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# Teachers' Perceptions of Student Performance on the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Exam in Department of Defense Schools

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**Walden University**

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of Student Performance on the Advanced Placement English

Language and Composition Exam in Department of Defense Schools

by

Tracee Nichole Fisher

BS, Cameron University, 2004

MAT, Cameron University, 2005

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2023

## Abstract

The problem that guided this study was the low proportion of students scoring 3 or more on the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition (APELC) exam at one Department of Defense (DoD) school. Moreover, the qualifying ratios were lower than students attending all DoD and U.S. schools. The need for teachers to examine the performance of military-connected students has become a critical element of high-stakes accountability in all schools, most importantly at military-connected schools. The aim of this research was to explore DoD teachers' insights into the factors influencing military-connected students' low scores on the APELC exam and the instructional strategies and practices that DoD teachers think can lead to improvement in military-connected students' scores on the APELC exam. The conceptual framework was differentiated instruction, allowing teachers to implement various techniques and evidence-based instructional strategies. Eight teachers who were currently teaching or had taught APELC courses in DoD schools were interviewed in this basic qualitative design. The coded interview data were analyzed using themes to address the research questions. These themes include factors contributing to low APELC scores, the instruction of APELC, student preparation for the APELC exam, DoD support, effective instructional strategies, and implementing practices to improve APELC scores. The outcomes of this research can be applied in a professional learning experience, allowing military-connected Advanced Placement (AP) teachers to enhance the performance of military-connected students on AP exams. This study's findings can also help DoD teachers identify areas of weakness for military-connected students.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to God Almighty, my creator, strong pillar, and source of inspiration, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. He has been the source of my strength throughout this program, and on His wings only have I soared. This work is also dedicated to my parents, the late Cora Lee Anderson and my father, Edward Louis Anderson, who have always loved me unconditionally. Their good examples have taught me to work hard for the things I aspire to achieve. To my children, Sydney and Coralynn, you two have been a constant source of support and encouragement during the doctoral program. I am so very thankful for having you both in my life. I pray all my work and dedication are in some way the example you desire to always be your best in whatever you do in life. Finally, to my husband, Roderick Fisher, you have always constantly encouraged me to be my best. You have supported me in everything I do. You were my cheerleader when I tried to end this journey. I know I would be nothing without your love and support. I thank God for you. I will love you for the rest of my life. I can never quantify the love I have for you. May God continue to bless each of you.

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## Section 1: The Problem

From 2017 to 2019, the proportion of schoolchildren from one U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) high school, Fisher High School (pseudonym), who passed the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition (APELC) test with a qualifying score of 3 or above declined. Furthermore, the rate was lower than the proportions for students attending all DoD schools and U.S. institutions. The DoD's schools are an exception. The Advanced Placement (AP) English test was created in the 1980s to assess English for college-bound students (Cobain, 2020). Students who complete the requirements may get college credit at the college or university where they are enrolled (Warne, 2017). The APELC and the AP English Literature and Composition exams are independent AP English exams that students may take.

The language and composition test, referred to as the APELC exam in this study, was the exclusive focus of this research. There are two sections to the APELC exam: three free-response questions and 55 multiple-choice questions. The tests aim to assess a student's reading and thought expression competence. The multiple-choice section equals 45% of the total score, while the free-response accounts for 55% (College Board, 2019a). The number of correct answers in the multiple-choice part is multiplied by 1.2272 to determine the total score for this section. The derived score is then added to the free-response score to obtain the composite score. The free-response questions are scored using analytic rubrics. The section has five sets of questions, comprising between eight and 13 questions. A passage of poetry, fiction, or drama of varying difficulty usually precedes each set of free-response questions. Each essay response in this section is multiplied by 3.0556 to find the total marks. According to the College Board (2019a), a

student's scores in each section are summed up to achieve an aggregate. The composite score is ranked from 1 to 5; if a student gets 3, the student has qualified, while those who attain a 5 are rated excellent (College Board, 2020c). If the composite score is between 0 and 52 points, then that is equivalent to 1; AP scores of 53 to 80 amount to 2, 81 to 97 is a 3, 98 to 113 is a 4, while 114 to 150 is a 5 (College Board, 2019a); hence, if a student scores 81 or above, they have qualified, as they meet the pass threshold of 3.

The academic performance of students taking AP exams is tracked through an Instructional Planning Report. Instructional Planning Reports are provided for each school by the College Board, providing a means of assessing the school's part of the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). DoDEA is a school system operated by the federal government responsible for directing, planning, managing, and coordinating education programs on behalf of DoD from prekindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The DoDEA also tracks school achievement for the APELC and other AP exams. In this basic qualitative research study, I examined DoD teachers' perceptions of factors affecting the performance of military-connected students on the APELC exam. According to Garner et al. (2014), "Military-connected students are defined as those students having at least one parent as active duty in the military or the reserves, or a parent who was honorably discharged with veteran status" (p. 32). The problem guiding this study was the low percentage of Fisher High School students scoring 3 or higher on the APELC exam, which suggests a gap in practice and a lack of effective strategies to support student success. Moreover, the qualified proportions were lower than those for all DoD and U.S. students.

In Section 1, I discuss the local problem in more detail. I also discuss the rationale for focusing on this problem and present a description of keywords, the local problem, the study's significance, and research questions (RQs). Next, I provide a detailed literature review concerning the conceptual framework and broader problem. The section ends with a discussion of the implications and a summary.

### **The Local Problem**

Considering the problem of the low percentage of Fisher High schoolchildren scoring 3 or higher on the APELC tests from 2017 to 2021, there was a need to comprehend the insights of teachers who teach the APELC classes regarding the factors influencing the performance of military-connected students on the APELC exam. Like students taught in DoD schools, military-connected students face many problems and difficulties in their education and lives, such as separation from their caregivers and frequent school changes (Kitmitto et al., 2011). Such students have elevated stress levels as they seek to make new friends and adjust to a new location (Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2016). The students risk developing stress and anxiety as they try to cope with the environment (Kitmitto et al., 2011). The students' challenges are further complicated because they must understand new regulations and policies in the new schools they join after relocation. Creating a safe school atmosphere, including considerate relationships with school staff, can facilitate the students' adaption to the new school environment and instructional programs (De Pedro et al., 2016). Appropriate learning conditions may also improve well-being, safety, and connectedness and lower the odds of depressing symptoms and suicidal thoughts among military-connected students (De Pedro et al., 2016). The efforts to interrelate with the transitioning family by getting to school will

likely positively affect the learner's experience if the student's challenges are well understood (Siegel et al., 2018). The views of the teachers who teach the APELC classes in DoD schools are essential in understanding the factors affecting the performance of military-connected students on APELC exams.

Research on the factors teachers perceive as influencing military-connected schoolchildren who attend community schools on APELC exams is scarce. Reputable databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus, among others, offer limited information on teachers' insights into the factors leading to the low performance of military-connected students in the APELC exams. The available studies highlight the gap in students' perceptions of study experiences on teachers' teaching approaches. The teachers' limited data creates a gap in knowledge on the effectiveness of the strategies, practices, and policies implemented in teaching students for the APELC exams. The numerous challenges the military-connected students face, such as adaptation to new environments due to frequent relocations (Military Child Education Coalition, 2020b), necessitate research on the possible factors that influence low performance. The findings will provide a healthy and supportive school environment, irrespective of official military-school connection, to provide this resilient population of children with the support and education they deserve.

The performance at Fisher High School was low, as few students attained an acceptable qualification score of 3 on the APELC tests. The students' performance at Fisher High School was generally low because less than half the participants achieved the recommended score of 3 and above. The scores meeting the set standard in 2017, 2018, and 2019 comprised 46.2%, 40%, and 22.3%, respectively. A breakdown of the scores

between 2017 and 2018 revealed that out of the 16 students who sat for the Fisher High School exams, only five attained the desired scores. The results further indicated that no student at Fisher High School scored 1, while 7% and 14% from the DoD schools and other global institutions scored 1. On the global scale, 29% of the candidates scored 2 points, another 29% scored 3 points, 18% scored 4 points, and 11% scored 5 points. The scores for the years 2018 and 2019 at Fisher High School revealed that 11 students took the exams, with three students scoring 1 point, five students scoring 2 points, two students scoring 3 points, and one student scoring 4 points. On the global scale, 15% of the participants scored 1 point, 31% scored 2 points, 26% scored 3 points, 18% scored 4 points, and 10% scored 5 points.

For the year 2020, AP scores were reported; however, they were significantly flawed due to COVID-19 (College Board, 2020a). Therefore, in 2020, AP exams were shortened and open book; each subject was administered online simultaneously (Richards et al., 2020). In 2021, the traditional exam length was used, each subject had three testing dates, the traditional paper-and-pencil and digital versions were offered, and students could take the exam at home or in school. According to College Board (2021), the number of registered students for all exams, specifically APELC exams, decreased compared to other years due to the pandemic.

In 2021, the percentage of students with a score of 3 and above was 80% at Fisher High School, 63.8% at DoD, and 64% globally (College Board, 2022). For Fisher High School, the scores were high in 2021 compared to previous years; however, it is essential to note that performance was probably affected by the changes that schools and educators had to make due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At Fisher High School, students sat for

examinations during a pandemic online, which might also have contributed to the variation in performance in 2020 and 2021. Students had not tested in a virtual setting in 2020. However, in 2021, the data show that the online testing scores for Fisher High School were above the global and DoD performance. Despite the few students who sat for the Fisher High School exams across the years, the percentages indicate a gap in practice. It is necessary to explore the factors teachers perceive to be influencing performance on APELC exams.

The data also show that the levels were lower for Fisher High School students who took the APELC from 2017 to 2019 regarding the percentage of the students who attained the qualification level compared to their classmates at the other DoD schools. This information implies that English language and comprehension competency has been consistently lower among Fisher High School students than learners at other DoD schools and globally. As Kolluri (2018) found with non-military-connected schoolchildren, there is a disconnect between the AP course material and the information on the test for the learners. A similar scenario may apply in Fisher High School, where more students achieve a higher grade in the AP class than on the exam. It was also necessary to understand what could be learned from AP teachers at other DoD schools where more or most students achieve the qualified standard. Understanding the variation in instructional strategies, practices, and policy reforms at the DoD schools could bridge the existing information gap on the issues affecting students' performance on the APELC exams and eventually eliminate the gap in practice, as seen at Fisher High School.

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

The local problem was the low percentage of Fisher High School schoolchildren scoring 3 or higher on the APELC test from 2017 to 2021. Fisher High School tracks school achievement for AP testing like the U.S. federal government and individual state governments. Specifically, Fisher High School tracks performance by tabulating the percentage in each of four categories: (a) students taking the exam, (b) group distribution, (c) score distribution, and (d) mean score. The AP exam is given at the end of an academic year, usually in May (College Board, 2019a). On the 2019 APELC exam, 27.3% of Fisher High School students qualified with 3 or higher scores. The percentage of AP students at all DoD schools who scored a 3 or higher was 50.8%. Globally, the score was 54.2%. Compared to 2017 and 2018, the percentage of students from Fisher High School who acquired the APELC exam and attained a qualification score of 3 or more was low. Moreover, the percentage decreased over the years (from 46.2% in 2017 to 40% in 2018 and 27.3% in 2019), while the percentages were lower than those of the DoD and global figures. As shown in Table 1, the 2021 percentage for Fisher High School of 16.7% was slightly higher than the 2020 percentage of 12.5% but relatively low compared to other years.

**Table 1**

*Performance Percentages for Fisher High School, Department of Defense, and Global Students Scoring 3 or Above on the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Exam, 2017 to 2021*

Exam year	Categories	Fisher High School	DoD	Global
2021	Total number of students who took the exam.	5	54	259,389
	Percentages of students who scored 3 or above.	80.0%	64.8%	60.0%
	Number of students who scored 3 or above.	4	35	155,633
2020	Total number of students who took the exam.	11	1,096	549,535
	Percentages of students who scored 3 or above.	63.6%	62.3%	62.2%
	Number of students who scored 3 or above.	5	17	8,835
2019	Total number of students who took the exam.	11	61	558,397
	Percentages of students who scored 3 or higher.	27.3%	50.8%	54.2%
	Number of students who scored 3 or above.	3	31	302,651
2018	Total number of students who took the exam.	5	71	556,463
	Percentages of students who scored 3 or above.	40.0%	59.2%	57.0%
	Number of students who scored 3 or above.	2	42	317,184
2017	Total number of students who took the exam.	13	130	561,980
	Percentages of students who scored 3 or above.	46.2%	47.7%	55%
	Number of students who scored 3 or above.	6	62	309,089

*Note.* The source for the total number of students who took the exam and the percentage who scored 3 or above for 2017–2019 and 2021 was instructional planning reports (College Board, 2022). The source for the 2020 information was the College Board AP Score Report for Educators for Fisher High School, accessed March 9, 2022.

I calculated the number of students who scored 3 or above for all years by multiplying the percentage of students who scored 3 or above by the total number who took the exam and rounded it to the nearest whole number. Therefore, according to data reported, Fisher High School students had not only been performing low (2017–2019) on the APELC, but the percentages were low compared to other DoD students who took the exam. The scores did increase in 2020 and 2021; however, this 2-year period was during a pandemic, and in 2020 and 2021 students performed better under other than typical circumstances. For example, students were quarantined and had more time to devote independently to study and test preparation. This performance was far from the norm at Fisher High School, whose students performed lower than their DoD peers on the APELC exams in 2017–2019.

It is essential to recognize that 45 students took the APELC exam at Fisher High School from 2017 to 2021 (see Table 1), and in 2017–2019 only 22 scored 3 and above. While 2020 and 2021 APLEC scores were higher than those for the previous years, these were atypical years for testing significantly due to COVID-19. The declining trend from 2017 to 2019 among the students scoring 3 points and above on the APELC exams at Fisher High School raised concerns over the educational approaches used to teach these students. Understanding the perceptions about the factors influencing APELC performance from teachers at Fisher High School and other DoD schools could reveal the underlying challenges.

The APELC course, which students at Fisher High School take before the APELC exam, is a collegiate-level English course model. Students should arrive with a working knowledge of how to interpret the language used by an author (College Board, 2020a).

Throughout the course, students are asked to examine and expound upon analyzing the broader purpose of those choices. For high school, there is no specific curriculum for the course. The College Board provides a framework geared towards teaching to pass the test, but instructors must construct all curricula (College Board, 2020a). It appears that the issues most AP teachers face are whether to teach specifically to the test or present a better rounded program that produces students who can function in an actual collegiate course. The bright side is that the AP community has a strong network of teachers who share freely and work together to ease the burden of curriculum design and implementation at the various learning institutions.

Compared to Fisher High School students' performance on APELC exams, I reviewed 5 years of student grades in the course students take at Fisher High School in preparation for the APELC exam. The years I analyzed included 2017 to 2018, 2018 to 2019, 2019 to 2020, and 2020 to 2021. According to a school administrator, the confidence gained from passing the practice APELC exams taken in the course may have caused students to become less keen about obtaining a qualifying mark, 3 or above, on the actual APELC exam. Students' performance at the entry-level level was low. The results of the practice tests they took in the course indicated that they could not even earn a score of 1 on the AP test. However, students demonstrated growth in performance on the practice testing in the course by the end of the year. For the past 5 years, students have exhibited quality performance in the practice exams in the course.

Additional evidence of the problem from 2017 to 2019 emanated from informal conversations with teachers at Fisher High School in May 2020. The teachers confirmed that the APELC data show that many students undertaking the APELC exams fail to

score 3 points or higher. The teachers further noted that the implications of the trend include the students' failure to attain the set threshold for earning college credit. The teachers also stated that Fisher High School does not adequately prepare students for the APELC course. The teachers' main concern about the low performance on the APELC exams was the implication that students had not attained the desired college-level knowledge and skills. Although students scoring 3 points or higher on AP exams are likely to exhibit better performance in college than those who do not get such grades (Sadler & Tai, 2007), no research identifies teachers' views on the reasons for the low performance in DoD schools. Therefore, this research revealed the teachers' perceptions of the factors affecting low school performance.

Overall, the percentage of students at Fisher High School who took the APELC exam from 2017–2019 and scored 3 or higher has been below 50%, as indicated in Table 1. The percentage decreased from 46.2% in 2017 to 27.3% in 2019. In 2020, the percentage increased to 63.6% scoring 3 or higher. The percentages for all DoD schools on the APELC were comparable to the global scores, except for 2020 and 2021, when the DoD percentage was lower than Fisher High School's scores. The recorded scores' main implication is that students' performance on APELC exams at Fisher High School was generally low. The Fisher High School administrator in 2019 also stated that the curriculum could be the problem because it may not cover all students need to know before taking the APELC exam. Therefore, DoD teachers' perceptions of what can work best are necessary for addressing the problem.

### **Evidence of the Problem From Professional Literature**

According to College Board (2021), more than 1.2 million U.S. public high school students sat for at least one AP exam. This number had increased by 27.1% from the number who sat in the class of 2010 (College Board, 2021). Therefore, the adoption of AP exams has gradually increased in the United States. The College Board has been reporting yearly growth in registered exam takers. However, significant stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and administrators increasingly express concerns over the number of students failing to attain the qualifying grade (College Board, 2019b). The U.S. federal government, through the U.S. Department of Education, has instituted massive developments at the DoD and public schools. The improvements spanning increased access to learning resources, the establishment of good policies at learning institutions, and the installation of programs such as the Military Child Education Coalition have explicitly aimed at augmenting the quality of education at the learning institutions (Military Child Education Coalition, 2020a; Pullin, 2017). When the policies for improving AP or APELC performance were not explicitly aimed, the gist of formulation dwelt on boosting overall student performance.

The increased effort by the U.S. federal and state governments to boost the quality of education should be commensurate with education quality outcomes. The primary concern of critical stakeholders such as teachers and the College Board is that the AP exams' overall scores are low (College Board, 2020d). The College Board (2019b) indicated that only 23.9% of those who attempted the AP exams in the United States in 2019 attained a 3 or higher score. Many high school students, teachers, and parents have pointed out that a good score on the AP exams indicates excellent performance at

learning institutions (Strauss, 2020b). Such learners are inspired to take the exams and achieve credit to use when they join a higher educational institution.

Previously, researchers have expressed concerns over the increased number of students scoring below the qualified level on AP exams (Kamenetz, 2017; Zubrzycki, 2017). Zubrzycki (2017) indicated that only slightly more than 20% of the graduating students who took the 2016 AP exams scored a 3 or higher. The primary interpretation of the reported results is that most AP exam takers fall below the qualified standard. The findings by Zubrzycki are supported by Kamenetz (2017), who indicated that pass rates fell after the broadening of educational access and the growth in the number of schoolchildren who take AP exams. According to data from 168,000 graduating seniors in California, only about 28% scored a 3 or above on the 2015 AP exams (College Board, 2020b). Similar percentages can be found across U.S. states. For example, in Maryland, 31.5% of the schoolchildren who took the AP exams in 2019 got a 3 or higher, while the number of learners who attained at least a 3 was about 29% in Virginia (Ryan, 2020). The number of learners who took the AP exam in Kentucky in 2019 was 50,506; out of this number, only 32% scored a 3 or higher (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020). In consideration of the current statistics, AP exam performance is generally low (College Board, 2020b); this is a significant concern among stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and administrators because only a few of the enrolled students attain the required qualification despite the money spent on the program.

Focusing on the APELC exam, in June 2021, the percentage of test takers who scored 3 or above on the APELC global exams was 49.6%, while 50.4% scored a 2 or below (College Board, 2021). Globally, APELC performance for 2021 was lower than

for 2020 (62.7% scored 3 or above) and 2017–2019. Percentages for DoD students who scored a 3 or above were comparable to the global scores from 2017–2019 but were much lower for 2020 and 2021 (see Table 1). Evidence from these data shows that the number of students who do not qualify for college credit is still high, especially for DoD students.

