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A Study Of Elementary School Involvement By Parents Currently Serving In The U.S. Armed Forces

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A STUDY OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT BY PARENTS CURRENTLY
SERVING IN THE U.S. ARMED FORCES

A Dissertation

By

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

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ABSTRACT

A phenomenological qualitative research study was conducted using currently serving military parents with children enrolled in elementary school. The intent of the research was to reveal factors that contributed to military parents' participation in the education of their elementary-aged child, analyze factors that contributed to the lack of involvement of military parents in the education of their elementary-aged child, and deduce ways the elementary school, that serve military families, can encourage parental involvement in the education of their child. The study was aimed to understand better how the parent–school partnership of military families can be improved.

Narratives from the nine military parent participants were recorded, transcribed, and coded to extract qualitative data from personal experiences as they responded to open-ended questions. The findings showed some of the positive actions and techniques that should be sustained which encouraged military parent participation at the elementary school. The findings also expressed the antithesis and revealed several barriers that were present that contribute to the lack of military parent involvement. The coded and analyzed data from the nine personal experiences led to heuristic recommendations for improvement in the field of elementary school involvement by military parents. The recommendations from this study include the use of modern technology as methods to connect the military parents to the school without physically

being at the school, the PTO considering the uniqueness of the military population and ensuring the organization encourages sustained participation by military parents, teacher and administration pedagogy techniques as it relates to the needs of the military child, intentional persist school involvement on behalf of the military parent, and the U.S. Armed Forces to promote access to resources that schools and parents can utilize to aid in the essential partnership. These recommendations effect the five stakeholder groups of elementary schools, PTO, teachers, military parents, and the U.S. Armed Forces. The recommendations involved the school strategically using modern technology to assist the military parents with timing conflicts, Parent Teacher Organization observance and inclusion reform, teacher professionalism emphasis, and intentional persist school involvement on behalf of the military parent.

Key Terms: military child, elementary school involvement, military parent involvement, stakeholder group

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all children. I feel that every child deserves the best education and support that he or she needs to be successful. I also dedicate this research to all parents in the United States Armed Services. This research and its results are for the edification and growth of you as well!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 44th President of the United States of America, President Obama, initiated and gained approval for policies such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) that was aimed at support for student education and enrichment and was powered by the involvement of parents (McGuinn, 2016). The ESSA also states, “Our most important task as a nation is to make sure all our young people can achieve their dreams” (ESSA, 2015). Currently, years after President Obama left office, the expression is applicable yet today, and “a call into action” (ESSA, 2015) is still needed from parents regarding the well-rounded education of their children. This comprehensive education has been proven by researchers to be achievable, and it includes participation and involvement with the child, teacher, and parent (Bai, Morgan, Scott, & Cohen, 2018).

Ongoing research in the field of parental involvement in relation to student success has shown that family engagement in schools improves student achievement, reduces absenteeism, and restores parental confidence in their children’s education (Sawhill, 2016). Furthermore, the children of involved parents earn higher grades, learn better social skills, and show improved behavior (García & Thornton, 2014). Bast and Walberg (2004) showed that parents of all occupations desire and strive to be the best parents they can be. For parents who are currently employed by the United States (U.S.) Armed Forces, this task is more tedious because of occupational requirements and constraints.

For more than 240 years, the U.S. Armed Forces have trained and equipped and enabled its service members to be successful with given missions in any circumstance. To build strong citizens of tomorrow, the U.S. Armed Forces offer seven core values: leadership, duty, respect,

selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage (Pruett, 2015). These values enable service members to work well with other nations in joint operational environments. The leaders are trained to enlist and implement a vision by first knowing the people involved (Kouzes & Posner, 2005, p. 75). These core values and traits of being personable and approachable are not only essential for the service member's professional life but should also be applied to their personal life as parents. It is recorded that President Theodore Roosevelt once stated, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" (as cited in Stefano & Wasylshyn, 2005, p. 142). President Roosevelt's comment is indicative of the military parent in that, no matter how well esteemed they might be professionally, all of the decorations are miniscule (from the child's perspective) if physical and deliberate involvement is not shown toward their student and his or her success.

The U.S. Armed Forces train in all environments to prepare to engage and destroy all enemies of the United States in any situation (Bradford & Brown, 2008). This modular force allows leaders of all levels to work concisely and collaboratively to achieve *mission accomplishment* (Kouzes & Posner, 2005). Mission accomplishment always has and will be the primary vision of the U.S. Armed Forces (Galgano & Palka, 2010). Just as this modular force works together to accomplish a common goal, so should the military parents and their children's school work toward a common goal. This goal is one that cannot be taken by only one side, and it requires full and collaborative participation by all involved parties. Research shows that involvement and partnership for the edification of the student requires participation and active engagement by the parents, yet parental involvement rates have decreased at a rate of 7% in the previous 5 years (Park & Holloway, 2017). The question is, how do these military parents effectively and efficiently apply this knowledge in their own lives to overcome this negative trend of less parental involvement with children's schooling?

This study was conducted by capturing the qualitative personal experiences of currently serving military parents with children enrolled in elementary school. The parents' responses and additional input were coded and analyzed for comprehensible and implementable results that can be used to encourage elementary involvement by military parents. The data contributes to professional knowledge and practice by providing researchers and military parents with data and corresponding methods to improve elementary involvement. The knowledge provided by this study will form a basis for future researchers in the field of military parent involvement with their child and will be a catalyst for reform for identified stakeholder groups (elementary school, PTO, teachers, military parents, and the U.S. Armed Forces).

Statement of the Problem

Having a family in the military can create very complex dynamics for a child, considering the constant moves and required time parents are away from the home (Bradford & Brown, 2008). In these military environments, the parents work extended hours and, at times, deploy for several months out of the year. This issue of time constraint is a general parenting challenge, but it is especially sensitive for members of the U.S. Armed Forces (Okpala, Okpala, & Smith, 2001). Whether the homes are single- or dual-parent homes, being overwhelmed is a common experience. Work and managing other daily necessities are stressful; therefore, the focus at times can move from the children to other concerns (Sawhill, 2016). This shift of focus then leaves the child with a deficit of attention towards his or her development. Research has shown that the lack of parental involvement can lead to problems in a child's life (Hartnett et al., 2018). Some of these categories for development (although not limited to) are sports and scholastic achievement, whereas categories of concern are bullying and crime. These areas can be affected and influenced positively if they are given the right amount of devotion from parents (Okpala et al., 2001).

Despite much previous research and data on the topic of parental involvement (Burke, 2013; Douglas, 2016; García & Thornton, 2014), more research is yet needed in the area of ensuring and sustaining parental involvement from the transient parent population (i.e., military service members) with their child's elementary school. Having identified parental involvement with the school as a requirement (Okpala et al., 2001), how can a military parent support their child's education with so many other competing tasks? This question led the researcher to examine two critical areas of this problem. The first critical area was concerned with the issues that limit military parental involvement at school. The second area of examination addressed the measures that could be implemented by the school to encourage the needed parental involvement at school. These two critical areas led the researcher to develop the underlying research questions of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to analyze the reasons for lack of parental involvement by military parents with elementary-school-aged children and to synthesize available and sustainable methods of improvement. Research has proven that parental involvement is important in a child's development (Hartnett, Fingerman, & Birditt, 2018). The data collected from research shows that scholastic achievement improves with the addition of parental involvement in the school environment (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The topic of parental engagement and partnership with teachers and the child's elementary school is very significant and it affects parents of all backgrounds, occupations, and economic levels. All parents want to see their children succeed (Douglas, 2016). This researcher aimed to study the phenomena of military parental involvement in the school environment and to explore ways to ensure that the relationship with school would be strong and sustainable, despite potential hindrances.

Research Questions

Grounding this study of elementary school involvement by parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces included developing appropriate research questions. These questions were designed to illuminate potential roadblocks to parental school involvement and partnership from the participants. The researcher believed that documenting the experiences of individual military parents with their child's elementary school as a collective whole might enlighten other currently serving, military parents regarding possible techniques to improve and sustain the relationship between them, their children, and their children's schools. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What factors ensure active participation of military parents in the education of their elementary-age child in the school environment?
2. What factors contribute to the lack of involvement of military parents in the education of their elementary-aged child?
3. In what ways can an elementary school that serves military families encourage the parents' involvement in the education of their child?

Conceptual Framework

The researcher approached this study from a phenomenological perspective grounded in the epistemology of social constructivism. The theoretical framework for this study was also supported by the application of the path-goal leadership theory (House, 1971). In social constructivism, people make meaning through interactions while taking into consideration the social stimuli from those interactions (Rumann, 2010). In addition, through this social theory, meaningful learning can occur when individuals are engaged in social activities that include interaction and collaboration (Amineh & Davatgari, 2015). The interaction between military parents and elementary schools is critical because parental involvement is a key component in

promoting a child's achievements (Hornby, 2011). By using a phenomenological theoretical perspective in conjunction with social constructivism, the researcher intended to understand better the interactions and experiences between military families and their local elementary schools.

An important aspect of path-goal leadership theory (House, 1971) is related to military parents' increased motivation, empowerment, and satisfaction in the parent and school interaction (Northouse, 2016). In conjunction with social constructivism, the application of this theoretical framework is relevant because parents have a role in providing guidance, direction, assistance, and inspiration to their child, which supports their success (Bass & Riggio, 2006). For example, student progress is impeded when parents are not aware of the areas in which their children might need extra attention and intervention measures (Horny, 2011). When a parent is informed of the potential emotional distresses of their child, they can then better serve them and remove any potential or emerging roadblocks (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). This hindrance is proven to be resolvable through parents and teachers working to avoid or overcome the roadblocks as soon as possible (Knight, Little, Harwood, & Goodger, 2016). These actions can positively affect the productivity and growth of the child.

Previous researchers contributed to the progression of the topic and the fortification of the theoretical framework (Burke, 2013; Douglas, 2016; García & Thornton, 2014). Anfara and Mertz (2015) and Goodall and Montgomery (2014) covered a broad spectrum of topics that created the basis of the parental involvement study. The importance of parental involvement with schools and parental engagement in connection to children's learning is a common topic of study among current researchers (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Burke, 2013; Douglas, 2016; García & Thornton, 2014; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). However, research that is more inclusive and will address military parental engagement tips and techniques to improve school partnerships is

required. Improving such partnerships will support the holistic education of children, which will lead to them becoming productive and successful students (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Assumptions and Limitations

Respecting the military population in this study, the researcher took into consideration several assumptions. This study is grounded in the theory of social constructivism; therefore, the researcher assumed that the interview questions were designed in a way would allow the participants to construct meaning of their individual experiences and that the researcher would be able to identify themes among the varied interpretations of each participant. Likewise, the researcher assumed that the participants would respond truthfully to the open-ended interview questions. In addition, although military service members have a reputation of being stoic, this reputation does not assume that they are not involved at their child's elementary school because of the unempathetic reputation some they must uphold. The limitation that affects everyone is time and its proper management (Grissom, Loeb, & Mitani, 2015). As result, the researcher considered this assumption. Lack of time, because of other competing obligations, is a valid limitation for parents who are currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces (Bradford & Brown, 2008). Nevertheless, previously conducted research explicitly shows the invaluable contribution of parental involvement (Sawhill, 2016), and some solutions to engage this population of parents must be found. The intent of this research is to uncover what can be done to ensure improved partnerships between military parents and their children's schools. Therefore, this researcher identified and codified implementable methods that could be used by all parents who currently serve in the U.S. Armed Forces.

However, some limitations to this research study might affect its outcome. One potential limitation is the bias of the researcher. The researcher, who is an active member of the U.S. Armed Forces, acquired participants through social media avenues with which the researcher

was connected. The researcher attempted to reduce bias by conducting all interviews outside the duty day, by not wearing uniform, and by not conducting the interviews on a military installation.

Scope

The scope of this study included active duty, U.S. military parents whose children were enrolled in elementary school (Grades Kindergarten–Grade 5 [K–5]).

Significance

The findings of this study could be used to inform the work of military officials who support active duty members, educational professionals, and parents who are serving in the military. Military officials could use this information to examine and revise their parent education programs. The study results provide tangible information to assist educational professionals (e.g., teachers and administrators) to engage more effectively active duty military families and to support the military child's education and existing partnerships. These findings inform parents that more than money, their time and interest are imperative in their children's development (Douglas, 2016). Parental involvement and partnership with the elementary school are actions that will affect the child personally, which will affect the community, and will ultimately affect the world. This insight is significant because it contributes to the objective of encouraging military parental involvement and participation with their child's elementary school.

Definition of Terms

The definition of terms has two purposes. The first purpose is to minimize external influence on words that are used in this study. The second purpose is to explain the link between the listed terms used and the study of parental involvement by military parents in elementary school. The terms have been defined below for a beneficial understanding of how they relate to this research.

Active participation. Consistent contact or partnership between parent and the school, and that is not solely initiated by the school, is considered active participation. The term active participation is used interchangeably with active involvement.

Deployment. The movement of the U.S. Armed Forces and their logistical support to a place or position for military action.

Elementary-school-aged. The age group of 5-year-old to 10-year-old children who are currently in Kindergarten to Grade 5 is termed elementary-aged. The term *elementary-aged* is used interchangeably with elementary student or students.

Joint operational environment. An environment during wartime that consists of all the U.S. Armed Forces as well as Coalition Forces (i.e., military units from other countries partnered with the United States) is called a joint operational environment (Galgano & Palka, 2012).

Military base. A facility that is directly owned and operated by or for the military and that shelters military equipment, personnel, and facilitates training and operations is called a military base (Bradford & Brown, 2008). The term military base is used interchangeably with military installation.

Modular force. The rank structure and military environment of the current U.S. Armed Forces is a modular force.

Parent. A child's overseer for food, clothing, and shelter is considered a parent; this person could be the child's mother, father, immediate or distant relative, guardian, or court-appointed custodian.

