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ADULT THIRD CULTURE KIDS AND THEIR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND COMPETENCE

Master's Thesis in Education

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Master's Degree Programme in Education and Globalisation

2016
Due to globalization, there are more and more families bringing their children abroad due to different reasons (Cockburn 2002, 475-476). Third culture kids (TCKs) have gradually become well known to people and the society. The aim of this research is to discuss TCKs’ intercultural learning and competence during their significant years of development and what this experience means to them in terms of their educational and career choices.

This is a qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews collected from six adult third culture kids (ATCKs). The theoretical framework lies under the study of intercultural learning and competence. Intercultural learning as transformative learning and informal learning are discussed and different models of intercultural competence are also presented in the theoretical framework. Narrative research has been chosen for the methodological approach of this study. The main findings of this research show that the intercultural learning and competence of ATCKs was characterized by the following three themes: Constructing different values and worldviews by living abroad; having no fear to new things and learning from feeling uncomfortable; and the increased ability to build social relationships and learning from others. Regarding the educational choices, the ATCKs I interviewed tended to continue their studies in their passport countries which they were more familiar with. However, their career choices were affected by a desire to learn more from living abroad. The findings of this study may be beneficial for teachers, parents, TCKs and many others who are interested in TCKs intercultural learning and competence.
Acknowledgments

I would like to express deep thanks and gratitude to those who support me during the research and writing phases of this thesis.

First of all, I want to thank my supervisor Katri Jokikokko who gave me loads of inspiration for writing. Thank you for always giving prompt feedback when I needed. You gradually helped me to better grasp my structure and contents. You encouraged me to write something that I am passionate about and I fell in love with the topic.

Secondly, I want to thank my research participants who I had great conversations with. Thank you all for sharing your experiences; for the open-minded attitude; for not treating me only as a researcher but also as a friend. I have learned a lot from all of you and words cannot fully express my gratitude.

In addition, I want to thank my coworkers in the Expatriate Archive Centre in The Hague during my stay in the summer of 2015. Thank you so much for listening to me, helping me find research participants and provide related research resources. Thank you for the love and support.

Last but not least, I want to thank my parents and friends who gave me endless encouragement and support when I was sick during the writing. Without you, this thesis would not have been finished on time. Thank you for giving me sunshine when I was blue, for showing me smiles when I was in pain, being the lights in the dark tunnel. Thank you for helping me to become stronger and stronger during these past months.
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1. Introduction

Globalization has a huge impact on creating an international job market for professionals and it also has encouraged cross-border migration (Wilkins 2013, 1). More and more people bring their families with them for international job postings. The term ‘third culture kids’ (TCKs) was created by Useem in 1963, who studied the experiences of American families living and working in India (Pollock & Van Reken 2009, 13). They found that these young kids who accompany their parents to another country often develop a third culture, formed from the mixing cultures of their passport country and the host country. A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her development years outside the parents’ culture (ibid.). And when TCKs become adult, then they are called adult third culture kids (ATCKs). My research interest focuses on ATCKs and their intercultural learning and competence.

The reasons which brought me into this topic are related to my personal experience as a Mandarin teacher for expatriate families since 2010. I became interested in a group of children who travel from country to country due to their parents’ job. In 2014 I learnt to know that the term ‘Third Culture Kids’ is referred to the group of children that I have known. The sentence “Mom, I am sad because my best friend is leaving tomorrow” has haunted me for many years. This was what my student’s child told her the day his best friend left a letter at their doorstep to say goodbye because the whole family was moving to another country. I started to search the term ‘Third Culture Kids’, and found many articles regarding identity construction and psychological well being. It seemed that researchers and practitioners in the field are mainly focusing on ways help the TCKs who are struggling with problems brought forth by the high mobility (Tanu 2015, 16). In 2015, when I was doing my internship in the Expatriate Archive Centre for collecting the data for this thesis, I found many memoirs which were written by TCKs. Also there are many NGOs who support expatriate families and TCKs, for example, Family in Global Transition. Indeed over the past ten years, the term ‘third culture kids’ has gained much
attention among the international community (Tanu 2015, 13). However, as the previous research has often focused on the problems and challenges that TCKs may face, I was wondering what positive aspects and possibilities are related to being a TCK and especially what they have learned during their years abroad. It seems that topics about third culture kids and their intercultural learning have not been extensively studied within academia. This is the main reason that I wanted to conduct this research. I want to fill in the gap that there seems to be in the research and provide more knowledge and understanding about this field. This research could be especially beneficial for teachers who have TCKs in their class and for TCKs parents who want to understand the process of their children’s intercultural learning and how ATCKs share the meaning from their TCKs’ experience for future plans.

This thesis has been structured so that I first discuss the researcher’s position and next define the central terms of the study. Then, under my theoretical framework, intercultural learning as a transformative and informal learning is discussed; also I analyze the models of intercultural competence and discuss their implications. Afterwards, the findings are presented and related to the theoretical perspectives. Finally, I evaluate the trustworthiness and ethics of the research. The aim of this thesis is to present what I have acquired from my data and link that with the theories instead of generalizing the findings or evaluating my research subjects’ intercultural learning and competence.

There are two research questions in this study: 1. How do adult TCKs describe their intercultural learning and competence as informal learning? 2. How do adult TCKs extract meaning from their TCKs’ experience for their future educational and career choices?

1.1 Researcher’s position

The reasons I write this thesis are due to my mobile life and my relationship with parents of TCKs, but I am not a TCK myself like many other researchers who have studied TCKs. However, according to the definition of terms, I would consider myself as a third culture
adult. I was growing up and finishing my Bachelor’s study in China, and afterwards I had a chance to work in the United States and later resided in Europe. My life within these four years has involved a lot of moving, back and forth between three continents and five countries. This hyper-mobile life has intrigued me; also I have done a lot of reflections about my intercultural learning. My relationship with TCKs starts from my language teaching career, I was a Mandarin Chinese teacher for four years and my students were expatriate families, whose children were TCKs. My knowledge about TCKs at that time was based on what my students told me about their children. Later, during my master’s studies, the more I learnt to know about TCKs, the more I got interested in knowing the stories behind their experiences. It ultimately led to this research.

One of the limitations of this research is that I am not a TCK, and at some point I cannot fully understand what their deep feelings are behind their stories. However, based on my own experience, somehow I feel that I know what they are talking about when they discuss issues such as ‘where is home’ and ‘saying goodbye’; thus discuss their identities. Also from a researcher’s perspective, I have done a lot of reflection on my own intercultural learning and competence due to high mobility. Furthermore, my interaction with the research participants during the interviews helped a lot for receiving informative data. I would consider myself both as an insider and an outsider to my research topic. As an outsider who listens to their stories without biases and as an insider who tries to sense and understand their feelings (Jokikokko 2010, 17).

1.2 Definition of Terms

When I started my research, and presented it to people, there was mass confusion regarding the definition for TCKs. Especially later on when I tried to find research participants for my interviews, I have encountered some problems as well; friends who were trying to help me were not that familiar with this term. Also while people are paying more attentions to this group, more confusion arised due to other migrating groups, such as temporary refugee or children of immigrants (Bonebright 2010, 352). McCaig (2001, xv) mentions “the term
risks being diluted beyond use for both researchers and TCKs themselves” (as cited in Bonebright 2010, 352). Therefore, I think it is necessary to clarify some definitions before moving forward to other discussions. People from various migrating groups may share some similar feelings, for example, towards identity construction, but after conducting further research, I found out that the reasons that cause these feelings are often different. The definition of terms will help readers have a better understanding of people from these different groups and also the subjects I am discussing in this thesis.

“A third culture kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her development years outside the parents’ culture” (Pollock & Van Reken 2009, 13). A typical example can be a couple from Germany who brought their 7 year-old kid to China and they stayed there for 4 years. Their kid is a third culture kid. And when TCKs become adult, then they are called adult third culture kids (ATCKs). They can also be called global nomads. The term “Global nomads” was created by Norma McCaig and is synonymous with TCKs (Miller 2012, 21). McCaig (1992) coined the term refers to those “who are raised and educated internationally due to a parent’s career choice” which highlights the specific experiences (ibid.). “A cross-cultural kid (CCK) is a person who is living or has lived in—or meaningfully interacted with—two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during childhood (up to age 18)” (Pollock & Van Reken 2009, 31). For example, the kid’s mother is from the U.S.A, the father is from Italy and the family is living in the United States. At home the child gets contact with both American and Italian culture. Third Culture Adults (TCAs) mean a group of people who start their global mobility during their adulthood and develop a third culture which involves processing and reconstructing different values that change their identity (Stokke 2013, 44; Miller 2012, 5). Children of Immigrants mean “Children whose parents have made a permanent move to a new country where they were not originally citizens” (Pollock & Van Reken 2009, 32). For example, the kid was born in Spain but their parents are both originally from China. Children of Refugees are “Children whose parents are living outside their original country or place due to circumstances they did not choose, such as war, violence, famine, or natural disasters” (ibid.), same as children of asylum seekers, like a
Syrian family brought their two kids to Sweden.