A higher percentage of Fisher High School students passed the AP-related course given than the APELC exams. The proportion of those recording a 3 or higher in APELC exams decreased from 46.2% in 2017 to 16.7% in 2021. These percentages suggest that there has been no improvement in the students' analytical and writing expression skills. The students' pass or fail rate on AP exams is determined by applying the skills they have mastered throughout the year. The local problem was the low percentage of Fisher High School learners scoring 3 or higher on the APELC exam over the last 3 years. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to discover DoD teachers' insights into the issues influencing military-connected students' low scores on the APELC exam, given that local stakeholders, such as administrators and instructors, are concerned about this trend.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Advanced Placement (AP) program:* At the end of the school year, high school students take a standardized exam that tests their knowledge of college-level material taught by their instructors (Finn & Scanlan, 2019). An AP exam is a college entry assessment. Those who do not qualify for college credit score either 1 or 2, while the qualifiers attain 3 or more (Warne, 2017). Students who perform well on their AP exam may be approved for college credit by the College Board and be excused from taking preliminary courses in the college they join later (Warne, 2017).

*Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA):* Accountable for preparation, direction, and management of prekindergarten through 12th-grade educational curricula on behalf of the DoD (DoDEA, 2020).

*English language arts (ELA):* Refers to reading, writing, listening, and speaking, which entails the engagement of learners in technology-supported instructional practices, as well as the use of traditional print and media formats (DoDEA, 2018).

*Military-connected school:* A military establishment or school run by the DoD. Public schools daily contain 3% or more military students (De Pedro et al., 2011). Many public-school military child attendees go to 214 schools considered military connected.

*Military-connected student:* Pupil with one or more parents actively serving in the military or the reserves (Garner et al., 2014). The parent could also have veteran status and have been honorably discharged.

*Resilience:* Military-connected students are frequently known for greater levels of resilience (Shafer et al., 2016). Military-connected learners often adapt to changes compared to their civilian counterparts. Schools usually expect educational resilience as military-connected students make many relocations and adjust to various teaching styles, educational requirements, and social groups.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research is essential for various reasons. First, the study addressed a documented problem at Fisher High School that requires remediation to meet the school's mission statement of providing an excellent education for all students. Focusing on student performance on the APELC exam may improve student performance through the performance of targeted assessments and assistance in classroom management, curricular

redesign, educational design, and parental support. Such improvements could enhance the education quality at the learning institutions. The study is also significant because its ability to generate effective ways of ensuring classroom instruction is aligned with the AP test that the College Board administers.

The study findings can be included in the national debate on student performance in DoD schools. In the current learning setup, military-connected students face hardship inside and outside the teaching space, causing military-connected students to be at high risk of lacking basic skills necessary to succeed, thus dropping out of high school, and having low literacy rates (Military Child Education Coalition, 2017). This qualitative study's outcomes may contribute to the evolving scholarly understanding of learning gaps for military-connected students, specifically APELC students, by determining teachers' perceptions of the factors influencing military-connected students' scores on APELC exams. As a result, the military will comprise competent individuals with knowledge and skills in the desired concepts.

Multiple investigations have occurred on military families and children regarding their social and emotional well-being (Pexton et al., 2018; Trautmann et al., 2016; Williamson et al., 2018). However, little is known about teachers' perceptions of the factors influencing military-connected students' scores on APELC exams. Most of the research projects have revolved around understanding the military stressors on military-connected children and families from the point of view of the people who live and work with them (Davis et al., 2015; Hall, 2011). Because teachers interact with highly mobile military-connected children daily, there is a need to understand teachers' perceptions about the learners' experience and how they affect AP class/test performance. In the

current study, I considered teachers' insights into the issues influencing military-connected students' performance on APELC exams. The study's outcome may provide a basis for developing instructional strategies that can help improve APELC classroom instruction and assist students in becoming successful in the AP classes and earning a 3 or higher on the AP examination.

The highly mobile students from military families also experience unique problems compared to other groups of children. The social and emotional struggles that the students encounter can adversely affect their ability to navigate the education journey and master new concepts (Meadows et al., 2016). When teachers and policymakers do not know the specific challenges facing such children, they will not create strategies to overcome them or develop support structures that enhance highly mobile learners (Masten et al., 2015). Teachers play a crucial role in helping students transition from one school to the other at different stages of their education. Therefore, their views can help policymakers determine the support structures needed to help students perform better and live healthy lives.

The present study is significant in understanding the challenges that military-connected students may face to achieve appropriate English proficiency when transitioning to higher education. Moreover, students and families can benefit from the knowledge gained through this project as it works towards developing methods for supporting the learners and their families. When the DoD and other policy-making organizations understand the support structures that military-connected children and families require, they will create interventions and programs to improve scores attained by military-connected students on AP exams.

The mission statement of the U.S. Department of Education (2017) is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (p. 10). The low performance of students at the Fisher High School and other DoD institutions on the APELC exam undermines the attainment of the mission goal. The low exam performance indicates inefficiencies in the teaching process necessitating new measures to boost performance. The teachers spend substantial periods with the learners, which equips them with knowledge of the inherent challenges in the learning environment. The outcome may illuminate the learning institutions' prevailing challenges and enable the federal and state governments to develop lasting solutions for the learners.

### **Research Questions**

The following RQs guided this study:

RQ1: What are DoD teachers' perceptions of the factors influencing military-connected students' low APELC exam scores?

RQ2: What instructional strategies and practices do DoD teachers think can improve military-connected students' scores on the APELC exam?

### **Review of Literature**

The purpose of this study was to discover DoD teachers' insights into the issues influencing military-connected students' low scores on the APELC exam, given that local stakeholders, such as administrators and instructors, were concerned about this trend. The literature review required an analysis of past literature to understand the genesis and progression of the research issue. The past literature offers insights into earlier research findings and the overall consistency between the results. The low performance of

military-connected students on the APELC exams raised concerns about the effectiveness of the instructional strategies used at the DoD schools.

The selection of topics for the study review entailed following a specific criterion using keywords that led to articles that directly focused on the research problem. The first step towards selecting studies for review comprised the selection of relevant keywords. According to the research subject, the keywords that would provide insights about the genesis and progression of the problem included *causes, reasons for causing, military-connected students, Department of Defense students, failure, poor performance, and Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Exam.*

I searched the Walden University library and Google Scholar. I used databases such as ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, Ebook Central, EBSCOhost, PsychNet, and PsycInfo, selected due to ease of access and the reputation of containing peer-reviewed journal articles. The search criteria further entailed selecting studies on APELC performance published between 2016 and 2021. The search yielded minimal findings on the factors related to DoD students' low scores on the APELC exams. I next focused on the College Board website to determine the performance of military-connected students on the AP exams. The search revealed vast literature in the form of reports about the performance of DoD students over the past years. The scarcity of research on DoD students' performance on the AP exams led to the extension of the years of publication. I lowered the literature inclusion criteria to accommodate studies conducted from 2013 to 2021. The flexibility led to various DoDEA reports documenting the performance trends of military-connected students on the examination. I discuss the conceptual framework and the literature related to the broader issue in the following sections.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### ***Description of the Differentiated Instruction Model***

Tomlinson's differentiated instruction (DI) model was the conceptual framework for this study. The framework allows teachers to provide several learning methods targeted at the student's current ability at the preassessment and how their abilities change throughout the course (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018). The framework recognizes diverse classrooms, and students vary in background, ethnicity, and knowledge (van Geel et al., 2019).

The process of differentiation can happen in any of four ways: through (a) the content provided (i.e., videos, lectures, written instruction, hands-on demonstration); (b) instructional processes (i.e., verbal, written, step-by-step demonstration); (c) expected goal or outcome, personalized to the student and their abilities; or (d) supplying a learning environment conducive to the learner (i.e., low lighting, adequate temperatures, bathroom facilities; van Geel et al., 2019). According to Bal (2016), differentiated learning improves student achievement. These differentiation approaches accommodate a more comprehensive range of students, acknowledging their individual needs while addressing the requirements for completed work.

According to the DI model, teachers change their instructional approach to students after acknowledging and understanding the differences among students' thought patterns (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). DI is a teaching strategy built upon modifying the content, process, and product of learning to positively affect the students' engagement with the learning material (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). The modification is realized by leveraging effective organization, communication, and scheduling to match students'

readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Ornauer & Harris, 2020). Under DI, student differences become vital determinants of the teaching strategy (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Accordingly, teachers who understand their learners succeed better with this model (Tomlinson, 2017). However, there is evidence that DI does not positively affect student achievement (Faber et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, the DI model requires that teachers remain flexible in their approaches to teaching (Wan, 2017). For instance, teachers should be open to situations that require the participation of the whole class, those that require the participation of small groups, and those that require the participation of individual students (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). The DI model encompasses diverse knowledge and skill sets that learners need to acquire. Students in DoD schools are taught using clearly defined teaching tasks that are flexible and fit small learning; increments make this model appropriate for such a learning environment. The DI model fits this way of teaching as teachers have the leeway to customize the teaching tasks based on students' needs. For example, many activities focus on communication and physical fitness instead of general academic performance (Di Stasio et al., 2016). This teaching tool informs the choice of content organization as an element in the first stage of this conceptual framework. Process references the different ways in which students internalize the content.

There are slow and fast learners, and teachers must adopt bespoke communication strategies for conveying information to different student groups in DoD schools. Customized communication is a strategy used in business, specifically custom-made products and services, to communicate effectively to the team members while ensuring internal communication and building credibility and trust (Peters & Peters, 2018). This

teaching tool informs the communication strategies' choice in the current research's conceptual framework. Product is the capacity of the students to demonstrate what they have learned and can be tested through assessments after extended learning. The appropriate scheduling of assessments between learning makes it easier for teachers to realize areas of differentiation for each student (Tomlinson, 2012). The fundamental goal of scheduled evaluations is to ensure that all students are well prepared for the final APELC examination regardless of the variations in their aptitude.

### ***Prior Research Using Differentiated Instruction***

The DI model has been used in prior research to effectively communicate instructional strategies to students according to their level of understanding. Ortega et al. (2018) indicated that the DI approach used by the teacher in the language learning classroom helps students and teachers to communicate effectively and makes the instructions comprehensible for students. Similarly, Brevik et al. (2018) investigated the positive effects of adopting the DI model in classrooms of secondary school students. The study implied that teachers must consider the students' differences to communicate with high-school students, or teachers may not communicate effectively. For example, students have different learning styles, translating into different communication styles (Alt, 2017). According to Alt (2017), if students learn best by reading, writing, or even listening, they are more likely to find various traditional forms of communication. In contrast, a student who learns with their hands, otherwise known as *kinesthetic learning*, may struggle with being given verbal direction with no demonstration or chance to attempt whatever task is in front of them for themselves.

Other aspects of learning and communication must be considered for meaningful education. Communication skills can range from very basic, wherein the military-connected student requires simplified ideas for the lesson, to proficient, wherein students understand the lesson. However, a military-connected student may be struggling with making a connection due to the number of times the student has had to relocate, thus causing a gap in connection. In the study by Arnold et al. (2011) involving teachers from eight primary schools in four public districts with a significant concentration of military-connected students, the teachers said that DI is crucial because of variations in transitioning kids' previous knowledge and academic abilities. The primary research discussed throughout this section also emphasizes the effectiveness and importance of the DI approach in classrooms for bridging the gap between teacher and student relationships. Moreover, these studies imply that if military-connected students are instructed according to the DI model, they could score well on APELC tests.

#### ***Applying the Differential Instruction Model to the Present Study***

Some military-connected students may require modifications because they have moved to a new school district due to one or both parents being military connected and deployed. These students may need different tools to learn and comprehend certain concepts or ideas and adjust to new curricula and forms of instruction. The DI framework acknowledges that although children may be in the same grade, they may not be at the same readiness level to understand certain concepts and learning profiles (Suprayogi et al., 2017). To provide DI, the teacher is expected to administer personalized goals based on the student's readiness or ability at that time, providing the instruction or aid inherent to how a student learns.

The study was further supported by the DI framework based on the needs of each student to be successful rather than applying whole-group instruction. Students are provided with initial preassessment and routine screening throughout their lessons. Preassessment allows teachers to gather data on students' initial understanding, learning style, and abilities before issues arise. The teachers will bring students to a satisfactory skill level with personalized goals and lesson plans (Cimermanova, 2018). DI can be used with any student. The framework accounts for how students learn and their academic level in a subject. Military-connected students are often not instructed by the same teacher long enough to become used to the curriculum; thus, they are at particular risk of falling behind, especially when attending schools that are not military connected (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2017). Reassessments are for continuous adjustment to the student's overall learning goals and how information needs to be delivered for optimal intake and processing (Pozas & Schneider, 2019). By making these adjustments, teachers can supply personalized lessons, plans, and materials to students with different needs or requirements.

The idea behind the DI is based on the understanding that students in DoD schools will become more engaged with their learning materials irrespective of the challenges that weigh down on their capacity to learn. Prior researchers have noted that students at DoD schools have different experiences from those in non-military U.S. schools (Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2016). Military-connected students' adverse experiences affect their appreciation of learning (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019). This realization should incentivize teachers to modify their instructional strategies to the advantage of the students. The bottom line is realizing a proactive learning environment in DoD schools.

This proactive learning bolsters the students' preparedness for the examinations, ultimately positioning them to excel on the APELC tests.

Furthermore, using the DI model may assist military-connected kids in improving their comprehension skills, allowing them to communicate more effectively. DI is built on changing three elements: content, process/product, and learning environment influence. The teacher's awareness of the students' needs—their preparedness, interests, and learning profile—guides this adaptation (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2011). The information, concepts, and abilities that students must gain are content (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2011). It is vital to note that these learning objectives should almost always be the same for all students in a differentiated classroom. Teachers may distinguish between "methods that students use to obtain important material" and "content that students use to access key content" (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2011, p. 15). Teachers do provide appropriate scaffolding when operating with content to confront individual student needs—for example, presenting the required subject to certain students, enabling advanced students to skip ahead in class, or even modifying the curriculum for specific students depending on their personalized education programs (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2011). Content, process/product, and influence on the learning environment, all three essential parts of the DI model, are critical to the learning process and students' success.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

There are factors related to the low academic performance of DoD school students, primarily regarding APELC exams (Brown & Thompson, 2016). These factors include poor learning conditions, adjusting to the new curriculum and instructional methods at a new school, local challenges and issues faced by teachers in DoD schools,

as well as the ability for students to focus and pay attention long enough to meaningfully engage with the lesson in a way conducive to their learning styles (Bailey et al., 2019).

The broader review section highlights the factors related to lower AP results of military-connected students. I also discuss strategies for teaching military-connected students.

### ***Student Mobility and Student Academic, Social, and Psychological Success***

Military-connected students need extra care and support from their new educational institutions each time they are required to move. This support is even more critical when their military-connected parents leave and participate in war-like situations or an actual war (De Pedro et al., 2011). Frequent change in the place of education has been defined as student mobility. Student mobility rate describes the number of students who move from one school to another (Goretti, 2017). According to Stimis (2017), due to the frequent relocations of military families, children are likely to relocate six to nine times between Grades 6 and 12. Such mobility can be substantially more difficult for younger students, in Grades K–5, as they are still learning foundational concepts to expand and build the rest of their knowledge (Cohen, 2019). Isolation may also cause students to withdraw or become even more isolated; with no support or social network, certain developmental milestones may not occur, inhibiting the student's ability to cope or concentrate (Lunceford et al., 2020). Thus, support is essential for military-connected students. Mobility negatively affects military-connected students' academic performance, especially in mathematics (Avritt, 2020). Constant mobility can create gaps in students' academics, especially in cases where teachers do not identify and fill the void. Therefore, it is essential to present military student-centered policies to prevent low performance in AP.

Military-connected students' mobility challenges can also affect their social and psychological health. Cohen (2019) suggested that while students do not experience military service themselves, they often carry as much emotional burden as adults when families are separated. There is a lack of understanding regarding how detrimental such a separation can be. Little is done to provide children with resources to cope with such an experience while maintaining the faculties required for adequate educational engagement (Cohen, 2019). Frequent mobility and transitions can cause an unhealthy learning environment uncondusive to what the student needs, and mobility has been linked to several scholastic difficulties, including a delay in learning and decreased math and reading proficiency (Maxwell, 2008; Strand & Demie, 2007; Temple & Reynolds, 2000). Tight schedules, constant movements, and a lack of reliable learning resources expose military-connected students to extreme challenges (Lunceford et al., 2020). Further research by Freudenberger (2020) highlighted the challenges that military-affiliated students encounter because of stress and anxiety concerning their deployed parents. The authors also suggested specific ways for educators in military-connected schools to consider and support the needs of military-affiliated students.

### ***Online Learning***

Online learning has become a common teaching method (Hart et al., 2019), especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (McElrath, 2020). Online learning in military-connected schools improves the flexibility of the students and teachers, as learning can happen anytime, anywhere (Freudenberger, 2020). Research before the pandemic showed that adopting online learning contributes to a healthy understanding for military-connected students (Phelps, 2015). Various negative consequences accompanied online

or distance learning adoption, with student academic results showing the most significant short-term and long-term effects (Hart et al., 2019). With online learning, students do not have to go to physical classrooms. Therefore, students can use the time usually devoted to commuting to school to do other activities focusing on their physical well-being (Swan Sein et al., 2020). The physical well-being of military-connected students improves the health of students in military-connected schools (Swan Sein et al., 2020). However, online or distance learning has little or no supervision and requires adequate self-discipline, which many children do not possess, regardless of their military affiliations (Dhawan, 2020).

Educators had to re-strategize and find ways of reaching all students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Saliccioli, 2021). Cessation of K-12 schools occasioned by the pandemic led to adverse social, emotional, and educational consequences for the children (Lanier et al., 2021). In the case of the AP exams and testing in 2020, instead of canceling the testing, the College Board shortened the AP exams, made the exams open book, and the exams administered online (Richards et al., 2020). The exam took 45 minutes, and each subject exam was administered simultaneously worldwide in 2020. Previous research has shown that online testing reduced anxiety for those who developed anxiety in a physical setting (Stowell & Bennett, 2010). Unfortunately, thousands of AP test-takers in 2020, representing about 1% of 1.6 million test-takers, reported issues such as faulty technology, students unfairly shut out of exams, and low-income students who did not have computers or high-speed internet being able to access the exams (Richards et al., 2020; Strauss, 2020a).

Additionally, students did not know how to prepare for the shortened exams (Richards et al., 2020; Strauss, 2020a). Before the pandemic, students' academic results were affected by system failures and a lack of high-speed internet or computers, an issue that also affected veterans using the GI Bill (Bailey et al., 2019). No attempts to ease the process of distance learning or provide students with more effective options have been offered, and most problems were reported by non-military students who took the exams from their homes (Bailey et al., 2019). To conclude, distance learning is challenged by the lack of control in individuals presumed to be self-sufficient in making their own decisions and limited access to technology and the Internet.

### ***Challenges at Home and in the Classroom***

The research studies highlighting the low performance of non-military students on the AP exams include local challenges that narrow down to the classroom and home setup. According to a study by Kolluri (2018), classroom challenges mainly include lacking access to quality learning resources such as computers and inadequate study time. Students with shorter attention spans or difficulty learning through reading and writing at home face the challenge of study and exam timing, insufficient study resources, and technical glitches in the exam system (Kolluri, 2018). As previously mentioned, studying and exam timing take a sense of organization and discipline to self-monitor one's education. When students who already possess poor self-discipline are left essentially alone, or perhaps are struggling in a way that has made them disinterested in the education process (typical of the military-connected student), they will assuredly fall behind as they will not study promptly and may miss exams completely (Hembrough, 2020).

