



Third Culture Kids: Challenges in a Globalized World

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Abstract. In the past century the world has experienced a number of changes in the economy, technology, jobs, businesses, etc. All of that is due to the process of globalization. One of the major changes is related to global mobility. Whole families moved overseas for different reasons and their children brought up in a culture different from their parent's passport culture are known as Third Culture Kids or TCKs. Those kids are gifted in many areas, such as linguistics, cultural adaptation etc. However, they lack a sense of identity and belonging. This paper is a literature review on this phenomenon, how it impacts kids living in this globalized area, and ways that could help them to face the challenges of this era.

Keywords: globalization · mobility · culture · TCKs · challenges

1 Introduction

The process of globalization has accelerated interconnectedness and interdependence between people and countries around the world. In the past century, many families have moved overseas for different reasons. In addition, every year millions of immigrants and refugees leave their homes for other countries [1]. According to [2], the globalized world's economy demands increased global mobility and flexibility in the workforce. The majority of people move overseas due to job assignments sponsored by multinational companies, NGOs, businesses, foreign services, education etc. [3]. Nevertheless, there are also individuals who expatriate themselves. They are not sponsored or assigned by organizations, but self-initiate expatriation as a result of the demands of globalization [4]. What the majority of them have in common is that they travel with their families to places culturally different from their home countries. In this scenario of international mobility is where the phenomenon of Third Culture Kids emerged.

The term Third Culture Kid refers to a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture [5, 6]. The term Third Culture is not a new term but has been developed over the years. According to [6] the term Third Culture Kids or TCKs was first coined in the 1950s by Ruth Hill Uusem and John Uusem while they were studying the relationship between Americans, who lived in India for different reasons, and the community of people that surrounded them. In their research, they found out that the children brought up in that environment had not been in contact

with the culture of their parent's passport country. Rather they realized the expatriates had formed a lifestyle of their own that was not the way of life from their home (passport country) or their host culture, but the one shared together in that particular settling [7].

As reported by [6] in their book entitled *Third Culture Kids Growing Up Among Worlds*, the Useems also defined that home culture is the First Culture the adults (parents) come from; the second culture is the culture of their host country (in that case India) and the culture shared as the expatriate's lifestyle as an interstitial culture or culture between cultures and they named it as a third culture. Therefore, the children raised in that particular environment are known as Third-Culture Kids.

According to [7, 8], they are also known or related to other terms, such as, Cross-Culture Kids, transcultural, Global Nomad Kids or Internationally Mobile Youth as some like to use it. The majority of global nomads are the children of employees in military service, foreign service, missionary work, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international education, and multinational companies [8]. However, as stated by [5] the parents' occupations have become more diverse over the years due to the increasing global business.

TCKs don't just cross borders and countries, but they also cross cultures and languages [7, 9] state that transnational mobility plays an important role in the development of bilingual and bicultural kids. Following that line, [10] states that TCKs are usually bilingual or multilingual, especially if the parents are from different language groups as in the case of mixed or intercultural marriage.

TCKs have the opportunity to know people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. They are gifted with amazing characteristics that distinguish them from other children that never had overseas experiences. They tend to gain strong cross-cultural, social, and linguistic skills as stated by [6]. Through life experience, they can also develop ways to shift identities depending on cultural settings and the ability to blend cultures to form a cultural identity [11]. However, during this process they also face many challenges once they have to learn new languages and sometimes are not fully fluent in any of them, they have to fit into different cultures frequently, to adapt etc. Depending on their level of mobility they have to say goodbye to close friends constantly. Some of them will never develop cultural balance which may have a huge impact on their sense of belonging [6]. Furthermore, [10] stated that one of the challenges of mobility lies in finding and defining one's roots. They can fit in anywhere, but belonging nowhere.

In this scenario language and culture play an important and fundamental role. Once the ability to communicate in the language of the host country alongside the understanding of how the community that surrounds them operates in terms of rules, values, practices, and principles can contribute to their journey of settling in, belonging, finding, and expressing their identity.