At this stage, I want to ask two questions. What is a third culture? And who is a third culture kid? “According to Ruth Van Reken (2014), the third culture is “a subculture where they share the experience of a cross-cultural lifestyle, high mobility (theirs or others’) and expected repatriation[,] which is what made this experience different from traditional [migrants] and began the need for international schools in the first place’”” (as cited in Tanu 2015, 17).

1.3 Research participants of this thesis

With the global society, a lot of international companies are opening branches overseas. Due to this scenario, the need for international assignments is growing and is becoming more frequent (Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang 2009, 97). TCKs are usually classified into four types due to the reasons their parents move abroad (Pollock & Van Reken 2009, 15): (1) Children whose parents serve in the military; (2) children of diplomats; (3) children whose parents work for international corporations; (4) children whose parents work in a missionary or non-profit organization.

The research participants of my interviews come from those families who went for international posting under the expatriate package due to their parents’ work. Expatriate package means the company which initiates the posting covers the relocation fee, spouse allowance, children’s education and so on (Farrer & Greenspan 2014, 3); they are not from self-initiated expatriate families whose parents volunteer themselves to make relocation for finding new job opportunities. My research subjects are from age 18-34. There are two males and four females whose passport countries are all European.
2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework focuses on the study of intercultural learning and competence. Intercultural learning as transformative learning and informal learning are discussed and different models of intercultural competence are also presented.

2.1 Intercultural learning as transformative learning

One of my aims in this research on TCKs intercultural learning and competence was to find out the specific learning theory which helps to analyze TCKs’ intercultural learning processes. According to my data analysis, the TCKs experience helped them to shape their values, and that is why I think Mezirow’s theory for transformative learning can form one theoretical basis for understanding TCKs’ intercultural learning.

Transformative learning is “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow 2009, 22). According to Mezirow’s theory, “disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection and rational discourse are experiences that can bring about transformative learning, with the application or experience of one or some combination of these elements leading to transformative learning” (Howie & Bagnall 2013, 818). Transformative learning starts by a disorienting dilemma when a person faces something that does not fit to his/her existing meaning structures and experiences and causes the changing of their frame of reference (ibid.), Mezirow (2000, 16) explains that it “provides the context for making meaning within which we choose what and how a sensory experience is to be construed and/ or appropriated” (as cited in Howie & Bagnall 2013, 817). Critical reflection goes beyond reflection to re-analyze a person’s ways of receiving and processing information (Jokikokko 2009, 143). Rational discourse happens based on critical reflection which refers to a dialogue with other people, exchanging different opinions towards situations and in the end to achieve certain common grounds (Howie & Bagnall 2013, 818). Moving from one country to another and interacting with people has brought many disorienting
dilemmas to TCKs. Encountering disorienting dilemmas may lead to critical reflection, however, as Howie and Bagnall (2013, 818) refer to Merriam’s suggestion regarding the transformative learning “…a person must have a high enough level of cognitive functioning to engage in rational discourse and critically reflect on, or otherwise engage in, transformative learning…”. I agree with this argument and this is one of the reasons that I chose ATCKs as my research subject. One can assume that they are able to reflect their learning experience and engage in informative dialogue with the researcher.

The transformation and learning for TCKs are interlinked. The learning experiences have transformative effects on the learner as a person and how the learner behaves in the future; also the transformation leads to further learning (Howie & Bagnall 2013, 821). The experiences of ATCKs may help to shape or reconstruct their values which may lead to transformation and provide a good foundation to learn more in the future.

Transformative learning theory is a theory which explains that “learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Meziro 1996, 162). In Taylor’s (2007, 184) research, he makes one reference to King (2000) and Lyon (2001) who argue that the experience of international sojourners planted the learning environment to develop intercultural awareness as one of the transformative outcomes. The outcomes are described as “products of the unique context in which the transformation manifested, highlighting the role of context in shaping a transformative experience” (Taylor 2007, 184). When applying this to ATCKs, the unique context can refer to the time being as TCKs no matter staying abroad or staying in the passport country, it is like an incubator for making intercultural learning happen.

Mezirow (1997) proposes that the transformation can be a result of certain crises, like a personal issue which leads to mental breakdown (as cited in Tayor 2008, 6). In the context of ATCKs’ experience, learning and transformation might not necessarily require this kind of painful or stressful event; the transformative learning can happen for example after
culture shock or a new realization after seeing inequality between people. Taylor (ibid.) also gives an example of a person from the USA who moved to Switzerland; this lady’s intercultural experience led to transformation, which involved her reflection towards her own experience and interaction with other people. In this case, Taylor presents a really good example of how transformation was developed and promoted through living in another culture. ATCKs have experienced at least two cultures (culture of passport country and culture of host country); their intercultural learning and competences can be the outcome of the transformation.

2.2 Intercultural learning as informal learning

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1991) formal learning often has the classroom as the learning place; it is structured by curriculum and there is somebody who serves as teacher or trainer who plans the course, takes the implementation and in the end makes the evaluation (as cited in Conlon 2003, 285). Contrary to formal learning, informal learning happens in everyday life situation and it is non-institutional (ibid.).

Callanan, Cervantes and Loomis (2011, 646) discuss five dimensions of informal learning. It is “(1) non-didactive, (2) highly socially collaborative, (3) embedded in meaningful activity, (4) initiated by learner’s interested or choice, and (5) removed from external assessment”. The informal learning can happen at home when the child is playing with parents. For example, language can be learned during the interaction and it will not be evaluated by tests. The learning happens in a relaxed, open ended and real life situation (Callanan, Cervantes, & Loomis 2011, 647). For TCKs, the intercultural learning which happens due to the mobility life is usually not structured and can happen anywhere: in school, at home or maybe an excursion with friends.

Coffield (1996) notes that it is not easy to find information for evaluating the participation and the achievable outcome of informal learning (as cited in Conlon 2003, 290). Jokikokko (2010, 75) argues in her research that “intercultural learning processes differ, depending on
person’s background, living environment and other experiences”. Conlon (2003, 286) quotes Mary Parker Follett’s idea about informal learning and describes it as being “nurtured at birth and spanned one’s entire life, acquired by the modes of living and acting that teach an individual how to grow a social consciousness”. During my interviews, I found that my research participants picked up intercultural learning at any stage, the learning happened when they were young, and also happens at present stage; the competences they have acquired from intercultural learning by reflection shaped their values and guide them through further learning.

Klob (1984) notes that reflection is a very important part of informal learning (as cited in Conlon 2003, 288). Without this reflection, we do not necessarily learn from our experiences. Furthermore, studies also show that “we find links between cultural variation in informal learning settings and children’s understanding of the relevant domain, these findings add credibility to the claim that children are learning through their experiences rather than through maturational processes alone” (Callanan, Cervantes, & Loomis 2011, 646). Intercultural learning during high mobility for TCKs is highly affected by their experiences, interaction with others and self-reflection.