### *Strategies for Teaching Military-Connected Students*

Teachers play a vital role in improving performance on APELC exams, such as addressing students' perceptions, engaging students in critical thinking, and challenging them to reflect on their learning (Judson, 2017). There are many strategies for teaching military-connected students. Araujo and Araujo (2021) have found unfamiliar or unorthodox techniques helpful when aiding students in studying and maintaining high marks. For example, storytelling was used to help student engagement regarding reading material. It was asserted that different forms of direction and interaction were conducive to increased reading comprehension and understanding in students (Araujo & Araujo, 2021). Thus, using creative outlets to provide a better experience is an effective teaching strategy. Verlaan (2018) suggested a multimodal model which allowed students to partake in a variety of activities at the same time to increase comprehension. The method was shown to work better in teams, increasing cooperation and teamwork while also asserting different learning styles in the same environment in congruence with comprehension. For example, visual and auditory elements provided instruction, hands-on activities, and the necessity for direction. Each student was provided with a component conducive to their learning style and was also able to become acquainted with other materials and learning methods in the safety of their educational comfort zone (Verlaan, 2018). Thus, participation in a variety of activities simultaneously can increase material comprehension.

Conventional learning environments are widely characterized by strategies focused on course completion rather than student engagement. Stabback (2016) has stated that the degree to which a student engages with the course content offers more value than

the course completion. Suggested strategies to maintain engagement included relating material to popular movies, shows, or other material, making it relatable and fun, and providing a basis for interest. “*Why* should the student care about this information?” is a question teachers are encouraged to ask when deciding how to engage with students and keep their attention (Volk et al., 2020). For instance, fully engaged students with the course content stand a chance of scoring more than 50% on their examinations, even if the course is just 70% complete. In contrast, the material completed is still unsatisfactory; we see an opportunity for students to regain their educational standing (Stabback, 2016). When the students are less engaged with the learning materials, the course completion percentage is unessential and maybe 100%, while material comprehension will be lower.

DoD school policy must be revised considering the students' engagement rather than course completion. Stabback's (2016) research forms a solid basis for the present study because it underscores the need for better teaching strategies to enhance student preparedness for examination success. DI could provide the DoD teachers with a better opportunity to bridge the gap between military-connected students and teachers.

Also, Roegman and Hatch (2016) cited that professional development among teachers enhances the quality of their teaching and advice to learners. Also, experiences faced by military school students can be helpful to other students. An overarching success factor in this regard is the quality of education. Roegman and Hatch (2016) elaborated that specific teaching strategies can enhance students' engagement with the learning material, increasing their chances of success. This opportunity to increase success implies that to strengthen the level of understanding between teachers and students DI module

must be considered a significant model for combatting militant-connected students' performance in AP exams.

### **Implications**

The information obtained in the research flow can help understand why military-connected students taking the APELC classes have consistently yielded lower exam scores for the past three years. These data are essential to understand better how teachers can educate military-connected students in APELC classes. Professional development, curriculum plans, and position papers are three potential projects that could be developed and followed through based on the findings obtained in this research. The application of DI will provide the conclusions that will help in the professional development of teachers in general and the DI's utilization for lesson planning purposes. Professional development could also allow teachers to become more efficient and focus on each student and their needs. Curriculum plans could help teachers develop individualized lessons, assignments, units, and projects to teach to students' individual needs and allow teachers to access students' knowledge and skills. The findings obtained in the study could help teachers relieve the burden of curriculum design into the district- and state-mandated learning standards, according to College Board, specific to AP classes. Finally, by developing position papers as arguable opinions about an issue relevant to teachers and students, teachers could convince the audience that their opinion is valid and worth listening to. Thus, the research findings obtained in the study may serve as the background for developing a standardized guide with the strategies and practices DoD teachers will have to use to improve military-connected students' scores on the APELC exam.

## **Summary**

The questions that formed the purpose of this basic qualitative design study presume that teachers' perceptions can indicate the factors influencing the low performance of students at Fisher High School on APELC examinations. The insights gained from the inquiry can provide the basis for improving the design and delivery of literacy strategies to students at Fisher High School while preserving and perhaps enhancing the factors that have led to success at the remaining DoD schools. The effective professional incorporation of teachers' recommendations on improving academic performance among military-connected students is a critical factor in improving the students' excitement, engagement, and proficiency and can accelerate students' learning. Section 2 includes my methodology to collect, analyze, and present the results. Section 3 describes the project developed based on the study findings, and Section 4 includes my reflections and conclusions.

## Section 2: The Methodology

Through this basic qualitative study, I aimed to discover DoD teachers' insights into the issues influencing military-connected students' low scores on the APELC exam. In Section 2, I thoroughly discuss the research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis. I end the section with the data analysis results, interpretation of the findings, and a discussion of the project deliverable as an outcome of the results.

### **Research Design and Approach**

The research design I selected for this study was a basic qualitative research design. A basic qualitative design was the best approach due to the nature of the research problem. A set of stated or established philosophical expectations in the recognized qualitative techniques does not guide basic or generic qualitative research (Ospina et al., 2017). People's intelligence of their subjective views, attitudes, beliefs, or thoughts on their encounters with items in the outside world is investigated using generic qualitative inquiry (Percy et al., 2015). According to Barnham (2015), generic inquiry aids researchers in analyzing what individuals believe and how these ideas may influence their behavior. In other words, Barnham acknowledged that qualitative research design might assist in expanding approaches for following up on results. Using a qualitative research design in previous comparable studies where instructors' perceptions were used to measure student academic achievement justifies this research approach (see Kiarie, 2016; Purvis et al., 2017; Whittle et al., 2018). In this study, I sought DoD teachers' insights into the factors, instructional approaches, and practices to improve students' APELC exam scores. Qualitative research to study subjects' perceptions is a perfect choice because it is a flexible design that explores experiences and attitudes in depth (Mohajan,

2018). Perceptions cover a wide range of ideas and opinions of the respondents, and qualitative research design helps in studying human thoughts and opinions.

Before deciding on a basic qualitative design, I considered several qualitative and quantitative designs. A phenomenological approach to qualitative research concentrates on a group's shared experience. The primary goal of this method is to describe the nature of the event in the issue (Villa et al., 2018). The phenomenological approach was unsuitable for this research because it requires several interviews and special analyses. In the current study, I aimed to get a better knowledge of an issue.

On the other hand, researchers using the ethnographic technique aim to learn about participants' culture in a specific area by depending on participant observation over time in the field and may employ qualitative or quantitative methodologies (Jones & Smith, 2017). The ethnographic approach was thus unsuitable for this study based on its definition and aim. The narrative method of studying participants' life stories did not fit the current research objectives (Reed et al., 2018).

A quantitative research design did not fit here because it would have involved quantifying the obtained data, and there was no need to quantify the perception of teaching strategies referring to the RQs. Moreover, a quantitative paradigm does not refer to respondents' experiences and perspectives, as there is a lack of connection between the researcher and participants (Rahman, 2017), which was not a focus of the current study. In this study, I sought to understand the perceptions of teachers who teach the APELC classes regarding the factors influencing the performance of military-connected students on the APELC. The choice of a basic qualitative design was justified by the intention to

reflect narrative data and gain meaning and understanding of the issue I focused on, teachers' perceptions (see Aspers & Corte, 2019).

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selection**

Current and past teachers from DoD high schools stateside and overseas who currently taught or had taught APLEC classes were selected for this research. The requirements for participation in the study were that the participant must (a) be currently teaching an APELC exam course at a DoD school or have taught an APLEC exam course for at least 1 year in the past and (b) have been working in a DoD school for at least 6 months.

### **Justification for the Number of Participants**

I interviewed eight participants. All teachers who met the study criteria were eligible to participate. Data saturation ensures that the obtained information is enough to draw conclusions. According to Hennink et al. (2017), nine respondents are enough to reach code saturation (to hear all the variations of the responses). Still, at least 16 respondents are required to reach meaning saturation, to understand what respondents say. However, one number cannot be used for any study. Data saturation can be achieved when further interviews have no new themes for analysis, and the research can be replicated (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I continued the interviews until the data saturation threshold was reached with eight participants.

### **Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants**

After the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research proposal, I initially planned to recruit participants through the DoDEA. However, I learned that DoDEA was not accepting new research requests at the time. The Research, Accountability, and Evaluation Division had yet to onboard someone to manage the program. I then took the alternative approach, using social media sites to recruit participants. I posted a flyer on two social media platforms, Twitter and Facebook, to allow interested participants who met the study criteria to volunteer to participate in the study. The flyer listed the study's purpose, the selection criteria, and my contact information. Participants who met the study criteria and were interested in participating were asked to contact me through an email or phone call to schedule an interview. I then emailed the potential participants the informed consent form and asked them to give their consent through an email stating, "I consent." The participant kept a copy of the consent form.

### **Establishing Researcher–Participant Relationship**

Delivered informed consent is one of the research elements to ensure trust between a researcher and participants (Roache, 2014). Next, good researcher–participant relationships were set by agreeing on an interview in a convenient place and time for the subject. The interview took place for approximately 45–60 minutes. Participants respond better to interview questions when they are at ease. Hence, for this study, I established rapport by first greeting them and offering them my name before the interview, asking them how their day had been so far, and creating a brief conversation about education and students before easing into the RQs.

## **Protection of Participants' Rights**

### ***Protection From Harm***

As human beings were involved in the study, the Walden University IRB approved the research. I ensured that the research did not harm the respondents and that all participants were comfortable with the interview process. The safety and well-being of all participants are always of the highest importance. Any individual who may have felt in any way that they were being harmed had every opportunity to stop and conclude the interview session at any time.

### ***Confidentiality***

I discussed confidentiality in the informed consent form. I kept all the responses obtained from the participants confidential; participant and school names were not mentioned in the data presented in the study. I used pseudonyms for the participants' names.

### ***Informed Consent***

I obtained informed consent through email. A letter of informed consent for the participants to sign was attached to the email. The informed consent introduced me as the researcher and included my contact information and the purpose of the study. Further, it presented the criteria for participant selection, which were also in the invitation letter, including the statement of voluntary participation, confidentiality, privacy, and the right to refuse and withdraw from the study. The document also informed the participants about the procedures, risks, benefits, and duration of the study.

Finally, I asked the participants to reply “I consent” in an email if they agreed to participate in the study.

## **Data Collection**

### **Description and Justification of Data Collected**

I collected data for the research through semistructured interviews with DoD teachers who prepared students for the APELC exam. I interviewed eight participants. I held all interviews individually. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes.

Once I transcribed an interview, I emailed the transcript to the participant and asked them to check it for accuracy and to indicate if they wanted to add or change anything. After I completed the analysis, I carried out member checks. I wrote up one-page bullet points of the main conclusions and asked participants for their responses—if they thought something was missing (see University of Miami, 2020). Member checking helped me authenticate the obtained data.

I developed an interview protocol, which assists an interviewer in organizing questions that are in harmony with the research objectives. A semistructured interview is a top option for data collection (see Appendix B). The choice of semistructured interviews was justified by collecting a more detailed description of teachers' perceptions encouraging teachers to explain their views in detail (Pathak & Intratat, 2012). A semistructured interview was an opportunity to get direct responses and deepen the understanding of the issue by obtaining descriptions of personal feelings regarding the question in focus (Adams, 2015). The semistructured interview guided the general understanding of the topic. Semistructured interviews have shown effectiveness in

seeking teachers' perceptions (see Azhar & Iqbal, 2018; Karmina et al., 2021; Smith, 2018). Therefore, I chose semistructured interviews as the best data collection instrument to meet the study's objectives to answer the RQs.

### **Data Collection Instrument Development**

The data obtained from the interviews were teachers' perceptions regarding the RQs. I advanced the interview inquiries based on the RQs and literature review. I concentrated on my experience working with military-connected students who have dealt with the difficulties military-connected students and teachers may experience. I developed 18 interview questions to cover the research purpose and help obtain information to answer the RQs (see Appendix B). I divided the interview protocol into three sections. The first four questions in Section A were related to demographics. Section B had four questions (Questions 5–8) highlighting the participants' teaching backgrounds. Section C (Questions 9–18) were related to the APLEC exams, with Questions 9–13 aligned with RQ1 and Questions 14–18 aligned with RQ2.

### **Collection Processes**

Once the participants showed interest by contacting me, I scheduled the interview appointments. After obtaining the respondents' agreement, the interview was audio-recorded using two devices stored on my computer's hard disk. I also made notes of reactions and body language to provide additional information. The time and date for the interview were agreed upon beforehand. I interviewed the participants in person, through video conferencing technology, or over the telephone using third-party applications to enable the recording and then transferred the audio to the computer hard disk. Follow-up questions expanding on initial responses were necessary. I used the words and phrases

system to code the information, make it easy to access in a Microsoft Word document, and transfer it to an Excel file. Then, I categorized the codes and added notes to define the themes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, I played the primary role in the study as I conducted the data assortment and investigation procedures. I relate to education and learning strategies, and the problem in focus lies in the field of my interests. However, I did not have any direct influence on the participants. I did not work with participants in a previous study or current work.

### ***Experience in the Setting***

I have 15 years of experience working with military-connected students in DoD schools. I am currently teaching AP classes in a DoD school. This study was motivated by my experiences working with military-connected students, who often face several challenges, such as changing military-connected schools as they prepare for AP exams. Educators can apply the strategies developed from the research to military-connected and non-military-connected students who must move and transition to a new school while preparing to take the AP exam in the spring.

### ***Reducing Potential Bias From Experience in the Setting***

One of the most common reasons for researcher bias emergence is a close alignment of the research purpose with the personal agenda of the researcher. In this case, it is essential to consider whether the researcher seeks to confirm individual perceptions or seeks the truth. For example, even though I have experience working with military-

connected students, I did not have any expectations regarding the factors influencing military-connected students' low APELC exam scores and the instructional strategies and practices participants may offer. Vocabulary bias is another issue the researcher can experience in the flow of the research. The choice of the proper vocabulary for developing questions is essential (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). I did not insert the ready ideas into the questions to gather the participants' responses. I also lacked any personal or professional associations with potential participants.

### **Data Analysis**

I began the data analysis process after all the participants completed the interview. Data analysis consisted of organizing the data for analysis, minimizing the data into themes by coding, and presenting the data. I used thematic analysis to examine the information gathered from the interviews. Thematic analysis is a versatile and robust study design method that is often misinterpreted (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). To do a successful thematic analysis, Kiger and Varpio (2020) offered six steps: (a) examine the data, (b) develop the codes, (c) search for themes, (d) evaluate themes, (e) identify themes, and (f) write a report. I added themes when they arose in fresh interviews because I would analyze each interview separately. Data reduction is the first step in qualitative data analysis, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), and is defined as "the process of choosing, concentrating, reducing, abstracting, and altering the data that appear in written up field notes or transcriptions" (p. 10). Researchers must compact the data to make them more manageable and to address the research problem. In coding, I broke the data into discrete parts and created codes to label them. Finally, I grouped common ideas into concepts, referring to the conceptualization discussed by Elliott

(2018). An idea unites the data under common themes for more straightforward interpretation and analysis (Saldaña, 2016).

Data coding is an option that helps make analytic choices regarding data assessment (Miles et al., 2013). It is essential to ensure that each theme from the interview is included in the data analysis sheet. In initial coding, a researcher aims to remain open to all possible theoretical directions that the data suggest (Saldaña, 2016). Coding is also essential for proper data synthesis (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The respondents' common elements themes expressed through coding helped me see the respondents' common characteristics and unique ideas relevant to the RQs. I further group the data, present the information in tables, and describe the data in the study's results section.

### ***Coding Procedures***

After the interviews, I downloaded the transcript of the recorded interview from Zoom and saved it in a Word format. Before entering the downloaded file into the NVivo software for coding, I reviewed the transcripts and made edits. Then, I entered the edited file into NVivo. I used the software to group the responses into thematic analysis codes, creating a matrix based on the codes developed. The NVivo software produced the initial results that revealed 47 themes.

To ensure data accuracy, I reviewed the codes and the interviews and found other codes I added. I added a new code if some data did not fit any developed. Then, I categorized the codes and added notes to define the themes. I further considered and grouped common themes under one section to show that the ideas were interrelated.

## **Evidence of Quality of the Data**

Qualitative research data quality is defined by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I discuss these factors in the following sections.

### ***Credibility***

To achieve credibility, I used member checks and reflexivity. After I analyzed each interview, I wrote up one-page bullet points of the main conclusions. I asked each participant for their response--if they thought something was missing (see University of Miami, 2020) to help me authenticate the data. In implementing the reflexivity technique, the researcher aims to acknowledge all instances where they have played a significant role in the research process. Further, the researcher provides their previous experience and any beliefs or assumptions they hold. As indicated earlier, factors such as the ethical standing of the researcher significantly influenced how they conducted the study.

Credibility is vital as the researcher is essential in interpreting study findings.

### ***Transferability***

The transferability of findings generally describes the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied in other contexts. In qualitative research, the attainment of transferrable results is delegated to the researcher. Munthe-Kaas et al. (2020) indicated that qualitative findings are subject to the understanding and research skills of the researcher. To achieve transferability in this study, I used thick and rich descriptions. The thick description provided a means of capturing participants' thoughts in a particular context, which allowed the study of the relationships between those thoughts (Rizal et al.,

2021). Overall, the thick description in this study allowed the participants to voice their opinions on the subject matter adequately.

### ***Dependability***

In research, dependability generally entails two factors. These are the reliability and consistency of study findings and the level of documentation of research procedures (McGinley et al., 2021). To achieve dependability, I used audit trails. I documented all steps I took to achieve the results. In addition, I kept records of any actions taken during the investigation. Some of the records maintained in the development of the audit trail include the raw data, the summaries from the analysis process, the data reconstruction strategies, methodological and audit trail notes, and the information used to develop the interview question form. However, Turner et al. (2020) indicated that audit trails are subject to possible alteration by the researcher. Further, the dependability of the study findings is promoted by adopting triangulation to boost the credibility of this study's findings.

### ***Confirmability***

In qualitative research, confirmability generally describes how other investigators can confirm a study's findings (Nguyen et al., 2021). To achieve confirmability, I used the same reflexivity technique that I described in determining credibility.

### **Procedure for Addressing Discrepant Cases**

In discrepant case screening, contrary cases are compared to cases that represent the widely available information (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Building, changing, or extending a theory through discrepant case sampling is also possible. Following the guide for thematic analysis developed by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), if some responses

differed significantly from the rest of the answers, I considered how this information fits the research purpose and RQs. Regarding data corresponding to the RQs, I defined the data as a unique opinion and included the information in the research design. I reported negative or discrepant data that did not align with the themes in the study. Any discrepancy found in the data required me to re-evaluate the data collected. If I found any discrepant data, I then reevaluated other responses. I made a note to see if the participant fully understood the question or if other issues played a part in the answer given.

### **Data Analysis Results**

The purpose of this study was to discover DoD teachers' insights into the issues influencing military-connected students' low scores on the APELC exam, given that local stakeholders, such as administrators and instructors, are concerned about this trend. In addition, student qualifying ratios at Fisher High School were lower than at other DoD and U.S. schools. I explored DoD teachers' insights into the factors influencing military-connected students' low scores on the APELC exam and the instructional strategies and practices DoD teachers thought could lead to an improvement in military-connected students' scores on the APELC exam. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are DoD teachers' perceptions of the factors influencing military-connected students' low APELC exam scores?

RQ2: What instructional strategies and practices do DoD teachers think can improve military-connected students' scores on the APELC exam?

This section includes additional subsections on how I generated, gathered, and recorded the data. This section also contains demographics, the results divided into

themes under the research questions, and how the findings connect to the framework and prior research. I also provide information to support the trustworthiness of the data and identify the project deliverable.