Parent-invited event. Any event that is held at a school to which a parent's attendance is petitioned is considered a parent-invited event. This could be a student update meeting, a school open house event, or a volunteer and enrichment opportunity that is held at the school to which families are invited.

Parental involvement. Time, attention, and activities that are spent with children who are priceless mean the most for development.

Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Localized assemblies of parents and teachers working together to promote teacher/parent partnership and where raised funds are used in the school where they were raised. Unlike Parent Teacher Association (PTA) which is a national program that requires annual dues to the centralized office.

Strategic. When one is intentional with one's actions, one is being strategic.

Student achievement. The amount of academic content that a student learns in a determined amount of time and that is measured by passing grades in a given subject area is called student achievement (Shouse, 2018). The term student achievement is used interchangeably with student proficiency.

U.S. Armed Forces: The military forces of the United States of America are the U.S. Armed Forces. They consist of the U.S. Army, the U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Air Force, and the U.S. Coast Guard (Bradford & Brown, 2008).

Conclusion

Researchers have shown that a task as paramount as the holistic development and enrichment of a child requires input and dedication from three groups. Douglas (2016) stated that the three entities that are responsible for this growth are the child, the parent, and the school administrators and teachers, with the parent and school together forming a collaborative base from which to support the child (Douglas, 2016). When parents collaborate with the school, they are first-hand witnesses of their child's performance that can lead to invaluable dialogue with the teachers on additional improvement and enrichment academic opportunities. This study provides insight into the area of elementary school parental involvement for the military parent and his or her lived experiences. Further analysis of the literature in Chapter 2 provides an in-depth look at

the place in their role where parents make the most impact. Each of these topics is discussed more fully in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research has shown that partnerships between parents and the school can lead to the effective education of children and can support holistic development (Chrispeels, 1996). To provide a foundation for the importance of parental involvement and partnership with the elementary school, this review of the literature begins with a discussion of the factors that affect military family school involvement; it then moves to the areas in which parents can make the most impact with their children. Next, the researcher explores the literature that informs parents seeking to create the perfect balance of interaction, which is followed by the different ways that parents can engage with their child's school. Finally, the literature review covers theoretical concepts that were derived from prominent authors in the study and an examination of the theory of the framework used for this study.

Factors Affecting Military Family School Involvement

Members of the military are accustomed to making adjustments to a multitude of differing situations associated with military service, which is a part of military life (Layne, 2016; Thomas & Bowie, 2016). Members of the military experience multiple deployments, reintegration, and multiple geographic relocations (Esqueda, Astor, & Tunac De Pedro, 2012). This uncertainty and constant moving applies not only to assignments overseas, but also to assignments in continental United States. One key aspect of military life is frequent relocation, which is also known as permanent change of station (PCS) moves. Approximately one-third of military service members experience a PCS move every year (Tong et al., 2018). Frequent PCSs affect the availability of childcare, financial resources, educational support offered, and service members' ability to achieve balance in their lives (Harrell, Lim, Castenada & Golinelli. 2004).

The average military child attends six to nine schools during the course of his or her development (Department of Defense Education Activity).

Understanding the needs of military families and the ways to support them is complex. With the increase in deployments, interest is growing in documenting the experiences of military families particularly regarding the impacts of deployment on their children's education. The uniqueness of the military lifestyle requires more exposure so educators can develop sensitivity and resources for their needs and respond to the challenges that they face as a parent in the military. Typically, military families move and change schools often; therefore, they might not be as familiar with the school as nonmilitary families (Lin, Twisk & Rong, 2011). The military lifestyle presents unique challenges; therefore, programs that are created specifically with the military parent population in mind and that acknowledge and address the challenges of the military lifestyle could be beneficial.

Where Parents Make the Most Impact

Research has shown that parents of all occupations desire and strive to be the best parents they can be (Bast & Walberg, 2004). At times, because of work and other competing responsibilities, the time and attention of parents moves from their children to those concerns (Sawhill, 2016). Although the issues that parents encounter appear imminent, when compared to the long-term effects to which that time not spent with the child can lead, it is essential that some focus and attention should always remain on the children (Park & Holloway, 2017). The mentioned long-term effects of lack of specialized attention from parents can be seen, but they are not limited to: lack of scholastic achievement or development of sports, and encounter with crime or bullying (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Gerber, 1996; Hornby, 2011). These areas can be influenced positively if the students receive the right amount of attention from their parents.

The objective of this study was to uncover viable information that could be shared with currently serving military parents. The purpose of documenting this information is to encourage and sustain the invaluable student support behaviors between the parents and the elementary school. The researcher discovered several data resources in the area of parents making the most impact. These areas can be separated into three categories or themes called the three impact pillars, which are scholastics, extracurricular activities, and social interaction and skills.

Scholastic Achievements

Several researchers have qualitatively and quantitatively measured the scholastic achievements of students over the years to enforce the topic of parental involvement. Specifically, Ho and Kwong (2013) conducted a study in the area of student scholastic success in relation to parental involvement. They queried more than 100 subjects in the 21–25-year-old age group, both male and female. Ho and Kwong's (2013) results showed that, per capita, the participants who obtained higher levels of education and higher-paying jobs attributed their achievements to parental involvement early in their life. The corresponding data was used to compose a link system diagram that depicted the child's academic success as a direct connection in a system that included parents, teachers, and other mentors (Ho & Kwong, 2013). This diagram shows the importance of each role in the accomplishment of the common goal of developing and educating the youth. Hill (1963) demonstrated the importance of systemic support in a targeted age group of elementary-school-aged (i.e., K–5) students because of the lasting impact of habit formation during this period.

Jeynes (2005) conducted an analysis of 41 studies, examining the relationship between academic achievement of elementary school children and parental involvement. The results from the analysis indicated that a significant relationship existed between parental involvement overall and academic achievement. Parental involvement as a whole was associated with positive trends

of academic improvement. The benefits of parental involvement in relation to scholastic achievement also proved to span the divisional gaps of race and sex (Jeynes, 2005).

Osborne (2001) conducted research in the area of student academic success or scholastic achievement that was differentiated by race and sex. Osborne disproved the negative stigma that minority students and boys consistently performed poorer on standardized tests compared to other races and to girls. While conducting research, over 1,000 cases identified the unifying factor that influenced student success and created a positive trend over all groups as the involvement of the parents. This discovered factor even permeated the lines of the negative stereotypes (Osborne, 2001).

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) continued the research covering the topic of scholastic achievements related to parent engagement. They provided insight on parental involvement by conducting more than 300 surveys to parents of elementary-school-aged children. These series of surveys led to the knowledge that parents understand “parental engagement” in different ways (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). A researcher who desires to contribute to this research on the impact that parental engagement has on scholastic achievement must understand that the term “engagement,” within this context, has multiple interpretations. Researchers have also shown that the concept of parental engagement is a leveling factor for scholastic achievements as well as financial outcomes.

According to Park and Holloway (2017), unfortunately, a child’s academic achievements directly correlate to the parent’s income level. The income level is based on the parent’s profession and socioeconomic status, which also corresponds to the parent’s involvement. Park and Holloway (2017) produced the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten Cohort dataset, identifying a noticeable gap in academic achievements of elementary school age children of parents on the lower spectrum of the socioeconomic scale, which correlated to lack of parental

involvement. It can be inferred that a parent's job security affords him or her more flexibility and peace of mind to leave work to be present for the family and children (Park & Holloway, 2017). Fortunately, the United States government has made strides to assist parents with life happenings that may infringe upon work and ultimately might negatively affect the parent's ability to care holistically for the family.

Medical sick days of children have the potential to negatively affect student scholastic achievement (Logan, Simons, & Carpino, 2012). The research findings from a clinical sample of 350 sick children highlighted the importance of fostering parental involvement as a response to child pain. This involvement was proven to help children engage and succeed in the school environment despite pain (Logan et al., 2012). Fostering the needed parental engagement during these trying medical crisis times is made possible by the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993, a policy that was instituted under the authority of President Clinton (Shepard, 2008). Shepherd (2008) recorded that the FMLA (1993) is a federal law that allows parents to take extended time away from work to handle certain family or medical needs (Shepard, 2008). The FMLA essentially fosters equilibrium of the demands of the workplace with the needs of family and children and can reduce that child's potential academic achievement gap. The research supports the claim that parental involvement helps students not only succeed in academics, but also participate in extracurricular activities.

Extracurricular Activities

Starting at the age of 5 years several types of extracurricular activities are available-- sports, social clubs, and music—in which a parent can get his or her child involved (Strolin-Goltzman, 2014). These activities offer opportunities for students to learn the value of teamwork, individual and group responsibility, physical strength and endurance, competition, and diversity (Gerber, 1996). Extracurricular activities provide a channel for reinforcing the lessons learned in

the classroom, offering students the opportunity to apply academic skills in a real-world context; therefore, they are considered part of a well-rounded education (Strolin-Goltzman, 2014). Gerber (1996) suggested that participating in extracurricular activities might increase students' sense of engagement and lead to scholastic success. The first area examined in the literature review concerning extracurricular activities is sports.

An integral aspect of the holistic development of children is their participation in sports (Park & Holloway, 2017). Knight et al. (2016) examined the parental involvement of elite youth athletes' and identified several trends. The results from focus groups consisting of over 150 elite youth athletes indicated that parents were generally deemed to have a positive influence on their accomplishments (Knight et al., 2016). Some positive parental traits that were identified included parents focusing on their children's development at home, motivational and constructive evaluation at training, and limiting demands on athletes through the provision of practical support (Knight et al., 2016). The data showed that these positive traits and behaviors ultimately aided in supporting the development and growth of the child (Sawhill, 2016). The advantages that were provided to elite athletes because of parental involvement were also evidenced when examining additional extracurricular activities.

Another extracurricular activity in which success or an edge in competition was noted was music. Gerber (1996) showed that parental involvement could affect children who were participating in independent music lessons. Other research in this field used surveys that were designed to explore parent characteristics, parental goals, and the relation to the child's musical progress. This data, from more than five schools and 225 students, addressed the child's practice environment and the parental behaviors during practice sessions. The trends and analysis showed that outcomes of enjoyment and progression in music could be predicted by parenting goals and values, time spent practicing, and teacher qualities (Upitis, Abrami, Brook, & King, 2016). Like

sports, music is an extracurricular activity that highlights how parental involvement is impactful in a child's life. Parental engagement also affects the child's social development.

Social Interaction

Social interaction is defined as a process by which people act and react to others around them and it consists of verbal and nonverbal communication (Cicourel, 1974). Social interaction is multifaceted and, it relates to child development; therefore, it can be greatly affected by parental involvement. This multilayered interaction can be used to view and classify individuals as extroverts or introverts. Extroversion (i.e., when a person is outgoing, talkative, and has energetic behavior) and introversion (i.e., possessing a more reserved and solitary behavior) all occur on a spectrum. According to many theories of personality, this spectrum shows that everyone has some degree of both extroversion and introversion (Eysenck & Cookson, 1970). Sawhill (2016) documented that children often tend to exude traits of either extroversion or introversion, and the reflection is often indicative of the culture in which they were raised. For example, Douglas (2016) showed that many introverts learned to cope with constant overstimulation by putting up a wall. However, this response can be influenced with a sufficient amount of parental involvement. Field (2010) showed that parents could affect a child socially by consistent physical touch and attentiveness. Field observed a sample of 54 mothers during puppet playtime with their elementary age child. The analysis showed that maternal aggressive touch during interaction predicted poor child adjustment behavior and that the touch received by the child had implications for the adjustment of that child with other children. Field's results showed that appropriate parental engagement impact increased social attentiveness and decreased depression in the children.

Another negative trait that is preventable by parental involvement is social awkwardness. Social awkwardness is defined as a sense of feeling nervous in a social setting, a situation that is

triggered by the individual's anxiety (Hudson & Rapee, 2001). This sense is generated by one's own fears and worries of what others think of one, and by social expectations. Social awkwardness can prevent children from fully interacting with others from fear of being ridiculed or even ostracized by their peers (Kotter, 2012). The child's anxiety and feeling of being socially awkward can lead to a decline in a student's academic performance (Hornby, 2011). Hudson and Rapee (2001) used observational methods to ferment the concept that parental involvement is critical to combat social awkwardness caused by anxiety. They showed that a 60% improvement occurred in 43 clinically anxious children in a completed cognitive task when parental support was introduced. However, if the anxiety is not diagnosed in time, it can manifest in negative behaviors that have life altering consequences (Looman & Carl, 2015).

With data from the juvenile court system, Burt, Simons, and Simons (2006) showed that, if left untreated by parental engagement, negative childhood behaviors lead to the child entering the judicial system. Heide (2018) documented that juvenile delinquency leading to violent crimes in the United States has increased by 7% over the past 5 years. Of this juvenile delinquent group, consisting of both sexes and all nationalities of ages 18 and under, 43% of this population consequently correlate their incarceration to anxiety, some other behavioral disorder, or to their upbringing by their parental figures (Heide, 2018). When further explored, some of these negative trends stemmed from negative experiences as a child.

Bullying has been documented in age groups as young as 2–4 years old, but intentional bullying starts at the elementary ages of 7–8 (Olweus, 1994). Bullying is defined as when an individual or a group of people with a conceived notion of more power, repeatedly and intentionally causes hurt or harm to another person or group of people who feel helpless to respond (Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Wiener, 2005). Bullying is very dynamic in the sense that the bullied individual and the bully himself or herself have the potential to be positively affected

by deliberate parental involvement (Douglas, 2016). The bullied individual is typically an outcast from social circles and, once it is introduced, bullying can lead to more mental pressure, at times physical pressure, and even in some cases severe depression (Olweus, 1994). Conversely, the bully has internal issues that can be resolved with the appropriate parental involvement. These individuals act out and “put down” others because of an internal tangible or intangible lack in their lives (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, Hamby, & Kracke, 2009). Research has verified that with proper diagnosis and the strategic engagements and intervention methods from parents, this cycle of bullying can be broken (Olweus, 1994).