2.3 Intercultural competence

According to Jokikokko (2010, 13) intercultural competence can be seen as a result of intercultural learning. It can be seen as both condition and aim for increasing cultural awareness, understanding, dialogue, fruitful co-operation and learning from each other in multicultural societies and the world”. Intercultural competence refers to an ability to encounter diversity in a respectful and positive way (Jokikokko 2010, 24). Deardorff (2004) describes intercultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitude” (as cited in Deardorff 2006, 247-248). Stier (2003, 84-85) summaries different intercultural competences into two categories (see Figure 1): content competencies and processual competencies. According to Stier, content competencies refer to the knowledge
of knowing the other cultures, for example, the histories, languages, social norms, values and etc. which belong to “knowing that” and processual competencies refer to having the knowledge of how to behave in another culture which are like “knowing how” compare to content competencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content-competencies</th>
<th>Processual competencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge, information about the culture and its people</td>
<td>Intrapersonal competencies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cognitive competencies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• perspective alteration</td>
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<td>• role taking</td>
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<td>• self-reflection</td>
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<td>• problem solving</td>
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<td>emotional competencies</td>
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<td>• avoiding automatic responses</td>
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<td>Interpersonal competencies</td>
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<td>• interpersonal sensitivity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• communication competence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• situational sensitivity</td>
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Figure 1. A summary of different aspects of intercultural competence (Stier 2003, p. 84)

When we enter another culture, it is very easy to see and learn the content-competencies but learning processual competences requires much more time and effort. Stier divides processual competences into two parts: intrapersonal competences and interpersonal competences which involve more of how to understand the difference by him- or herself and how to solve the problems, furthermore, how to interact with people from different culture efficiently. The process is moving from an insider towards an outsider.

Deardorff (2004) proposes the ‘Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence’ (as cited in Deardorff 2006, 254), which includes the attitudes, knowledge& comprehension and skills for the solid foundation in order to achieve desired internal and external outcomes (see Figure 2).
Attitudes at the base level provide the premise for further knowledge acquisition and comprehension. “Attitudes act as affective filters for engagement with the development process and consequently a general receptivity to cultural diversity and an ability to temporarily suspend judgment during intercultural interaction (while retaining one’s own identity) is necessary” (Cajader, Daniels, & McDermott 2012, 325-326). When comparing Deardorff’s and Stier’s models, Deardorff’s upper level knowledge and comprehension is similar to what Stier (2003, 84) calls “content-competencies”. Once a person has the knowledge about other cultures, it helps him/her to engage more profoundly in intercultural interaction and to develop certain skills such as listening, observing and analyzing as the results. Such skills also encourage acquiring further knowledge and understanding about the unfamiliar culture and may help when entering new cultures. I also noticed in my study that the knowledge TCKs gained from one culture helped them to
acquire certain skills and when they moved to another country, those skills prepared them
to better understand the other culture. The top two levels by Deardoff; desired internal and
external outcomes, relate to the processual competences by Stier, which help to achieve the
certain goals such as having appropriate behavior and communicating effectively in
different cultures.

Deardorff (2004) has also developed another model ‘The process model of intercultural
competence’ which shifts the elements in the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence
into a circle (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff 2006, p.256)

According to Deardorff (2006, 257), the process model of intercultural competence shows
an ongoing process which means that external outcome will not be the ultimate goal; after
achieving certain outcomes, it goes back to attitudes for another circular process. This
model is different to the pyramid model which assumes that knowledge and skills are first needed in order to achieve the external outcome as the final goal. Also compared to Stier’s model, Deardorff’s process model is different. As in Stier’s model, different aspects of intercultural competence are more skills oriented, and no relationship between the content competences and processual competencies are shown.

Jokikokko (2010, 59) argues in her research that intercultural competences are not just a set of skills which help a person to behave properly or interact successfully in the intercultural environment, but more a holistic approach or a philosophy for providing guidance in various intercultural situations. Jokikokko (ibid, 22) also notes that intercultural learning and competence is more like a process which requires “constant reflection, openness and willingness for mutual learning”. I agree with Jokikokko’s (ibid, 24) argument that intercultural competence and intercultural learning are intertwined and some intercultural competence is an essential condition for intercultural learning to occur.

In relation to third culture kids, it is possible that they learn in a new place and then they move to another place which may have totally different culture compare to the previous location; they can use the competences they have developed in the previous place to adapt the new environment. Thus, “the achievement of intercultural competence is very much a learning process, formal or informal, and also an interactive process” (Ericsson 2000, 1).
3. Methodology of the research

In this chapter I will discuss the methodological approach, research subjects and data collection as well as the data analysis of this thesis.

3.1 Narrative research approach

The reason I chose this topic is because I am very interested in ATCKs’ experiences, and willing to learn about how the journeys abroad can shape their life. Narrative approach fits my purpose very well, as it is especially focusing on life story which Chase (2005, 652) describes to be ‘a narrative about a specific significant aspect of a person’s life’. This concept helped me to construct my interview questions, and I was interested in studying their learning process through different life stories. Furthermore, from Atkinson’s (1998) point of view a life story is the part of a person’s life what the teller chooses to tell people and want to let others know about it (as cited in Jokikokko 2010, 49). Narratives are ways to show feelings, thoughts and also different interpretations (Chase 2005, 660-661). People show their emotions when they tell about their life. The stories can be seen also as a combination from both the participants’ and researcher’s stories; the understanding of the questions by the participants differs as well as the interpretations of the stories. I also hold the idea that the perceptions of the readers somehow affect the research topic.

When I talk to some researchers about my approach, some of their first reactions were: “oh, narrative, super long text”. From one hand, narrative can be very exciting, interesting, informative and attract you to do more research, on the other hand, it can be too long, too complicated (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou 2008, 2). When I finished my interview transcription, huge amount of data was in front of me and waiting for analysis. Even though my data is very compelling and insightful, I only used less than 1/10 of them. I had to make the choice that I only need data which is related to my research questions. For analyzing narrative data, every time is a different experience, the words are very vivid and I can feel my research participants, the happy feeling or the struggling feeling. My position
when talking to them, and later on analyzing the data, is not only as a researcher, but also as a good listener. Research participants are speaking to someone who is listening to their words which makes the conversation meaningful. Ricoeur (1991) notes that writers/researchers are making efforts to present “life as a story in its nascent state” (as cited in Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou 2008, 44) in this kind of relationship between talking and hearing for readers.

My focus on the narrative research is experience-centered. “Experience-centered narrative research distinguished personal narratives from other kinds of representations are being sequential in time and meaningful, are definitively human, ‘re-present’ experience, reconstituting it, as well as expressing it and display transformation or change” (ibid, 42). These narratives may involve a life turning point or just a general experience which has impact on construction of values (ibid.). In my research the participant told about some turning points which were caused by a person or certain incidents and these turning points reconstructed their perspectives towards their TCKs experience. These perspectives are also based on every day’s life when living abroad. Hence, the interpretations of the data show the great importance of the learning experience.

When the ATCKs were telling their stories, their position was not static. It involved all the past as well as the present, old perspectives towards old experiences, also new perspective towards old experiences and new experiences. The research participants built their stories while interacting with the listener (Gubrium & Holstein 2009, 94). The stories they told me are also their interpretations about their life. “Human reality is always the reality of interpretation” (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou 2008, 86), in the case of this study it means both the research participants’ interpretations about their lives at a specific moment and the researchers’ interpretations about the participants’ stories.

3.2 Research subjects and data collection

The table below summarizes the participants of the research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to my own interest in intercultural learning and competence, firstly, I chose my participants who have lived in the countries with very different cultural background; my research participants have lived in Asia, Europe, South America, North America, Africa and Oceania. Secondly, my target group is adult third culture kids because we can assume that they are able to reflect their experiences in a different way compared to younger people. As I am also interested in TCKs’ future educational and career plans, ATCKs might have chosen the field for study or even already have a job. In that case, they are able to describe the stories differently than younger children. Hence, I set the age from 20-30. I attempted to encourage my research subjects talk freely about their personal experiences. This is what I have also mentioned in the narrative approach chapter: I wanted myself not only as a researcher but also as a friend who is listening to their stories.

I started my data collection process by asking my friends if they know someone who were TCKs, and as I did my internship at Expatriate Archive Centre in the Hague, I also asked my co-workers if they know someone who fits my requirements. Thus, I have used the snowball sampling when looking for research participants. In the end, I found 6 participants who have lived in 22 countries in Asia, North America, South America, Africa and Europe. They are from age 18 to 34, two males and four females.

Interview questions
My aim for this thesis is to do research about ATCKs’ intercultural learning and competences and the interview is semi-structured. Due to the third culture experience, ATCKs may have to do a lot of identity work. My research focus lies on intercultural learning and competence which set the foundations for my interview questions. In order to keep this focus, I avoided asking the questions related to identity when I drafted my interview questions (see appendix 1), although I am aware that issues related to intercultural learning often relate to identity.

I was aware that as my research participants do not know me well, it may occur that they don’t feel comfortable enough to talk freely. That is why I set some warm up questions in the beginning in order to make the atmosphere as relaxed as possible. My questions were focused on how they review their past experience and the way they talk about it.

