

**An exploration of English-medium teaching at an international school
towards joining the globalised world: An autoethnographic account from
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**

by

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Declaration

I, Elize Becker, declare that this PhD thesis, titled *An exploration of English-medium teaching at an international school towards joining the global world: An autoethnographic account in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*, is my own original work and has been submitted for examination by the University of South Africa (UNISA). The thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements set out by UNISA.



Signature

2026/02/25

Date

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Abstract

Within international secondary education, English is frequently positioned as a primary pedagogical vehicle intended to cultivate global competitiveness among students. Consequently, English language proficiency has emerged as a fundamental benchmark of institutional success. In Kyrgyzstan, international schools are officially licensed by the Ministry of Education and Science to employ English as the medium of instruction; however, this mandate explicitly excludes Kyrgyz and Russian literature, alongside socio-historical disciplines. These subjects are deliberately reserved for local educators to safeguard students' historical consciousness, cultural heritage, and traditional values. Crucially, English is not the sole global lingua franca, nor do Anglo-American contexts exclusively define the global arena. Numerous highly developed nations utilize alternative instructional languages while offering superior socio-economic opportunities for emerging generations. Therefore, it is imperative to deconstruct and historicise the dominant discourse that equates English proficiency with quality education to analyze how this logic operates within contemporary Kyrgyzstan. More fundamentally, interrogating educational structures through the lens of global power dynamics—specifically the global matrix of power—is essential to provide novel insights into the role of education in navigating the structural complexities of modern societies.

An autoethnographic approach is utilised to explore the dominance of English in the international schools. Using her two years (2023–2024) of personal experience of teaching English at the selected international schools in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan the researcher explored the complexities of teaching English that impede an understanding of education. Qualitative research methods were used to collect data, 22 interviews being conducted with international and local educators, government officials, parents and administrative staff. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with 34 participants, and four months of participant observation took place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Data was analysed using grounded theory to develop themes from the findings.

The study shows that English is presented as education to the detriment of subjects that are critical in addressing the challenges faced by the societies concerned. Access to the global world does not necessarily translate into opportunities but in fact can put young people in a

more precarious position because of the shifting global powers. More saliently, there is now less favourable emphasis on multiculturalism, which had been the foundation of globalisation and internationalisation, which were premised on diversity. Education should ideally foreground different epistemologies to produce education with a wider capacity for good. This entails a call for epistemic justice which will propel social justice as a response to coloniality. This is a much-needed intervention because colonial logic continues to determine how and what we should consume despite the promises of globalisation and internationalisation to include everyone. English thus becomes an example of how dominance of other countries is maintained.

This study therefore calls for an alternative logic that is not premised on exclusionary knowledge but rather on the inclusion of all knowledges to provide a meaningful understanding of education and role for it. The shifting geopolitics is central to the argument of this thesis that the cornerstone of education is not the language of communication but rather skills. The weakening of globalisation and internationalisation is opening possibilities for many centres of power. The main contribution of the study is the call for education to be redefined to draw on diverse epistemologies that are beyond the limits of Western epistemology.

Keywords: English-medium teaching, international schools, education, multiculturalism, globalisation/internationalisation

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Acronyms

ADB	–	Asian Development Bank
EMI	–	English-medium instruction
FGD	–	Focus group discussion
IB	–	International Baccalaureate
ICT	–	Information and communication technology
OECD	–	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	–	Sustainable Development Goals
UK	–	United Kingdom
UNISA	–	University of South Africa
USSR	–	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USA	–	United States of America

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 My experiences matter: An introduction

I am a white female South African who comes from a family whose parents held managerial and administrative positions in the government sector. I enjoyed a comfortable upbringing and lived in a safe neighbourhood, and I was protected from the situation of political turmoil in the 1980s. I always thought of myself as apolitical and never understood the impact of the political situation on my upbringing. After completing Grade 12 or Standard 10 in the old education system, I chose full-time employment over university, although my academic performance had been strong. I worked for almost ten years before deciding to further my education. I enrolled for BA honours degrees in Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. Upon graduating I became a heritage officer in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, and then began a career in consultancy in 2008, which continued until 2015.

I introduce myself in this fashion to show how my ostensibly ordinary life was actually a privileged one, beyond the reach of many people in South Africa and abroad. I would not have understood this if I had not gone to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan to teach at an international school. In 2015 I decided that I wanted to explore the world, but I did not have enough resources to finance the desire. My consultancy career in the social sciences started in 2008 which provided an opportunity to engage with communities across the world inclusive of youth groups and young adults. Teaching English in the international schools became a golden opportunity to fulfil my desire to travel the world while changing a career, as working in the engineering and construction field was no longer fulfilling. I did not know that this was a life-changing decision. My interest in Central Asia developed unexpectedly but was strengthened by my knowledge of Eastern European and Russian historical influence in the region, which contributed to my decision to accept a teaching position there. This background helped me adapt to Kyrgyzstan more effortlessly than anticipated, as the country draws visitors mainly from Eastern Europe. My grandfather spoke German, and I retain memories of the language, art and musical instruments present in my grandparents' home, reflecting their cultural origins. I formally studied German in high school and have maintained basic proficiency in it throughout my career. This skill aided my adjustment in Kyrgyzstan, where a significant German community resides.

My main focus, as mentioned, was to change my career path while fulfilling my wish to travel the world. I had no intention of engaging in what I see now as a political venture. I think what I could not prepare for was the global politics entangled in history, economics, culture and knowledge. My experience as an international teacher introduced me to these dynamics, which is what the thesis wrestles with – the entanglement of these aspects in the context of globalisation and internationalisation. Studying anthropology afforded me an opportunity to see the dynamics with a different lens, revealing factors that ordinarily I would not have paid attention to. The ability to make connections while using myself as a tool of analysis heightened my intellectual rigour, which oftentimes was discomfiting because I had to ask myself existential questions on matters such as what it means to be white, English, female, South African in global politics. I had to confront the privileges I had inherited and continued to enjoy by just appearing.

The experience of teaching in Bishkek has been transformative, challenging my whole existence. I had never thought that as a white woman I could ask questions about global politics, because my environment had taught me that politics belonged elsewhere. However, being confronted with inequalities and what I felt was unfair treatment unsettled me. This propelled me to ask ontological questions about the logic that informs how the world is structured. It is in that context that I decided to pursue my studies, wanting to make sense of the questions that were now troubling me. The study presented here is therefore both personal and political. Accordingly, I employ autoethnography as a method to interrogate both my positionality and the impact it has had on my understanding the world. In a way, I have made myself vulnerable to ask uncomfortable questions to benefit humankind. This process has not been easy, but I believe that the merits of the cause have outweighed my discomfort. As such, this is an honest thesis written from my perspective as a white woman, which does not shy away from tackling the real issues to unravel the continuities of colonialism that, in a way, are the root cause of modern-day challenges.

1.2 Background of the study

International teaching experience remains critical to analysing the educator's characteristics and where they originate (Poole & Bunnell, 2021). Poole and Bunnell (2021) explain that

teachers, in addition to their specific individual characteristics, also form part of a middle class, defined as professionals, who aim to capitalise on English teaching. This provides an in-depth explanation of why teachers decide to travel to foreign countries as educators and teach English-medium classes. According to Barbee (2018), international teaching, defined as middle class, also presents a diversity of frustrations, identity challenges and multicultural misunderstandings of each other. Barbee (2018) further argues that intercultural communication and exposure to cultures different from the teacher's country of origin result in changes over time in the identity of the individual teacher. The international teaching environment continuously challenges and undermines the multiple stereotypes and preconceptions that teachers bring from their country of origin, which have unconsciously shaped their perceptions (Barbee, 2018).

Being involved in international education necessitates an understanding of multiculturalism. According to Barbee (2018), language brings the added complexity that, because of communication difficulties, students remain subordinate to and divided from the international teacher. This is a result of different cultures being embedded in the different languages used in the classroom. In addition to the risk of cultural misunderstanding is the risk of verbal misunderstanding, with oversimplified sentences being used in the classroom (Barbee, 2018). Poole (2019) explains that teacher and student relationships “align with the development of specific identities in the schooling environment aligned with the international schooling dynamics” (Poole, 2019: 39).

Furthermore, international schools consist of a diversity of teachers and students from around the globe, allowing for a combination of learning opportunities and multicultural understanding for both parties (teachers and students) in the classrooms (Barbee, 2018). In addition, Chee (2020) argues that students who attend international schools feel the need to become global citizens, and this worldview influences their understanding of identity construction. Most of these students, according to Chee (2020), utilise the meaning of Hong Kong identity in the Chinese world and the subsequent creation of different identities because of the political dynamics. Obviously, this has implications for the culture used in the classroom. This requires educators who are aware of both their own culture and that of the students.

Consequently, international teaching requires “individuals to work closely with parents responsible for school oversight, identification of disadvantaged children who need support and to spend time with parents and children to make education possible for all” (DeYoung, 2005: 44). As argued by Jailobaeva, Jailobaev, Baialieva, Ismanbaeva, Kirbasheva and Adam (2023), there is limited research on community involvement in the international schools and “the roles parents or the guardian play in taking part in the school operations and success rates of the education” (Jailobaeva et al., 2023: 2). Interventions such as the Aga Khan Foundation that connect parent and guardian with teachers have allowed for improved accountability and responsiveness from the educators. This is important because teachers are responsible for learners in the absence of parents and guardians.

Another important aspect in the international school is teacher skills. According to Poole (2019), teachers’ skills become influenced by their levels of experience over time and their change in attitude towards the field. Although there is significant literature on teachers’ work at international schools as part of a traveller experience or a teaching career, understanding of changes in teacher identity remains limited (Bright, 2022). Teachers are expected to adjust to multicultural settings and the international teaching framework, with both international and local educators needing to adapt as circumstances evolve over time (Poole, 2019). For example, according to Poole and Bunnell (2021: 288), “A significant portion of international schools remain in Asia and the Middle East attracting teachers to these different regions as English medium educators”. It is not surprising that “these international schools continue to represent a significant number of individuals from the UK, USA, New Zealand and Australia” (Poole & Bunnell, 2021: 288) because English makes them international. This means that the recruited teachers have to adjust to these new environments and learn the new culture. Although schools provide a platform for the inclusion of educators in the form of economic migrants, challenges remain for individuals in adapting to the new environment and equipping themselves with the culture. This means that teachers originating from English-medium countries who arrive at the schools with different worldviews and cultural practices, sometimes opposite to those of the host country (Chee, 2020; Poole & Bunnell, 2021), must learn to appreciate a different culture and bring this awareness to the classroom.

While schools attempt to present a global viewpoint, teachers are more comfortable with the worldview of the so-called Western countries, which creates a gap between the West and

countries perceived to be non-English (Poole & Bunnell, 2021: 288). Therefore, the teachers need to supplement their skills with awareness of their own worldview's limitations and biases. Appointing teachers from native English-speaking countries, labelled as more critical than the non-native English-speaking teachers (Chee, 2020; Poole & Bunnell, 2021), could be detrimental to the learning of students. Multiculturalism in education is a field of great complexity, with implications that have been studied over many years (Chee, 2020). In addition, Chee (2020) warns against the alienating boundaries set by the creation of imagined communities, which can prevent teachers from becoming fully incorporated in the education system, because they continue to form part of "the other". The development of boundaries categorising teachers and students within the multicultural environment tends to result in a community teaching approach (Sheridan, Bennett & Whiting Blome, 2013). According to Sheridan et al. (2013), the focus on international teachers impacts the relationship between international teachers and local students originating from different cultures. These different identities are intrinsic to multiculturalism and its significance in an international environment (Chee, 2020).

The impact of globalisation in international schools plays a key role in linking Kyrgyzstan with other global organisations, for example UNICEF or the Asian Development Bank (ADB). According to Shamatov, Tajik, Karakus and Mukhamejanova (2024), the collaboration with these institutions provided a positive influence according to teachers, because it resulted in the provision of quality study material, computer equipment and improved school conditions. This means that the external stakeholders have a positive role to play in the international school because they are the beneficiaries of the students who are exposed to multiculturalism. It is not surprising that the World Bank calls for effective teaching by transferring education accountability to the parents (Jailobaeva et al., 2023). According to Shamatov et al. (2024), this involves the development of a school curriculum with the parents as stakeholders of the international schools. The school's credibility is significant because it convinces parents to register their children there despite substantial yearly fees. International teaching credibility relies significantly on having support from the parents, which includes accountability.

In other words, international schools are a response to a struggling education system which cannot meet societal demands. These pressures may reflect a desire to participate in an increasingly globalised world, yet also to enhance the knowledge gaps within the country from

which individuals originate. As such, there is a need to revisit the education sector in an attempt to mitigate the challenges confronted by all stakeholders. For Khoo (2023: 93),

the regeneration of public things requires decolonial demands for restitution and restoration to be taken seriously, if hope for the public good is not to founder on the rocks of colonial-imperial legacies that continue to trouble democratic societies as they currently exist.

Clearly, this requires more efforts that go beyond just one government to an overhaul of the very foundations of education as we know it today. While the focus of the study is on international schools and the logic of teaching English at them, it is important to also pay attention to global politics, as it directly shapes and influences this topic. To understand the global impact on the local, the study focuses on the schools in Bishkek. According to DeYoung (2005), the struggling education system in Kyrgyzstan results from budget-related issues that fuel an increase in private schooling funded by wealthy parents, creating a big divide between rich and poor. These nuances are important in reading the social situation so as to make connections with global realities.

Given the centrality of globalisation to understanding Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia, it is evident that political, economic and social influences extend far beyond Soviet legacies and contemporary regional dynamics. Naz and Riaz (2024:120) argue that nation-states are no longer the primary drivers of impact, although the long-term sustainability of this change remains uncertain.

Although the focus of the study is not political, it does include relationships that influence the credibility of education in Kyrgyz Republic. The study could not exclude how these relationships influence the credibility of education in the country, even postulating the complete exclusion of English-medium teaching. English as a representation of power thus becomes an important aspect of this study. Its focus is not the study of English as a language only but as a language of power. It is more concerned about the presentation and status of the English language and the implications within the global matrix of power. However, although the study focused on English as a medium of instruction, the influence of power extends to the Russian and Kyrgyz languages but in different formats. Russian is more prevalent in the cities for example Bishkek while Kyrgyz is more prevalent in the agricultural or rural areas.

The study therefore highlights a power play between speaking Russian or Kyrgyz as first languages driven by perceptions of Russian being modern. These power plays together with the English influence in the education sector, shape the classroom environment among learners who originate from different cultural and geographic backgrounds. Russian speaking thus remains the primary method of communication between the students in the classrooms in addition to speaking English during lesson times. Subsequently, students who do not speak Russian may find themselves excluded from social groups created by their fellow learners. The power relations shape the relationships between foreign and local teachers with Russian and Kyrgyz speaking educators viewing English as the language of the opposition. Subsequently the worldview of English as a language of power is perceived differently by the local teachers at times.

An extended power dynamic is also visible in the influence of Türkiye within Kyrgyzstan's education sector, particularly through its substantial financial contributions to private schools. These investments have enabled members of the Kyrgyz elite to access private schooling and subsequently secure positions in government or global professional spheres. However, the influence of the Turkish government, whether through financial or advisory support, is limited by the Ministry of Education, which ensures that authority remains with the Kyrgyz government. While this dynamic is significant, the study deliberately excludes it, as addressing it would require a level of political analysis that would shift the research in an entirely different direction. In other words the focus on power dynamics is to examine the power of English as a language of instruction and ultimate use in the international schools to educate at large the country's elite learners.

1.3 Research problem

English-medium teaching has been seen as a method of gaining access to universities and employment in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, which have become a symbol of freedom for many Kyrgyz citizens. Both countries have been identified as the leading resources for finding and appointing teachers at international schools in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Over time, South Africa has been included in the list of preferred countries due to its perceived association with the United Kingdom. The international schools have formulated

a specific model by which they are conceived as private institutions adapted to align with schooling objectives.

At the core of this situation is the impact of globalisation and internationalisation. Because countries are unequal, many from poorer countries seek opportunities in North America and the United Kingdom. It is important to understand the impact of this internationalisation on local education systems. The main question concerns inequalities and social justice. Related to this is the role of international schools and the opportunities they present in the context of inequalities. Secondly, what international teaching entails in a complex education system needs to be better understood. How it is linked to the global teaching system remains vague, with limited information available about the context and the regulations behind it. Its nature tends to be fluid, and it does not yield the expected outcomes. Non-native English speakers are unable to develop skills that would enable them to attend further educational institutions or pursue employment opportunities due to their newly acquired language skills.