### **How Data Were Generated, Gathered, and Recorded**

To answer the research questions, I conducted semistructured interviews with eight participants over Zoom due to the geographical distance between the researcher and participants. Using Zoom's recording feature to provide an automated transcription, I downloaded the interview transcripts and saved the files into eight individual Word files, one per interview. I edited the transcript by replaying the audio and adjusting the transcripts. I uploaded the edited file into the NVivo software I used to perform the thematic coding. The software grouped the responses into thematic analysis codes, creating a matrix based on the codes developed. The NVivo software produced the initial results that revealed 47 themes. During the coding process, data saturation occurred early in coding the fourth interview transcript. After the initial coding process, 47 codes emerged. After reviewing the transcripts and codes, I determined that subsequent clarification was needed, as data from the initial interviews were nearly identical on several responses. Five participants offered the same response to multiple questions with few inconsequential wording differences, such as choosing the article "a" instead of "the" during phrasing. When I discuss such responses in the results section, only one representative response is presented.

Thus, I became concerned about participant honesty. During follow-up, Participant 3 said, "Teachers are comfortable in their job of working for the government, and they often remain silent in order not to make administrators upset." Four participants

participated in member checking, and this additional data clarified their initial insights, leading to a reorganization of the codes and categories. During this process, I removed several codes, as they provided demographic information that did not directly contribute to answering the research questions. Table 2 presents the list of the 50 final codes.

I checked, cleaned up, and organized into categories those final codes. Then I grouped the categories into themes. At the end of that analysis, six themes emerged: *factors contributing to low APELC scores, how APELC is taught, student preparation for the APELC exam, DoD support, effective instructional strategies, and implementing practices to improve APELC scores.* Finally, I present the codes, categories, and themes in Table 3.

**Table 2***List of Final Codes*

List of final codes	
Things teachers plan to implement	Remote learning
Unaware of any	Alignment with counseling and education development (CED)
Allow revisions	AP program robust
Extended time for English speakers of other languages (ESOL)	Large selection of classes
Focus on skills and not grades	Rigor
Group work	9th grade needs more writing instruction
Specific, personalized feedback	Emphasis on skills and completion of outside reading
COVID	Lack of emphasis on rhetoric
ESOL population	Hired a paid Educational Development Center Advanced Placement (EDC AP) coordinator
Lack of preparation	Incorporate writing inquiry collaboration organization reading (WICOR) strategies
Reduced instruction time	Uncertain
Available for early enrollment	Use of CED
Flexible	AP info night
One teacher teaching	Identifying honors candidates
Teacher preparation	Vocabulary assignments
Skill redundancy	Taught to test, not to learn
Lack of instructional time	Online completion
Learning management system (LMS) difficult to use	One teacher limitations
Multiple preps + little time	Provide safe space
Any student may take class	Taught to be test ready
Students believe no prep needed	Maintaining normalcy
Students not knowing material	Parent sessions
Administration philosophy	
Pressure on students	
No DoD help provided	
Reliance on computer prep software	
Lack of prerequisites	
Teacher connections	
Lack of student support	
Lack of resources	

**Table 3***Codes, Categories, and Themes*

Code	Category	Theme
Lack of preparation, reduced instructional time, lack of vocabulary teaching efficacy, reliance on computer-assisted preparation, taught to be test ready.	C1a: Instructional factors	Theme 1: Factors contributing to low test scores
COVID, ESOL population, students not knowing the material, students believing they can pass without prep, lack of student support.	C1b: Population factors	
Maintaining normalcy, frequent moves, lack of preparation	C1c: Military-Specific Factors	
Available for early enrollment, flexible, one-on-teacher teaching	C2: Instructional strengths	Theme 2: How APELC is taught
Teacher preparation, skill redundancy, Lack of prerequisites, instructional standardization	C2b: Instructional weaknesses	
Lack of instructional time, LMS is difficult to use, multiple preps + little time, remote learning, lack of resources	C3a: Preparational challenges	Theme3: Student preparation for the APELC exam
Alignment with CED, AP program robust, Rigor	C3b: Preparational Strengths	
Unaware of any, No DoD help provided Things teachers plan to implement, parent sessions.	C4a: Support unknown C4b: Self-sufficient support	Theme 4: DoD support
Hired a paid EDC AP coordinator, Administrative philosophy.	C4c: Administrative actions	
Allow for revisions, Specific and individualized feedback, and Extended time for ESOL.	C5a: Revision and feedback strategies	Theme 5: Effective instructional strategies
Group work, Focus on skills and not grades, Providing safe space, Weekend boot camps, Allowing for online completion.	C5b: Instructional design strategies	
Ninth grade needs more writing instruction, emphasis on skills and completion of outside reading, lack of focus on rhetoric	C5c: Preparational weaknesses	
Incorporate WICOR, strategies, uncertain use of CED.	C6a: Instructional practices	Theme 6: Implementing practices to improve APELC scores
AP info night, identifying honors candidates, Teacher connections among schools	C6b: School-based practices	

## **Demographics**

I interviewed eight teachers who teach at various DoD schools. All eight teachers were female between the ages of 46 and 55. All had master's degrees and less than 24 hours earned toward a doctorate. The participants had between 13 and 25 years of teaching experience, with the mean years of experience being 15.625. All have been teaching at their current location for 3 to 15 years, with the mean number of years at the current assignment of 6 years. Of the eight participants, five teach in the Europe West district, one in the Europe East district, one in the Pacific district, and one in the Americas district; all school districts are part of the DoDEA. Currently, all are teaching APELC classes and high school language arts. In addition, six teachers are also teaching journalism/newspaper, and one is teaching AP Literature.

## **Results**

Once I decided on the themes, I checked the themes against the study's research questions to determine which themes and codes were extraneous to the purpose of this project study. The process revealed that no unnecessary themes and codes remained. Because the study had two research questions, I assigned the themes to a particular question. Themes 1, 2, and 3 provide responses illuminating participant perceptions of the reasons for student performance on the APELC exam (RQ1). Themes 4, 5, and 6 respond to the inquiry regarding strategies that may improve said scores (RQ2).

### ***RQ1: What Are DoD Teachers' Perceptions of the Factors Influencing Military-Connected Students' Low APELC Exam Scores?***

In the first research question, I sought to understand teacher perceptions of the factors influencing military-connected students' low APELC exam scores. As previously

stated, three of the emergent themes address teachers' perceptions of factors that contribute to poor performance by students at DoD schools on the APELC exam. In the order of their presentation, these themes are factors contributing to low test scores, how APELC is taught, and student preparation.

**Theme 1: Factors Contributing to Low Test Scores.** When I asked the educators participating in this study what factors they perceived as contributing to lower test scores, they responded with what became Theme 1. I subdivided this theme into three categories, instructional factors, population factors, and military-specific factors. Instructional elements focused on those factors directly related to the instruction process. Population factors focused on factors extraneous to the instruction process. Finally, military-specific factors focused on those factors directly the stresses of students being connected to military personnel.

***C1a: Instructional Factors.*** Teachers perceived several instructional factors as contributing to lower test scores. During the initial interviews, teachers identified reduced instructional time and lack of preparation as contributing factors. However, as lack of preparation connects more directly to the military-connectedness of the students, I will discuss it under that category.

Seven participants identified reduced instructional time as a significant contributing factor. Each of those seven articulated that the number of assessments, absenteeism, and other requirements met came at the expense of time in the classroom devoted to instruction. Participant 3's words exemplify the overall sentiment:

Furthermore, the DoDEA assessment schedule reduced class time – for DCAS [the Department for Citywide Administrative Services], the entire English wing

was relocated to other classrooms, causing disruption in learning. Most district lost instruction days for the Writing Assessment, which was given three times throughout the year. These days lost to absenteeism and testing severely hampered my ability to provide timely and thorough instruction, which likely influenced the students' scores.

The DoDEA assessment caused delays in learning, a sentiment that was concurred with by Participants 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

When asked for clarification, four participants illuminated three instructional factors that they perceived as contributing to lower test scores, such as disruption of learning. Participant 1 said of vocabulary-building exercises, "Students are also prepared by assigning them vocabulary and additional work; this helps sometimes. However, I think this is not as successful as it could be." This statement suggests that, for this participant, how they teach vocabulary is not as effective as it could be in improving student scores.

Another instructional factor that Participant 2 later illuminated when prompted further was the reliance of some schools on computer-assisted preparation software. As she said:

Students are often prepared the same at the start of the year in this class; however, as the year moves on and the demand for teachers to complete other obligations, they turn to the computer program and have students simply read and complete the multiple-choice questions. This form of practice is not a practice I feel is helpful in the success of students.

For Participant 2, the reduced instructional time brought on by other obligations led to the use of computer-based preparation software that this participant believed contributed to lower test scores.

As a final instructional factor, one participant perceived that students were taught “to the test” and not to the point of understanding the material. When prompted further, Participant 1 said:

One of the reasons students at my school are not prepared well is because the students are not taught to do well; they are taught to score high on the test. I know that sounds crazy, but the students need to know their work matters longer than the test.

In summary, the primary instructional factor educators perceived as contributing to lower test scores among military-connected students at their DoD schools was reduced instructional time. Lack of preparation by students due to frequent moves, ineffectual vocabulary teaching strategies, reliance on computer-assisted testing (which the participant linked to lack of instructional time), and students being taught how to take a test but not how to understand the material were perceived as instructional factors leading to lower test scores.

***C1b: Population Factors.*** Additionally, the participating educators identified several population factors contributing to lower test scores. These factors do not directly relate to instructional practices but affect the efficacy of said practices. During the initial interviews, participants identified three factors: COVID, the impacts of the ESOL population, and students not knowing the material. During the review of their transcripts,

they also identified a belief by students that they could pass without preparation and a lack of support provided for the students.

The most common population factor educators perceived as impacting test scores was the COVID-19 pandemic and its absenteeism. All eight participants echoed the words of Participant 7, who said:

Another factor that I know affected this group's scores was COVID-19. We had incessant absenteeism throughout the school year, especially from January until March, which caused me to pause some of the lessons to get everyone caught up and back together for instruction.

The full impacts of the pandemic on education have yet to be fully understood. Still, it is worth noting that all participants mentioned the pandemic as a factor external to instruction that impacted student performance.

The second most common population factor educators perceived as impacting test scores was the presence of a large ESOL population. Seven of the eight participants articulated similar words as Participant 6, who said:

If by "low" you mean non-qualifying scores, I attribute it at my location to the larger ESOL population. We have about 60% non-American/non-English as a first language population. Of my 34 students, my [AP English] classes were comprised of 17 ESOL and 17 native English-speaking students. Of the students who earned 3+ [on the APELC exam], 8 were ESOL students. One of them earned a 5, 3 earned 4s, and the other 4 earned 3s.

Participant 6 was the only participant who discussed the scores of the ESOL students in their classroom. And only, Participant 3 did not identify a large ESOL population as being a contributing factor to lower test scores.

One factor that emerged from later clarification during the transcript review by Participant 1 was a belief that students have too many demands for their time and attention. As a result, the students believe they do not need to prepare for the APELC exam. According to Participant 1,

Students are not prepared very well for the class. Students have so many things they have to focus on that they cannot give the time and dedication to the class without doing poorly on the test. Students think they can simply come into class and be successful. This needs to change.

As student attitudes and beliefs are not inherent in the instructional design, they are a factor of the population that contributed to lower test scores.

Participant 4 provided additional clarification during transcript review and identified a lack of support offered to students as another factor perceived as negatively influencing student performance:

The students at my school did as well as can be expected; these students have not had the support many schools have. One of the reasons is greatly due to the change in administration, and this has caused the students' motivation to be down. The students feel and have expressed to me how they do not feel they have been supported in their lack of knowledge. They often feel they must cram and not really know the material.

Lack of support for students and instructional design reflect student beliefs and attitudes influence performance.

***C1c: Military-Specific Factors.*** The final category under Theme 1 includes military-specific factors. While this may be seen as a subset of C1b, the factors discussed in this category are specific to military-connected students. Given that the study focuses on schools connected to the DoD, thus warrants special attention. Two codes fell under this category: Lack of preparation and maintaining normalcy. While lack of preparation by students may at first appear general and broad, one mention by Participant 3 directly connects it to the frequent moves of students, saying, “I attribute it to the gap in learning is the biggest cause of low scores in my opinion. Students move often, and the gaps cause them not to be properly prepared.” Participant 2 spoke more directly about the stresses of being part of a military family on students when she talked about the struggles of maintaining a sense of normalcy. Participant 2 stated:

Students are also facing the challenge of doing well in the class and maintaining some normalcy at home. It is difficult for military-connected students to complete all they must do in the class and what they have at home. The challenges are also rooted in the parents. Military-connected students have this image to keep up because of many of their parents being high-ranking individuals in the military.

This adds to the stress of the students simply being their best.

Only two participants mentioned issues directly related to the military service of the students’ parents as factors impacting exam performance, and both only mentioned these factors when asked for clarification.

**Theme 2: How APELC Is Taught.** While Theme 1 presented educators' perceptions when directly asked what factors contributed to student performance on the APELC exam, the method of instruction warrants consideration. Theme 2 presents participants' perceptions regarding how the APELC course is taught. There were two categories under this theme: Strengths and Weaknesses. Each category shall be discussed in detail.

*C2a: Strengths.* Participants mentioned three strengths of how the APELC course was taught: having only one teacher, the flexibility of when students can take the course, and its availability for early enrollment. All eight participants mentioned that having only one teacher was a strength. Participant 1 stated, “When thinking about teaching, a strength is that only one teacher teaches it, so it is concentrated in one or two (usually smaller) classes.” Except for Participant 3, all other participants responded similarly to Participant 1. Participant 3 added specificity to the class size, saying, “When thinking about teaching, a strength is that only one teacher teaches it, so the classes usually have between 12 and 20 students”. All participants initially agreed that one teacher teaching the APELC course, which six connected to a smaller class size, was a strength of how the course is taught at their respective schools.

Another strength all participants mentioned was the course’s flexibility. By flexibility, they meant that it was an open-enrollment course with no prerequisites and could be taken whenever the student wished. As Participant 8 said:

It is open-enrollment, so any student who wishes to strive for rigor can take the course – it is open to 10th, 11th, and 12th-grade students with no prerequisites. Students can take the course in place of either an 11th or 12th-grade class.

All eight participants used similar language when discussing the course's flexibility.

The final strength mentioned regarding how the APELC course is taught by Participant 3, who identified its availability for early or summer enrollment as a strength. This participant was the only one who expressed that this was a strength. She said, "It is available for all who come to early/ summer enrollment." There was no elaboration on this openness for early enrollment as a strength.

**C2b: Weaknesses.** Participants perceived four weaknesses with the method of instruction. These were teacher preparation, skill redundancy, instructional standardization, and lack of prerequisites. The most common perceived weakness was teacher preparation, which included concerns about teachers being ill-prepared, teachers not wanting to teach the class, and the limitations of having only one teacher teaching the course. All eight participants initially perceived having one teacher teaching the course as a strength but also perceived it as a weakness when discussing teachers being ill-prepared. Each participant agreed with the responses from Participant 1, who stated that Participant 1 stated, "Some might also say that only one teacher for the course could be a weakness, especially if that teacher is ill-prepared." Participant 1 added as a point of clarification that having a teacher who did not want to teach the AP course affected the students:

The exam is a course that one teacher is assigned to teach. I feel this also plays into the reason why many students don't do well. If you have a teacher teaching the class who really does not want to teach the class, this comes off to the students.

Participant 3 spoke of the limitations of having one teacher teach the course. First, the participant mentioned the desire to have one teacher come from administration monitoring. Participant 3 stated, “Most administrators like having only one teacher teaching the class because it is easier for the administrator to monitor and be aware of what is going on in the class.” During the transcript review, Participant 3 elaborated that even when teachers spend time helping students, there is only so much one teacher can do. Participant 3 related that,

Students are also prepared for the exam by working with the teacher on off times such as lunch and after school. The time spent working with the teacher is not the issue. The problem is that many teachers do not give all the additional help, and when you only have one teacher, students lose out on opportunities for growth.

Thus, having only one teacher teach the APELC course is perceived as a limitation by those who participated in this study.

The second perceived weakness in the instructional method of the APELC course was skill redundancy. While participants praised the flexibility and open enrollment of the course, all eight participants connected that flexibility to creating redundancy in student skillsets. As Participant 5 said, “Because it is open for 10th-grade students, this does cause an issue if they wish to not take APLIT [Advanced Placement in Literature] the next year, and they must enroll in ELA 11. In which case, some of the readings/material/skills are redundant.” All eight participants repeated that sentiment almost verbatim.

The third most frequently perceived weakness was the instructional standardization of the course. While not mentioned initially during the interview, four

participants discussed it to clarify earlier comments. For example, Participant 4 succinctly said, “In my school, the course is basically taught right in line with the College Board website. Our school does little moving from this format and adding anything more.” Additionally, Participant 2 said:

This course is taught by any teacher that wants to teach the class. The teacher follows the College Board curriculum and does not move from that method. This is not always good, but administrators demand the teacher teach to the standard of College Board and not what they see the need of the student is.

Other participants expressed concern that following the College Board’s curriculum without considering the needs of the students was a significant weakness. Participant 3 added:

The course is taught just as I have stated above; however, I do feel schools need to do a better job of allowing teachers to focus more on the weaknesses of students. Students take this a class as a junior, and by the time they get to this course, they have not been prepared for the rigor of the class.

And Participant 1 echoed earlier sentiments regarding the lack of instructional time when describing this weakness as follows:

Another thing about how students are prepared is that we are given guidelines from College Board; however, those guidelines are not given for students who have excessive gaps and cannot be ready to test in the spring. Students come to class on a block schedule, thus only having two days a week to prepare for the exam. The block schedule does not work well for these classes, such as AP, because students need practice with the material and time to really understand the

material every day, not twice a week. The school I am at needs to readjust the schedule to provide more time for students, especially those with gaps or are new students in class and on the test, and it's the teachers who get blamed when the scores come out.

Thus, the standardization of how the course is taught and the lack of consideration for the needs of the students that results from that standardization are perceived as a weakness.

The final weakness mentioned was the lack of any form or prerequisites, whether exams or other classes, to help assess if a student can handle the course's rigor. After reflection, three participants discussed this topic later in their interviews to clarify previous statements. Participant 1 suggested an exam to determine if a student could handle the course's rigor. According to Participant 1, "Schools need a form of an assessment to determine if students are ready for the class. This class is heavy, and most students cannot handle the rigor." Participant 6 said:

One of the biggest concerns in our school is students not being fully ready for the rigor in this class. The students come from a wide range of educational backgrounds, and it is hard to fill all the gaps many students have within the time we must prepare them for the exam in the spring. Most students are not ready for the rigor; however, because we are a military school, we welcome them all in and must struggle getting them ready for the exam and comfortable with the material.

Participant 4 offered emphatic remarks on perceived weakness associated with the APELC exam/course, saying:

Another weakness is that students do not know the material or the background of the material. Students are allowed to take the class without having any

prerequisites. Many students honestly do not need to be in this class. The gaps and the lack of knowledge only set them up for failure. The goal is not to pass the class; the goal is to learn and retain the material.

The educators who participated in this study perceived four weaknesses in how the APELC course is taught to their students. Flaws focusing on teacher preparation and skill redundancy emerged during the direct inquiry. Concerns regarding the instructional standardization failing to account for student needs and the lack of prerequisites allowing students to take the course without adequate preparation emerged later when participants had time to think further on the topic and add clarification.

**Theme 3: Student Preparation for the APELC Exam.** The final theme responding to RQ1 is Theme 3, Student preparation for the APELC exam. This theme includes all discussions of student preparation to take the exam. Preparational strengths and preparational weaknesses are the three categories that fall under Theme 3.

*C3a: Preparational Challenges.* Participants identified several challenges that made preparing students difficult. There were five perceived challenges: multiple preparations, the LMS was difficult to use, remote learning, lack of instructional time, and pressures on students. At least half of the participants mentioned each of these perceived challenges.

All eight participants mentioned that having multiple course preparations left them little time to collaborate with others. Each used similar language to Participant 1, who said, “having multiple preps with little time for collaboration with other APELC teachers across the district (no time, really) likely could be seen as challenges.” This lack of time to collaborate with others teaching the APELC course will be elaborated on later.