Interview
After I found the potential participants, I briefed them about the purpose of the interview, and asked them if they would like to help me with my research. Some of them showed positive feedback and I asked them for their contact email. I sent the interview consent form, in which it was written clearly that the interview will be recorded and their identity will be protected; only my supervisor and I will have the access to the entire transcripts. I also asked if they would like to donate the interview transcript to Expatriate Archive Center for future research purposes, and the decision was up to them.

In the email I also scheduled the interview time with them. They all signed the interview consent form before the interview. The places for interview were chosen together; four interviews were conducted at some relaxing places like parks and quiet cafes and two interviews were conducted via Skype due to our different locations. The places of the interviews to be chosen in a quiet relaxed setting is quite important because the ‘same’ story can differ when choosing somewhere else (Chase 2005, 659), such as a loud public place that the research participants are unwilling to tell the stories. During the interview I paid much attention to the collaboration with my research participant. Some of them were
very excited to share their stories in detail with me and some of them just answered my
questions briefly. In addition to themes and questions mentioned in my interview frame
have used some addition questions (such as “Can you tell me more about it?”, “What do
you mean by this, can you explain it for me?”, “I totally agree with what just said, can you
think of more examples?” and so on) in order to encourage the participants to share more
details which may reflect their intercultural learning experience. I also showed my
curiosity, understanding and attentiveness as a sign of encouragement (Gubrium &
Holstein 2009, 93).

As I have mentioned before, my role was not only to be a researcher from the outside, who
tries to understand third culture kids’ world, but I was also trying to understand them and
think things from their angle. Gubrium & Holstein (2009, 94) mention “Conversational
collaboration may also influence where the story is going and what the story is about”. The
interviews were recorded and later transcribed into written words. After the interview, the
research participants were told that if they feel uncomfortable about the interview, they can
withdraw their participation before the submission of the thesis and also they may be
reached in the future for more questions. In the end I had rich data about their experiences,
including personal development and intercultural learning and competence.

Data Analysis
The goal of qualitative data analysis is to extract information from the huge amount of data
and the information you put together should have clear meaning and answer your research
questions (Lichtman 2010, 195). To be short, the data and interpretations we present should
answer our research question, and readers should be able to easily understand what we are
attempting to say through the words which we have written. I have two research questions,
and the second one regarding educational and career choices I have asked them specifically
during the interview, hence, it is easier to find the answer for the second research question.
The first one is regarding their intercultural learning experience, and in the findings I want
to present what my research participants have learned during the past years when living
abroad and when repatriating to their passport country. My goal is to find the knowledge
which represents their learning.

My data analysis can be considered “analysis of narratives” (Polkinghorne 1995, 5), which means that I have looked for differences and similarities in my data and categorized the data under broader themes. First, I separated all the narratives from the interviews, which were relevant in terms of my research questions. Next, data needed to be read for many times for constructing and deconstructing the categories. I first had my initial list of categories and later on when I re-examined my data; I realized that some data fit better into another category. Also additional categories needed to be added to make sense of the data. For example, when I was analyzing one participant’s story which was very long, I decided to put it under a new theme instead of including it in other existing themes since it clearly showed an interesting aspect of what the participant had learned from a specific turning point. When categorizing the data I attempted to follow Lichtman’s (2010, 195) advice: “Don’t jump to conclusions and concepts too quickly. That often leads to superficial analyses that don’t really add much new information to the literature”. In the end of the analysis process I still had quite many categories related to my research participants’ intercultural learning and competence. By reanalyzing the data and categories once more, I managed to create broader themes. Finally, I have 3 findings- categories related to my first research question. Thus, my data analysis has included both separating and synthesizing the data and the categories.

In the quotations that I have included in my findings I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of research participant. Three periods (…) between the sentences indicate the omission of content. ‘Passport country’, ‘host country’, ‘country name’ and ‘city name’ indicate the name of the country or city that was removed to protect the participants’ identities. ‘Unclear sentence’ refers to the sentences that I was not able to transcribe due to the recording sound quality. ‘Long silence’ indicates a long pause during the interview.
4. Findings

The intention of this research is to present the intercultural learning process of the research subject. I am very interested in the places, the people and the time that ultimately shape the environment for intercultural learning experience. Due to my personal experience, I can conclude that I have learned a lot from interacting with people from different cultures and also from overcoming the difficulties I met. I also aim to find out about my participants’ future plans about their educational and career choices; whether the TCKs’ experiences affect their decisions, for example, if they want to keep moving from country to country and continue this journey. Talking to ATCKs and reading more stories about them intrigued me to make the decision to conduct this research. It is also a learning experience by getting to know more about their experiences and especially later on analyzing the data. It is only a small research which cannot and will not represent all the ATCKs; however, one of my goals is to give certain references to readers who are interested in intercultural learning with high mobility.

During the data collection period, six interviews were conducted in English and I have received interesting data about my research subjects’ TCKs’ experience. Based on my research questions, I have two main parts for my findings. The first part is regarding their intercultural learning experience, I have put the data into categories based on what and how they have learnt in different situations. My second part looks at their future plan about educational or career choice.

4.1 Part one: Intercultural learning and competence

The main findings of this research show that the intercultural learning and competence of ATCKs was characterized by the following three themes: Constructing different values and worldviews by living abroad; having no fear to new things and learning from feeling uncomfortable; and the increased ability to build social relationships and learning from others.
4.1.1 Constructing different values and worldviews by living abroad

It is hard to change values which often have already been formed during the childhood. When I was interviewing Matt, I asked if there has been any turning points in his life that made him think differently. He told me this whole experience as a third culture kid changed a lot of his perspectives towards various issues, and he gave me one example of living in the Middle East.

_I played different views to most of the people, because most of people, you know, you said you lived in the middle east, they are like ‘Really? It is safe out there?’, and you actually realized that it’s small amount of people, because you see from the news living in the middle east, this or that, you don’t actually understand it, probably, that for me, a big point that I see it, I can see it in a completely different light, probably I understand it a little bit better. I have experienced, not like terrorism or something, I’ve experienced their culture, their religion at first hand, while other people just experience it from the news._

(Matt, Adult TCK)

This is also an aspect that Pollock and Van Reken (2009, 88) mention “…TCKs not only observe firsthand the many geographical differences around the world, but they also learn how people view life from different philosophical and political perspectives”.

When Linda told me what she has learned from her TCKs’ experience, she mentioned open-mindedness referring to the fact that there is no fixed right or wrong criteria for her because things can be very different depending on location, thus, she will not judge right or wrong but try to integrate.

_Oh, what is open-mindedness. There is no right and wrong answer to anything. Just because you eat, say, spaghetti with a fork doesn’t mean that’s the right way to eat, maybe the right way to eat is with chopsticks, and it’s not spaghetti with tomato_
sauce, it’s spaghetti with an interesting coloring sauce which taste just as good, so, there’s no right and wrong answers and if there is, I am not the person, who claims, who decides what it is, just molding yourself to the situations, not fighting against changes, there’s nothing wrong with change, I think those things are might be the biggest lessons.

(Linda, Adult TCK)

Pollock & Van Reken (2009, 47) also refer to this phenomenon, that Linda is discussing, by arguing that “As TCKs move with their parents from place to place, the cultural values and practices of the communities they live in often change radically. What was acceptable behavior and thinking in one place is seen as crude or ridiculous in the next”. Also Jokikokko (2010, 72) who describes intercultural learning as transformative and argues that it does not aim to achieving a set of skills like a survival tool kit but to form a way to approach the world and interact with people. From my point of view, what has come from the intercultural learning experience for ATCKs is a kind of attitude which helps them move forward.

Matt was telling me that once he was the only student from his country in the whole class in the international school he attended and also he experienced over 50 nationalities existing in one class. This kind of diversity pushed him to learn more about others.

I think when, at first it was a bit strange, looking back but I think it’s actually it’s (unclear sentence) that you are lucky, you experience the world more, makes the world kind of like a small place, so actually you are learning about other people, and things like that, it’s not, it’s not just like socialize with your group or your country all the time, you make connections all around the world. I’ve learned to, kind of, you know, to adopt anything, sort of like, just mold to whatever you got, so, it’s kind of, wherever, I’m kind of, sort of mold into that group, and make friends really easily, I’ve also learned to, kind of, open my eyes, the world, see it in different ways, and actually to, not just stuck in the bubble of (passport country),
Matt went to international school after returning to his passport country, and he realized that he was exposed to many more cultures before while the family was abroad. He compared the international schools he attended before and currently, and realized the lack of diversity in his current school. These two quotations have similarities with Jokikokko’s (2005, 75-76) research on teacher’s intercultural competence and she argues that “Openness, tolerance, appreciation of diversity, critical thinking, creativity, and patience were the abilities which came up in the most all the discussion as precondition for intercultural interactions”.