1.4 Research objectives

The research objectives include the following actions that form part of the steps taken to fulfil the study:

- i) The research focused on teaching English in international schools and on understanding the roles played by teachers and how these have been integrated into international teaching models.
- ii) In addition to researching the emphasis on English in the international schools in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, the objective of the study required understanding the origin of international teaching at private schools in Bishkek and the expectations set by the Ministry of Education, neighbouring or influential countries, parents, and external bodies linked to the system.

1.5 Purpose of the study

The research objectives support the purpose of the study and described in the list below:

- i) The purpose of the study was to investigate the success and influence of English-medium teaching using an autoethnographic narrative of international teachers lived experiences within private school settings in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

- ii) The study aimed to illustrate how international education language policy, institutional context, and cross-cultural pedagogical practices interconnect in shaping students' and parents' career expectations and outcomes. The focus was on teachers who had arrived from perceived native English-speaking countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and South Africa.
- iii) The study provides ethnographic insights into the teaching experiences embedded in the teaching models developed by accredited bodies, such as Cambridge and Oxford Education.

1.6 Research question

The main research questions include the following:

- i) The study aimed to explore the facilitation of English-medium teaching and whether it allows access to the global world in terms of education opportunities;
- ii) Or enables speakers of English as a second language to gain access to institutions perceived high-ranking institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom.

To respond to the research questions, the study explored the following themes as sub-questions:

- i. Are the experiences of international teachers taken into consideration during curriculum planning and development of the teaching models by international schools, governments and accreditation bodies, such as Cambridge and Oxford?
- ii. What is the role of government and external stakeholders towards supporting international English-medium teaching in Kyrgyzstan?
- iii. What is the impact of teaching practices that use English as the communication method to non-English speakers?
- iv. What are unintended consequences or challenges faced by students who study English in the international schools?

These key themes informed the interview guide for different groups of participants, which is why they are broad in nature.

1.7 Theoretical framework

The study sought to explore the impact of globalisation in the context of education. An interpretative approach is required to unpack the impact of education on the educators and students as a result of globalisation and internationalisation. Globalisation as a theory thus becomes critical in understanding the role of education in the betterment of societies. According to Pašalić and Marinov (2008: 250), “Globalisation includes interdependence and interconnectedness of the large number of countries in economic, cultural, scientific, linguistic and many other domains”. In other words, globalisation means that all countries should contribute to the development of a better world anchored in the development of economic, cultural, scientific and linguistic domains. However, the imbalances of the world structure have created a monopoly in the development of many domains. As Pašalić and Marinov (2008: 250) state: “The process of globalisation through which one language has evolved into a global or world language has lasted for decades.” Using globalisation as a theory becomes critical in understanding the impact of these imbalances in the context of education and English in particular.

Also, as this is an anthropological study, cultural relativism will be used as a normative framework for analysing cultural beliefs and practices within their contexts. Cultural relativism supports the idea that the perception of other people’s cultural beliefs, values and practices should not be circumscribed by a generic matrix of outsiders. Anthropology has been argued to be “a discipline that encourages – or even requires – relativism”, as noted by Österman (2021: 125). This means that in anthropology one needs to pay attention to the context, because it shapes how people perceive the world. For this study, it was important to pay attention to the context of Bishkek to make sense of the role of English and education there. For Geertz, cultural relativism moulds anthropology “with its materials, [and] is thus in some sense implicit in the field” (Geertz, 2001: 44). Anthropology as a field can thus be understood as an “attentiveness to context and recognition of contingencies” (Österman, 2021: 125). This theoretical approach made sure that I would not overgeneralise the findings but would read them in context while making connections with broader experiences.

1.8 Significance of the study / rationale

The pertinent considerations can be described in the following manner: (a) the worth, importance and inherent value of English-medium facilitation at private schools; (b) how effective and worthwhile these activities/entities are in their (perceived) stated role of providing opportunities to work and study abroad; and (c) what the alternative options are and how such varied opportunities manifest themselves in an ever-changing multipolar world. English-medium teaching facilitation has evolved over the years, shifting from teaching English only to teaching subjects in the English language. The English-medium models based on the Cambridge and Oxford education systems change and adapt according to government, school, parents and external body influences. The rationale lies in developing an understanding of the teaching models and whether a model is a method that students from non-English-medium countries may use to gain access to English-medium countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom. This study is therefore timely given the current geopolitics that show drastic changes on the global stage. This has direct implications for the role of English as a language of opportunities.

1.9 Outline of the thesis

The thesis has been designed to explore the reasons behind the international schools in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and provide critical insights into why parents prefer their children to attend international schools. It begins by presenting the background of the study to give the reader an understanding of the role of education in general and in Bishkek specifically. In this first chapter, I state the research problem and research objectives that the study has sought to explore. The chapter further explains the theoretical framework to show the approach of the study and how it should be understood. The last section discusses the significance of the study in the context of education in general and English in particular. After this section, the chapter presents an outline of the thesis by briefly explaining what each chapter entails.

Chapter 2 discusses relevant literature to locate the study within the existing body of literature. The topics covered in the chapter include the role of education as one of the Sustainable Development Goals, questions on English as education, the impact of multiculturalism in international schools, and the understanding of globalisation and internationalisation. The chapter also engages the debates on international schools to show their contributions and unintended consequences based on the political landscape. It concludes by providing a critique

of international schools by showing their shortcomings and pointing the way for more research in this area.

Chapter 3 is the methodology section, which explores the research tools used to answer the research questions. Discussion of the research tools used attempts to indicate the depth of the research, which used different tools ranging from in-depth interviews to focus group discussion and participant observation. To give pertinent context, the chapter discusses the research site in detail, locating it within the global context. The chapter also highlights ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Of utmost importance in this chapter are the analysis tool and the writing process using autoethnography. The use of autoethnography signifies a quest for sincerity in research and an effort to expose how positionality forms part of the research toolkit as the researcher uses his or her own personal experiences as a legitimate tool of analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings and begins by profiling the participants. Based on the questions asked, the chapter presents the voices of the participants to ensure that the analysis is grounded in the views of those directly affected by the international teaching. These views are important because they form the basis of the themes discussed in Chapter 5. Lastly, the chapter presents the autoethnographic account, which is the main tool of analysis of this study. The experiences and belief systems of the researcher played a pivotal role in selecting the questions and making sense of the responses. The chapter is thus integral to the thesis, as the gathered material is fruitfully related to the critical underpinnings of the thesis. The chapter shows explicitly that the researchers matter in research because they shape and influence the discussion. Neutrality is therefore unattainable, but research must be ethical and must be conducted with integrity. This means that honesty is critical to avoid misrepresentation of data.

Chapter 5 analyses the data by bringing to the fore the themes that emerged from the field. Using autoethnography, the researcher read the data in relation to her personal experience to discern convergences and divergencies of data. While grounded theory was used to analyse that data, autoethnography played a pivotal role in interpreting the data. One major theme is reading English language as power while being an English language speaker. This theme is a classic example revealing that the role of a researcher matters. This theme reveals the complexities of identities and the global matrix of power. This chapter thus engages the themes developed within the body of literature. What is critical in this chapter is that it shows the gaps in our

understanding of education and the continuities of colonialism hidden in the narrative of globalisation and internationalisation.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by presenting a summary of the thesis. It then states the conclusions drawn, including the study's critical contributions to the body of knowledge about education as an enabler for social justice. One of the major conclusions drawn in the thesis is that understanding geopolitics in the context of globalisation is fluid. Accordingly, calling for social justice requires agility because these politics are ever changing.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review provides an overview of important themes in the discourse of international education. It discusses the importance of education as one of the key indicators for sustainable development. It further interrogates the importance of English in education to ask questions such as whether English is education or a tool to transmit knowledge and communicate. It moves on to review literature on multiculturalism as a critical component in international schools. This is an important part of internationalism because it interrogates the issues of worldviews and the production of knowledge. This further determines what is regarded as legitimate in the education sector. Finally, the literature engages the debates on international education by juxtaposing them with experiences of international teachers. While this literature review is not exhaustive, it does centre the study in broader debates around international education.

2.2 Understanding the role of education

Education is a major factor in societal development and is ranked fourth among the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015). Proper education changes the course of any society because it enables the citizens to think creatively and critically about development. Societies with less illiterate citizens tend to have a lower ratio of poverty, showing a correlation between education and development. Scholars such as Makoe (2023) have argued that education is responsible for the development of any society, and that is understood as education for good. Education should therefore be of service to society and not only for individual benefit because “[t]his deeply social view of working together for common purpose is embodied in humanising education that reflects social and cultural practices that engender participation, cooperation, reciprocity and empathy” (Makoe, 2023: 308).

Accordingly, education is not just for individual advancement but is communal. It is in this context that a true understanding of education should include different ways of knowing, such that it is founded on epistemic justice. Chapfika (2025: 149), calling for epistemic justice, argues as follows:

A philosophy of education that excludes the epistemology and lived experiences of the people in which it is practised is not worth its name. If that happens, especially in the context of historical injustice, such a philosophy of education would be suspected of protecting the status quo and justifying the continuity of an injustice.

This is important, because education as we know it today is mainly exclusive of other ways of knowing; hence, English language use is advanced as a key to opportunities rather than learning. This exclusion also affects ways of knowing. It limits opportunities for learners to engage through their own languages and for teaching materials to reflect local cultures, while privileging predominantly Western methodologies. International schools are therefore largely informed by a logic of education that is centred on an individual advancement over communal advancement. It is important to study the implication of this logic in lived experiences so as to contribute to providing a logic that will bring about education for good. By framing English learning as the key to achieving global success, the approach challenges the ability of Kyrgyz ways of knowing to produce knowledge relevant to the country's development.

Accordingly, Bright (2022) argues that research about the dynamics of international teachers has resulted in the creation of typologies aligned with the experiences, reasons and personalities of teachers, which explain the complexity of this topic. It is important, therefore, that we pay attention to teachers' experiences to advance the quality of education in the international schools. Poole and Bunnell (2021) support this argument in explaining that the international teacher has become an important aspect in understanding the theory behind education and globalisation. Although parental involvement has been studied over many years, "the operational implication of their involvement still requires in-depth investigation and the types of involvement required" (Boonk, Gijssels, Ritzen & Brand-Gruwel, 2018: 11). As such, the legitimacy of international schools remains critical because "it provides a means of acceptance and trust between the institutions practices and expectations of those associated with these institutions" (Bunnell, Fertig & James, 2016: 413).

2.2.1 Role of educators in international schools

Drawing from the established role of international education, which should be founded on diversity, the teacher's role is not only about teaching English but also about maintaining the

sustainability of education. Furthermore, it has been about changing the educational focus from a socialist to a capitalist environment, which contributed to inequality in the Kyrgyz Republic, according to Ozawa, Durrani and Thibault (2024). However, equity in international teaching has become a point of discussion among Kyrgyz citizens because of schooling affordability and the available government funding that allows for the maintenance of the school buildings (DeYoung, 2006). Kyrgyzstan's shift from state-owned policies to a capitalist model increased the imbalance in the country and affected the education sector by creating a micropolitical atmosphere and questioning the sustainability of English-medium teaching in the international schools (Caffyn, 2010).

Education became critical for the government after independence in 1991, which required alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which included free education for all (Jailobaeva et al., 2023). Nel and Ssentanda (2023) note that global education initiatives implemented by global organisations often overlook the importance of the English language in promoting education sustainability. Sustainability and English-medium teaching stretch beyond the ability to teach children to engage using a foreign language, because success aligns with “the use of English in the region as a result of the growing integration of local markets with the international global market”, according to Hajar, Babeshko and Smagulova (2023: 94). Nonetheless, success aligns with the “establishment of selective schools for gifted students, emphasising proficiency in English” (Ozawa et al., 2024:7).

English teaching in the international schools carries questions not only about the sustainability of this approach for the learners and the country but also about the education experience of the teachers (Jakubiak, 2020). Poole (2023: 8) argues that “academic literature paints a vivid picture of international school teachers' motivations, which are diverse and complex in nature”. Education and identity in the form of multiculturalism arrive in many forms, which transpire not only in the teacher's origin but also in the learners' ability to imitate their foreign educators (Ai, 2016). In Kyrgyzstan, the use of a national language, for example Russian, plays a critical role in shaping the local teacher's identity, and it is being taken seriously by the government (DeYoung, 2006). Dynamics continue to develop, embedded in multiculturalism aligned with the appointment of national versus foreign teachers, which plays out in the identity development of the educators (Poole, 2023). Liddicoat (2019: 453) asserts that “the view of the

idea of nation was at the heart of the early Soviet policy of indigenisation (коренизация), which sought to recognise and develop ethnic identities, cultures and languages as part of the socialist agenda”. However, a strong drive toward projecting modernity is evident in urban centres and this aspiration is often expressed through language choice. Proficiency in Russian and English is widely associated with social advancement and an elite cultural background. In Bishkek, a Kyrgyz person’s identity is frequently linked to their ability to shift from speaking Kyrgyz to Russian and, increasingly, to communicate in English.

This search for identity was the basis for why international schools wanted to offer a modernised approach, according to Umetbaeva (2015). Cultural differences have had to be taken into consideration when attempting to understand the identity of the local teachers versus the foreign teachers who arrived at the schools as native English speakers. In addition to the formation of a new identity, it is apparent that the different cultures in the country have created a clash between individuals who see themselves as Kyrgyz because they were born in the territory and Kyrgyz who originated from the USSR or their families. In addition, individuals from other parts of Europe also relocated to the country as migrant workers, which has made it even more complex to define nation-building. This has created a contradiction between perceived nationalism and new internationalism (Umetbaeva, 2015).

According to Abdoubaetova (2020), English-medium teaching and the availability of private schools have grown in Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic. However, DeYoung (2006: 507) argues that although “English-medium schools are primarily located in the capital city, they are also available in other cities, such as Osh, albeit with different dynamics”. This is true to the context of Kyrgyz Republic because, compared to Bishkek, Osh is more traditional and less open to accepting English-speaking teachers. International teachers working in areas considered more conventional face challenges regarding acceptance by the wider community, but this does not prevent private schools from opening in these regions. The research is focused on Bishkek, which, in comparison, has been described as a more “democratic” and “Western” city, open to the English language and foreigners, which has resulted in a variety of English-medium schools being established there (Abdoubaetova, 2020).

Another important aspect is that the system set up to apply for registration at English-speaking universities requires a level of skill that is tested by the universities before the time to determine

a language capability score (Schoepp, 2018). This means that universities are the custodians of English language and attach credibility to language proficiency for entry into the international higher education institutions. It is, therefore, the role of the international schools to provide school children with the ability to write these tests and receive acceptance at the institutions of their interest. The system is fluent and adapts to motivate the international schools' existence by using English accreditation as a reason. It is in this context that Abdoubaetova (2020) argues that the system is therefore reliant on the need of the global world to have students studying in English. DeYoung (2005) asserts that many private schools were formed without understanding administrative requirements, which included decentralising education finance to the local governments although they had no taxing authority. This resulted in various development banks expressing their concern about the educational status of Kyrgyzstan, which led to the creation of an Education Development Strategy (Shamatov et al., 2024).

2.2.2 Multiculturalism and its impact in international schools

Liddicoat (2019) argues that since the creation of the Central Asian Republics in 1920, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek have become the local and official languages in addition to Russian. However, according to Hajar et al. (2023), the need for English-medium teaching was initiated by the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education and Science, which allocated a few hours per week towards English instruction in the Kyrgyz private and public schools. According to Ahn and Smagulova (2022), in the Kyrgyz context 76.3% of survey respondents (between 2015 and 2017) indicated that they were learning English in some capacity. It would appear that the main motivation for parents to take their children to international schools is for their children to be eloquent in the English language. The assumption is that this would give the children a better chance to be admitted into universities in the USA and UK, which would then afford them better opportunities. This assumption negates the fact that when students apply to the universities, while they are expected to be fluent in the language of instruction, what matters most is the marks obtained in the subjects relevant to the degree they would pursue. English is therefore not the ultimate criterion in furthering their studies and thus cannot replace performance in all other subjects.