The ability to collaborate became a suggestion some participants later offered as a strategy to improve performance.

Seven of the eight participants said two perceived challenges: difficulty using the LMS and incorporating remote learning. Participant 4's words exemplify the responses offered by the other participants:

We do have materials, but the online textbook is linked to a program via Schoology, an LMS that is difficult to use. I use Google Classroom, but students must switch back to Schoology to use the textbook. During COVID with at-home learning for quarantined students, this was an issue.

The only discrepancy among the participants occurred as Participant 2 did not mention remote learning during COVID as a challenge, and Participant 3 did not mention the difficulty in using the LMS. Given the frequency of responses, it became clear that multiple preparations that left little time for collaboration with colleagues, an LMS that was difficult to use, the challenges of remote learning, a general lack of instructional time, and various pressures on students proved challenging obstacles to overcome.

***C3b: Preparational Strengths.*** When overcoming challenges, one often relies on one's strengths, and the participants in this study identified three perceived strengths of how the APELC course is taught. These strengths were the program's alignment with CED, the robustness of the AP course offerings, and the program's rigor.

Seven of the eight participants stated that the program aligning with CED standards was a key strength. As Participant 2 stated:

Most of the CCSSL standards align with the CED big ideas and essential skills, so that helps prepare students, especially the standards related to claims, evidence, and analyzing seminal documents.

The six other participants expressed a similar sentiment. Only Participant 1 did not mention aligning with CED standards as a perceived strength.

Another perceived strength was the robustness of the AP program. Five of the eight participants offered the following sentence with only minor variation. “One strength is that the AP program is very robust with many courses offered.” Only Participants 2, 4, 6, 7, and 8 perceived this as a strength.

The final perceived strength was the course’s rigor. Only two participants, Participants 3 and 5, mentioned this. Both said, “One strength is that the AP program allows rigor for students who want to be challenged.” The participants discussed all perceived strengths in the initial interviews.

***C3c: Preparational Weaknesses.*** Participants perceived three primary weaknesses in how students are prepared for the APELC exam. First, they perceived that the ninth grade needs more writing instruction, there needs to be an emphasis on skills and completion of outside readings, and a lack of focus on rhetorical education. These weaknesses emerged during the initial interview phase. All participants who perceived a weakness responded with nearly identical verbiage. For example, regarding the ninth grade needing more writing instruction, Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 all said:

A greater emphasis on writing, composition, style, and grammar could be made for the 9th-grade classes so that students do not need much review/remediation.

These are areas of greatest assessment on the APELC exam, and a foundation set

of skills would go a long way toward helping students be better prepared to move onto the more rigorous aspects of the exam.

Participants 1, 4, 5, and 6 noted a lack of focus on skills and completion, saying, “Additionally, a greater emphasis on skills and completion of outside reading would help students see the purpose and need for good personal student habits.” And finally,

Participants 4, 6, 7, and 8 illuminated the lack of rhetorical education. Participant 6 said:

Additionally, students in 9th and 10th grade do not receive a lot of instruction in non-fictional/argumentative texts or rhetoric. These are areas of greatest assessment on the APELC exam, and a foundation set of skills would go a long way toward helping students be better prepared to move onto the more rigorous aspects of the exam.

All three of these weaknesses, ninth grade needing more writing instruction, there needing to be an emphasis on skills and completion of outside readings, and a lack of emphasis on rhetorical education, were identified in the initial phase of the interviews.

***RQ2: What Instructional Strategies and Practices Do DoD Teachers Think Can Improve Military-Connected Students’ Scores on the APELC Exam?***

In the second research question, I inquired about what strategies and practices DoD teachers perceived as possibly leading to improvement in military-connected students’ scores on the APELC exam. Themes 4, 5, and 6 relate directly to this question. Theme 4 focuses on DoD support that is either perceived to have/not been given, how teachers have responded themselves to this perceived lack of support, and administrative attitudes and actions impacting scores. Theme 5 describes strategies teachers perceive as

effective in improving learning and exam scores. Finally, Theme 6 presents suggested practices for implementation.

**Theme 4: DoD Support.** Theme 4 focused on the support participants perceived the DoD to provide or not to provide. Additionally, participant responses to the direct questions regarding DoD support often revealed practices that individual educators had employed or planned to employ. Participants later spoke about the actions and attitudes of the administration that impacted student learning. Thus, this theme presents all aspects of the support/lack thereof provided by the institutional hierarchy as perceived by participants.

*C4a: Support Unknown.* The first category of responses represents the perception that the DoD is not providing support. During initial interviews, all eight participants said they were “unaware of any DoD initiatives and supports available.” They did not elaborate. However, during the clarification period, three participants elaborated on their perceptions of the lack of support from the DoD. Participants 3 and 4 stated that the DoD provides no initiatives to support teacher education and improvement. Participant 3 said:

Actually, the DoD does not provide any initiatives for teachers. Teachers get the one summer training, and once that is complete, it is up to the teacher and school to decide what additional support is needed. Students don't know this, but most teachers of AP classes have no way of participating in other initiatives because the administrators have them so tied up doing other duties, and they have not time. Schools need to do a better job with providing annual training and not just one time for the AP teachers. It's hard to look at the things that need work in our school, but I know in order to get better, we have to be uncomfortable.

Participant 4 reiterated similar perceptions:

The DoD schools don't have many initiatives to support teachers. Our school does not even allow the AP teachers time to plan together due to other teaching obligations. The material we teach is provided by College Board, and if the school (DoD) took more concern with the students and not the scores, we might have more success as a school and district.

Participant 2 was more critical, saying:

DOD is suppurative of one thing...looking good for other schools, especially non-military schools. It's sad to say, but the wellbeing of the student often goes by the side because administrators are all about the numbers and not the students. My school is all about keeping up appearances with other schools.

It should be noted that before any other responses were given during initial interview questions about DoD support, the first thing stated was that participants were unaware of any support initiatives offered.

***C4b: Self-Sufficient Support.*** All eight participants followed their statement of being unaware of any official DoD support with similar statements of what they planned to do to improve scores. For example, Participant 1 stated:

For myself, I will reach out to those students who did not earn a qualifying score, especially the one who will be in my 11th grade ELA class, and I will use my instructional planning report to help reinforce the weaker skills in ELA for him. For my future students, I plan to do some curriculum building and mapping this summer to ensure I am hitting all CED components and skills more evenly and planning ahead to give myself a greater buffer of time for next year. I will also do

a better job of ensuring my expectations for out of schoolwork is established early on and encourage students to work for the skill-improvement rather than the grades/points by intentionally planning to include lots of practice in formative assessments with summative assessments truly measuring what skills they've gained so I have a better idea of which students might struggling prior to exam day.

In another response regarding DoD-specific support, Participant 2 shared initiatives teachers had implemented to prepare their APELC students without DoD support.

Participant 2 stated:

One teacher here created a study session calendar and published it to a joint Google Classroom, which all AP students could access. Teachers signed up for days to give the mock exams so that there wouldn't be overlap. This really helped. Of the students who attended my Saturday optional mock exam session, five of the students scored a qualifying score of 3+.

Participant 2 added that those at her school had taken the initiative to host parent nights. She said, "our school also has taken the lead with providing parent sessions to help their students at home better. This opportunity for parents has been welcomed and needed." Considering a perceived lack of official support, the educators took matters into their own hands, finding ways to support their students' success through various practices.

***C4c: Administrative Actions.*** The final category under this theme focuses on the actions and attitudes of the school administrations. All participants agreed that the schools hired an "EDC paid AP Coordinator position who communicates and organizes the exam date for students and parents." When offered the chance to clarify, four of the

participants elaborated on their perceptions of administrative attitudes that led to problems with the APELC program, which teachers perceived impacted test scores. Participant 3 stated that administrators favored the single-teacher policy due to the ease with which it allowed them to monitor the program. According to Participant 3:

Teachers are comfortable in their job of working for the government, and they often remain silent in order not to make administrators upset. Most administrators like having only one teacher teaching the class because it is easier for the administrator to monitor and be aware of what is going on in the class.

Participants 1, 2, and 6 believed administrators cared more for school reputation and appearance than student performance. Participant 2 said:

Most administrators want their students to succeed by any means necessary for they school to look good. The success of the school is more important than what the students know. It has come to the point in our school that the only thing teachers and administrators care about is the score on the test, not the student.

Participant 1 shared similar perceptions:

Administrators need to understand that the students are bigger than the test. Often schools (like mine) think all that matters are numbers. The school's leadership needs to demonstrate to students a standard in the class that causes them to what to be their best, not only for a score.

And Participant 6 described their perception of administrative attitudes in detail, saying:

Our school is so focused on other things... such as sports, and they do just enough for the academic classes. This has to change. You also have to have administrators who value the program and ensuring all gaps are filled, not just

concerned about test time in the spring. They must be focused on the preparation for the test as much as the teachers and students. In the end, teachers need to be prepared better, thus making it much easier to fill gaps with students who come to us from any school.

Through these examples, participants perceived a lack of support from the DoD as being present, as evidenced by none being aware of any official initiatives or programs offered, thus necessitating a perceived need to compensate with self-sufficient action while struggling with the attitudes of their school administrations.

**Theme 5: Effective Instructional Strategies.** Theme 5 incorporated the various instructional strategies participants perceived as effective in raising student scores. During the initial interviews, participants identified five strategies, with all eight presenting nearly identical responses. These five strategies are allowing revisions, providing extended time for ESOL students, focusing on skills instead of grades, offering group work, and providing specific and personalized feedback. In addition, all eight participants shared perspectives like that of Participant 2, who said:

We do a lot of group work. With ESOL students, they need time to read, think, speak, and process before writing. I also work very hard to give specific, personalized feedback. For every writing we do, students have the chance to revise. I require them to reflect on their writing and use my feedback to revise and resubmit. After they have done the revision, they write a reflection about the changes and moves they made. Before we start another writing, they revisit past writings. We keep a digital portfolio for this purpose. Before the exam, I required them to pick one of each type of FRQ and do one final revision. This counted as a

summative grade so that I knew they would do it. This really helped in the final days before the exam. Additionally, I focused more on skills instead of grades. Using the AP rubric for everything they did, reinforced the exam expectations and also helped them hone specific skills. I've been working toward standards-based grades, so using the AP rubric, stripping it to a single-point rubric, and then assigning a 4-pt scale helped them monitor their own progress as well.

This in-depth response covers the educators' response to various scenarios and student demographics, recognizing students' needs and responding as the educators deem appropriate. As a result, the students' needs are met, from more time to plan their writing to individual feedback to a focus on skill development. This additional time allows the students to see their progression and achievement in more tangible ways.

Later in the interview process, three more effective strategies emerged: allowing for online completion, providing a safe space, and offering weekend boot camps. For example, participant 1 said of online completion:

Once COVID hit, the strategy that works well now is also allowing the students to do a lot of the work virtually and online. Students were out of school for a period that allowed them to become comfortable with online resources, and this is still helpful.

While the transition online during the COVID-19 lockdown was a negative to preparation, it was influential as time progressed. For instance, it was beneficial as it helped learners familiarize themselves with online resources. Participant 3 spoke on the importance of the classroom being a safe space, saying:

Something else I work hard on doing in my school is providing a safe space where students are allowed to simply speak what is on their minds. Often my students simply need a place to vent; they are so stressed out that when I take at least one class each month and allow the class to vent, they do much better the following weeks in class. Students are stressed, and they need support; sometimes, that comes in the form of just letting the class share how they feel and what they are concerned about. Many of the students know they will be going back to the states for their senior year, and this time is stressful because they often feel they will not compare to their state-side peers who have had the same class.

Thus, this teacher provided support by having a safe place to vent, express fear, and share anxiety in a healthy way that allowed the students to feel heard, understood, and not alone in these feelings. Participant 2 provided weekend boot camps to prepare students for all aspects of the test, including the time limitations for the exam. Participant 2 stated:

Another instructional strategy I use is weekend boot camps for the students. Once we get into the new year, I have students meet me on the weekends to help build their ability to complete the test in the time given. Many students know the material; however, they do not have the timing down, and they fall short of a good score because they did not complete the test.

The effective strategies participants perceived as being effective included allowing revisions, providing extended time for ESOL students, focusing on skills as opposed to grades, offering group work, providing specific and personalized feedback, the opportunity for online completion, and providing a safe space to express emotional concerns.

**Theme 6: Implementing Practices to Improve APELC Scores.** The final theme focused on strategies teachers perceived as potentially beneficial if implemented. These suggestions for improvement fell into two categories: instructional practices and school-based practices.

*C6a: Instructional Practices.* The category of instructional practices arose during initial interviews. Again, all participants provided nearly identical responses, identifying three areas concerning this line of inquiry: uncertainty, using CED, and incorporating WICOR strategies. For example, Participant 4 said:

Well, because I do not really get to talk to other APELC teachers, I am unsure. I assume using the CED for backward planning (Wiggins and Tighe, Understanding by Design) with DoK [Depth of Knowledge] skills and HOTS [Higher Order of Thinking Skills] questioning, etc. I incorporate WICOR [Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading] and AVID [Advanced via Individual Determination] strategies such as Cornell Notes and Socratic Seminars, so I assume others do, too, in AVIDized schools within DoDEA.

The response shows that the DoK, HOTS, WICOR, and AVID effectively enhance the APELC scores.

*C6b: School-Based Practices.* Participants also perceived practices that schools should implement. During initial interviews, all eight participants described a need to identify students capable of success in honors courses. They described these students as “who can/should pursue courses of rigor, honors diploma requirements.” Participants 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 suggested an AP Information Night for students and parents, saying, “My

current school did not hold an AP Information Night, but previous schools have.” During the transcript review, Participant 4 clarified the idea of teacher connections and collaboration:

The one instructional strategy our school uses is to have teachers take the one-time College Board training; this training is good; however, it is not enough, and teachers need to have more training and opportunities for growth with like teachers across DoD. If teachers were given time to meet with other teachers who teach military-connected students, they would have an additional level of knowledge given to them from other likeminded teachers. The strategies needed are necessary to identify the gaps military students have and how they can be filled.

Thus, at an instructional and school-wide level, participants offered thoughts on programs they perceived as potentially beneficial for students.

### **Discrepant Cases**

When a researcher faces a discrepancy in data, they must take a closer look and re-evaluate the data gathered. Suppose the researcher finds a difference has occurred. In that case, they will reexamine the other participants’ responses to the question and notes to determine if they may not have heard the question or if there were any outside influences. Presenting contradictory data makes the findings more “realistic” and “valid” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200). According to Brodsky (2008), “finding and understanding negative cases not only strengthens a good study, but these cases protect against researcher biases in what and how data are seen and reported” (p. 552). Knowing

this helps to strengthen the reporting of discrepant data and ensure that research findings are trustworthy.

For this study, I reported any negative or discrepant data issues that took the focus away from the main themes of the study. For instance, I conducted further probing to establish the accuracy of participants' responses using member checking or follow-ups. Participant 3 said, "Teachers are comfortable in their job of working for the government, and they often remain silent in order not to make administrators upset." Further, four participants took part in member checking or follow-up, which resulted in several codes being removed because they did not directly contribute to answering the research questions.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is sometimes questioned by various researchers as the concepts of validity, and reliability are addressed differently than in quantitative research (Fusch et al., 2018). As the researcher, I needed to ensure I documented and recorded all the information shared by the participants exactly as the participants stated. A great deal of time was spent analyzing all information provided concerning the research questions asked. Each participant was made aware of the purpose of using a tape recorder, and I was permitted to record the interviews in a virtual setting. To assure trustworthiness and credibility, I provided clear and deliberate descriptions in the written section of the data. I used member checking, an opportunity for the participants to review aspects of the data they provided (see Carlson, 2010). Rich and thick descriptions of settings, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures are used to make qualitative research more credible (Hammarberg et al., 2016). More

information on the steps I took to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings appears in the Data Analysis section.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

I developed five themes from the data analysis. I subdivided Theme 1 into three categories, instructional factors, population factors, and military-specific factors. Instructional factors focused on those factors directly related to the instruction process. Population factors focused on factors extraneous to the instruction process. Military-specific factors focused on those factors directly associated with the stresses of students being connected to military personnel. Theme 2 presents participants' perceptions regarding how the APELC course is taught. There were two categories under this theme: Strengths and Weaknesses. I discuss each category in detail. The final theme responding to RQ1 is Theme 3, Student preparation for the APELC exam. This theme includes all discussions of student preparation to take the exam. Three categories fall under Theme 3: preparational challenges, preparational strengths, and preparational weaknesses.

In the second research question, I inquired about what strategies and practices DoD teachers perceived as possibly leading to improvement in military-connected students' scores on the APELC exam. Themes 4, 5, and 6 relate directly to this question. Theme 4 focuses on DoD support that is either perceived to have/not been given, how teachers have responded themselves to this perceived lack of support, and administrative attitudes and actions impacting scores. Theme 5 describes strategies teachers perceive as effective in improving learning and exam scores. Theme 6 presents suggested practices for implementation.

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The final theme focused on strategies teachers perceived as potentially beneficial if implemented. These suggestions for improvement fell into two categories: instructional practices and school-based practices. In this section, I interpret the findings. I discuss the study's findings and how they relate to DoD teachers in the issues influencing military-connected students' low scores on the APELC exam, which is the foundation of the study. I also connected the findings to the conceptual framework and prior research.

### ***Relationship of Findings to the Conceptual Framework***

The study's conceptual framework was based on Tomlinson's (2012) DI model. The model concept is premised on the need for educators to respond to the different abilities of learners, hence, teach them at specific readiness levels. The relationship of the findings to the conceptual framework can be seen in Theme 5. The findings highlighted some strategies for teaching APELC. These strategies include DoK skills and HOTS

questioning, WICOR, and AVID strategies such as Cornell Notes and Socratic Seminars. The study findings align with the framework showing that teachers should adopt multiple teaching approaches. The differentiated learning underscores that students come in class with diverse and unique differences owing to their readiness to learn, languages, cultural orientation, life experiences, background knowledge, preferences, interest in how they learn best, and feeling about the school and themselves as learners (Ornauer & Harris, 2020; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). The findings show that learning activities should be differentiated based on the readiness of the student to learn in a varied configuration, such as learning in small groups. Differentiated learning considers learners with different or similar interests, readiness, and learning preferences learning individually, with a partner, or as a small group.

The differentiated learning model is premised on effective education and instructional practice or strategies. The framework is framed on several critical elements, including teaching, flexible groupings, community-building, respectful tasks, continual assessment, and high-quality assessment (Wan, 2017). The findings from the study affirm that flexible grouping, which was an instructional strength in how APELC is taught (Theme 2), is integral in enhancing learning to cope with varied learning capabilities, interests, backgrounds, and preferences. The grouping assignments can be randomly chosen by the learners or the instructor, which allows learners to interact and work with different students (Di Stasio et al., 2016; Faber et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2017). It also affirms the value of providing learners with the complexity of learning beyond their comfort levels (Theme 3). The approach offers learners appropriate instructional scaffolding and challenge levels that enhance successful growth.

DI underscores the instructional planning that responds to preferences, conditions, and skills. The approach is integral in implementing effective practices to improve APELC scores and provides several styles, such as pre-assessment skills and changing their abilities (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018). The goal of differentiating instruction is designed to optimize the growth of learners. To realize this growth, Tomlinson (2017) stated that teachers should understand the needs of students and relate the progress with crucial content and approaches to realize effective learning. The findings show that differentiation can happen through determining the expected goal and customizing the content to the abilities of revisions, providing extended time for ESOL students, and focusing on skills instead of learners. The study's findings showed that participants preferred these five strategies: focusing on skills instead of grades, offering group work, providing specific and personalized feedback, and allowing revisions, providing extended time for ESOL students. Tomlinson (2017) contends that these approaches are designed to meet learners' differentiated needs, allowing instructors to attend to the learner style of learners by adjusting how and what they teach.