Creating the Perfect Balance

Having a balance in daily life ensures overall good health, which includes a person’s mental and physical health that is pivotal to growth (Hyman & Summers, 2004). Hyman and Summers (2004) also highlighted that a single adult might have to balance work, school, physical fitness, and his or her spiritual health. When a spouse or child is added to the dynamic, the individual is stretched even more in effort to address the needs of everyone (Hyman & Summers, 2004). With an individual being pulled in so many directions, while race and sex are immaterial, all concerns cannot be addressed and receive the necessary attention that they deserve. Given that one has only 24 hours in a day, time management is even more critical to accomplish balancing the needs of a family and to secure the success of everyone involved (Sawhill, 2016).

Concerning the raising of a child, the household could consist of one primary income or two incomes. Whether it is a single- or dual-parent home, being overwhelmed is a common theme (Crouter, Bumpus, Maguire, & McHale, 1999). Douglas (2016) showed that parents are overwhelmed because 64% of parents in single-parent homes are employed and 82% of parents in dual-parent homes are employed. Managing work and other daily necessities is stressful; therefore, at times, the focus moves from the children to other issues (Sawhill, 2016). Crouter et

al. (1999) linked parents' work pressure with the child's well-being and inferred that being able to balance these events would positively affect the parent and child relationship. Sometimes, creating a balance requires a parent to recognize internally a deficit in their parental involvement (Douglas, 2016). Although inattentiveness is a concern, inversely, some parents can be too involved with their children with all the right intentions, yet yield negative results.

Coincidentally, Locke, Campbell, and Kavanagh (2012) showed that too much involvement could lead to similar results as the lack of parental involvement; they labeled it overparenting (Locke et al., 2012).

Negative Trends of Too Much Involvement

First-time parents experience a plethora of emotions, including joy, excitement, and even fear (Larson & Richards, 1994). The unknowns of parenthood and the pressure of expectations of raising a child cause the fear. These parents' zealotry to be involved is heightened, but the involvement could be taken too far. This overzealousness is shown through negative parental involvement behaviors such as excessive unscheduled visits to the child's school, creating a source of distraction for their child (Gibbs, 2005). These parents must remember that school is not only a place of learning for their child, but also a workplace for the teachers. Being overly involved could lead to stepping in too frequently to deal with issues that the child should handle on his or her own (Park & Holloway, 2017). Some children become distracted by the presence of their parents, which could cause a lack of focus or other problems.

Some of these other problems are a student's false sense of entitlement. The appropriate entitlement of attention is understood, but when the parents foster a false sense of entitlement by being too involved, they could incubate the child's narcissistic habits (Bishop & Lane, 2002). If such a selfish behavior is encouraged in the child, he or she might lean on the parents to resolve certain problems that the child should experience and work through (Kotter, 2012). Another

noted reciprocal behavior of parents being too involved is when the child becomes too guarded academically and socially because he or she always expect the parents to step in (Morgan, 2016). When this occurs, the child could become dependent on the parent for tasks of which the child is actually capable of doing.

Dependency and Inactivity

Children who become dependent on their parents because of overparenting become docile, passive, and nonassertive (Tsaousis, Mascha, & Giovazolias, 2012). Tsaousis et al. (2012) conducted research using the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) and showed that these children exert a great deal of energy to please others, constantly attempting to elicit the approval of others because of the overbearing behaviors of the parents. These traits and reliance correlate directly to parents not allowing the appropriate personal growth and development of the child to take place (Morgan, 2016). Maccoby (1992) conducted a study in which the corresponding data showed that the researched population of children felt helpless, even to complete seemingly simple tasks, had low levels of confidence in their own intelligence and abilities, and had difficulty making decisions and undertaking individual projects—all of which were related to the overbearance of parents (Maccoby, 1992). This overbearance could lead children to be pessimistic and self-doubting, and to belittle their own accomplishments (Park & Holloway, 2017). It is commonly thought that the development of dependence in these children is the result of overparenting (Locke et al., 2012). Not only does overparenting cause over-dependency, but may lead to inactivity. These behaviors are counter-productive to the child's growth and development, for which the child requires appropriate assistance from the parents in the home and school environment.

Ways Parents Can Help

The purpose of this section was to examine data concerning different methods parents could use to ensure that their child achieves success in all endeavors. Marion and Gonzalez (2014) conducted research on a public elementary school parental population, which showed that increases in parental commitment consequently lead to a higher degree of trust and greater productivity. This commitment should be intentional from the parent and must be constantly developed. Data showed that the mentioned parental commitment could be in the form of consistent time set aside for child enrichment and introduction to new experiences (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). The aid that is provided from parents should occur in the home and school environment (Walters, Smith, Leinwand, Surr, Stein, Bailey, 2014).

Home Environment

Learning does not stop, nor does it begin, at school. The home environment is the child's first classroom and, when the child reaches school age, the home should also be used to reinforce what is taught in the classroom. Epstein (1988) reordered statistics from 1,021 parents and students and 82 teachers, capturing responses that concerned homework and parental help. The data coincidentally correlated a greater time spent doing homework with more minutes of parent help, and more frequent requests from teachers for parent involvement of homework activities in the subjects of reading and mathematics were linked to high achievement (Epstein, 1988). Mathematics is a subject and skill that people use daily everywhere in the world in the areas of transportation, economy, and even physical fitness (Sangalli, 2018). Math computation and comprehension are important; therefore, it is imperative to examine further how parents could help improve student success. The methods for parents to take to improve student mathematics comprehension involve a four-part approach.

The four methods or approaches that parents can implement are (a) student-centered approach to mathematic instruction, (b) linking instruction to environment, (c) considering and including the student perspective, and (d) a relationship to student outcomes (Walters et al., 2014). Of the four approaches, the one all-encompassing approach is being able to consider and include the student's perspective. This approach was proven by using knowledge comprehension assessments that collectively showed that true understanding is achieved in the home environment through the student-centered approach when students feel comfortable to ask exploratory questions that cover the subject material (Walters et al., 2014). Using additional training material and homework that parents provide at home further reinforces the subject matter and supports academic success (Bamford & Topping, 2013).

Another impactful way that parents can assist with child growth in the home environment is to broaden the child's horizons. This is made possible through child enrichment, which is defined as strategically added engagements and experiences that permeate a child's knowledge base and leads to a deeper understanding in that subject (Davis & Rosso, 2006). Some implementable broadening could come in the form of family activities, games, trips, and culture awareness. Parents could aid in holistic development in the home environment with simple and inexpensive events such as a family game night, a trip to zoo, or even a day at the community park with a picnic lunch could prove beneficial to the academic and extracurricular growth of the child (Bamford & Topping, 2013). Culture awareness enrichment aides in the child's social interaction and skills (Marková, 2017). A simple at home assignment (e.g., researching a culture, then preparing a food dish from that country's cuisine for dinner) could expand the child's knowledge base (Wheatley, 2006).

One of the final yet imperative traits is the importance of being a team player and sharing; these skills are learned at home from parents. Parents can support and reinforce the

child's growth in these areas by seeking community involvement and volunteer opportunities (Stritch & Christensen, 2016). Gerber (1996) conducted 123 studies of child community involvement that showed that community involvement is a factor connected to student achievement and educational aspirations of students who were active in giving in the local community. According to research from the National Education Association (as cited in Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), when schools, parents, families, and communities work together to support learning, students tend to earn higher grades, regularly attend school, stay in school longer, and enroll in higher level programs. The benefits listed by the National Education Association cannot be achieved with just support at home, but require parental interaction in the school environment with all parties possessing the synchronized objective of assisting students to succeed.

School Environment

The Fullerton Longitudinal Study, a contemporary ongoing long-term longitudinal investigation, aids in showing the benefits of a connection between teachers and parents. The data in the Fullerton Longitudinal Study from over 500 participants show that parental interaction at school and child development plans created in conjunction with teachers at school corresponded to significant positive effects in reading achievement and motivation through childhood (Gottfried, Schlackman, Gottfried, & Boutin-Martinez, 2015). From the results, one can conclude that parental involvement in a child's life goes beyond childhood and will play a vital role in their success as an adult. The long-term positive effects could not have been accomplished without the combined effort from parent and teacher (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). These efforts can be strengthened through the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO).

The purpose of the PTO is to encourage parents to assist with various school activities, aid the mission, support vision of the school, and foster a community atmosphere (Woysner &

Cucchiara, 2017). During these meetings, both parents and teachers can outline expectations, meeting times, and educational plans concerning topics of student curriculum. This is also an opportunity for parents to talk with school personnel about the structure and content presented in parent–teacher conferences and open houses (Chen, Anderson, & Watkins, 2016). The National PTO polled 245 parents and the results displayed positive trends in student academic achievements connected to parent/family involvement at school programs that were supported by a receptive and welcoming PTO program (Ho & Kwong, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

Several authors have conducted studies in the field of parental involvement (Burke, 2013; Douglas, 2016; Finn, 1998; García & Thornton, 2014; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Hornby, 2011). They are all professionals with a wealth of information taken from both didactic and field experiences that validate and substantiate their research and writing (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Hornby, 2011). For the development of the topic of parental involvement, and to ensure the significance and accuracy, several of their works have been referenced that support the development of the conceptual framework that grounded this study.

These authors cover a broad spectrum of topics that create the basis of this study on parental involvement. Through research, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) captured the importance of parental involvement with schools and parental engagement in connection to a child’s learning. In a school environment, Finn (1998) conducted focus groups with nearly 130 parents. At that time, the analysis of the data revealed parental knowledge gaps in the area of techniques to assist with improving the relation with the child’s school. If this deficit of knowledge were to become the focal point and if it were developed, the ultimate goal of the holistic education of children would be improved and would show in the students’ academic and extracurricular successes (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Hornby (2011) emphasized the importance of school and family partnerships. The interaction between parents and schools is critical because parental involvement is a key component in promoting the child's achievements (Hornby, 2011). When parents are not aware of the child's difficult areas, and do not know how to interpret the signs and assist them in the home environment, progress is impeded (Hornby, 2011). In conjunction with teachers, parents must work against hindrances to student growth to avoid or overcome them expeditiously (Knight et al., 2016). These authors assisted in the development of the topic and the fortification of the theoretical framework.

Theories of Framework

The path-goal leadership theory is relevant to this study. The use of the path-goal leadership theoretical framework is appropriate because it can lead to enlightenment for both the parents and the child by prescribing set goals and the plan to achieve said objectives (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). As a parent of a child, the goal or purpose is to provide guidance, direction, assistance, and inspiration to the child, which will lead to his or her success (Bass & Riggio, 2006). When a parent is informed of the potential emotional distresses of their child, they can then better support them and remove any potential or emerging roadblocks (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). These actions positively affect the productivity and growth of the child.

The path-goal leadership theory also involves how leaders motivate followers to accomplish designated goals (Northouse, 2016). As a parent, one of the most important tasks is the cultivation and growth of the child or children for whom the person is responsible (Reece, 2017). The promotion of the child's development through involvement and engagement establishes a foundation for the child that he or she can build on for life and that will lead him or her to success (Northouse, 2016). The parent accomplishes this success when he or she discovers

what motivates his or her child, clearly develops and defines the path, and meets his or her child's individual needs (Marion & Gonzales, 2014).

Strengths and Weaknesses of Framework

The framework exhibits strengths and weaknesses regarding its applicability to parental involvement at school. The strength of the path-goal leadership theory is its ability to employ four specific traits to one's parenting style. The four traits that a parent can embody are (a) to be directive, (b) to be supportive, (c) to be participative, and (d) to be achievement-oriented; these traits can be applied to a person's parenting style to assist the child in any environment (Northouse, 2016). One week the child might require the parent to be direct with homework task for comprehension, while the very next week the child might need a little more support. The strength of these traits and techniques are that they allow the parent to meet the developing and ever-changing needs of the child at home and in the school environment (Figlio & Kenny, 2007).

Despite the previously mentioned strengths concerning the path-goal leadership theory, some weaknesses are noticeable. A drawback to the theory is its inefficiency when implemented in large groups (Northouse, 2016). This inefficiency occurs because of the underlying key component of the four traits, which is motivation. It is difficult to motivate large groups to achieve the same goal because it requires from the leader simultaneously different styles of motivation (Northouse, 2016). These strengths and weaknesses will be further explored in the research methodology section in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

The analysis of the literature explored four primary sections that informed the research study: (a) where parents make the most impact, (b) creating the perfect balance, (c) ways parents can help, and (c) the conceptual framework. In these four areas, the researcher addressed parents in a general grouping, but did not address the transient population. To this date, a gap exists in

research regarding parental involvement in elementary schools by parents who currently serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. Parental involvement for these military families can become a very complex dynamic. The men and women serving in the U.S. Armed Forces work extended hours and sometimes deploy for several months in support of the Nation's fight against terrorism (Wheatley, 2006).

In the area of parental involvement and partnership with the elementary school, authors in the literature showed a consensus that constant parental involvement in conjunction with teacher efforts consistently lead to positive trends for a child. The researchers further showed that this deliberate involvement spans all areas of the child's life, and prohibits certain negative traits, and showed that its effects lead to success in adulthood. Finally, ambiguity exists in the ways to support the transient population of the parents in the U.S. Armed Services, and few researchers have attempted to document ways to assist parents who are currently serving to support their child by connecting with their child's elementary school.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Methodology is defined as a system of methods used in a particular area of study or activity. The method that was used to examine and assess the factors that prohibit elementary school involvement by parents with a military background was the implementation of open-ended questions in an individual interview environment. The following related questions offer insight from personal experiences:

1. What factors ensure active participation of military parents in the education of their elementary-aged child in the school environment?
2. What factors contribute to the lack of involvement of military parents in the education of their elementary-aged child?
3. In what ways can an elementary school, that serves military families, encourage the parents to be involved in the education of their child?

