



Little Global Nomads: Preparing Expatriate Children to Become Citizens of The World

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DOI: [10.31004/aulad.v9i2.1421](https://doi.org/10.31004/aulad.v9i2.1421)

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Abstract

There is still limited research on how early expatriate childhood experiences shape Third Culture Kids (TCKs) into future global citizens. Global citizens are individuals who demonstrate intellectual growth, openness, tolerance, respect, and responsibility toward themselves, others, and the environment. Therefore, this study aims to review existing literature to understand how TCKs can be effectively prepared to become global citizens. This study is a qualitative study that employed a literature review approach on how expatriate children who experience social, cultural, and linguistic transition are prepared to be citizens of the world. The analysis was organized into three key concepts: the role of the family, the role of schools, and the role of the environment. Findings underline that these three elements influence expatriate children's ability to adapt, develop intercultural competence, and internalize global citizenship values. Altogether, they form an interconnected support system that supports resilience, cultural understanding, and global awareness in expat children as they navigate diverse contexts.

Keywords: *Expatriate Children, Third-culture Kid, World Citizen*

Article Info

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Received 14 December 2025, Accepted 20 April 2026, Published 09 May 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

Global mobility is incredibly free for everyone. People can move from country to country, work, socialize, and even bring their families with them. This is because many countries require professional workers or experts in fields that are difficult to find locally, opening up opportunities for foreigners (Erogul & Rahman, 2017; Korpela, 2023). Professional workers often bring their families, including spouses and children, along with them. Some companies or agencies allow and facilitate this. Some agencies provide training to dependent family members before and after departure. This is done because it can impact the work performance of those holding valid work permits (Erogul & Rahman, 2017).

Groups of expatriates who bring their families will produce children who are now called third culture kids (TCKs), where they do not grow and develop amidst the culture of both parents, but rather the culture of the place where they now live (Ali, 2003; Delaere-Maclean, 2021; Donohue, 2022). These children experience stages of the process in their adaptation period. According to Delaere-Maclean (2021) These stages are 1. Transition; 2. Entering 3. Leaving. This constant changing constructs their sense of belonging and identity (Rustine, 2018).

TCKs are exposed to more than just a single geographic location, language, religion, nationality, or ethnicity. These elements form the foundation of their identity and sense of belonging (Donohue, 2022; Zhang, 2024). Relating this to the early identity and global citizenship development, the cross-cultural exposure will give the TCKs a unique chance to develop their open-mindedness, intercultural understanding, and adaptability from a young age (Limberg & Lambie, 2011). Early childhood is an important period for identity building, therefore, being immersed in diverse environments will encourage them to see themselves not merely via the national or cultural view, but as part of a wider global community too.

However, despite these opportunities, expatriate children face several significant challenges. First, they often struggle with identity confusion and a sense of rootlessness, as they do not fully belong to their parents' culture nor the host culture (Tan et al., 2021; Donohue, 2022). Second, frequent relocations can lead to emotional distress, loss of friendships, and difficulties in forming stable social connections (de Sivatte et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2023). Third, language barriers may hinder academic performance and social integration, especially when transitioning into education systems where the language of instruction differs from their mother tongue (Schmidt, 2017). Fourth, cultural adjustment stress is common, as they must navigate unfamiliar social norms and expectations, often without adequate preparation (Warinowski & Laakkonen, 2020). Finally, psychological challenges such as anxiety, loneliness, and resilience deficits have been noted among TCKs, particularly when family support systems are strained (Jones et al., 2023; Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2014). These challenges underscore the need for targeted support systems to help expatriate children thrive amidst transnational mobility.

The present studies explore on how expatriate mobility and the adaptation processes of TCK. A study by (Rachel & Cason, 2015) revealed the various labels held by TCKs, including quirky, the other, and unique. Those labels are the construction of their sense of belonging, identity, and their current place. The study also found that these labels influenced their career identities as adults. Another study by Warinowski & Laakkonen (2020) remark that parents play a crucial role in the successful adaptation process for TCKs. It's been suggested that parents as family members, should pay more attention to their children, such as listening to their opinions, being supportive, and spending more time together. According to Ittel & Sisler (2012), The importance of family relationships will increase the level of TCKs' self-confidence and will provide more support for the process of socialization with friends, people around them, and the environment.

