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Civilian School Educators' Perspectives of Needed Supports for Military-Connected Early Childhood Students

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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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MS, Walden University, 2014

BS, University of Arizona, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The support needed for military-connected children in civilian schools remains a largely unexplored subject. Military-connected children and their families face unique stressors due to the nature of military life and culture. The problem is that civilian educators are often unaware of the presence of military-connected students in their schools and of the academic and behavioral support these students require to be successful. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of educators concerning the support needed for military-connected early childhood students in civilian schools to be successful. The three research questions focused specifically on teachers' perspectives on the classroom supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected students, counselors' perspectives on the counseling supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected students, and administrators' perspectives on the administrative and school-wide supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected students. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory forms the conceptual framework for this study. Eleven educators participated in Zoom interviews. Data were analyzed by transcribing interviews, using three-cycle coding data, and inductive data analysis which led to four distinct themes: awareness, relationships, specialized support, and understanding. The results demonstrated civilian educators' perceptions that military-connected students need specialized support due to the challenges they face because of the military lifestyle. Military-connected students may benefit from the results of this study through increased awareness of their needed supports, development of educator training programs, and education policy reforms.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to two of my greatest supporters who received their mansion, robe, and crown, and are now walking on streets of gold. Dad (Carlwell Head Jr.) and Josie, I miss you both so much! The love you gave me carried me through this endeavor. Thank you for living your lives for all “your” children. Thank you for loving every student that crossed your path. And thank you for encouraging me to always do the same.

This dissertation is also dedicated to all the military-connected children who are serving along with their families. Thank you for every move that you don’t want to make. Thank you for every day you were the new kid in school when you just wanted to see your old friends. Thank you for being resilient even when you wanted to be emotional. I know you. I was you. I hear you. And hopefully, this dissertation will help others hear you too.

Acknowledgments

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To my family and many friends, thank you for your love and support. To those of you who listened to my writing ideas, counseled me when I got negative feedback, kept me company on long writing nights, checked on me when I hadn't been seen, accepted my last minute canceling of plans to meet deadlines, and the plethora of other ways I was provided with emotional and practical support, thank you.

A special thank you to my mom, Annette Head. Thank you for teaching me how to lean on my faith and not my own understanding. To my dear husband, no words can express my gratitude to you. Antoine, since the day we met, I have been working on this dissertation. I look forward to the next chapter of our lives together!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The United States has been in conflicts requiring military deployment since the United Nations formation of Desert Shield in 1990 (Evans, 2016). Desert Shield was a U.S.-led coalition of both air and ground troops to aid Kuwait during their invasion by Iraq (Moger, 2021). Since Desert Shield, the United States active and reserve military force personnel have grown to include more than 2.1 million men and women (Totenhagen & Albright, 2018). Along with these men and women, their spouses and children also serve (Totenhagen & Albright, 2018). In the past, these families mainly lived on military base installments with the children attending Department of Defense schools located on the base. Beginning in 1988, the Department of Defense and Congress implemented Base Realignment and Closures in several cities across the United States (Lee, 2018). There were five rounds of closures, with the latest occurring in 2005. According to Hanna (2020), there are now more than 4 million school-age children under the military-connected umbrella and 80% of them are attending civilian schools and being instructed by civilian educators.

Military-connected students face unique challenges that require specialized support, especially during the deployment cycle. Some of the challenges include the temporary absence of one parent, social isolation, language and cultural barriers, gaps in academic records, and delays in mandated supports (Lake & Rosan, 2017). Often, civilian educators and their school communities are unaware of the military-connected students in their schools. According to Quintana and Cole (2021), consultation of professional literature affirms the unfamiliarity of civilian educators with military-connected students

and how they are ill-equipped to provide support to this specific group of students. They also may lack the understanding necessary to provide support as these students navigate through stressors related to frequent relocations, schedule changes that are unpredictable, family separations, and anxiety related to a loved one being in danger (Conforte et al., 2017). The potential positive social change implication of this study was to raise awareness of the needs of military-connected early childhood students in civilian schools. Kranke (2019) expressed an immediate necessity for research to be conducted on the perspectives of educators' teaching military-connected students and for the findings to be disseminated. By allowing classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators to share their perspectives on the supports these students need, this study brings a new voice to the military-connected student demographic. De Pedro et al. (2016) suggested research studies should be conducted in areas populated with military-connected children that examine school contextual factors, including educators' awareness of matters related to military life. This suggestion supports the necessity for this study, which examines educators' perspectives on the supports required for early childhood military-connected children who are being educated in civilian schools in school districts which are located near active military bases in the southern region of the United States. The study of school-level practices and how they relate to school climate and the needs of military-connected early childhood students at critical points of school experience was recommended by De Pedro et al. (2018). This study contributes to the body of knowledge needed to address supports provided to early childhood military-connected children in civilian schools by presenting questions to civilian teachers, counselors, and

administrators who educate these students to understand their experiences and school practices.

The first chapter of this study is divided into major sections that relay the significance and necessity for the research. The major sections consist of a statement of the problem being researched and related background information, the purpose for the research and questions that will be used to guide the qualitative research study, along with the theoretical foundation, and nature of the study. The significance of the study is also addressed in this chapter and is supported by the research questions and literature reviewed in the introduction. The importance of the perspectives of educators concerning the support of military-connected students in civilian schools is highlighted in the above-mentioned sections of this chapter. This chapter reviews a portion of the literature that recognizes the necessity for educators to bypass their possible biases and preconceived notions concerning the life of military personnel and develop an understanding of the current military culture (Anderson et al., 2014).

Background

While the American military family subculture makes up less than 1% of the population, about half of these soldiers have children (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). Of the children in the military, about 70% of them are under the age of 11 and considered a part of early childhood (Bradbard, 2019). For this study, early childhood was defined as prekindergarten to second grade based on the cognitive development stages presented by Piaget and Inhelder (1969/2000). This specific group of children experiences deployment differently than older children with their main struggle being the ability to form healthy

attachments due to separation and a lack of consistency in nurturing caregivers (Barbee et al., 2016). Knobloch et al. (2017) reported that reunion after deployment can be one of the most stressful times in the deployment cycle. The difficulties these children face during the reintegration stage present through cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and relational challenges (Knobloch et al., 2017). This results in preschool and elementary school students receiving medical care for problems related to mental health and maltreatment upon return of a deployed parent. Prior research has focused on deployment and the possible effects it can have on children, such as higher levels of risky behavior and mental health problems (Wadsworth et al., 2017), and ways to help alleviate the potentially negative effects. Cunitz et al. (2019) stated that when a parent goes to war, children and families can have particularly hard times. Problems can arise in school ranging from "depression/anxiety, hyperactivity/attention problems, and aggressive behavior" (Cunitz et al., 2019, p. 2). The Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3) drafted a compact that was adopted by all 50 states to help alleviate some of the education transition issues faced by active-duty military children due to frequent transitions (Shaw, 2019). The main goal of the MIC3 is to afford active-duty military students with the same opportunities for educational success as any other student while ensuring there is no penalization or delays in achievement due to duty station reassignments and relocations (Shaw, 2019). Recent research has shown that when compared to their nonmilitary counterparts, military-connected youths are more at risk for adverse life outcomes (Castillo et al., 2017). There should be recognition of the real source of emotional and behavioral problems, so these students can be helped through all

steps of the deployment cycle. According to Cole (2016), the challenges that arise as a result of the military lifestyle are often unknown to civilian educators and can be overwhelming if they are unequipped to handle them.

Military dependent children are still a largely unexplored subject in early childhood education research (Stites, 2016). Many educators are unaware of military-connected students' presence in their schools and classrooms. Many teachers of military-connected students have received little to no training to prepare them to deal with the special needs of children with parents who are deployed or have recently returned from deployment. There was a gap in research on practices of civilian educators of military-connected early childhood students. Research specific to civilian educators of military-connected students should be conducted to explore perceptions of civilian educators concerning the needs of military-connected early childhood students. Therefore, this study was based on the recommendations for future research by Classen et al. (2019), Pexton et al. (2018), Conway and Schaffer (2017), and Cole (2016) to examine perceptions of teachers, counselors, and administrators of students in public civilian schools where military-connected early childhood students attend. The researchers explored whether there was a lack of training and understanding of the military culture and lifestyle and its influence on students learning. Sherbert (2018) put the responsibility on educators who "need to be informed how the unique and diverse lived experiences of military-connected learners" (p. 2) create a culture that has both positive and negative effects on their learning. An initiative that became a legacy of the Obama Administration was called Joining Forces and was led by Former First Lady Michelle Obama and Second

Lady Jill Biden. Their initiative was designed to highlight the variety of strengths and needs military-connected students have so that better supports can be built at schools and on the stages where policies are adapted, and to encourage more research centered around their social-emotional challenges (Shafer et al., 2016). Inspired by the Joining Forces initiative, Operation Educate the Educators aimed to increase awareness by encouraging the support of military children through teacher-training programs at colleges and universities (Shafer et al., 2016). Educators who are unaware and lack understanding of military culture and the emotional challenges that military-connected students face may struggle as they attempt to handle behavior and discipline problems in conventional ways. Civilian schools that educate military-connected students should work on improving school climate and involving parents so that all the students' needs can be met, especially during times of deployment. Pexton et al. (2018) recommended that schools utilize evidence-based support to provide services that will be appropriate and effectively benefit families faced with the challenges that accompany military service. Future research studies can provide such evidence for educators and those who make influence education policies.

This study focused on educators' perspectives on the support military-connected early childhood students need, the practices of their institution, and how these components combine and relate to the school climate. Instructor perceptions are important as they not only shape the experience of the instructor but also the experiences of their students (Houser & Waldbuesser, 2017). Teaching does not occur in a vacuum, but instead, within a room that contains a teacher and students who all have needs.

According to Capp et al. (2017), teachers are an integral presence in the classroom with the potential to construct positive goals in their classrooms. Students need their teachers to validate who they are and to endorse them as valuable and significant (Houser & Waldbuesser, 2017). Teachers need their students to be willing and able to learn, as free from distractions and barriers as possible. Military-connected students experience challenges that can make them feel different and possibly weak internally. To reach them, educators should let down their guard, show their vulnerabilities and struggles openly, and thus forge a meaningful bond with their struggling students (Huddy, 2015). There should be an increase in awareness of the presence, life experiences, and factors for success regarding military-connected students in public schools. This study was needed to help increase awareness of the needs of military-connected early childhood students as perceived by the civilian educators who lead, counsel, and teach them.

Problem Statement

Elementary-level civilian public-school educators lack an understanding of the unique challenges faced by military-connected early childhood students. There are more than 4 million school-aged U.S. children who have parents connected with the military (Hanna, 2020), and about 80% of them attend civilian public schools (Monsif & Gluck, 2016). Despite extensive research results suggesting the positive influence that supportive school communities can have on students who are dealing with negative social and emotional outcomes, there is still a struggle for civilian schools to support the specific and unique needs of military-connected children (De Pedro et al., 2018). Teachers, counselors, and administrators are often unaware of the military-connected students in

their schools or their students' family situations, which results in their inadvertent neglect to provide specialized support to their military-connected students (Castillo et al., 2017). Educators should examine and consider the unique behavioral and academic challenges affecting military children. Some examples of behaviors and academic challenges are the stress of the nondeployed parent, feeling disconnected from the school community, frequent school transitions, and shifts in household responsibilities as well as the many psychological deployment-related and non-deployment-related stressors that result from having a parent in military service (Conway & Schaffer, 2017). Teachers who are providing instruction to military-connected students should be trained to recognize the "internalizing and externalizing symptoms" (Walsh, 2017, p. 86) expressed by younger children during deployment-related family separations. This study addressed the gap in research on practices of civilian educators who interact with military-connected students by encouraging classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators from civilian schools to share their perspectives of the necessary supports for military-connected early childhood students as well as their current practices as educators.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the occurrence of civilian teachers, counselors, and administrators who educate military-connected early childhood students in Southeastern United States civilian public-school districts that are located near active-duty military installments. The basic qualitative research study method was utilized to explore this phenomenon because it is applicable to the present-day, real-life situations humans face (Simon & Goes, 2018). This research is placed

within the constructivist paradigm as it aims to understand how the participants socially construct their reality while defining their individual and shared meanings around the educational support of military-connected early childhood students in the context of civilian public schools (Simon & Goes, 2018). This study gained the perspectives of civilian educators regarding the supports needed for these students' academic and behavioral success in the civilian public-school setting. The results of this study can be used to raise awareness and inform positive social change in supports provided to military-connected early childhood students in civilian schools. The mission of educators should be "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (Valentine & Brevetti, 2018). To help military-connected children, civilian educators need to overcome the different stressors these children face associated with the military life and culture to ensure they are fostering educational excellence and providing equal access. While frequent relocation issues have been addressed through the enactment of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, there is still a gap in research on the everyday practices of civilian educators of military-connected children. To address this gap in research on practice, the study encouraged classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators from civilian schools to share their perspectives of the supports needed for military-connected students as well as their current practices as educators. According to Stites (2016) exploring the perspective of educators is an important first step in the exploration of how relocating, being separated from a parent, and socioemotional needs influence the educational achievement of military-connected students. The qualitative

research approach was utilized to explore this problem. This methodology best serves my research purpose when defined as “a study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Yazan, 2015, p. 148). The stakeholders in my research are civilian classroom teachers, counselors, or administrators in civilian public-school districts near an active military base, who interact with military-connected early childhood students. The study was conducted in several elementary schools that are located near military installments in a southeastern state in the United States. This area yielded early childhood educators who have had relationships with military-connected students and their families. Educators’ perspectives, especially those of early childhood teachers, are vital in the development of programs, curriculum, and other resources to meet the needs of these children (Stites, 2016). Classroom teacher, counselor, and administrator interview responses were helpful in deepening our understanding of the perceived needs of the diverse population of military-connected students in the classroom and school-wide.

Research Questions

This study explored the perspectives held by teachers, counselors, and administrators of children in prekindergarten to second grade in an attempt to better understand the support needed for military-connected students to be successful in civilian schools. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are teachers’ perspectives of the classroom supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?

2. What are counselors' perspectives of the counseling supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?
3. What are administrators' perspectives of the administrative and school-wide supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?

Conceptual Framework

To elucidate the "why" of this doctoral study, there was a solid conceptual framework that functioned as a road map with detailed paths of how other studies have addressed a similar problem (Simon & Goes, 2018). Although other researchers have explored relationship influence on the development of children, adding the parameter of relationships and how they influence the development of children who have a military connection leads this study down an alternative path that has been traveled less frequently. School climates, specifically educator relationships with students, can influence academic achievement. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that spheres formed from environmental influences encapsulate children during their development. Children develop within the close adult relationships that permeate their everyday lives and mainly include their parents, teachers, and other significant adults (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The basis of this conceptual framework was Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, which consists of five environmental influence systems that each impact the development of individuals differently (Vèlez-Agosto et al., 2017). In Bronfenbrenner's model, the word *system* refers to the manner in which people are linked to and interact with each

other (Shelton, 2019). The five systems in this model include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. These different systems encompass the child and help to explain how the qualities of a child and their environment interact while influencing how the child develops and grows.

The system closest to the child is the microsystem, which consists of the people with whom the child interacts along with "their activities, their relations with each other, and the roles they play" (Shelton, 2019, p. 58). Christensen (2016) described it as the setting in which the focus child lives. The patterns within this system, as experienced by the focus child, are what influence the development and growth (Shelton, 2019). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), personal interactions within the microsystem involve family members, teachers and caregivers with influences and interactions going back and forth.

The next system, the mesosystem, refers to the relations between the different contributors in the microsystem and the connections between them (Christensen, 2016). According to Shelton (2019), "each person has any number of microsystems, but only one mesosystem, the mesosystem being the relationships among all the settings in which the person participates" (p. 71). Examples that fit into this system for children may include the relationships and experiences between their family and their school, their school and their church, and their family and their peers (Christensen, 2016). One possible scenario of patterns in relationships within the systems would be a child who feels rejected by a parent having a difficult time developing a positive relationship with a

teacher. The mesosystem consists of the links and relationships between a person's different microsystems (Shelton, 2019).

The exosystem, in contrast to the microsystem, includes all other people that have a large effect on the child but do not have direct interaction with the child (Christensen, 2016). These people would include a parent's supervisor, extended family members, and the neighborhood. For military-connected children, the influence is seen in duty station changes, relocations, and deployments that all stem from the parent's workplace.

The next level in Bronfenbrenner's theory is the macrosystem, which Christensen (2016) described as the social culture that people live in, such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and other national and cultural borders, customs, lifestyles, laws, and rules. As a child participates in the larger environment of society, "the macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture" (Shelton, 2019, p. 98). Military culture would be in this level of the ecological systems theory for military-connected children. It could be argued that the components of the macrosystem are less remote for military-connected children while having a greater influence on development than for civilian children.

Lastly, Bronfenbrenner's theory includes a system that specifically considers change and constancy in a child's environment. This level in the model, known as the chronosystem, encompasses the four previous levels and includes changes in family structure, parents' employment status and social changes that are considered a natural part of life (Vèlez-Agosto et al., 2017). The fluctuation and lack of stability that can occur in the five developmental levels of the ecological system of military-connected

children, particularly in the early childhood years, influence their growth and development.

Adom et al. (2018) suggested the examination of this phenomenon through natural progression. Using data gathered from in-depth interviews based on three specific research questions, I explored the perceived influence of educators on the academic success of military-connected students. In RQ1, I focused on teachers and their perspectives of the classroom supports needed for military-connected early childhood students and the role the teacher-student relationship and interactions play in student development. RQ2 focused on the perspectives of counselors concerning the counseling supports needed to identify and address both the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students. The final research question, RQ3, focused on the schoolwide supports' administrators perceive are needed to address the academic and behavioral success of these students. These questions were an integral part of the conceptual framework that accentuated the reasons why the perspectives of educators of military-connected, early childhood students are worth studying, my assumptions as a researcher, the views of related scholarly works, and how I conceptually grounded my approach (Adom et al., 2018). The conceptual framework of the study was the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform my research and are a key part of the study design. Simon and Goes (2018) suggested that the conceptual framework can also assure the reader that established theory informed the investigation, not just the personal instincts and feelings of the researcher. Simon and Goes (2018) further stated that the conceptual framework provides a route from defining

the problem to resolving the problem that justifies that the concepts chosen for investigation or interpretation, and any relationships among them, will be useful and appropriate in regard to the research problem under investigation.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study explored the perspectives of civilian educators who were supporting military-connected early childhood students in civilian public schools in school districts located near an active-duty military base in the Southwest United States. Because analyzing the lived experiences of civilian teachers, counselors, and administrators with military-connected students was a key component of the study, the qualitative methodology produced comprehensive and descriptive information (Queirós et al., 2017) with the participant maintaining control over the content of the data collected. My intent was to determine what supports civilian educators deem necessary for military-connected early childhood students to be successful in civilian schools. De Pedro et al. (2016) recommended investigating the contextual factors of schools, specifically teachers and principals, to determine their levels of awareness of military life issues. To do this, an unstructured, open-ended, direct interview style research study is recommended (Queirós et al., 2017). The qualitative research method fits this need and provides a more versatile and flexible approach which is helpful in an educational setting. A quantitative study would not have allowed the educators to share their experiences and would have limited my ability to glean more information through clarifying and follow-up questions. Open-ended qualitative interviews allowed viewpoints of participants to be shared without suggestion or influence that are more likely to occur with the closed-

ended question format (Zanotti et al., 2016). Educators' perceptions cannot be quantified without a loss of meaning and reduction of understanding (Queirós et al., 2017). The qualitative study method aligns with the research goal of exploring civilian educators' perspectives while producing opportunities to elicit "meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes" (Queirós et al., 2017, p. 370).

Definitions

The terms defined below were utilized throughout this doctoral dissertation and were designed to provide clarity and understanding of the study.

Administrator: Any educator tasked with managing school operations such as maintaining a budget and supervising staff members and students while creating a safe learning environment. This can include principals, assistant principals, instructional coordinators, and other support staff.

Civilian: Not currently enlisted in the military.

Cycle of deployment: Series of stages an active-duty military family unit will go through during their military service: Stage 1 – predicting difficulties with deployment; Stage 2 – pre-deployment; Stage 3 – deployment; Stage 4 – sustainment during deployment; Stage 5 – post-deployment/reintegration (Barbee et al., 2016).

Dependent: The spouse, children, and possible other relatives who are sponsored by a military member and are subject to receive special benefits, privileges, and rights.

Deployment: The shifting and locating of armed forces and their logistical support infrastructure all over the world (Barbee et al., 2016).

Early childhood: Stage of physical growth and development in human beings from about age 2 to 8. In this study, early childhood refers to students from prekindergarten to second grade.

Educator: Title used for certified school staff members, usually from preschool through high school. Includes classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators.

Emotional cycle of deployment: Series of emotional phases that an active-duty family unit may experience during the cycle of deployment: Phase 1 – anticipation of loss; Phase 2 – detachment and withdrawal; Phase 3- emotional disorganization; Phase 4 – routines established; Phase 5 – anticipation of homecoming; Phase 6 – homecoming; phase 7 – reintegration (Boice, 2017).

Enlistment: Period of time that a service member commits to being active duty and serving in the armed forces.

Esprit de corps: The commitment and pride taken by soldiers and military personnel that inspires them to be dedicated to helping each other, protecting each other, and defending the honor of all members of the unit/organization (Affandi et al., 2019).

Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children: A mandated agreement between all 50 states that is designed to alleviate common problems that affect military students because of frequent relocations and deployments (Shaw, 2019).

Military: Any person who is currently serving in any of the United States Armed Forces which includes the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, National Guard, or Reserves (Tam-Seto et al., 2020).

Military-connected children: Children with at least one parent who is defined as military.

Military installment: Name used for a military base which includes housing for family members.

Military student identifier: An identifying number assigned to school-age children in military families that allows schools to monitor these students' progress through test scores, graduation rates, and other measures (Adams, 2016).

Assumptions

In this study, there are several assumptions. One assumption was that all those who agreed to participate in the study would be available and hold their position for the duration of the entire interview process. I assumed that all participants would accurately portray their perspectives on military-connected students and what supports, if any, they feel this group of children need. With participation being voluntary and confidentiality being preserved, these are reasonable assumptions (Simon & Goes, 2018). Lastly, it was assumed that participants in the selected school district have had some interactions with military-connected early childhood students and feel confident enough to honestly share any experiences, whether challenges or successes, in relation to these students and academic progress. Recognizing that this assumption greatly influences the validity of the research findings, the selection of a public civilian school district that is located near an active-duty military installment lays a solid foundation for this assumption. Since parental disclosure of employment is not mandatory, there was no way to guarantee that the participants have had interactions with military-connected students; however, the

likelihood is higher given the proximity to the military base. These assumptions were necessary for the study as the focus was to investigate the perspectives of civilian educators who have worked with military-connected early childhood students

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was built on the foundational research questions and includes only prekindergarten to second grade educators, administrators, and counselors in a school district that is near an active-duty military installment. Because of this, some of the findings will not be able to be generalized to apply to other educators in different districts. Excluded from the study were other staff at the school who interact with military-connected students in a less structured manner with minimal contact for less frequent amounts of time. For example, although they are contributors to the overall school community, custodians and cafeteria staff do not have a significant impact on the academic and behavioral outcomes of students due to the nature of their contact with said students. Another excluded group was educators of third through fifth grade students. The focus of this study was early childhood children, which is defined as birth to age 8 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2016). Upper elementary children have different levels of emotional understanding and thus different needs during the deployment cycle. These differing needs render the opinions of upper elementary educators irrelevant for inclusion in this early childhood study. Civilian educators in districts that are not near military installments are also excluded because they are less likely to have teaching experiences with military-connected students. This

study has transferability as it could be conducted in any other school district that is near a military installation where military-connected students attend civilian public schools.