### ***Relationship of Findings to Prior Literature***

Previous studies have shown that military-connected students face challenges in their education performance owing to constant mobility and the immense emotional burden associated with the profession of their parents and guardians. Cohen (2019) stated that continual mobility brings students from diverse backgrounds and psychological and social health, which requires that they are taught based on their level of understanding. Avritt (2020) found that mobility negatively affects military-connected students'

academic performance. In this study, mobility was stated as a factor contributing to low APELC test scores (Theme 1).

Previous studies showed that military-connected students faced challenges in learning during Covid-19 and suggested using online learning as it made a healthy learning environment, improved learners' health, and promoted flexibility (Dhawan, 2020; Freudenberger, 2020). However, teachers in this study faced challenges preparing for the APELC remotely (Theme 3). For instance, instructors found implementing remote learning and LMS challenging, lacked instructional time, and pressured learners. In addition, the technologies learners adopt, such as Schoology, that help them access the textbook are incompatible with LMS and other remote learning resources. Dhawan (2020) reported that instructors must develop ways of managing the challenges of adopting remote learning as the approach relies on self-discipline among learners, a rare skill among students.

The study findings relate to the previous studies noting that instructors should use various strategies to enhance learning among military-connected schools. For instance, Judson (2017) stated that engaging learners through critical thinking and changing their perception of APELC exams is critical. Araujo and Araujo (2021) suggested using unfamiliar and challenging techniques, and Volk et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of using techniques that keep students' attention. In addition, the findings showed that allowing students time to revise, providing them with safe space, and providing individualized feedback are critical in changing their perception of learning (Theme 4).

### **Summary and Project Deliverable as an Outcome**

In this study, I sought to address the documented problem of Fisher High School students underperforming on the APELC exam through a theoretical framework of differentiated instruction and a phenomenological methodology that aimed to understand teacher perceptions of both the reasons for student performance being what was and the level of support they perceived the DoD provided them.

During the data analysis of the interviews with the eight participants, six themes emerged in response to the study's two guiding research questions. First, regarding the inquiry into student underperformance on the APELC exam, teachers perceived numerous struggles with instructional factors, population factors, and military-specific factors, as well as numerous challenges, strengths, and weaknesses in the way the APELC course is taught and administered and, in the way, students were prepared. In the second research question, I sought to understand the perceived level and types of support provided by the DoD. During the interview, participants revealed they were unaware of any official support but discussed how they provided it individually. They also offered suggestions they perceived as being beneficial for future improvements. The following section will consist of the project developed from the findings to improve the APELC exam performance of students at Fisher High School and others like it.

As an outcome of the results, the project is to conduct a 3-day virtual seminar providing teachers with effective instructional strategies that could support DoD teachers' need for more support materials to help improve military-connected students' scores on the APELC exam. In this 3-day virtual professional development, I will provide information on successfully implementing strategies to support military-connected

students and improve higher APELC exam scores. The strategy will focus on ways teachers could adapt the College Board curriculum to ensure the academic success of military-connected students.

### **Conclusion**

Data gathered from this study were necessary, as was recognizing factors preventing military-connected students' performance on the APELC in DoD Schools. Discovering strategies to assist teachers will take collaborative efforts between administrators, school leaders, and teachers. Likewise, acknowledging the importance of understanding ways to enhance military-connected students' scores on the APELC exam will also take the efforts of administrators, school leaders, and teachers. In Section 3, I will discuss the 3-day virtual professional development project that I developed based on the findings of this study.

### Section 3: The Project

The purpose of this study was to discover DoD teachers' insights into the issues influencing military-connected students' low scores on the APELC exam, given that local stakeholders, such as administrators and instructors, are concerned about this trend. Understanding the perception of DoD teachers about the factors that influence military-connected students' low scores on the APELC exam and the instructional strategies can improve military-connected students' scores on the APELC exam through the implementation of corrective approaches.

I decided to design a 3-day professional development training from the study findings. The project consists of assessments, perceptions, preparations, and strategies. The professional development will provide teachers with strategies for dealing with factors that impact students' performance on APELC exams, developing a positive perception among teachers about how the APELC course is taught in DoD schools as well as creating a positive perception about how the APELC course is taught. The project can assist teachers in military-connected schools in incorporating numerous strategies within the classroom environment to make learning and preparation for APELC exams comfortable.

#### **Rationale**

The study findings show that teachers perceived numerous struggles with instructional factors, population factors, and military-specific factors, as well as numerous challenges, strengths, and weaknesses in how the APELC course is taught and administered and how students are prepared. Therefore, school administrators should provide DoD teachers with support and strategies to improve military-connected

students' low scores on the APELC exam. It is also crucial and effective for teachers in DoD-connected schools to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom to improve students' performances on the APELC exam. Thus, the 3-day professional development program will help teachers in DoD schools develop better planning skills to prepare for APELC exams. Furthermore, the professional development program can make DoD teachers more efficient, such as realizing new strategies of focusing on students instead of paperwork. Additionally, the program will expand teachers' knowledge base on APELC, which will, in turn, enhance students' performance.

The objective of conducting the 3-day professional development program is to assist DoD teachers in developing strategies that can result in improved APELC performance. The teachers will be able to gauge their abilities and weaknesses to evaluate the potential improvement in classroom work and exam preparation. In addition, the program can enhance collaboration between teachers and administrators. Thus, the program can provide school administrators with the opportunity to develop strategies that could lead to improved performances in ways such as evaluating and assessing the activities of teachers towards improved APELC performance in DoD schools.

### **Review of Literature**

The literature review comprised extensive research on professional development and its benefits, characteristics of professional development, and effective professional development curriculum. The study also focused on the AP teachers' responsiveness, professional development, and APELC exams in DoD schools. I focused on sources published between 2019 and 2023. The sources were accessed from Google Scholar and Education Research Library. The key terms I used during the search were *professional*

*development, characteristics of professional development, effective professional development, effective professional development curriculum, and teachers' responsiveness to professional development.* Other keywords were *APELC course and Department of Defense schools, preparing students and APELC exams, instructional and school-based practices, instructional strategies, teachers, and DoD schools.*

### **Professional Development and Its Benefits**

The fraction of the school-going children from DoD high schools who passed the APELC test has declined since 2017. Professional development is suitable and helpful in addressing the problem. Professional development training and programs directed towards the development of teachers in military-connected schools within the APELC classroom can foster appropriate preparation and exam performance. In addition, professional development can help teachers in DoD schools with opportunities for learning and knowledge (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019). Professional development is continuing education and career training that individuals engage in after entering the workforce to develop new skills, advance their career, and stay updated with current trends (Compen et al., 2019). Although it is not mandatory in most parts of the United States, teachers' professional development helps teachers stay updated within the profession (Bascopé et al., 2019). Specific continuing professional education requirements must be completed through a certified teacher's continuing education provider.

Professional development can refer to many other types of training or education beyond continuing education opportunities relevant to teaching careers. Teachers aspiring to excel in their careers voluntarily seek professional development and learning

opportunities even when no authority requires them. Professional development sessions help improve educational quality and student achievement (Tran et al., 2020). The sessions help trainers equip trainees with crucial information about strategies and helpful instructions. Teachers' professional development helps bolster confidence in their work (Powell & Bodur, 2019). Improved confidence increases job satisfaction, teachers' performance, productivity, and morale (Zheng et al., 2020). In their study, Sancar et al. (2021) concluded that professional development helps teachers to improve planning and stay organized. Thus, teachers become efficient and have enough time to focus on students instead of paperwork.

Professional development enhances the work commitment of teachers, which promotes high-quality learning (Asiyah et al., 2020). Teachers maximize the benefits of professional development by acquiring new skills that enhance student performance. Professional development is ongoing education for teachers, who develop new skills by attending training courses, workshops, and seminars (Powell & Bodur, 2019). To ensure that teachers have new skills, professional development helps teachers acquire knowledge constantly (Rutten, 2021). In a world where teachers have not taken significant professional development, their productivity and the students' exam performance can be affected. A trend of low grades in students means that teachers and learners are responsible for improving their grades (O'Meara & Faulkner, 2022). Fischer et al. (2020) stated that improving students' performance in exams is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders: teachers, students, school administrators, and parents. Thus, taking advantage of professional development can give teachers an upper hand in understanding and creating new strategies to improve student exam performance.

## **Characteristics of Professional Development**

Teachers are adult learners who are self-directed, experienced, ready to learn, task-centered, and motivated (Guo et al., 2021). Teachers are comfortable engaging in professional development opportunities and directives that match the pace of their learning. Peng and Kievit (2020) commented that teachers approach professional development with clear goals and intents backed up by adequate preparation from their career experience; teachers approach learning with clear goals and use their experience to make sense of new information. Additionally, Powell and Bodur (2019) emphasized that teachers are motivated to undergo professional development because it creates opportunities for solving problems directly and creates solutions related to their lives. Teachers' professional development has become necessary in contemporary teaching (Sprott, 2019). Understanding the characteristics of appropriate teachers' professional development can help school leaders understand approaches to planning professional development for their teachers.

Effective teacher professional development has characteristics such as being supportive, being aligned with daily teaching activities, having an instructional focus, and enhancing collaboration (Kalinowski et al., 2019). Intrinsic motivation is essential to all types of learners (Powell & Bodur, 2019). Thus, effective teachers' professional development should support teachers' motivation and commitment to acquiring new skills. An excellent support system for teachers' professional development should combine the needs of individual teachers, schools, and district goals (Philipsen et al., 2019). Connecting individual teachers' needs and district goals allows for engaging all learners of different levels and addresses teachers' specific weaknesses and strengths to

ensure improved student performance (see Tran et al., 2020). Sancar et al. (2021) stated that one of the critical characteristics of effective professional development is that it is job-embedded, making it authentic and relevant. Teachers consider professional development appropriate if it addresses specific concerns and needs effectively. Additionally, teachers should feel a connection between their daily responsibilities and the learning experience. Teachers' professional development aligned with teaching daily activities engages teachers in learning through responsibilities and activities. Powell and Bodur (2019) agreed that coherence and continuous learning are critical.

The instructional focus is vital to teachers' professional development because instructions emphasize subject area, pedagogy, content, and students' exam performance (Philipsen et al., 2019). According to Krasnova and Shurygin (2020), the primary objective of teachers' professional development is to enhance learners' performance, and instructional-focused professional development guides teachers in achieving such objectives. However, effective teachers' development should be centered on subject area content and how it should be taught because teachers ought to understand their subject area content through a wide range of instructional strategies (Ofi, 2022). Collaboration between stakeholders in the learning environment is crucial (Popova et al., 2022). Effective professional development should emphasize interactive and active learning experiences. Teachers' professional development engages teachers emotionally, physically, and cognitively through problem solving, discussions, simulations, and visual representations (Rutten, 2021). Powell and Bodur (2019) insisted that effective teachers' professional development should be ongoing to involve a combination of coherence, duration, and contact hours. Further, Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021) established that the

availability of development activities during professional development requires collaboration.

### **Effective Professional Development Curriculum**

In the broad view, effective teachers' professional development curriculum should integrate literacy and language teaching into the subject area. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of teachers' professional development curriculum relies on numerous factors, such as the program and educators (Stieler-Hunt & Jones, 2019). Teachers should possess specific knowledge to support language development among students successfully (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). Additionally, content area teachers in military-connected schools may not feel responsible for supporting language proficiency in classes and may have low expectations of students who lack competence in the English language. Such situations highlight the necessity of implementing effective teachers' professional development that helps tackle their beliefs and enhances teachers' ability to bolster learners' English language skills.

The effectiveness of such a curriculum is measured on different levels, namely, teachers' satisfaction and acceptance of professional development, classroom practice, and student learning (Harris & Jones, 2019). Similarly, Sancar et al. (2021) reported that solid connections exist between an effective professional development curriculum and enhanced teacher knowledge, improved student performance, and classroom teaching. Therefore, an effective teachers' professional development curriculum should aim to change an individual teacher's belief because it is the effect and cause of improved classroom teaching and student performance (Powell & Bodur, 2019). An effective teachers' professional development curriculum requires comprehensive preparation,

appropriate structures, and resources that integrate complex and multifaceted professional learning processes into teachers' working lives (Ofi, 2022).

### **Professional Development and Student Performance**

Leaders of different categories of schools, including military-affiliated schools, have sought to improve students' performance by improving teaching standards (Dong et al., 2020). The U.S. government has also provided teachers with lifelong and continuous professional development services (Zheng et al., 2020). However, Caingcoy (2020) stated that the effect of the emphasis on a comprehensive framework for teachers' professional development and outcome in the last decade had been insufficiently studied. Thus, despite literature signifying that professional development and knowledge are linked to students' performance, clear evidence is lacking. Kalinowski et al. (2019) investigated the effects of teachers' professional development on students' performance. The researchers established that teachers' professional development and knowledge are positively connected.

Similarly, a study by Fischer et al. (2020) revealed that professional knowledge and professional development positively affect students' exam performance. Kalinowski et al. (2019) argued that professional knowledge mediates the connection between students' academic performance and professional development. The authors concluded that teachers' professional development results in improved student performance through improved professional knowledge in teachers and other teacher characteristics, such as beliefs and classroom experiences. Postholm (2018) recommended that government and school administrators encourage teachers to engage in various professional development activities to respond to inadequacies within their profession.

## **School Environment and Advanced Placement English Language and Composition**

### **Exam Performance**

APELC exams are standardized exams offered in schools to measure the ability of students to master the skills and content of specific AP courses. Students in DoD schools from ninth to 12th grade can enroll in AP classes and take a corresponding AP exam at the end of the year. Schools play a significant role in influencing students' performance in APELC exams. Factors such as differences in the learning environment and frequent school transfers among students might cause low APELC exam performances in DoD schools (Caingcoy, 2020). Different schools create different learning environments, influencing students' performance (Kalinowski et al., 2019). Additionally, the resources available in each school contribute to the overall performance of students. Zheng et al. (2020) pointed out that school setup and structure influence students' performance. Thus, implementing the 3-day professional development in a DoD school can provide the teachers with the strategies specific to such schools to enhance improved APELC exam performances. Professional development can also assist in discovering strategies to help teachers make collaborative efforts between administrators, school leaders, and teachers in DoD schools.

### **Summary**

Teachers' professional development has numerous advantages, such as helping teachers become more organized (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019). Teachers participate in professional development programs to expand their knowledge base. Lidolf and Pasco (2020) added that teachers' professional development programs can be used to improve students' low performance. Although enhancing students' performance is a collective

responsibility between critical stakeholders such as schools and parents, teachers contribute significantly (Fischer et al., 2020). Appropriate teachers' professional development programs have characteristics such as being task centered, enabling teachers to acquire skills aligned with their daily school activities. Effective teachers' professional development curriculum should integrate literacy and language teaching into the subject area of learning. Schools influence students' exam performance directly through the resources available and the learning environment created.

### **Project Description**

DoD teachers will undergo a 3-day professional development training to learn possible strategies to improve students' APELC exam performance. Students' poor performance is attributable to a lack of required knowledge and skills among teachers (Fischer et al., 2020). Thus, the project was designed to help teachers understand effective instructional strategies that could support DoD teachers' need for more support materials to help improve military-connected students' scores on the APELC exam. In addition, the training will provide teachers with knowledge on differentiated instruction, a strategy used to address diversity challenges and help students improve their performance despite their different learning backgrounds. Finally, the training will be conducted online to guide possible ways of improving students' performances.

### **Resources and Support**

The project will need support from DoD schools and all other relevant authorities. Additionally, the project will require cooperation from teachers and schools. The resources necessary for the project include teachers' participation, the availability of well-equipped trainers, and research-based training. Communication tools and the

appropriate technology will be essential for professional development. Nonetheless, adequate funding for the project and proper planning are also vital resources. Suitable venues and sufficient time are also crucial resources for the project. However, a lack of cooperation or interest from DoD schools might be a potential barrier. Poor planning might also adversely affect the project outcome if individuals cannot participate in all three professional development days.

### **Potential Barriers**

Some potential barriers to my professional development training are difficult working conditions, systematic challenges, conflict, and poorly designed professional development plans. Difficult working conditions are among the main challenges of implementing professional development. Systematic challenges such as poor leadership, limited administrative capacity, and inadequate budgets might jeopardize professional development performance. According to Caingcoy (2020), internal or external conflict creates barriers to successfully implementing teachers' professional development programs. Poor planning and designing of professional development pose potential threats to its successful implementation.

### **Implementation and Timetable**

The teachers' professional development training project will take three days during the school calendar. I will be the only presenter for this 3-day training. Each day will include training sessions related to the study's themes and findings. The participants will have opportunities to share their experiences related to the session topics. The goal is to implement professional development during the beginning of the school year. Two

training sessions will occur between August and December and one between January and March of the following year, providing the participants time to implement what they have learned from the training with their students before the actual AP exam in the Spring.

Before the start of the school year, I will email potential participants for the training through the DoD email list, which allows me access to all teachers and administrators about their availability to participate in the virtual professional development at the start of the new school year. I will also extend the invitation to teachers and administrators from other schools. Once I have at least 10 participants, I will email a calendar with tentative dates for the three professional development days. After I have reviewed the email responses to determine which dates work best for participants, I will take the top three dates to use as the professional development dates. Then, I will send another email with the top three professional development sessions. Once the second professional development session has occurred, I will review the participants' school year calendar and send out potential dates for the final professional development session due to unforeseen schedule changes at the start of the year. The completion time for developing and implementing the professional development is six months. The assessment of the effects of the training on APELC exam performances in DoD schools will last for more than that period.

Day 1 will entail assessing and providing teachers with strategies for dealing with factors affecting students' performance. The day's activities will equip teachers to handle instructional, population, and military-specific factors. On Day 2, the professional development will mainly deal with factors around preparation for the APELC exams. The day's activities will aim to develop a positive perception among teachers about how the

APELC course is taught in DoD schools and create a positive perception towards the support offered by DoD schools. Support by the schools' hierarchy directly affects preparation. Thus, the activities will be centered around acknowledging the teachers' contribution towards preparing students for APELC exams and how to maximize the support provided by the school. The day's main focus would entail providing teachers with strategies for overcoming challenges and weaknesses and maximizing preparational strengths. Day 3 will entail equipping teachers with various instructional strategies teachers in DoD schools to perceive as effective in raising student scores. The day's activities will focus mainly on the significance of allowing revisions, providing extended time for ESOL students, focusing on skills instead of grades, offering group work, and providing specific and personalized feedback. Also, the professional development will focus on strategies teachers perceive as potentially beneficial, primarily instructional and school-based practices.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Administration**

Teachers and administration are critical during a professional development project. According to Powell and Bodur (2019), teachers should be motivated to prepare and attend training programs. Teachers have the responsibility of attending the professional development program. The roles of the teachers during the 3-day professional development include attending the program on time and collaborating with the administrators. Teachers have the responsibility of taking notes for references after the 3-day project. Also, teachers are responsible for actively contributing by asking questions and giving feedback and suggestions during the program. The primary role of the professional development developer is planning and preparing for the day's activities.

Cooperation with the administrators will encourage and motivate teachers to participate by communicating the objectives and intentions of professional development. The professional development developer is responsible for researching and developing the program's teaching materials. Also, the administrators are responsible for guiding how to implement the new skills.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The 3-day professional development program will be evaluated on three principles: significance, lessons learned, and resourcefulness of the sessions. At the end of each professional development day, participants will be asked in a survey to reflect on what they learned in the sessions. In their evaluation, the participants will highlight the strategies taught that they connected with and plan to implement in the classroom (see Appendix A). I will also use the survey to evaluate whether the participants agree that I know the topics covered.

### **Project Implications**

The project implies that teachers' professional development project is vital since it focuses on enhancing APELC exam performances in DoD schools. The teachers' professional development can significantly improve the instructional strategies teachers use toward APELC performance in DoD schools. As a result, teachers in DoD schools can become more productive, effective, and efficient than before. The teachers will reflect on their teaching and highlight gaps in their knowledge and experience to ensure improved APELC exam performances in DoD schools. Teachers will also be more

prepared to make new contributions toward improved APELC exam performances in DoD schools.