However, there remain limited studies that focus on how early-stage expatriate childhood experiences are internationally shaped to prepare them as future global citizens. According to Hidayat et al. (2020) Global citizens are defined as people who have had intellectual progress in their lives, as well as an attitude of openness, tolerance, respect, and responsibility for themselves, others, and the environment. Yet, there's still a bit of research to be done on how to prepare TCKs to become global citizens by having a good understanding of the concept of global citizenship. Therefore, this study will review the existing literature and provide an overview of how TCKs should be prepared to become global citizens.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a systematic literature review design. The systematic review method was selected because it allows for the comprehensive identification, evaluation, and synthesis of existing research in a transparent and replicable manner, minimizing bias and providing a holistic understanding of the research topic. This approach is particularly suitable for mapping the current state of knowledge regarding the preparation of expatriate children as global citizens, as it integrates findings from diverse studies to generate evidence-based insights.

The data collected consisted of scholarly articles and conference proceedings published between 2010 and 2025 that focus on third-culture kids, global mobility, global citizenship education, and related themes in early childhood. These documents were sourced from reputable national and international journals accessed through academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, and DOAJ. The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed publications in English and Indonesian that empirically or theoretically addressed the roles of family, school, and environment in fostering global citizenship among expatriate children.

The methods, techniques, and instruments involved several stages: identification of keywords, systematic database searching, screening based on titles and abstracts, full-text assessment, and data extraction. The primary instrument was a data extraction form developed by the researchers, which included indicators such as author(s), publication year, research objectives, methodology, sample characteristics, key findings, and themes related to family, school, and environmental influences. Keywords used in the search protocol included "third culture kids," "expatriate children," "global citizenship education," "early childhood," and "cross-cultural adaptation."

Data analysis followed a thematic synthesis approach, which involved coding the extracted data, generating descriptive themes, and developing analytical themes to answer the research questions. The process included reading and re-reading the selected articles, coding meaningful segments, organizing codes into categories, and synthesizing categories into overarching themes that capture the interconnected roles of family, school, and environment in preparing expatriate children as global citizens. The research flow is illustrated in Figure 1, which outlines the systematic steps from problem identification and research question formulation to literature search, screening, eligibility assessment, data extraction, analysis, and reporting. This structured procedure ensures the review's comprehensiveness, transparency, and reliability.

