown to look back on them as an undeniable positive experience.

Interview results

The following section summarizes the interviews conducted with ten early childhood educators (5 in Malaysia, 5 in Hungary), with their years of experience teaching TCKs spanning from 6-36. The following results are based on their thoughts regarding what it means to create a culturally considerate environment.

Participants all spoke of the elaborate process required to *learn of new students' backgrounds*, be it *cultural* or more focused on the personality traits that represent the given child. Some educators mentioned using transitional files, and others get to know their students by using application- or registration forms. They all underline the importance of observation that can then be used to evaluate their educational needs accordingly. Participants tend to organize orientational meetings with the families at the beginning of the year or after the registration phase. Looking at the different answers, there seemed to be a varying opinion on investigating the child's specific cultural background. While some educators found it essential to research the cultural aspects of the child's family, others saw greater importance in mapping out the child's personal qualities.

When integrating children into their classroom, three main areas were mentioned in terms of methods used: *song and play*, *language support* and *body- and sign language*. After observing the child, the educators assess the given situation and construct the follow-up tasks accordingly. Additionally, they spoke of the importance of using visual elements at the early stage of the year, adding that it is "natural for early childhood teachers to build in gesture and dramatise facial expression to portray a message". In addition to using body language, it was also common to hear about speaking slowly and clearly with the child. It can be seen that there is a clear pattern among the attitude of educators in terms of integrating a new child. As elaborated, all participants emphasise their body language, clear communication, and the general aim to make the child feel comfortable in the new environment.

According to the interviewed educators, there are several areas in which parents can *help* their *children overcome the possible struggles of a new cultural environment.* They may include language use at home, involvement in the adaptation process, and reading as a means of strengthening the mother tongue. The importance of maintaining the mother tongue came up among several interviewees. Some encourage families not to change much about their home to maintain the family routine, despite changing countries, specifying how this gives the child "something that is always the same, and that makes them feel safer". One educator found no issue in parents practising the target language at home. Beyond language use, a teacher stressed the value that parents can provide their children by getting to know their home culture.

All interview subjects spoke of the importance of incorporating the *host countries' holidays.* A common theme was the celebration of International Week and incorporating a constant Culture Corner in the classroom. However, the question of cultural representation-based problems seemed to arise within several educators, who claimed certain celebrations should be dismissed due to their religious base. In general, although it can be said that the educators can agree on the importance of bringing together children and parents during whichever festivals they choose to celebrate, it is an excellent opportunity for them to become "aware of their culture and cultural differences as well".

Participants' opinion regarding the *ability to recognise different cultures* was evidently at odds. Some educators strongly believed in understanding children's portrayal in identifying cultures, explaining that seeing a difference "comes naturally for them because they start seeing it at such a young age". Others believe children notice what is relevant or specific to them, and it is a different kind of culture than that of which adults' notions define. The first things they notice are skin colour, gender, and foods eaten but tend to focus more on social interaction elements. All educators agree concerning the importance of engaging in conversation concerning such topics.

The question on *raising cultural awareness* was another topic that split the opinion of interviewees. Although all educators attributed great importance to the implicit learning experiences obtained through interaction within the multicultural classroom environment, the attitude towards directly raising cultural awareness varied. Some educators emphasise conversations, while

others believe materials such as toy people, books, and other visual elements that can represent cultural differences to be more effective. From a different viewpoint, in one interview, it was claimed that culture is not very important at such a young age. "It is more about what they like and can do together". While most educators emphasise the importance of play experience, others admittedly recognise that children gain "powerful experiences" from the various talks in the classroom about the similarities and differences.

Based on their experiences, all early childhood educators participating in this interview agree that the *multicultural environment provides numerous benefits* for children living in it. The most common advantage mentioned was the *acceptance* that develops due to exposure to many different cultures. Many participants mentioned prejudice as the negative quality most often eliminated from children's personalities when culturally exposed, replacing it with *tolerance*, flexibility, and the notion that difference is a good thing.