Limitations

In the selection of a qualitative study, where the research occurs in a predominately natural setting, the limitation of replication will be present (Simon & Goes, 2018). Although there are many states where civilian teachers are instructing military-connected students, it may be difficult to find another state that has demographics that compare to this Southeastern state in the United States for a true replication. Another limitation related to qualitative research is the length of the verification process to extract information to be compared and compiled (Queirós et al., 2017). The data I collected were based on teacher perspectives at various grade levels that they have taught; therefore, the data that is garnered may not be applicable to all academic levels. Information provided by a prekindergarten teacher participant might not be reliable to compare to a second-grade teacher participant's perspective. Participant honesty is another possible limitation. The teachers, counselors, and administrators that were interviewed may not answer questions honestly due to a sense of loyalty to their district, time constraints, or a lack of understanding or clarity of the questions. My lack of experience as a researcher is another limitation that could affect the delineation of the data collected during the interviews. I knew it would take skill and practice for me to be able to solicit trust, honesty, and understanding from the interview participants while carrying out the data collection activities. Researcher bias is another limitation that could bring strength or weakness to qualitative research (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). As the child

of a military father, I was a military-connected student for all but my last 3 years of high school, which is when my father retired. This personal attachment to the issue of concern has focused my passion, which supplies the dedication necessary for conducting good research (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). To handle my personal biases, I "commit[ed] to being open-minded, skeptical, and considerate of research data" (Machi & McEvoy, 2016, p. 21). Careful consideration and introspection of the above-stated limitations helped in being able to control them and their influence on the overall research data, findings, and outcomes.

Significance

My study can help to guide educators as they work to make decisions that will positively support the academic success of the military-connected students in their schools. The findings from this study may inform school districts near military installments regarding the perspectives of teachers, counselors, and administrators concerning the educating of military-connected children in civilian schools by civilian educators. The information discovered in this study may also lead to the development of best practices for academic success along with developmental support for military-connected children. With so little being known about the impacts of exposure to wartime trauma and challenges on children's academic achievement as well as their cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes, this study can steer educators to consider all aspects of the child they are tasked with educating (Diab et al., 2018). In this study, I was able to nurture positive social change in education by bringing awareness to educators and district officials about the challenges that civilian teachers face when educating

military-connected children. The majority of the approximate 3.2 million military-connected students who attend public schools are taught by civilian teachers (Carlile, 2019) and could benefit from more people understanding the military culture and how it affects student's daily lives. Changing the way that teachers, counselors, and administrators approach the education of the whole child, considering the affects that home life can have on children's education, will not only benefit military-connected children but any children whose life and family situation have unique circumstances. Raising awareness of educators and education decision makers concerning the needs and additional supports that should be present for military-connected children could lead to more successful education experiences for this specific group of students.

Summary

This chapter introduced the study in detail with a problem statement, a purpose of the study statement, and research questions as well as the theoretical framework, assumptions, limitations, and what is significant about the study. A problem currently exists in the education system that relates to military-connected students who often lack the support needed to be successful and overcome the possible negative effects of the military lifestyle. The purpose of this study is to explore the situation of civilian teachers, counselors, and administrators who are charged with educating military-connected early childhood students and gain their perspectives of the supports needed for these students' academic and behavioral success. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature that relates to the study. It contains the most current and relevant information in the field. The literature is

organized into the following topics: military culture, the deployment cycle, unique stressors and demands, school level practices, and bridge building relationships.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Active-duty military personnel and their families relocate to a different duty station every 2 to 3 years. This results in the children of these service members moving between six to nine times from elementary to high school (Shafer et al., 2016). The challenges of frequent relocations along with other military lifestyle specific stress factors, such as social isolation, cultural barriers, repeated temporary absence of one parent, and risk of injury or death to a family member, may result in negatively displayed disciplinary and academic problems (Bóia et al., 2018). Military base closures have also occurred resulting in the majority of the 2 million active-duty military children attending civilian schools (Shafer et al., 2016). The students who are still attending base schools are often dealing with the challenges of overcrowded classes, rooms that are too hot or too cold, and other issues due to the recent loss of promised funds (Cooper, 2019). When President Trump diverted funds that were to be used for the construction of military base schools as well as 127 other projects, he created a ripple that touched almost every aspect of the military life of Americans (Cooper, 2019). The burden of so many years of war is being carried not only by the servicemen and women but by these military-connected schoolchildren (Cooper, 2019).

Public school staff members or civilian educators, which consist of teachers, counselors, and administrators, are often unaware of students' family situations and lack of understanding about the military lifestyle and culture (Arcuri, 2015). This lack of knowledge can result in educators' inability to see a need to provide specialized support to their military-connected students. Those who are charged with providing academic,

social, and behavioral instruction to military-connected children should be trained in the areas of military culture and deployment-related stressors (Nguyen et al., 2014). The purpose of this qualitative study was to raise awareness and inform positive social change in supports provided to military-connected early childhood students in civilian schools. To fulfill this purpose, I encouraged elementary level civilian school educators, who provided academic instruction and social and behavioral training to military-connected children, to share their perspectives on the needs and supports of this specific group of children. This study addresses the gap in research concerning the everyday practices of civilian educators regarding their students who are military-connected children.

In this chapter, after describing the strategies I used for researching the topics being presented, I defined the conceptual framework through a synthesis of primary writings from researchers related to the concept of school climates and the perceived needs of military-connected early childhood students. The chapter then includes an extensive overview of the current research literature used to establish the relevance of the problem. Also included in the chapter are the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the approaches of researchers in the areas of military-connected students, their specific needs, and the perspectives of the civilian educators who are charged with their educations. The summary at the conclusion of the chapter provides a synopsis of the chapter's key sections that will have a direct influence on the reader's understanding of the importance of the research topic, the purpose of the study, and the literature that supports it.

Literature Search Strategy

Due to the complex nature of research in the scholarly realm, a thorough search and critical review of studies related to the needs of military connected students was a necessity (Simon & Goes, 2018). The Walden University Library database system was the source of the peer-reviewed articles used in this literature review. EBSCO Host was my primary search database. Along with EBSCO Host, I also utilized SAGE, ERIC, Google Scholar and ProQuest for the search and retrieval of articles that were relevant and applicable to the research topic. While searching on these databases, I used several key terms and phrases in different combinations at different times over the course of the research period. Searches were conducted in April 2018, August 2018, January 2019, June 2019, October 2019, February 2020, May 2020, July 2020, November 2021, March 2022, and May 2022. This research period resulted in current, relevant results. The phrases and key terms I used were military-connected students, military children and challenges, military-connected students and teachers, educators or trainers or teachers or academic and military-connected students, military children and transitions, military children and effects, school counselors and military-connected students, military children and education, military children and Biden, military children and thriving, military children and civilian schools, children and transients and migrants and military, children and military families challenges, child development and military children, education or school or learning or teaching or classroom or education system and military children, educators or instructors or teachers and military children, and teacher or educator, teacher-student relationship and military, and perspective and military children.

Conceptual Framework

The central concept that grounds this study is that school climates, which are shaped by safety, teaching and learning, physical environment, and relationships (specifically educators' relationships with students), have an impact on student success (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). Student success can be measured by not only academic achievement but also behavioral and emotional development. Although there are many theories of human development, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory holds that human development is active and progressive in conjunction with the changes in their immediate settings and the relations between the settings. This theory was originally proposed to explain how development and typically occurring activities are heavily affected by the situations and connections in which they occur (Tudge et al., 2017). In his critical reflection on Bronfenbrenner's development ecology model, Christensen (2016) determined that "development ecology should be seen as a general system theory and that in itself makes it possible to understand a general context and complexity from a holistic approach" (p. 23). Looking at an individual's development from a holistic approach allows for the influence of interactions between individuals and the different contexts that make up their lives to emerge.

Other theorists have studied child development utilizing the holistic approach as their foundations and were considered for this study. Vygotsky (1978, as cited in Christensen, 2016) considered the influence of interactions when he theorized that the process of learning that causes development is social. Although I have used Vygotsky's theory as the basis for scaffolding instruction as an early childhood educator, his view

involving teachers, other children, and other adults of influence all having equal significance was not in alignment with the central concept for this study. Piaget and Inhelder's (2000) cognitive and affective development theory was also considered for use in the framework for this study. One of Piaget and Inhelder's foundational thoughts was that "intellectual competence represents an integrated ensemble of operations built from reflections on the child's action in the world" (p. x). While the action of military-connected children in the world does impact their academic development, this theory does not allow for the consideration of other influences, nor does it consider the social and emotional impacts the world may have on the child.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) recognized that child development, whether academic, emotional, or behavioral, naturally depended on the surroundings in which they grow up as well as how the people in those surroundings interact and change. He theorized that human relationships have the ability and power to propel children down pathways that end in either problematic or positive life outcomes. This theory was the frame for this qualitative study.

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory consists of five subsystems that nest one within the other. For this study, military-connected students are in the center of this interactive system that consists of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The construction of military-connected students' social experiences cannot be understood effectively without investigating the interconnectedness that occurs between these layers of systems. Bronfenbrenner (1979)

defines a microsystem as “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (p. 22). The microsystem consists of the groups that have direct contact with the student. The next subsystem, the mesosystem, “comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood per group)” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). The mesosystem focuses on the interconnections between the groups in the microsystem. It is virtually a system of microsystems. The exosystem, the next ecological context, “refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). This level for a young child might consist of an older sibling’s school class, the parent’s group of friends or coworkers, and so on. Next in the concentric circle of systems is the macrosystem, which Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to as the “consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies” (p. 26). The macrosystem is one of indirect influence as it determines how the other systems will express themselves. Cultural elements and official religion are a few examples of macrosystems that define specific consistencies that affect a child’s life and the lives of everyone around them. The outermost circle in Bronfenbrenner’s theory is the chronosystem, which “emphasizes life transitions and individual changes through time in the environments in which the person

is living" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 724). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory places emphasis on human development being understood "within the interconnected societal and environmental influences on individuals" (Top et al., 2017, p. 109). For the purposes of this study, the contextual lens will focus on each of the five systems and how they are defined in relation to the military-connected early childhood student.

Microsystem

As the first layer of the ecological systems theory, the microsystem contains the people who are closest to a child and have face to face interactions with them, such as parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and friends. Rozsahegyi (2018) defined the most crucial of these being the family, followed by childcare and educational settings. The family is an important aspect of the microsystem because they are expected to influence social and emotional development as well as behavioral adjustment (Top et al., 2017). Diab et al. (2018) referred to the microsystem as the "characteristics of children's immediate daily environment expected to influence academic achievement" (p. 3). The microsystem is comprised of the complex relations between children and their immediate environment and is where developing children learn about the world (Rozsahegyi, 2018). In this developmental stage, children learn their habits, temperaments, and capabilities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These lessons occur through observation, experience, and participation in interactions between two of the groups that are within the microsystem. An example of this would be the influence that may occur by the intertwining of the relationship between a child's mother and father, or between a child's mother and

preschool teacher. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that the individual develops within close relationships to parents and other significant adults such as teachers.

Young children with parents in the military lack the constant interaction they had with their parents before deployment and are thus denied an important influence during the most crucial of the developmental stages (Top et al., 2017). In the instance of the military-connected early childhood student, these relationships are affected by frequent transitions, wartime challenges, and deployments. These distinctions set military-connected children apart from their peers while also resulting in interruptions to their developmental systems and the factors within them. The other members of the child's microsystem become more influential when parents are not consistently available.

Educators of early childhood military-connected students should recognize the position of influence they have in the lives of their students so they can maximize positive outcomes. Research confirms that school atmosphere and children's academic achievement are influenced by "teacher's attitudes, practices, communication styles, pedagogic beliefs, and attributions" (Diab et al., 2018, p. 4). The rationale for using the microsystem as a lens for my research is to garner information concerning relationships between military-connected children and teachers, counselors, and administrators and how these relationships influence the child's capabilities and development. The microsystem also encompasses the unique stressors experienced by military-connected early childhood students as well as the school-level practices that are in place to help them through the many transitions they experience during the deployment cycle.

Mesosystem

The second layer of the ecological systems theory consists of the links and connections between all the different microsystems that exist and influence the military-connected early childhood student. Although children can be active participants who are influenced by several microsystems, they are only affected by one mesosystem (Shelton, 2019). All the relationships among all the settings in which children participate make up the mesosystem (Shelton, 2019). Christensen (2016) described this relationship with the examples of "the relationship of family experiences to school experiences, school experiences to church experiences, and family experiences to peer experiences" (p. 23). The mesosystem is all about relationships, interactions, and interrelations between the systems that make up the child's immediate settings (Elliott & Davis, 2018). This level of the ecological systems theory can be perplexing because the settings for each child can be different which leads to an inability to make definitive and generalized statements about development. By focusing our lens on military-connected early childhood students, however, we can narrow down the settings and thus formulate statements and hypotheses that can be used in a generalized manner for the majority of students fitting these parameters. The rationale for using the mesosystem as a lens for my research is to examine school-level practices and relationships that build bridges between military-connected early childhood students' home and school microsystems.

Exosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1986) stated that "the psychological development of children in the family is affected not only by what happens in the other environments in which

children spend their time but also by what occurs in the other settings in which their parents live their lives" (p. 723). The third level of the ecological systems theory, the exosystem, consists of these settings and is considered the most distanced level as the child does not have explicit or active involvement but their microsystem is indirectly influenced (Rozsahegyi, 2018). The exosystem is an external environment that the child has no dealing with but that has an important indirect effect on the child. They are the contexts that children experience through their parents, family members, and those in the family's social network (Tudge et al., 2017). Examples of an exosystem would be a parent's work or company, the neighborhood, local community, and mass media.

In the instance of the military-connected child, the biggest factor in the exosystem would be the parent's work. The parent's work causes major and minor changes that can be empowering or degrading but that are all beyond the child's control. If the parent comes home from work with a new duty station assignment, this can have a degrading effect on the family interactions for the evening. If the parent gets a raise in rank, this can have an empowering effect on the entire family. In this study, the exosystem refers to the potentially traumatic war-related experiences, both locally and abroad, that military personnel can experience during wartimes that have a direct effect on their children. The rationale for including the exosystem as a lens in this study is to learn how the academic success of military-connected early childhood students is affected by the deployment cycle and other experiences of the people in their microsystem.

Macrosystem

All systems in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory are influenced by the macrosystem which "comprises the broader level policies, political institutions, and cultural beliefs" (Elliott & Davis, 2018, p. 10). The overall culture of the society in which the child is living including socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and national laws and rules have an impact on the development of the child. Since the late 1990s, U.S. military-connected and civilian children have developed within a culture that includes war, world conflict, and political and civil unrest. This has caused them to experience a different kind of development than children in peaceful environments with civil alignment. The culture of the overall country is partnered with military culture in the macrosystem of military-connected students. Shelton (2019) characterized this system as a system of beliefs that demonstrates our outlook on the world and what we characterize as right, good, logical, and essential. As a child develops, the formation of new microsystems is based in commonalities that are found in the previously developed macrosystem.

Chronosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1986) developed this last level of the ecological systems theory in the late 1980s when research on human development determined that changes over time within a person and their environment have a bearing on development. The chronosystem in its simplest form captures transitions and shifts that occur during an individual's life. It provides a broad understanding of the student's life from a historical perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The chronosystem focuses on two main types of transitions and distinguishes them as "normative (school entry, puberty, entering the

labor force, marriage, retirement) and nonnormative (a death or severe illness in the family, divorce, moving, winning the sweepstakes)" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 724). These transitions influence development of the individual directly as well as indirectly by affecting the family processes. The chronosystem is time-based which means the changes that are examined must also be considered based on age. The toddler's friendships, conflicts, and duties are very different than those of an adolescent and thus is their understanding and ability to handle complex problems. While the normative transitions hold the normal amount of stress based on the child's age and biology, the nonnormative transitions result in higher stress levels and have more impact on overall development. In the instance of military-connected early childhood students, frequent moves will be in the nonnormative transition category thus forcing them to operate in higher stress levels. The rationale for using the chronosystem as a lens for my research is to examine how military-connected early childhood students' development is affected by nonnormative transitions.

Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems seeks to elucidate the complex way that children develop and progress as well as how the practices of parenting and early childhood education could enhance their development (Rozsahegyi, 2018). The ways children "learn, organize information, rehearse, and reflect on their knowledge, and regulate their emotions [is] salient in their academic achievement" (Diab et al., 2018, p.21). Child development is influenced not only by the individual's direct relationships with parents, siblings, peers, and teachers but also by the environments in which they are developing and the time in their life that they are experiencing normative and

nonnormative transitions. Military-connected early childhood students face unique challenges during their development in the areas of the microsystem, exosystem, and chronosystem. These challenges can negatively affect their academic success unless specialized academic and behavioral support is provided through the people in their microsystem. In order for the support provided to be the most effective, the mesosystem must include positive interactions and connections between the student's microsystems. The military-connected early childhood student's macrosystem is so strongly influenced by military culture that it must be considered and understood by all members of the microsystem to foster successful development and the proper foundational support. Civilian educators are often unaware of the unique components of the military-connected early childhood student's microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem and thus do not perceive a need for specialized support. This lack of awareness renders them under prepared to build school climates that provide the most relevant and helpful support. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and the findings of current literature as a lens for my research, this study will guide civilian educators into the analysis of their practices in the development of military-connected early childhood students. Current literature on the needs of military-connected early childhood students and practices of civilian educators who are charged with their educations will be explored in the literature review.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

The literature review is an integrated essay that critically analyzes and synthesizes the most relevant and current published knowledge on the topic being researched (Simon

& Goes, 2018). In the following section, I will discuss the key concepts of recent studies involving military-connected students and educators' perspectives of needed supports including military culture, the deployment cycle, unique stressors, school level practices, and bridge building relationships. In addition to these concepts, the methodologies used in the research will be reviewed with an overview of the strengths and weaknesses in the research approaches being discussed. Each key concept in the review will be accompanied by a rationale for its inclusion in this qualitative study as well as surrounding issues and background information. An explanation of how the concepts could benefit from further research will also be included. Synthesis of the research reviewed will be the foundation that will support the approach that will be used in this study (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

Military Culture

The first key concept in this research study will be military culture. Members of the military and their families have been identified as a population with its own culture that is shaped by life events such as "frequent mobility, familial separation, and living with the risk of injury and death of their military family member (Tam-Seto et al., 2020, p. 96). Some of the major elements of military culture are discipline, leadership, and esprit de corps (Affandi et al., 2019). Although these elements would mainly be applied solely to the service member, the macrosystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory connects the culture of the parents to the culture of the entire family. Comprised of values and ethics that are founded in patriotism and pride (Elfman, 2017) and expressed by a sequence of experiences (Davis, Finke, & Hickerson, 2016), most

military families embody the old adage that “the [government] recruits soldiers but retains families” (Stepka & Callahan, 2016, p. 15). Unlike other professions and careers, military service requires a commitment that continues 24 hours a day, seven days a week and involves the entire family unit. Sories, Maier, Beer, and Thomas (2015) recognized that while the current armed forces consist of willing volunteers, their loved ones, most specifically their children, are “effectively draftees” who are conscripted into military service (p. 211). According to Leppma et al. (2016) military culture is comprised of “values, beliefs, expectations, customs, traditions, and behaviors” (p. 85). Along with long work hours, Williamson et al. (2018) characterized children in military families as having childhood experiences that are notably different when compared to their civilian peers including awareness of conflict with indirect exposure, extended separation from one or more family members due to deployment, and frequent relocations. They conducted a review aiming to explore relationships between military family members and child well-being compared to nonmilitary youth. After examining nine studies consisting of 8th through 12th grade participants, Williamson et al. (2018) found similarities between military-connected children and civilian children regarding depression, mental health, and quality of life. Their research also revealed that military-connected children are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors during deployments, have an increased likelihood of depressive symptoms, and a higher rate of substance use. These differences in military youth and civilian youth can cause distinct groupings to occur and are an indication that some children from military families could benefit from additional school-based support. In most instances, military families become an inclusive group of people

who support each other through these and other difficulties especially when a family member is gone. When this grouping happens in the form of community support, it can be "predictive of positive psychosocial adjustment in children" (Conforte et al., 2017, p. e1872).

Alongside differences in exhibited behaviors, frequent relocation is a part of the military culture that can differ from civilian culture. Although civilian families may relocate, military families move approximately three times more often than civilian families resulting in military-connected children switching schools an average of six to nine times between kindergarten and 12th grade (Davis et al., 2016). Welsh (2017) affirmed that frequent moves and school changes that happen in conjunction with home disruptions or changes to the family structure, such as deployment or duty station relocation, are the most detrimental moves to student achievement. Welsh (2017) researched literature on kindergarten to 12th grade student mobility to determine whether it is helpful or harmful for students. An important element of the research was delineating the reason for the relocation into one of two categories: reactive moves which are unplanned due to a family or school situations or strategic moves which are purposeful and planned to achieve a desired end (Welsh, 2017). The literature Welsh (2017) compiled, which consisted of mainly quantitative and quasi-experimental methods, also considered whether the moves were student/family initiated versus school initiated, voluntary versus involuntary, or occurred between school years or during the school year. According to Welsh (2017) it takes students two years to make a full recovery after a move. Consequently, my family switched duty stations every two to three years, making

it more difficult for us to build lasting relationships. I experienced this transient upbringing and recall the challenges related to school. I remember being the new kid more times than I can count. I also remember feeling like I did not fit into my class because friendships were already established. I did not see a place for the military kid who was bused in from the base to attend school. Quinn et al. (2016) presented their belief that "individuals and families create bonds with their homes and neighborhood communities, and these attachments become a part of their identity and help provide stability" (p. 236). Quinn et al. (2016) researched the effects of relocation on children after a natural disaster. Although military-connected students were not the focus of their quantitative research, they share similarities with the study subjects because their sense of normalcy is disrupted and altered. One of the biggest factors in the results of the study was the age of the participants. Quinn et al. (2016) found that younger children needed more support during the relocation transition. My qualitative study focused on the educators of young children with the goal of adding more information about the needed support to students from prekindergarten to second grade. As a child, I was very unhappy with the instability of our lives but learned to lean heavily on my parents and siblings. My sisters became the friends that I would never have to leave. As I got older, the pressure to be included in school pushed me to join clubs and sports. My family taught me to work hard at making friends and building positive social relationships.

Another part of military culture is resiliency. Resilience is defined by Beckman and Stanko (2020) as "the positive adaptation to adverse circumstances" (p. 415). Several articles attribute the success of military-connected students to their development of

resilience. When applied to military-connected children, it is the ability to adapt and cope with military life in a positive manner while possessing the fortitude to do your part as your family member serves the country. From a young age, I learned that my part was being strong and not worrying my deployed dad. When my family went to support meetings while my dad was deployed, I was taught to only share the positive things that were happening in my life when my dad called from the ship. I was also taught that if I got in trouble in school, it could be reported to my dad's supervisor and could be trouble for his military career. My experience fit the findings of Julian et al. (2018) who found that in military culture high value is usually placed on structure, orderliness, and conformity while emotional expression is often dissuaded. In their quasi-experimental study, Julian et al. (2018) presented their belief that while most military families are remarkably resilient, the difficulties inherent to deployments and the demands of military life on young children can be helped by supportive interventions. When I was young, my mother made sure that I played with other military-connected children who shared the same life demands and would be understanding. Some of my best friends as a child were other military-connected children who knew that we would move in a few years and that new friendships would be forged out of necessity. As I got older, the responsibility of making friends and sharing my military culture became easier because I had a better understanding of what my dad was doing and why he was doing it. He was more of a hero to me because of my understanding and maturity.

Richardson et al. (2016) emphasized that though military-connected youth ages 11 to 14 experience stressors unique to military culture that can increase their

vulnerability, they have been found to be resilient and have overall high levels of well-being. Studies of military-connected students have found they possess strengths such as "self-regulation, academic performance, emotional well-being, and lower risk-taking behavior" (Ohye et al., 2020, p. 595), but that stress and anxiety are also frequently present. Their findings reinforce the necessity for providing supportive relationships both formally and informally to military-connected adolescents (Richardson et al., 2016). When Puskar et al. (2018) conducted their qualitative study of military-connected adolescents to determine the effectiveness of supportive relationships fostered through the MilTeenChat App. Their goal was "to meet the unique needs of military adolescents and support coping resilience among military adolescents when their parents are deployed" (Puskar et al., 2018, p. 44). Puskar et al. (2018) reported that while the adolescents were worried or anxious about their parents being gone, they had the understanding that their parents were serving the country and had strong feelings of pride. While possessing these strong feelings of pride, Blasko (2015) found that military children "are coping with increased levels of anxiety, stress, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and higher incidence of behavioral problems" (p. 262). Like Puskar et al. (2018), Blasko conducted research on a Department of Defense website designed to enhance the already present coping skills in military children as it relates to sharing their military life experiences. During initial planning for the site, a track was added for parents and educators to provide them an opportunity to learn about common behaviors during the deployment cycle, relocation, and the reintegration of parents returning from deployment. This sharing was helpful for civilian educators who may only have a

rudimentary knowledge of military culture but want to be a support to their military-connected students.