It is in this context that Ahn and Smagulova (2022) state that over 35% of parents indicated that they expected their children to learn English, a language that reputedly provided

opportunities and possibilities. Based on the argument advanced in the previous paragraph, this perception misconstrued the facts and was misleading for the students. English alone does not and cannot provide opportunities without the achievement of good pass marks in other subjects as well. English should be understood as being an additional language for students. According to Liddicoat (2019: 457), “Mandatory foreign language learning was introduced in schools in Kyrgyzstan in the 1992 curriculum reform”. In this dynamic, the Central Asian governments remain a primary factor in language control, although impacted by external factors. Because the local language remains a symbol of the country, the local languages maintain their importance (Fierman, 2009). There is thus a historical context for the introduction of English in schools, which should be understood in that context.

It is in this context that Chee (2020) calls for multicultural training programmes to offer the teaching community additional insight into the occurrence of nationalism and colonialism and to gain greater understanding of citizenship (Chee, 2020). Accordingly, the development of a plan by educators is advocated “to execute a teaching programme open to the development of trust relationships between all individuals in the schooling environment (Moya-Chaves, Moreno-García & Núñez-Camacho, 2018). This schooling model tended to revert to a Western approach and excluded any non-Western worldviews towards teaching (Reyes et al., 2021). The aim of international teaching presented a combination of all backgrounds, traditions and experiences, even originating from different parts of the world (Reyes et al., 2021).

However, teachers have continued to limit the idea of multiculturalism during language teaching, and the inclusion of a logical plan has remained critical (Moya-Chaves et al., 2018). This is because international schools focus on English as the communication and instruction method without additional insight into the roles of other languages used by the students (Chee, 2020). Teachers who attempt to bring different cultures into the classroom continue to struggle with information transfer within an intercultural context and the promotion of a non-stereotypical environment (Moya-Chaves et al., 2018). This is a result of poor coordination between different schools that capture the information of students. That is why it remains key to integrate the intercultural context into the language teaching environment and to develop a greater multicultural approach at the international language schools (Chee, 2020).

In most circumstances, teachers become reliant on their own devices to deal with multicultural backgrounds and different learning spaces, and this is related to the structuring of the classroom environment, which is representative of different cultural dynamics and sensitivities (Kapofu, 2019). International teaching also influences a teacher's ability to communicate at a student support level by adopting more local phrases and idioms known to the host country's culture (Barbee, 2018). This means that the longer the international teachers stay in the host country, the better they become in integrating local culture with their teaching methods. According to Barbee (2018), understanding local cultures includes references to local heroes, customs and practices that form part of the educator's ability to link with the students on their level. It would seem that international teachers are also tasked with immersing themselves in the local culture, in addition to their teaching responsibilities.

Foregrounding culture as part of teaching is crucial because, according to Kapofu (2019), the misunderstanding of teacher culture and the synergy that supports consideration of educators' cultural backgrounds influences the execution of the curriculums in the classroom environments. In other words, multiculturalism should be integral in the classroom so that the execution of lessons may be successful. Kapofu (2019), looking at the South African context, argues that difficulties are experienced within a teaching environment when the educators originate from different cultural backgrounds. More disturbing in the South African context is that the attitude towards teachers of colour has seemed to filter down to the treatment of students who arrived from cultures different from the teachers (Kapofu, 2019). In these multicultural settings, all stakeholders can be affected negatively; hence there is a need to have clear guidelines and support systems for multiculturalism.

To address multiculturalism in international schools, preference is often given to teachers who have taught in different international schools. The assumption seems to be that they would have expertise in multiculturalism. However, according to Estaji and Tabrizi (2021), this assumption that teachers who travel regularly and work at different international schools are converted into culturally sensitive educators may not be the case. An example of a multicultural environment related to the South African situation suggests that each context presents a range of different customs and belief systems (Tandlich, 2022). This is why Kapofu (2019) in his study revealed that teacher culture judgements are accepted by a small group of students and are largely challenged by the others. This makes it difficult for teachers to infuse their own cultural aspects

into the teaching system, and these aspects thus become less important during the structuring and implementation of school curriculums (Kapofu, 2019).

Evidently multiculturalism requires daily interaction, with multicultural relations between educators and students (Tandlich, 2022). This would ensure that the transfer of knowledge happens in a creative space that includes the educators' ability to develop a multidimensional listening environment (Tandlich, 2022). To understand different cultures fully, teachers must be culturally sensitive, especially to diverse views, going beyond understanding of traditional foods or holidays to becoming involved in community engagement (Jacobs & Haberlin, 2022). This means that multiculturalism requires political understanding especially from the teachers' side.

2.2.3 *Culture in a language*

Many scholars, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1994), have argued that language is not just about communication but also carries one's culture. While authors such as Estaji and Tabrizi (2021) call for a level of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) that plays a significant role at international schools, some have challenged this call. The ICC concept refers to the various symbolic and knowledge systems, inclusive of references to language, norms, values and beliefs as well as customs such as art (Estaji & Tabrizi, 2021). Clearly, language and culture are intertwined, so when introducing one the other is introduced too, because they are inseparable. Originally, interculturalism in the international context was referred to as a foreign-culture approach, with a focus on one specific territory, but this has recently been reconceptualised as an intercultural environment with multiple backgrounds (Estaji & Tabrizi, 2021). By virtue of the interconnectedness of language and culture, interculturalism involves the interaction of more than one language.

Consequently, bringing different languages into the classroom means we diversify the teaching approach. Estaji and Tabrizi (2021) attest to this diversity, as they argue that the change to teaching multiple cultures has given rise to diverse complexities, with teachers being requested to educate learners from different cultural environments. For example, the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has allowed teachers to become more familiar with different cultures and to learn methods of reacting sensitively toward this variety of

traditions or behaviours (Estaji & Tabrizi, 2021). Agaidarova (2025) attests to this and argues that the multicultural working environment allows for structured and more organised working arrangements, with role-players having different professional insights. In addition, ICC is linked to cognitive knowledge and the ability to show cultural knowledge, including an ability to analyse cultural aspects (Estaji & Tabrizi, 2021). Accordingly, it is important for teachers and learners to improve their ICC levels and thus gain deeper insight into each other's cultural understanding and knowledge systems (Estaji & Tabrizi, 2021).

To understand different cultures necessitates going beyond the classroom setting to immerse oneself in other ways of being. Agaidarova (2025) argues that educators who engage in non-academic interactions receive opportunities to experience different ideologies and cultural viewpoints and develop culturally specific understandings in the school environment. However, the exposure on its own is not enough without intentionality as well. As Estaji and Tabrizi (2021) point out, a general but false belief is that educators who have worked in multiple countries necessarily develop greater multicultural sensitivity. It is therefore critical to invest in the professional development of intercultural communication to create a positive learning environment (Estaji & Tabrizi, 2021).

It is clear that multiculturalism is not automatic but requires intentionality from all stakeholders. As Demerath (2022) shows, it is critical for teachers and students in the multicultural environment to increase their social and emotional learning range while demonstrating the meaning behind a non-racial environment. In addition, teachers should show concern about available teaching methodologies focused on intercultural, non-colonial and equal comparison thinking (Moya-Chaves et al., 2018). Intercultural learning continues to require understanding between different parties in terms of each other's language as well as culture (Moya-Chaves et al., 2018).

In addition to willingness by all stakeholders to understand multiculturalism, there should be concerted effort from the education department to develop a model that would standardise multiculturalism practices in the classroom. According to Moya-Chaves et al. (2018), teachers have complained especially about the lack of an available intercultural teacher model that could provide them with guidance to work with multicultural groups. The structuring of classroom environments should play a key role in creating a multicultural environment and develop a

sense of inclusivity for all cultures (Kapofu, 2019). To improve international teaching, it remains critical to include multiculturalism as a demonstrable part of the curriculum and allow for student discussions in this respect (Moya-Chaves et al., 2018). The understanding of culture in the classroom could facilitate success on various academic, teaching or administration levels and play a significant role in the success of the international teaching endeavour (Kapofu, 2019).

2.3 English as education

It is important to highlight that language is imbued with cultural value and thus carries a worldview. Introducing a new language to native speakers of another language unsettles their customary worldview and way of knowing. Printsipalova (2024:1) argues this point as follows:

When acquiring a foreign language, individuals delve into the cultural milieu of its native speakers, thereby immersing themselves in the embedded cultural nuances. The primary worldview shaped by one's native language and culture overlays the secondary worldview introduced by the target language.

This means that there is a disruption that occurs when one introduces a new language. It is important, therefore, always to take into account the different power dynamics at play when one teaches a foreign language. This is to ensure that different cultures are respected and are allowed to contribute in the learning process.

International schools therefore should not be about English as a dominant form of cultural capital but should truly reflect international education. This means the education provided in international schools should be informed by or grounded in international worldviews because they are different. The languages carry these worldviews, which means that international schools should have diverse languages to embrace. As Printsipalova (2024: 2) points out: "The multitude of languages mirrors the diverse facets of the world, with each new linguistic perspective illuminating novel aspects while potentially obscuring familiar ones." Education should therefore embody diversity if it is to aid the development of a diverse society. This diversity in languages would enhance the individual's ability to navigate opportunities. It is therefore not surprising that education is identified as one of the Sustainable Development Goals that are aimed at ending poverty. Understanding different kinds of education becomes

paramount to advancing education that is transformative. International teachers should therefore embody an openness to diversity in their attitude towards other cultural worldviews.

2.3.1 Complexities of English as a medium of instruction

The significant role of language in education gains even more importance in the international schools in Bishkek, which in the main are English focused. The progress of any student has a direct link with the student's ability to perform academically and their ability to communicate in a second language (Kurum & Erdemli, 2021). Language learning in international education should provide a platform to develop a sense of interculturalism and could prepare learners to embrace online teaching opportunities (Alsamadani, 2021). Reyes et al. (2021) show the importance of teaching experience at international schools and the combinations of knowledge created. Many students arrive at educational institutions with the hope of receiving a Western type of schooling and related experience in terms of relationships as well (Reyes et al., 2021). This expectation is associated for them with proficiency in the English language.

More importantly, English should also be understood in relation to the economic possibilities of different societies. In situations of growing economic meltdown, the economic powerhouses understandably attract more people, which increases competition. As it were, affordability becomes an issue. Hajar et al. (2023: 98) argue that EMI also carries the “financial benefits of attracting lucrative students from other countries, increasing the emphasis on internationalization”. However, parents' motivation aligned with the availability of classrooms and smaller class sizes would allow teachers to provide more personal attention (Abdoubayetova, 2020). Consequently, the aim of achieving globalisation through English-medium education could result in an increase of inequality and the exclusion of individuals from quality teaching (Jakubiak, 2020). This reveals the contradictions of globalisation that is aimed at levelling inequalities but that at the same time widens them. English thus should not be the main focus when attempting to level up the inequalities; rather, learning should be the focus.

As driven by the globalisation trajectory, international schools expect academic performance in a second language, for example English, and oppose the nationalistic approach in the home country, which advances the national language (Chee, 2020). The importance of the first

language in teaching is its inculcating of intercultural awareness, which is embedded in first language teaching, and this prevents cultural misunderstandings in the classroom (Alsamadani, 2021). For example, in the Hong Kong context, after a range of protests by the teachers and students, references made to supporting Chinese nationalism created a diversity of opposition in education (Chee, 2020). Consequently, international schools in Hong Kong decided to remove references in study material supportive of China to prevent any additional frustrations (Chee, 2020). These changes were fuelled by the fact that teachers' ability to display high levels of subject knowledge would be less effectual if the educators could not create a multicultural platform inclusive of respect for individuals from different backgrounds (Demerath, 2022). The example of Hong Kong demonstrated the necessity for teachers to display a higher level of sensitivity related to the occurrence of multicultural communities and different viewpoints presented in the international school environments (Chee, 2020).

Evidently, across the world more non-native English-speaking individuals have worked at international schools than native English-speaking people (Estaji & Tabrizi, 2021). The roles accepted by the local versus international teachers become complex when they receive different power positions and the native-speaking individuals receive higher-authority posts (Demerath, 2022). This influences intercommunication between the teachers and individuals at the different schools, and additional intercultural communication training becomes critical (Estaji & Tabrizi, 2022). Intercultural training should include cultivating an understanding of whiteness and what racism means (Demerath, 2022). This should entail a much deeper approach than attempting to prevent aspects of racism and perceptions of whiteness from influencing the international school environment. In this respect, anthropologists have played a role in supporting multicultural training programmes that encourage the development of trust between teachers and students.

2.3.2 Impact of globalisation and internationalisation

It is important that to note that globalisation in many instances does not speak to the local context. Even though it can influence policies, globalisation oftentimes does not find expression in how things are done in communities. It is in this context that Ghosh and Tarrow (1993: 81) state the following: "Social policy for a multicultural society has not been effectively translated into educational responses in the school system and much less so in teacher education

institutions.” However, the ability of teachers to interact with students using a multicultural and inclusive approach allows students to feel more comfortable with teachers whose backgrounds differ from theirs. According to Kurum and Erdemli (2021), in many cases the school curriculum reflects the host country’s political agendas and impacts the ability of educators to achieve a global teaching environment. To emphasise this point, Ghosh and Tarrow (1993) argue that when education is viewed as a political process, the teacher’s role is seen as even more critical because schooling is neither neutral nor objective.

The idea of a one-world teaching approach is not a representation of the real international teaching platform and dynamics associated with it (Tate, 2016). Many schools aim to brand themselves as international schools without understanding what the concept means and the philosophy behind it (Fabian, 2016). According to Alsamadani (2021), interculturalism aligns with an understanding of cultural dynamics and frameworks and with the ability to apply them as knowledge in the community. The frameworks and cultural dynamics in the school environment offer a range of differences between international schools, depending on location and cultural backgrounds (Fabian, 2016). International teaching has taught educators to realise that their worldviews are not the only acceptable social-political stances, and other cultural ideologies exist across the globe (Jacobs & Haberlin, 2022). Hytten (2017: 121) argues that “the primary goal of multiculturalism is to use education to create a society in which all people and their differences are valued, understood, accepted, and respected”. Vasquez (2022: 125) supports this argument and points out that “the incorporation of multicultural principles and practices into education and training aids the development of multicultural competence”.

Hytten (2017) argues that although the global population consists of a diversity of cultures and identity, only a small, privileged group is representative at the schooling system, and a more accurate display is needed. This suggests that teachers’ experiences sometimes become too reliant on their own viewpoints and lack in-depth analysis of cultural attributes (Kim & Choi, 2020). This is exacerbated by following a Western-influenced teaching approach that teachers are trained in. Consequently, many students become isolated and change into passive learners, just accepting the norm presented to them (Reyes et al., 2021). It is important to note that globalisation and internationalisation should not be the only approach to understanding education. A better understanding of education in general and English in particular is also called

for. The education that centres globalisation needs to be refuted or, as Khoo (2023) puts it, “cursed”:

Cursing refuses the marketing hype, with its forced celebration of problem-free success, and rejects the endless insistence that we must substitute our work of teaching, learning, or researching with pseudo-competitions for publicity and funding. (Khoo, 2023: 95-96)

Thus, we need a different kind of education that is not driven by materiality but by the development of society and that, accordingly, equips learners with knowledge.

These cultural awareness learnings form part of the ability to read, write, listen and speak and apply them to communicate in a sensitive cultural field (Alsamadani, 2021). Intercultural sensitivity itself requires a definition similar to internationalisation or multiculturalism because of the diversity of viewpoints in the schooling environment (Skelton, 2016). The debate on interculturalism affirms individuals’ ability to become interculturally sensitive and refrain from superior behaviour towards other people (Alsamadani, 2021). Interculturalism becomes more successful when aligned with teachers’ ability to express their identities influenced by their country origins and international work experiences (Poole, 2019). Referring to teachers who attempt to use interculturalism, Poole (2019) argues that teachers strive to use their past experiences to create a place for themselves in a foreign country. In this sense they identify the possibilities of creation in the schooling environment aligned with professionals who allocate many years working on an international platform, but they struggle to understand the real meaning behind interculturalism (Stobie, 2016). It is worth noting that many references to international teaching also bear relevance to debates about the meaning and nature of imagined communities (Poole, 2019).