The interviews have presented the participating ten educators' unique experiences and perspectives. Although there was a certain difference in opinion concerning the question of directly raising cultural awareness in the early childhood programme, they all understood the importance of creating plenty of opportunities for children to experience culture through various levels. They might include interactive story times with family members, celebrating festivals, providing culturally diverse classroom materials, or simply promoting the value of difference through play. Finally, all participants agreed that the multicultural environment benefits children in many ways and builds a skillset consisting of tolerance, flexibility, and a general open-mindedness to carry with them throughout their life.

Case study

The participant of the case study is a female TCK whom we will call Sophie. Sophie was born in Hungary. Both her parents were also born and raised in Hungary, but when she was five years old, Sophie's parents, who are musicians, were offered a job in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Reminiscing on her first impressions of her host country, she still remembers the sights, the smells, the sounds. After a short silent phase spent observing her new school environment and strange, different language inputs, she began to adjust. She made friends and assimilated quickly. Sophie and her family spent most summers visiting family back in Hungary and other holidays exploring their host country's nearby regions. At home, language use was strictly kept to Hungarian, as Sophie's parents understood this was crucial in maintaining her mother tongue.

After ten years, Sophie moved back to Hungary. She described feeling as if she was leaving a part of her in Asia, and the further away they flew, the stronger the feeling became. While she enjoyed her first summer after arriving in Hungary, the feeling of distance connected to her alleged "home" was undeniable and, with time, only became stronger. She experienced a reverse culture shock. In her experience, these feelings first arose when she was

admitted into a local high school. She had a difficult time fitting in. Sophie felt unable to share stories and memories of her past with her new friends, as they understandably could not place themselves in her situation – as she also had difficulty placing herself in theirs.

To fit in, she tried to adopt different qualities and adjust her personality to suit those around her, which made her feel like a hidden immigrant, a term used to describe TCKs moving back to their passport countries and having difficulty fitting in. While it became more difficult to stay in touch with her TCK friends, she grew closer to the new friends she had made. Still, she felt homesick, so she decided to visit Malaysia one summer. During the time that she was there, many aspects of her perspective changed. For one, she realised that most of her friends had graduated, leaving an almost "empty place" that did not feel the same anymore. Furthermore, upon returning, her recurring desire to move back to Malaysia had all of a sudden vanished. As soon as she felt that *control* in confronting her own decisions – which TCKs typically lack due to the constant moves powered by their family's work motives –, she was no longer trapped in the spiral of homelessness.

From then on, her life became much easier, and she could revisit her roots with an entirely new approach. During the rest of her high school years, she learned of her countries' history, literature, music culture, and other unknown areas. She pursued her passion for singing and found new hobbies. The *flexibility* and *adaptation* she had attained as a TCK made it possible for her to overcome many new situations and obstacles in the years to come. Furthermore, her early *exposure* to the different surrounding cultures allowed her to understand the value of her own and make the necessary effort to learn about it.

Reflecting on her early years, Sophie spoke of her appreciation for having been granted the privilege to see so much of the world before she could even process any of it; appreciation for her TCK experience moulding her into the person that she is today, past every hardship along the way; and finally, appreciation for giving her purpose in using her experience as a foundation for initiating a path in which she can guide young children in the same situation she was in eighteen years ago.

Conclusion

Although present literature on the TCK character profile is relatively limited, it provides valuable insight into the highly mobile lifestyle's significant attributes. It offers a conceptual framework for understanding the complex influence it can have on children. While TCKs may often face difficulty in grasping a sense of belonging, they gain perspective and flexibility. Additionally, while cultural exposure may put heritage at risk, it develops tolerance and intercultural competence. While language retention can be a challenge, TCKs foster ease in learning multiple languages. Finally, although long-lasting relationships may cause difficulty, TCKs build a rich network of relationships and develop effortlessness in making friends. Through reflection on their childhood, ATCK individuals who participated in this research justified their overall positive

attitude towards their cross-cultural upbringing. The early childhood educators who took part in this research validated that implicit learning is the most effective approach in promoting cultural awareness instead of directly teaching culture. Considering the limitation in literature based on preschool-aged TCKs, further research would involve an observational investigation method.

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Appendix

Figure 15
Cultural representation through dolls (International School Classroom)

Figure 16
Cultural representation through toy people (International School Classroom)

Figure 17

Cultural representation through books (International School Classroom)

Figure 18

Cultural representation through world map (International School Classroom)