Military culture and the elements of frequent relocation and resiliency are commonplace to those who have a connection to the military. Each relocation brings not only a new physical location but also changes to support systems such as peers, family members, teachers, and coaches (Blasko, 2015). To civilians, these concepts may be foreign along with the feelings, emotions, and challenges that accompany them. This lack of knowledge can lead to student actions being misunderstood and students not receiving the support they need. Military-connected early childhood students become virtually invisible to civilian providers who are unaware of their histories and cultures (Wadsworth et al., 2017). Blasko (2015) states that "the social, environmental, communal, and societal context in which military children live is directly influenced by military culture" (p. 264). Studying the elements of military culture, and how military-connected children cope with each element creates learning opportunities that can be used to help civilian children who find themselves in similar situations.

The Deployment Cycle

Another key concept of this research study is deployment. This term refers to the shifting and relocating of armed forces all over the world (Barbee et al., 2016). Deployment, especially during wartime, can be lengthy, frequent, and stressful for the active-duty military member but can also have lasting effects on the family members who are left behind (Barbee et al., 2016). The cycle of deployment consists of phases of adjustment that Kritikos and DeVoe (2018) defined as Pre-deployment, Deployment,

Sustainment, Re-deployment, and Post-Deployment. During the Pre-deployment phase, the family is predicting when deployment will occur and preparing for the deployment. The Deployment phase consists of the physical departure of the military service member. The Sustainment phase is how life continues for the family while the service member is deployed. Cunitz et al. (2019) utilize the Vietnam War era term Military Family Syndrome "to describe the behavioral and psychosocial problems of children of deployed parents, as well as the effects of deployment on the relationship between the child and the parent remaining at home" (p. 1). Possibly the most exciting portion of the deployment cycle is the last month of deployment when the service member receives orders to return home or Re-deployment. The Post-deployment phase is when the service member returns to the family and begins the process of reintegration. In this post-September 11th era, an estimated 2.7 million troops have been deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq (DeVoe et al., 2017). Although military-connected children of all ages may be affected by the strains of deployment (DeVoe et al., 2017, p. 25), very young children are uniquely sensitive and more vulnerable developmentally when there is a prolonged absence or separation from a primary caregiver (DeVoe et al., 2017). According to Classen et al. (2019) "limited research has focused on the unique needs of military families and their preschool-age children" (p. 233). This may be because military children are generally resilient (Blasko, 2015) and efficient in the management of their daily challenges. Resilience and efficiency should not be misinterpreted as a lack of emotional distress but as an opportunity for research to determine what support should be given to children who are living through the deployment cycle.

In conjunction with the deployment cycle, experts have conceptualized the stages of emotional processing that occur when a family member is deployed. The anticipation phase occurs during the pre-deployment and can provoke anxiety about the separation that is coming (Zanotti et al., 2016). As soon as the service member receives orders, the tension at home can increase as fears and frustrations can foster anger and resentment. Young children may not fully understand what is going on which can make this time most distressing. In the final days before the actual deployment, the family will experience the detachment and withdrawal emotional phase. This phase may involve the family shutting down emotionally or avoiding emotions altogether (Boice, 2017). If parents do not know the developmentally appropriate strategies to use to prepare their young children, there can be increased stress and difficulty adapting to the challenging changes (Zanotti et al., 2016). With the actual physical deployment of the active-duty family member, the phase of elevated emotion begins (Boice, 2017). Zanotti et al. (2016) explains that "young children with a deployed parent experience more anxiety, depression, withdrawal, aggression, and attention difficulties" (p. 430). The first few weeks of deployment can be characterized as a time when the parent or guardian left behind may experience emotional disorganization while navigating the family disruption (Boice, 2017). Once the caregiver settles into a "new norm" and helps the family recognize the different structure of the family unit, the new routines phase begins (Boice, 2017). Although caregivers still worry about the safety of the deployed parent, a greater sense of independence has been achieved. This coincides with the Sustainment stage of the deployment cycle. The emotionally charged period from receiving the orders for

redeployment, to the actual homecoming can be the best part of the actual deployment. The final emotional phase, reintegration, occurs during the post-deployment and can be a time of both relief and excitement but also a time of unknowns and frustration (Zanotti et al., 2016). This phase can put families on an emotional roller coaster as they welcome back the deployed parent, establish new norms, and relearn each other. This period of time can take several months or longer to work through depending on factors such as the mental fortitude of the parent and caregiver, the length of the initial deployment, events occurring during the deployment, and the age of children.

Different studies have been conducted utilizing military families. These studies have had similarities and differences in regard to the deployment cycle and frequent transitions. Walsh and Rosenblum (2018) drew on their work experiences with military families to explore the personal experiences of young military-connected children regarding separating and reconnecting. They referenced Bowlby's attachment theory which indicates that "stable, nurturing, parent-child relationships provide the most advantageous context for early development and foundation for development across the lifespan" (Walsh & Rosenblum, 2018, p. 68). Walsh and Rosenblum (2018) stated that disruptions in the early childhood parent-child relationship can "pose risks to social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development" (p. 68). After speaking to dozens of mothers and fathers who serve and deploy or served as primary caregivers of children of deployed service members, Walsh and Rosenblum found that descriptions of experiences before, during, and after extended periods of separation take a great toll on everyone involved. Walsh and Rosenblum discovered that the majority of parents handled pre-

deployment in two ways: either making efforts to create memories to help sustain them during the separation or by beginning to create distance (both inadvertently and intentionally) as a way to prepare for being separated. Children as young as infants respond to such changes and react to the heightened levels of stress that come from preparing for the deployment (Walsh & Rosenblum, 2018). Bóia et al. (2018) found that "children may react negatively during the pre-deployment stage, displaying disciplinary and academic problems, tantrums, anger, apathy, inconsolable crying and other regressive behavior" (p. 304). During deployment, Walsh and Rosenblum noticed that young children demonstrated their stress by either withdrawing or regressing, while other children showed increased aggression. The post-deployment reunification is also difficult with Walsh and Rosenblum discovering that reunification is also stressful because of the extended process of reestablishing relationships, roles, and routines in the family. According to Julian et al. (2018a), reunification posed challenges to families "including reestablishing relationships, roles, and routines as well as potentially necessary accommodation to injuries or psychological impacts" (p. 108). Through their evaluation, Walsh and Rosenblum revealed that the separating and reconnecting that occur during the deployment cycle are complex processes that cause significant stress in young children and their parents.

Like Walsh and Rosenblum (2018), Wadsworth et al. (2017) studied military children and wartime deployments. They also examined civilian children and children whose parents deployed during non wartimes or in previous years of military service. They describe deployment as military assignments related to specific missions that occur

away from the permanent duty station. In their research, Wadsworth et al. found that "for children, separations from loved ones, especially during wartime, can challenge the foundations of secure attachment relationships, competent emotion regulation, and other abilities needed for successful functioning later in life" (p. 24). In another supporting article, Sherman and Larsen (2018) affirmed that following their deployments, military members face numerous challenges in areas of mental and physical health, relationships, family reintegration, social functioning, religion and spirituality, as well as financial stability. Though their research centered around veterans and their families as they transition into civilian life, they acknowledge the need for civilian providers to meet the needs military families face during and after deployments.

Stepka and Callahan (2016) presented their belief that it is "critical to explore early childhood experiences within the military context and their impact on the developing child" (p. 11). In their study on the impact of military life on young children and their parents, Stepka and Callahan defined the single largest group found in the military family as children from birth to preschool age, accounting for 40% of all military children. Similar to Walsh and Rosenblum (2018), Stepka and Callahan focused on infancy and early childhood experiences and how they establish "a cognitive template for future events and [set] into motion a trajectory of capacities and expectations about how things and people will interact, which affects how the young child will select and process new experiences" (p. 12). Stepka and Callahan proposed that behavior problems of young children can manifest at different points in the deployment cycle. They discovered that the pre-deployment stage is the most difficult and overwhelming as parents struggle to

explain to young children the facts of deployment in a way that fits their cognitive capacity (Stepka & Callahan, 2016). Some of the during deployment struggles that Stepka and Callahan uncovered in their research of service members are “maintaining communication with their young children, supporting the parent-child attachment relationship, and using positive parenting practices throughout deployment and military-related separations” (p. 19). In their qualitative study, Strong and Lee (2017) reported that during deployment families encounter challenges such as feeling socially isolated, having to carry on normal life without the service member, and needing to make parental decisions with one of the main decision contributors. Upon reintegration, families reported challenges they encountered as “the nondeployed spouse having difficulty letting go of control, navigating co-parenting and parenting roles, and negotiating the service member’s household routine” (Strong & Lee, 2017, p. 13). Strong and Lee also affirmed the resilience of military families by questioning their study participants about strengths and strategies for coping. One common strength mentioned was reaching out to the community and gaining social support from other military families.

Cabrera et al. (2018) presented a different perspective on the effect the deployment cycle has on military children. Although they recognized that most studies implied strong differences between the way military-connected students experienced K-12 education and the way their civilian peers experienced K-12 education (Cabrera et al., 2018), they found a deficit in research comparing academic preparation for college between military-connected students and civilian students. Cabrera et al. (2018) researched military and nonmilitary children and their attainment of milestones toward

college as well as levels of parental involvement. They reported that although the obstacles of frequent relocation and absence of the uniformed parent may suggest that military children will have difficulty achieving their milestones toward college, when compared to civilian families, there were no differences in children's academic readiness nor attainment of milestones toward college. Cabrera et al. (2018) concluded that academic success for children is embedded in the military culture and is supported by several networks and services that non civilian students cannot access.

Cunitz et al. (2019) came to yet a different conclusion when they found that parental military deployment has a negative impact on children's mental health, whereas the age of the children did not play an active role in the impact. Cunitz et al.conducted a meta-analysis where they examined the association between deployment and children's overall mental health. They also studied deployment and children's mental health (Cunitz et al., 2019). The age of children was also examined to determine if it would have differentiated effects on the results. Their study attributed outstanding factors such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks to be the reason for an increase in the negative impact of parental deployments on the mental health of children (Cunitz et al., 2019). Accessibility to previously classified information such as daily death tolls coupled with news stories and the constant barrage of military maneuvers and war footage have also played a role in the mental health of children who have a connection to those serving overseas.

The effects felt by the deployment cycle can be exasperated by other mitigating factors such as mental illness, physical disabilities, and special needs. Although there was limited research focused on young military-connected children, Classen et al. (2019)

found a paucity of research literature that focused on preschool military-connected children with special needs or disabilities. Implementing a multi-case qualitative research design, Classen et al. worked to gain perspectives across all service ranks by including "early educators working with the school districts associated with each military base and families who had been deployed within the past 5 years and had a child with a disability" (p. 233). They concluded that professional development was needed to formulate plans to meet individual students' specific needs and strengthen family-centered approaches, while simultaneously creating collaborative partnership between the school and military personnel. Davis and Finke (2015) conducted a qualitative study consisting of military families with a child between the ages of 6 and 12 with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Davis and Finke reported that research investigating the impact of military separations on dependents has mixed outcomes with children only showing small amounts of maladjustments during deployments involving separations. They found that frequent location may cause more stress on the marital unit but not necessarily on the average military child. Davis and Finke concluded that "the impacts of relocation and separation on education services and emotional and behavioral health may be more pronounced when the military child is also a child with special needs" (p. 2020).

Separate and apart from the daily experiences and challenges for military-connected children, the impacts of the deployment cycle can include both chronic and acute stressors and carry greater implications of emotional and behavioral disfunctions (Wadsworth et al., 2017). Effects on children may be more pronounced due to their levels of development and lack of understanding of the continual changes in the structure and

roles of the family caused by deployment (McGuire et al., 2016). Since deployments are still a constant possibility for active-duty military families, it is necessary to research its effects on young children in our society. Research has shown that the implications of separation during deployment are great, and the process of reunification are complex (Walsh & Rosenblum, 2018). This is one of the reasons why future research should continue to provide a fuller understanding of how service members and their families can be best supported during the deployment cycle (Zanotti et al., 2016).

Unique Stressors

Another component of this research study is the unique stressors that military families withstand. The difficulty of the deployment cycle and the unique stressors it presents for military families during war times have been seen more recently in this post-September 11th era (DeVoe et al., 2017). Peacetimes are also difficult for military-connected children as they experience adjustments related to moving, lost friendships, and the process of making new friends (Conforte et al., 2017). Military-connected children not only deal with the stress and demands of normal childhood social, emotional, physical, and academic development but they also face unique challenges that are directly related to the military profession and that require specialized support (Bóia et al., 2018). Some of the issues that military families face can be classified as unique, but some are also common. According to Wolf et al. (2018), the commonality is that they frequently deal with the same issues that civilians face which can include living with daily stress and worry about how their students are dealing with life. Wolf et al. (2018) stated “what sets military families apart, however, is that service members sacrifice personal, emotional,

and physical safety to endure forced separations [from their families] for the greater good of the nation" (p. 88). Blasko (2015) used the term "family readiness" to reference the military families' ability to navigate the day-to-day challenges they experience in conjunction with the uniqueness of military service. According to Strong and Lee (2017) there are a set of unique life circumstances for military families which are accompanied by greater burdens then the civilian public because of their military service. Children who grow up in active duty or veteran military families "are naturally exposed to certain elements of the military family lifestyle, which has been characterized by a unique triad of mobility, family separation, and risk" (Cramm et al., 2019, p. 1725). During the deployment cycle as well as during regular enlistment, these children and their families can be faced with frequent relocation, schedule changes that are unpredictable, and short- and long-term family separation along with threats to the safety of the service member (Conforte et al., 2017). Facing these types of challenges daily qualifies military children and youth as a distinct population (Conforte et al., 2017).

Joining the military is a professional decision, but it is different than other career choices because it involves a unique commitment (Bóia et al., 2018). This commitment is unique because family and personal needs are placed in the background to meet the level of dedication demanded by military institutions (Bóia et al., 2018). The commitment begins with a specific number of years and then the opportunity to follow a different professional career path or to give more time in service (reenlistment). I remember when I was old enough to attend my father's reenlistment ceremony. At this point, he had done this several times in his 20-year career, but this last time was special. There had been

much discussion of the reenlistment in our house with my parents being on opposing sides. I was extremely proud of my father for all the years he had already served and his willingness to continue after his initial commitment was considered complete. I also felt the realization that his reenlistment meant the entire family was reenlisting and committing to putting our needs aside so he could serve.

In a review of recent research, Wadsworth et al. (2017) considered the implications for military-connected children with a parent serving regular enlistment (in the absence of wartime deployments) to determine how it may affect the child. They found that while "deployments can constitute both chronic and acute stressors" (Wadsworth et al., 2017, p. 24), peacetime missions, training exercises, air, and sea patrols, and responding to natural disasters can bring about the type of stress. During any type of deployment, children worry about the well-being of the deployed parent and fearing they could be injured or killed (Arcuri, 2015). Often, the whereabouts of the deployed parent are unknown and communication opportunities are less than optimal. These parameters add a deeper level of stress and worry. For many military personnel, these types of peacetime deployments are expected features of life in the military. Long work hours and intrusion into family time are also expected parts of life for the average military family. Wadsworth et al. (2017) cited the demand of relocating for military families as being responsible for the moderately high rates of un- and underemployment of spouses in military families. My mom shared her difficulty with underemployment when my father was in training or deployed. She became underemployed when she went from being an operating room technician to working door-to-door direct sales positions

so that she could be home with us while my father was deployed. Frequent relocating had removed us from our extended family and my mom often felt it was her sole responsibility to keep the family unit together while supporting our many academic and extracurricular activities.

While Wadsworth et al. (2017) pointed out the variety of challenges and stressors that military service can expose children to, they also notated the benefits and opportunities that can come from having a parent in the military. Williamson et al. (2020) affirmed both risk factors and protective factors related to military service members and their children. Williamson et al. stated that most military families possess the strengths of stable income, strong family ties, and access to quality schools. Concerning the risk factors, Williamson et al. reported that "though most military-connected children appear to be functioning well, these youths are exposed to a unique constellation of stressors, such as extended separation from their parent(s), frequent relocations, and parental physical or psychological injuries" (p. 108). St. John and Fenning (2020) found that while the unique challenges that military families face require support, these challenges also serve as a source of unique strength and resiliency. My dad, mom, sisters, brother, and I became the people we could always count on because we shared the same resilience-building experiences. Even after leaving our parent's house, the bond continued to bring us back to whatever state they relocated to. The challenges we faced together in our youth, helped us develop a bond that manifested into us all living within 20 minutes of each other, well past my father's retirement. McGuire and Steele (2016) reported that frequent relocation has shown to increase the resilience of military families while not

appearing to have lasting developmental impacts. Dealing with relocations and deployments helps all members of the family develop skills such as coping strategies, resourcefulness, flexibility, and adaptability (St. John & Fenning, 2020). When I was growing up, moving started out as a chore and later developed into a routine way of life. As an adult, I get the urge to move every couple of years which directly correlates to the pattern of moving in my youth. Determining the positive or negative effects of military service on children is not the purpose of this study however understanding both effects can help in the developing of support and educator practices to benefit academic growth.

The necessity for civilian schools to make a place for military students due to their unique life circumstances has been detailed in multiple articles. Elfman (2017) shared that when compared to civilian classmates, military-connected students have elevated rates in most of the risk factors. Considered in these risk factors at the middle and high school levels are substance abuse, bullying, and suicidal thoughts (Elfman, 2017). Including students whose parent has been deployed to a combat zone makes these numbers even higher. Although these challenges are not considered unique as they are experienced by civilian students as well, the partnership of these factors and the stresses of military dependent life make for a unique combination of emotions and behaviors. Elfman felt that the problem could be traced back to a lack of awareness about military culture and the experiences of military families on the part of civilian society. Recognizing military-connected students as a unique population may prompt civilians to have a keener awareness of the differences in life circumstances faced by military families and the needed support to level rates of risk factors. Neil (2015) addressed the

unique needs of students from military families. She utilized the term “exceptional challenges” to describe the roadblocks of education gaps, sustaining friendships, and adapting to new school environments that military students confront because of continual relocations, deployment of a parent, and separation from said parent (Neil, 2015). Academic challenges are more frequent for military-connected students who are often mislabeled as needing special education because of differing curriculum coverage between states and due to deployment-coping behaviors such as conflicts with peers, anger, and sadness that disrupt classroom activities. When I was younger, I was misplaced due to academic gaps because of differing age requirements for starting school. It took my mom several trips to the school to get me tested to show that I was not in need of special education but just needed to catch up due to the differences between states. Due to supports that have recently been put into action, such as the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, this situation is less commonplace but still occurs (Shaw, 2019). Another unique challenge of military families that Neil (2015) brought attention to is separations due to training exercises or national disasters. These separations are often more traumatic than deployments because they occur with less notice and give families little time to prepare. The military refers to these separations as “regular irregularities” as they are an expected requirement of military life (Neil, 2015, p. 51). The uncertainty involved in these situations coupled with the pressure placed on the other family members place strain on the children and can present academic challenges.

In their qualitative study, Puskar et al. (2018) explored the use of a mobile app to help military youth develop coping resilience. During their study, military-connected adolescents shared the common stressors they experienced being connected to the military during an era consisting of the lengthiest and greatest amount of wartime deployments in the history of the United States (Puskar et al., 2018). Some of the stressors they shared were related to frequent relocations and multiple school transitions. Other stressors were more personal in nature and related to feelings of loneliness, isolation, anxiety for the deployed parent, disappointment over the deployed parent missing special events, and difficulty communicating with parents as well as civilian classmates and teachers (Puskar et al., 2018). Military-connected students are a unique group of people who are dealing with developmental milestones while also adjusting to the challenges of military life. Bóia et al. (2018) presented similar military-connected family stressors and challenges at the completion of their qualitative research study. Their study explored the association between military-related international missions, marital relationships, and parenting in military families (Bóia et al., 2018). Using the format of semi-structured interviews, Bóia et al. allowed participants to tell their stories about life changes in preparation for the military member's absence and homecoming. Findings revealed that military-connected children can experience feelings of abandonment along with anxiety and apprehension. Their feelings of "abandonment" can present externally through aggression and irritability or internally through anxiety, apathy, and sadness (Bóia et al., 2018). These feelings have a profound impact on the daily habits and routines of the children but also on the military spouses caring for them. The possible

negative implications of military connectedness can potentially impact the nearly 1.2 million active duty and 716,000 National Guard and Reservist school-aged children (Castillo et al., 2017). These students' presence in civilian schools afford civilian educators with a unique opportunity to identify them and provide them with supplementary support (Castillo et al., 2017).

To provide relevant supplementary support, it is necessary to understand each military family's unique dynamics and experiences and how they influence the effects of the unique military-career stressors. One thing to consider is the differences between families with partnered parents versus single parents. Vaughn-Coaxum et al. (2015) presented how deployment and readjustment involves unique stressors in differing family structures. The participants who identified as single were asked to more specifically classify into the categories of widowed, separated, divorced, or never married at the time of deployment (Vaughn-Coaxum et al., 2015). The study found that single parents reported a "a greater burden of worry or concern surrounding their families' well-being and adjustment" (Vaughn-Coaxum et al., 2015, p. 247) than partnered parents because the stressors of deployment and military service were not being shared with a partner. Results of stress presenting as depression or anxiety, however, did not differ substantially in the different family groups (Vaughn-Coaxum et al., 2015). This research survey provided parents with an opportunity to share their feelings concerning stress related to military service and the findings are beneficial helping others understand how differing circumstances can affect common stressors.

Another military family dynamic to consider is the age of the children and their current developmental stages. To gather firsthand data concerning the unique experiences of military-connected adolescent students, Knobloch et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study consisting of 33 military youth. The participants completed one-on-one, semi structured interviews to share their experiences in their own words. The three research questions used in the study revealed that changes and challenges were a part of the deployment experience as well as positive opportunities and gaining of resilience (Knobloch et al., 2015). During deployment, the changes experienced by most children included having more chores and everyday activities having to change everyday activities which at times meant restricting or eliminating extracurricular activities (Knobloch et al., 2015). The two main themes that emerged when the students were questioned about challenges that occurred during deployment were the disruptions to their daily routines and emotional difficulties including anger, sadness, and stress (Knobloch et al., 2015). Research designed to capture the voices of students who have experienced the changes, challenges, and opportunities of military life can be the catalyst for policymakers, educators, and other professionals who work with military-connected students to gain better knowledge concerning what services are needed to support this highly mobile group (Burnette, 2017).

Sories et al. (2015) emphasized that young military-connected children have been exposed to stressors not generally faced by the general child population due to ongoing foreign conflicts. One such stressor is the loss or wounding of a family member due to military combat. To increase understanding of how such exposure is challenging military-

connected children from preschool to adolescent age, Sories et al. (2015) studied the use of play therapy as an intervention for behavioral health challenges due to grief from the wounding or death of a service member parent in combat. This case study research demonstrated the effectiveness of this specific type of therapy in decreasing trauma and grief when treating military-connected children. The findings also showed that play therapy can be used to address other issues that are unique to military children and their families (Sories et al., 2015).

Another stressor that young military-connected children must navigate is the trauma of separation. According to Mogil et al. (2015), "the preschool period is a time of rapid growth and a sensitive period for achieving self-regulatory capacities, emotion regulation, and forming the foundation for future interactions" (p. 205). When young children are separated from their primary caregivers, they can struggle with developing trust in relationships in later childhood and adulthood (Osofsky, 2018). In a study of 6,000 children under the age of 8, Osofsky (2018) collected longitudinal data regarding adverse childhood experiences and the developmental impact of separation trauma. Young children have a more limited understanding of separation than older children do which is why their sense of security in relationships is more important (Osofsky, 2018). Due to their level of development, they are unable to understand the reasoning behind prolonged separations, such as deployment or duty station relocation, and thus may blame themselves which can lead to "dysregulation of their emotions and behaviors" (Osofsky, 2018, p. 84). Findings showed that although the stress of separation is negative for many

children and families, most children will be resilient and recover when provided with protection and support (Osofsky, 2018).