The methodology exercised provided insight to these questions is phenomenological research. Phenomenology was identified and used as early as the 18th Century and it refers to the knowledge as it appears to consciences, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience (Moustakas, 1994). Kockelmans (1967) believed that, by using this method, the process would lead to an unfolding of phenomenal consciousness through science and philosophy "toward the absolute knowledge of the Absolute" (Kockelmans, 1967, p. 24).

Several indepth areas of phenomenological research can be used. The specific method for this study was heuristic research. This is the best method to investigate human experiences, because of the characteristic of not attempting to place the results in quantitative form

(Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research observes the raw data and pulls from the phenomena of responses to achieve useful and applicable results.

This research stemmed from the Greek word *heuriskein*, which means to discover or to find (Moustakas, 1994). This definition was applicable while attempting to discover or find the challenges that both limit and contribute to military parents' parental involvement in elementary schools. This process allowed the reader to comprehend the phenomenon by analyzing the responses from members of the focus group of military parents who were currently serving in the Armed Forces, which led to increased self-awareness. Self-awareness was defined as having a clear perception of one's own strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, beliefs, motivation, and emotions, which, according to DeVoe, Paris, Emmert-Aronson, Ross, and Acker (2017), leads to internal discoveries and eventually to the implementation of corrective processes. When this process occurs, the synonym to the word heuristic (eureka) also occurs, and the realization of the data becomes transparent to the reader's own experiences and lives (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). The researcher intends that this eureka experience occur for every U.S. Armed Forces service member who has children and might read the report of this study.

Setting

The setting of the study varied according to the individual participant's discretion. The study was focused on currently serving, U.S. Armed Forces members and their experiences in relation to the participation and partnership with their elementary school-aged child's school. Therefore, the research was not dependent on any one military base or site. The participants were recruited globally through a structured flyer (Appendix A) that was placed on social media. Interviews were conducted in person at a location that the participant chose or via Zoom. Zoom is a conference call system that can be used from a personal computer or mobile device. This option was used to eliminate the barrier of geographic distance and to allow more service

members to participate if they chose, regardless of their current physical location because of their military obligation. These interviews did not take place on a military installation; military approval was not required for this research study (Disque, 2016).

The study was conducted using open-ended questions that were implemented during personal interviews with the parents of K–5 students; these parents were currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher posted the IRB approved flyer on social media pages that currently serving military service members typically view. These pages included a public Facebook page and other private Facebook pages to which current military members must apply to be a member and of which the researcher is a member. The posting stated,

There is an opportunity for you to participate in a confidential personal interview session that is directed at learning from your experiences in the area parental involvement in elementary school from the lenses of currently serving military parents. The topic that this information will be gathered for is, “A Study of Elementary School Involvement by Parents Currently Serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.”

The only stipulations for voluntary participants were that they must be parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces and have a child in elementary school (i.e., K–5). The participants confidentially discussed parental school involvement from the point of view of a military service member and discussed, in individual interviews, ways of improving the partnership with their child’s elementary school. The interviews were conducted at the participant’s preferred location in person or by video chat (i.e. library, coffee, Zoom) at a time according to participant availability.

If a participant wanted to volunteer for the study, he or she was instructed to contact the researcher privately at the University of New England’s password-protected Outlook email

account. The period for response was 1 week from the date of posting. Data for the consent form and demographic portion was collected using an online, Web survey tool (e.g., Survey Monkey). All interested participants who met the criteria were immediately sent an email that included a link for Survey Monkey and that led to the electronic participation consent form (Appendix B) and participant demographic information (Appendix C). This allowed the researcher and participant to obtain electronic copies of the signed documents. An advanced copy of the open-ended questions (Appendix D) that were discussed earlier was sent during the email correspondence. Once all of these materials were received, the participants were instructed to have all the information returned to the researcher as soon as possible, no later than 1 week, and if they were emailed back, the participants were also instructed to send possible suitable times and locations for the individual interviews. It is important to note that, when the participants responded to the researcher with their information for the most-suitable, mutually agreeable time and public place for the interview, the participant was no longer anonymous, but his or her information and identity were kept confidential throughout the entire process.

Participants

The participants for the study were chosen through purposeful sampling. Creswell (1998) defined purposeful sampling as when “the researcher selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 156). The identity of the participants who were interviewed was kept completely confidential. Confidentiality for the parents who volunteered meant that they would not be identified by name or any other type of information. Protecting the confidentiality of participants allowed for full, open, and honest answers in the subject area. This safeguarded full disclosure allowed an unbiased assessment of school parental involvement that encompasses the enlisted and officer rank structure in the U.S. Armed Forces. These participants collectively

represented a diverse pool of experiences that led to information that yielded heuristic phenomenological research data. This data were then used to document ways to encourage and sustain the partnership between teachers and parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces, of elementary-school-aged children.

Data

The data were extracted from the responses to open-ended questions in an individual interview setting. The conversations were recorded and saved by the researcher and later sent to a third party to be transcribed. The transcription was coded and used to observe some potential phenomena from the parents' experiences. The six phases of heuristic research were applied. These phases were initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27).

The data were reviewed to provide insight into and a description of participants' experience through the interview. Once the interview was transcribed, the participants were able to review the transcription of their interview (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). To conduct this process of member checking, after the interviews had been transcribed and the researcher had received the transcripts, the researcher emailed the individual transcripts to the respective participants. All electronic information was password protected on a personal computer. The researcher will store for 1 year in a fire-rated locked file cabinet the digital recordings along with any data in the form of transcribed notes that were printed. After 1 year of safekeeping, the information will be deleted from the digital recorder and all documents will be shredded using a cross-cut shredder.

Analysis

The collected data were analyzed by using the common qualities of human science research. The interpretation, coding, and triangulation of knowledge and experience from participants were completed by using seven common bonds: (a) recognizing the value of a qualitative design that is not approachable through quantitative methods, (b) focusing on wholeness of experience, (c) searching for meanings and essence rather than measurement, (d) obtaining descriptions of experience, (e) regarding the data of experience as imperative in understanding parental behavior and evidence for scientific investigations, (f) formulating questions and problems that reflect interest in the researched subject, and (g) viewing experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship of subject and object and of parts and whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). The nature of the content required that nonparametric statistics be used. This “distribution-free” statistical technique allowed a variety of nonparametric statistics to be available for use with nominal or ordinal data (Fan, 2018).

All of the analyses was made possible by the evaluating the interview responses, which included data gathered through the collection of the parents’ stories, the parents reporting individual experiences, and the researcher ordering the meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 1998, p. 70). For this study, the researcher interviewed nine participants who met all of the inclusion criteria. When they were obtained, the researcher then accessed the optimal approach to a thorough analysis that would yield substantial and significant data from the currently serving military parents whose responses could be transposed into beneficial findings that would lead to transformational thinking concerning school involvement.

Participant Rights

Participant rights were always a focal point of concern and the researcher used prudence during the collection and interpretation process. These rights included but were not limited to

allowing the participant enough time to decide whether to be in the research study and allowing the participant to make that decision without any pressure from the researcher (Henderson, 2015). The military parents who participated in the individual interviews answered the open-ended questions from personal experiences in the hope that their responses would lead to data that could be used so that a thorough analysis could be made. Through this study, the researcher uncovered viable information that will be shared with other currently serving military parents to encourage and sustain the invaluable student support behaviors. The researcher ensured that safeguarding the confidentiality and honest responses of the willing participants took precedence at all times (Henderson, 2015).

There is always the potential that some of the participants might internalize the questionnaire and their personal responses. This internalization might cause the participant military parents to visit their child's school too frequently, or cause teaching interruptions and distractions for the faculty members. This overzealous behavior could potentially be an unintended outcome of participation in the study. The plan of mitigation was to include a phrase that advised the participants not to take their personal response to the questionnaire as absolute and to be participative at their child's school, but practice balance in their participation (Henderson, 2015).

Potential Limitations

The zeal that a researcher might have for the subject area could lead to a limitation during the research process. One of the limitations of the study might have been that the researcher could have over-scrutinized the data and results. Naturally, people hold knowledge judgmentally and should refrain from judgement and abstain from the ordinary way of perceiving things (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27). This holds true because of the researcher's passion for the education of children and the researcher's knowledge gained through research on the importance of parental

engagement in the school environment. Specifically, in this case, the researcher's relationship to the topic is because of having been an active duty service member. Therefore, the researcher can personally relate to the demanding schedules of the military and possesses the passion to assist the military child by educating his or her parents.

Another notable limitation was that the study was not intended to assess the correlation of parental involvement with student achievement. Shouse (2018) conducted a study that showed the importance of parental involvement and its link to student academic success. However, this phenomenological research was intended to uncover the reasons for the military parents' active or inactive participation at school invited events. The limitation of not meeting with school administration as a part of this study placed the emphasis on the topic from the perspective of the military parents.

Past judgments and knowledge concerning the topic were set aside to avoid biases and address the potential conflict of interest. To mitigate further bias in this small study, the researcher encouraged participants to share their unique perspectives in lieu of reporting what they thought the researcher might want to hear. When this is done, the phenomena were revisited freshly and accurately from the vantage point of pure intentions (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27). Creswell (1998) also recommended using *bracketing*. The process of bracketing was accomplished by using the demographic information (Appendix C) to place the information in categories of groups to view objectively the data for information (Creswell, 1998). This clear perspective led a clear interpretation of information by viewing it at face value. This heuristic, phenomenological, methodical approach embodied the statement of Husserl (1931) that "existence in the form of a thing is never demanded as necessary by virtue of its givenness" (pp. 144–145).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, the researcher outlines and provides perspicacity to the research questions that were examined as part of the study concerning military parental involvement with their child's elementary school. Table 1 provides an overview of the research questions in relationship to their data sources. Chapter 4 also includes participant demographics, a description of the participants, and an analysis of the participant individual interview data.

The process used for the distribution of the recruitment flyer (Appendix A), consent form (Appendix B), and participant demographic information (Appendix C) was outlined in Chapter 3. The coding procedures used for the volunteer participant responses to the open-ended questions (Appendix D) are described in Chapter 4, which includes a detailed discussion of the data analysis procedures used to interpret responses to each question.

Chapter 4 also includes the presentation of the results. The results concerning the extracted themes by research questions (Table 1) are presented first. Next, the participant responses are presented with the data homogeneously grouped, using overall participant responses. Finally, the results at the participant level are discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the qualitative phenomenological results.

Research Questions Investigated

Interview inquiry in educational research offers several advantages (e.g., producing more in-depth and comprehensive information, producing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon, and allowing participants to be observed in their natural setting) (Creswell, 1998; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Therefore, the researcher developed a qualitative study to examine the involvement and experiences of military parents of elementary-aged children. To capture the individual and

collective experiences with active duty parents, individual interviews were conducted. The study was guided by three research questions:

1. What factors ensure the active participation of military parents in the education of their elementary-school-aged child in the school environment?
2. What factors contribute to the lack of involvement of military parents in the education of their elementary-school-aged child?
3. In what ways can an elementary school that serves military families encourage the parents' involvement in the education of their child?

To strengthen further the research, to ensure consistency, and to synchronize similar themes from the participant responses to each question, Table 1 is provided to cross reference this study's foundational research questions with its sources of data.

Table 1

Research Questions and Data Sources

Research questions	Corresponding participant interview questions	Subtopic alignment
1. What factors ensure the active participation of military parents in the education of their elementary-school-age child in the school environment?	Interview Question 1	What brings parents to the school
	Interview Question 4	Experiences
	Interview Question 5	Barriers
2. What factors contribute to the lack of involvement of military parents in the education of their elementary-school-aged child?	Interview Question 2	Details about events
	Interview Question 3	Personal usefulness of events
	Interview Question 4	Experiences
	Interview Questions 5–6	Barriers

Research questions	Corresponding participant interview questions	Subtopic alignment
3. In what ways can an elementary school that serves military families encourage the parents' involvement in the education of their child?	Interview Questions 7–9	Ways of improvement

Survey and Interview Distribution Process

After IRB approval, the researcher placed the recruitment flyer (Appendix A) on social media platforms. This method of broadcasting and recruiting included a public Facebook page and other private Facebook pages to which current military members must apply to be a member and of which the researcher is a member. The researcher immediately received responses from 12 individuals within 24 hours of posting the request flyer online. From the 12, two potential participants did not meet criteria because they were not currently serving members in the U.S. Armed Forces with a child in the K–5 grades of elementary school; therefore, they were excluded as participants in this study. One volunteer did not follow-up with the researcher within the prescribed time for correspondence, which was to complete the electronic participation consent form (Appendix B) and participant demographic information (Appendix C) on the Web survey tool, Survey Monkey; therefore, this person was also excluded as a participant in this study. This gave the researcher nine qualified volunteer participants with whom to conduct individual interviews.

Individual interviews were conducted in person at times and locations that were mutually agreed upon with each participant. The open-ended questions (Appendix D) were sent to each participant prior to his or her interview through personal email addresses that were provided to the researcher during the initial correspondence. Sending the interview questions in advance

gave the nine participants an opportunity to review the topics that would be discussed. Each interview resulted in transcripts that had word counts of 2,650–3,125 words, was recorded and transcribed by a third-party organization. The researcher then emailed a copy of the written interview transcriptions to the respective participant and required a reply of agreement or request for edits. This was done to facilitate member checking and to ensure that the transcriptions were accurate and encompassed the participant's experiences accurately. The nine participants replied to the researcher's email within 1 week of receiving the request and included a response of agreement for the transcribed interview with no requested changes or edits. This act solidified researcher perceptions that the transcribed interviews were accurate to the best of participants' knowledge. The responses were then coded for data interpretation. The phenomenon that was observed from the transcribed interview data showed similar trends. These trends are displayed in the presentation of results section of this chapter including the subsections of themes and collective presentation of participation results, through the lens of each participant.