2.3.3 Continuities of the colonial legacy

Bright (2022) argues that internationalisation advances a way to break from colonial approaches to education, though signs of those impacts still influence teaching curriculums today. Interculturalism in international teaching includes an expectation of teachers to become not only bilingual but also bicultural, according to Alsamadani (2021). Kurum and Erdemli (2021) show how internationalisation at the higher education level impacts the classroom and

educational environment in multiple ways. A significant emphasis is placed on individuals' ability to move between different countries and actively influence the interculturalism dynamics at educational institutions (Kurum & Erdemli, 2021). There is a need for scholars to support and influence the internationalisation of education and, in the same sense, remove colonialism from the system (Demerath, 2022). Globalisation, associated with internationalisation, reflects an awareness of global citizenship and cultural diversity to create a global citizen world (Chee, 2020). Kurum and Erdemli (2021) refer to the outcome of international mobility resulting in tolerance, improved communication, social and political understanding, and self-confidence in individuals.

For Chee (2020), international mobility requires the exclusion of concepts related to citizens or non-citizens in education and rather an increase in global migration in education. This mobility raises a diversity of teacher versus student challenges, for example the ability to read and write with functional contextual understanding (Kurum & Erdemli, 2021). Student–teacher relationships play a significant role in ensuring not only the creation of a multicultural platform but also that teachers modify their role to present a world of inclusivity without colonial viewpoints (Demerath, 2022). The exclusion of colonialism also entails the appointment of teachers from different cultural backgrounds in a diversity of positions, rather than the appointment of Western versus local teachers (2022).

Bright (2022) argues that international teaching requires significantly more research to understand its multicultural dynamics and the identity of international teachers, who remain under-described; instead, the similarities and differences between them and migrants are generally brought more to the fore. To support this argument, Fierman (2009) asserts that transitioning from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet constituted a significant cultural shift, aiming to project a sense of global identity. As mentioned by Nel and Ssentanda (2023), schooling is increasingly expected to respond to multilingualism as well as diversity in the classrooms. However, after the Kyrgyz received their independence in 1991, the English language would allow users to understand the role of English in the local business markets as the economy grew (DeYoung, 2005). This has opened a means for the private schools to use the government-implemented English-medium instruction (EMI) policy to set up English-instruction private schools, although quality concerns have remained (Hajar et al., 2023). These quality concerns are most evident in the contrasting classroom methodologies, which range

from practices rooted in the Soviet educational tradition to the more recently adopted approaches influenced by the United States and the United Kingdom.

2.4 Debates about international teaching

Debates continue to develop about the meaning and definition of international teaching and its relevant impacts on the education society (Stobie, 2016). Bunnell (2016) highlights the fact that international teaching presents multiple voices and people with different cultural backgrounds, which teachers need to accept. One of the discussion points is the differences between interculturalism and multiculturalism and their application in international schooling (Alsamadani, 2021). Gaining a deeper understanding of international teaching identities required input from educators about their daily work and living circumstances (Kurum & Erdemli, 2021). The attributes of education and its dynamics have been influenced by various historical factors, including colonialism and its connection to multiculturalism (Demerath, 2022).

To advance the debates about international schools, Alsamadani (2021) argues that interculturalism presents a one-sided approach while aiming to develop individuals who have invested time towards understanding and linking with the other. The drive to create an intercultural environment using internationalism becomes difficult in conjunction with a global thinking approach (Waterson, 2016). Internationalism is seen as a global notion, with every school following the same standards rather than reflecting diversity. A diversity of arguments about the management of multiculturalism in the international teaching environment continue to characterise the international teaching community. Many scholars suggest that the debates regarding the acceptance of different cultures, and challenges about superiority as well as whiteness in the teaching environment, are limited because they do not show the complexities of multiculturalism (Alsamadani, 2021; Henry, 2013; Poole, 2019). All identities, inclusive of gender, race and class, influence the approaches that are developed, while being distinguished as native or non-native speakers and as inner or outer circle groups.

The constant focus on defining schools as chaotic and destabilised by temporary staff who soon move elsewhere impacts our academic understanding of these institutions (Poole & Bunnell, 2021). Developing a clearer definition is key to a greater understanding of what international

teaching means (Poole & Bunnell, 2021). Booth, McKenzie and Shanahan (2016) show that international schooling needs to define itself by focusing on inclusivity of cultural differences and diversity of backgrounds and traditions. International teaching experienced in the past has been associated with cross-cultural experience and the development of identity through exposure to different customs and traditions (Poole, 2019). Internationalism, therefore, implies diversity rather than the one-world idea advertised by many schools (Tate, 2016). Researchers have indicated the need to understand international schooling in terms of its possible structure and interconnectedness (Poole & Bunnell, 2021).

The question remains: if international schools represent chaos and are mismanaged, why do they remain popular places of employment for teachers from different countries (Poole & Bunnell, 2021)? The idea of chaos has become entangled with the idea of internationalism as representing a range of cultures, viewpoints and behaviours experienced daily (Fertig and James, 2016). A number of other factors affect the image of international schools, such as leadership issues, ethical and behavioural concerns by educators, and high staff turnovers (Poole & Bunnell, 2021).

2.4.1 Critique of the international teaching environment

International schools' main focus on English over and above science subjects, for instance, is misleading about the benefits of this emphasis. Mastering English as a form of education perpetuates inequalities and opens job opportunities for groups that are already at a higher echelon. This is observable in the appointment of English-speaking teachers mainly from the UK and USA. Abdoubaetova (2020) indicates that the number of private schools in Kyrgyzstan had reached 114 in 2017, and there has been a corresponding increase in the number of learners attending these schools. An expectation exists that English language capabilities would allow vulnerable individuals to succeed in the global system (Jakubiak, 2020). Therefore, the international schools were licensed by the Ministry of Education and Science, but children still needed to write a local exam to pass the Kyrgyz national qualification (Abdoubaetova, 2020). It seems that education has not been understood as benefiting the community, as scholars such as Makoe (2023) suggest, but as uplifting the individual. It is understandable that parents would want what is best for their children and would not want to see their children go through the

same difficulties as they did. However, leaders of society should not mislead communities but should protect citizens from possible exploitation.

Another problem with the international teaching environment is the levels of ethnocentrism that continue among international teachers, even after gaining more cultural sensitivity during their teaching experiences (Major, 2020). In the study conducted by Major (2020), the critical reflection by educators provided an opportunity to have their thinking and experiences challenged, so that they had to rethink their practices. Therefore, in the development of teachers in the international schooling environment it is critical that they become aware of their biases very early on (Major, 2020). The teaching environment continues to be critiqued because of the different challenges highlighted, but critique is at a micro rather than a more macro level (Sylvester, 2002). To mediate these challenges, Tharapos and O'Connell (2022) suggest that individuals be trained in the fields of cognitive behaviour, biases, and cultural understandings.

Although international teaching and the inclusion of diversity are frequently discussed, for Fertig and James (2016) the definition and understanding of these concepts do not become integrated into the curriculums. The increase in international schooling is aligned with a range of political events across the globe and the resultant historical changes in the education environment (Sylvester, 2002). According to Hayden and Thompson (2010), it remains to be questioned whether the individuals who have worked in the institutions understand the complexities and changes themselves. Another critique of the international teaching environment is centred on whether teachers are able to accept the other's perspective and the practicalities involved (Oh & Nussli, 2021). In order for a full understanding of the dynamics of international schooling to be developed, it is necessary for post-international teaching experiences and their outcomes to be reviewed.

2.4.2 Measurement of the quality of lived experiences

According to Tharapos and O'Connell (2022), personal preferences and experiences are significant factors in understanding educators' perceptions in foreign countries. They argue that measurement of the quality of lived experiences is key to understanding perceptions of international teaching (Tharapos & O'Connell, 2022). The quality of lived experiences in international teaching environments contributes significantly to the development of teachers'

cognitive knowledge, including their greater openness to different cultural approaches (Agaidarova, 2025). Authors such as Agaidarova (2025) and Oh and Nussli (2021) show that teachers who are given opportunities to work at global schools demonstrate growth in confidence and professional ability, particularly in communicating clearly and exhibiting cultural sensitivity during lessons. This is facilitated by study programmes implemented with the aim of allowing student-teachers to gain familiarity with international teaching and to develop knowledge suited to multicultural environments (Tharapos & O'Connell, 2022).

Lastly, the monitoring of classrooms with less experienced teachers sometimes focuses more on the participants than on the teachers themselves (Tharapos & O'Connell, 2022). Also, efforts to cultivate cultural sensitivity are not always successful, due to differing cultural norms (Tharapos & O'Connell 2022). For example, in most Asian schools it is expected that teaching would be conducted from the front of the classroom, with little integration with students (Tharapos & O'Connell, 2022). This shows that the measurement of teacher quality is influenced by a diversity of worldviews. It is also dependent on the school's location and its expectations (Agaidarova, 2025). Opportunities for networking and the development of friendships should be encouraged in international teaching to improve the quality of life for the teachers.

It appears that international teachers need to create measures to take care of their well-being. This is supported by Byker (2019), who argues that teachers have become the cultural writers of the world by working within a global environment exposed to a diversity of people's backgrounds and origins. This means that international teaching, as Byker (2019) points out, presented an opportunity to implement and understand inclusion in classroom environments when exposed to less affluent countries or areas. However, this did not come without challenges as, according to Jacobs and Haberlin (2022), the increasing number of other cultures in the education system required teachers to become more sensitive when faced with a diversity of traditions and cultures. Becoming sensitive can be tricky because sometimes the triggers are not visible. For Kim and Choi (2020), sensitivity is inclusive of racial connotations that are normally excluded during the use of teacher self-reflection programmes. Nonetheless, teachers who were culturally sensitive, within their understanding of traditions, also became aware of their attitude towards customs other than their own (Jacobs & Haberlin, 2022). So, quality is

inclusive of personal awareness and censorship. This is difficult to measure but forms part of lived experiences in the classroom.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary, the literature review provided insights on themes related to the research topic. The literature highlighted the impacts of historical events, particularly those during the USSR period, influences exerted by neighbouring countries, and dominant perspectives regarding the international teaching environment. It further discussed topics such as multiculturalism, professional development within the international education sector, influences on foreign teacher identity, and the management of their daily challenges. These topics reflect significant socio-political issues evident in international teaching, as well as their impacts on the status of the teaching profession. This literature review identified possible research gaps related to teacher responses in these teaching environments, and the shortcomings that gave cause for the current research and its possible contribution. The literature review illustrated the significant interconnection between nationalism, multiculturalism, integration and communication phenomena characteristic of the international context.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methods used to collect data during the field season between 2023 and 2024. This methods chapter considers the research approach, research tools, sampling strategy, analysis strategy, ethical considerations, limitations, research site description, and personal reflections. The chapter provides detailed insight into the study journey followed, including the role I played, as the researcher and as an international teacher, and how this influenced the application of the research methods and the challenges faced. The chapter also provides a detailed description of autoethnography, since it has a bearing on the analysis of data and the writing process. Accordingly, as the researcher, I was part of the research too, so the chapter includes personal reflections by me as an international teacher from South Africa.

The research methodology was shaped by my professional role in both schools and the research time available for data collection. During my third year in Kyrgyzstan as an educator in 2022, I accepted a position of Head of Social Sciences at School A, after completion of earlier roles as a primary and secondary teacher at the same institution. Ethical clearance for the study was granted in May 2023, which coincided with the final month of the school year in Kyrgyzstan. During this time teachers had limited availability to take part in formal interviews, but teachers shared their interests in the research topic. However, to ensure that participants had an opportunity to contribute, a Google questionnaire was developed and shared with the participants. These participants included foreign and local teachers in addition to the administrative staff. In addition, informal focus group discussions scheduled by administration and held on Friday afternoons enabled input by participants in a shared approach.

At School B, where I was employed as a secondary teacher in Global Perspectives and research methodologies for Grades 7 to 11, I had a longer period in which to collect formal interview data. Both foreign and local teachers showed interest in international education from professional and personal perspectives, which gave me more time to conduct formal interviews between August 2023 and January 2024. Although my role was not administrative, I was regarded as one of the more academically oriented teachers in the group and was asked to support teacher career development by advising on potential courses and training opportunities

for international educators. This also created opportunities to link career development discussions with a follow-up focus group discussions on teachers' experiences in international education. However, participant observations occurred at Schools A and B during the research time period.

3.2 Research methods

Initial attention was given to selecting the best research method, as many options existed. A method was required that would not only yield the highest-quality data but also consider the schools' sensitivity, given their vulnerability to public opinion. The research paradigm outlines the qualitative approach used, including tools such as sampling methods, participant observation, and ethnographic experiences. The analysis strategy covers the techniques employed to analyse the qualitative data collected through formal and informal interviews, participant observation and the recording of ethnographic experiences.

The study has attempted to understand the why and how of events occurring at a specific place and time, including the intentions of participants taking part in the study during the research period. To achieve this, a qualitative research approach was used in posing primary and secondary research questions. The research gathered more data through participant observation, which is explained in detail later in this chapter. The research questions introduced in Chapter 1 evolved as the social context of international schools shifted, including the roles of international teachers.

The qualitative research approach to the interview process included identifying questions that would create an informal environment, allowing informants to share information in a relaxed setting. It was important to avoid an environment in which teachers, administrators or government officials would respond by trying to shape a narrative they thought the researcher wanted to hear. I attempted to establish relationships with the interviewees to gather research material in a manner that allowed them to share their ideas and thoughts about international teaching, as well as its influence by political factors or the perspectives of the Kyrgyz people. The study therefore aimed to ask basic questions that would not lead to an overly complex political discussion about the influence of Russians and Americans on Kyrgyz education. It attempted to identify qualitative research questions that would guide the approach to

understanding the daily experiences of international teachers and gain insights from both local teachers and administrative staff. It was clear that if the study were to become overwhelmed with political debates, this could prevent a focus on the ethnographic experiences it wanted to capture.

Gathering qualitative information required the researcher to remain objective and avoid being shaped by personal interpretations of international teaching and its management. However, because the study adopted an autoethnographic approach, personal experiences were also incorporated to analyse international teaching from a foreign teacher perspective. It became critical to read various articles to develop a greater understanding of the field and to cross-reference viewpoints with other interpretations. As the research was question-based, the core of the inquiries shifted over time as new information emerged and the participants evolved during the research process. As understanding of the problem became clearer, the questions also became more focused, which resulted in a change in the research perspective. Agee (2009) has described similar examples of constant changes in the researcher's position as the study field becomes clearer and more detailed.

3.3 Research tools

The focus of the study was to provide narratives of people's experiences from teaching in international schools to understand the role of English as a core component of their experiences. In addition, the study aimed to explore people's understanding of the importance of the international schools and the contributions that these schools make. To achieve this, it was important to use research tools that would gather information to answer the whys rather than the whats. To collect data, use was made of participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

3.3.1 Participant observation

According to Shah (2017), participant observation is divided between long-term engagement, understanding a group of people and their social ways, understanding all aspects of social life, and methods of befriending strangers. Shah (2017) argues that by not taking participant observation seriously, we reduce this to a method of confusion and fail to explain to readers the

seriousness of our research. This critique is partly linked to the view that ethnographic fieldwork is time-consuming and expensive, especially when compared with online data collection methods that have become increasingly popular in other social sciences. Using participant observation in this research provided opportunities to ask open-ended questions, verify field notes, and cross-reference the theories developed from the research. The teachers' rooms provided an opportunity to identify topics that would influence the daily lives of international and local teachers. The setup allowed for the development of an understanding of relationships and of challenges between the local and foreign teachers. My role in the field as participant observer remained true to the assertion by Ingold (2017: 23) that

[t]o observe is not, in itself, to objectify. It is to notice what people are saying and doing, to watch and listen, and to respond in your own practice.... Participant observation, in short, is not a technique of data gathering but an ontological commitment. And that commitment is fundamental to the discipline of anthropology.

Accordingly, my interaction with participants involved noticing what people were doing and listening attentively. More importantly, I was part of the participant group because I was also the subject of study as my personal experiences informed the data collected and the analysis. Participant observation provided insight into the daily lives and experiences of international teachers and how they coped with the challenges of living in a foreign country. This methodology allowed me to better understand the challenges associated with English teaching in Kyrgyzstan and the perceptions created by administration about the role of international teachers. Nabhan-Warren (2022) explains that participant observation allows the researcher to gain a deeper insight into the informants' lives while using all five senses. The study required participant observation over four months, primarily at Schools A and B.