While students are adjusting and coping with the challenges they face through their connection to the military, the deregulation of their emotions (Osofsky, 2018) may result in “disciplinary and academic problems, tantrums, anger, apathy, inconsolable crying, and other regressive behaviors” (Bóia et al., 2018, p.304). Often, students and family members experience feelings of confusion, doubt, and powerlessness that Owen and Combs (2017) described as an inherent part of military life. Utilizing the causal uncertainty model, Owen and Combs “encouraged effortful cognition and support family attributes to ameliorate the negative effects of the stressors these families may face” (p. 27). Owen and Combs used the term causal uncertainty to characterize unfavorable feelings that do not have an apparent causation or connection to a specific event. When there is no clear cause for an event, people who are experiencing causal uncertainty take on feelings of confusion, a lack of control, and disappointment which can turn to depression, anxiety, and insomnia (Owen & Combs, 2017). The theory of causal uncertainty can be used by medical professionals, counselors, and any other qualified personnel to support families through recognition of specific signs and symptoms of personal and family distress. The two interventions that best work to combat causal uncertainty is taking time to understand the children and family member perceptions of their unique stressors and then to learn what matters most to the so that the correct support can be provided (Owen & Combs, 2017).

Garcia et al. (2015) affirmed that the unique stressors that military-connected children encounter can affect them in a social and emotional way which then impacts and serves as a risk to their successful academic performance. Since students spend a large part of their days at school, symptoms and behaviors deriving from stressors at home may impact their academic performance (Garcia et al., 2015). In a quantitative study conducted by Garcia et al. (2015), the participant pool included eight military-connected public-school districts with approximately 140 schools and about 117,000 students. One of the goals of the researchers was to "ensure the capacity of public schools to create military-friendly school environments that improve students' social, behavioral, and academic outcomes" (Garcia et al., 2015, p. S105). They presented the belief that training in the five Families Over Coming Under Stress (FOCUS) resilience coping skills (emotional regulation, communication, goal setting, problem solving, and managing deployment and loss reminders) in a manner that is specific to each child should be done in schools that house a large population of military-connected students. The study found that teaching both civilian and military-connected students resilience coping skills was an effective way to build their capacity for emotional regulation, life adjustments, and problem-solving (Garcia et al., 2015). The study also identified a common occurrence among schools of dedicating most of the fiscal resources to academic interventions instead of programs centered around social and emotional learning and climate (Garcia et al., 2015). To address stress and the resulting negative consequences, emotional and practical support should be provided to military families (Sumner et al., 2016). For military-connected students to get the support they need in academics, social, and

emotional learning, there will need to be an increase in awareness of the connection between these three types of learning.

In another study based on the utilization of FOCUS, Mogil et al. (2015) described the effectiveness of adapting the "established trauma-informed preventive intervention for military families" with children ages 3 to 5-years-old (p. 201). This new model, FOCUS-EC, consisted of the same training in resilience coping skills with the notable difference of the parent needing to draw upon their perceptions of the child's understanding of key events as young children may not have the ability developmentally to chronicle their experiences (Mogil et al., 2015). Early usage of the FOCUS-EC program has shown a reduction in stress and behavioral disturbances in young children (Nolan & Misca, 2018). A contributing factor to the success of this program is its use of open validation of emotions by all family members that in turn encourages preschool children to express and cope with their emotions in a constructive way (Nolan & Misca, 2018). Some other positive findings from the usage of FOCUS-EC were "a reduction in psychopathology symptoms and concurrent increases in prosocial behaviors" (Mogil et al., 2015, p. 201) as well as reported benefits to family adjustments.

Like the studies on resilience coping skills conducted by Garcia et al. (2015), Mogil et al. (2015), Nolan and Misca (2018), and Okafor et al. (2016) presented four distinct coping profiles that were revealed in their study of active-duty military family adolescents. In their quantitative study of military-connected adolescents aged 11 to 18, Okafor et al. (2016) studied sources of stress related to military service. Though this study focused on adolescents, early childhood students begin the process of coping as

they reach the age of understanding of what military-connected life entails. In addition to the challenges of frequent relocations and parental separations, they listed parental rank (pay grade) as an issue that contributed to depressive symptoms (Okafor et al., 2016). These symptoms were found to manifest in several areas including painful physical symptoms, negative personal thoughts, and interpersonal relationship problems. Okafor et al. (2016) explored the relationship between military-specific stressors and resilience coping which includes primary control engagement, secondary control engagement, and disengagement coping. Primary control engagement involves "working to change one's reaction or situation through emotional regulation and problem solving" (Okafor et al., 2016). An example of secondary control engagement that Okafor et al. (2016) provided was "attempting to adapt by regulating one's cognition and focus, positive thinking, and distracting" (p. 134). Disengagement coping is used synonymously with withdrawing (Okafor et al., 2016). Military-connected adolescents who utilize a variety of these coping skills have a higher level of resistance and can better manage the stressors they encounter due to their families' connection to the military.

Military-connected students are a unique population of children who have distinct opportunities for growth and stressors in their lives directly linked to having a parent in the military. According to Wertsch (1991) as cited in Sories et al. (2015) "military-connected children 'constitute a separate and distinctly different subculture from' their civilian counterparts" (p. 210) with differing life experiences. Illuminating the changes, challenges, and opportunities for growth that military-connected students experience due to a parent serving in the armed forces is necessary for full understanding of the military

culture and lifestyle (Knobloch et al., 2015). As part of a military family, children are afforded with opportunities for growth and building resilience as they travel the world, observe and experience diversity, and take on new roles in their families (Conway & Schaffer, 2017). These same opportunities, however, can be challenging and stressful due to the family separations, unpredictable schedules, frequent relocations, and constantly changing family dynamics. Although many children in military families are resilient and can successfully adapt to these changes, some children can feel too overwhelmed, which can lead to pathological symptoms requiring treatment and specialized support (Sories et al., 2015). The unique stressors that military-connected children face stem from "frequent relocation, extended separations from loved ones during combat deployment, parental estrangement and divorce, and their own shifting roles within their family, school, social, and other systems" (Sories et al., 2015, p. 210). These stressors can have a negative effect on the behavioral and mental health of military-connected students as well as on their academic achievement if they are not provided with the necessary support and encouraged to develop coping resilience. (Conway & Schaffer, 2017). When offered support to overcome the negative stressors that they are faced with, military-connected students will not only develop resilience coping skills that can be used for a multitude of life situations, but they can also overcome adversity (Arcuri, 2015). Understanding and addressing the needs of military families today requires knowledge of the diversity of each family (Kizer & Menestrel, 2019) and the development of policies and practices that fit diverse families.

School Level Practices

The practices of civilian schools who are educating military-connected children will be another key concept in this research study. When I was growing up, I attended schools located on or very near to the military installment with peers who also had a parent in the military. Most of the educators in these schools were connected to the military themselves either being retired, being reservists, or having a spouse in the military. As I got older and my father transitioned toward retirement, we moved off the base and I attended a civilian school in my home school district. It was the early 90s and I was in middle school. This transition, coupled with the normal pre-teen angst, made for a tough school year filled with emotional and academic highs and lows. Fast forward 15 years and in 2005, the latest round of base closures occurred which resulted in 80% of the estimated 1.7 million school-age military children attending U.S. civilian-operated schools (St. John & Fenning, 2020). This statistic demonstrates that there are children in our education systems in nearly every school district who are dealing with stressors and challenges that are unique to the military lifestyle. It raises the question of whether these students are being provided with the support they need to be academically successful. St. John and Fenning (2020) explained that "due to the unique military lifestyle, children of military families may have an increased risk of mental health and behavioral challenges throughout their development" (p. 99). Elfman (2017) stated that most civilian schools do not have an awareness of these children in their schools or the experiences the family may have endured. As our country continues to deploy military personnel around the world, it is critical that all stakeholders "across school settings have access to information

that supports the academic, behavioral, and social emotional health of military children" (St. John & Fenning, 2020, p. 99) and understand the importance of utilizing it.

One challenge in providing support to military-connected students is civilian educators lack of awareness and knowledge of military culture and lifestyle. Castillo et al. (2017) affirmed that most civilian educators and public-school staff are unaware that there is a population of military-connected students in their schools. One contributor to this lack of awareness is that students may not be flagged in the computer as military dependents (Garcia et al., 2015). As part of the "Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015" (ESSA), the military student identifier flags students as having an active-duty service member as a parent (Jowers, 2018). On student enrollment paperwork, there is a voluntary question about parents' affiliation with the military. Though the option to identify exists, it is not mandatory for military parents to disclose. If parents choose not to disclose, the child's military connection may go unknown. Having an efficient system for identifying military children involves engaging with and communicating with families when they arrive in the district and then again at their assigned schools (Ham, 2019). Military families may be more likely to disclose their careers if they know the school environment is one that supports the military lifestyle and that will provide support and resources to their family and children. Castillo et al. (2017) noted that due to military-connected students' moves and transfers between schools, it is vital for schools to show their support of military culture, children, and families by establishing themselves as nurturing and welcoming environments.

Once military-connected students have been identified, efforts then shift to facilitating their successful integration into civilian public school. This integration should be a blending of the military culture and lifestyle with the civilian lifestyle and procedures. This process can be very stressful and can have an impact on the overall psychosocial functioning and well-being of military service members, veterans, and their families (Gil-Rivas et al., 2017). According to Conforte et al. (2017) community support has been a predictor for positive psychosocial adjustments in children. After reviewing available literature, Gil-Rivas et al. (2017) reported that most research and intervention points toward how integration can be dysfunctional instead of "addressing the factors and conditions that promote wellness and that can increase the ability of the family to cope with and adapt successfully" (Gil-Rivas et al., 2017, p. 179). One suggestion they gave for successful reintegration included focusing on coordinating services, so that families could navigate them in a more efficient way. Another suggestion was to develop mechanisms for family support so that specific needs can be met in specific ways. The final suggestion from Gil-Rivas et al. (2017) was to not just focus on the immediate period of support for families but to develop a long-term strategy that can be built upon as family needs develop. For families that may be dealing with adverse situations concerning integration into the civilian lifestyle, it is necessary to use a multilevel response which includes both universal and targeted strategies (Gil-Rivas et al., 2017). Utilizing these strategies will not only strengthen but also deepen the support that can be provided by civilian schools to military families.

Another challenge in providing support to military-connected students is the negative perception of the military lifestyle. Traditionally, the public-school system has viewed the military lifestyle as problematic (Russo & Fallon, 2015). Although military-connected children may have a greater risk of difficulties while adjusting, they do not have a poorer wellbeing than children from civilian families (Williamson et al., 2018). This bias coupled with a lack of knowledge of the military culture has led to the military-connected students being overlooked as a distinct group with a need for support specific to their unique stressors and strengths. Early childhood teachers have perceived that there is no significant difference between military-connected and civilian students in emotions or behavior but in stability with parental separation having a negative impact on academic success (Stites, 2016). When personal views interfere with educational demands, schools may find themselves being less accommodating and not as welcoming to any specific group of students. The negative implications of military connectedness that impact military students attending civilian schools can manifest into strengths with the proper resources and support. (Castillo et al., 2017). When working with this group of children who are distinguished through their military-connection, it is imperative that both their strengths and challenges can be identified so that the necessary supports and interventions can be identified and utilized (Capp et al., 2017).

As a positive step toward providing a nurturing school environment for military-connected students, elementary schools can provide training for their educators in the areas of military culture, unique needs, and strategic support (Castillo et al., 2017).

Researchers have suggested colleges and universities provide training to students in their education programs to help increase awareness of military culture and the unique needs of military families (Castillo et al., 2017). Training should also include strategies to better support this population as they navigate daily life in the civilian world. Due to frequent transitions between different states and districts, military-connected students often find themselves in the position of being ahead or behind their classmates in the curriculum (Ham, 2019). This disparity can be handled by educators who are trained to recognize and reconcile such differences. Research guides have been developed by different organizations for use by educators and military parents to help them address issues such as "understanding military culture, challenges faced by military students and their families, and best practices developed to help military students deal with multiple transitions" (Castillo et al., 2017, p. 2). In a mixed-method study, Castillo et al. (2017) surveyed users of a series of research guides to explore their effectiveness. Data showed that the resource guides would best be used to train future professionals while increasing awareness of military-connected students, their unique needs, and strategies that would better support the population (Castillo et al., 2017).

Research indicates that educators in civilian public schools are generally insufficiently equipped to handle issues such as deployment, school transitions, and other military-connected stressors (Neil, 2015). To help educate public school teachers on military culture and military students, the United States Department of Defense created an education partnership program 2008 to provide professional development workshops (Neil, 2015). For training to be successful, the participants must recognize their need for

training and be open to learning. Schools and educators need to recognize the role they play in specifically supporting their military-connected students as they navigate the stressors in their lives (Neil, 2015). In their study on the needs of military families, Classen et al. (2019) had the primary goal of understanding the family-professional partnership from the perspective of the military parents and educators. To achieve their goal, the participant groups included early childhood educators working for a school district associated with a military base and families who had been deployed in the past 5 years and have a child with a special need (Classen et al., 2019). At the conclusion of the multi-case qualitative study, the researchers discovered one barrier in the family-professional partnership was the deficit of military-related professional development opportunities offered from the school district (Classen et al., 2019). When districts fail to establish military-related professional development for their staff, educators are tasked with designing and arranging their own training opportunities. Classen et al. found that both groups of participants reported the type of support needed must be family-centered and include empathy, communication, professional competence, and collaboration to be prudent in overcoming the barriers of cultural difference between military families and civilians.

In addition to providing training for educators, Russo and Fallon (2015) provided suggestions for how schools can work together with families to support military-connected students as they adapt to the military lifestyle. Public school educators need to realize that viewing the military lifestyle as a problem is a bias that can be detrimental to the success of the military-connected students they are charged with educating (Russo &

Fallon, 2015). Open communication can be a major factor in the level and depth of support that is needed in a military family. The dialogue "must center on key issues such as previous educational experiences, current academic goals, effective instructional methods, behavior management, and assessment requirements" (Russo & Fallon, 2015, p. 411). When the school climate is one that provides opportunities for positive home and school interactions, the entire community becomes stakeholders in the education of not only the military-connected students but all the students. When the culture of the school does nothing to respond to student's needs, students can develop a mistrust for the school environment which can cause problems and extra stress for the family and educators. As Hampden-Thompson and Galindo (2017) stated the policies and practices of schools should enhance relationships with the families as well as improve levels of parent satisfaction which can result in rewards for all students in the school. Building strong relationships between military-connected families and civilian educators will not only help students but can create teachers who help strengthen their school's practices concerning military-connected students.

A school-level practice that civilian schools with military-connected students can utilize to aid in open dialogue and mutual understanding is to increase educators' military cultural competence. Tam-Seto et al. (2020) defined military cultural competence as the joining of awareness, caring, knowledge, and skills regarding educators and military-connected families. For civilian educators who are educating military-connected students to have cultural competence, they must be aware of the military children in their care so that they can develop the personal connections that are necessary for cultural sensitivity

to occur (Tam-Seto et al., 2020). Gaining an understanding of the unique characteristics of military service and how they affect military personnel, families, and veterans will aid civilian educators in working effectively with military-connected students (Carter & Watson, 2018). Carter and Watson (2018) suggest infusing aspects of military culture into curriculum to create supportive school experiences while building the military cultural competence of civilian educators. Conducting focus groups and interviews as a part of their qualitative study, Tam-Seto et al. found that personal connections and relationships with military-connected students and their families to be the main factor in cultural competency. There needs to be an increase in the number of professionals and caregivers who are prepared to deliver care to military-connected children that is culturally competent (Ohye et al., 2017).

Civilian schools have a critical role to play in not only educating military-connected students but in providing them with socio-emotional support (Garcia et al., 2015). De Pedro et al. (2016) stated that "the psychological strain of a family deployment and multiple moves adversely impact the social and emotional functioning of military-connected youth in school" (p. 763). The adverse impact can manifest in feelings of alienation and disconnection which may make these youth vulnerable to peer victimization in the form of bullying (De Pedro et al., 2016). In recognition of this growing problem, a large research university formed a partnership with eight civilian public schools who educate military-connected schools. The partnership resulted in the Building Capacity Consortium with the main objectives of helping public schools create and maintain "military-friendly school environments that improve students' social,

behavioral, and academic outcomes" (De Pedro et al., 2017). The Consortium developed the program "Because Nice Matters (BNM)" (De Pedro et al., 2017, p. 139) to help recognize bullying and integrate kindness and anti-bullying messages. Developing a supportive and positive school climate is paramount to all students emotional and academic success (Neil, 2015). In their study of this partnership and program, De Pedro et al. (2017) questioned teachers and parents to determine the overall effects seen after implementation. The results indicated success of both the partnership and the BNM program with a raise of awareness of school bullying, and forward promotion of kindness and antibullying. The study findings revealed that the whole-school mindset, which begins at the top with administration and trickles down to the entire school community, is the most valuable proponent in antibullying efforts (De Pedro et al., 2017).

Raising awareness and building the military cultural competency of civilian educators of military-connected students can result from intentional school practices. To many civilians, the military lifestyle and culture are foreign concepts that are too often disregarded and not seen as an integral component of child development and academic advancement (Stites, 2016). The education and well-being of military-connected students is the responsibility of the school which they attend. School practices can be put into place however, they are only as effective as the educators and personnel who are charged with implementing them. Negative perceptions and biases must be met with training and the development of all educators' military cultural competence. Nurturing environments that support military families need to be built with open communication and community awareness. Positive social interactions can be increased through the development of

programs and processes for military-connected students to participate in and share their life experiences (Knobloch et al., 2015). With so many military-connected students attending civilian public schools, there must be infrastructure and policies in place to ensure they receive support to be academically successful while dealing with the unique stressors of military life. Awareness of military culture as a contributor to the life experiences of military families, while recognizing the potential impacts on academic performance, should motivate educators to desire the cultural skills that are necessary to support this distinguished group of students.

Bridge Building Relationships

The final concept that will be addressed in this research study is relationships that bridge the gap between military culture and civilian education. One huge gap that has been filled is due to the Military Interstate Children's Compact. This document advocates for military-connected students and supports "flexibility around academics" (Elfman, 2017, p.29) and other school activities. This flexibility allows students to integrate into schools more easily when they are relocated due to military duty station reassignments. Students are permitted to join sports team and clubs regardless of entry deadlines. Students are also allowed to participate in advanced placement classes or study subjects online if they are not offered at their new school. Parents can walk in records for preliminary placement and students who relocated at the end of their high school years can graduate under the guidelines of their previous district (Elfman, 2017). The goal of the Military Interstate Children's Compact is to try to ensure that these students are not

left behind and that they are afforded the same opportunities and experiences as their civilian counterparts (Elfman, 2017).

The task of adapting civilian education to meet the needs of military-connected early childhood students has several different working parts that must all come together. School stakeholders, which consists of teachers, counselors, administrators, and other personnel, are responsible for developing programs and practices to promote social, emotional, and academic growth for the students under their care. Regarding military-connected students, civilian providers must familiarize themselves with the lifestyle and culture of military families (Sherman & Larsen, 2018). Most children spend the largest portion of their days at school. Arcuri (2015) determined that on average, public-school children spend 7 hours a day in school for 180 days. This means that the education stakeholders at civilian schools have roughly 1260 hours a year that they can use to support, educate, and influence the children in their schools. Armed with this time and a realization that military children serve alongside their parent and "endure the infinite toils and continual hazards of war and/or preparation for one" (Arcuri, 2015, p. 93), stakeholders have the opportunity to empower children's lives and help them reach their full potential. Fostering resilience through strong, supportive relationships can only occur when stakeholders understand military children as a whole and the various ways they differ from civilian children (Arcuri, 2015).

The teacher-student relationship is an area where relationships can help build a bridge between military culture and civilian education. Capp et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of "relationships with teachers and other adults in schools [as] an integral

component of school climate" (p. 2). Using quantitative analysis and the Building Capacity Project, Capp et al. (2017) investigated the perceptions of public-school staff regarding military-connected students. Their preliminary data demonstrated that a lack of training or orientation about military culture, the civilian staff described difficulties in providing the proper social and emotional support to these students (Capp et al., 2017). The Building Capacity Project mission involved changing school climates to help all students, including those with a military-connection, "feel welcomed, connected, and academically supported" (Capp et al., 2017, p. 3) in their schools. Over two different waves of data collection, Capp et al. (2017) gathered staff perceptions through online surveys. A myriad of questions was asked under the headings of school learning environment, professional development, strengths, assets, and challenges of military-connected students, school response to military students, and professional development related to military students (Capp et al., 2017). The findings revealed that although the staff felt their school reflected a positive learning environment, more than half of the staff felt the need for more training to meet the social, emotional, and developmental needs of their students and 40% of the staff did not know how their school responded to military-connected students and their families. This study raises the question of how important perceptions of staff are to what is transpiring daily to support the discrete needs of the multiple groups of students in a school, including military-connected students. School climate has the power and potential to support and bolster military-connected students (Capp et al., 2017). Teachers, with the proper training and understanding of the deployment cycle, "are invaluable in providing assistance to meet the behavior and

social-emotional needs of military children" (St. John & Fenning, 2020, p. 103). The staff and educators who are an integral part of the school climate have the potential to be positive influences and affect change that brings support to all students.

Collins and O'Connor (2016) researched the association between teacher-child relationships, child temperament and academic performance. This study focused on students from urban, low-income communities who were at risk for low achievement and low-quality teacher-child relationships. By following the same 324 students from kindergarten to second grade, they were able to establish a strong baseline for each child's temperament (Collins & O'Connor, 2016). The conclusion of their study confirmed that conflict filled teacher-student relationships hinder children's academic performance while close teacher-child relationships encourage children's academic performance (Collins & O'Connor, 2016). The findings suggested that a child's temperament and the quality of their relationship to the responsible adult to be critical factors in early academic development (Collins & O'Connor, 2016). This study was not specific to military-connected students, but it did focus on early childhood students dealing with adversity and difficult family circumstances that could cause similar stressors to those that military-connected students face. Collins and O'Connor found that teachers must be equipped with strategies and tools to support students who may not explicitly advocate for the instructional support they need. They recommended training in children's early academic development as well as professional development on how to foster close, high-quality teacher-child relationships.

Barbee et al. (2016) researched literature on how early childhood practitioners can provide services and effective support to assist military-connected early childhood students with healthy coping and functioning. With 40% of military children being under the age of six (Barbee et al., 2016), it is vital for early childhood educators to understand the military lifestyle and the effects it can have on their students. Young children can have trouble building healthy attachments due to the inconsistency of a military parent, while toddlers may have "higher emotional reactivity, anxiousness, depression, comatic complaints and withdrawal symptoms" (Barbee et al., 2016, p. 6) during the deployment of a parent. Educators need to help their students, especially those in early childhood programs, to develop resiliency and coping skills that will improve their lives and help them face challenges throughout their entire lives (Russo & Fallon, 2015). An understanding of "all areas of child development (i.e., attitudes toward school, friendships, self-esteem, depression, anxiety, well-being, and at-risk behaviors) in families with a military parent" (Russo & Fallon, 2015, p. 414) is vital in providing the necessary support at the most appropriate times to garner the best results academically, emotionally, and behaviorally. In my experience as a teacher, I believe I can get to know all students and build a bridge between school and home to find out information that can help support my students' development and academic success. All educators should be willing to develop a positive, consistent, caring, and nurturing relationship with their students as it is "crucial for healing and supporting the child's positive developmental trajectory" (Osofsky, 2018, p. 85).

One way for educators to show their commitment to supporting their students is through vulnerable teaching practices (Houser & Waldbuesser, 2017). Student-teacher relationships come from genuine connections and flourish "with a spirit of caring, empathy, generosity, respect, reciprocity, and a genuine desire to know [one another] personally" (Huddy, 2015, p. 96). To help build a relationship with their students, teachers can use their own life experiences to demonstrate how resilience is built through "positive adaptation in the face of significant adversity" (Okafor et al., 2016, p. 134). The personal connection that I have to military culture and lifestyle can help me in supporting military-connected students however, it will not foster a deep bond unless I am willing to share the challenges and opportunities that I experienced while encouraging my students to share as well. This type of emotional vulnerability and mutual sharing builds a bridge to deeper levels of bonding and understanding (Huddy, 2015). Teaching does not occur in a vacuum, but in a space where students and teachers bring their perceptions and experiences that influence how they see each other (Houser & Waldbuesser, 2017). Social science scholars have discovered that emotions are contagious and influence the climate of the classroom (Houser & Waldbuesser, 2017). In a quantitative study of instructor perception and student behavior, Houser and Waldbuesser (2017) found that instructor behaviors and emotions influence what emotions and behaviors they chose to see from their students. This implies that if teachers build relationships that are supportive and understanding, they will look for and see the same type of relationships in their classrooms. Fostering these kinds of relationships in the classroom will benefit

military-connected students who are looking to be affirmed, respected, understood, and supported as they develop their physical, mental, and academic well-being.