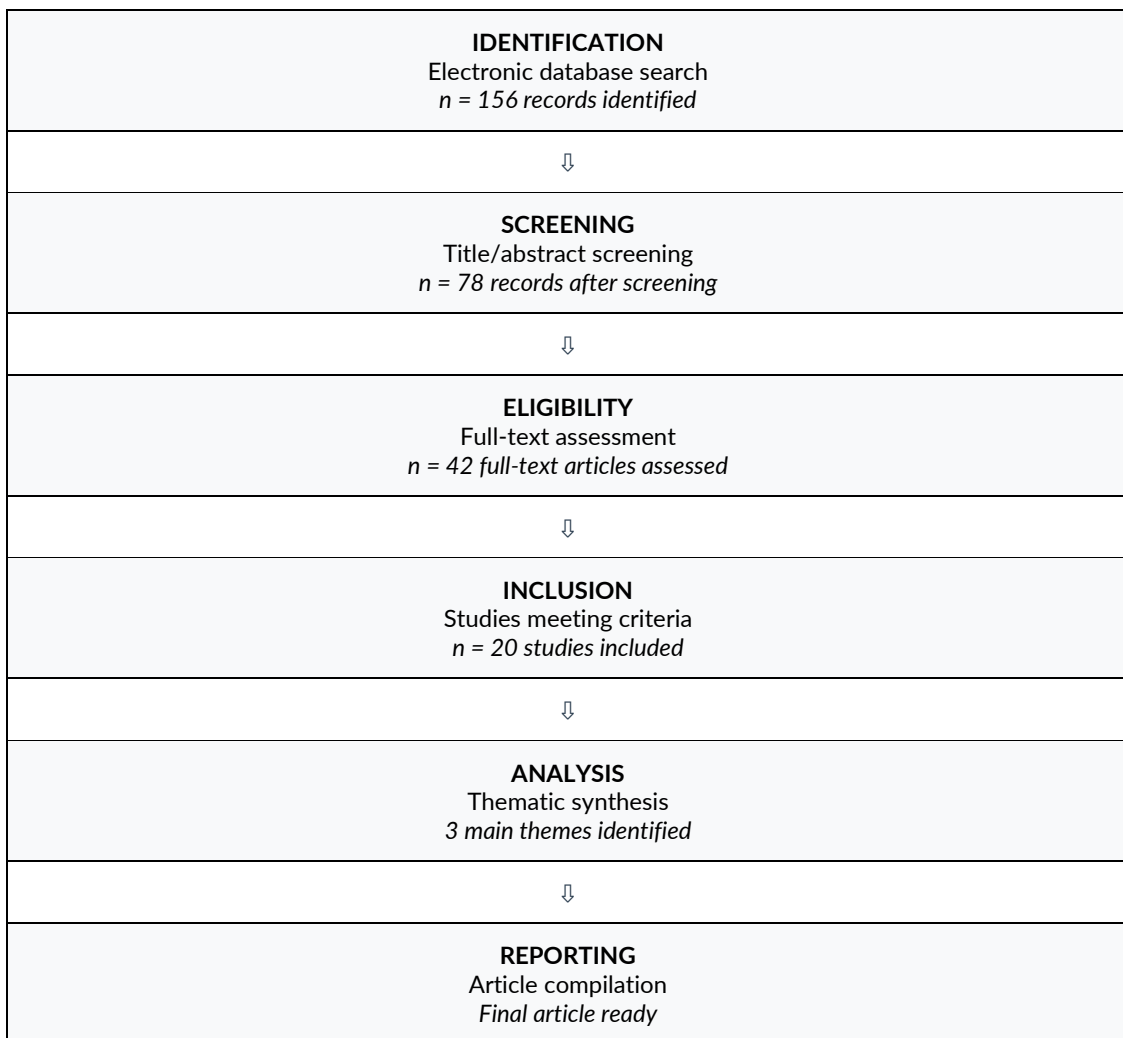


Figure 1. Prisma Flow Diagram

The screening process followed the PRISMA guidelines as shown in Figure 1. After full-text assessment, 20 studies were included for final analysis. The complete list of these studies is provided in Table 1, which includes author names, publication years, and key focuses. The sources are as follows.

Table 1. List of Included Studies in the Systematic Review

No	Title	Author	Journal	Year	Key Findings
1	American School Counselor Association Third-Culture Kids: Implications for Professional School Counseling	Limberg & Lambie	Professional School Counseling	2011	Cross-cultural exposure shapes TCKs' identity from an early age.
2	Third Culture Kids: Adjusting to A Changing World	Ittel & Sisler	Diskurs Kindheits-Und	2012	Strong family relationships increase TCKs' self-confidence and support their socialization
3	Narratives of Third Culture Kids: Commitment and Reticence in Social Relationships	Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk	The Qualitative Report	2014	Language proficiency in a new environment affects TCKs' ability to fit in and socialize.
4	Global Citizenship and The Role of Education in The Twenty-First Century	Caruana	Symposia Miletensia	2015	Education builds identity and prepares students to become empathetic global citizens.
5	Experiencing Difficulties: Language Issues Among Immersed Third Culture Kids	English Schmidt	Journal of Cross-Cultural Studies	2017	Language barriers can hinder academic performance and social integration in a new education system.
6	Children of Expatriates: Key Factors Affecting Their Adjustment	de Sivatte, et.al	Journal of Global Mobility	2019	TCKs face frequent relocation, which can cause a sense of loss.
7	Preparing Students to be Global Citizens	Gallagher, Peschken, & Gilmour	The European Conference on Education 2020	2020	TCKs need inclusive schools that support adaptation and promote global citizenship through diverse perspectives.
8	Global Citizenship Education: Parents' Reflections	Zeguniene	Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference	2020	Global citizenship develops learners to support a more inclusive and peaceful world.
9	Psychological Adjustment of Expatriate Children in Cultural Transition	Warinowski & Laakkonen	International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies	2020	Parents are key to TCKs' successful adaptation.
10	Global Citizen Preparation: Enhancing Early Childhood Education Through Indonesian Local Wisdom	Hidayat, et.al.	Universal Journal of Educational Research	2020	TCKs need schools that teach and foster global citizenship values
11	Third Culture Kids, Their Beliefs and Their Intercultural Competences	De Waal, et.al.	International Journal of Intercultural Relations	2020	TCKs tend to have stronger intercultural sensitivity, communication, and relationship-building skills.
12	Becoming A Global Citizen? Developing Community-Facing Learning in The Social Sciences	Booth	Learning and Teaching	2021	Education helps students understand their own and others' cultures.
13	A Systematic Review of Third Culture Kids Empirical Research	Tan, Wang & Cottrell	International Journal of Intercultural Relations	2021	TCKs have strong social and intercultural sensitivity, helping them understand others and navigate different cultures.
14	Growing Up as A Third Culture Kid and Its Impact on Identity and Belonging	Donohue	Counselling Psychology Review	2022	TCKs' identity and sense of belonging are shaped by multiple cultures, languages, and environments.
15	The Influence of Moving Countries During Childhood on Personality Development	Jonsson	Journal of Student Research	2022	Parents provide guidance and support.
16	Stress, Mental Health and Sociocultural Adjustment in Third Culture Kids: Exploring The Mediating Roles of Resilience and Family Functioning	Jones, et.al.	Frontiers in Psychology	2023	Frequent environmental changes cause stress for TCKs, making adjustment difficult without resilience.