### **Department of Defense Community**

The 3-day professional development training will equip teachers teaching in DoD schools with educational access and strategies for enhancing students' performance on APELC exams. Professional development training can promote positive social change by transforming the lives of teachers and students. I seek to develop a diverse community of educational practitioners capable of impacting knowledge as scholar-practitioners. The professional development training can empower teachers to develop new teaching strategies that offer solutions to challenges in DoD schools, including student mobility that advances global good. The teachers will be provided with strategies that empower them as change-makers, elevating social change and building community outcomes. Each day of the professional development days has a range of activities with a particular emphasis on selections, emphasis strategy, and skills acquisition for DoD teachers. Also, the professional development training creates and contributes to the mission of improving APELC exam scores in DoD schools. Thus, the professional development training positively impacts the DoD community and future generations of teachers to learn strategies for enhancing APELC exam performances.

### **Overseas Department of Defense School Districts**

The program underscores the challenges that teachers in DoD schools face, including cultural differences. Thus, the professional development training sessions have implications for change in teaching strategies in overseas DoD school districts as it will train them on more effective methods of teaching AP classes. Another implication is the

increased awareness of the importance of providing thorough training and collaboration opportunities with the required AP exam curriculum and instructional materials to improve scores on the exam. The professional development sessions could serve as a paradigm across DoD schools and possibly nonmilitary-connected schools globally. If teachers in the schools implement the suggested strategies, it is possible DoD schools would be more successful in meeting the diverse needs of all students. This continued success would increase military-connected students' chances of continued growth, leading to greater success on the APELC exam and overall in school.

### **Conclusion**

From the data gathered through interviews and research, I designed a 3-day professional development training for teachers to find additional ways to support their teaching of students in APELC classes. The overall professional development project was created with the idea that teachers would receive the support and guidance they need. Teachers would receive the guidance they need to improve students' academic success in taking the APELC exam. The 3-day virtual professional development project is meant to provide teachers with a better understanding of how to implement the required APELC exam materials and instructional strategies more accurately and successfully. During the professional development training, teachers are offered the opportunities to collaborate, connect, and reflect on their current teaching practices with the growth of student performance on the exam and classroom learning. Section 4 will present my reflections, influence on future research, project study strengths, scholarship, and conclusions.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to discover DoD teachers' insights into the issues influencing military-connected students' low scores on the APELC exam, given that local stakeholders, such as administrators and instructors, were concerned about this trend. The study offered critical insights that I will share in this section, including the project's limitations and strengths and my role as study creator, educator, and professional development facilitator. In addition, the experiences learned offered an opportunity to provide implications of the research for social change and the need for future research.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

#### **Strengths**

A strength of the 3-day professional development training is that it is based on interview responses from participants, who were teachers with knowledge of the different strategies that they adopted in teaching learners in DoD schools. Because the professional development sessions are premised on the insights and responses of teachers, there is a high likelihood of other instructors embracing the teaching pedagogy. Another strength is that the teachers will learn new strategies for teaching learners from different backgrounds with the varied approaches advocated by the professional development sessions. Additionally, the project allows teachers to interact and collaborate with other participants. The project emphasizes peer review, where instructors share effective strategies for teaching APELC exams in DoD schools. The approach can help improve the performance of learners. Offering teachers new techniques for teaching learners APELC will help them explore other strategies to enhance learners' performance. Another strength of the 3-day professional development training is that it is generalizable

to teachers who teach other AP exam courses and teachers outside of DoD schools. A final benefit of the professional development is that it will be online. Because this professional development will benefit stateside and overseas DoD schools, being online will allow more AP teachers to participate in this professional development.

### **Limitations**

The aim of this professional development project is to enhance the knowledge and skills of DoD teachers in improving learners' performance in APELC. The strategies developed address the environmental challenges that learners in DoD schools face, such as high student mobility. The potential limitations of conducting the project are technological challenges such as poor Internet and lack of knowledge by participants on the use of current technologies such as LMS and Zoom. In addition, Internet outages and disruptions will potentially cause a delay in training and interfere with the sessions' fidelity. To address the issue, I will provide participants with physical copies of the training materials, which will also offer an opportunity for participants to read ahead of the training sessions. Additionally, Zoom technology will allow participants to download the sessions to read later, which will help to overcome technological issues.

Additionally, the 3-day professional development training has not been tailored to address individual problems of teaching practice. The sessions are universal, which means that teachers of all levels and experience will be able to realize the same outcome. While seasoned teachers have more profound knowledge than less experienced teachers, repeating information they are aware of can make them bored. In contrast, others will be overwhelmed and uncertain of where to start learning new models. Professional development should be tailored to the needs of individual teachers for it to translate into

practice. The approach makes it easier for teachers to acquire knowledge based on their developmental readiness levels. The best approach to fix the issue is conducting needs assessment surveys where teachers share their specific instructional challenges. The goal is to establish the presence of patterns in the responses provided to decide the focus of the professional development time. Besides, the approach will help match the educators based on areas of growth and strength.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

This professional development was designed to enhance DoD teachers' teaching pedagogy. A variation to this study could have been to include nonmilitary-connected AP teachers to understand a more diverse group of teachers and compare their teaching styles to military-connected teachers. In addition, I could have interviewed non-military-connected teachers to understand factors influencing students' performance on AP exams. By taking an alternate approach, I could have seen if similar factors contribute to the low student scores on the AP exam. I could have also approached the problem quantitatively by surveying military-connected and non-military-connected AP teachers regarding factors influencing students' performance on APELC exams and effective strategies on the AP exam for improving student performance.

### **Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change Scholarship**

The project helped me appreciate the value of continuous teacher training in enhancing the knowledge and skills of DoD teachers in improving learners' performance on APELC exams. The project has highlighted the importance of differentiated instruction that addresses varied needs and students' thought patterns. The project offered insights into the current teaching pedagogy and research skills. Examining the existing

literature provided insights into strategies for DoD teachers to adopt to improve learners' performance in their APELC exams through professional development training sessions. The strategy emphasized included DoK skills and HOTS questioning, WICOR, and AVID strategies such as Cornell Notes and Socratic Seminars. The analysis of the current studies on the strategy for enhancing the performance of APELC exams among learners in DoD schools helped underscore the challenges that learners and teachers experience. For instance, high student mobility among learners in DoD schools makes it necessary to adopt differentiated learning to address the varied learning capabilities of students from diverse backgrounds.

The knowledge from the project informed my desire to develop 3-day professional development sessions to offer teachers in DoD schools insights on enhancing learners' performance on APELC exams. The need for the scholarship was premised on the desire to acquire knowledge and skills to support academic growth and current pedagogy. As an experienced teacher in a leadership position, I recognized that acquiring new skills and knowledge is critical in enhancing competence. In addition, developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills is imperative for an educator to overcome challenges. The project has highlighted the knowledge vital to realizing personal aspirations in education and becoming an effective researcher.

### **Project Development**

The project development and implementation highlighted my challenges as an AP teacher. The issues at hand have made it difficult for me to advance in my teaching. However, I have expanded my understanding and teaching methods through current strategies and pedagogy training while teaching AP classes. I focus on understanding the

challenges that military-connected learners face and the best procedures I need to adapt to assess the gaps in learning on the AP exam.

My background in enhancing the skills teachers use to teach AP classes began before the start of this research. I knew I needed and wanted more information on improving AP scores so that students would be more successful. As a school leader, I must be able to provide opportunities for myself and others to grow as teachers and leaders; I was motivated to continue my studies with Walden significantly because I received my master's degree from Walden, and I knew that once I completed this doctoral degree, I would be enhancing my abilities as a competent educator and researcher. Once I finish this study, I will be confident that I have acquired the knowledge required to conduct more authentic and lasting research to affect the teaching of AP students and their success on the test.

### **Leadership and Change**

I am currently teaching at a DoD school, serving as an APELC teacher with extensive experience, having taught for the past 20 years. As a Continuous School Improvement member, site literacy lead, and college and career counselor, I guide high school teachers by embracing APELC exams. Completing this project has offered insights into enhancing the differentiated instruction critical for learners in DoD schools because of their diverse backgrounds and varied thought patterns. The project emphasizes exploring the multiple approaches to teaching learners for APELC exams in DoD schools. Integrating innovative instructional strategies that address diverse students' needs may help in sharing new pedagogy that can improve student performance.

## **Scholarship**

I developed a 3-day professional development for teachers in DoD schools to improve their knowledge and skills to enhance student performance and job satisfaction and promote positive change. Professional development is critical in helping teachers acquire current instructional strategies that promote student performance and enhance professional growth. As an individual, I have improved my research skills, teaching competence, and leadership capabilities in supporting learning in DoD schools. Besides, the project can inspire other teachers to embrace new ideas and strategies to promote student learners and improve their performance. To address the varied needs of students, instructors should implement the instructional strategies advanced in the project to support student performance because they come from diverse backgrounds.

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

The project was vital as it helped me to appreciate and address the challenges that learners in DoD schools face when learning APELC and doing composition exams. The high student mobility in the DoD offers opportunities to study with learners from diverse backgrounds. Still, it challenges instructors who require differentiated instruction to meet their varied needs. Conversely, the project was designed to help instructors understand the various instructional strategies to teach DoD students. Differentiated instruction is integral as it enhances student experiences, performance, and knowledge acquisition.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

#### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

The project is a 3-day professional development training that empowers teachers to adopt differentiated instruction that addresses the varied needs of learners from diverse

environments. Teachers participating in the professional development will be trained with current strategies to address emerging issues such as online learning, differentiated learning, and the diverse needs of learners. The approach can enhance their capabilities and competence in teaching learners in DoD schools. Teachers need to understand how to improve learners' performance on APELC exams in DoD schools. The students come from diverse backgrounds, and differentiated learning that addresses their varied needs is critical. The teachers can acquire the knowledge and support they require in implementing the curriculum and make changes that respond to the needs of learners. The implication of the project is enabling instructors to plan and prepare lessons based on the different needs of their students. The knowledge gained could be shared with colleagues and school leadership after the professional development training is completed, which could increase the application of the ideas in classroom settings. Additionally, sharing knowledge and its successful implementation can trigger a change in teaching pedagogy by the school administration.

### **Applications**

The professional development training will be conducted in 3 days, each offering an opportunity for educators and administrators to get participant feedback and promote their interaction with educators. The training will help address concerns about the AP class and exam raised by teachers and administrators. Further, the longer sessions will offer the opportunity to involve and engage teachers in collaborative, hands-on, and active participation. There will be breaks where peer-review sessions and teacher interaction will help in assessing whether participants sufficiently acquired knowledge.

### **Future Research**

While the 3-day professional development training offers an opportunity for teachers to learn about current strategies in teaching learners for the APELC exams, it fails to provide an understanding of the varied backgrounds of teachers. Therefore, future studies should underscore instructors' perceptions in teaching students with various backgrounds and knowledge. Additionally, future research could involve surveying APELC students regarding their exam performance, needs, and difficulties. The findings could help in developing training for APLEC teachers to enhance their competence, knowledge, and skill gaps.

### **Conclusion**

Exploring teachers' perceptions of the APLEC in DoD schools provided an understanding of the need for adopting differentiated instruction to address the varied needs of learners from diverse backgrounds. In this study, teachers reported numerous challenges, strengths, and weaknesses in how the APELC course is taught and numerous struggles with instructional and military-specific factors that influence students' performance on the exam. The project highlights the need for continuous learning and training to enhance the teaching pedagogy. As a leader, I aim to empower, inspire, encourage, and influence teachers to advance their knowledge and skills to improve student performance.

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## Appendix A: The Project

### **Student Performance in Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Exam in Department of Defense Schools**

#### **Overview**

This project on professional development is designed to help instructors develop effective strategies for improving the Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition exam performance in Department of Defense (DoD) schools. The project was premised on the knowledge that learners in DoD schools face many challenges due to student mobility. The 3-day professional development training will provide insights on best practices in teaching AP English Language and Composition, how to prepare learners for AP exams, and preparing students for success. The training will integrate active and collaborative learning and subject-focused group discussion that will improve student performance in AP exams.

#### **Target audience**

The target audience for the professional development training is high school teachers with years of experience.

#### **Professional Development Schedule**

The training will be conducted for 3 days, with each session training teachers on themes and findings related to the study. The training will be taught virtually to allow overseas DoD teachers to participate in the professional development.

#### **Professional Development Goals**

1. Develop tools to enhance student performance in AP English language and composition exams in DoD schools.

2. Develop strategies to promote student success on the AP English Language and Composition examination.
3. Develop strategies to promote differentiated learning in DoD schools.

### **Professional Development Objectives**

1. The professional development training seeks to ensure that at the end of the sessions, the teachers can integrate best practices in teaching AP English Language and Composition.
2. Teachers will learn the methods to prepare students for all aspects of the AP exam.
3. Train instructors on varied, differentiated instructional learning strategies.

### **Professional Development Outcome**

1. The project seeks to ensure teachers can implement the innovative and creative strategy of preparing students for AP exams.
2. Teachers will understand how to integrate best practices in teaching AP English and composition.
3. Teachers will integrate differentiated learning strategies to help improve the performance of learners.

**Professional Development Day 1: Improving Student Performance on  
Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Exam in DoD  
Schools**

**Required Materials**

- a) Professional development binder: Day 1 Poster
- b) Highlighters
- c) Sticky notes

<b>Day 1: Improving Student Performance</b>		
<b>Time</b>	<b>Session</b>	<b>Session Overview</b>
8:00 am	Ice breaker and welcome	The day will begin with an introduction, with participants expected to introduce themselves by stating their name, years of experience, educational level, and any other relevant personal information. The participants will be welcomed into the training by reviewing the agenda and session norms (Slides 1-5)
8:30 am 11:00 am	Overview of AP Classroom in DoD Schools	During the session, the participants will be provided insights on MCS and how they can prepare students for the exam and offer meaningful scores and feedback. (Slides 6)  Article

		<p>✓ <i>Our turn to serve: Assessing military-connected students</i> by Lunceford et al. (2020).</p>
11:00 am- 11:30 am	Break	The session will offer participants time to stretch, decompress, and prepare for the next session (Slide 7)
11:30 am- 12:00 pm	Review of article and discussion	<p>The participants will review the article by Lunceford et al. (2020) and review addressing the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What could be the solutions to the challenges?</li> <li>b) Identify the challenges that students in DoD schools face (Slides 8)</li> </ul>
12:00 pm- 13:00 pm	Lunch	The participants will break off for lunch (Slides 9)
13:00 pm- 15:00 pm	Technology	The participants will be trained on the existing online learning tools such as LMS, videos, and apps and their integration into learning. They will share their experiences about the benefits of the technology that they deploy (Slide 10)

15:00 pm- 15:30 pm	Making connections	In the session, participants will be encouraged to discuss with their colleagues to understand the challenges of using online learning tools that they face and how they address them. (Slide 11)
15:30 pm- 16:00 pm	Wrap-up	The day will end with a review of the first session with clarification offered to participants. The facilitator will offer an overview of the next session to prepare participants. (Slide 12)



**Professional Development Day 1: Student Performance in Advanced Placement  
English Language and Composition Exam in Department of Defense Schools**

1

Student Performance In Advanced  
Placement English Language And  
Composition Exam In Department Of  
Defense Schools

Professional Development Day 1

Presented by:

Date:

2

## Objectives

- During Day 1, the participants will learn best practices in the teaching of AP English Language and Composition
- Also, they will learn the methods to prepare students for all aspects of the AP exam

### Materials needed

- Professional development binder: Day 1 handout
- Highlighters
- Sticky notes

3

## Agenda

---

- 8:00am: Ice breaker and welcome
- 8:30am-11:00am: the overview of AP Classroom and How to prepare students for AP exam, offer meaningful scores and feedback
- 11:00am-11:30am: break
- 11:30pm-12:00pm: review of article and discussion
- 12:00pm-13:00pm: Lunch break
- 14:00pm-15:00pm: Integrating technology and writing processes to enhance students with writing and reading experiences
- 15:00pm-15:30pm: making connections
- 15:30pm-16:00pm: Wrap-up

4

## Welcome!!!

---

- This is the first day in a 3-day personal development training for teachers in DoD schools.
- The day will begin with discussing the overview of AP classroom, and how to prepare students for AP exam, offer meaningful scores and feedback.
- Also, the session will include how to effectively integrate technology and writing processes to enhance students with writing and reading experiences
- Before we begin, let us introduce ourselves and get to know each other

5

## Icebreaker

---

- Kindly introduce yourself by providing us with:
  - a) Your name
  - b) Educational level
  - c) Years in education
  - d) Other relevant personal information

6

## Overview of AP Classroom in DoD Schools

---

- In DoD-connected schools, students face many problems and difficulties in their education and lives
- Such students have elevated stress levels as they seek to make new friends and adjust to a new location.
- Creating a safe school atmosphere can facilitate the students' adaption to the new school environment and instructional programs

7

## Break

---

- Thank you for your concentration, please take few minutes to digress
- We will meet at 11:30am



8

## Article Study

---

- Read and review the article, "*Our turn to serve: Assessing military-connected students*," by Lunceford, Buetikofer, and Roberts.
  - a) Identify the challenges that students in DoD schools face
  - b) What could be the solutions to the challenges?

9

## Break

See you at 13:00pm!!!