Description of Participants

To provide a description of the study's participants, demographic information (Appendix C) was collected through Survey Monkey. Using the responses of the participants, the demographic profile showed notable differences. As shown in Table 2, the characteristics of gender, marital status, education level, and rank are the demographic variables that displayed areas of congruency and disparity in the participant pool. The participant gender breakdown showed a 67% male population, and a 33% female population. The marital status of the participants consisted of seven married participants, one single participant, and one divorced participant. The variance between the participants was more sporadic in relation to education level. One participant possessed some college experience (i.e., had taken some college courses, but not enough to earn an associate degree or a bachelor's degree), one participant had an

associate or trade degree, three participants had a bachelor's degree, three participants had graduate degrees, and one participant had a professional degree. This one participant's industry-specific, professional degree was in pharmacology. The educational level was very different for all nine participants as was the ranks represented.

There is a hierarchical relationship among military ranks in the U.S. Armed Forces. Military ranks define authority and roles of responsibility in a military hierarchy (Ray, 2018). The order of succession starts from enlisted ranks (E1-E9), warrant officers, technical experts, (WO1-CW5), and commissioned officer (O1-O9) (Bradford & Brown, 2008). Military ranks were captured and expressed in this study for reference and categorization, not to draw salient conclusions nor connections in the field of military parent involvement at their child's elementary school. The current rank difference of the volunteers could be grouped into three concise categories.

The rank difference of the nine participants was almost equal with 44% enlisted personnel Sergeant–Sergeant First Class (SGT–SFC). The officer participation was 56% that encompassed a makeup of officers Second Lieutenant–Colonel (2LT–COL). The percentage of officers included two participants in the rank of Second Lieutenant–Captain (2LT–CPT) and three currently serving at the ranks of Major–Colonel (MAJ–COL). This data is listed in Table 2 and includes more detailed information related to demographics at the participant-level.

Table 2

General Demographics and Corresponding Profiles of Interview Participants

Variables	<i>n</i>	Percent	Participant profile (P)
Gender (<i>n</i> = 9)			
Female	3	33.33	P2, P4, P9
Male	6	66.67	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8
Marital status (<i>n</i> = 9)			
Single	1	11.11	P4
Married	7	77.78	P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P8, P9
Divorced	1	11.11	P5
Education level (<i>n</i> = 9)			
Some college	1	11.11	P1
Associate or trade degree	1	11.11	P4
Bachelor's degree	3	33.33	P2, P5, P8
Graduate degree	3	33.33	P3, P6, P9
Professional degree	1	11.11	P7
Rank (<i>n</i> = 9)			
Sergeant–Sergeant First Class	4	44.44	P1, P4, P5, P8
Second Lieutenant–Captain	2	22.22	P2, P6
Major–Colonel	3	33.33	P3, P7, P9

Analysis Method

Before any of the individual interviews were conducted the researcher required all of the surveys to be completed and closed in Survey Monkey. The survey also included the informed consent for participation as noted in Appendix B. The results were then downloaded from Survey Monkey and were exported into Microsoft's Excel program for coding and analysis. A table was then formatted with appropriate variable columns, data for each participant, and the correlated participant profile. A personal optical litmus test was run to look for frequencies or inconsistencies within the variable categories. These groupings in the variables were identified and analyzed per participant indicated in Table 2.

The next stage of the research study involved individually interviewing nine participants. Each session was held at an agreed upon location of preference by the participant. All these locations were independent of a military installation and did not interfere with the participant's workday or duties. The consistent duration of the interviews was from 15–23 minutes each. There were not any outlying circumstances of extremely long or short interviews. Each individual interview session was recorded and transcribed.

The first steps of coding for this phenomenological qualitative study began with the collection and formatting of the data. During the review, the researcher captured preliminary words and phrases of the transcribed, recorded, individual interviews. This was done for investigative and research purposes, as the study moved along, to ensure continuity of intriguing and consistent ideas from the participants (Wilmot, 2015). The researcher used an open code procedure to analyze data and to inform the extracted theories from the data. Open coding was used to delve into the data and to unearth the emerging abstract concepts (Punch, 2009). Codes were used to assign labels to pieces of data to find patterns. The first phase included the actual

data or excerpts from the transcriptions. Then, line-by-line coding was used to build concepts and categories. Nine service members participated in this qualitative study; therefore, the transcripts were coded at the individual participant level. The participant response data was recoded holistically. Individual responses were grouped into categories. The identified conceptual categories of observed and recorded data were used in the building of theory and displayed in the presentation of results.

Presentation of Results

In this section, the researcher looked in depth at the three research questions that were investigated. First, the participant responses were individual; therefore, they are presented by the common themes that surfaced. Each section also included specific participant feedback. Then, the collective feedback of interview participants is presented, which is followed by a more detailed discussion of the results from the perspective or lens of the individual participant.

The participants were asked a series of nine, open-ended, interview questions. Embedded across the interview questions were six thematic subcategories that were related to parental engagement: (a) what brings parents to the school, (b) details about events, (c) personal usefulness of events, (d) experiences, (e) barriers; and (f) ways of improvement. These subcategories enabled the researcher to cross-reference the questions with the three primary research questions of this study concerning the parental involvement in elementary school of parents who are currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces, as indicated in Table 1.

By Themes

This section includes a discussion of the results according to the nature of the design of the research question and the corresponding themes within the interview question. The first research question that underpinned the study addressed discovering factors that could ensure active participation of military parents in the education of their child in the elementary school

environment. The subtopics that are associated with Research Question 1 are (a) what brings parents to the school, (b) experiences, and (c) barriers, which are related to the nested Survey Questions 1, 4, and 5 (Appendix D). The following positive concepts emerged from the analysis of the participant responses; these concepts included the number and spacing of school-invited events and the environment on attending the events at the school.

The collective results showed that a primary factor that led to active school participation from military parents was related to the number and spacing of parent-invited meetings in relationship to their timing. The data indicated that military parents were more likely to participate in school events when meetings were deliberate, concise, and effective. Participant 4 described the school experience concerning the number of parent-invited events as “Sufficient, not too many or too few, and the number of meetings were held frequently enough, aligning with the child’s report card. Too many leads to parents losing interest, and too few can also raise eyebrows in concern.” The data showed that the second factor that ensured active participation of military parents was connection to the welcoming environment. Participant 1 recalled having a sense of warmth as he entered the school during several visits to his child’s elementary school. On entering the school, he noted that it was clean and well lit, and that teachers and faculty knew his daughter by name. This personal touch added to Participant 1’s warmth because his daughter possessed a sense of comfort being in the learning environment. The participant responses indicated that knowing when and how to arrange meetings with individual teachers, and even the vice principal or principal, if needed, was a comforting factor and important in the developing the relationship with the school.

With Research Question 2, the researcher attempted to shed light on the factors that contribute to the lack of involvement of military parents in the education of their elementary-school-aged child. Research Question 2 had its own trends that were identified through the topics

embedded within the question. Interview Questions 2, 3, and 4 (Appendix D) supported the topics: details regarding events, personal usefulness of events, and experiences. The key themes that emerged and that identified contributing factors to the lack of involvement of military parents were organization, timely communication, and the attitudes of teacher and other employees/representatives of the school.

The theme of organization was a resounding topic that was discussed among all nine participants. The participants noted that when the respective elementary school for their child held parent-invited events, they felt as though the events were organized and focused to push a prescribed agenda. The participants further noted that this focus provided structure, but that the meetings were not innately beneficial to them because the parent did not receive specific information concerning the individual child at the hosted event. Participant 2 recalled going to her child's school and hearing about general school-wide fundraisers and being directed to view an ambiguous wall of classroom projects. This experience led to Participant 2's lack of interest in attending these events in the future.

The next theme that collectively emerged during coding was the timeframe in which the teachers reach out to parents concerning student concerns. Participant 7 stated, "Teachers reach out and inform the parents of student concern of poor grades, but at times it's too late. They usually contact parents before report cards, but if this is known sooner, us as parents can effect change." This theme showed that lack of involvement could be triggered by not having timely communication between parent and school. The overlooked factor of not knowing the student concerns and, when identified, possibly too late to implement improvement measures, could be a cause of military parents not being present at school-offered events.

From the subtopic "ways of improvement" and Interview Questions 7-9 (Appendix D) during the coding process, the last theme that materialized concerning the lack of involvement of

military parents was related to teacher attitudes and behaviors. During Participant 6's interview, he shared a personal experience about a particular incident that occurred when his son was in the second grade.

My son is in the fifth grade now, but when he was [in] the second grade, we had an incident at his school. In this particular case, the kid couldn't hear. So his teacher was talking to him and he didn't hear her. That didn't clue into the teacher that something was wrong with his hearing, but only that he's not paying attention, and she then commences to yell at him and it's not that he's not listening. Teachers should be able to pick up on certain thing[s], understand he is a kid, and not get personal or emotional toward them. If something is up with this kid and he's not getting it, it [would] require a little one-on-one with the child to see if he was catching it or not catching it. I understand teachers [are] people and have lives, at time[s] they bring their personal attitudes in to the classroom.

In Participant 6's discussion of his perceptions of this negative personal experience, it was noted that this was a factor that contributed to the lack of involvement at the school level.

Research Question 3 aimed to gain insight to the ways in which an elementary school that serve military families could encourage the parents' involvement. The two, interrelated, encouragement themes that were discovered through the analysis of the data were related to the timing of school events and the implementation of current technology. The data analysis revealed that these aforementioned themes were consistent across the nine participants. The results echoed sections of the literature review that addressed the intentional focus of time and implementing current and relatable methods, including technology. Participant 8 stated that, in this day and age, as an alternative to traveling to school for parent-teacher conferences, technology should be implemented. Participant 8 went on to recommend iPhone's FaceTime application or some variation of teleconferences should be offered as an alternative to the necessary commute to the

school for each meeting. This implementation would encourage the military population to be present at the school events and show sensitive consideration to their unique circumstances. The commute during the work–school week was a noted barrier for Participant 8. Other participants offered the suggestion of downloadable real-time apps that could display the child’s grades and make upcoming assignments available to view from the parents’ cellular phones.

This is the consistent portion of each individual interview in which the most data from interview responses was recorded. The nine participants offered these suggestions to provide helpful information to future U.S. Armed Forces service members who might have elementary-school-aged children. From the wealth of knowledge that the participants provided, the researcher coded data not only by subgroup themes, but also by collective participant responses.

Collective Presentation of Participant Results

From the aggregate of participant responses concerning how the elementary school could ensure active participation of military parents in the elementary school environment, two participant responses encapsulated the majority’s thoughts and opinions. Participant 2 stated that, if the three to four parent-invited school events were more focused on the individual student, more like parent teacher meetings, as opposed to generalized meetings, then parents would be more apt to participate and attend more school events. Participant 2 even went on to mention that child enrichment ideas and partnership should be encouraged and implemented during these three to four school meetings in the school year. The other plausible suggestion to ensure active school partnership came from Participant 3. Participant 3 highlighted that the elementary school could potentially ensure more participation from military parents if there were more school visit options. Participant 3 experienced the following.

Don’t forget during the week, you’ve already put in 8 to 10 hours of work. You’ve had to go home, feed the family . . . that’s a big issue right there for me. I have to get off of

work. I have to go home. I have to feed the family. Then, I have to go back to the school, do the interaction, and then leave. Usually, the interactions are between, what, about 5:30–6:30 pm? So, the whole eating thing is a big deal because you're trying to juggle a lot of balls. Not to mention, you're trying to get yourself ready for the next day. I get it. There's some sacrifices that need to be made. However, you start making choices on what's the most important thing . . . well, the night school visit is gonna fall off and not my child's routine of homework and eating. It's not that you're not interested. It's just that I think the time offerings can be done better.

Qualitative data from other participants showed that the expressed sentiments were mutual. Several solutions were offered such as weekend meetings, teleconference options, and meeting times during the day similar to a working lunch option. These participant responses also proved invaluable with recommendations for the second research question.

The parent participants aided the researcher in uncovering a finding about the lack of military parents feeling connected to the elementary school. When questioned about whether the meetings at school with teachers were frequent or seldom and whether they were initiated by teachers, parents, or both, a one-sided phenomenal 78% (seven out of nine participants) stated that the meetings were seldom and were initiated by the teacher. Participant 9 mentioned that enrichment and broadening opportunities for the students were available and supported by the faculty, but not publicized. Participant 9 went on to share that her daughter showed an interest in meteorology and, after proactively engaging the school, the child now does the daily weather reports at school during morning announcements and was even granted the opportunity to visit the local news station and meet the meteorologist. This was made possible by mutual involvement and efforts on behalf of the child. This heuristic, eureka moment (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9) was gleaned from participants when asked about lack of involvement and inherently

reflected on what could be done internally on the parents' behalf. Their responses were also vital to what they felt schools could do to encourage more parent involvement.

When questioned about the ways the elementary school could better encourage parental involvement with military families, one topic clearly emerged. The resonating topic involved the use and participation in PTOs. Across the board, all nine participants agreed that PTOs are useful with the connection between parent and school and they gave the parents a voice in the implementation of school programs and ideas for improvements. The common challenge was the time requirement needed to be an active member of the PTO. It could be deduced that schools could encourage parental involvement of military families by attempting to change the cumbersome stigma of the PTO. Several participants suggested the use of a virtual PTO participation. This would be a situation in which the thoughts and ideas of these military parents could be captured and considered, in the case that they could not attend. Also, some form of online chat room application could be useful in posting all the events, so that the parents could remain abreast of them. Through personal coding methods the researcher was able to highlight participant response trends that answered the three research questions.

Lens of Each Participant

Each volunteer contributed to the research by sharing his or her personal experiences in the area of school partnership with the researcher through their responses and additional comments during the individual interviews. The following subsections capture the uniqueness of the responses of each participant. The data is presented in chronological order from Participant 1 to Participant 9. Although in that order, each subsection sequentially lists the respective participant's responses to open-ended questions starting with Question 1 and ending with Question 9.