The outlook and dynamics of both schools differ significantly, and these differences shaped the ethnographic data presented in the study. School A which consists of two campuses in the eastern and western side of the city, focused primarily on English-medium teaching and registered students from the elite class of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Because students arrived from families in which at least one member uses English professionally, their levels of English proficiency ranged from basic to advanced. However, the second campus, located at the eastern side of the city, was situated in a more traditional area where English speaking was less commonly spoken which affected learners' confidence in using the language.

School B offered a contrasting model, maintaining separate Russian and English-medium instruction within one campus. This resulted in Russian-speaking teachers functioning apart from the foreign English-medium educators. With classes spanning early childhood to Grade 12, the school appeared more advanced than School A. Its students, however, reflected a predominantly middle-class demographic, with parents engaged in local business rather than the elite government or diplomatic circles typical of School A.

Participant observation commenced at the start of the research project, in May 2023, and allowed sufficient information to be gathered regarding the teacher's experiences in the educational environment. The researcher concluded the participant observation process by attending peer review lessons, observing teaching methodologies, engaging in general discussions about education, and integrating with teaching activities in the school, as well as observing extracurricular opportunities. The integration with other teachers allowed the researcher to develop insight into how educators approached their English-medium classes, connected with the students and presented their English-medium assignments to the pupils.

Participant observation also included integration with the administration staff to gain an understanding of the challenges they dealt with. Some of these challenges related to the application of working permits for teachers and foreign students, processing of monthly salaries, reimbursements of flights, and transportation and accommodation funds. Participant observation happened while having general discussions, joining meetings or working in the same area where the administrators worked. Sharing of workspace at the schools provided opportunities to identify activities that staff dealt with, for example, sharing information with parents and discussing difficulties with pupils.

Informal and formal interviews involved having a discussion with a local teacher over a cup of tea or coffee or listening to an international teacher comparing the schools and countries they had worked in and how their impressions changed according to their experiences. These relaxed environments became crucial in developing an understanding of the events that would directly impact the local teachers, such as their livelihoods, their children, and their ability to travel and work in other countries. It became critical to record and analyse the differences

between local and foreign educators' daily experiences and challenges, with the purpose of feeding their relevance into the problem statement.

A journal was kept of the discussions, the viewpoints and comments shared by the participants and these entries were reviewed after school to identify potential themes for the thesis. However, at times additional notes were taken on a separate piece of paper during informal conversations which local teachers offered insights into international education and its development in Kyrgyzstan. Because a substantial portion of my research centred on my professional role in relation to those of other foreign and local teachers, I engaged in reflexive analysis of how my viewpoints differed from them. My background in a pre-1994 South African schooling system, combined with comparisons to teaching methodologies adopted by the international schools shaped the way I analysed these practices.

The use of participant observation also included the personal use and study of the curriculums presented in student and teachers guides. I dedicated time to familiarise myself with the content of the learner books and identified themes within the teaching methodologies that were relevant to my study. The materials, provided by Cambridge Learning Assessment and purchased by the schools, outlined the topics, teacher instructions and learner tasks. Although the themes such as family, sport, and hobbies appeared universal, the framing of these lessons reflected traditions commonly associated with the United Kingdom. In contrast, cultural practices in Kyrgyzstan, such as boys and girls eating and playing separately during school events, were not represented in these Western-produced study guides.

The lesson content was predominantly Western in orientation, students frequently asked questions about my own family traditions and daily routines. As an educator from the West, I was often asked whether parents sit together at the same table or whether shoes are removed upon entering the home. While my analysis primarily focused on teacher experiences, it was not possible to exclude my own interpretations of the culturally specific behaviours that emerged in the classroom.

The selected international schools were registered for either the Cambridge Learning Assessment International Education programme or the International Baccalaureate (IB), both of which provide structured curriculum materials for educators. While the IB programme places stronger emphasis on activity-based learning, schools often chose to blend the two approaches, largely because the Cambridge programme carries significant prestige within the country. This preference reflects the view that British English is the more appropriate variety, even though many Kyrgyz citizens aspire to relocate to the United States. The evidence of the approach can be seen with a variety of English learning “clubs” that were made available to high school students who want to experience English in a social setting.

My own background continued to play a role in my view and analysis of the classroom environment. Consequently, I often engaged in critical reflection on the reliance on the IB (International Baccalaureate) curriculum game-based learning in contrast to Cambridge Assessment theoretically oriented instruction. Having been educated within a pre-1994 South African schooling system, one that was predominantly teacher centred rather than student centred, this background shaped my interpretive lens. Taking this schooling background into account, I decided that the use of in-depth interviews became critical to identify viewpoints of teachers who arrived from Kyrgyzstan but also other parts of the world.

3.3.2 In-depth interviews

To prepare for interviews with participating teachers, the researcher requested the school administration to provide feedback on the qualifications of foreign teachers teaching English subjects. Bishkek had experienced shortages of science and mathematics teachers who could teach in English, and an understanding of this by local teachers formed part of the investigation. For the administration, it remained a challenge to identify teachers with the correct qualifications who would be capable of teaching in English-medium schools. In a structured and unstructured interview format, at least three interviewees formed part of the school’s administration group. The remainder were primarily teachers. These 30 interviewees provided the necessary insight into the coordination and management dynamics of international schooling in Kyrgyzstan.

The interviews involved presenting structured and unstructured questions to interlocutors. The administration helped facilitate the interviews by determining the most suitable time for teachers to participate in the sessions. Thereafter, with assistance from the administration, decisions regarding the timeframes were discussed with the informants and assistants. Interviews were aimed to be completed in full confidentiality, and interview data were collected using alias names. References in terms of specific school names were treated confidentially and approved by the appropriate school board or representatives. In addition, anonymous names were used to report on data collected during the education department interviews. Protective computer software with a security code was used to prevent unauthorised access to the research data. The school board were informed, and approval was requested to undertake interviews or record ethnographic data as part of the research process.

3.3.3 Focus group discussions

The study conducted two focus group discussions (FGDs) with 34 teachers. The first FGD, conducted on 23 August 2024, on Zoom, had 20 teachers. Of these, seven were foreign teachers from various countries such as Norway, United States, Nigeria and the Philippines, and thirteen were local teachers. Of these teachers, sixteen were female and four were male. The second FGD was face to face and was held at the second school on 17 January 2025. This FGD had fourteen participants, comprising ten foreign teachers and four local educators. The foreign teachers were also from various countries including United States, Germany, India, Afghanistan, Malaysia, South Korea and Egypt. Eight male teachers and two females from foreign countries participated. The FGD for local teachers consisted of females only, while the FGD for the international teachers consisted of eight males and two females.

It became clear that the group discussions presented country origins from different parts of the globe, education experiences and backgrounds. Therefore, a diversity of topics originated from the focus group discussions namely curriculums, perception influences by the Kyrgyz and Russian educators, expectations by administration, parents and the students. Also, discussions about the importance of English-medium education in Kyrgyzstan and how the skill is perceived in the country.

Since the focus group discussions included a combination of foreign and local teachers, the input of the latter group became critical and the topics varied. Local teachers would discuss issues related to the quality of English-medium teaching, the qualifications of foreign teachers and the teaching methods used in the classrooms.

Therefore, it became critical to ensure that diverse teacher and administration viewpoints were reflected in my research study, including responses from the United Kingdom, United States as well as distinct responses from Europe, Africa and South Asia. Equally it became important to create an environment for local teachers to respond confidently while being supported by translators. I intentionally avoided using foreign teachers who spoke Russian as translators, as their own perspectives could influence the responses of local teachers.

The initial research started in a Zoom classroom format (later colloquially referred to as “hybrid teaching”), which presented an individual new to the teaching field and working with foreign school children directly. This opportunity allowed for the development of a greater understanding of international teaching dynamics and of how educators adapt to this context in a foreign country. Several pertinent thoughts that arose in my mind were (a) whether this was a worthy teaching system and what its chances were of producing laudable and successful candidates; and (b) whether the students could attain and satisfy a high level of comprehension and learning and reach their end destinations, and what those destinations would be.

The teaching assistants assisted with translating the interview data obtained from Kyrgyz-speaking and Russian-speaking teachers. In addition, assistants would support the understanding and analysis of data provided by the school’s non-English-speaking staff. These interviewees were primarily sourced from the other schools identified for research activities, with whom unstructured discussions were held to ensure that the data presented a detailed sense of the broader context of English-language teaching. These other schools provided additional, on-the-ground data identifying the broader international experiences. These events included discussions with the heads of schools to understand their backgrounds and the English-medium teaching dynamics in the institutions.

3.4 Sampling strategy

The study used purposeful sampling because of the limited resources available to the researcher as a doctoral research candidate. According to Stratton (2024: 121), “[p]urposeful sampling is advantageous because it requires less resources and time than most traditional research methods”. Purposeful sampling was thus the perfect strategy given the constraints of the study. The sampling was subjective and therefore could not be representative of a target population due to unmeasurable sampling errors and biases. As such, the findings from this study are not generalisable but provide insights on international schools that necessitate further research. It is important to read the findings from this study in context.

The first research site, School A, had roughly 500 pupils, whereas School B accommodated about 800 learners. Data collection comprised 22 coded interviews and focus group discussions involving 34 participants. Translation support was provided for local teachers with minimal English proficiency or those who spoke only their native language.

Teacher assistants, who graduated at the Kyrgyz Republic’s national universities, provided overall student support and language translations in English-speaking lessons. The local teachers became critical to the class environment, especially at the primary level, as they acted as translators in the classroom setting and also provided basic care to the children by accompanying them during meal or other break times. These teacher assistants were the foundation in giving the background details on international teaching from a local perspective, and on how local Kyrgyz teachers perceived it. These educators were receiving a full-time salary from the international school and were employed as local teachers. The teachers played a significant role in explaining their educational background and the reasons why they had decided to join private schools instead of public institutions.

The Department of Science Education played a vital role in administering the overall schooling experience in Kyrgyzstan and was responsible for implementing national policies. The department was approached to conduct interviews, which resulted in a challenge due to

government officials being reluctant to respond. After various emails a response was provided, with one letter explaining Kyrgyzstan's general approach to education and that certain educational institutions had been accredited to represent the government in providing answers about teaching methods in the country. The study required collaboration with other international teachers, who had experienced the same positives and negatives while attempting to make a career out of a system that seemed to change continuously. It therefore required me to have conversations with individuals who had worked in education for many years, including local and foreign teachers. The role-players in international teaching are diverse and take on different positions, including school administrators, coordinators, lawyers and teachers. This is in addition to the government, parents and external organisations, who influence the credibility of the international schools.

The research undertook to study the details of international teaching in a non-English-speaking country with the aim of determining if this model had been successful. While living in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, I had an opportunity to work with people from the country, speak to parents, school administrators and government officials about the topic of English as a cultural language and a mechanism of upward economic mobility. The ability to speak English was taken as a serious matter in the country, especially by individuals who lived in the city areas but also in some instances the agricultural regions. The drive to speak English came from various sources—from older generations who wanted their children and grandchildren to have more diverse opportunities outside of the country, from individuals who saw English as a language of freedom, and from people who wanted study or work in an English-speaking country.

3.5 Research site

Bishkek is divided between the new and modern in the west of the city and, in the east, the older, Soviet-era buildings. Figure 1 depicts the layout of the city, showing increased development in the north-west. During informal conversations with long-term teachers and residents, it was learnt that the rise in development had occurred only in the last five years, encompassing the expansion of parks, new homes, apartments, schools and government buildings. Many of these areas had buildings, but the infrastructure had not yet been completed, for example certain accessways, residential streets and parking areas.

Figure 1 shows the layout of the capital city. School A has two campuses—one in the west and one in the east—while School B is located in the western part of the city. These locations were chosen to align with the residential and work patterns of parents, typically found in upper-class to middle-class areas or near embassies, government offices, universities, and colleges. This provides an essential indication of how the school bodies and parents had decided on the best locations of these schools.

School A primary and secondary school provided access to learners from Grades 1 to 12. However, the new eastern campus only accommodated students up to Grade 11 aligned with the license issued to them by the Kyrgyz Government.

School B differentiated since they allowed Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education in English-medium teaching but also added an extra branch presenting subjects in Russian only. The distinct Russian schooling branch provided access to teaching methodologies that arrived from the past education system and focused on mathematics, science, literature and history mostly.

The references to students and learners interchangeably at the selected schools refer to individuals who attend classes at the schools and regularly used at the selected international schools. The concepts adopted by the Cambridge learning assessment curriculum became preferred references by administration and educators in the international schools.

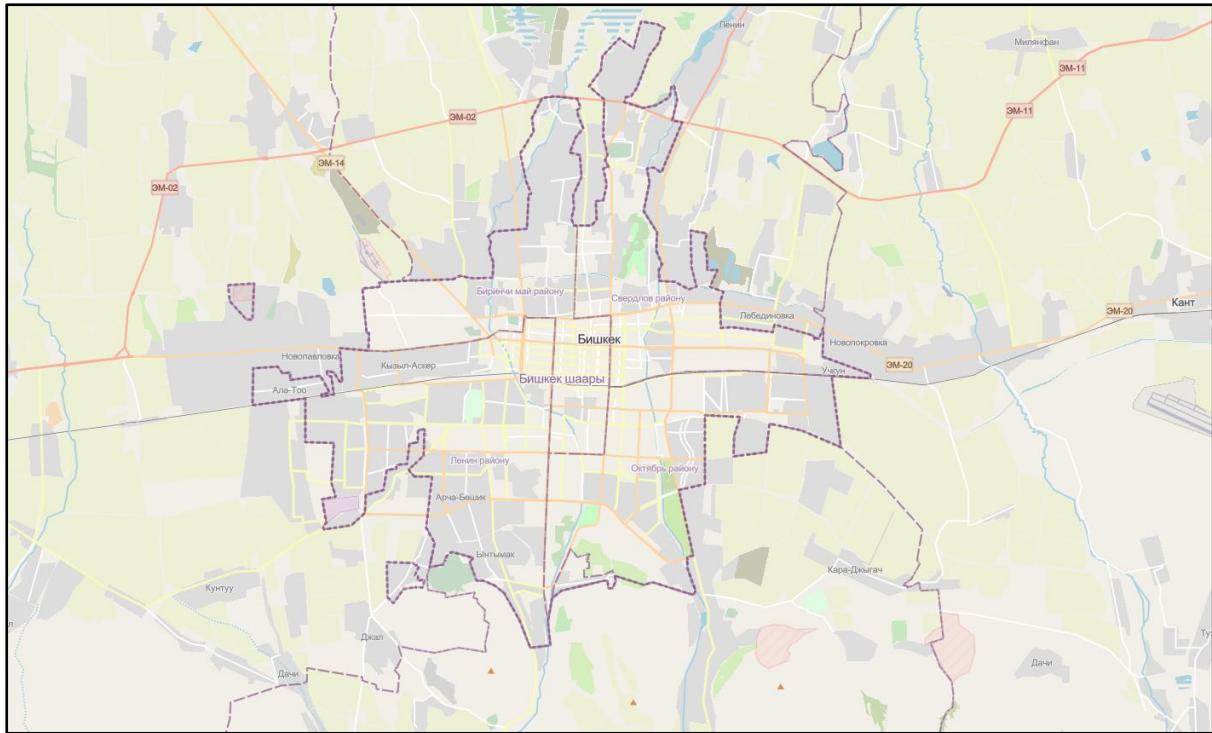


Figure 1: Bishkek, capital of the Kyrgyz Republic (ArcGIS Explorer, 2025)

It was critical to have an overview of the city to explain the in-situ environment in which the international schools were operating. Figure 2 provides a satellite view of the city to complement Figure 1. The rapid increase in high-rise buildings, as shown in Figure 3, had raised concerns among Kyrgyzstan residents about property costs. While the citizens were keen to demonstrate their independence from historical influences, they also expressed apprehension about the sharp increase in urban development and the associated services provided. Electricity blackouts had begun in the city, alongside the rise in waste at the new apartment blocks.

Figure 3 shows the new high-rise buildings in the background, in comparison with the single homes or lower-level buildings in the foreground. Rental accommodation costs had increased, which did not align with the average salaries paid to people from Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, the high-end rentals were paid by foreigners or citizens of the country who had businesses that operated internationally. Rental was, in most cases, paid for by the private schools in Bishkek, but incidents have been identified where teachers had been asked to pay rent themselves. The outskirts of the city remained predominantly agricultural, with a focus on small-scale farming and a reliance on the land for food. The member of one family informed me of the following:

“Most of our parents or grandparents have homes in the villages. It is normal for us to visit the villages even over a weekend.”