2 Communication Skills

Moving around the globe whether to fulfill governmental duties, look for better job opportunities, be with family or have different cultural experiences can be quite challenging. In the case of TCKs, they don't usually have a choice in the matter. They simply follow their parent's careers or educational opportunities wherever they might lead them

[5]. They often have to adopt multiple cultures and have to adapt and learn new languages and find different ways to communicate and express themselves that would help them in their sense of belonging.

Communication competence includes an individual's effectiveness in communicating ideas and feelings to members of a given culture, both verbally and non-verbally [11]. Due to the exposition to different languages, TCKs have strong linguistics skills that will help them in their journey of language acquisition. [6] believed that learning the grammar of one language can strengthen grammatical understanding in the next one. As reported by [12] an Indonesian TCK, children are believed to have better achievement at learning second languages than adults. Human brains may be more receptive to language early in life [13]. Therefore, kids can be exposed to different languages while growing up.

According to [14] learning the language of the host country is a good way to express one's ideas, feelings, and stories. It is also a way to identify with the emotions and culture of the people from that country. In addition to that, it helps the child to cope with and communicate in the new country they are living in. Furthermore, it helps them setting down and feel part of the community. According to [10], there are many advantages to gaining fluency in a second and third language especially taking into consideration that language contains nuances of the culture and the TCKs will have the ability to make friends and settle in easier.

However, there are some important things to take into consideration while learning a second, third, or fourth language. As [7] states, the kids must be fluent in their first language in order to be able to learn other languages well and understand their thinking patterns of them. Parents have an important role to play in raising bilingual kids. Once they are the ones in charge of teaching their kids their first language (or the language chosen to be spoken at home) well and ensuring the ongoing use of them frequently [13].

3 Cultural Balance

According to [7] to develop a strong sense of identity, as well as a group identity, will help TCKs to find meaning and sense of belonging. [15] agreed that Belonging can be regarded as a crucial part of creating one's cultural identity. Culture is more than clothing style, and how people eat or speak. It also includes shared concepts, beliefs, and values. Cultural identity is believed to be a significant aspect in establishing how an individual relates to another individual in society [1]. TCKs are exposed to and have their identity development influenced by the host country's culture, but also by subcultures expressed by their families (home and created culture), caregivers, peers, schools in their educational system, etc. [7, 9].

The challenge for TCKs is not just to learn how to use the language well to express themselves or to find meaning but also to make sense of all the cultures they are constantly exposed to and find a balance between them. Some TCKs can't separate the cultures they were exposed to. They usually develop the ability to shift between them and as their identity is blended with them, they can't ever fully separate them, no matter in which country they are currently living in, or the culture they are currently exposed to [11].

This ability to shift cultures gave them the name of chameleons [7]. This ability not just help them to blend in with the culture, but it is a powerful skill looked for in this globalized era.

4 Conclusion

Globalization increased worldwide mobility and brought up the TCK phenomenon. Those kids that are also known as sojourners or nomads are raised in a culture or cultures different from their parent's passport culture, which helps them to be open-minded, and empathic, develop extraordinary linguistic skills, have abilities to communicate across cultures or switch between them etc. [1]. Unfortunately, not being rooted in one specific culture can also bring difficulties in finding an identity and a sense of belonging [15].

Growing up those kids face challenges to learn new languages, to adapt and re-adapt to new and different cultures. One of the ways they can find or build identity and a sense of belonging is through communication [16]. It can be done in verbal or non-verbal ways. Verbal ways mean that they need to learn new languages and become bilingual or multilingual. Second, they find identity through cultures [16]. Their culture is not the one from the country they are living in, but a mix of all the experiences and values they learn and make sense of throughout their lives. We can't forget to mention that their true identity and sense of belonging is not just found in places, languages or cultures, but also in people that share the same experience.

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