Parallel to the positive teacher-student relationships, school counselors are called upon to build relationships with military-connected students in several different ways. Counselors and other mental health service providers are in a unique position to provide more direct and individualized care to military-connected families (St. John & Fenning, 2020). Counselors may begin their relationships as advocates for the upholding of student and family rights during the initial transition to the new school. Since civilian educators are often "unfamiliar with, overwhelmed by, or unequipped to handle the challenges that the military lifestyle brings" (Cole, 2016, p. 37), school counselors are called as mentors for other educators who may need help in deciphering the best methods for supporting their military-connected students. They can provide teachers with specific information and individualized classroom strategies based on their personal knowledge of each military family (St. John & Fenning, 2020). School counselors are ethically obligated to understand the military culture and have competence in providing military children with counsel (Arcuri, 2015). Fostering school community awareness of the military family culture is another responsibility of the school counselor. This begins with the education of all stakeholders who are a part of the education of military-connected students. To aid newly transplanted military-connected students, "school counselors can promote and foster the development of positive and appropriate connections" (Arcuri, 2015, p. 99) through social interactions with peers and extracurricular activities. When needed, counselors can provide individual or group counseling with a focus on resilience coping

and social skills (St. John & Fenning, 2020). Counselors also support military families and bridge the connection between family and school.

Cole (2016) discussed the role of school counselors in the integration and support of military-connected students and presented the school counselor as the educator responsible for addressing emotional issues displayed by military-connected students. Individual counseling can be used for normalizing students' feelings of anxiety and stress related to a parent's military service (Cole, 2016). Having a relationship with someone who is qualified to help them sort out and work through feelings is vital to student integration into civilian school. According to Cole, counseling can also be used to help students understand their strengths and the resilience they have already achieved as well as establishing their place in the school family. Cole also suggested that school counselors collaborate with community organizations by partnering with other adults such as coaches and band directors to help the understand any emotional challenges that may arise with their military-connected students. One final suggestion given by Cole was for counselors to pair students with a peer to help them navigate the new school culture. The counselor that services military-connected students at a civilian public school has unique responsibilities and opportunities. Working with this distinguished group of children requires knowledge of military culture, the unique stressors associated with the military lifestyle, and the deployment cycle as it relates to different levels of child development. Being a school counselor also permits unique relationships with military-connected students that can bridge the gap between military culture and civilian education.

Though military children and parents may rely on school counselors and teachers for assistance, administrators, as the leaders of the school, are necessary in the success of aligning military-connected students with the support they need from civilian education. As a part of the education team in a school, administrators can better serve families if they have a better understanding of their military-related experiences and tailor services and support to meet their needs (Walsh, 2017). In support of training for civilian educators of military-connected students, Ohye et al. (2016) developed a program to be used in schools to show educators their role in "promoting resilience for individual students within the culture of the classroom as a whole" (p. 874). The school administrators committed to the initial intervention of 60-minute training for all faculty and staff at the beginning of the year as well as a year-long training for guidance counselors. The five components of the training included an introduction to military culture, a documentary portraying the life experiences of two military-connected students, an overview of resources designed specifically for increased awareness and support to military children in school, and the necessary steps to begin establishing resilience support plans (Ohye et al., 2016). Through advocacy of such a program, administrators showed the importance of supporting all students in their schools. Increasing community awareness and establishing routines school-wide that include military culture emphasizes the importance of such actions to all other faculty and staff members. Leading by example in their awareness of military culture and military-connected students in their civilian schools is necessary for the building of a nurturing and caring school climate.

Although administrators may not be a part of the daily interactions that occur for military-connected families, they do not have to be removed from the building of positive and supportive relationships. Providing their staff with awareness of the available resources to address mental health and wellness along with professional development in the areas of academic, behavioral, and social-emotional success is how administrators can provide care and support for these students (St. John & Fenning, 2020). Another way to engrain themselves in the support of military children and families is for administrators to be responsive and supportive to those who are providing support to this group. Supported teachers and staff are more likely to feel satisfied and confident in their work. This confidence permeates the instruction in the classroom and carries over into the services teachers administer to all families, but specifically military-connected families (St. John & Fenning, 2020). At civilian public schools where the population of military families is significant, the administrators have the role of reporting data on military families to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (St. John & Fenning, 2020). They also make decisions based on the data they collect. Administrators are the head of the school community body and their efficiency and success lie in the ability of their staff and the programs they institute to provide support, maintain relationships, and demonstrate academic success for the military-connected student population in their school.

Just as important as the contributions made by administrators to the overall climate of the school regarding military-connected students, other caregivers at school can provide support to these students. Although there is a gap in the literature related to civilian school caregivers and educators' competencies to provide positive interactions,

there are researchers who focused on the necessity for specified skills and training to work with military families. In their study, Leppma et al. (2016) explored the competencies of healthcare professionals who worked with military veterans and their families. Using a mixed-method Delphi approach, they surveyed civilian experts in the mental health field who had worked with military veterans in the past 5 years or who had trained others to work with military veterans. The purpose of the study was to determine what competencies were necessary to help veterans and their families with specific challenges that resulted from their military service such as post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, anxiety, and depression (Leppma et al., 2016). Their findings determined that training of the professional as well as their understanding of their client's worldview were important along with an understanding of military culture and recognition of reintegration issues that are common for veterans and their families to face when they transition from military to civilian (Leppma et al., 2016). Just as healthcare providers, school nurses, and other caregivers are tasked with access situations and making decisions in the best interest of their patients, auxiliary school staff should have an awareness of and training in the effects of the deployment cycle and how to help military-connected students maintain stability in all types of situations (St. John & Fenning, 2020).

Having a working relationship with students who need extra healthcare and wellness support is a necessity for healthcare providers, school nurses, other caregivers at civilian schools. Understanding the temperament of a child in a low-stress situation will help in the understanding and treating of that child during high-stress situations.

Depending on a child's temperaments, they can be significantly and negatively affected by changes to their environments and circumstances that are unfavorable such as the deployment of a parent or family relocation (Collins & O'Connor, 2016). If a child is high in negative reactivity, it could impede the child's ability to pay attention in class, be motivated to work, inability to recall information, and a lack of necessity to be cooperative (Collins & O'Connor, 2016). When I first began teaching, I had a mentor who shared that taking care of a student's physical and mental needs is more important than learning because without physical and mental wellness, learning will not occur. For the caregiver of students who are dealing with unique stressors and negative situations that affect their physical and mental wellness, it is imperative that these areas are supported for academic success to be achieved.

The symptoms and behaviors of negative situations that are happening outside of school have an impact on a student's academic performance. For military-connected students, parental deployment and relocation are the outside happenings that play a role in their classroom performance. School-based interventions can help these students build the resilience skills they need to counteract the negative situations (Garcia et al., 2015). Needs of military children and families not being recognized or supported, whether due to ignorance or bias cannot continue. Policies should focus beyond the surface issue of identifying military children and make active strides toward supporting them in the diverse communities in which they live, learn, and receive care. Garcia et al. (2015) recommends training in the areas of "emotional regulation, communication, goal setting, problem solving, and managing deployment and loss reminders" (p. s104). The classroom

is a smaller model of the diverse community in which it is located and as such, contains a diverse group of learners. With the obligation to educate this diverse group comes the opportunity to develop and foster connections and relationships based on understanding and support. Cabrera et al. (2018) states that during deployment, schools can function as a stable, safe place which will add another element to academic achievement during deployment. To fulfill this function, schools and the educators that run them need to gain understanding of the military culture and lifestyle. This can be achieved by military families and educators coming together and constructing procedures and practices that will benefit not only military children but also their classmates and the entire school community. Teachers, counselors, administrators, and other caregivers at civilian public schools are charged with educating the whole military-connected child which includes social, behavioral, and academic education. Building relationships that cover the gap between military culture to civilian education are vital in developing and maintaining positive school climates that are conducive for the academic success of all students.

Summary and Conclusion

To begin this chapter, I reviewed the problem and the purpose of this qualitative study of the civilian educators' perspectives of the supports needed for early childhood military-connected students to be successful in civilian schools. This chapter includes a review of literature specific to military-connected early childhood students, beginning with a description of the literature search strategies that I used to complete this review. Additionally, a detailed description of the conceptual framework is included and is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner contended

that the development of individuals is active and progressive in direct correlation with their relationships with others, their environments, and interactions between the two. This review of literature is divided into five major themes that surfaced from the related literature: military culture, the deployment cycle, unique stressors, school-level practices, and bridge building relationships. The literature provided insight into the military lifestyle and culture which contain unique challenges, stressors, and opportunities. Although military-connected students face frequent relocation, parental deployments, and numerous transitions, they are afforded with opportunities to obtain diverse experiences while building resilience coping skills which can be used in different aspects of life. Civilian educators may not be aware of the unique stressors and challenges that can be aspects of military life and the impact these stressors and challenges have on the social, emotional, and educational lives of military-connected students (Sherbert, 2018). This lack of awareness about military culture in civilian communities has led to "few evidence-based interventions designed to promote resilience in military-connected children" (Ohye et al., 2016, p. 872) who are being educated in civilian schools. Learning from the experiences of military-connected children and their families clarifies the presence of risk and resilience not only in military children but also in civilian children (Wadsworth et al., 2017). The literature provided insight into the need for training for all education staff interacting with military families and their children "regarding the unique strengths, issues, concerns, and needs of this cultural group and be prepared to provide informed exchanges, supports, and interventions" (Hathaway et al., 2018, p. 54). Through relationships that are caring and nurturing, civilian educators can increase their

understanding of the needs of their military-connected students. These relationships can bridge the gap between military culture and civilian education that serves as a barrier for social, behavioral, and academic success in military-connected students in civilian schools.

Several of the articles in the literature review state the need for further research in civilian support of military-connected children as well as awareness of needed support for this unique group of children. Although research has documented difficulties faced by military-connected children during the deployment cycle and a need for additional support, far less is known about the treatment of said students in civilian schools by civilian educators (Knobloch et al., 2017). The review of literature shows a need to extend the current body of research to include early childhood military connected children and practices of civilian schools and educators since very young children can be developmentally vulnerable and more sensitive to stress and the absence of caregivers (DeVoe et al., 2017). The aim of this research study will be to contribute to filling the gap in literature related to civilian school educators and their perspectives of needed supports for military-connected students to be academically successful in civilian schools. According to Knobloch et al. (2017) “this gap in the scholarly literature corresponds with a gap in the evidence-based guidelines available to policymakers and [educators] supporting military families during” (p. 542) the deployment cycle. Literature dictates that military youth are a distinct population that should be studied as little is known about the risk and resilience factors associated with stressors in children of service members (Conforte et al., 2017). To bridge these gaps, my study will collect data from civilian

classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators of military connected children to investigate these educators' relational dynamics as supports of military-connected children as they journey through the deployment cycle and duty station relocation. One goal of this study is to gather the perspectives of educators who are experiencing the unique circumstances that accompany working with military-connected students (Sherbert, 2018). Another goal of this study is to give a voice to civilian educators who are tasked with educating elementary students who are connected to the military. Their voices will impart firsthand knowledge related to the support needed for military-connected early childhood students with parents who are subject to deployment and duty station relocation.

Chapter 3 will include a description of the research method that I will use in this qualitative study. In this chapter, I will discuss the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, and the study methodology including participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection as well as the plan for data analysis. Elements of the study's trustworthiness and ethical procedures will also be described.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather educators' perspectives on needed supports for military-connected students in civilian schools. In the previous chapters, I introduced the problem of military-connected students lacking the necessary support to overcome the possible negative effects of the military lifestyle. This problem was explored and chronicled in a collection of literature consisting of more than 50 articles. The literature review showed a deficit in information specific to military-connected early childhood students. To help fill this gap, my research focused on the perspectives of civilian educators who work specifically with early childhood students who are also connected to the military. In this chapter, I present the rationale and design for the research; my role as researcher; the methodology, which includes participant selection, the interview approach, and the data analysis plan; and issues regarding trustworthiness and ethics.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for this qualitative study were as follows:

1. What are teachers' perspectives of the classroom supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?
2. What are counselors' perspectives of the counseling supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?

3. What are administrators' perspectives of the administrative and school-wide supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?

These research questions were designed to discover and better understand the experience and perspective of civilian educators who work with military-connected early childhood students (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Garnering a deeper understanding is one of the major reasons that researchers utilize the qualitative approach. Braun and Clarke (2013) defined the purpose of qualitative research as understanding or exploring meaning and the ways people make meaning. Conversely, quantitative research involves results and findings in relation to hypotheses and statistical significance (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Whereas quantitative research is mainly utilized to test or verify theories by relating variables in questions, qualitative research is mainly used to focus on a single concept with the researcher collecting data through open-ended questions with the intent of developing themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research uses questions as keys to open the doors of data (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The single concept focus of qualitative research is the more frequently used method of researchers featured in the literature review. The ability of qualitative research to gather the voice of the participant allows for the use of words as data, which were collected and analyzed in a variety of ways. This is the predominate factor that separates qualitative study from quantitative study, which is mainly number-based and statistically analyzed data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research permits the inclusion of the researcher's personal values into the study and encourages collaboration with the participants (Creswell & Creswell,

2018). Using a qualitative research design affords the researcher "with flexibility in examining data based on participants' opinions and beliefs" (Vargas, 2020). Unlike quantitative research, the qualitative methodology allowed me to bring my personal history of being an early childhood educator who also grew up as a military-connected student attending civilian schools into the research.

Just as there are different methodologies that researchers can choose to approach their research, there are also different designs associated with each method. The major qualitative designs are narrative, grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, case study, and basic. Although each of these designs has different structures based on varying assumptions, according to Merriam and Grenier (2019), all qualitative research designs have in common the hunt for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the principal means of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy and analysis process, and a product that is richly descriptive of the phenomenon.

After careful consideration of each design, I decided to use the basic qualitative design for my study. This decision was reached through process of elimination after careful consideration of the purpose of the study in conjunction with the contextual lens and potential for positive social change. Basic qualitative studies are not guided by the philosophic assumptions that have been used to form one of the five major established qualitative methodologies (Kostere and Kostere, 2022). Narrative qualitative design is compiled of stories or "first-person accounts of experiences told in story form" (Merriam and Grenier, 2019, p. 10). Although some of the open-ended interview questions used in my research lent themselves to the sharing of experiences in story form, the overarching

plan was not to solicit and gather stories to be analyzed, thus eliminating narrative design as an option for my study. Grounded theory aims to understand the research situation of an area where there is little previous research or where a new viewpoint would be of high value (Simon & Goes, 2018). The goal of grounded theory is to discover theories implicated from the data and to allow those emerging theories to drive the rest of the data collection, which includes interviews and observation. Although this method avoids researcher assumption, it can also require the repeating of analysis steps if a theory is not emerging (Simon & Goes, 2018). Because the purpose of my research was to gather information to provide deeper understanding of a phenomena as opposed to developing a theory concerning civilian educators and military-connected children, grounded theory was eliminated as an option. Though ethnography could be used for this research as it looks to develop an understanding of how people organize and interpret their experiences (Simon & Goes, 2018), it was not ideal as it focuses on cultural correlations for this understanding. In my study, individual participants' cultures were not a bounded parameter and thus varied across a wide spectrum, eliminating ethnography as an option for my research design. Both phenomenology and case study designs are similar as they describe the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon and how they experienced it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the instance of phenomenology, the focus is on understanding human behavior as described by the individuals who experienced it. The researcher's personal attitudes or beliefs about the essence or structure of an experience are not to be considered or included in the phenomenology design which is why it was eliminated as an option (Merriam and Grenier, 2019). In the instance of case

study, the researcher focuses on building a general explanation that makes sense of all the individual cases. Case study has been defined by researchers as “an intensive study about … a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalize over several units” (Heale & Twycross, 2018, p. 7). Case study was closely considered as my research design; however, the use of a plethora of procedures for data collection over a continuous period of time (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) as well as the in-depth analysis of a particular case, event, program, activity, or process did not fit with the nature of the study.

After considering and eliminating each of the other major qualitative research designs, basic qualitative research design was determined as the most appropriate for my research study. This design can be considered when the desired data cannot be gathered or easily integrated into another qualitative or quantitative methodology (Kennedy, 2016). Being the most simplistic and common of the qualitative research design types, basic qualitative research design allowed me to have more flexibility in the process of examining data based on participants’ opinions and beliefs (Vargas, 2020). According to Kennedy (2016), “basic qualitative inquiry investigates people’s reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences, of things in the outer world” (p. 1370). The basic qualitative research design was not restricted by the necessity to use multiple data points (Vargas, 2020). Being a novice researcher, it was helpful to start with a design that provided structure in the sense of how data should be analyzed but allowed for my own determination on what and how data collection should occur. As the research in this study involved the analysis of data gathered from three separate groups consisting of teachers, counselors, and administrators, using the basic

qualitative research method permitted an increased understanding of three distinct groups of civilian educators as well as their perspectives concerning military-connected early childhood students as a complex phenomenon in its natural setting (Heale & Twycross, 2018).

The phenomenon of this basic qualitative study was civilian teachers, counselors, and administrators who are providing education-related services to military-connected early childhood students. Studying this specific group of teachers, counselors, and administrators allowed for generalization concerning other civilian educators of military-connected early childhood students. This qualitative study was inductive as it focused on detection, awareness, and realization from the perspective of the participants and offered the greatest possibility of making a difference in people's lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative study methodology permitted the perspectives and understandings of the participants to drive the data that contributed to the scholarly discussion on how educators can improve their practices with military-connected students. Working inductively as a qualitative researcher required me to build patterns, establish categories, and determine themes from the bottom up as I organized the data into more and more abstract components of information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

While maintaining the focus on student needs, educator interviews were analyzed to help determine teachers', counselors', and administrators' perspectives of the support that is necessary for military-connected students in civilian schools. The three stakeholder groups were treated as individuals for data collection with each having their own research question, and both individually and collectively for analysis with the inclusion of some

similar interview questions. Some of the interview questions were different as they each perform different roles in the elementary school setting. The data from these three types of stakeholders underwent "within-participant" analysis and then the resulting data underwent "across-participants" analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because the context that each educator group will describe is unique, the high tolerance for ambiguity of basic qualitative research is necessary (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using the data from these differing interviews in conjunction demonstrated the role that environment plays in a child's development (Shelton, 2019).

According to Braun and Clarke (2013), qualitative research "captures the complexity, mess and contradiction that characterizes the real world, yet allows us to make sense of patterns of meaning" (p. 10) all while being rich, exciting, and challenging. Military-connected early childhood students face unique challenges that are often unknown to their civilian teachers, counselors, and administrators. The qualitative focus of this study examined the perspectives of civilian educators regarding what military-connected children from prekindergarten to second grade need to grow and develop academically in a civilian school setting.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in this study, my roles in this study were multifaceted as I was the sole interviewer, transcriber, and data analyst. I also had to recognize and minimize my biases due to my personal values as an early childhood educator and history as a military-connected early childhood student who attended civilian schools. When I was growing up, my dad was active duty in the United States Navy. He served for 23 years

before retiring to become a high school teacher. From my first day of kindergarten to my high school graduation, I attended eight different schools, and lived in five different states. My background as a military-connected child affords me with a certain amount of passion toward this protected group. I have also been an early childhood teacher for the past 20 years, which helps me to understand the roles of educators in the lives of their students, both academically and developmentally. Although this history is always a part of me, it did not override my roles in this study. According to Simon and Goes (2018) "where quantitative researchers seek casual determination, prediction, and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek, instead, illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations" (p. 310). To help identify participants, I began by collaborating with a member of the education community who knows educators in a school district that is located near an active military base. While the collaboration with this educator helped me locate potential participants, I did not limit my participant pool to teachers, counselors, and administrators with whom she had a connection. I did not use said educator in my study as she did not fit the parameters of the study, and as a precaution to help ensure that I had no personal ties to any of the participants selected. To establish a rapport with each participant, I encouraged casual conversation before each interview and encouraged participants to feel comfortable talking about themselves.

As a qualitative researcher, I partnered advocacy and empathy with interpretation to provide a comprehensive study of civilian educators' perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used my preconceived knowledge and familiarity with the content as an advantage while not allowing it to affect the participants or the interpretation of the

findings (Bengtsson, 2016). It was imperative that I utilize my personal biases and feelings to help me ask questions of the participants that would yield the highest amount of information while not steering the data in a particular direction. To do this, I bracketed my feelings before and during the data analysis process as suggested by Adu (2019). Bracketing increased the credibility of the findings while promoting self-awareness and encouraging me to give balanced attention to all parts of the data (Adu, 2019). By listing my perspectives and preconceptions, I was able to be aware of how they influenced my analysis.

Methodology

The methodology for this research is explained in this section. The methodology includes the participant selection process, the interview protocol, and the process used for recruitment, participation, and data collection. The last section of the methodology outlines the process for data analysis.

Participant Selection

This study focused on civilian educators of prekindergarten to second grade military-connected students because previous studies and reviewed literature uncovered more vulnerability to the effects of deployment in younger children (Nguyen et al., 2014). Young children coping with military deployment-related family division tend to express their feelings through externalizing behaviors, which can have an adverse effect on their academic success (Nguyen et al., 2014) and present social, psychosocial, academic, and school-based challenges (Moses and McCrary, 2021). The participant pool consisted of teachers, counselors, and administrators from more than 50 different elementary schools

in a district of a southeastern state in the United States that has active military installments. Participant selection was based on the grade level of students they work with as well as their official role at the school and being civilian educators. Within this district in this southeastern state, there were about 500 teachers, counselors, and administrators who provided services to students from kindergarten to second grade.

Recruitment consisted of direct emails to educators' public email addresses. The recruitment goal was to screen, qualify, and schedule 10 to 12 educators for inclusion in the study (i.e., three to four participants from each category: classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators). This diverse sampling of educators would provide a rich tapestry of information and would be imperative to the success of the study. In the instance that a minimum of 10 participants were not secured, the attrition plans included broadening the parameters of the study to include third grade educators as well as broadening the study location to other districts in the same southeastern state that are also near an active military base. As early childhood is usually defined as birth to age 8, most third grade students fit into this category for their first few months in the grade level.

If people responded with interest in participating but did not meet the screening criteria, they were thanked for their interest and informed of their exclusion from consideration due to lack of qualification. If a participant did not show for a scheduled interview or needed to leave before the interview was concluded, an attempt was made to reschedule for another interview time. If a candidate was unable to participate during any part of the process, they were excused from the study and another participant from the pool was contacted for inclusion in the study. Considering these possible challenges of

my qualitative research study and creating a plan helped me to push through adversity and address other issues that arose during the participant selection and interview process.

Instrumentation

A major goal of the study was to learn how civilian educators of military-connected students interact with and service this group of students. Interviews were the data collection instrument for this study. The participants were asked to speak on their perspectives on the supports needed for military-connected early childhood students and how they differ in method and frequency from supports needed by their civilian students. In addition, I invited the participants to share any insights they had into interventions and resources that they believed would be useful, empowering, and make a positive difference in the academic and developmental success of their military-connected early childhood students. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) framed interviews as the collection of data consisting of quotes from participants about their personal experiences, conclusions, feelings, and awareness. The exploratory nature of the study and the researcher objectives align with the semi structured interview as this type of interview encouraged the sharing of information as people told stories through the answering of questions and responses to previously specified topics (Bóia et al., 2018).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that one of the main purposes for a qualitative researcher to use interviews is to obtain information and interpretation about a specific circumstance from the person being interviewed. There were three different interview instruments, one for each of the different research questions and groups of stakeholders being studied. The data collection instruments were researcher produced and follow

Merriam and Tisdell's suggestions in their interview guide as outlined in Appendix A. The instruments (Appendices B–D) were a diverse compilation of "four major categories of questions: hypothetical, devil's advocate, ideal position, and interpretive questions" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 119). Hypothetical questions asked what the participant might do in a certain situation and devil's advocate questions challenged the participant to consider an opposing view (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ideal position questions asked participants to describe an ideal situation and interpretive questions were designed to solicit reactions based on the interpretation of previous responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This design was intentional to promote flow of conversation and motivated the participants to interact and talk freely about their experiences and feelings.