In the city areas, after the break-up of the USSR, residents mentioned that they had received the older apartments as a “gift” from the Soviet government. They explained that many people relied on their properties to gain additional funds and supplement their income. Inequality was noticeable in Bishkek, with high-end and low-end residents living within a short distance from each other. Mass protests over similar disparities were experienced in 2005 and 2010, which led to the fall of political regimes (Sullivan, 2021).

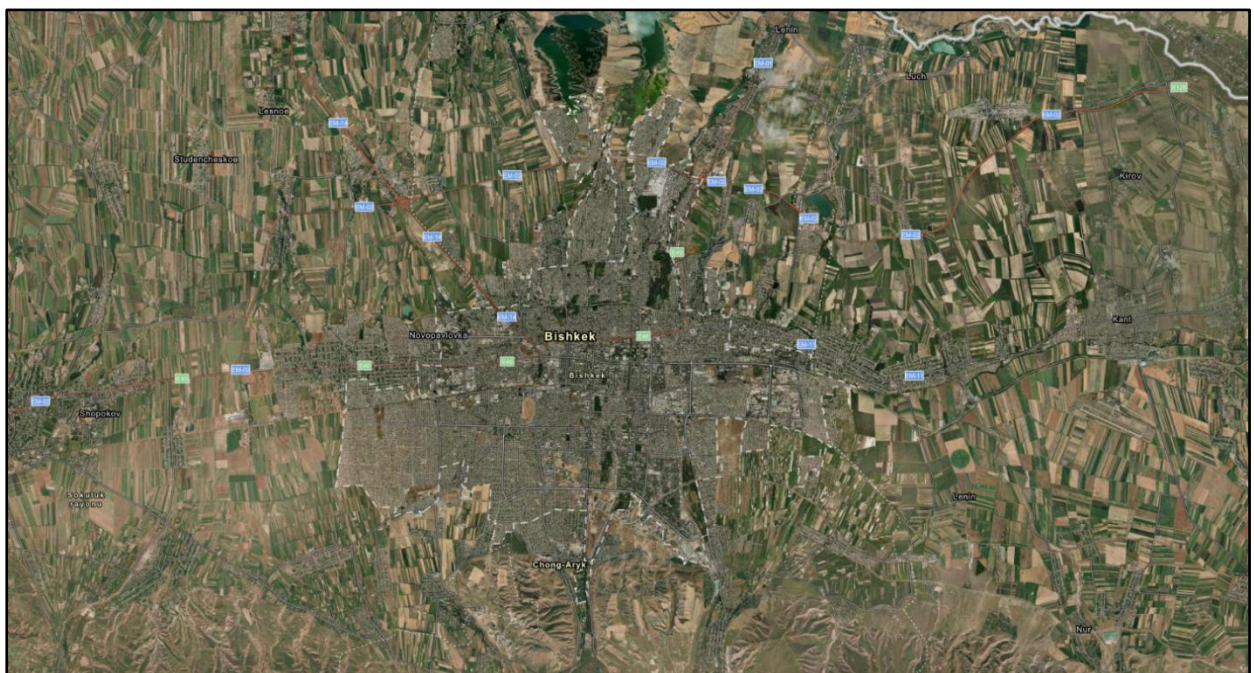


Figure 2: Aerial photo of Bishkek
(ArcGIS Explorer, 2025)



Figure 3: New high-rise buildings in the background
(Photo by Elize Becker, 2024)



Figure 4: New Park on the east of Bishkek

(Photo by Elize Becker, 2024)

The parks in Bishkek reflect a contrast between historical and modern designs. Older parks, developed linearly around water channels, feature Soviet symbolism and names. Newer parks, however, focus on central grass areas, coffee shops and playgrounds. Figure 4 shows a park near an international school, a new shopping centre and various embassies. Students at these schools regularly use these parks, contributing to their understanding of both their current city and its history.

The city of Bishkek reflects a contrast between the Soviet past and the modern present, with this outlook playing a key role in shaping the environment of international schools. Located at the foothills of the Tian Shan mountain range, the city has attracted foreign teachers eager to explore the country's natural benefits alongside educational opportunities.



Figure 5: Outlook of the city of Bishkek

(Photo by Elize Becker, 2024)

3.6 Ethical considerations

As part of the research methodology, various ethical factors had to be considered to ensure that the research aligned with the ethics application submitted. The ethical clearance certificate from the University of South Africa was applied for, and the number associated with this certificate is 31698182_CRECHS_2023. The research field is in the primary and secondary education environment involving school children ages 5 to 18, making it sensitive. Consequently, the research focused on interviewing adults exclusively, ensuring that learners were omitted. The study excluded children as informants and ensured that all interviewees were authorised to share information. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the seniority of the researcher in the department could have influenced the informants. Therefore, it became critical that the interviewees should feel comfortable during the interview sessions.

Experiences with the older teachers were different because of their age and because they had a better understanding of the research objectives. The older teachers' past experiences assisted them in providing more detailed insight into the Kyrgyz education system. Younger staff were

more reluctant to share their viewpoints about the current teaching environment and focused more on their own dreams for the future. This could reflect nervousness about sharing information they thought might get them in trouble with the administration. The ethical approach included connecting with officials from the government, which was undertaken by means of a formal email correspondence. One of their government officials also responded to a formal letter. The ethical approach in this case had to be taken seriously, because the notion of “everyone knows each other” exists in a small country and capital city like Bishkek. Local teachers and school administrators would know someone in the Ministry of Science and Education, or they would have a family member working for the government. As described in the background chapter, Kyrgyzstan still followed a Soviet-aligned approach to many governmental procedures, and staff knew they needed permission to share information. This approach played a key role in identifying informants who could assist in sharing information about primary and secondary education models in Kyrgyzstan.

One of the aspects taken into consideration was the safety of the researcher because of the sensitivity of the education sector in Kyrgyzstan. The Ministry of Science and Education had opposed certain comments made about education in the country, primarily directed at private schools in Bishkek. Incidents of educators who had experienced attacks because of their political viewpoints had occurred. The Kyrgyz government had regularly declared that it would not be told how to manage education in its country. To be mindful of the safety concerns, questions were formulated in a manner that would exclude political viewpoints. School A’s affiliations with the Sapat network were considered because they were the institution’s founders. The research took into consideration that the Sapat network a Turkish founded educational institution carried a political nuance and received criticism about its involvement in political plots. For this reason, research conducted at the institution had to be carefully managed without implying any involvement or interest in past political events.

3.7 Limitations

Limitations were faced during the study that affected the amount of data collected, despite having permission to conduct research at Schools A and B. One of the issues experienced included the language differences between the interviewer and the interviewees. The local teachers at the schools had a moderate level of English understanding, especially those who

taught Kyrgyz and Russian literature, including history. These teachers spoke only the local languages, so a translator was needed to explain my questions to them. The study mainly focused on international teachers, but understanding the local context was essential to provide background information on how international teaching had developed in the country.

Another limitation is the sensitivity aligned with the school environment, and the focus remained to exclude children from the research interviews. The focus would stay with understanding the international teacher experience in the classroom from an educator point of view. The change in roles of educators between junior to senior positions continued to influence the freedom expressed by the interviewees. The junior educators were aware of the differences in professional rank between us and I expect they would have given answers that they thought were the ‘right’ answers. To avoid the impact of these normative expectations, informal conversations were facilitated in communal areas, including the teachers’ room and during coffee breaks. Given the generally relaxed rapport I maintained with junior teachers, which I viewed as conducive to collaborative practice, I used these interactions to emphasise mutual information sharing.

Lastly, a critical challenge faced was identifying a person in the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education and Science who was prepared to share their insights into how they perceived international teaching and the levels of support they provided. This proved to be very challenging—besides a letter, no official was prepared to take part in a formal or informal interview. This consequently limited the information the research study hoped to obtain at a government level. The scheduling of interviews happened in between classes, which provided limited time for the teachers to share additional experiences. Depending on the availability of teachers, the research study adapted and collected more data after school or when educators felt more relaxed. Teachers remained cooperative and made time available during free lessons, break times and lunch times to answer questions.

3.8 Field experiences

The research setting in the schools, teachers’ rooms, classrooms, playgrounds and shared eating areas provided opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of the background of international teaching in Bishkek and the rest of the country. While English-medium teaching success rates

in Kyrgyzstan were a primary focus, topics like local salaries and lifestyles also offered insight into relationships between foreign and local teachers. The local teachers' responses to questions were influenced by their perceptions of the outside world, particularly the Americanisation approach and their aspirations to one day teach in the so-called developed world. Therefore, the reference to "Americanisation" presents a local perception of how people in the Americas live and work. The teachers' worldview of the Americas influenced their teaching methods and the decisions they made in their career development. This could quickly make their responses topsy-turvy, by mingling comments on how they experienced English-medium teaching and what they hoped to achieve. To prevent incorrect data from being recorded, it was critical to compare interviewees' responses tailored to what they believed interviewers wanted with other interview data and academically published articles during the study. This aligned with the aim of achieving objectivity and consistency during the fieldwork.

The Soviet influence, the Turkish involvement in the setup of the schools, and the multicultural background of the schools, with stories told by local teachers, could quickly combine into a seemingly fictional tale without any objective evidence. Therefore, it became critical to constantly verify the interview responses and prevent research from recording data without sufficient evidence. As mentioned by Jakimovska (2021: 58), "the challenge of losing common sense is something ethnographers must deal with". Especially responses focused on the Soviet past and the Turkish influence, which remained two critical topics during the study, had to be cross-checked.

The changing of facts into fiction remained a constant threat during the recording of the interview data and the notes made during my participation in various school functions. The education sector in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan attracts a lot of attention from the media and easily influences the objectivity of the research data (BBC Monitoring, 2022). It became critical to take note of the dynamics of the education sector and the viewpoint of local teachers to develop an expectation of how they may respond to interview questions. Foreign and local teaching required long working hours, which needed to be taken into consideration when scheduling the interviews. Local teachers provided more personal support that influenced their availability to take part in interviews, which happened during break times.

Conversely, local teachers also attempted to show how Kyrgyzstan had grown and developed in the education sector. Although they experienced various difficulties, they were also wary of displaying too many negative data points about their experiences working as English-medium teachers in the Republic. In addition, they were aware of their positions and worried that an imaginary group of politicians might target them. The reasons for individuals teaching in Central Asia also varied, depending on the countries they originated from. In some instances, the replies would be based on survival and the ability to look after their families back home, while others were more about exploring and attempting to travel while working. The research methodology had to consider the different backgrounds of the teachers, financial situations and teacher qualifications. Some countries are more relaxed with the required teacher qualifications for foreign teachers than others. This influenced educators' ability to be accepted at Schools A and B or their decision to maintain working in Kyrgyzstan or leave for other destinations. The acceptance of teachers from different countries formed part of the research study, and understanding the criteria set by the school administration aligned with the parent expectations.

Research also focused on teachers' ability to stay in the country for a longer than two years that the work permits typically would allow for, which could increase the success of teaching. This required honest answers from educators without trying to sound for or against teaching, because the research looked for the key events that influenced the daily operations of English-medium teaching. Research had to take into consideration that several teachers had collected experiences in other parts of world before they arrived in Kyrgyzstan. This had influenced their viewpoints on English-medium teaching and the teaching methods they were exposed to. Consequently, the answers submitted by the teachers had to be considered in the light of their past experiences and perspectives created in other locations.

3.9 Autoethnography as a method

An autoethnographic account was critical in the study in addition to the qualitative methods outlined in the chapter. Autoethnography became the key research method I used. Adams, Ellis and Jones (2017: 3) argue that “[a]utoethnographers offer accounts of personal experience to complement, or fill gaps in, existing research”. As such, autoethnography informed data collection and analysis. The write-up process was the critical component of the study as the voices of participant were privileged. These voices were interrogated using the researcher's

personal experiences and autoethnography approach to make sense of the findings. I was not aware of this method when I started my field of study; it was introduced to me by supervisor as I was narrating my field experiences to her. Learning about autoethnography was a gamechanger, because it afforded me an opportunity to reflect better while I was asking questions and to make my interest clearer to myself. Using autoethnography as a method forced me to go back to my upbringing and confront my belief system, and this was transformative. It is this transformation that enabled me to locate the study within the global matrix of power.

More saliently, understanding autoethnography entails locating it within ethnography, which is about the representation of research findings. Autoethnography thus becomes critical because it does not hide the researcher's views and beliefs, and the researcher makes a disclaimer upfront about the lens they will use. A more compelling reason to choose autoethnography as one of the methodological approaches for this study was my role as a teacher of English in an international school. I believe that my experience guided the study immensely in reading and observing what might be understood as mundane. Given the focus on personal experience, autoethnographers also describe moments of everyday experience that cannot be captured through more traditional research methods (Adams et al., 2017). These will be reflected in the analysis section.

Accordingly, using autoethnography as one of the research methods meant that my experiences became part and parcel of the data collection. Data collection was not separate from my everyday experiences. Even when I was not paying attention, these experiences were recollected when I conducted interviews or participant observation. When I asked follow-up questions, for example, or reflected on the day, I would ask myself why certain questions seemed important. In doing so, I exposed myself to my cultural beliefs and personal experiences that I had never thought I had. For example, in one of the focus group discussions with the local teachers I asked the group why English was so important in Bishkek considering that their direct neighbouring countries were not English-speaking countries. One of the participants replied by saying, "clearly it is not for those countries". This response exposed me to my naivety in having taken for granted that I was also a migrant because I wanted to expand my horizons. But somehow I had forgotten that probably everyone wanted the same, and English had afforded me the possibility. It is this experience that reminded me of the privilege I had and oftentimes had taken for granted. At that moment I realised that I was living the

dream of the children I was teaching. This changed me, as I wanted to contribute meaningfully not from a privileged space but from using my existence to reflect and dissect the experiences of the people of Bishkek. Hence the auto-ethnography.

The auto-ethnography approach provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my position within a country that is totally different from my own. This relates to the language I speak, the food I eat, the friends I have and the way I live my daily routine. These differences in lifestyle became more evident as a teacher who temporarily lives in Kyrgyzstan who approached daily life and schooling in different ways than I am used to. Subsequently the idea of teaching being a lifestyle, a social event and community gathering instead of having it as a workplace was new to me and it took time to understand the concept of education in a country that is community instead of individual focused.

Auto-ethnography allows for a holistic approach by which all senses contribute to the study. This is the point Adams et al. (2017: 4) make when they argue: “Doing auto-ethnographic fieldwork allows what we see, hear, think, and feel to become part of the field.” This is supported by Adams and Herrmann (2023), who argue that in auto-ethnography the author’s experience is to be prioritised—” used, reflected on, and theorized throughout a manuscript” (Adams & Herrmann, 2023: 2). In other words, the researcher could use herself as a research tool to collect, analyse and write graphically about the study. This moves away from the idea of objectivity but recognises that even from that position one is implicated. This was more pronounced for me because the study was conceptualised on the basis of personal experiences as a teacher in international schools. The selected international schools in Kyrgyzstan are licensed by the Ministry of Education and Science to teach subjects in English. However, this excludes Kyrgyz and Russian literature and history subjects who are required as part of the Kyrgyz government’s approach to support enhancement of the local culture. As such, my “mind, body, instincts and intuitions, interests, emotions, experiences, perspectives, values and beliefs, and everything else [made me] a one-of-a-kind research instrument” (Adam & Herrmann, 2023: 4). So, the study is personal but with significant contribution to the field of anthropology.

As a teacher, I was often invited to family dinners hosted by mothers who spoke their native language only. A local teacher would usually accompany me to translate and also show me the

traditional practices in terms of praying, eating or sitting. Because these gatherings were informal, my inability to understand the native language sometimes became a light-hearted point of humour, and the differences between my traditions and theirs opened natural opportunities to exchange stories about our cultures and perspectives.

Over time, I developed basic understanding of Russian that allowed me to ask for essentials for example milk, bread, ask for a taxi or where is the doctor. However, a portion of the community, spoke only Kyrgyz or Turkish depending on their country origins. Over time I became used to hearing and being surrounded by people who speak diverse languages, even if I could not understand everything being said. Repeated words and phrases gradually became familiar, allowing me to develop a sense of the topics being discussed.