Sometimes we may not realize we have internalized some values by living in one place, so when we enter another culture, we may feel culture shock. Pedersen (1995, 1) describes culture shock as “the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment”. For TCKs, culture shock happens sometimes when they are facing their passport culture, for example, in the case of one of my research participants Elena who had never lived in her passport country for more than 3 months until high school, the years before she just went back for summer and winter holiday. Even the passport country is supposed to be the familiar culture but compared to the one of her host countries which she stayed for 10 years passport country’s culture is not that familiar. Sometimes the way how people behave in her passport country is not what she agrees with, as it is different from the values she learned when living abroad.

*I guess, so they have less respect for teachers, and you know, they have less respect for the environment, a lot of the time at my school, there was a massive problem that everyone brings their lunch to school, bring their plastic bags or alumni foil and those kinds of things, after lunch, the whole floor will be covered with them, and that is something you would never see in (host country), in (host country) everyone would put their rubbish in the rubbish bin, that is just how it worked you*
know, every child was slightly raised in a way that they would clean up after themselves.

*(Elena, Adult TCK)*

Compared to going to a place for vacation is totally different to living in that place; maybe her passport country is not a new place for her but actually by living there she has encountered many differences such as teenagers’ attitude towards drinking and schooling. As mentioned in the theoretical framework of this study self-reflection is an important condition for learning, and according to Elena, she learned a lot by living in many countries and reflecting their differences. According to Jokikokko (2010, 61), self reflection is a very important part of ethical intercultural learning and the realization can be found by comparing one’s own thinking and acting to the surrounding people, as Elena describes:

*What I also think is that I am very aware of my surroundings, I am very aware of the culture differences and countries and you know what you kind of have to be aware of when you are in different countries and when you are speaking to different people and I believed I’ve gotten certain kind of maturity, I became more independent because of it, I can do certain things, I, yea, that I wouldn’t be able to do if I grew up in (passport country) in my whole life, things you learned as a child living abroad, I don’t think you could ever learned if you are living in one place your whole life, and I think it’s because you kind of, you see all these different realities, and you see how so many people live that you kind of reflect more yourself, you reflect more what others do, and you come, more aware of these surroundings as well, I think that is something that I really really appreciate about being able to live abroad at that certain time.*

*(Elena, Adult TCK)*

When I asked Will how he thinks about his third culture kids’ experience, he told me he appreciates it a lot because he benefits so much from it in terms of his cultural awareness.
Bennett (2009, S4) notes that “Cultural self-awareness is a necessary precursor of intercultural learning, which involves recognizing cultural difference”.

_Hmmm, I think it really gave me idea of how big and different the world can be, and not just different how stuff looks but in how different it can be to live, and different nations._

_(Will, Adult TCK)_

Eva told me about one turning point in her life related to her third culture kids’ experience in one of her host countries. She saw the huge contrast between the rich and the poor and looked back to her own privileged life for living comfortably all the time. She told herself that she needs to work harder to help people as much as she can. Taylor (1994) notes that the transformation will not happen only through reflection, it also needs discourse and action (as cited in Jokikokko 2010, 32). Eva really has deep thoughts from when she was living abroad and she keeps telling herself to do something more and she is working hard on achieving her plan.

_In my class in (host country), one of my best friends, her dad is a business man, I think he is the 5th richest man in (host country), incredible wealthy, and in our class, we also have some scholarship kids who are local students who had really high marks, so they got a scholarship to go to high school...once I celebrated the (host country)’s holiday with my rich friends, you know there’s three chefs and five maids serving you the food and, you know, you never need to do the things yourself, you walk into the house, someone takes your coat, someone with gloves on will show you to your place, very fancy, and I also went once to meet one of my scholarship friends, went to her house, which was small, small little shoe box, you know, she made the food herself, you know, I helped her out, and we sat there together, the contrast was so, so huge... and for me, I went to my home, you know, I lived in an embassy compound, beautiful compound...and I sat there and I’m like, ok, this is really ironic that my family is in this country to help poverty and here we are, in_
this luxury house...I don’t know, I feel it’s really backwards, really, and I feel, I feel remember this kind of realization like, ‘wow, this is really embarrassing, like we come here, oh, don’t worry we are going to save you, but first help ourselves, we have this nice luxury comfortable life here, we are coming to your country to help you but we are living in a very lovely lifestyle’, I really hated like that, like kind of, that was a turning point because I thought of that my whole entire life, like, wow, I’ve been very comfortable, my entire life in the countries where everyone there were mostly uncomfortable, they have to fight almost every single day, to find the things they have you know, so that was always very like, still don’t know how to reconcile? ... well, I should do something with that, in my life, you know, like I’ve seen all these suffering people, so I’m gonna go to college, with the money that I have, and go back and help people... I try to remind myself, listen, even you are very average here, this is very much above average for the rest of the world, always thinking about that, always keep that in the back of your mind...it’s a very difficult thought for me because I feel guilty for having what I have even though I can’t really help it, you know, I’m a lucky person for having what I have...

(Eva, Adult TCK)

To summarize the findings of this chapter, it seems that when describing their intercultural learning, my research participants often mention how their attitudes, perspectives and values have changed by living in different places. They are open to a lot of new things because they know how diverse the world is; they have realized that what they see is not necessarily what it true. They do compare different situations and reflect on what they should do to make the best of each situation.

4.1.2 Having no fear to new things and learning from feeling uncomfortable

We all have our own comfort zone, and it is hard to get out of this comfortable zone. Eva has lived in many developing countries due to her father’s job. She has seen people living in uncomfortable situations and even has friends in similar living arrangement. After
moving back to her passport country, Eva realized that people around her did not really pay attention to what is happening in the world and complain a lot for little things. What she feels is that there is always more to explore, and one does not need to be afraid to see the world.

*There’s always more, I was think like that there’s always more than (passport country), cuz for a lot of my friends and family here in (passport country) is all they know, for them it’s a big deal to go (city name) for a weekend, for me it is kinda like ‘no, come on guys, there’s so much happening around you, turn on the television, watch the news, you know, do you know what’s going on’ and they are like ‘oh no, there’s so much sad news, I don’t want to watch that’, and that really bothers me, that’s when I’m like, ‘no!’, you are living in a very comfortable life, and people out there don’t have a comfortable life, you need to realize how lucky you are, I don’t know, I always think you need to come up with a way to make everyone live comfortably, maybe that’s because I’ve seen more of the world, that’s more of the feeling that I’ve got. I don’t know, I feel like, yea, always more, whatever you are doing now, it’s not it, you can always be doing more, something is always important to me, I would never just settle for a job from 9 to 5, every single day, I’ve always want to make sure that I know what’s going on the world, try to come out with solutions, what could I do? Where could I go? Who I can talk to? Stuff like that. That’s something that I think living abroad for a long time has done for me.*

*(Eva, Adult TCK)*

TCKs’ experience has made Eva better understand the inequality of the world; some people can live very well and there is no need to worry about hunger while other people need to struggle everyday to fight starvation. After living in her host country, Eva started to appreciate what she has and she became willing to take action to solve some of these problems instead of remaining ignorant to what is happening in the world.

When Linda was in one Asian country for her internship and she was talking to a friend
about coming back in the future to work there, her friend told Linda that she will stay in her country after graduation instead of going abroad for job because her family and friends are all in her country. However, Linda has different views towards moving.

*But for me was like ‘no, I wanna come here’, she was like ‘aren’t you scared of, you know like, everything new, not having anything’, I was like ‘not really’, I feel like one of the personality traits I’ve gained from the life I had is I easily mold myself to this situation, as hard as I molded, so, yea, I think, maybe, yea.*

*(Linda, Adult TCK)*

Moving to her passport country alone was not easy for Linda; everything was new to her, even the language. She was alone and needed help; however, things were not going according to her expectations. She told me she feels like “a hidden immigrant” but she tries to understand the culture and society in order to successfully integrate. Despite these difficulties and uncomfortable feelings, she appreciated all the difficulties because she has feels that she has gained so much from them; so for her moving to another country is not a big deal because Linda knows how it feels to live in different countries. However, for her friend, moving means giving up the life, family and friends back in her country. Living abroad has brought so many memories to ATCKs, there are positive parts and negative parts, sometimes during the interviews, they paused a while and really thought about the memories.