Through answering the questions in the instruments, the participants provided data that answered the research questions specific to their job title of teacher (RQ1), counselor (RQ2), or administrator (RQ3). To enhance the validity and reliability of the interview instruments, I asked an expert panel of three colleagues with advanced degrees in education to aid in establishing sufficiency of each instrument to answer the research question. This expert validation provided feedback that led to the final version of the interview instruments (see Appendices B–D). Along with the expert panel validation, the instrument was aligned with the literature and theoretical model as detailed in Appendix E. After transcription and preliminary research findings, participants were provided with tentative interpretations so they could provide feedback on the plausibility of the data that were derived from their interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method of respondent validation was paramount in ruling out the possibility of interpretation and researcher

biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following this process of member checking added validity and reliability to the instrument as well as the data from the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

For this study, data sources included interviews and a research audit trail. The one-to-one interviews were conducted with civilian administrators, counselors, and teachers of military-connected students in grades prekindergarten through second grade. All data sources address the central research questions about civilian educators' perspectives of needed supports for military-connected early childhood students. In conjunction with this alignment, the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection were strictly followed as a method to further enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

The recruitment procedures were developed in accordance with the requirements of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). A community connection and Google Maps were utilized to determine the location of the participants' schools of employment as being near a military base and servicing military-connected early childhood students. Emails were sent to the public email addresses of all teachers, counselors, and administrators in the selected areas who were classified on their school websites as working with students from prekindergarten to second grade. As these emails are a part of public domain, no consent to use them was required. A personal family acquaintance who is a former military-connected wife turned teacher had personal connections to one of the school districts located near an active military base. I asked my contact to direct others in the district with interest to answer the email and to forward the

email to others who may be interested. There were approximately 500 educators who were solicited for participation in this research study. This process provided enough contacts to meet the sample size of 10-12 participants.

The data collection took place over several months after IRB approval. Due to circumstances at the time, and in accordance with policies that had been instituted due to COVID-19, Zoom interviews were used in lieu of face-to-face interviews. Data collection, in relation to the interviews, involved corresponding individually with selected educators to schedule the dates and times for the main interviews. My first contact was used to gather basic demographic information as well as background information from each participant. This first correspondence helped me familiarize myself with the participant and to take note of any nuances in their written tone. This correspondence also provided an opportunity to build a rapport with the participant and to solidify the foundation for the main interview. The main interview was scheduled for each participant with a third encounter being an option if needed. A time frame of 30 to 45 minutes was allotted for this interview. Using the Zoom platform allowed the meeting to occur wherever was most comfortable and appropriate for all involved. This interview was recorded to be transcribed later. The main interview was a mixture of questions (see Appendices B–D) designed to engage the different participant groups (administrators, counselors, and teachers) in sharing their perspective on military-connected students who attend their school, and how these students are supported as a group and in individual experiences. This main interview asked a variety of questions that were open-ended and produced descriptive data including stories about the participants knowledge, opinions,

feelings, and personal experiences with military-connected students (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although a third interview was an option, none were scheduled as no need for follow-up questions developed.

Data collection, in relation to the research audit trail, consisted of a detailed account of "how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 252). Creating an audit trail challenged me as a researcher to be intentional and careful with keeping records throughout the entire study (Carcary, 2020). Following the guidelines of Merriam and Tisdell (2016), my audit trail described in detail data collection, theme origins, and decision making throughout the entire research process. According to Carcary (2020) when an audit trail is used during qualitative research, it provides a record of how the study was conducted and how the researcher arrived at their conclusions. A logbook with research notes on the process of conducting the research, including methods and procedures, was kept throughout the study. Reflections, questions, and decisions made regarding any problems, issues, or ideas encountered during data collection were recorded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A running record of any interaction with the data during analysis and interpretation were also included in the audit trail. These data sources worked to build confidence in the study results by convincingly showing how the means justified the results.

Data Analysis Plan

This basic qualitative study involved investigating the perspectives of a variety of civilian teachers, counselors, and administrators who work with military-connected

children in prekindergarten through second grade. The study participants were all educators from elementary schools in school districts in a southeastern state in the United States that are located near an active military base. The research study gathered their perspectives of what supports, if any, are needed for military-connected children who are being taught by civilian educators. The data were collected from the stakeholders through interviews with open-ended questions.

According to Simon and Goes (2018) qualitative data analysis can be defined as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 313). When conducting analysis, the researcher is searching for patterns in data and ideas that are paramount in the understanding and explaining of why those patterns exist in the first place (Saldaña, 2021). For this study, the plan was to implement a thematic inductive analysis approach that included the use of In Vivo coding in the first cycle, and Axial coding as the bridge to a second cycle of Pattern coding. While this plan mirrored the language used by Saldaña (2021), it was formulated after consideration of the research questions and the amalgamation of different approaches from "the field's diverse data analytic methods" (p. xxi). The umbrella of thematic analysis focused the researcher on detectable themes and patterns related to living and behavior (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). Inductive data analysis during the coding process allowed the themes to emerge from the data (Simon & Goes, 2018). Inductive analysis was driven by the data instead of attempting to fit the data into categories that already existed (Kostere & Kostere, 2022).

To analyze the data that were collected, and to validate its accuracy, I synthesized my specific research analysis plan with a combination of basic steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013), Adu (2019), Creswell and Creswell (2018), Saldaña (2021), and Kostere and Kostere (2022). The raw data from each participant's recorded interview were organized and transcribed into a Microsoft Word document in preparation for individual examination as well as analysis in a holistic "big picture" fashion (Simon & Goes, 2018). Since this study included 11 participants and interviews spanned over several months, transcribing and interviewing happened concurrently. After each transcript was confirmed for accuracy by the participant, I began manually coding the data. Coding was a multi-step process consisting of several rounds that provided descriptions about people in a specific setting as well as major themes that were used to make complex connections in subsequent cycles (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Coding was a natural process that aligned with how the human mind naturally works—by digesting large amounts of information by breaking it into smaller pieces. This is how our brain turns information into knowledge (Saldaña, 2021). According to Elliott (2018), "Coding is a ubiquitous part of the qualitative research process" (p. 2850) and is fundamental in the process that researchers use to break down their data and form something new. At the beginning of the process, coding was done by hand using hard copies of the transcripts and a combination of color coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and index card sorting (Adu, 2019). Simon and Goes (2018) call this open coding and label it as the first level of information breakdown. For this first cycle of code generating, In Vivo coding was used (Saldaña, 2021). By drawing from participants own language to

garner codes, it was easier for me to set aside all pre-understandings and preconceived ideas (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). In Vivo coding was the beginning stage of data analysis that split the data into individually coded keywords, phrases, and segments.

Codes created during the initial In Vivo coding cycle were analyzed and clustered into categories from which they were prioritized to develop "axis" categories which other categories revolve around (Saldaña, 2021). This method, termed Axial coding, reassembled the data that were split to determine which codes were the dominant ones based on occurrences in each interview transcript. During Axial coding, "synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed, and the best representative codes are selected" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 308) to be categories. As code reduction occurred, there were discrepant data that did not fit neatly into any one category. These data were revisited and analyzed for possible outside influences and other differences that resulted in their elimination or necessity of gathering more details by consulting the original interview transcription. During the Axial coding process, saturation was achieved as no new information seemed to emerge from the clustering of codes into categories (Saldaña, 2021).

Finally, Pattern coding with a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet facilitated the emergence of overarching themes. According to Saldaña (2021) qualitative researchers seek patterns as indicators of stability in the way humans live and work to make the world more understandable, predictable, and manageable. Pattern coding pulled together the material from the In Vivo and Axial coding of each of the stakeholder groups and organized it "into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis" (Saldaña, 2021,

p. 322). These themes became the research study findings. Looking at patterns in the data from all three stakeholder groups helped common words and phrases to be considered as contributors to the main themes. Determining how the description and themes were represented was the next step that Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested. The representation of each theme included narrative passages and a description that conveyed my analysis of the data collected. My final step involved using the themes to interpret the meaning of the data. This permitted me to incorporate my personal interpretation which included my understanding of the study along with my own culture, history, and experiences.

Trustworthiness

As a researcher, demonstrating how I established trustworthiness in my study was imperative in the overall acceptance of my results. To establish trustworthiness, I needed to address the areas of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. There are several different strategies that can be utilized to establish trustworthiness in the above areas. As a researcher, I was tasked with determining which strategies fit best with my research method and then developing the strategies in context of the study. The identified strategies were used with fidelity throughout the study design, data collection, and data analysis processes.

Simon and Goes (2018) shared that the credibility criterion should be focused on exhibiting a correlation between the responses of the study experts (teachers, counselors, and administrators) and the information represented by the evaluator and creator of the instrument (the researcher and the research in the study). To build credibility in the study,

triangulation was utilized. Yazan (2015) shared four strategies of triangulating data as data source triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. This study utilized data source triangulation by examining data from different participants that were collected using the same method. The method of data collection for this study was interviews from different participants which included classroom teachers who provide academic instruction to a variety of students including military-connected children, administrators who serve as leaders of schools whose population includes children with military-connections, and counselors who deliver social and emotional support to military-connected students. Saturation was also used to strengthen the credibility of the study. For the study, 10 to 12 educators were interviewed, with each of the research question groups having 3-4 participants. This provided a complete and truthful picture of the civilian educators' perspective on the supports needed for military-connected early childhood students to be academically successful in civilian schools (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The credibility of the study was maintained through member checks of the transcribed interviews and emergent themes by each participant to determine accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants were given the opportunity to comment on the study findings and a follow-up interview was offered but none of the participants deemed it necessary for accuracy to be achieved.

Transferability refers to the results having the potential to be transferred to different settings and yielding the same result. One technique that can enhance this aspect of external validity is the use of thick description (Yazan, 2015). Although each relationship and space that teachers, counselors, and administrators work within is

unique, describing all components of the study in detail provides other researchers with the information they need to recreate the study with other participants, settings, treatments, and measures (Simon & Goes, 2018). The recruitment of participants as well as the interview process yielded rich and vivid data that could possibly be gathered in a different location with the same result. In this study, the instrument used for data collection as well as the location of the participant's school districts near active military bases could potentially be transferred to other studies nationwide.

Similar to credibility of the study was dependability in the study. The dependability of the study came from member checking which involves asking the participants to review the transcripts and emerging themes of their interviews to ensure that I had understood their responses, represented their perceptions accurately, and captured the essence of the entire experience. Triangulating the three different sets of interview data from this qualitative study were necessary "to build a coherent justification for themes" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By using the converging perspectives of the study participants to establish themes, validity and dependability were added to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Developing an audit trail including analysis and process notes of what I saw, heard, and thought during the interview, as well as how the study should proceed helped bolster the dependability of the study (Simon & Goes, 2018). Producing a research audit trail was an important factor in guaranteeing that the correct amount of "emphasis [was] placed on the theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions made throughout the study" (Carcary, 2020) as well as critical reflection and evaluation of decisions made on the part of the researcher. Dependability of the study

directly correlated to my position with regards to the study (Yazan, 2015). In a transparent strategy of dependability, I explained my position and personal connection to the study with enough detail to demonstrate that my conclusions make sense which increased the credence of my interpretation (Yazan, 2015).

The final aspect of trustworthiness that was considered was confirmability. To build on the confirmability of the research study, I needed to examine my background and position to see how they influenced the research process. Recognizing that biases exist helped to keep them from being an unacknowledged factor in the data analysis. Keeping a reflexive journal to reflect on what happens during the research process and bracketing any of my own feelings or biases that emerged during the interview phase was one way that I maintained the confirmability of the research study. During this reflection, I asked myself if I was truly generating a description of the phenomenon that was comprehensive and accurate while developing my interpretation of the data (Yazan, 2015). Throughout the entire study, I continually questioned my actions to make sure I was validating my data for confirmability as well as credibility, dependability, and transferability.

Ethical Procedures

In preparation for conducting a study with human participants, I completed the CITI Program Doctoral Student Researchers training. Upon approval from the IRB at Walden University, I began recruiting participants and collecting data in the form of interviews as outlined in this chapter. An informed consent agreement was provided to all participants, and they all had an opportunity to read said form and ask questions before

they gave consent and interviewing began. This agreed consent helped to limit legal issues that could arise. The informed consent included confidentiality, pseudonyms, and the possibility of discussions and interview content being published. Confidentiality was assured to all participants before their entering into the study to protect their rights during the study. All personal information and any identifying factors were kept confidential with any information that could be used to disclose the participants' identity was removed. The participants were assigned a participant identifier and only general information about the participants was shared. Participation was voluntary and those who begin the process could withdraw and conclude their involvement at any time. All paper records that were created as a part of the IRB application and interview process were stored in a secure, locked location in my home office. I shredded the paper records that originated during the data entry and analysis phases. A password protected computer with an encrypted external drive that is my personal property was used to store all digital and audio versions of the interviews, transcripts, and data analysis. I am the only one who can access the data, and I will destroy the storage device 5 years after my dissertation approval date.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a detailed outline of the research method that was the basis of my qualitative study. This approach was used to study the perspectives of civilian educators of military-connected children. I conducted one main interview, with a second being an option, to gather data from the 11 voluntary participants who were either classroom teachers, counselors, or administrators in school districts that were located

near an active military base in a southeastern state in the United States. This chapter outlined my data collection as well as the data analysis. I also included how I built and maintained trustworthiness and ethical procedures throughout the duration of the study. Chapter 4 is dedicated to presenting the results of the research study and includes the setting for the study, the data collection specifics, analysis of the data collected, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perspectives of educators regarding the needed support for military-connected students who are being educated in civilian schools. To delineate between the different stakeholders who fall under the category of educator, the following three research questions were used for this study:

1. What are teachers' perspectives of the classroom supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?
2. What are counselors' perspectives of the counseling supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?
3. What are administrators' perspectives of the administrative and school-wide supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?

In this chapter, I present the setting of the study, including participant demographics. The method I used for data collection as well as the data analysis process are explained. Next, I present the results of the study with an analysis of the data collected, which were coded and categorized into four emergent themes related to the three research questions. Finally, evidence of trustworthiness is addressed in the forms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Setting

This study was conducted through electronic means during several months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although effects of COVID-19 on the education system were mentioned during interviews, none of the participants indicated having any special concerns related to the pandemic that affected their participation in this study. Upon consideration, there did not appear to be any other personal or organizational conditions that influenced the participants or their experience at the time of the study that could have an impact on the data analysis of the study. At the time of their interview, each participant was a civilian educator employed in a public school district and working in a position that involved early childhood students. Table 1 lists the participant identifiers, demographics, and characteristics relevant to the study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant identifiers	Position title	Military connection [a]	Years in current position	Years in current district
A1	Assistant principal	DNC	16	6
A2	Assistant principal	Military spouse	6	15
A3	Principal	Father retired military	6	26
A4	Assistant principal	DNC	5	19
T1	Teacher (general)	Military spouse	1	1
T2	Teacher (general)	Veteran and military spouse	8	12
T3	Teacher (special education)	Military spouse	3	5
T4	Teacher (general)	DNC	14	14
C1	Counselor	DNC	6	8
C2	Counselor	DNC	12	21
C3	Counselor	DNC	1	1

[a] DNC = did not comment on any personal connection to the military in their responses.

The table shows information for the 11 study participants. Four of the participants held the title of administrator, whereas four others were teachers and three were counselors. Among the group of participants, their length of years in their current positions ranged from 1 to 16 years, with an average time of 7 years. Five of the 11 participants had a personal connection to the military, with one participant being a veteran as well as a military spouse. All participants' employment occurred in the same southeastern state in the United States.

Data Collection

During the IRB approval process and participant recruitment, the COVID-19 pandemic closure guidelines intensified, which created complications in recruitment, as well as rendering in-person interviews impossible. It became necessary to devise a plan that focused solely on electronic recruitment and interviews. Once I obtained IRB approval (02-26-21-0308478), I started the recruitment process in one school district located near an active military base in a southeastern state in the United States, using public email addresses acquired from said school district websites. After the first round of emails only garnered seven participants, my committee and I agreed on changing the procedure to include a neighboring school district that was still within close proximity to the same active military base. Once this change was approved by the IRB, another round of email invitations was sent out while transcription and data analysis began on the previously conducted interviews. When the second round of emails garnered no new participants, the committee decided to petition the IRB to change the procedure one final

time to include participants from any school district located near an active military base within the southeastern state.

For data collection in my basic qualitative research study, I used Zoom (https://zoom.us), which is a web-based platform with audio and video recording. All participants were sent links to my personal meeting room on Zoom at the predetermined time for their interview. Each participant managed their own physical setting. There was one interview where technical complications in the form of internet connectivity disrupted the audio recording; however, the participant was willing to restate her answer so that it could be more clearly recorded. Each participant took part in a single interview. During interviews, the participants were able to speak freely and offered responses to all interview questions. As a final step in each interview, I asked the participant if they had anything else they would like to add or that was pertinent to the study. This provided them an opportunity to share something not previously addressed in the interview.

I transcribed the interview recordings by downloading each Zoom audio/video file into Express Scribe Transcription Software. This software, along with a foot pedal, allowed for more controlled playback on each interview. I typed each transcript in a Word document, bolding the questions and labeling the text with either the participant identifier (see Table 1) or RI, for Research Interviewer. Upon completion of transcription, I emailed a copy to the respective participant for review. One of the participants suggested minor corrections, while the others confirmed accuracy. Once the minor corrections were made, I considered the transcripts finalized.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were collected in this study through the use of open-ended interviews, which are an inductive strategy suggested by Merriam and Grenier (2019) for qualitative research practices. The inductive data analysis process was based on the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2013), Adu (2019), Creswell and Creswell (2018), Saldaña (2021), and Kostere and Kostere (2022) and consisted of (a) transcribing the data, (b) manually coding the data, (c) clustering codes into categories, (d) developing patterns in categories into themes, and (d) interpreting meaning from the categories, patterns, and themes.

Data analysis began during the data collection process. I collected the perspectives of teachers, counselors, and administrators to assess the supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students. Interviews consisted of educators being asked some general questions that provided background information about their knowledge of military culture and then they were asked a series of questions that were specifically related to their experiences and perspectives in supporting military-connected students. Their perspectives were used to identify themes, while also identifying areas for awareness and knowledge acquisition for civilian educators of military-connected early childhood students. As I transcribed the interviews and then read and reread participant responses, I became increasingly familiar with the data and saw the emergence of codes, categories, and themes. I revisited Chapter 3 to keep my focus on the purpose of the study and the conceptual framework for the study. I used the in vivo inductive coding process first, as suggested by Saldaña (2021)

and Adu (2019), so that the voices of the participants would lead the study findings. As I progressed through the interviews and transcriptions, I kept the codes in a notebook, which I referenced frequently so I would recognize codes that were similar or related to codes previously identified while continually adding newly evident codes. Because there were three research questions that related to three different stakeholder groups, I initially coded each set of data in their perspective groupings of teachers (RQ1), counselors (RQ2), and administrators (RQ3). Although my personal experience as a military-connected student who attended civilian schools was a major mitigating factor in the selection of the research questions, using inductive coding allowed the data to speak for itself instead of readers thinking that the data were force-fit into preexisting codes (Saldaña, 2021). At the conclusion of reading all 11 of the transcribed interviews, I recognized connections among the codes and grouped them into larger categories that reflected the connections. At the conclusion of my analysis, 21 total categories were identified. Tables 2, 3, and 4 display the categories, description of interview questions, and in vivo codes (data samples) from the teacher, counselor, and administrator interviews, respectively.

Table 2

Categories, Description of Interview Questions, and In Vivo Codes (Data Samples) From Teacher Interviews

Categories	Description of interview questions	In vivo codes (data samples)
Awareness	Experiences working with military-connected students; School policies concerning military-connected students	"I am not aware of them" "There is a lot of in and out" "A nondisclosure with families" "I really don't know if there are any policies"
Community	School's culture or community concerning military-connected students	"We should all make sure that the kid gets what that kid needs" "A collective community effort" "It takes a community; it takes a village"
Connections	Role and responsibility as classroom teacher	"Being more intentional in checking-in" "Best serve the students holistically, emotionally, and academically"
Counselor	Perspective on the needed supports for military-connected students	"Counseling should be more available" "She will ask all the right questions when she knows the child is military"
Gaps	Perspective on the needed supports for military-connected students	"They need you to help them fill in some holes" "Missing a whole chunk of his education" "Swiss cheese learning" "Disparity"
Military culture	Knowledge of military culture	"They bring so much culture and such a fresh perspective" "There is so much more than just moving a lot"
Relationships	Role and responsibility; personal classroom practices and instruction influenced by presence of military-connected students	"I really reached out to the parent" "Unique perspective on life and their classroom relationships"
Support	Perspective on the needed supports for military-connected students	"Helping them transition" "It wasn't really much of a support system after all" "Support a student emotionally"
Understanding	Experiences working with military-connected students; Knowledge of military culture	"The kids tend to be way more self-sufficient" "People don't understand" "The school needs to understand a little bit better"

Table 3

Categories, Description of Interview Questions, and In Vivo Codes (Data Samples) From Counselor Interviews

Categories	Description of interview questions	In vivo codes (data samples)
Awareness	Experiences working with military-connected students	"I don't know a whole lot" "They usually let us know right up front"
Connections	Role and responsibility as Counselor	"Huge military support group" "A newcomer's club" "Instant friend group"
Military culture	Knowledge of military culture	"Military mindset" "I can imagine it is so different" "Good percentage of teachers who have some sort of military background" "Knowledge of this is very limited"
Policy	School policies concerning military-connected students	"We have a lot of rules surrounding our military kids" "Attendance policies" "Military Reciprocity Rule"
Relationships	Role and responsibility; personal classroom practices and instruction influenced by presence of military-connected students	"We try to help as much as we can" "Great partnership with them" "Want to have a conversation with the student"
Understanding	Experiences working with military-connected students; Knowledge of military culture	"I think our teachers are very understanding" "There are a lot of pros and there's a lot of cons"

Table 4

Categories, Description of Interview Questions, and In Vivo Codes (Data Samples) From Administrator Interviews

Categories	Description of interview questions	In vivo codes (data samples)
Awareness	Experiences working with military-connected students; School policies concerning military-connected students	"Sometimes teachers are not sure what questions they can and cannot ask" "Helping the teachers and having some in-service"
Deployment	Experiences working with military-connected students; School policies concerning military-connected students	"How a change at home has such a big effect on what is going on at school"
Military culture	Knowledge of military culture	"Very rule orientated, policy driven" "I am very familiar with the culture of the military"
Relationships	Role and responsibility; personal classroom practices and instruction influenced by presence of military-connected students	"We are all in this together" "Make sure they know that it is okay to tell us" "Culture and climate of positivity"
Specialized support	Specific policies when military-connected students' transition; Immediate response to deployment	"Bridge some of the things that they may have missed moving around" "Multi-needs of students" "Gaps and interventions" "National standards"
Understanding	Experiences working with military-connected students; Knowledge of military culture	"Make sure we do something extra" "They do go through emotional ups and downs"

Of the 21 categories that emerged during data analysis, four categories presented across all three of the research question-based data sets. The categories that emerged from the three data sets were then clustered back into one group labeled educators and analyzed for patterns and to determine saturation. Concerning saturation, I determined the frequency of which each category emerged in the 11 interviews and resolved that the threshold for saturation would be reached when a category occurred in six or more

interviews. More specifically, categories occurring in many (6–8), most (9–10), or all (11) of the interviews were considered to have occurred enough to have significant meaning. During this second level of coding, patterns were identified, which allowed main themes to develop and synthesize meaning. This process of lumping, splintering, and clumping facilitated the gathering of findings and natural generalizations supported by the direct quotations of the study participants.

Results

At the conclusion of my data coding and analysis, four main themes were identified: awareness, relationships, specialized support, and understanding. These themes demonstrated meaningful commonalities in the data. Each main theme was comprised of categories that correlated in meaning based on data from participant interviews. Table 5 displays the themes, the commonalities in participant responses, and the categories represented in each theme.