No	Title	Author	Journal	Year	Key Findings
17	Becoming A Global Citizen: Belief vs. Action	Wingenbach, Graham & Gomez	Advancements in Agricultural Development	2023	Teachers, staff, and students all contribute to helping learners grow into global citizens.
18	Children as Citizens of A Global Society: Learning Together in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms	Theobald, et.al.	International Perspectives on Educating for Democracy in Early Childhood	2023	Developing global citizens relies on faculty, staff, and students creating a respectful and inclusive environment.
19	Voices Across Borders: Exploring Linguistic and National Identity Among Ukrainian Expatriates in Tallinn	Stelmakova & Zabrodska	Forum for Linguistic Studies	2024	Global citizenship education combines intercultural learning, with parents preserving cultural roots.
20	Conceptualising The Identity of Third Culture Adults (TCAs) in the GCC: Implications for Labour Markets and Organisations	Benuyenah & Mustafa	National Identities	2024	Parents provide guidance and support.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Identity Formation in Expatriate Children

Third Culture Kids grow up away from their parents' home culture and country and are exposed to multiple cultures, places, languages, religions, ethnicities, and races (Donohue, 2022). This multicultural exposure makes their identity development distinctive, complex (Limberg & Lambie, 2011), and often challenging (Collier & Petty, 2006), leading many TCKs to experience identity confusion and a sense of not fully belonging anywhere (Tan et al., 2021).

Identity formation is fundamentally based on how a culture values an entity, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and so on (Collier & Petty, 2006). This can be very challenging to achieve, but it offers many benefits that monocultural individuals don't. According to (Tan et al., 2021), TCKs possess a high level of social sensitivity, enabling them to read situations and understand the abilities and feelings of others. Furthermore, they demonstrate a growing intercultural sensitivity, enabling them to bridge multiple cultural boundaries.

In the context of expatriate children, identity formation is dynamic and constantly changing. This is based on the high mobility of their country. Unlike monoculturals, TCKs shape their identities not only from family values and norms but also from the diverse and ever-changing environment. Because the formation of TCKs' identity is very complicated, they need help and support from various parties, such as family, school, and friends. Yet, TCKs' interactions with diverse environments make them unique as global citizens. Their innate traits, such as social sensitivity, openness, and the ability to embrace differences, are key to becoming global citizens.

Global citizenship focuses on fostering learners' knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to support a more inclusive and peaceful world (Gallagher et al., 2020; Žegunienė, 2020). For Third Culture Kids, this aligns with their identity development, as they are naturally exposed to and accustomed to navigating cultural differences. As experienced by a movie character observed by (Yuliani & Liyanti, 2021). Sabine's identity is shaped by her relationships with those around her, and her growth as a TCK is influenced by her experiences with the "foreign" or "different" cultural values in both her host and home cultures.

Role of Family

Family is the key to TCKs' success in becoming global citizens. Žegunienė (2020) remarks to become global citizens, education to achieve this goal is to implement education from an early age, where parents as a family play an important role in this regard. Multicultural education, intercultural education, and, more recently, cultural responsiveness and cultural literacy are all components of global citizenship education. Parents can maintain cultural roots within the family, as shown in a study by Stelmakova & Zabrodska (2024). A study by Stelmakova & Zabrodska (2024) reported that Ukrainian parents in Tallinn brought artifacts such as carpets and perfume from their homeland, as

well they also became a communication bridge to the homeland with relatives to maintain their cultural identity. A strong cultural identity helps children feel less alone and isolated. This positively impacts their development toward global citizenship.

On the other hand, parents impart positive values and serve as a support system for them (Benuyenah & Mustafa, 2024; Ittel & Sisler, 2012; Jonsson, 2022), enabling them to adapt to diverse and changing environments. According to de Sivatte et al. (2019), TCKs experience many obstacles in their lives, such as having to move to another country and leave behind old friends. This can create a sense of loss. Parents, as the closest people, are advised to mediate in this situation, validating feelings and providing understanding (Jones et al., 2023; Warinowski & Laakkonen, 2020).