*I remember one, I moved here I was so mad with my family, I was so mad, why wouldn’t they move the earth and land and for air and water for me, like they are my family, and they know I’m lost, like how dare they are not helping me and not it’s, looking back on, it’s, of course with the experience, thinking I’m glad they didn’t, because you learned to value more things that you do, like my cousin is about the same age like me, but she’s grown up in her life in (country name), and she doesn’t value certain things that I value a lot because her parents give to it, easily, and I have to earn it with my own sweat and blood, so you know like, that*
sounds like but the moment I moved to (passport country), I hated the world for it, but now, it’s like, you know, good that (passport country) does this, you learn to value stuff. Thanks to this experience, I’ve been showered with this, with this culture, so I’ve learned to value the things that I have and don’t have. If I would grow up living in one country, certainly there would be something that I wouldn’t value because I haven’t been really given the chance to value them.

(Linda, Adult TCK)

TCKs experiences have put my research participants into many uncomfortable situations, for example it may be very hard in the beginning to say goodbye to friends when TCKs are leaving to another country. But on the basis of my data it seems that they get used to it and become quite good at it. Saying goodbye is no longer very sad but turning to a nice hope. They hope to see the old friends somewhere in the future. Aittola (1998) points out that significant and transformative learning can be happening even in informal life situations (as cited in Jokikokko2010, 34). Saying goodbye to friends is a very casual phenomenon, it is not what we are learning in schools with a well structured curriculum; however my research participants have learned that saying goodbye is not a negative experience, but can actually be an enlightening experience.

yea, I can actually, I can exactly see what I have changed, when we left (host country), I was a lot more upset, when I was leaving (host country) or (host country) or (host country), I wasn’t as upset, when I was younger, it was a lot of sad to leave, but I wasn’t when I was older, and looking back now definitely it was quite a lot of people there I knew in (host country) I actually met up with or spoken to since leaving...probably that’s one of the hardest parts, but also it’s one of the good parts as well, because it’s just, when you move, cuz most of time everyone moves on, so it might only be a goodbye for a little while, you may end up being in the same place again.

(Matt, Adult TCK)
Surprisingly I’ve gotten really good at, I just dropping and going, like I am bad at like saying goodbye, from the moment that where we have to say goodbye, it’s quite easy for me to just pick up my luggage and go, I don’t, I think it’s just from practice you learned to disconnect, move on, disconnect and reconnect somewhere else.

(Linda, Adult TCK)

Matt and Linda are two ATCKs who have lived in more than four countries and for them, it was sad in the beginning to say goodbye to friends. When they got used to this kind of life in which you have to constantly disconnect and move to another new country, saying goodbye doesn’t necessarily mean never seeing each other again. They realized that it is quite easy to connect with people using new technology and many of my research participants mentioned this in the interviews.

In this section the research participants described how they have become comfortable from feeling uncomfortable and how they do not fear new things. Furthermore, they discussed how they have learned to overcome difficulties and perceive them as learning experiences and how some negatively loaded experiences, such as saying goodbye to friends, can also be seen from a positive perspective. Adaption to something new and difficult has become natural to them.

4.1.3 The increased ability to build social relationship and learning from others

For TCKs it is very common to move from one country to another, which means they have to make new friends from time to time. After interviewing my research subjects, I found that some of them thought it is not difficult to talk to people despite being from different countries.

Matt and I were discussing one of the best things during the time staying abroad, and he mentioned that it was all the friends he met. This TCKs’ experience helped him to easily make friends because he has lived in many countries and got to know so many cultures,
hence, it is easy for him to talk to people from different places.

I find it easy to make new friends in the new places. I think, yea, mixture of personality but also because I have experienced different cultures and things, I can always talk to somebody, and that, I may not know a lot about that culture of where they are from, but I know a little bit, so you know, you can always talk from that, it’s a starting point, to get to know someone.

(Matt, Adult TCK)

Another participant, Elena, also talked about how the best part of being a TCK is visiting different places and this also helped her learn how to make friends. As a TCK, she has stayed in three countries and travelled to many other countries.

I have visited so many different places, maybe I don’t remember all of them, but, you know, you can say you’ve been to several different places, you can say you have experienced so many different places as well, that was also very very, that is a great part of it, I can say that I have, you know, had a lot fun, may not captured all of them but I have had quite a lot about them, and I mean that is the positive and negative part as well, but you know, I think it is also being a positive part because it makes you easy, you can get in contact with people easily, you know, it makes you more sociable, that’s what I have to say, you know, it’s really easy to just go to a random person and just have a conversation, you know, you are not scared anymore, you have to know how to make friends, as a third culture kid.

(Elena, Adult TCK)

When I was having the conversation with Milly regarding moving back to her passport country, she told me it was hard to explain her identity to people who only live in one country; instead it was easier to make friends with international students who come from different countries.
I definitely realized that I’ve grown up and gone to different places stuff like that made me, I definitely feel more comfortable being around people, have like maybe a mixed background and who lived in different places, cuz you are sort of identify with that.

(Milly, Adult TCK)

Linda gave me another perspective of socializing with friends when we discussed that it is hard to greet people sometimes, if we do not know how they do it in their culture. She said there are so many different kinds of greetings, she doesn’t initiate and wait for others to do it which will result in less awkward interactions.

But to be honest, I don’t initiate socializing in general, that’s something I come out from this experience of travelling; I never know what people want to do, when it comes to socializing, they want the hand or they just want a ‘hi’ or they want a hug or they want a kiss or they want two kisses, three kisses, four kisses, five, so my mode is just I stand there and smile, and I’m kind of wait for the other person to initiate, if we both going looking like we are not sure what we should do but we want to do something, then I will (unclear sentence), we kiss? But I don’t initiate so, there’s so many out there, I don’t know which one.

(Linda, Adult TCK)

In general, my research participants discussed more about precessual competences, however, they also mentioned content competences which refer to the knowledge about cultures and people (Stier 2003, 84), as Linda did in the previous example.

Sometimes when we go abroad, we still find a lot of communities from our passport countries, for example, China town, Korean town, little Italy. It is very nice to hang out with people from the same country; also it is very exciting to get to know people from different countries. However, some of us neglect the communication with local people; excuse can be the lack of local language knowledge. Building relationship with locals can
open a new world. For example Linda told me her relationship with the ‘ayi’ who is their cleaning lady for helping the domestic things.

*I think it was quite smooth, I can’t even realize that I was adapting, cuz, like I said the people there were so enthusiastic to have me be part of it, like I remembered, first half year we had a ‘ayi’ at home, and she would bring (host country)’s opera, she was the one who taught me certain phrases in (host country)’s language, half of which I don’t remember, now I went to (country name), I recognized couple of them, she was the one who taught me properly how to count in (host country)’s language, also the international school that I went they had like (host country)’s study trips, or some sort of projects that will integrate us or understand more of the culture, to be more aware of that we were not just in the bubble of internationalism.*

(Linda, Adult TCK)

Will told me that they had a family driver when they were in one of the host countries and the driver affected him a lot, and he had a great time with him instead of feeling lonely. He experienced a lot of local culture with the family driver.

*Yea, (long silence), maybe with the driver first, very important guy, he was the first which I related like a big brother maybe, he watched with me the (host country)’s version of MacGyver, and then went with me to the (host country)’s hairdresser, and told them I should get a MacGyver hairdo, it was very fun relationship, with this guy, and he made me feel at home between this other culture, he was like the guide maybe and he spoke French because (host country) was the old French protectorate, so it was very easy to communicate with him and anybody in the (host country) by the way because they all speak French, that was an impressive guy.*

(Will, Adult TCK)

The people TCKs met during their stay in passport and host countries helped them have
more information about that country; interacting with local people deepened their knowledge towards cultures and created friendships. The past experiences as TCKs made them easily to get to know new friends.