Table 5

Themes, Commonalities in Responses, and Categories

Theme	Commonality	Categories
Awareness	Educators had various levels of awareness regarding the presence of military-connected students in their schools or of school and district policies specific to the military-connected population. Educators were aware of instructional gaps caused by the transient nature of military life.	Awareness Gaps Policy Deployment
Relationships	Educators believed that they and their schools have created climates that are encouraging and inclusive to all students with a special sensitivity to military-connected students.	Relationships Community Connections
Specialized support	Educators believed that more resources, training, and specialized support should be provided for themselves to better support military-connected students.	Specialized support Support Counselor
Understanding	Many of the educators understood military culture due to a personal connection in their own lives.	Understanding military culture

Theme 1: Awareness

One of the interview questions posed to the study participants asked them to share their experiences working with military-connected students and their families. Since interviews were conducted with participants at schools located near active military installments, the assumption was that there would be military-connected students present at the schools. Participant C1 shared that there are quite a few military-connected students at her school. Participant A1 stated that her school has a very big population of military-connected students, and although most of their parents are higher-ranking enlisted and officers who do not have as much turnover, all situations are treated individually and differently if needed. There is a parttime Military Family Life Counselor (MFLC) and a program dedicated to the large military-connected population of students at their school. At the time of his interview, Participant A4 was an administrator at a total

magnet school, with students from all parts of the city, including from an active military installation. Participant A3 shared a story to relate how she is super aware of the military families in her school because of her own personal connections to the military. She said,

> A parent came today, and she had her uniform on, so I know she was on her way to work. She dropped of her student in prekindergarten. He was late and you know, in the big scheme of things, do we like tardy kids, no, but watching that mama give her baby a hug and say, "I love you!" and he say, "I luwv you back!" and knowing that she is looking at him like ... she is going to serve our country every day and dropping her baby off at the school. All I can think of is she has given us the best thing that she has probably ever created in her life, and it is our job to take care of her baby. No judgement, no questions.

Participant A2's husband was in the military, and she shared that her awareness was from her own personal children and their experiences. Participant T4 had "never experienced a parent openly sharing that they were active duty or active members of the military in her 14 years in education." Her awareness came from informal conversation with students and their friends or from observing parents in uniform. Participant T1 was very aware of the number of military-connected students in her class and in the school community.

Gaps

Due to the differing standardized practices across states and districts, military-connected students can have academic adjustment issues that include instructional and learning gaps. Due to transitions in the middle of a school year to a different state,

Participant T2 had a student who was “missing a whole chunk of his education,” while Participant A2 mentioned some of her experiences with military-connected students involved “learning gaps, but maybe just gaps in instruction [because of] different standards and that type of thing.” Participant T3 used the phrase “Swiss cheese learning” to describe the holes in learning and instructional gaps she witnessed in her military-connected students. One such situation arose with a student who missed an entire year of Georgia History because he lived in a different state. When the teacher was asking questions about Georgia, the student did not know the answer and the rest of the class looked at him like “why don’t you know this?” Since schools in the same state do not always have the same standards and pacing, Participant A1 encouraged her teachers to differentiate instruction as needed to fit military-connected students into the teaching cycle and “bridge some of the things that they may have missed moving around.” She worked to instill the mindset that “the change in curriculum does not mean a child is slow but that they may have come from a state that might not have been on the same [page],” and have an instructional gap that can be fixed.

Military-connected students do not just encounter instructional gaps between states and districts but also when moving from duty stations in different countries. When dealing with a military-connected student who had been stationed abroad, Participant C1 had to explain to him that it was okay that the class was doing things he did not know and that “in a little bit, they will probably get to something that they do not know how to do but you already had.” Participant A4 found it challenging for military-connected students

to adjust to the rigor at his school due to the transient nature that can be a part of military life.

Policy

When asked about particular policies for military-connected students at their school or district, the participants answers were inconsistent. Participants C3, T2, and T1 stated that they were not currently aware of any policies, but it is something they would be open to learning more about. Participant T4 said she "honestly cannot recount any policies that may [have been] shared or disclosed to teachers." She felt this demonstrated the disparity between districts and states and how they handle what should be a distinguished group of students. Participant A4, who is at a public magnet school, stated that his school "reserves a certain [number] of spots per year for military families" who might get orders and need to change schools after open enrollment. Participant A1 shared that her school tries to let the military-connected students know that they are supported by having several events during the month of the military child. Participant C1 shared that her school has "a lot of [policies] surrounding our military kids." One of the policies they have include students being able to start school without enrollment documentation if the parent produces their active military orders. Another policy, the Military Reciprocity Rule, is one that is for the entire state of Georgia regarding the gifted program and military-connected students not needing to retest to be enrolled in the program. The Military Reciprocity Rule as well as flexible attendance policies and excused absences for military events or upcoming deployments were included in the policies at Participant C2's school. Participant T3 stated "there is a form that you have to fill out at the

beginning of the school year identifying military students because the school gets money based on how many military kids they have."

Deployment

Most of what participants mention about deployment was that it causes disruptions and moves during the middle of the school year. Participant C3 knew about deployment from the experiences of a friend, and she shared that with deployment "there are a lot of pros and there's a lot of cons." As a result of relationships that they have built with the parents, Participant A1's school knew when most of their parents were being deployed and worked to understand and support the parent or grandparent that was going to be taking care of the child when mom or dad deployed. She also recognized that deployment could affect the child's behavior, causing them to "seem a little different or upset or down."

At Participant A2's school, their policy was to "grant time off to students and [staff] spouses also when there are deployments or rejoining to the family." Similarly, Participant A4 stated,

> if the kids need to stay out of school because a parent is coming in or leaving, we don't count that as an unexcused absence. We make sure that its excused so that they are not penalized for wanting to take a couple days to handle the sendoff or the receiving of a parent coming in town from being deployed.

Participant C1 relayed that when she found out a parent was going to be deployed, she ran a military deployment small group where all the students with a deployed parent could come together and talk about deployment-related issues. She has them mark return

dates on a calendar, so they have a visual representation of the number of days left until their parent returns. To show similarities and build relationships in the group, she has them share with each their preferred methods of communicating with their deployed parent. Participant A3 mentioned the social-emotional side of deployment and how they host small groups to help students deal with the separation anxiety they might experience when someone they are close to gets deployed or suffers a military-related death.

Participant C2 described deployment as one of the challenges she encounters when working with military-connected students and their families. Different from the normal deployment overseas, she spoke of parents being deployed to permanent assignments away from their families but still stateside. One of her students had a father who was deployed to another state and came home four times a year and spent 10 days each time. She shared that her student was really struggling with the arrangement and as the counselor, she was unfamiliar with "the dynamics of how best to meet the child's needs when the family is so spread out and communication is not always possible."

When sharing information about deployment, Participant T2 focused on the parent left behind. She understood from her husband's deployments the challenges that the home-based primary caregiver may face. This experience pushed her to reach out to her military-connected students' parents regularly and check on them to make sure they were managing everything and offered them any resources that she had at her disposal.

Theme 2: Relationships

Relationships involve connections between two people or groups. According to Participant C3 it began as a simple conversation with the military-connected students to

give them a chance to share their lives and feelings. When Participant A1 was asked about her experiences working with military-connected students, her answer also included building a rapport so that positive relationships can be made, and trust can be established. Participant A2 held relationships in a high regard and felt it was her responsibility to develop and cultivate "a culture and climate of positivity at [the] school" for all the students, not something done separately for the military-connected students. Participant T1 felt it was her responsibility to be flexible in her classroom and allow for open dialogue so that if the kids wanted to talk about what they are experiencing or feeling, they felt safe. She had a set routine that aided in students being able to transition into a new environment quickly but also had a place in her room where they could go if "they just sometimes needed somebody to talk to or they just needed a hug."

Another way that relationships were encouraged at schools was through staff-facilitated small groups or peer counselors. Participant A2 had peer helpers at her school, and they were paired up with all new students who registered after the beginning of the school year. They used someone from the new student's grade level and classes so they had a familiar face and could get help with whatever they needed. Participants A1, A3, C1, C2, and C3 all advocated for small groups geared specifically toward military-connected students to help them acclimate, adjust, and get the support they needed. To help newly stationed military-connected students form bonds, Participant C1 ran a newcomers club every semester. Although any student new to the school was welcome to come, they reserved certain meetings for just the military-connected students to provide

them with “an instant friend group.” She shared the following story about how she built a relationship with a student:

> I have one little boy, bless him. He is so sweet. He is from England, and he is shy. He comes to my office every morning just to say, “Good Morning” and “Hello” because that makes him come all the way to the back of the building. [Before], he was kind of refusing to come in. Now, he comes all the way to the back of the building and once he says “hi” to me, well, he just needs to go around the corner to get to his classroom. It gets him in the [school] door a little bit easier.

Building relationships takes time which is a precious commodity during the instructional day. Participant T2 suggested an after-school program to provide more connection time for military-connected students. Participant T4 shared that she saw building relationships with her students as a part of her job duties. She regularly conducted “check-ins” with all her students to allow them to use their voice and to make sure she was addressing all their needs. When she had a military-connected student, she was listening for their voice to portray worry, stress, or anxiety so that she could provide them the necessary support.

Community

To involve the community, Participant A1 facilitated a Veteran’s Day program each year. Last year, due to Covid, the program was held as a drive-thru and over 300 people from the community attended. She shared, “the veterans were saying how much they appreciate that we are teaching all our children about being appreciative to the veterans and all they did.” Likewise, Participant T4’s school had a week-long celebration

for Veteran's Day and spent time reflecting on the men and women who served. They also utilized partners in education to help bring awareness to deployments of "parents and guardians as they are making their journey to serve our country." Participant C3 shared it is important for military-connected families to feel close to someone at the school to build the sense of community. Community involvement was regarded highly at Participant A2's school where their community partners donated a small lunch or cake reception for the military-connected student group each month.

When new military families were stationed near her school, Participant C1 met with them and gave them a packet that had community business names and numbers that they might need to get settled. She also gave them information that was relative to their specific neighborhood so they could get settled and acclimated as quickly as possible. Her school has also been adopted by the nearby military installation so that when they need volunteers to read to the students or participate in career day, half a dozen soldiers in full uniform were only a phone call away. When describing her school climate, Participant C2 described the school community as a neighborhood built around three schools, one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. This made for not only a strong community atmosphere, but the kids were always together, and they had a huge military support group.

Connections

In this research study, connections referred to the bonds between the students, their families or home, educators or the school, the military, and the community.

Concerning the connection between students and educators or the school, Participant C1 had a personal connection to being the "new kid" in school. She shared:

> My dad was in education. He was a university professor and every three or four years, he would get a better job at another university and off we would go moving to wherever. So, I was not military, but I was the new kid a lot.

Concerning the connection between home and school, Participant A1 shared that her school has an open-door policy and works to maintain a good rapport with parents "so they feel like they can tell us [about deployments] and they trust that we are going to try to help their child in any way we can." Participant A3 talked about how her school personnel completes multiple home visits just to meet the families and to let them know about available resources should they need them.

Concerning the connection between educators or the school and the military, Participants A2, A3, T1, T2, and T3 all disclosed a personal connection to the military. Participant T2 and her husband were both military veterans. Participant A3 was a military-connected student as her father was in the military when she was growing up. Participants A2, T1, and T3 were all military spouses. Participant C1 shared that at her school, there was a good percentage of teachers who had some sort of military background. Participant T1 loved the military culture and that she could "bring a personal connection to [her] students who are military-connected and to their parents as well."

Theme 3: Specialized Support

The sharing of their perspectives regarding the needed supports for military-connected students when they are in civilian schools was the main reason for the study

and provided several opportunities for rich discussion during the participant's interviews. Participant A2 presented an argument for national standards because of the transient nature of military life. She stated that "standardizing some practices as far as pacing guides" would help to accommodate for learning and instructional gaps and help in the provision of specialized interventions. Participant T4 suggested that schools near military installations should have guidance counselors with a military background to best support the military-connected students holistically. Some educators discussed having a military liaison for the district to serve as the bridge between the military and the civilian school. Participant A1 stated it would be helpful to have "an extra person to help when they are coming in or even moving from on base to off base" who understands the culture and knows the chain of command because "sometimes teachers are not sure what questions they can and cannot ask." She also suggested an in-service or awareness training for classroom teachers to help them understand how to best support their military-connected students. Participant A3 mentioned her school having a good collaboration with the liaison who works in conjunction with the full-time school counselor and the in-house school-based mental health counselor. She also detailed how her school addresses social-emotional needs of military-connected early childhood students by forming small groups to address their concerns, questions, and fears. Participant T3 suggested support focused on transitional stress that military-connected students face as well as helping them to fill any instructional and learning gaps that they may have. Participant T1 was also a proponent for transitional support for military-connected students since "so often you find that they are transplanted in the middle of the [school] year." She also stated:

> I definitely think that some sort of resources for teachers who may not be familiar with military culture but are teaching in school districts that are near military installations, so they are more than likely going to have kids that are military-connected. I think having some sort of resources for them on how to best serve these kids would be really helpful just because a lot of people don't know. They want to help these kids and they want to connect with them and reach them wherever they are, but it is just hard.

Focused more on what the military could do to support their families and students in civilian schools, Participant T2 suggested a change in military procedure regarding changes of duty stations in the middle of the year. She felt that "If the soldier needs to move, that's fine, but let the family stay until the end of the year which would be very helpful." When asked about the needed supports for military-connected students, Participant A2 stated, "I think that a lot of times when you just don't have the experience or don't know about the multi-needs of students like that, it can just get pushed to the back burner." Participant T2 shared that a follow-up curriculum should be established to help fill in instructional gaps. Participant T3 felt:

> the biggest need that we have is for people to understand that the uncertainty of the home life of military kids is not the same as the uncertainty of the home life of the kids who have negligent parents. I think sometimes teachers want to lump military kids in the same category as the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) case like they have some sort of damage. Military kids aren't damaged.

Participant C1 shared that she perceived the biggest support needed for military-connected students "that come with some sort of 'specialness' or specialty like an IEP or 504." Although a law was in place to advocate for gifted students being provided with gifted services immediately, this had not been done for special education, IEPs, or 504's. One major concern that parents have presented to her was making sure that their child was getting all the same services from their previous duty station that were deemed to be necessary for their academic, behavioral, and social success. Streamlining this process would take a stress off the parents while allowing the new student and staff to get to know each other with all the correct information in place.

Support

In conjunction with the research question, participants shared how they felt support was handled at their schools. Participant A1 shared that her school does things for the students however, she does "wish that there was something for the spouse that is left here." Participant A2 stated that support at her school is given to all students to encourage inclusion because "sometimes, treating people the same, with the same regard, is exactly what they need and makes them feel included." Participant A3 felt that her school had several procedures in place to support military-connected students. She stated that "one of the things that [they] always want to make sure is that the kids are safe, they feel good about themselves, and that they feel like they can handle coming to school." One way that Participant C1 supported her military-connected students was to "make sure that they are immediately introduced to other kids, and they are immediately introduced to all the teachers on the grade level so that they can all help them." Working closely with

the MFLC at her school, Participant C2 did different things throughout the year to recognize their military-connected children. She shared:

> We do a Veteran's Day program which they are all involved with. We usually have a family social in the spring where we invite military families in for an ice-cream social. We do month of the military child where we put military children on our school news show. So, these military kids, while they are here, they quickly learn they are not the only military kid and that they have this huge military support group.

Counselor

Several administrators felt that caring for the needs of military-connected early childhood students should be one of the job duties of the counselor specifically. This belief was shared by Quintana and Cole (2021) who stated school counselors should be aware of the specific challenges that military-connected students face in the areas of academic achievement, social/emotional development, and career readiness. When answering the questions of how to handle finding out that a student's parent is being deployed, Participant A3 stated that the counselor will be notified to help the student deal with emotions if they are willing and to have individual or group counseling sessions as needed. She expressed her concern that all staff, but especially counselors, be more sensitive to content when talking about war or current events that may involve students' family members. She worked to make sure that everyone had enough knowledge to understand "how delicate and sensitive we need to be to the feelings of others." Participant A4 shared that his school has a "wonderful counselor who is very good at

being in touch with the families," and checks on them in the school regularly to make sure they are adjusting when deployment occurs. Participant A1 also spoke about her counselor in high regard. She shared how the counselor at her school was working with a military grant from the district so she would "work just with the military children and did things with them discussing things and talking about how they feel."

Some classroom teachers in the study felt that counselors were a huge part of the support system for military-connected students. Participant T4 mentioned that school counselors should be the people to have networks and support resources that would help the school "best serve the students holistically, [both] emotionally and academically." Participant T2 relayed that the school counselor should be more available and "a little extra vigilant" when it concerns military-connected students and their families. She wanted them to reach out more and make communication more available.

The counselors in the research study shared that their job responsibilities included spending time building relationships with all students, but especially those connected to the military. Participant C2 had a MFLC at her school but only parttime so she also ran small groups and hosted events to help the military-connected students build relationships. She mentioned that most of her military-connected students are academically strong but need help with the social-emotional piece. She stated "if you don't deal with the child's heart, you are never going to be successful anywhere else. You've got to kind of deal with their social-emotional needs first." Participant C1 shared another job responsibility that she was given at her job concerning military-connected student as being paperwork. There had been times in her experience where parents did

not bring a copy of the child's record and then it has taken "an awful long time" for paperwork to be sent from previous schools. She tried to be proactive at times and when a parent contacts here in anticipation of enrolling students, she advised them to hand carry a copy of their child's records.

Theme 4: Understanding

Understanding involves being sympathetic to other's feelings. As educators, most of the study participants felt that working to understand military-connected students and their situations was vital to their success. Participant A2 shared she could not help but have compassion for the military-connected students she interacted with because she understood that they came to school with some needs that some of her other students did not just because of the emotional side of things and the disruption in the household when a parent leaves or either rejoins the family. Similarly, Participant C1, "moved around a lot as a kid," so she had a personal understanding that helped her connect with military-connected students who had been displaced due to duty station transfers. As a new military spouse, Participant T1 worked to help other teachers understand military-connected students' situation and how "their lives sometimes look a little different than the rest of [their] students." Participant A3 replied that she felt her responsibility to parents was to be understanding that things happen and to make sure her staff was flexible concerning late students, make-up work, or absences. She focused on making sure that teachers gave allowances to students in military-connected families, and that they were mindful of the sensitive and tough times they may be experiencing. Participant A3 stated her policy was not to "major in the minors" and that tolerance and

understanding helped her school personnel stay mindful of the "real-life" big picture that military-connected students and their families deal with every day. Concerning understanding the unique circumstances of military-connected students' lives, Participant A4 shared that his school made exceptions and accommodations to the attendance, academic, and behavior requirements for these families since "they are serving our country, and we know that's a tough job to do." According to Participant C3, being connected to the military as a student was "a subjective experience that involves pros and cons that only turn traumatic" when military-connected students do not understand and do not have support to help them understand. This statement aligned with comments from Participant T3 that military kids "have a desire to want to know that you understand that there might be weird times for them" and for people to recognize that their life circumstances have given them knowledge that the typical kid does not have.

Military Culture

When asked the question about their knowledge of military culture, the participants' responses ranged from "very limited" to "very familiar". Participant A1 stated, "they adjust a whole lot better than a lot of kids just because of the nature of their lives anyways." Participant A4 disclosed no personal connection to military but shared his thinking on military culture being "very rule orientated, and policy driven." Participant C2 admitted that she did not know much about military culture because most of their military-connected students do not live on base, so she did not have a reference for the day in, day out of a child living on base. Growing up in "home of the infantry, one of the largest military installations in the world," Participant A3 felt very familiar with

the culture of the military as well as the negative feelings that some people could have toward war and the military. She encouraged her staff not to teach the students to think like they do and to leave whatever personal beliefs they have concerning war and military out of the classroom. Participant T3 had done nothing but live military culture since she was 21 years old. Similarly, Participant T1 loved military culture and appreciated the unique perspective on life and classroom relationships that military-connected students possess. Conversely, Participant C3 shared that military culture was not something that she had much experience with and that her knowledge was limited to there being different branches and families living on bases. She was more familiar with the deployment cycle as her friend's husband is in the military and they recently relocated to Japan.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is essential when the goal of the researcher is "to bring meaning, structure, and order to the data" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 281). The study's integrity was reinforced by adherence to the study methods and procedures detailed in Chapter 3 during data collection and analysis. The evidence of trustworthiness of this basic qualitative study resulted from a conscious effort to follow the processes necessary to bolster the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data collected.

Credibility

To ensure credibility of the study, I used specific guidelines for participant selection. At the time of the study, all participants were trained educators with state-

approved credentials working with early childhood students. All participants met the classification of civilian as none of the participants were active-duty military members at the time of the study. All interviews were completed individually and consisted of open-ended questions that were designed to encourage the participants to discuss their perspectives on the needed supports for early childhood military-connected students. Verbatim transcripts were created, and member checking was used to strengthen the credibility of the data shared after analysis. Triangulation using theory, recent literature, and constant comparison worked to establish credibility. Saturation parameters were clearly defined and maintained throughout the inductive coding process. I also bracketed my perspectives and preconceptions to not only increase credibility of the findings but to promote self-awareness and encourage "giving balanced attention to all parts of the data" (Adu, 2019, p. 73) while intensifying my engagement with the data.

Transferability

To provide a solid basis for transferability of the study, I established a specific criterion for all participants to be eligible for inclusion in the study. I utilized public emails for recruitment which allowed for the inclusion of participants with a range of years in the education field with different experiences and perspectives. Rich and thick data from 30–60-minute interviews aids in the ability for replication of the data collection and analysis process. This data, when partnered with the description of participants' experiences in the findings, provides a basis for fellow researchers to consider transferability in other contexts when similar populations and similar research focuses are being utilized. Although transferability is possible, it could be limited because of the

number of active military bases with elementary schools can vary for any given state which would lessen the amount of military-connected early childhood students who are attending civilian schools.

Dependability

The dependability of the study was enhanced by maintaining of the audit trail with records of the protocol and analysis processes. The audit trail "describe in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the study" (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 28). To further strengthen the dependability of the study, a description of the participants demographics was included in the study. Participants were also instructed to read their interview transcriptions to make sure their experiences were recorded accurately with no discrepancies.

Confirmability

To establish confirmability, the data collected were consistently related to the structural entities of the study which included the conceptual framework and the research questions. Participant quotes were included to substantiate that participant data were the source of the study findings. My identity as a researcher conducting a research study was disclosed and my personal experiences and assumptions were shared with the participants. I also did not have a personal relationship with any of the participants prior to the study. In order to further develop the confirmability of the study, I utilized reflective processes to continually review my analysis for biases that could influence the interpretation of the data.

Summary

In this chapter, I detailed the setting for the study while sharing information related to the collection and analysis of the data. The results of the study were described along with the four elements that comprise the evidence of trustworthiness. The four main findings that were expressed as themes in the study revealed the participants perspectives on the needed supports for early childhood military-connected students who are being educated in civilian schools by civilian educators. The four themes that emerged were awareness, relationships, specialized support, and understanding. When these themes are taken together, they revealed the perspective of the participants concerning the needs of military-connected early childhood students who are being educated in civilian schools. All participants shared their belief that specialized supports are needed for this particular group of students. Participants explained that awareness of military-connected students and the military culture is a first step in recognizing what type of support should be provided. Some of the study participants expressed their lack of understanding of the deployment process and the effects it can have on the whole child, not just academically, but emotionally, physically, and behaviorally. Relationships were described as essential for students to feel included and connected to all the contributors in their learning processes.

In Chapter 5, I will present an interpretation of the findings as related to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework. I will also describe the limitations of the study while providing recommendations for further research in the

study of early childhood military-connected students. Finally, I will describe the potential impact for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore early childhood educators' perspectives of the needed supports for military-connected students in prekindergarten through second grade who attend civilian schools. To determine the educators' perspectives and experiences, I designed three research questions:

1. What are teachers' perspectives of the classroom supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?
2. What are counselors' perspectives of the counseling supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?
3. What are administrators' perspectives of the administrative and school-wide supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?

As I analyzed the data, I discovered that many educators (a) shared various levels of awareness regarding the presence of military-connected students in their schools, (b) recognized instructional gaps caused by the transient nature of military-connected life, (c) were unsure of district or state policies specific to military-connected students, (d) regarded deployment as a circumstance of military life that had an effect on military-connected students, (e) believed that relationships were a vital part of being an educator, (f) believed they had created climates in their schools that were encouraging and included members of the community, (g) worked to build sensitivity to military-connected students

by fostering connections to peers, (h) felt that military-connected students in civilian schools needed to receive specialized supports, (i) believed that more resources and training should be provided to civilian educators of military-childhood students, (j) shared that a liaison or counselor with a personal military connection should be working with the schools population of military-connected students, and (k) worked to better understand the support needed for military-connected students; however, they commonly misunderstood military culture and the role it played in the lives of their military-connected students.