Although I am a white South African with a Christian background and accustomed to praying before meals, while the Kyrgyz and Turkish communities pray after eating, these differences never created discomfort during home visits. Since education was seen as a community-centred responsibility, I was expected to honour parents' invitations to visit their homes. At times I felt tired and, on a personal level, did not always see the necessity of home visits, yet I understood their cultural significance and wanted to show respect to the communities I worked with.

Using auto-ethnography, it became critical to collect data in a format where individuals would share knowledge in a relaxed way. This became significant as participants alluded to the fact that the persistence of low-level autocratic practices in the country often makes them hesitant to express their views. Also, individuals were allowed to share their teaching experiences collected before and after the end of the Soviet Union. Even the younger teachers who did not work during the Soviet past had been influenced by their parents or other family members. They developed a particular viewpoint, which formed part of the conversations during the interviews. Using myself as one of the research tools played a pivotal role in ensuring that participants were at ease with the study.

3.10 Analysis strategy

The study used grounded theory as an analysis strategy. Priya (2016) argues that grounded theory became popular when researchers needed to focus on generating a theory that derived

from a process or interaction between participants. Research questions were answered by collecting and analysing qualitative as well as quantitative data (Creamer, 2021). The questions focused on where people originated from, where they studied, and which places and years they worked at various institutions. Data that would reflect teachers' viewpoints of English-medium teaching formed part of the data. How anthropological knowledge is produced is explained further by Ingold (2017: 24):

I believe we must demand the right to speak with voices of our own, and to say what *we* think on the basis of *our* inquiries, regardless of whether it accords with the thinking of our interlocutors. We may have learned from what they have told us, but as anthropologists rather than ethnographers it is not our job to reflect it. Just like practitioners of any other discipline, we must be ready to speak with our own voices and not hide behind the voices of others.

One way of thinking about grounded theory is as offering the ability to use a multilayer method of research focusing on macro, meso and micro levels (Creamer, 2021). Grounded theory has become a popular method to conduct qualitative research, especially in the social sciences (White & Cooper, 2022). Although grounded theory has become popular, the method has also received criticism from theorists concerning its methodology, epistemology, data collection and analysis approach (Priya, 2016). Because research is undertaken to find the theory instead of starting with an existing theory, grounded theory has presented an open-ended approach. Grounded theory offers an alternative to the social sciences for developing initial research questions, collecting information and allowing the theory to emerge from the data collected (White & Cooper, 2022). Although structured and unstructured questionnaires played a key role in my research methodology, the participant observation component developed an on-the-ground understanding of foreign teaching experiences, for example perceptions of international teaching in multiple countries.

Grounded theory is a response to concerns about using deductive theories while forcing data into an existing theory (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). In other words, grounded theory aims to find theory from the data collected rather than fitting data into the already existing theory. This means that grounded theory goes beyond just using a constant comparative analysis: “part of this approach formed part of the process and the ability to answer questions if the data present valid information aligned with the proposed theory” (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012:

170). It is in this context that themes and arguments developed in the thesis were informed by data and not distilled from already existing theories. The themes developed here are thus a direct result of the research experiences.

Following the grounded theory approach required significant efforts to observe and record the daily classroom routines, the typical practices teachers became involved in, and the relationships between teachers. It also required recording the relationships between the foreign and the local teachers and how they reacted towards each other. For example, local teachers had a perception that foreign teachers worked less than they did, which created conflict between the educators. Conflict would not necessarily be in the form of a verbal argument but could take the form of cold silence or ignoring of each other. The journal notes continued to highlight the themes identified that became the basis of the thesis. These have been analysed in detail to understand the origin of the behavioural patterns concerned. To analyse the field notes that were captured throughout, the study themes were highlighted manually and checked by use of Atlas.ti.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the research methodology used to collect data during the field study, aligned with the best approach required to obtain ethnographic data. It has explained the role of qualitative data, participant observations, autoethnography and the interviews undertaken to collect the necessary data. It has further explained the nuanced value of the interviews and the challenges and limitations associated with the cultural and language differences evident in the country. Key to this chapter has been the research site, because it gives the historical context for the data collected. The chapter has thus presented the research site to give a reader a clear picture of the place. The chapter moved on to discuss ethical considerations with regard to participants' protection, the safety of the researcher, which was critical, and the political dynamics that could potentially have influenced the collection of the research data. The chapter concluded by discussing the analysis strategy that enabled themes to be developed from the data collected. These themes are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines data from the field that ground the argument of the thesis. It begins by presenting the participants and the context of the views articulated in the data. Data collected using Google Drive show the profile of participants in terms of country of origin and work experience in international teaching and English teaching. Data collected using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions are organised into themes informed by the research question. As this research used an autoethnographic approach, the impressions of the researcher are also presented as a lens used in the analysis section. The chapter concludes by emphasising the need to read the data in context to avoid overgeneralisation and to expose nuances in the experience of international schools and the understanding of English as an international language.

4.2 Profile of the participants

The study involved interaction with diverse stakeholders to obtain a holistic answer to the research question. The main group of participants represented international teachers and local educators to develop both a global and a local understanding of education in Kyrgyzstan. The role of non-teaching staff informed the viewpoints of administrators and their career backgrounds. Even though the key question focused on teaching English, educators were teaching different subjects, for example mathematics or science, which also formed part of the research study.

4.2.1 Teaching and non-teaching staff interviewed

Table 1 indicates the teachers and administrators who formed part of the study, their ages, subjects and school levels for which they were responsible.

Table 1: Teaching staff interviewed

Code	Gender	Age	Teaching subject	School level
E	Male	65	English and Business Economics	High School
G	Male	65	English	Middle and High School
AD	Male	60	English	Middle and High School
J	Male	35	English and Maths	Middle School
AE	Male	25	English	Middle School
AC	Female	30	Maths and Biology	Primary and Middle School
H	Female	30	English	Primary and Middle School
K	Female	34	English	Primary and Middle School
I	Male	45	English and Science	Middle School
AB	Male	50	Science and Biology	High School
AD	Male	45	Science and Biology	Middle and High School
BG	Female	35	Science and Maths	Middle and High School
BF	Male	45	Science	Middle and High School
AA	Female	27	English	Primary and Middle School
L	Female	30	English	Middle School
BE	Male	34	English and Physical Education	Primary, Middle and High School
BD	Male	35	Global Perspectives and Mathematics	Middle School
AC	Female	37	English and Mathematics	Middle and High School

Table 2 identifies characteristics of non-teaching staff who were interviewed.

Table 2: Non-teaching staff interviewed

Code	Gender	Age	Role
BB	F	35	Administrator
BC	F	42	Administrator
BD	M	33	Administrator
G	F	Unknown	Kyrgyz Ministry of Education and Science

4.2.2 Focus group discussions and unstructured and structured interviews

This section presents data from two focus group discussions (FGDs) and from unstructured and structured interviews. These interactions allowed as many participants as possible to contribute to the research. I need to state that the focus group discussions and interviews aligned with the ethics clearance certificate. I labelled the focus group discussions A and B. FGD A was conducted with international and local educators. The main themes from this FGD are:

- Challenges of the emphasis on English
- Middle-class privileges
- Politics of globalisation and internationalisation

FGD B was conducted with the school administrators, focusing on international teaching methodologies. The discussions included information from both schools, using both English and Russian to ensure that all teachers understood the reasons behind the research. These focus group discussions provide insight into the status of international teaching between May 2023 and August 2023. The themes from FGD B included:

- Impact of inequalities
- False promises of English
- Contextual realities of the people of Bishek

The structured interviews were conducted over a period of six months, from August 2023 to January 2024. The research intention was to develop a relaxed participatory approach, and therefore the asking of questions varied according to each participant's response manner. Themes were derived from the structured interviews through foregrounding the participants' responses and substantiating data collected. These themes are substantiated with data from sections 4.3 to 4.6 to reflect the voices of the participants.

4.2.3 Data from Google Drive questionnaire

The initial thinking in creating a Google questionnaire arose from the limited availability of teachers and the need to provide a means for individuals to respond in their free time. The outcome, although limited, provides an insight into the teachers' country representation and the timeframes of their commitment to international schools. To analyse the responses, I used

Google Analytics and have developed a series of graphs to provide insight into the responses. After the questionnaire was sent to 29 individuals, only 7 formally responded, mostly educators from Kyrgyzstan. Responses show that of the teachers with more than five years of experience, less than 30% spoke English as a native language. Most teachers had worked for two years at the schools before changing to take a position at another institution; and more than 85% of the educators indicated employment at other schools in Kyrgyzstan or other countries.

Which country are you from?

7 responses

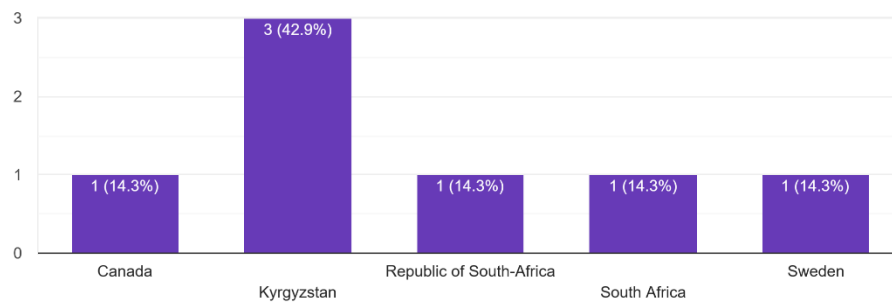


Figure 6: Country of origin

How long have you been teaching English or educating in the English language?

7 responses



Figure 7: Length of teaching experience

Are you a native English speaker?
7 responses

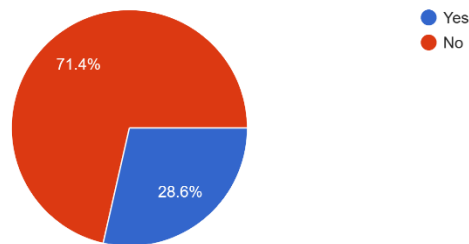


Figure 8: Native versus non-native speakers

How long have you worked at the current school?
7 responses

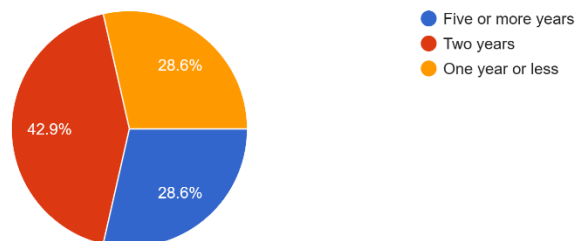


Figure 9: Employment length at school

How long have you worked at other schools?
7 responses

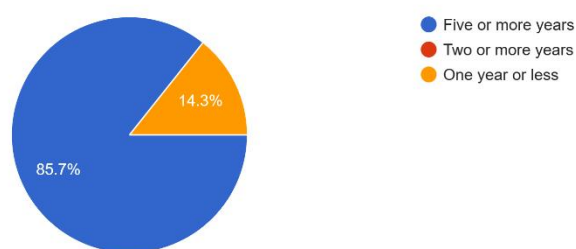


Figure 10: Previous international school experience

Responses to the questionnaire assisted in profiling the participants so that I could read the interviews and focus group discussions in context. According to the statistics, the respondents originated from Canada, Sweden and South Africa. South Africa reflects two separate responses because of the different renderings of the country's name.

One challenge in teaching English to non-English speakers is the complexity of English grammar and the wide range of vocabulary, making it difficult for learners to grasp all the nuances. Additionally, overcoming pronunciation barriers and adapting to different accents can be challenging.

4.3 Teaching framework

Themes identified here arise from the collected data, gathered using different tools of data collection and interviewing different stakeholders. One of the main themes coming from the data was the teaching framework in Bishkek that many participants argued was informed by international standards, because the whole point was to ensure that students would be accepted into the international universities. To articulate this, one of the government officials said:

“The international schools in Bishkek work within the IB or Cambridge International Assessment frameworks. Other accreditations follow, for example, the British Council or Council for British International Schools. International Schools use these accreditations to require [acquire] a level of credibility.”

This means that the standards for the international schools were set externally, as the expectation was that students had to meet the standards required by the international universities. However, these international standards were not met without resistance from local teachers, as one participant from FGD B said:

“In some instances, the Russian medium schools do not support the international sections for a variety of reasons. Some of the complaints by the Russian-speaking teachers relate to the fact that they feel the international curriculums are too easy.”

While international education was appealing to the parents, the educators felt the international standards were not great. This was attributed to the emphasis on English rather than education itself. There were certain positive aspects of the international school’s teaching framework. For example, the ability to adapt formed part of the international schools’ criteria, according to one of the administrators. Informal discussions with the head of school revealed their expectation that teachers from abroad should adapt to the host country and become used to the different cultures. The school administrator from School B explained this as follows:

“In terms of age groups, the younger foreign teachers seem more relaxed, adapting to a more fluent environment, consisting of a relaxed and less strict teaching style. Older expat teachers complain about the new teaching methodologies recommended by the schools and this results in conflict situations at times.”

Participant BB, an administrator, said:

“Teaching adults to speak English is less stressful and I decided working in school administration is better for me.”

Although administrators offered teaching experience, they preferred to work as non-teaching staff because it was less stressful. These discussions about the stress of teaching frequently surfaced in the focus group discussions and participant interviews. In the focus group discussion that had both older and younger international teachers, the following responses provided an insight into their view of international teaching:

“Senior teachers indicate that they are at a stage in their career where they are not able to accept complex student behaviours and classroom difficulties anymore. They are at the end of their career and not concerned about student discipline as long as they can deliver the classes.”

Clearly, age had an impact on the implementation of the teaching framework because it came with experience.

One of the main questions I asked in the FGD with the international teachers was: Why did you decide to teach in international schools? This question received varying responses ranging from changing career path to exploring the world. But some teachers' responses indicated that they wanted to contribute to the world. Research indicates that some teachers would arrive from a successful non-teaching career and decide to become involved in part-time education to remain economically active. This profile included teachers who had come out of retirement to continue working but in a different economic sector.

Another question was: What are the challenges you encounter from teaching in the international school? One participant in FGD A said:

“I offer business consultancy experience of more than 20 years and decided to take a break from the financial world and join the education field. Teaching is a mentally tiring job and the student discipline makes it harder. In addition, salaries are not enough and therefore it may not be the best choice to take part in teaching. A career change seems more difficult than expected.”

While teaching internationally offered a career change, it seems that it came with its own challenges, so it was not as easy as some international teachers might have thought. However, the fact that international teachers always returned, even though sometimes they would change school, meant that the opportunities outweighed those challenges. Also, the challenges varied according to the historical background of the teachers in terms of their personal financial situations and career preferences.

4.3.1 *Emphasis on English and its challenges*

One of the reasons international teachers obtained an opportunity to teach in an international school was their proficiency in English. International schools emphasised English because, according to participants, it opened a window to the international world. One participant from FGD B said:

“English teaching at the international level seems to link clearly with career guidance and future life expectations. The classroom practices align with the ability to speak, listen and write English but also to understand the students’ long-term objectives. Teachers are expected to guide students not only on the English-speaking aspect but also on the ability to use this as part of future success planning.”

The international teachers were thus expected to ensure that their students were articulate in English beyond the classroom. This is the point one of the school administrations regularly explained to me. Teaching had to stretch beyond the classroom, and international teachers needed to understand that this would be a full-time contribution to the overall health of students. This expectation was difficult for international teachers, however, as one participant from FGD B said:

“Challenges related to communication associated with different languages remain an issue. For example, the switch between the use of English and Russian creates a diversity of challenges. This relates to the Cyrillic used in Russian versus the Latin alphabet in English. In

Russian the letter “c” stands for “s.” The outcome of this resulted in many spelling mistakes by local teachers and students. For example, the spelling of “stop” as “ctop” or “soap” as “coap.” Direct translation from Russian to English created a diversity of spelling mistakes, for example “geography” spelled as “geogafy” originating from a direct translation from the Russian “География.”

Teaching English was therefore difficult because the English teachers needed to correct the local teachers, which created tensions. Secondary to this was the tension between local teachers and international teachers. It is unclear what the source of the tension was, but interviewees expressed frustrations and the feeling of being excluded during teacher meetings. This was stated by local teachers in the teachers’ room. For example: *“Why do we have local teacher meetings on Saturdays exclusive of international staff?”* At the secondary level, international schools appointed more local teachers with the idea that students were conversant in English already. No teaching assistants were available to translate during parent–teacher meetings. Administration attempted to pair foreign teachers with local educators in the event that translations would be required during the meetings. In the event that local teachers were not available, the students themselves would translate, or any locally available person in the building. Foreign teachers relied on translation programmes on their phones at times.