Role of Schools

Education is seen as a tool for promoting identity, both cultural, national, and global (Caruana, 2015). According to Booth (2021), Education should indeed engage students with social issues occurring around them, such as national and local issues. This will prepare students to become global citizens, possessing empathy and prioritizing the interests of the community over their own (Caruana, 2015; Hidayat et al., 2020). Furthermore, education also shapes students' perspectives on various cultures. Booth (2021) supposes such education can be provided through culture-based learning, where students are first encouraged to understand their own culture. Then, they learn to listen to others' opinions about their own and explore their own perspectives and assumptions about other people's social and cultural backgrounds. This was proven by Hidayat et al. (2020), who in his study used local wisdom in the form of the Cirendeu Indigenous community to foster a sense of empathy, respect, and openness.

In the context of TCKs, they need schools capable of imparting and instilling the character values of global citizens. These schools should be open to differences, considerate of their difficulties in moving and adapting, and respectful of the differences between local residents and expatriates as newcomers. Which according to Gallagher et al. (2020), the educator is able to create a supportive atmosphere for students to be exposed to a diversity of international perspectives and practices.

Schmidt (2017) found that some TCKs in the United States have deficiencies in English language acquisition, impacting their academic performance. This is certainly not without the responsibility of schools. Schools are advised to provide additional materials in the form of vocabulary enrichment and reading materials in English. In his study, Limberg & Lambie (2011) also addressed the difficulties experienced by TCKs during their transition to the United States. He stated that it is the responsibility of school counselors to find solutions, thereby encouraging schools to provide counseling opportunities. The explanation above is in line with the opinion of Wingenbach et al. (2023), which states that the development of global citizens cannot be separated from the role of faculty, staff, and students. The framework is when the children are being respected, included, and accepted (Theobald et al., 2023).

Role of Social Environment

Besides family and school, the environment plays a crucial role in preparing children to become global citizens. The environment we're discussing here encompasses neighborhoods, communities, peers, and even digital spaces. These factors intersect with children's lives and provide access to differences, including culture, religion, ethnicity, ethnicity, perspectives, and so on. Due to these, TCKs are viewed as having greater intercultural sensitivity, communication skills, and commitment-building abilities than individuals who grew up in only one culture (de Waal et al., 2020). They embrace diversity more since they have been exposed to a wide range of opinions and cultural experiences throughout their childhood. Also, they are more accustomed to managing differences and finding common ground than their counterparts who were raised in a single culture, which fosters more favorable attitudes toward diversity and cross-cultural collaboration.

On the other hand, TCKs actually face many difficulties. They struggle to comprehend the cultural norms in their new environment, but they must adapt quickly to blend in. Furthermore, the language of their surroundings also plays a role. If they lack language skills in their new environment, they will have difficulties in fitting in, making friends, and even socializing (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2014). They, in fact, frequently experience environmental changes and shifts. According to Jones et

al. (2023), this can be a key factor of stress experienced by TCKs. When they feel the high levels of stress, adjustment and transition are extremely difficult, unless they have resilience to help them cope.

However, the environment remains a strong supporting factor in preparing TCKs to become global citizens. Supportive communities, diverse peer groups, and digital networks will be able to provide solutions for learning, practicing, and exchanging cultures. When they are surrounded by environments that encourage open dialogue, celebrate cultural diversity, and provide emotional support, they are more likely to develop confidence, intercultural empathy, and a sense of belonging in global society. Kőrös & Trentinné Benkő (2022) suppose that in the context of TCKs at a young age, even though they do not yet understand the real concept, the quality of language, attitudes, interaction styles, and social expectations are already well developed, influenced by diverse environments at the subconscious level.

4. CONCLUSION

This article highlights the key factors that play a role in preparing expatriate children to become global citizens: family, school, and the environment. All three have a significant impact on their development toward becoming global citizens. The family is the closest entity to TCKs, with parents acting as adults capable of supporting, providing understanding, and validating their children's feelings. Schools are crucial, not only in instilling the character of global citizens but also in playing a role in resolving problems along the way. The environment is equally crucial, as it is the primary exposure received by expatriate children or TCKs.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the invaluable support from my lecturers, colleagues, and classmates, as well as for their valuable feedback, encouragement, and guidance throughout the research process.

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