Participant 1. Participant 1 is a married male. He possesses some college classes for education level and is in the Sergeant–Sergeant First Class rank category. In response to Interview Question 1, Participant 1 stated that he recalled that the school held two to three parent-invited events per year. Out of these, either he or his wife was able to attend all the parent-invited events, and they were appropriately placed. In his opinion, the parent-invited events were organized and lasted about 30 minutes, and the length of the events was appropriate. The communication with the teacher was seldom, performance-based, and initiated by the teacher for Interview Question 3. When Participant 1 entered the school, he felt welcomed yet experienced a sense of concern about school safety and security. This feeling was triggered by notable physical security shortfalls that he expressed to the school. However, he did feel that he could speak freely to the principal and that he knew the process to schedule a time with the principal or any other faculty member. Regarding a potential barrier in Interview Questions 5 and 6, Participant 1’s responses were “No.” He was able to make all parent-invited events and did not mention any barriers. Participant 1 also could not attest to observing the school offering any language barrier assistance. The school did not involve Participant 1 in planning and evaluating school programs, which was his response for Interview Question 7. Participant 1 did experience the school seeking suggestions for improvement and enrichment when he and his wife were members of the PTO. He felt that his input and feedback was well received, but that the issue was the time demand of the PTO. The time required to be an active member of the PTO was not feasible nor was it sustainable for his working family; therefore, he did not maintain his membership in this organization that he felt was beneficial and created time for his voice as a parent to the school. For Interview Question 9, Participant 1 felt that the use of individual texts from teachers and implementing a real-time phone application that displayed the child’s grades would improve communication with military parent and school.

Participant 2. Participant 2 is a married female. She possesses a bachelor's degree for education level and is in the Second Lieutenant–Captain rank category. In response to Interview Question 1, Participant 2 stated that she recalled that the school held about three parent-invited events per year. Out of these, either she or her husband was able to attend all the events, and they were appropriately placed in the school year. In her opinion, the parent-invited events were organized and ran about 30–45 minutes, and the length of the events was appropriate. She added that the drawback from these meetings were that they did not provide specific information or updates concerning her child. Participant 2 recalled an experience of attending a meeting at school when she was instructed to view a wall of art that was the students had composed. During this event, nothing was mentioned that was inherently beneficial about updates, shortfalls, or enrichment concerning her child; therefore, she felt that it was a missed school and parent partnering opportunity during the visit. The communication with the teacher was seldom, performance-based, and was initiated by the teacher for Interview Question 3. Participant 2's demeanor changed during the interview when she realized that she had missed an opportunity by not prompting these meetings and that she had been more reactive than proactive. When Participant 2 entered the school, she felt welcomed and recalled only one instance during which the principal was difficult to reach for personal meetings and was scheduled to meet the assistant principal, who appeared very defensive during the meeting. However, she did feel that she knew the process to schedule a time with the principal or any other faculty member. For potential barriers for Interview Questions 5 and 6, Participant 1's responses were "Yes." She was not able to make all of the parent-invited events because of the time that they were offered. She suggested that flextime for parent-invited events would be very beneficial to encourage more participation. Participant 2 did observe that the school offered Spanish translators for parents in an effort to assist with the language barrier. The school has not involved Participant 2 in planning and

evaluating school programs for Interview Question 7. Participant 2 did not experience the school seeking suggestions for improvement or enrichment. She added that, although her daughter was in pre-K, the school consistently sought this information from the general population of parents but has not experienced this yet while in elementary school. Participant 2 stated that, from dialogue with other parents, she feels that, if she offered ideas, they would be well received, but only from PTO members. She added that the PTO has the stigma of being an “elite club” and very time consuming, hence, her lack of involvement. For Interview Question 9, Participant 2 felt that the use of chat rooms or online forums, where information, ideas, and updates could be shared between teacher and parents, as well as parent to parent, would improve communication.

Participant 3. Participant 3 is a married male. He possesses a master’s degree for education level and is in the Major–Colonel rank category. In response to Interview Question 1, Participant 3 stated that he recalled going to the school about 3–4 times for parent-invited events. Out of these times, either he or his wife was able to attend most of the events, and they were appropriately spaced on the calendar. In his opinion, the parent-invited events were organized and lasted about 25–30 minutes, and the length of the events was appropriate. The communication with the teacher was often via email, performance-based, and initiated by the teacher for Interview Question 3. When Participant 3 entered the school, he felt welcomed and possessed a sense of familiarity because his son is now in the fourth grade and has been enrolled at the same school since Kindergarten. Participant 3 recalled an event from the previous school year when he could not speak freely to the principal because the principal was not available. However, even then, all the teachers were ready and available to engage in dialogue concerning his son. Participant 3 knew the process to schedule a time with the principal and any other faculty member. For potential barriers for Interview Questions 5 and 6, Participant 3 responses were “Yes.” He was not able to make all events and he accredited the barrier to timing. He went

on to say that his son is on a regimented dinner and sleep schedule during the week and the timing of the parent-invited events significantly affect the evening. If he attends all of the parent-invited events, the timing constraint then addressed feeding the family dinner, getting home to prepare for the next work and school day, and getting to bed on time. Participant 3 could attest to observing the school offering Spanish as assistance for parents who possessed language barriers. The school has not involved Participant 3 in planning and evaluating school programs (Interview Question 7). Participant 3 did not experience the school seeking suggestions for improvement or enrichment. For Interview Question 9, Participant 3 felt that more uses of technology such as the option of teleconference attendance to meetings and use of FaceTime or other video conference platforms would encourage participation/partnership and improve communication.

Participant 4. Participant Four is a single female. She possesses an associate's degree for education level and is in the Sergeant–Sergeant First Class rank category. In response to Interview Question 1, Participant 4 stated that she recalled that the school held three parent-invited events per year. Out of those, she was able to attend all the events and they were appropriately aligned with her son's grading period. In her opinion the parent-invited events were organized, the events ran for about 15–25 minutes, and the length of the events was appropriate. The communication with the teacher was very often, performance-based, and initiated by both Participant 4 and the teacher for Interview Question 3. Participant 4 was very passionate and expressed the necessity, she felt, of being visible on a consistent basis at the school. When Participant 4 entered the school, she felt welcomed and the visit was productive. She felt that she could speak freely to the principal and knew the process to schedule a time with the principal and any other faculty member. Participant 4 also added that, even though she knew the process, if it was an impromptu visit, the school was very receptive. For potential barriers for Interview Questions 5 and 6, Participant 4 responses were “Yes.” She was not able to make all

parent-invited events and the major barrier was timing with work requirements. She did observe the school offering language barrier assistance in the form of sign language. The school has not involved Participant 4 in planning and evaluating school academic programs (Interview Question 7). Participant 4 did experience the school seeking suggestions for improvement/ enrichment, but in the form of petitioning flyers in her son's weekly folder for attendance to PTO. She feels that the feedback would be well received, but that the issue is the additional time required to go to the school for PTO attendance. This cannot be maintained on top of work requirements, her son's sports participation, and other extracurricular activities. For Interview Question 9, Participant 4 felt that the use of teleconferences would eliminate the need to travel to the elementary school, which would improve school communication and involvement.

Participant 5. Participant 5 is a divorced male. He possesses a bachelor's degree for education level and is in the Sergeant–Sergeant First Class rank category. In response to Interview Question 1, Participant 5 stated that he recalled that the school held about four parent-invited events per year. Out of those, either he or his son's mother was able to attend all the events that were appropriately placed at the beginning, middle, and end of school year. In his opinion, the parent-invited events were organized with individual time slots and lasted about 15–20 minutes, and the length of the events was appropriate. The communication with the teacher occurred often, was performance- and enrichment-based, and was initiated by both the parents and teacher for Interview Question 3. When Participant 5 entered the school, he felt welcomed and that they were very military-friendly and patriotic. He felt that he could speak freely to the principal and knew the process to schedule a time with the principal and any other faculty member. For potential barriers for Interview Questions 5 and 6, Participant 5 responses were “Yes.” He was not able to make all the parent-invited events and the barriers were deployments, training, and timing conflicts. Participant 5 did observe the school offering Spanish

language barrier assistance. The school has not involved Participant 5 in planning and evaluating school programs (Interview Question 7). Participant 5 did experience the school seeking suggestions for improvement or enrichment from the PTO. He feels that the feedback would be well received, but that the issue is that it requires too much time to be an active member of the PTO. Participant 5 recalled a time when his son first started in Kindergarten and when he attempted to be an active member of the PTO, but the time and money demands in the form of mandatory fund raisers were too great to maintain his involvement. For Interview Question 9, Participant 5 felt that implementing more modern technology in the school's efforts to connect and contact parents would improve communication.

Participant 6. Participant 6 is a married male. He possesses a master's degree for education level and is in the Second Lieutenant–Captain rank category. In response to Interview Question 1, Participant 6 stated that he recalled that the school held 3–4 parent-invited events per year. Out of those, he was able to attend all the events and felt that they were appropriately placed in the school year. He expressed that the parent-invited events were organized and structured with the meetings lasting about 15–20 minutes. He also felt that the length of the events was appropriate. The communication with the teacher was seldom, and only seemed to be initiated when poor performance or behaviors occurred and initiated by the teacher for Interview Question 3. When Participant 6 entered the school he felt welcome, unless it was for a visit caused by his son's behavior. When this occurred, he felt that some of the teachers lost their professionalism from the viewpoint of being an adult and teacher. Participant 6 went on to say that he understands that the teachers cannot be nurses and diagnose medical issues, but if they are attentive to the students, it would have been identified that the issue that his son possessed was not a behavior problem, but a hearing-loss problem. Although this was a concern, he felt that he could speak freely to the principal and he stated that the process to schedule a time with the

principal and any other faculty member was known. For potential barriers for Interview Question Number 5, Participant 6 was not able to make all of the parent-invited events and he mentioned the primary barrier being time and scheduling conflicts. For Interview Question 6, he could not attest to observing the school offering and language barrier assistance. The school has not involved Participant 6 in planning and evaluating school programs (Interview Question 7). Participant 6 did experience the school seeking suggestions for improvement or enrichment, but the population that was queried was those who were members of the PTO. He felt that the feedback would be well received, but the issue he feels is that the PTO has a “private” or not very inclusive stance. For Interview Question 9, Participant 6 felt that the only way to improve communication was through education. He feels that the prohibiting factor it is not a lack of methods being implemented by the school to encourage this relationship, but a lack of knowledge on the parent’s behalf concerning the importance of this partnership in relation to the edification of the child.

Participant 7. Participant 7 is a married male. He possesses a professional pharmacy degree for education level and is in the Major–Colonel rank category. In response to Interview Question 1, Participant 7 stated that he recalled that the school held about four parent-invited events per year. Out of those, either he or his wife was able to attend all the events and there were appropriately aligned with the grading period. In his opinion, the meetings were organized with value to his attendance for his child. Participant 7 mentioned that the parent-invited events lasted about 30 minutes, and the event length was appropriate. The communication with the teacher, for Participant 7, was seldom and via email, performance-based, and initiated by both the teacher and parent for Interview Question 3. When Participant 7 entered the school, he felt a pleasant atmosphere and that the school was receptive and prepared for the parents. He did feel that he could speak freely to the principal and knew the process to schedule a time with the

principal and any other faculty member, which was by appointment. Participant 7's response for Interview Question 5 was "Yes" for not being able to attend all events and the identified barrier was time in relation to family and work time demands. He did not observe the school offering any language barrier assistance for Interview Question 6. The school has not involved Participant 7 in planning and evaluating school programs (Interview Question 7). Participant 7 mentioned that, in his experience, the school sought suggestions for school improvement or enrichment at the PTO meetings that his wife attended. He felt that the primary issue was the time and financial demands that the PTO places on its members. For Interview Question 9, Participant 7 felt that an increased use of modern technology would further encourage and improve the communication between military parent and elementary school.

Participant 8. Participant 8 is a married male. He possesses a bachelor's degree for education level and is in the Sergeant–Sergeant First Class rank category. In response to Interview Question 1, Participant 8 stated that he recalled that the school held 3–4 parent-invited events per year. Either he or his wife was able to attend all of the events and they were appropriately spaced in the school year. In his experience, the parent-invited events were very organized and gave a needed assessment on his daughter's performance and capabilities. The parent-invited events lasted about 15–20 minutes, and the length of the events was appropriate. The communication with the teacher was seldom, performance- and behavior-based, and initiated by the teacher for Interview Question 3. When Participant 8 entered the school, he felt welcomed and that it was well organized. He also felt that he could speak freely to the principal and knew that there was an open-door policy in place. For potential barrier for Interview Questions 5 and 6, Participant 8's responses were "Yes." He was not able to make all meetings and the attributed barrier was time, caused by mandatory military training and work. Participant 8 observed the school offering Spanish translators in efforts to assist with the language barrier.

The school has not involved Participant 8 in planning and evaluating school programs (Interview Question 7). Participant 8 did experience the school seeking suggestions for improvement or enrichment when he and his wife attended PTO meetings. He feels that their ideas were heard and implemented by the school. However, he added that the drawback was the amount of time and participation in school activities and fund raisers that being a member of the PTO carried with it. For Interview Question 9, Participant 8 felt that implementing more convenient technology mechanisms would improve communication. He also suggested using cell phone apps, online forums, and teleconference options.