4.2 Part two: Future plan: educational and career choices

This part includes the answers to my question regarding future plans especially about educational and career choice. I am very interested in doing research to find out how high mobility may relate to future choice making: will they choose to go back to host country or passport country for further studies? After graduation, will they prefer to choose a career which enables them to go abroad just like the mobile life they had when they were young? However, I am aware that in this research I am only able to scratch the surface of this issue related to my participants’ choices. A large scale of quantitative research should be done to find out the more general answer. I have two sub-categories in this section due to the age range of my research participants is from 18 to 34. Some of them are facing university choices, some are in universities and some are already pursuing a career. Hence, I categorized educational choice and career choice for the clarity reasons.

4.2.1 Education choice – passport country as the most natural place for studies

Matt and Milly both told me they chose to go back to their passport country for higher education because they are familiar with the educational system there, and also because the international schools they went to have always followed home system, no matter where they have lived. Milly mentioned some of her friends were going back to their host country for a master’s degree due to the increased tuition fee in the passport country. Financial considerations are mentioned as a very important factor for making decision (Wilkins 2013, 8).

I probably, as I always go back to the (passport country)’s university, because it’s for me that something I know, better, so that’s what my plan will be.
(Matt, Adult TCK)

Because I think, because, we went to, cuz our system is, our school system was English, we learned in English, and then, also, sort of, you know, going to an international school is sort of maintain your culture, you don’t integrate with (host country)’s people that much, so then it’s just natural to go back to like, your home country, so, that was, yea, then I noticed that a lot of people coming back here for master’s courses cuz obviously the fee goes more expensive in the (passport country) in the last of couple of years, so now everyone’s like, like more people, you know, even people who’ve never lived here before coming over, going other European countries as well, so, yea, it’s interesting.

(Milly, Adult TCK)

When I interviewed Eva, she just got her Bachelor’s degree and was going to start her Master’s degree after the summer break. She went back to her passport country for university studies, and has been staying there for 4 years. She told me she cannot wait to move again because it has been quite a long time for her to stay in one country.

Well, my master is one year, the second half is an internship where you also collect your research for your master thesis, and I, I feel like I have been in (passport country) for a long enough now, so for that semester I would like to go a country that I have never been before, so completely uncomfortable, so I won’t be with my family, that go somewhere new with my family, now, go all the way, go somewhere by myself, completely, and, yea, I wanna just start there, see how I like that country, how I’m gonna do in that country without my family there, how I am gonna figure it out, what’s gonna be like, I feel that that will be a turning point, if I can do by myself then I know I will be fine wherever I go, you know, it’s not a big deal……I feel after that I wanna try to find an internship or job outside (passport country), you know, move away from this part of my life now, go back to what I was used to, kind of, so, yea.
All of my research participants chose to pursue their Bachelor’s degree in their passport country, Wilkins (2013, 7) mentions many international school students who study in UAE thought it is natural to go back to their passport country for higher education. During the interviews, 4 out of 6 of my research participants’ parents were still abroad when their children were studying in the university.

4.2.2 Career choice – affected by a desire to learn more from living abroad

Linda is going to finish her master’s degree in education soon and when I asked her about her future career plans, she told me she likes what she is doing now, for example she went to one Asian country to teach as her internship. She can travel around the world and do something she is truly passionate about – teaching. I asked whether the reason for choosing this study program is affected by her past high mobility life, and she gave me a positive answer.

\[I \text{ like the career that I am doing now, cuz I could be a teacher in Singapore, be there for 4 years and then I can go and do a job in Australia, another three years and then I could go... it's like, when I think of the future plans that I have for myself, I don't see myself settling down. I need a career that I can work anywhere I want and the pay may not be necessary perfect but decent, like I don't need to worry about my rent. I take the world as my option, not, just (passport country).}\]

\((Linda, \text{ Adult TCK})\)

When I was discussing with Matt, he also revealed some thoughts about future plans after graduation. He is about to study at a university, however, living abroad is more attractive for him, he has great experience of living in many different countries in the past years.

\[Probably abroad. Because it's kind of, I just, it's different, cuz you don't, you get\]
great of experiences, because you experience the world you are not just know your home country, you see lots of different things. You are sort of, you are not expecting, you know, it’s just completely different experience that, it’s just another way of life, that, you know, you get into, get experienced, get involved in it, it’s kind of the excitement of the unknown.

(Matt, Adult TCK)

Eva also mentioned that her plans include not living in her passport country and even not in one country in the future. She has earlier moved every four years from one country to another until she went back to her passport country for university. For her, moving has become ‘logical’.

I know for sure that I don’t see myself living in (passport country), for my life, hmmm, so I know that for sure, I can’t see myself living in the same country forever, I feel like moving around is just logical, that something that should be happening, so I definitely see myself doing the same thing like my dad did, like every four years hop around from job to job, living in different countries, meeting new people. Hmmm, then I also, I don’t know, I would also like to be more attached to one place, and kind of really build my life in one area, then I think it would nice be just find a country and this is the place that I want to settle down and just live there, forever, ever and ever.

(Eva, Adult TCK)

Another example of combining passion and travelling around the world came from Elena. She wants to experience more in the future and when I asked if this is because of her past experience, she told me ‘partially’, the more she travels, the more she realizes there is more out there than her hometown.

I really wanna combine my love for sports and I really wanna combine that with developmental studies, I am very much into development of countries, and I see
sports that is a good magnetism for that, and that is something that I really want to try to combine, cuz I have love and passion for sports, you know, it is just something that has been very close to me that I love very very much, and I find development very very interesting, so that is something that I am pursuing now when I am at the university, and, yea, that is what I want to try and combine together, which, and I hope those, that this combination brings me abroad, I can do it in (passport country), maybe, but it is something that is very much you know, out there in the world, that’s what I want to try as well, wanna see and wanna do, yea, wanna experience...No, it partially because of my past experience, but I have only lived in quite developed countries I mean, I have never had to live, you know, in a place where the electricity doesn’t work right, or where a lot of people live in poverty, that is not something that I personally experienced, but it is something that, you know, because I travelled so much and I took thing more beyond, you know, than just your little hometown, yup, that’s kind of, made me realized so much more.

(Elena, Adult TCK)

From the conversations with my research participants, I can feel the past experience does affect their understanding of the world; they expressed a desire to see more differences, to experience more cultures and avoid staying in one place. Two of the participants’ choices towards career are missing because one already has a job which requires frequent international travel which she thinks fits her very well. Another revealed his willingness to travel around the world again like before but due to some personal limitation, he is currently working in his passport country and has less travel included in his work.
5. Discussion of the trustworthiness and ethics of the research

In order to understand the definitions of reliability and validity in qualitative research, it is inevitable to present different perspectives by many qualitative researchers. However, it is also relevant to remember that reliability and validity were developed in the use of quantitative research (Golafshani 2003, 600-602). In this section, I adapt Guba’s (1981) four criteria for pursuing the trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (as cited in Shenton 2004, 64).

First of all, I would like to briefly review my research method, research participants, and data collection to evaluate credibility. Before the interview, I introduced myself to my research participants in order to let them have a general idea about my background and the purpose of this study. They were informed that the interview will be recorded but their identities will be protected and the consent form will be signed before the interview. The interviews were semi-structured and included introducing the researcher’s background and asking for participants’ background in the beginning which serves the purpose of getting to know each other first; this set of data is not used to analyze the finding. During the interview, I asked research participants to describe their past experience, their feelings, and turning points; I also encouraged them to elaborate the experiences when they were talking about learning. My aim was to analyze what they described as life stories instead of asking them to create detailed life histories. I have written the researcher’s position in the introduction chapter in order to examine the insider and outsider position in this study. Narrative approach was used and its application for my research was discussed as well.

With regard to transferability, Shenton (2004, 69) argues that “Since the finds of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate if the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations”. It was also mentioned by Stake (1994) and Denscombe (1998) that even the case is unique it also can be used as a reference within a broader group (as cited in Shenton 2004, 69). As I mentioned earlier, one of my aims in this study is to
provide reference to people who are interested in TCKs’ intercultural learning and competence. It can be argued also on the basis of the previous literature and research that although my participants’ stories are unique, they also tell something more general about the phenomenon that I have studied.

I have carefully discussed the theoretical framework, methodological approach and data collection in the previous chapters in order to evaluate the dependability. Since it is a qualitative research, the stories told by the research participants were affected by the time, place and the interaction with the researcher; moreover, the interpretation of the data by the researcher is also time, place and context based (Jokikokko 2010, 87; Karjalainen 2003, 85-86).