Interpretation of the Findings

To interpret the findings of this study, I made connections between the literature and conceptual framework of the study. This basic qualitative study was framed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The study was guided by three research questions that focused on exploring the perspectives of civilian educators (teachers, administrators, and counselors), concerning the supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students learning in civilian schools. Literature reviewed in Chapter 2 will be compared to the current study findings to confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the area of military-connected students.

Research Question 1: Teachers' Perspectives

Findings from this study expanded the understanding of civilian teachers' perspectives of the needed supports for military-connected students. According to the teacher participants, support can come in many different forms. Participant T1 supported

her students by having a set routine to provide stability to their daily lives. This comment is corroborated by the research findings of Cabrera et al. (2018), who stated that schools should be stable places for students. Participant T4 disclosed her interest in supporting the student holistically, with priority being placed on emotional support. In the review of the literature, Kizer and Menestrel (2019) and Russo and Fallon (2015) supported the knowledge of child development and the diversity of each student to provide the necessary support at the most appropriate time for the best results. Participant T2 suggested that an afterschool program with auxiliary staff could be used to provide support to military-connected students, in agreement with Castillo et al. (2017) who suggested creating opportunities for supplementary support to military-connected students in civilian schools. An advocate for specialized support for military-connected students, Participant T3 generally perceived that providing support is the responsibility of anyone and everyone who works at a school where there are military-connected students. She felt that the unique challenges that military-connected students face in conjunction with the "normal" childhood developmental challenges require specialized support. This belief is supported and aligns with the findings of Bóia et al. (2018) who presented the stressors and challenges that military-connected families face.

Concerning awareness and its place in the support realm, the teacher participants generally perceived that a lack of awareness of the presence of military-connected students in civilian schools has a direct correlation to support not being provided. Participant T4 commented that, in her 14 years of education, she had never had a parent openly share that they were active duty or connected to the military. This finding can be

informed by the research of Castillo et al. (2017) and Elfman (2017), who discovered that most civilian educators lack awareness of the population of military-connected students in their schools. Three of the four teacher participants had a personal connection to the military, which increased their awareness of the needs of military-connected early childhood students and influenced how they provided instruction and facilitated learning. They recognized the importance of developing personal connections and genuine student-teacher relationships. These findings align with the prior findings of Tam-Seto et al. (2020) and Huddy (2015), who asserted that genuine relationships with military-connected students and their families are a main factor in building cultural competency.

When asked their responsibility concerning military-connected students in their classrooms, the teacher participants in the study mentioned making connections and building relationships as a part of the multi-tiered education plan for all students, but especially military-connected students. When commenting on her relationships with students, Participant T1 stated that she worked in her classroom to foster open dialogue so that her military-connected students could share their life experiences. She disclosed that her military-connected students "just sometimes needed somebody to talk to or they just needed a hug," which coincided with the close teacher-child relationship described by Collins and O'Connor (2016) in their study on the association between teacher-child relationships and academic performance. In agreement with Participant T1, Participant T4 asserted that the role of a teacher is to teach lessons without forgetting about the relationships that need to be developed with the students. Her comments align with the findings of Richardson et al. (2016) and Capp et al. (2017), who pointed out the necessity

of providing supportive relationships and positive school climates. Reaching out to parents to build the family-professional partnership, as Classen et al. (2019) found in their study, was reported by Participant T2 as one of the roles of the civilian teachers of military-connected students. According to Participant T3, the resilient and self-sufficient nature of military-connected students does not negate their need to be provided with understanding and the specialized support they may need. These findings were corroborated by the research of Sories et al. (2015), who expanded on the unique stressors that military-connected children face. To build relationships and provide support to their military-connected students, teachers need to understand the military culture since, according to Blasko (2015), this is the social, environmental, communal, and societal context that has a direct influence on military-connected students. The teacher participants in this study generally perceived that military culture should be appreciated for the fresh perspective that is valuable in the classroom and the school. These findings align with the work of Hampden-Thompson and Galindo (2017), who mentioned that such appreciation of the military culture "can result in rewards for all young people" (p. 248).

Research Question 2: Counselors' Perspectives

The understanding of civilian counselors' perspectives of the needed supports for military-connected students was expanded from the findings of this study. The counselor participants disclosed their method of supporting military-connected students to be building relationships with them and their families. In agreement with these findings, Carter and Watson (2018) asserted that the counselor position is unique in its ability to

provide more direct and case-by-case support to military-connected families. Participant C3 stated that when getting to know her military-connected students, she treats them subjectively because the transient nature of their lives may prevent them from knowing how to seek security in long-term connections with people other than their families. These findings can be informed by Boice (2017), who noted the emotional shutdown that can occur in military-connected students during difficult times, and Osofsky (2018), who commented on the struggle of military-connected students to develop trust in relationships due to frequent separations. The counselor participants in the study mentioned training being a necessity to help support military-connected students. To provide support, education professionals must be aware of military-connected students and the military culture (Leppma et al., 2016). Participant C1 utilized her training to inform decisions such as how to handle newcomer military-connected students and how to support the teachers whose classrooms they will attend. Participant C2 admitted to using the knowledge of the MFLC at her school to help her plan events when different needs arise and to serve families specifically during the deployment cycle.

Participant C1 revealed that, at her school, there were several rules and policies regarding military-connected students. These findings can be informed by Hampden-Thompson and Galindo (2017), who reported that enhancing relationships through school policies and practices results in rewards for all young people. In agreement with these findings, Participant C2 works with her school and a special military-connected counselor to encourage familiarity with the military lifestyle and how to best support the school's military-connected students. As stated in the literature, Cole (2016) found that school

counselors are called to mentor other educators in areas concerning the support of military-connected students. Participant C3 desired the creation of a military culture curriculum to help her school community be more supportive and better understand the needs of this group as mentioned by Carter and Wilson (2018), who suggested that such a curriculum would help to create supportive school experiences. Counselors in this study reported what Arcuri (2015) found in her study regarding the understanding of military culture and fostering of school community awareness of the military culture being the responsibility of the school counselor.

Bóia et al. (2018) found that children with a military connection may react negatively and exhibit regressive behaviors during times of transition. In agreement with these findings, Participant C1 shared her personal experience of negative reaction during her transient childhood and how she has used it to influence her interactions with transient students, especially those with a connection to the military. These findings coincided with the earlier study of Blasko (2015) concerning relocation and how it changes the child's entire support system. Although Participant C3 expressed her lack of understanding of the military culture, her comments on building students' skills to help them combat negative situations were corroborated by the findings of Garcia et al. (2015). Participant C2 in this study reported what Conforte et al. (2017) found in their study, that community support in the forms of communication and relationship building work to influence positive psychosocial adjustments in students.

Research Question 3: Administrators' Perspectives

Findings from this study expanded the understanding of civilian administrators' perspectives of the needed supports for military-connected students. Similar to the teacher participants, the administrators in the study mentioned support being necessary for military-connected students and their families. Participant A4 disclosed that his school practices flexibility when considering the needs of their military-connected students and families. The practice of "flexibility around academics" is supported by Elfman (2017), who explained how flexibility allowed for easier integration into the school for military-connected students. Participant A3's comments corroborated flexibility and special allowances for military-connected students and their families. As part of the "real-life big picture," she encouraged her teachers to be mindful of the challenges that come with the military lifestyle without being judgmental and questioning. In alignment with the findings of Neil (2015) that military-connected students deal with education gaps, sustaining friendships, and adapting to new school environments, Participant A2 was a proponent for addressing some of the "exceptional challenges" (p. 50) of military-connected students by accommodating for gaps in instruction due to transitions and providing necessary interventions. Recognizing that young military-connected children can be uniquely sensitive and more vulnerable due to separation from a primary caregiver (DeVoe et al., 2017), Participant A1 encouraged her school personnel to let the military-connected students know that they were there for them while also reaching out to the students' families.

All the administrator participants were aware of military-connected students being a part of their school population; however, their awareness of military culture varied. Participants A2 and A3 had a personal connection to the military, which resulted in a deep connection and understanding of military culture. As revealed in the literature, Walsh (2017) found that having a better understanding of military-related experiences helps administrators to better serve their families and tailor support to meet their specific needs. Tam-Seto et al. (2020) found in their study that military cultural competence comes from the joining of awareness, caring, knowledge, and skills. Participant A1's comments corroborated these findings. Participant A4 view of military culture being mainly composed of rules and policies contradicted the literature which found military culture to be a compromise of "values, beliefs, expectations, customs, traditions, and behaviors" (Leppma et al., 2016, p. 85).

Although all the administrator participants disclosed their practices for supporting military-connected students, their responses were mixed regarding who should be held responsible for providing that support. In the review of the literature, St. John and Fenning (2020) found that the administrators' role in civilian schools is to report data on military families as well as provide their staff with awareness of resources that are available. These findings coincided with comments shared by participant A4. Bridging the gap between home and school and forming relationships with the students was presented by participants A1 and A3 as the responsibility of the school administration. Participant A2 commented that no one person can handle the job alone, so it is the job of every educator in the school to make sure that military-connected students get the support

they need. The study findings revealed that three of the four administrators encourage school policies and practices that encourage building relationships with military-connected students and their families, as reported by Hampden-Thompson and Galindo (2017). The administrator participants placed the job responsibility of supporting military-connected students on the school counselor. Participant A3 disclosed that since military-connected students need emotional support, that falls under the counselor's role. This finding coincided with Cole (2016), who presented the school counselor as the educator responsible for addressing emotional issues. Participant A4 stated that the counselor at his school keeps in touch with the military-connected families and keeps the school informed of upcoming events or changes, which is what Arcuri (2015) agreed is the school counselor's ethical obligation. Since her school had a counselor with a personal connection to the military, Participant A1 relied on her knowledge of military culture and the chain of command and tasked her with being the liaison between the military, the school, and the family.

Administrators who participated in this study commented on the preparedness of teachers in their schools to provide instruction to their military-connected students. According to the participants, their teachers work to build relationships with all students but may need more knowledge on how to specifically handle the frequent changes and challenging needs that may arise with military-connected students. This belief is supported and aligned with the findings of Knobloch et al. (2015) and Hampden-Thompson and Galindo (2017), who expanded on the need for full understanding of the military culture and lifestyle to enhance relationships and improve levels of parent

satisfaction. Participants A1 and A3 suggested training and discussions with professional learning communities to increase awareness and better equip teachers at their schools to support military-connected students. These findings were corroborated by the research of Neil (2015) and Castillo et al. (2017), who recommended the establishment of educational partnership programs and strategic support for educators in the areas of military culture and the unique needs of military families. In agreement with St. John and Fenning (2020), who asserted the use of specific information and individualized classroom strategies to support military-connected students, the administrator participants recognized their responsibility to provide their staff with professional development in the areas of academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support for military-connected students. Participant A4 shared that he was always looks for ways to improve his school and their educating of military-connected students and that "we can always get better."

Context of the Conceptual Framework

This study's findings can be viewed based on the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. This theory has previously been incorporated by major institutions worldwide as a foundation for social programs (Vèlez-Agosto et al., 2017). Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological model envelops the ever-developing body of theory and research that centers around the mechanisms and circumstances that regulate human development in the actual environments where human beings live. Bronfenbrenner's theory originally declared the relevance of bringing social policy and developmental research together (Vèlez-Agosto et al., 2017) and has been applied to research examining multiple aspects of human development for well over 25 years. Examining the

perspectives of teachers, counselors, and administrators concerning support in the areas of academic and behavioral development aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) environmental systems. The systems in the Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory relate the student's family, peers, neighborhood, and their school, the connections student's form with the members of each group, and how together, the group members have an impact on the student's development (Christensen, 2016). The presence of and direct interactions with these members of a student's microsystem help to construct and shape what occurs in the student's development. The findings of this study offer insights for Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory being a practical lens to guide the understanding of educators' on how their perspectives of the needed supports for military-connected students affects their students' academic and behavioral outcomes. This theory has provided a model for expanding the primary focus of military-connected students support from their home families to their school families which includes their teachers, counselors, and administrators. The findings of Classen et al. (2019) support the study findings that educators' perspectives of their knowledge and beliefs about military-connected students frame their relationships with and educating of military-connected students.

Limitations of the Study

The majority of the limitations for this study were centralized in the study's design. First, the study solicited participants from the same geographical area. Although there any many states where civilian teachers are instructing military-connected students, the perspectives expressed by the participants could have been influenced by regional

norms. Secondly, while the sample size of four classroom teachers, four administrators, and two counselors was sufficient for achieving data saturation (Saldaña, 2021), the findings might not transfer to a larger group of participants. Another limitation was that only educators who worked with prekindergarten through second grade were permitted in the study. Therefore, the transferability of the data findings to all educators is limited because of their experiences and may not be applicable to all academic grade levels. Although participant honesty was listed as a possible limitation, researcher protocol of ensuring identity protection using pseudonyms and location concealment aided participants in feeling free to speak without repercussions and ensured that the credibility and reliability of the study were maintained.

After data analysis and the presentation of findings in chapter 4 were completed, other limitations in the study arose. Most of the participants, 10 out of 11, identified as female. This may have inadvertently had an impact on the data findings. The analysis and interpretation of the data may have been influenced by my own experience as a military-connected student as well as being a classroom teacher. To uphold the credibility of the study, I bracketed my preconceptions and perspectives. Also, six of the 11 participants had a personal connection to the military which could have influenced their experiences and impacted their perspectives. For future research, it may help to further define the parameters of a "civilian educator" to provide clarity in the study findings.

Recommendations

Some recommendations surfaced based on the limitation of the study. Sample size is the basis for one such recommendation. Eleven educators of military-connected

students from grades prekindergarten through second were interviewed in this basic qualitative study. Although this study did well to gather the perspectives of a small group of participants, it is recommended that future researchers modify this study by conducting research in more geographical locations using a larger group of participants to gain a greater understanding of civilian educators' perspectives on the needed supports for military-connected students. Future researchers should also consider using a mixed research method so that educators with time-related constraints could still share their perspectives by answering questions in a quantitative survey. Data could also be collected regarding the number of military-connected students serviced in the participants schools to see if there is a correlation between awareness and visibility. Due to the paucity of qualitative and quantitative research with this specific focus (Totenhagen & Albright, 2018), more rigorous research focused on military-connected children and the supports they need when being educated by civilian educators is recommended. Since findings confirmed the need for educators to be trained in the areas of military culture and policy, I recommend exploring the professional development needs of civilian educators in schools with military-connected students.

Implications

One major implication for positive social change that emerged from the analysis of the study data was raising awareness of the needs of military-connected early childhood students in civilian schools as perceived by civilian educators. Awareness should be raised on the part of educators as well as those who influence education policies. If educators realize that military-connected students are in their schools, they

may make decisions, adopt practices, and develop a range of supports for military-connected families that would positively influence the development of these students (Natalicchio & Wooleyhand, 2020). Nine of the 11 participants expressed that professional education and teacher training programs should be structured to provide a better understanding of military culture, the impact that multiple deployments can have on military children, and how the academic and social development of prekindergarten to second grade military-connected early childhood students may be affected by their connection to the military (Natalicchio & Wooleyhand, 2020). Participants T4, C1, C2, and A2, who each had more than 8 years of experience in the education field, agreed with Sikes et al. (2020) who recommended ongoing professional education opportunities that involve the reassessment of cultural sensitivity for military-connected students as well as all other unique student populations to facilitate awareness and acceptance.

Awareness of the needs of early childhood military-connected students in civilian schools on the part of those who influence education policies was also connected to positive social change. Although several of the participants' schools had policies in place for their military-connected students, most of the policies were not state mandated. Policies pertaining to the training of teachers and guidance personnel would result in a ready-made group of skilled professionals who are dedicated to promoting the well-being of military-connected students (Ohye et al., 2020). Having a school liaison to serve as a source of military knowledge and to aid civilian educators in supporting their military-connected population was mentioned by participants A1, A3, T3, and T4. Regarding policy, participant T2 suggested the military should establish policies that would

eliminate the need for mid-school year duty station relocations. The lack of consistency across the state can result in extra stress on the military-connected students, their parents, and the school stakeholders when duty station relocation occurs. If schools are equipped with the resources and expertise needed to support military-connected students and their families, they can provide families with peace of mind (Natalicchio & Wooleyhand, 2020).

Conclusion

The number of military personnel in our country is growing which translates to an increase in military-connected students in civilian schools with civilian educators as their administrators, classroom teachers, and counselors. With this increase comes the importance of school educators being equipped with the training and knowledge to provide a supportive and stable community for military-connected students and their families (St. John & Fenning, 2020). The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore educator's perspectives related to the supports needed for military-connected students attending civilian schools. The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature and the findings of previous research where civilian classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators commented on the needed supports for military-connected students in civilian schools. By analyzing educators' perspectives on the nature of the problem of needed supports for military-connected students, this study provided a basis for designing programs and social policies (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). Participants believed the district and state should provide teachers with the appropriate materials, resources, and training to work with military-connected students. They also felt that educators

should be aware of military culture and how it impacts students psychologically, behaviorally, socially, emotionally, and academically.

The overall mission for educators is to equip all students with what they need for academic, developmental, and emotional success. To achieve this mission, educators' roles are diverse and interrelated and include providing their students with emotional , social, and instructional support while also instructing them in the academic curriculum, maintaining strong classroom management, and many other roles (Cohen Zilka, 2022). Critical to this mission is the intentional and purposeful consideration of the needed supports of military-connected students to build their resilience while eliminating any physical and psychological risks (Rossiter et al., 2018). It is imperative that teachers, counselors, and administrators "be educated regarding the unique strengths, issues, concerns, and needs of this cultural group and be prepared to provide informed exchanges, supports, and interventions" (Hathaway et al., 2018, p.54). When educators at civilian schools pair awareness of the best methods for supporting military-connected students with compassion for the unique circumstances of military lifestyle and culture, then they can provide these students with the best opportunities for educational success.

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Appendix A: Data Collection Instrument Validation

The main data collection instrument for this study will be interview questions that are researcher produced. To garner the highest yield of information, the instrument will contain a diverse compilation of question formats as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The question formats that will be included are hypothetical, devil's advocate, ideal position, and interpretive (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), along with general information gathering questions and yes or no questions paired with specific follow-up discussion questions. Hypothetical questions pose a certain situation to participants and ask them what they might do or how they would handle said situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Devil's advocate questions present an opposing view as a challenge for the participant to consider (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ideal position questions ask the participant to describe an ideal situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These questions can contain parameters that are placed by the researcher. Interpretive questions are designed to solicit reaction based on the interpretation of previous responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). General information gathering questions will also be a part of the data collection instrument. Questions that allow for only a yes or no answer will be used as a bridge to more specific follow-up discussion questions.

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Instrument

Name:

Title:

Number of years in position:

Number of years in GHI school district:

1. Tell me about your experiences working with military-connected students and their families.
2. Share with me what you know about military culture.
3. Explain your perspective on the needed supports for military-connected students to be successful academically in civilian schools.
4. Tell me about any school policies concerning military-connected students and their families.
5. How has the presence of military-connected students influenced your classroom practices and instruction?
6. What do you perceive the role and responsibility of teachers to be in addressing the needs of military-connected early childhood students?
7. What do you perceive to be challenging when working with military-connected students and their families?
8. How would you handle the following scenario: It comes to your attention that one of your student's parents has been deployed?
9. What would you do if you got a new student mid-semester due to a parent's duty station relocation?

Prompts

Tell me a little more about…

Then what?

And…?

What do you mean by…?

You said…., Could you please elaborate on that?

Appendix C: Counselor Interview Instrument

Name:

Title:

Number of years in position:

Number of years in GHI school district:

1. Tell me about your experiences working with military-connected students and their families.
2. Share with me what you know about military culture.
3. Explain your perspective on the needed supports for military-connected students to be successful academically in civilian schools.
4. What do you perceive to be challenging when working with military-connected students and their families?
5. What do you perceive the role and responsibility of counselors to be in addressing the needs of military-connected early childhood students?
6. What do you do when a new student enrolls mid-semester due to a parent's duty station relocation?
7. How would you handle the following scenario: It comes to your attention that a student's parent has been deployed?
8. Tell me about any school policies concerning military-connected students and their families.
9. How does the school climate support military-connected students?

Prompts

Tell me a little more about…

Then what?

And…?

What do you mean by…?

You said…., Could you please elaborate on that?

Appendix D: Administrator Interview Instrument

Name:
Title:
Number of years in position:
Number of years in GHI school district:

1. Tell me about your experiences working with military-connected students and their families.
2. Share with me what you know about military culture.
3. Explain your perspective on the needed supports for military-connected students in civilian schools.
4. Tell me about any school policies concerning military-connected students and their families.
5. What do you perceive to be challenging when working with military-connected students and their families?
6. What concerns, if any, do you have about teacher preparation for educating and providing instruction to early childhood students who are also connected to the military.
7. What do you perceive the role and responsibility of administrators to be in addressing the needs of military-connected early childhood students?
8. How would you handle the following scenario: It comes to your attention that a student's parent has been deployed?
9. How does the school climate support the military-connected students?

Prompts
Tell me a little more about…
Then what?
And…?
What do you mean by…?
You said…., Could you please elaborate on that?

Appendix E: Alignment of Data Source with Research Questions

Different Color Coding to show alignment

Literature (themes) and theoretical framework	RQ1 – What are teachers' perspectives of the classroom supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?	RQ2 - What are counselors' perspectives of the counseling supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?	RQ3 – What are administrators' perspectives of the administrative and school-wide supports needed to identify and address the academic and behavioral needs of military-connected early childhood students?
	Qualitative Study Questions		
School climates, including educator perspectives, have an impact on student academic success and development. Military Culture Deployment cycle Unique Stressors School-level practices Bridge building relationships	1. Tell me about your experiences working with military-connected students and their families. 2. Share with me what you know about military culture. 3. Explain your perspective on the needed supports for military-connected students to be successful academically in civilian schools. 4. Tell me about any school policies concerning military-connected students and their families.	1. Tell me about your experiences working with military-connected students and their families. 2. Share with me what you know about military culture. 3. Explain your perspective on the needed supports for military-connected students to be successful academically in civilian schools. 4. What do you perceive to be challenging when working with military-connected	1. Tell me about your experiences working with military-connected students and their families. 2. Share with me what you know about military culture. 3. Explain your perspective on the needed supports for military-connected students in civilian schools. 4. Tell me about any school policies concerning military-connected students and their families. 5. What do you perceive to be challenging when working with military-connected

	5. How has the presence of military-connected students influenced your classroom practices and instruction? 6. What do you perceive the role and responsibility of teachers to be in addressing the needs of military-connected early childhood students? 7. What do you perceive to be challenging when working with military-connected students and their families? 8. How would you handle the following scenario: It comes to your attention that one of your student's parent has just been deployed? 9. What would you do if you got a new student mid-semester due to a parent's duty station relocation?	students and their families? 5. What do you perceive the role and responsibility of counselors to be in addressing the needs of military-connected early childhood students? 6. What do you do when a new student enrolls mid-semester due to a parent's duty station relocation? 7. How would you handle the following scenario: It comes to your attention that a student's parent has just been deployed? 8. Tell me about any school policies concerning military-connected students and their families. 9. How does the school climate support military-connected students?	students and their families? 6. What concerns, if any, do you have about teacher preparation for educating and providing instruction to early childhood students who are also connected to the military. 7. What do you perceive the role and responsibility of administrators to be in addressing the needs of military-connected early childhood students? 8. How would you handle the following scenario: It comes to your attention that a student's parent has just been deployed? 9. How does the school climate support the military-connected students?

Expert Interview Question Review Panel

Individual to do the review of this interview protocol	Individual's role	Identify the reason you selected them	Revisions they suggested making based on their review
Dr. Beryl Watnick	Ph.D. in Education	Extensive knowledge in thematic analysis in qualitative descriptive study	
Dr. Adrianne Redmond	Ed.D. in Education Leadership	Master teacher with extensive knowledge in the education field	
Nelldra Allen, Ed.S.	Specialist in Curriculum and Instruction	Master teacher and former military-connected student	
Melanie Spencer	Bachelor's Degree	20+ years of experience with military-connected and civilian early childhood students	RQ1-Q7: more clearly define the scenario RQ2-Q4: more clearly define the scenario