Participant 9. Participant 9 is a married female. She possesses a master's degree for education level and is in the Major-Colonel rank category. In response to Interview Question 1, Participant 9 stated that she recalled that the school held 2–3 parent-invited events per year. Out of these, either she or her husband was able to attend all the events and they were appropriately placed throughout the school year. In her opinion the parent-invited were well organized and lasted about 30 minutes, and the length of the events was appropriate. The communication with the teacher was very seldom, only for behavioral issues, and initiated by the teacher for Interview Question 3. When Participant 9 entered the school, she felt welcomed; however, when visiting for behavioral concerns, the teachers were very agitated. Participant 9 highlighted that in her Profession of Arms, she has gotten aggravated by subordinates, but professionalism and composure must always be maintained, and so it should be in education, especially in elementary education. However, she did feel that she could speak freely to the principal and knew the process to schedule a time with any school administrator. For potential barrier for Interview Questions 5 and 6, Participant 9's responses were "Yes." She was not able to make all events and mentioned that the available time split between home and work was a major barrier. She did observe the school offering sign language to assist parents with a hearing barrier. The school has

not involved Participant 9 in planning and evaluating school programs (Interview Question 7). Participant 9 did experience the school seeking suggestions for improvement or enrichment when the school granted her daughter an opportunity to explore her interest in meteorology. Her daughter expressed interest in meteorology and through engaging the teachers her daughter was able to meet the meteorologist at the local news station and read the weather report during the daily morning announcement at school. Participant 9 stated that this would have only been possible through persistent inquiry. She stated that opportunities such as this are not readily offered but are available and must be sought by the parents. For Interview Question 9, Participant 9 felt that the use of individual texts would support and improve communication between the military parent and elementary school.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to determine the barriers to parental involvement in elementary school by parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The phenomenological qualitative data reflect the thoughts, ideas, attitudes, and feelings of nine, currently serving members of the U.S. Armed Forces who have children actively enrolled in elementary school. The results of the data analysis are provided in this chapter. Research questions followed by survey and demographic survey distribution were presented first, with the description of participants and analysis method directly following. Finally, the results were separated and listed by the subgroups of theme, collective presentation of participant results, and lens of each participant.

Chapter 4 began by presenting the three research questions that were the foundation and guided this study. The research questions are displayed in Table 1. Table 1 further showed how each of the three research questions nested with the nine, open-ended, interview questions

(Appendix D) that were asked of the participants. This table listed the corresponding question number and subtopic alignment for ease of reference. These aligning questions were administered to volunteers and first required the distribution of the demographic survey and interview to these participants.

The demographic survey and interview survey distribution was completed electronically. This process began by a posted recruitment flyer (Appendix A) for participants after the researcher gained IRB approval for the proposed topic of research. After several volunteers expressed interest in participating in the research, a total of nine volunteers met criteria of currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces and having a child enrolled in elementary school. Email and telephone information was exchanged between researcher and the nine qualified participants. The researcher then emailed and instructed the participants to complete the electronic participation consent form (Appendix B) and participant demographic information (Appendix C) on the Web survey tool Survey Monkey. After this was complete, the Web system emailed the researcher upon completion. The researcher then emailed each participant a copy of the open-ended questions (Appendix D) so that they would be aware of what would be asked during the individual interviews. This was also the same email that began the dialogue of a consensual meeting place and time for each participant. Each participant was unique and added something different and insightful to the research.

In the next section of Chapter 4, the researcher explored the description of the study's participants and their corresponding demographic information (Appendix C) that was collected via Survey Monkey. This information was further examined, separated, and grouped by variables derived from the features included in the demographic survey and listed in Table 2. In addition, Table 2 also reflected participants' profiles. Though demographic data was not used to draw

salient conclusions, these demographic profiles were created to provide the reader with referral ease when provisionally comparing each participant responses.

After the individual interviews were digitally recorded they were transcribed to capture all responses. This allowed for thorough and efficient coding. The analysis of the transcriptions occurred using an open code procedure to analyze data and to inform the extracted theories from the data. The coding of data that allowed the researcher to find patterns. The first phase included the actual data or excerpts from the transcriptions. Then, line-by-line coding was used to build concepts and categories. From the codes three subcategories emerged and were explored in the last portion of Chapter 4 which was the presentation of results. These three subcategories were themes, collective presentation of participant results, and lens of each participant.

The first subcategory that was captured during the coding and analysis was by theme. The one positive theme that surfaced concerning the topic of military parents and the relationship with the elementary school was the number and spacing of the parent-invited events. The events were not too often or too far apart and were strategically placed around the grading periods. For the one positive, there were three negative themes identified. These negative recorded themes were teacher communication and attitude, performance reporting being sent too late for a positive action to occur and be viewed during reporting period and lack of use of modern technology for communication between school and home. The themes offered that communication should be a persistent and continual flow that allowed for parental interjection and ultimately leads to noticed letter grade change for the identified student. This would be enabled by teachers and faculty using modern technology such as cellphone apps, teleconferences, and more forms of text and chat to relay messages and other correspondence to the military parents. The researcher not only conducted an analysis on the emerging themes, but also coded and displayed the collective presentation of participant results.

This collective presentation of results in Chapter 4 provided a contextual description, including stories of participants' versions of personal experiences regarding parental involvement and engagement with their respective child's elementary school. The two major results were timing of events and the lack of proactive engagement by parents with individual elementary teachers. The resounding response about barriers by participants was attending parent events because of military training, deployments, and work demands that competed with the evening parent-invited events at the child's school. Proaction for the military parents at the school was identified by the participants, and they noted only seldom communication with their child's teacher, that the meetings were only being performance or behavior triggered, and that they were mostly initiated teachers. The highlighted themes and data from the collective presentation of participant results were also mirrored in the lens of each participant.

Documenting important events was critical to the understanding and interpretation of data collected throughout the study and this is what was expressed in the lens of each participant section. The researcher was able to capture the nonverbal communication such as the tone of the participant's voice, confidence displayed, passion for the topic, and body language of the participants that played a role in the discovery of the phenomenon. This section uncovered two things from the coded data from the lens of each participant. The first addressed the role of the PTO within the elementary school. Each participant has either been a part of a PTO at one time or is familiar with the organization. The positive aspect is that each participant recognizes the benefits the PTO can offer and that its use could improve and enrich programs and offerings at the school. The drawback to all the military parents knowing of the PTO is that they can attest to the PTO having high demands of time and at times funds dealing with school fund raisers. Unfortunately, among the nine participants, the PTO carries negative stigmas; therefore, for military parents, it is counterintuitive in its existence. The second focal point from the lens of the

participants was a need for the supplementation and implementation of more effective communication between school and parents. The military parent participants suggested such things as smart phone apps that provided “real-time” updates of student grades and upcoming assignments, teleconference options opposed to having to attend school parent-invited events, and the use of online forums to connect parents to teacher and other parents for enrichment and other holistic child development ideas. All of these techniques will encourage and improve the communication between the military parent and school from the lens of the participants.

This data provided insight and enlightenment concerning the research topic of elementary school involvement by parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The phenomenological qualitative data led to the positive and negative coded data expressed by theme: Positive responses were about number and spacing of the parent-invited events. Negative responses were about teacher communication and attitude, performance reporting being sent too late for a positive action to occur and be viewed during reporting period, and use of modern technology for communication between school and home. Two topics were highlighted within the collective presentation of participant results were timing and the lack of proactive engagement by parents with individual elementary teachers. Two key areas from each participant’s lens were PTO within the elementary school and the need for the supplementation and/or implementation of more effective communication between school and parents. Some of these points were recognized as positive attributes that should be maintained and built upon. The others that were negative require attention to change. If educators are to better support the military child the change must occur with the parents, school, and several mechanisms currently in place. The proposed implementation of said changes will be discussed in Chapter 5 of this research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This researcher examined the relationship between currently serving military parents and their child's elementary school. The results of this research provide insight for both parents and elementary school stakeholders regarding the factors that positively and negatively affect the relationship between military families and the elementary school. Through the phenomenological qualitative research approach, the following questions were posed:

- What factors ensure active participation of military parents in the education of their elementary-school-aged child in the school environment?
- What factors contribute to the lack of involvement of military parents in the education of their elementary-school-aged child?
- In what ways can an elementary school that serves military families encourage the parents' involvement in the education of their child?

The nine military parent volunteers met all of the criteria and requirements to become participants in this study. The specifications that were met were to be currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces and to have a child who was currently enrolled in elementary school. The results from the individual interviews in Chapter 4 are summarized in this chapter along with the researcher's proposal for future action that could positively affect the field of study for the parental involvement of military parents. The implications of study and recommendations for action are addressed first, with the recommendation for further study and conclusion ending Chapter 5 of this study.

Research Findings

The qualitative data extracted from the coding of the nine individual interviews led to two heuristic occasions. The first involved the participants who experienced heuristic revelations upon self-reflection of their personal responses. The participants came to the realization that more proactive behaviors could be exuded on their behalf for the overall edification of the military child. The second heuristic moment was from the researcher's perspective when observing data and identifying the internal and external stakeholders that could positively affect the elementary school involvement of parents currently serving in the military. These enlightening occasions were undergirded by the personal experiences of the participants, which enabled the researcher to capture some negative and positive actions that affect elementary school involvement by parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The catalyst for the first phenomena discovery, concerning actions that support the elementary school involvement in a positive way, were the number of parent-invited events and the time spacing between the meetings. The qualitative data showed that, if the parent-invited events were concise, focused in nature, and not held too frequently, the military parents would be more apt to attend and participate. In turn, making these types of adjustments would assist military families in becoming more familiar with the school, for they might not currently attend because of the military family moving and changing schools often (Lin et al., 2011). In addition, the results of this study align with the research from Kouzes and Posner (2005). Kouzes and Posner (2005) indicated that mission accomplishment is achieved when group events and other actions are concisely orchestrated. In the field of the military, the concept of 'mission accomplishment' is closely linked to a member's connection and commitment to their unit. This concept of dedication was evident through the insight provided by the participants as they all noted an unwavering commitment to giving their children the best start educationally and holistically.

The experiences of the study's military parent participants also led to the identification of elementary school, PTO, and self-reflected areas that required attention. If these areas are addressed appropriately, the corresponding results could lead to positive trends of increased elementary school involvement from the military parent population. The documented experiences from the parents that require attention are related to (a) times during the week that the parent-invited events are held, (b) teacher and parent immediate feedback of child performance, (c) PTO perceptions, (d) teacher attitudes and professionalism, and (e) parents being proactive in their role. Each of these research findings has led to a recommendation for action to sustain or to improve the identified action. The entities to which these recommendations for action are presented are the elementary school, PTO, teacher, military parents, and U.S. Armed Forces stakeholder groups.

Recommendations for Action

The results of this research showed, from a military parent's perspective, the actions that should be maintained and those that should be changed respecting the military parent's relationship with the elementary school organization. There are many important initiatives by military branches to support the education of children and students of military members. There might be gaps in communication between on-base military personnel and local/community public schools. It is vital to bridge the gap by connecting the military and public schools caring for military students. These changes are all in effort to foster and ensure the positive trend of elementary involvement from parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The elementary school is the first entity for which the researcher recommends that an action for change be taken. The actions recommended for elementary schools concern (a) the times during the week that the parent-invited events are held, (b) parent immediate feedback of child performance, and (c) the overarching implementation of modern technology. As military families

face transitions, using technologies to promote innovation and engagement within school communities might provide an advantage to their military-connected students. The elementary school action of offering a teleconference or a type of video conference option would support the schools' military population exponentially by considering the unique challenges of the military lifestyle. By *actioning* this virtual attendance method, the parents would be able to be present and participate in the parent-invited events offered by the school, as long as the service member had WIFI access at the location where the military stationed him or her. This enabling action would eliminate several of the barriers that were mentioned during the individual interviews. The second action on behalf of the elementary school would be to implement a downloadable phone application or to institute a weekly forum or chat option would provide military parents with current information. This provided student status would equip the military parent with the information needed to assist the child in the home environment, which would correspond to changes in the child's performance at school. This effort would assist parents in knowing how to approach and assist the child in working toward better results for the student, regardless of his or her parent's geographic location respecting the child's elementary school. The results of this recommended action by the school have secondary effects that align with Marion and Gonzales (2014) research, for they proved that the action of parental involvement leads to higher scholastic and extracurricular achievements by the child. With that said, the research data from this study were congruent with Marion and Gonzales (2014) in that the participant military parents noticed higher grades from their children when an active approach was taken with the child's school. The nine parent participants of this study recognized the importance of elementary school involvement and all that it encompasses. Elementary school involvement is multi-faceted and the recommendation of actions do not stop with the elementary school inherently, but also address some of the support organizations associated with the school such as the PTO.

The PTO is an organization that is an internal stakeholder group with which all nine participants of this study were noted to be familiar. Five of the nine participants indicated that they were active members of this parent group. From the recorded experiences of the participants, the noted issues connected to PTO membership addressed the demands of members' time for meetings and functions and the imposed financial contributions in the form of fundraisers. Likewise, participants who shared that they were involved with the PTO identified that the demands are not conducive nor are they maintainable by currently serving military parents. Ironically, the current perceptions of the PTO by participants are not in alignment with the programs intended purpose, as defined by Woysner and Cucchiara (2017), of encouraging parents to assist with various school activities, aid the mission, support vision of the school, and foster a community atmosphere. This researcher's results suggest that the military parents have experienced PTOs as not being very encouraging; therefore, the PTO stakeholder group could evaluate those negative experiences and improve the way in which they are viewed. The recommended action to the PTO is to offer the military parent population the option to receive email correspondence from the PTO meetings. These emails would include the minutes from the PTO meetings and even digital, fillable forms through which military parents could submit suggestions and ideas for the school. This action would encourage parental involvement by this transient population of parents and provide them a voice, even if virtual, in the PTO that ultimately influences the activities at the elementary school. With actions being recommended for the school and PTO, the next identified internal stakeholder group for action concerns teachers and faculty members.