As Shenton (2004, 72) notes “The concept of conformability is the qualitative investigator’s comparable concern to objectivity. Here steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher”. My findings were presented in complete stories instead of short sentences. Some sentences are omitted in order to protect the identities and privacy or to shorten the length of a very long paragraph. Readers can have their own interpretation by reading the findings although I have also offered my interpretation by referring to references.

Regarding ethical consideration, the names of the ATCKs were changed and the passport or host countries were removed in this study in order to ensure the confidentiality of the research participants. The research participants were also aware of being recorded and agreed that only the researcher and her supervisor have the access to the original data for this study; they can withdraw the participation at any time before the submission of the master thesis, but none of them has contacted me for withdrawing their participation.
6. Discussing the findings

The book “Third Culture Kids” which was written by Pollock and Van Reken “contributes to an understanding of the way international mobility impacts upon the individual” (Tanu 2015, 16), and issues such as benefits and challenges as a TCK, rootlessness and restlessness, dealing with transition etc. were discussed in the book. The aim of this research was to discover the intercultural learning experience through the lenses of ATCKs and to find out how they think about the TCKs experience when choosing future education and career. I used narrative approach as my research methodology and the findings are split into two parts to answer my two research questions. Part one with regard to the intercultural learning and competence has three themes to present my findings: 1. Constructing different values and worldviews by living abroad; 2. Having no fear to new things and learning from feeling uncomfortable and 3. The increased ability to build social relationships and learning from others. Part two regarding their educational and career choices discuss has findings such as my research participants tend to go back to their passport countries where they feel more familiar with education but still have a strong desire to continue the international mobility journey in the future when choosing career.

I discussed the intercultural learning and competence under my theoretical framework; TCKs’ intercultural learning as a transformative and informal learning was elaborated and different models of intercultural competences were presented. What my participants described under the themes “constructing different values and worldviews by living abroad” and “having no fear to new things, learning from feeling uncomfortable” is related to transformative learning. According to Lang’s (2004, 137) understanding of transformative learning gives a good lens to understanding the learning as “not just an epistemological process involved in a change in worldview and habits of thinking”, but also as “an ontological process where participants experience a change in their being in the world including their forms of relatedness”. TCKs experiences have really brought them different perspectives towards how they think about the world. They reconstructed certain views by experiencing different situations.
Theme three “the increased ability to build social relationships and learning from others” presented their intercultural learning through interacting with people they met; it is an informal learning environment which requires no evaluation and it happens all the time.

To summarize my research participants discussions related to their intercultural competence, I have included the *Worldwork’s framework of international competencies* (see Figure 4) as it describes those competences that also my research subjects discussed, such as openness, flexibility, personal autonomy and etc.

![Table 1: Worldwork’s framework of international competencies](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Sub-competences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>New thinking&lt;br&gt;Welcome to strangers&lt;br&gt;Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Flexible behaviour&lt;br&gt;Flexible judgement&lt;br&gt;Learning Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal autonomy</td>
<td>Inner purpose&lt;br&gt;Focus on goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional strength</td>
<td>Resilience&lt;br&gt;Coping&lt;br&gt;Spirit of adventure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening orientation</td>
<td>Active listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Clarity of communication&lt;br&gt;Exposing intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural knowledge</td>
<td>Information gathering&lt;br&gt;Valuing differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing</td>
<td>Rapport&lt;br&gt;Range of styles&lt;br&gt;Sensitivity to context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergy</td>
<td>Creating new alternatives</td>
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**Figure 4. Worldwork’s framework of international competencies.** Adapt from: Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, 76-78

This model nicely summarizes some of the important elements of Deardorff’s Pyramid Model and Stier’s different aspects of intercultural competence. However, I agree with Jokikokko’s (2010, 24) argument that intercultural learning and competence are intertwined and that intercultural competence should not be trivialized to the list of skills and knowledge, as it is more of a holistic philosophy guiding one’s thinking and action. This was also visible in my data of ATCKs.
Pollock and Van Reken (2009, 38) note in their book that “We want to continue giving TCKs and ATCKs language and understanding for the depth and unique aspects of their own cross-cultural journey. We have seen for many years how important that is”. I also want to take the opportunity to present my research to people who are interested in topics such as intercultural learning and competence, talents in mobility etc., no matter if they are ATCKs, parents of TCKs or ATCKs, educators and many others. It is a learning journey that we can be proud of and share with people; intercultural learning is not limited by the time, place and people.
7. Discussion of the implications for education and future research

This research discussed the intercultural learning experiences of six ATCKs. It also studied how being abroad helped to shape them into how they behave and think now. As I mentioned before, the aim of this research is to try and provide new insights for teachers and parents who play very important roles during the learning period of TCKs. Especially when ATCKs are entering university, the learning environment is no longer similar to staying in international schools and being surrounded by peers who come from many different countries. Compared to university students who have been staying in their passport countries for their whole life, ATCKs may have gone through intercultural learning process and may have notable intercultural competence. They can be great assets for peer learning in the classroom and teachers or educators should not treat them as a special group but see them as students who have knowledge and expertise regarding intercultural interaction.

For parents, it is also very important to know what their children have learned during this TCKs’ experience. Parents can give support and guidance when needed and help their children to reflect their various experiences as TCK; this is how informal learning happens. According to my research participants, some of them discuss and reflect their experience with their parents a lot and some of them do not. Thus, this research also draws a picture for parents about their children’s learning, as Benjamin and Dervin (2015, 8) note that “…parents’ educational strategies, which play an important role in the children’s adaptation to the host societies and later on in the possible repatriation experiences”.

Furthermore, I do think people with high mobility also can benefit from this study. As Jokikokko (2010, 73) argues in her research, intercultural learning is a lifelong learning process, and also people who are not TCKs may encounter similar type of learning during their adulthood. This study also raises some other interesting topics, such as the role of being able to speak more than one language in intercultural learning for TCKs. Some of my research participants have learned host countries’ language, however in this research I
have not asked any question regarding the effect of language learning. The importance and meaning of language in TCKs’ intercultural learning would be an interesting topic to explore in future research.

There is another trend which many researchers have noticed that the migration of expatriated families is no longer people who serve in corporate or foreign service, but more and more attention is giving to “…the migration of a growing transnational middle-class from emerging post-industrialized societies…” (Désilets 2015, 148). This group of people includes more self-initiated movers who do not benefit from the so called expat packages. Previous literature notes that “Historically, employees of international businesses and members of missions, the military, and diplomatic corps have been part of an elitist community—one with special privileges bestowed on its members by the sponsoring organization, the host culture, or both…diplomatic families may have chauffeurs to drive the children to school or around town. Even without perks, there are entitlements such as worldwide travel to and from their post—all at the expense of the sponsoring agency…” (Pollock & Van Reken 2009, 18). In Farrer and Greenspan’s (2014, 3) research, they mention that the high expense of international schools has become a burden to self-initiated expatriate families and they choose to send their children to local bilingual school or even local school which have much lower tuition fee; the study shows the parents want their children to have better integration in the Chinese society and it is a great opportunity for the children to learn Chinese. Parents’ social-economic status is also one factor which affects TCKs’ adaption during the moving (Benjamin & Dervin 2015, 8; Rizvi 2009, 283). It would be very interesting to do research and know more about TCKs from the self-initiated expatriate families; how their intercultural learning may be different compared to people such as my research participants.
References


Appendix 1

Interview questions

1. General background

1) So, can you tell me a little bit about you, like what is your name? Age? Where were you born?
2) Can you tell me your third culture kids’ experience? (Countries moving to/how many years staying at that country, at which age, what’s the reason for relocating?) Does your whole family move abroad together?

2. Living abroad

1) What do you think when you just moved abroad? How do you adjust your life abroad?
2) How do you deal with saying good-bye to friends? What do you think about it now? What have you changed before and after?

3. Repatriation

1) What’s your expectation before moving back?
2) What do you think about life back to your passport country?
3) What about the life behind? Are you still in contact with the friends before?

4. Comparison

Which kind of life do you prefer? Life abroad or life at passport country? Why?

5. Future

What will you do after your study? Do you have any plans?
If TCK experience has somehow affected your future choice?

6. Conclusion

1) What have you learned from this TCK experience? What do you think about this special adventure?
2) Can you think of some turning points in your life that have especially affected you or changed you? Can you think of some people who have especially affected you or changed you?
3) What was the best(or some of the best things) in this whole experience
What has been the most challenging/difficult part?