Bon appetite

10

## Online learning

❖ Use of online learning and technologies such as LMS is integral in DoD school

❖ Use of videos and apps are recommended

### Benefits

- Online learning as it made a healthy learning environment, improves learners' health, and promotes flexibility
- Online learning in military-connected schools improves the flexibility of the students and teachers, as learning can happen anytime, anywhere

### Challenges

- Implementing remote learning and LMS challenging, lacked instructional time, and pressured learners.
- In addition, the technologies adopted by learners, such as Schoology, that helps them access the textbook is incompatible with LMS and other remote learning resources

11

## Making connections

- In the session, you are encouraged to discuss with your colleagues to understand the challenges that they face and how they address them
- You will be able to integrate the lessons from today's discussions into your pedagogy
- At the end of the discussion, provide technologies adopted by your colleagues



## Wrap-up

---

- You are encouraged to read the review and complete the session exit ticket.
- We are looking forward for your feedback to better your experience
- The link for the ticket will be provided
- The next session will focus on the strategies to promote student success on the AP English: Language and Composition examination



**Professional Development Day 2: Strategies to promote student success on the AP  
English: Language and Composition Examination**

**Materials Needed**

- a) Professional development binder: Day 2 handout
- b) Highlighters
- c) Sticky notes

Day 2: Improving student performance		
Time	Session	Session Overview
8:00 am	Icebreaker and welcome	The session will begin with an introduction, with participants expected to share their experiences on diversity. The participants will be welcomed into the training by reviewing the agenda and session norms (Slides 1-5)
8:30 am- 11:00 pm	Differentiated Instructional Learning	The participants will be trained on the concept of the differentiated model, the basis for the use of the model, and its salient features. The session will empower instructors to teach learners from diverse backgrounds. (Slides 6 and 7).
11:00am 11:30pm	Break	The participant will take a short break to decompress and relieve themselves as they prepare for the following sessions. (Slide 8)

11:30 pm- 12:00 pm	Review of Video	The participants will watch and review the video Differentiation and The Brain: A discussion with Carol Ann Tomlinson. After reviewing the video, they will identify the objectives and usefulness for DoD students. (Slide 9)
12:00 pm- 13:00 pm	Lunch	The participants will break off for lunch (Slides 10)
13:00 pm- 15:00 pm	Benefits of Differentiated Instruction	The session will help the participants to understand the differentiated instruction framework by exploring the critical elements of the teaching strategy. The participants will be informed of the benefits of DI in teaching DoD schools. (Slide 11)
15:00 pm- 15:30 pm	Making connection	In the session, participants are encouraged to discuss the benefits of differentiated instruction with their colleagues and offer alternatives for implementing the learning strategy. (Slide 12)
15:30 pm- 16:00 pm	Wrap-up	The session will end with a review of the first session with clarification offered to participants. The facilitator will offer an overview of the next session to prepare participants. (Slide 13)

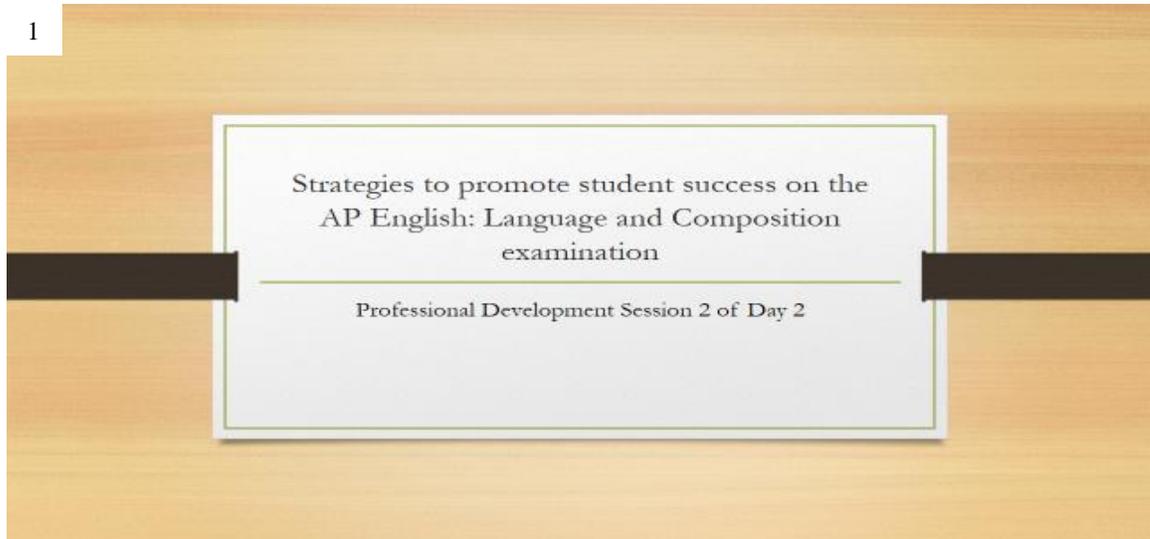
## Day 2: Exit Ticket and Evaluation

Please reflect on Day 2 and honestly review whether your expectations were met and if you learned or gained new insights. In your review, please answer the following questions:

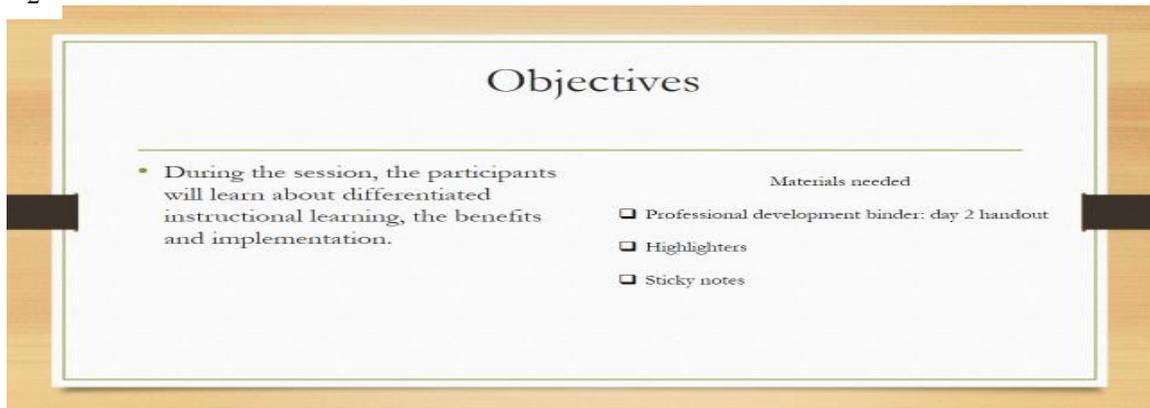
- a) Please rate the presenter's knowledge of the topics addressed in the sessions.
  - Excellent
  - Above Average
  - Average
  - Below Average
  - Poor
  
- b) Please rate the overall usefulness of the topics addressed in today's sessions.
  - Extremely Useful
  - Useful
  - Moderately Useful
  - Slightly Useful
  - Not Useful
  
- c) How likely are you to use the strategies taught today?
  - Very Likely
  - Somewhat Likely
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat Unlikely
  - Very Unlikely
  
- d) What did you learn that was new?
  
- e) What stood out regarding the benefits of differentiated instruction?
  
- f) Are there topics not addressed in today's sessions that you would like to include in future sessions? Please list them.

## Professional Development Day 2: Strategies to Promote Student Success on the AP English Language and Composition Examination

1



2



3

## Agenda

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- 8:00am: Ice breaker and welcome
- 8:30am-11:00am: the focus of differentiated instructional learning
- 11:00am-11:30am: break
- 11:00am-12:00pm: review of video and discussion
- 12:00pm-13:00pm: Lunch break
- 13:00pm-15:00pm: differentiated instructional learning strategies
- 15:00pm-15:30pm: making connections
- 15:30pm-16:00 Wrap-up

4

## Welcome!!!

---

- This is the second day in a 3-day personal development training for teachers in DoD schools.
- The session will begin with discussing differentiated instructional learning, which is integral in addressing challenges faced by students in DoD schools
- Also, the session will discuss the benefits and application of the differentiated instructional learning
- Before we begin, let us share our experiences on diversity

5

## Icebreaker

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- Would you prefer working in rural areas or urban centres?
- What is the ideal choice for you, remote learning or traditional classroom?
- Do you support diversity classroom or inclusive classroom?

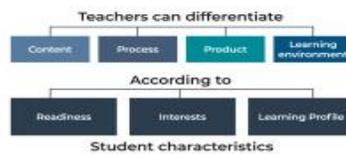
6

## Differentiated Instructional Learning

- The concept of the model is premised on the need for educators to respond to the different abilities of learners
  - The goal of the model is to teach learners at the specific readiness levels.
  - The differentiated learning underscores that students come in class with diverse and unique differences
- Students from DoD schools vary in:
- Languages
  - Cultural orientation
  - Life experiences
  - Background knowledge
  - Preferences, interest in how they learn best
  - Feeling about the school and themselves as learners

7

## Features of Differentiated Instructional Learning



8

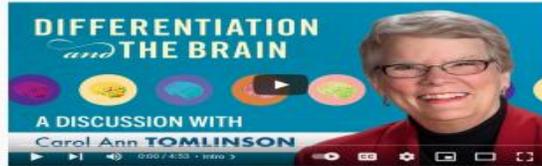
## Break

- Thank you for your concentration, please take few minutes to digress
- We will meet at 11:30am

TAKE  
a  
break

9

## Video: Differentiation and The Brain: A discussion with Carol Ann Tomlinson



After reviewing the video: Identify objectives of DI and usefulness in DoD schools

<https://youtu.be/mLzCqoPFxRw>

10

## Break

See you at 13:00pm!!!



Bon appetite

11

## Benefits of Differentiated Instruction

The framework is framed on several critical elements that include teaching up, including:

- Teaching
- Flexible groupings
- Building community
- Continual assessment
- High-quality assessment

The benefits includes:

- Higher student engagement
- Flexibility and creativity
- Students learn on own pace
- Improves performance

12

## Making connections

- In the session, you will discuss the benefits of differentiated instructions
- At the end of the discussion, provide alternatives for the implementation of differentiated instructional learning



13

## Wrap-up

- You are encouraged to read the review and complete the session exit ticket.
- We are looking forward for your feedback to better your experience
- The link for the ticket will be provided
- The next day will focus on Strategies to Promote Differentiated Learning in DoD Schools



**Professional Development Day 3: Strategies to Promote Differentiated Learning in DoD Schools**

**Materials Needed**

- a) Professional development binder: Day 3 handout
- b) Highlighters
- c) Sticky notes

Session 2: Improving student performance		
Time	Session	Session Overview
8:00 am	Icebreaker and welcome	The session will begin with an introduction with participants expected to share their experiences on diversity. The participants will be welcomed into the training by reviewing the agenda and session norms (Slides 1-4)
8:30 am- 11:00 am	Differentiated Instruction Focus	The session will train participants on the focus of differentiated instruction. They will learn how differentiated instruction establishes an expected goal and customizes the content.  Video: Differentiating Instruction: It's Not As Hard as You Think (Slide 5)

11:00am- 11:30am	Break	The participants will take a short break to decompress and relieve themselves as they prepare for the following sessions. (Slide 6)
11:30 am- 12:00 pm	Review of Video	The participants will watch and review the Video: Differentiating Instruction: It's Not As Hard as You Think. (Slide 7)
12:00 pm- 13:00 pm	Lunch	The participants will break off for lunch (Slides 8)
13:00 pm- 15:00 pm	Differentiated Instructional Learning Strategies	The participants will be trained on differentiated instruction strategies such as DoK (Depth of Knowledge) skills and HOTS (Higher Order of Thinking Skills) questioning; WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading); and AVID (Advanced via Individual Determination) strategies such as Cornell Notes and Socratic Seminars. (Slides 9 - 11)
15:00 pm- 15:30 pm	Making connections	In the session, participants will be encouraged to discuss the lessons learned from the training and develop a lesson plan with their colleagues. (Slide 12)

15:30 pm- 16:00 pm	Wrap-up	The day will end with a review of the first session with clarification offered to participants. The facilitator will offer an overview of the last three days and request that participants ask questions. The facilitator will respond to questions and provide clarifications. (Slide 13)
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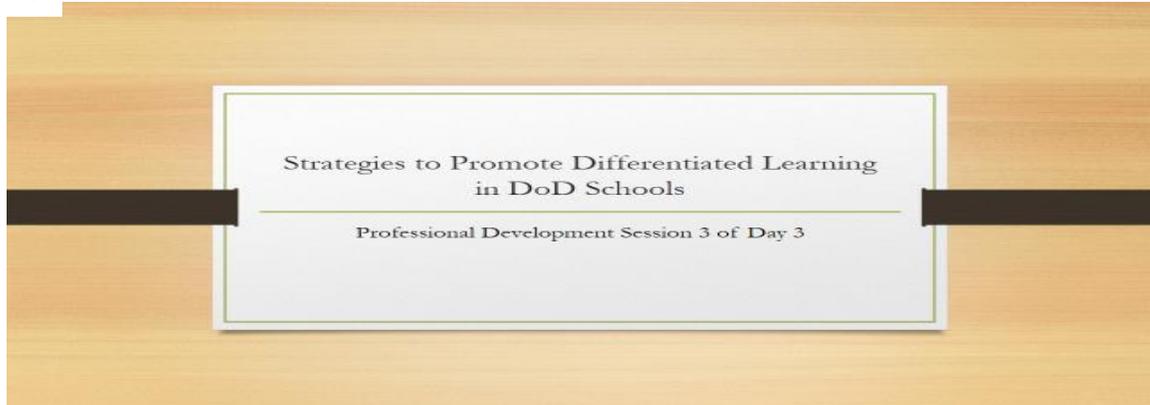
### Day 3: Exit Ticket and Evaluation

Please reflect on Day 3 and honestly review whether your expectations were met and if you learned or gained new insights. In your review, please answer the following questions:

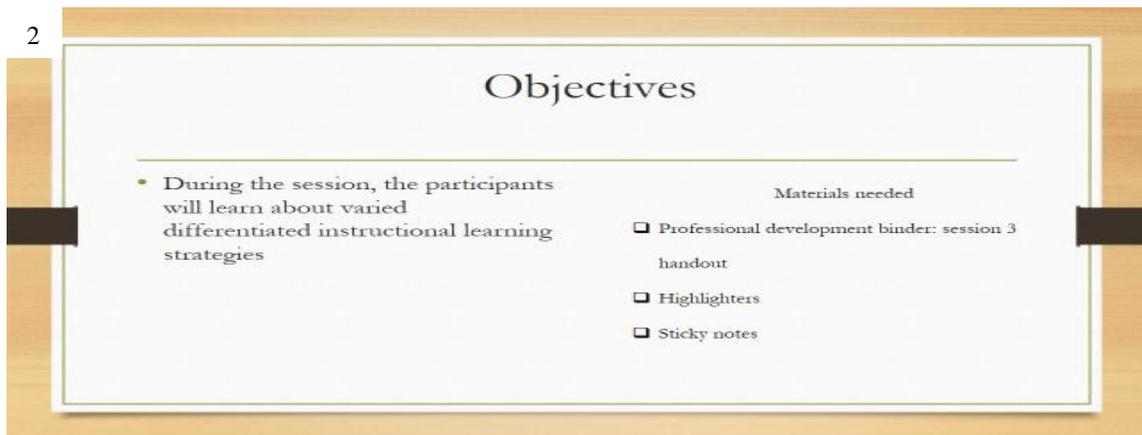
- a) Please rate the presenter's knowledge of the topics addressed in the sessions.
  - Excellent
  - Above Average
  - Average
  - Below Average
  - Poor
  
- b) Please rate the overall usefulness of the topics addressed in today's sessions.
  - Extremely Useful
  - Useful
  - Moderately Useful
  - Slightly Useful
  - Not Useful
  
- c) How likely are you to use the strategies taught today?
  - Very Likely
  - Somewhat Likely
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat Unlikely
  - Very Unlikely
  
- d) What did you learn that was new?
  
- e) What do you think stood out as effective strategies using differentiated instruction?
  
- f) What topics not addressed in the 3-day professional development training would you like to include in future sessions? Please list them.

## Professional Development Day 3: Strategies to Promote Differentiated Learning in DoD Schools (PowerPoint Presentation)

1



2



3



4

## Ice breaker and Welcome!!!

---

- This is the third day in a 3-day professional development training for teachers in DoD schools.
- The session will begin with discussing the differentiation instructional learning strategies and their rationale
- Before we begin, let us share our experiences on diversity

5

## Differentiated Instruction Focus

---

Differentiated instruction is based on determining the expected goal and customizing the content to:

- Abilities of revisions
- Providing extended time for ESOL students
- Focusing on skills as opposed to learners
- Focusing on skills as opposed to grades
- Offering group work,
- Providing specific and personalized feedback

6

## Break

---

- Thank you for your concentration, please take few minutes to digress
- We will meet at 11.30am



7

## Video: Differentiating Instruction: It's Not As Hard as You Think.



8

Break

See you at 13.00pm!!!



Bon appetite

9

## Differentiated Instructional Learning strategies

- DoK (Depth of Knowledge) skills and HOTS (Higher Order of Thinking Skills) questioning,



10

## Differentiated Instructional Learning strategies

- WICOR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading)



11

## Differentiated Instructional Learning strategies

- AVID (Advanced via Individual Determination) strategies such as Cornell Notes and Socratic Seminars.



12

## Making connections

- At the end of the session, you will take the lessons and develop your lesson plans



13

## Wrap-up

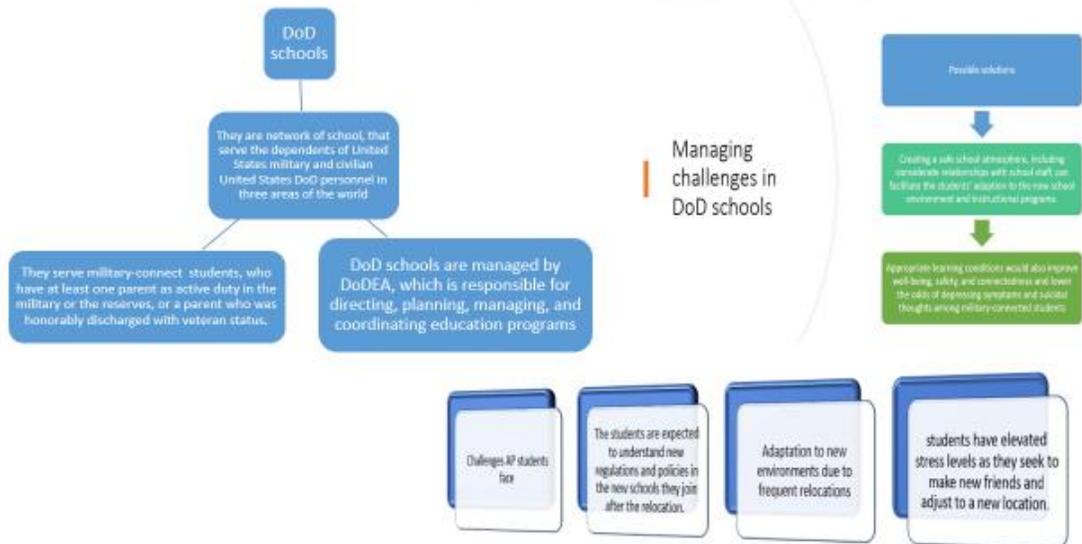
- You are encouraged to read the review and complete the session exit ticket.
- We are looking forward for your feedback to better your experience
- The link for the ticket will be provided



## References

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## Poster on the Overview of DoD schools



## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Candidate (position and Name): \_\_\_\_\_

Questioner: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Introduction**

*You have been selected for this interview as you are deemed to have the required information needed for this study. My focus is on the performance of military-connected students on the Advanced Placement English Language Composition (APELC) exam. I am seeking to understand the factors affecting the administration of the exams and their effect on student performance.*

*I want to record our discussion today to take better notes. Please fill out the authorization form and sign it. The recording will be transcribed and subsequently destroyed, and only I, my doctoral advisor, and the Walden University Institutional Review Board will have access to transcripts.*

*You must also sign a consent form that complies with my study requirements. In summary, this document stresses that: (1) all data will be kept private; (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may opt out at any time if you are uncomfortable; and (3) I have no intention to offend you.*

*The interview should take approximately 45 – 60 minutes.*

### **A. Demographics**

1 What is your gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female

- 2 What is your age bracket?
  - 0-25 years
  - 26-35 years
  - 36-45 years
  - 46-55 years
  - Above 55 years
- 3 What is your highest education level?
  - High school or equivalent
  - Technical or occupational certificate
  - Associate degree
  - Some college work completed
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Master's degree
  - Doctorate
  - Professional
- 4 Is there anything else you would like to share about the APELC exam and military-connected performance with me?

**B. Teaching Background**

5. What is your main teaching assignment?
6. How many years have you been:
  - a. A teacher? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Teaching at this school? \_\_\_\_\_

- c. Teaching APELC courses? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many years have you been teaching APELC courses? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What other AP subject courses have you taught? (List them.)
- 

a. How many years have you been teaching each course? \_\_\_\_\_

---

b. Which of these courses are you currently teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

---

**C. Perceptions About the APELC Course and Exam**

9. Could you please tell me how the APELC course is taught in your school? (RQ1)
- a. What are some strengths of how the course is taught in your school?
- b. What are some weaknesses of how the course is taught in your school?
10. How are students prepared for the APELC exam in this school? (RQ1)
- a. What are some strengths of how students are prepared for the APELC exam in your school?
- b. What are some weaknesses of how students are prepared for the APELC exam in your school?
11. How do students perform on the APELC exam in this school? (RQ1)
12. What factors do you think influence military-connected students' low APELC scores? (RQ1)
13. What challenges do you face preparing students for the APELC exam? (RQ1)

14. What instructional strategies and methods have you used that effectively teach the APELC course to military-connected students? (RQ2)
15. What instructional practices can DoD teachers use to improve the scores of military-connected students on the APELC exam? (RQ2)
16. What are school-based practices in place to improve students' performance on APELC exams? (RQ2)
17. How has the DoD been supportive and influential in administering the APELC course and improving students' performance on the exam? (RQ2)
18. What initiatives and supports are available from the DoD for teachers to support students who score poorly on the APELC exam? Which have you used? (RQ2)

**Thank you for your time.**