Teaching is not only a job, but also a profession. In the review of the literature in Chapter 2, the researcher has noted that the profession of teaching is one that requires daily devotion and a knowledge base that grows and improves (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). The results of

this prior study are valuable because the growing and improving knowledge base that the authors highlighted is the focal point in the recommended action of professional development and training for teachers. This recommendation is grounded in the idea that some schools might find it more difficult to involve military parents because of their life stressors (e.g., needing to take care of the family while a spouse is deployed and the emotional strain associated with such deployments). Military parents might also be more transient in comparison with civilian parents. For schools to be helpful to these parents and children, special efforts should be directed to help accommodate the special circumstances of these parents. This knowledge base addition is in the form of classroom etiquette and pedagogy training. This training would include how to handle oneself in tough situations, situation de-escalation training, and how to handle a diverse classroom that might contain students who have learning inhibitors or disabilities. This actionable training is applicable and needed in the profession of teaching to prevent negative teacher behaviors that could create barriers for military parents. Such negative behaviors that teachers might exude have the potential to escalate difficulties and ultimately to deter the parent from being involved. When these behaviors are committed, as participants experienced it, they are in direct objection of the data that Goodall and Montgomery presented. They offered through research that the development of a child requires the combined effort and partnership from both the parent and teacher (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The offered action of teacher and administration training for partnering with military families aims to eliminate the barriers of military parents' lack of involvement at the elementary school. The offered training could be taken either online through several modules or in person during teacher summer workshops or during teacher workdays during the school year. All the recommendations to this point focused on internal stakeholder groups, but the next recommendations for action focus on the external stakeholder groups of military parents and the U.S. Armed Forces.

The data from previously conducted research consistently shows that parents have a significant impact on their children's development (Burke, 2013; Douglas, 2016; Finn, 1998; García & Thornton, 2014). With this topic being well studied, the recommended action for parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces is to be more proactive with elementary school visits and active dialogue with the child's teachers. After responding to interview questions, seven out of the nine participants noted that they were reactionary in their communications with the school organizations. During the process of member checking, when the participants checked their transcribed interview for accuracy, they realized that too often the teachers had initiated the communication from the school. The action of the parents being proactive is the antithesis of being reactive or waiting for something to occur to respond. The recommended action urges parents to initiate constant communication and to visit with the child's elementary school. These actions are in accordance with Chrispeels's (1996) research data who found that the partnership between parent and school is not an optional task but a necessity for the holistic development of a child. This mentioned partnership and proactivity from the parents ensures that the child will receive all of the needed assistance and opportunities at school and the enrichment activities that can be taken home. The last external stakeholder group for recommendation for action is the U.S. Armed Forces.

The recommendation for action for the external group of the U.S. Armed Forces is to provide and promote access to resources that can be utilized by elementary school teachers as well as currently serving military parents that promote understanding of each other and stronger working relationships. One such resource that is currently available is the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) (Thomas & Bowie, 2016). This online resource can be used to assist teachers and faculty to understand the uniqueness and challenges of a military child entering their class and provide various pedagogy techniques that have been proven successful in

previous case studies. This resource also assists service members to understand the teacher's perspective and allows military parent comprehension of the school's expectations of their military child. All the recommended actions support the recommendations for further study. The recommendations for further study extend the knowledge in the field of the military parent's involvement at his or her child's school and enable more in-depth discovery in this field of study.

Recommendations for Further Study

From the key and implied themes that emerged through the voices of the military parent participants in this study, several recommendations for further study in field of elementary school involvement by parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces are presented in this portion of Chapter 5. Implementation of these suggestions might improve the relationships between parents and teachers and might contribute to involvement of service members' participation in their elementary-school-aged child's education. There are four areas of recommendations for further study: (1) conducting a pilot study, (2) altering the interview methods, (3) including the perspective of the teachers, and (4) expanding the data collection to middle school and high school children of parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Recommendation 1 is that, if this study were to be replicated, prior to the administration of the survey instrument to the intended study population, a pilot study could be performed. For example, the survey instrument could be distributed to a small population of enlisted American service members. Although a pilot study does not completely ensure the success of the primary study, it can be used as a "trial run" with the results of the pilot study to provide insight on whether changes to the survey instrument were warranted (Simon, 2011).

Recommendation 2 for further study involves altering the interview methods of the study to improve the interview protocol and the use of focus groups. This recommendation is drawn from the data for Interview Question 1 compared to Interview Question 5. The researcher

observed that all nine of the participants answered positively they were able to attend all of the parent-invited events that the school held for Interview Question One. However, by Interview Question 5 in the individual interview and after several minutes of dialogue, eight out of the nine participants responded that there were times during the school year that they were unable to attend some events and listed barriers that they felt kept them away from attendance. The one outlier participant was consistent with his responses and attested to being at all events for Interview Question 1 and again at Interview Question 5 with no barriers listed. The researcher proposes that initially, the eight participants might not have been open to disclosing the negative aspect of personal information; however, after several minutes of discourse with the researcher, they became more forthcoming. The recommendation for data collection methods in future studies includes personally dictating participant responses and using focus groups. If the researcher were to implement a form of shorthand dictation of participant responses in a focus group setting, it could foster a positive non-attribution setting that the one-on-one setting with a recording device did not provide. These two recommendations are in line with the research that Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2012) conducted on the benefits of focus groups that foster an open environment that is free of participant response reprisal (Acocella, 2012). These social scientists presented that the heuristic value of this technique is gleaned from the interaction that occurs during the dialogue and debate of the participants (Acocella, 2012). The researcher noted that the use of a recording device during the conversation might have been initially a limitation regarding the participants fully disclosing their thoughts, opinions, and barriers to their involvement at the elementary school. Previously supported investigations have shown that the implementation of the focus group, as opposed to individual interviews, might unearth more pertinent data when multiple parents are expressing the same sentiments.

Recommendation 3 for further study would be the inclusion of teacher perspectives. If this study were replicated, in addition to the parent interviews, teacher interviews, as participants of the study, would provide the researcher with an additional set of phenomenological results for a comprehensive analysis and the consideration of another stakeholder group. These results from a different vantage point could then lead to a different set of recommendations for actions that would ultimately inform and foster the elementary school involvement by military parents. By interviewing the teachers, the researcher could compare the results with the data from the parents of this study. This information could potentially contribute to a better understanding of the problem by showing alignment and even adding additional recommendations for improvement of the parental involvement at the elementary school. By instituting the action of interviewing teachers, the new research would align with the proven concept that a cohesive comprehension from all parties could lead to true understanding of the issues that are presented (Walters et al., 2014).

Recommendation 4 for further study involves including military parents who have children enrolled in middle school and high school. Although the current study assists in understanding involvement in elementary school by currently serving military service members, further research is needed in this area. This final recommendation for further study involves expanding the data collection to examine the involvement in middle school and high school settings of parents currently serving in the military. To add a complete range of information for the parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces, studies on involvement in middle school and high school and the ways to improve the partnership with the school should be conducted. This wealth of knowledge would grant parents in the U.S. Armed Forces forthcoming insight concerning techniques and tactics that could be implemented from elementary to high school for their child. The middle and high school ages are currently areas in which no research has been

conducted on involvement with the schools by military parents. The research from the middle school and the high school in conjunction with this data from the elementary school would cover the entire span of child development and encourage the military parent involvement from elementary through high school.

Limitations

Obtaining research participants for this study was Limitation 1. The study was open to a more general pool of prospective participants who included service members who did not have a child or children enrolled in an elementary school. This resulted in prospective participants not meeting the threshold or criteria for participation. Specifically, only currently enlisted American service members with an elementary-school-aged child (K–5) enrolled in school were included. Therefore, the research findings were limited.

Limitation 2 was the potential biases of the researcher. The researcher is an active duty, Army officer who has more than 10 years of service, which could have introduced research bias into the study. The potential researcher bias in this research was avoided by implementation of two strategies. First, researcher did not include any personal experiences in this study and only used scholarly researched literature as references. The second strategy was the researcher not interviewing anyone that may have appeared to professionally have had a conflict of interest; no one directly above or below him in the chain of command or military hierarchy.

Conclusion

With the findings, the researcher concludes that the voices heard in this phenomenological, qualitative study from the participants can contribute to the understanding of elementary school involvement by parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Through inquiry and comparisons, several barriers to elementary school involvement were discovered and addressed through recommendations for action and further study. The themes, communication,

and experiences of the participants often overlapped and flowed as a trend in the data. The results of this study point to the positive and negative events that are currently being experienced by military parents with their child's elementary school and that can be actioned.

The ability to effectively involve military parents in the elementary school is a complex challenge, yet critical for student development and academic success. The complexity of this issue calls for equal action on behalf of the elementary school teachers, administrators, and parents. This study allowed for a better understanding of elementary involvement by the military parent population, and it adds to the body of knowledge regarding parental engagement with the school.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore area parental involvement in elementary school from the lenses of currently serving military parents.

Who: You are eligible to participate in the research study and share your perspective as a parent if all of the following are true about you. You are:

- A. Currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces
- B. Parent of a child in elementary school (K–5)

If you do not meet the description and criteria noted above, you are not able to be in the study. Your perspective as a parent currently serving in the military is very important. By sharing personal experiences, your data along with others will confidentially be compiled and produce data that could encourage and strengthen the relation between the elementary school and parents. This partnership may ultimately positively impact the child's growth and development.

How: If are interested in potentially participating in the research study, please contact the researcher privately at jwilliams41@une.edu. The period for a response is one week from post of this information on social media. For confidentiality reasons and to ensure validity of research data, please do not respond directly to this social media thread or make public comments regarding study. Once communication is established, the participant will receive three items via email: a survey link which will contain the participation consent form and participant demographic information as well as a copy of the interview questions. The participant will be allocated one week, but encouraged as soon as possible, to complete and sign the electronic information and provide preferred location and time for the individual interviews in person or video chat (i.e. library or Zoom). I appreciate your cooperation and support as I strive to further explore A Study of Elementary School Involvement by Parents Currently Serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

Participant's Signature**Date**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Jonathan Williams from the University of New England. I understand that this project is designed to gather information concerning a study of elementary school involvement by parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

My participation in this research study is voluntary.

I understand that I will not be paid for my participation.

I may withdraw and discontinue participation without repercussions or penalty at any time.

If I decline to participate in this study, this decision will not be disclosed to Jonathan Williams.

The demographic information collected will not include identifying information so that individual responses cannot be linked back to a participant's identity.

The individual interviews will be recorded and transcribed. All notes and recordings will be securely locked and only accessible to the researcher. At the conclusion of this research, all recordings and transcripts will be kept for one year by the researcher in a fire rated locked file cabinet. Upon that year of safe keeping the documents will be disposed of by shredding using a cross cut shredder.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for studies involving human subjects at the University of New England.

I have the right to request a print and/or electronic copy of this consent document to maintain for my records.

I understand that there are no foreseeable risks or hazards to my participation in this study.

I appreciate your willingness to participate in an individual interview as a component to the research project entitled: A Study of Elementary School Involvement by Parents Currently Serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The information from the individual interviews could prove to be helpful in discovering methods and practices that parents currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces can use to partner with their elementary-school-aged child's school in efforts to support, develop, and grow the child.

Participation in the interview session is confidential including the names of other participants and the content of the discussion. Before I begin the interview, I will provide a list of all questions and be sure to answer any questions that you might have.

Below you will find the link for your electronic participation consent form and demographic information.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7JKXTGD>

Please provide your preferred location and time for the individual interviews to the jwilliams41@une.edu email. These interviews can be conducted either in person or video chat (i.e. library or Zoom).

Please know that I will take every precaution to ensure confidentiality of participants and security of data collected in this study, and should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at jwilliams41@une.edu. My advisor, Dr. Heather Wilmot, can be reached at hwilmot@uene.edu.

Again, thank you very much for your assistance and participation in this valuable study.

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender Male ___ Female ___

2. Please check one of the following:

Single ___ Married ___ Separated ___ Divorced ___ Widow ___

3. What is your highest level of education?

High School Graduate or GED ___ Some College ___ Associate or Trade Degree ___

Bachelor's Degree ___ Graduate Degree ___ Professional Degree ___

4. Current military rank:

PVT-SPC ___ SGT-SFC ___ MSG-SGM ___ 2LT-CPT ___ MAJ-COL ___ BG-G ___

5. What is your Age?

Under 21 years ___ 21-25 years ___ 26-30 years ___ 31-35 years ___

36-40 years ___ 41-45 years ___ 46-50 years ___ 51+ years ___

[] I have read and understood the explanations and questions that have been provided to me. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and have had all of my questions answered. Furthermore, I have answered the demographic information to the best of my ability.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What brings parents to the school:

1. If you can recall, how many times in the school year are parent-invited events at the school held?
 - Approximately how many parent-invited events did you or your family attend last year?
 - Were they appropriately spaced? (i.e., one meeting every 3 months?)

Details about these events:

2. In your opinion, were the parent-invited school events organized? Did the events provide specific information/ updates concerning your child? Did you feel overall value in your attendance?
 - Approximately how long were these events? Was the time length allotted too long/too short?

Personal Usefulness of Events:

3. How often do you communicate with teachers about your child's performance?
 - Is it usually prompted by the teacher, yourself, or mutual?

Experiences:

4. From your perspective, when you visit your child's school, how would you describe your experience?
 - Do you feel welcome at your child's school? How does the school make you feel welcome? If not, what do you think contributes to this?
 - When at the school do you have access to speak with the teachers and principal freely (i.e. open door policy), if needed?

- If not, how would you describe the process to contact and schedule time with your child’s teacher or administrator?

Barriers:

5. Were there times during the school year that you were unable to attend parent-invited events?
 - Can you describe the barriers to your attendance?
6. While at the school for any parent-invited event, did you observe the school offering language barrier assistance, if needed?
 - Were interpreters used?
 - If a service was provided, did you personally use this service? If so, please describe the process and experience.

Ways of Improvement:

7. In what ways has your child’s school involved you in the planning and evaluating school programs?
8. In your personal experiences, has the school sought suggestions from parents on improvement/enrichment ideas?
 - Do you feel your feedback would be well received and used?
 - How can your child’s school improve in the way in which they involve parents in the feedback process?
9. From previous experiences, in what ways can your child’s school improve their communication of parent-invited events?
 - What steps can your child’s school take to make the environment more welcoming for parents?