Without a doubt, culture plays a pivotal role in education. As an introduction, international teachers had been introduced to the history and culture of the country, as one teacher in FGD B explained:

“Foreign teachers receive opportunities to visit cultural events, ceremonies, and visitations to local families. Local teachers join in during these events to act as translators between the educators and the hosts.”

It is therefore important to make sure that international teachers of English do not impose its culture on the local inhabitants but are exposed to the local culture to avoid unnecessary conflicts. Most international teachers come from different countries with different cultures. What needs to be avoided is the exoticisation of the local culture by international teachers. The small size of the country makes people wonder why educators decide to travel to Kyrgyzstan, one teacher said.

Administration officials explained their happiness with international teachers visiting their country and asked why people decided to work there. For them, Kyrgyzstan was a small country with limited resources, and they asked why educators did not travel to other, larger countries, for example China. For many local people, the small size of the country made them wonder why foreigners were interested in visiting them.

This shows that even the schools were aware that the educators should consider the culture of the place as part and parcel of education, although they expected the institutions to show a globalised approach. The question remains whether the use of the English language teaching was making a real difference in the future career planning of students and educators and their ability to form part of the global employment world.

4.4 Globalisation and internationalisation

The findings on globalisation and internationalisation were drawn largely from interviews with teachers. These interviews focused on the underlying reasons why individuals perceive English as a means of accessing global opportunities, particularly opportunities for higher education and employment that are regarded as international. In this context, English is understood not simply as a language of communication, but as a gateway to universities and career pathways that are seen as available primarily to those who can speak it.

“International schools in Asia regularly appoint educators from the Philippines because of their elevated level of English use capability and their exposure to the US English because of their historical ties with the country. They are believed to be hardworking people and prepared to work for a lessor salary than educators from the US, UK, or Europe.”

This was presented to challenge the trend in Kyrgyzstan, where the preference is for teachers from the UK and America. Local teachers also highlighted the element of exploitation they thought was prevalent in that those who could speak English but were not from the USA and UK would receive less favourable treatment from the administration in terms of salary package and workload. What is even more intriguing is that according to the teachers in the focus group, international schools would pay foreign teachers in dollars and local teachers in the local Kyrgyz som. A significant difference is clear between the different pay scales, and this contributed to the frustrations that local teachers talked about. In addition to this, the schools

would employ foreign teachers along with teaching assistants, which made the costs of teaching significantly higher.

Clearly, there was a discrepancy when it came to the treatment of foreign teachers versus local teachers, which could elevate the animosity between them. According to participants in the informal conversations, the main assumption was that schools preferred native English-speaking educators from the US and UK to ensure an elevated level of English teaching and accents.

However, this preference seemed to create problems for the learners, because in the parents' meeting I attended, parents raised concerns about English accents coming from the UK, which made it difficult for children to hear the instructions clearly. In addition, local teachers whom I interacted with during casual conversation pointed out that the preference for teachers from the English-speaking countries did not guarantee the best English for the learners. They said this approach did not always work according to expectation, and international schools would at times appoint native English-speaking teachers from the UK, for example, who did not necessarily present high-quality English-speaking capabilities.

4.4.1 Politics of globalisation and internationalisation

The globalisation question was not a straightforward one, and the responses could not be easily interpreted as referring to globalisation. A clear definition of globalisation needed to be understood before attempting to interpret data. For instance, in the previous section I have shown how foreign teachers were preferred over local teachers. This does speak to globalisation because it is about the inequalities on a global stage. What is important in the section is the aspiration to be part of the globe. The participants during the informal conversations indicated that the presentation of English-medium teaching was helping Kyrgyzstan to upgrade its overall education. It also prepared the students to become familiar with other cultures and bridge the gap between different languages. According to various participants I interacted with, the emphasis was on the fact that, globally, international schools follow either the Cambridge International Assessment or the IB teaching models. The backgrounds in these models are American or UK-based curriculum programmes. Cambridge International Assessment originated from the Cambridge International Press affiliated with Cambridge University. This

means that being part of the globe means to be in alignment with the English-speaking countries. This is in line with the unwritten rules of globalisation and internationalisation, by which a few countries dictate to the rest of the world what is important. In this case, English was being sold as important over and above education.

The sentiment that English represents education was echoed by one of the participants in FGD A, who stated:

“The marketing of the curriculums relied significantly on the use of consultants who attempted to sell the curriculum products to different international schools. The package originally included English, Mathematics and Science subject packages and was later followed by additional subjects, for example ICT. Subsequently, the core remains on the teaching of English, Mathematics and Science in Primary and Secondary levels.”

The consultants were private and were not accountable to the government objectives and policies. They would sell what they thought had a market. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, most of the students wanted to go to the US; however, as a second option, they would often go to countries in Eastern Europe. The choice of a specific country really depended on what the students wished to pursue or accomplish, but I think any international experience for the students would benefit them in the long run. In exploring this further with the government official, she indicated that most of the Visa applications were for the following countries:

- The USA and UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand
- Japan, South Korea, Poland
- Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Uzbekistan
- Sweden
- European countries

The countries chosen for their greater opportunities reveal the global inequality that prevails, as young people would seek opportunities outside their home countries. It is interesting that the international teachers tended to come from those countries where young people were told they could find opportunities. One may wonder why those teachers would not enjoy those opportunities but decide to go to places whose young people believed were without

opportunities. Perhaps these countries did have opportunities but no power to sell themselves, making it easier for young people to be sold dreams of opportunities elsewhere.

4.4.2 Impact of an unequal world on local communities

I heard a lot of stories of individuals' birth and workplaces that gave insights into the inequality in the country and how the education system was adapting to these dynamics. Because parents, guardians and financially strong individuals did not receive extensive salaries from local employment, the homes where children grew up presented a multicultural environment in general but with limited English-speaking opportunities. The Russian migration dynamic played a key role in shaping education, because various local teachers arrived from the region on special assignments, according to the local Kyrgyz teachers. Observing the origin of local teachers in the international schools, it became evident that at least two or three educators originated from Russia, although they were seen as local. This shows that the inequalities had bred migration from the developed countries by which their citizens would go and find decent work in less developed countries, whereas the opposite did not seem to be true.

It was clear that extreme opposites existed in Kyrgyzstan, with families situated on both sides of the financial spectrum. The focus group sessions and interviews with teachers indicated that parents or guardians who registered children at the international schools received an above-average income. Because Kyrgyzstan had a struggling economy, the employment salaries in the cities stayed low, while in the rural areas people lived from day to day, mostly reliant on agriculture. Subsequently, I found that families and persons who were able to pay the relatively high school fees in this local context were business owners, highly waged state employees, diplomatic staff stationed in Kyrgyzstan, consultants for international organisations, and other 'expatriates,' from the United Arab Emirates for instance.

This brings the discussion to the issue of global inequality. While inequalities are evident in all communities, they also exist at a global level. These inequalities shape the narratives and the perceptions of ordinary people. Focus group sessions and the interviews with local teachers indicated that, as much as they perceived Russia as a historic oppressor, they viewed the country as an alternative to working in the Americas. It is therefore interesting that, for the middle class, teaching their children English was understood as providing the children with

opportunities, while Russia was another viable option. The idea of Russia as the great provider was still there, and according to the Russian-speaking teachers, migration of educators to Russia remained a popular option for individuals to find employment opportunities.

Unequal worlds are the root cause of migration, which suggests that as long as there are unequal worlds, migration will remain a viable option to access opportunities. Therefore, inequality in Central Asia is marked by a wide gap between rich and poor, and this disparity also drives migration to countries that are perceived to be more equal. Hence, low salary levels help explain why parents invest heavily in international schooling, expecting it to provide access to prestigious professions such as law, medicine, and accounting. However, although these occupations carry social status, their remuneration often remains below expectations because salary structures continue to be shaped by state regulation and the legacy of the Soviet system.

International schools therefore thrive in unequal worlds, as many people look outward for opportunities. Based on the conversations I had with people during participant observation, the salaries in the Kyrgyz Republic were low, a general complaint by the professional population. Lawyers, medical professionals, teachers and other professionals received significantly lower wages than their counterparts in countries such as Canada, the United States, Europe and South Africa. International teachers, in comparison, received higher salaries than local teachers, which attracted individuals to work in the country temporarily.

4.5 Multiculturalism in the classroom

Multiculturalism in the class and teachers' room represented a combination of individuals who had arrived from the historic Western and Eastern countries, allowing for hectic debates. These debates could provide insight into individuals' viewpoints on how international teaching should be managed and perceived. Teachers' experiences in the teachers' room also showed how these complexities would play out in the behaviour between educators, where they could act differently towards each other. The interview I had with participant AB showed the complexities in the understanding of identity, as he said: *"I am Ukrainian and my wife is Kazakh, but we experience poor treatment because we are not from here"*.

The research indicates that the differences in class and between teachers depend on whether the person had arrived from Russia proper or would speak Russian with the correct accent. Teachers generally said they preferred to work in international schools that did not clash significantly with their home beliefs and cultures. However, a significant portion of the employment would occur in countries that were totally different from the locations they originated from. A student's academic experiences in international schools located in the villages would differ markedly from those in the cities, taking a different approach with less emphasis on English in the rural areas.

4.5.1 Challenges of different cultures

In the focus group discussion with the local teachers, one participant explained that if they visited Russia, they treated them differently because their Russian sounded different. In opposition, teachers from Russia said they received different treatment from the Kyrgyz because they sounded different when speaking. Educators from Kazakhstan complained that their Russian sounded different from the Kyrgyz Russian; they received poor treatment from public officials. The study noted the complexities in the speech of Russians and how the accents could influence the reactions of teachers as well as students towards each other in the schools. This aspect of multiculturalism played out in the international schools' view of local teachers. Kyrgyz educators said Russian teachers (individuals who originated from Russia) were too strict. This was emphasised by participant BD in reminiscing about their school days: *"The Russian teachers are too strict and make you stand in class until they tell you to sit. I remember from school days, and I am still scared of them"*.

The informal discussions with local teachers emphasised the fact that the senior Russian- and Kyrgyz-speaking teachers seemed to take discipline more seriously. In addition, they did not carry the fear of imposing discipline that was evident in the foreign teachers. In contrast, foreign teachers expressed their fears and were anxious about being overly strict in case the student or parents complained. International teachers had sometimes left schools owing to their frustration over discipline issues presented by the students. Different identities did not always find the requisite synergy for coexistence, but rather there were tensions. In FGD B, one teacher said:

“The students do not show the same respect to the foreign educators as they do to the local Russian- and Kyrgyz-speaking teachers. A difference at times becomes noticeable between the discipline ratio of the Russian- and Kyrgyz-speaking teachers. The Russian-speaking teachers seem to display a stricter control over their learners than the Kyrgyz-speaking educators.”

This was often mentioned by foreign teachers, even during the casual conversations that I had with them. It is important to understand that the background of educators and administrators influenced their view of the international schools, as discussed during the focus group sessions. This meant their experiences were also based on their perceptions according to whether they were local or foreign teachers. It appears that the foreign teachers had fears of being ostracised, and this was displayed even in how they sought to discipline the learners.

Seemingly, the foreign teachers displayed a more relaxed culture that resulted in a less strict teaching approach. Russian-speaking teachers indicated that the international teaching component required more discipline from their point of view. The approach followed by international teachers was the major complaint from some of the students. The majority of learners preferred the stricter teaching environment. One local teacher in FGD A said students at times would request to return to the traditional teaching environments, especially when it came to mathematics and the science subjects. The relaxed culture of the international teachers was seen as problematic in inculcating the discipline required in subjects such as mathematics and science. This meant that the main contribution of the international teachers was in improving English to the detriment of other subjects.

4.5.2 Promises of English

One of the main reasons for acquiring English, even by teachers, in the Kyrgyz region was the need to apply for an opportunity to relocate to the USA. When I travelled to work daily, I observed on most mornings a long queue of individuals awaiting their chances outside the US embassy to apply for residence in the country. The so-called green lottery and the hope of winning a chance to live in the USA remained a popular route for young Kyrgyz people. Many of them would return home after a year or a few months of struggling to adapt to the American lifestyle. This is the reason that had made international schools popular, because in the main they would teach good English. According to participant AB: *“The approach towards the role*

of English depends on the parents' or guardians' background and how they perceive the role of the language should be."

The international schools had therefore been most popular to mainly middle-class families. It is important to highlight that the overall learning towards English aligned with the expectation to form part of a globalised world, influenced by the following factors:

1. The desire of students to study at English language universities and the advantages this would offer in terms of language preparation and international opportunities.
2. The benefits of English language education in terms of expanding students' horizons, improving career prospects, and facilitating cultural adaptation

This orientation was not just an interest for the sake of it but a gamble, because the outcome might not be successful. One of the administrators I spoke to during a casual conversation said that approximately 50% of students may receive student visa approvals, resulting in a decline in the number of students who could study abroad. English as an education focused mainly on the ability to write an English test on speaking, writing and listening with the aim of receiving sufficient points to register at an English-speaking university. This is the point participant BG expressed:

"The subjects, for example chemistry, physics and mathematics, are better taught at the Russian schools. The international schools focus more on the English language specifically and started to exclude some of the subjects, for example, geography as well as history."

Even though the study did not aim to focus on the class issue, the observed experiences were informed by the students' reasons for English-speaking lessons and why international schools were flourishing in the cities. This proved even more complex as they were also informed by ethnicity. For example, the Russian teachers did not need to focus on English but on science subjects, while the American teacher could focus on English language speaking only, with additional benefits, and this reflected the unequal experiences of the foreign and local teachers.

English therefore cannot be understood outside of the global politics that afford speakers of certain languages more opportunities. What most participants highlighted was the opportunities that English offered and the fact that access to English education was dependent on access to money. They said this when talking about how expensive international schools were. This

meant that learning English demanded currency because it could give access to opportunities. However, the fact that getting a visa to the USA was not easy meant that the promised access entailed other conditions that the international schools might not meet.

4.6 An autoethnographic account

When I started the journey of my PhD, I wanted to showcase the experiences of international teachers based on my personal experiences. The interest was triggered by the complex administrative visa application processes, the high education fees I paid, and travelling abroad without fully knowing the implications for my finances or well-being. This experience was traumatic for me, and I thought that it should be documented and explored to make sure that other international teachers did not go through such difficulties. But first I needed to know if my experiences were common or if I was just being difficult. I had not factored in my upbringing as a determinant of the main lens I was using. It did not cross my mind that I came from a privileged background and that even my ability able to travel was itself a privilege. The more I heard from many people I interacted with about their desire to escape Bishkek, the more deeply I started thinking about what I thought my own frustrations were.

As already indicated in the introduction, I come from a middle-class background. My parents' backgrounds were diverse, with a heritage tracing back to Germany, Russia, Poland, Britain and France. Some family members of recent generations had returned to Britain through ancestral citizenship applications. The most significant influence in my life has come from my paternal grandfather and his family, who were historically classified as poor whites of German Jewish descent and who settled in Heidelberg in the 19th century. My grandfather's origins lie in East Germany, with some Russian and Polish influences. My grandfather passed away when I was five, yet his legacy stimulated my interest in Eastern European and Russian social and political history. In contrast, my mother's family comes from a wealthier background. Her ancestors, originally from Britain and France, settled in Rhodesia before relocating to South Africa in the 19th century. Many lived on farms or married white South African farmers, advancing Dutch cultural influences within the family. While I have a general interest in family history, my father's German–Russian heritage has predominantly shaped my worldview. So, my reading of the field experiences in this study is largely influenced by this heritage.

Coming from South Africa with the background I have, things I assumed were normal included being consulted on matters that affected one on a personal level. This was normal in my culture and experience. Decisions would not be made in my absentia, and I would not be expected to accept them. The first shock I had as an international teacher is that I was not consulted on issues that I thought would affect my livelihood. For example, I thought I should be given a choice on the classes I wanted to teach and the times to teach them. Like many other teachers from across the world, I arrived in Bishkek to experience the local culture and visit the natural and cultural landscapes while earning a basic salary. The fact is that I was not able to enjoy the culture in Bishkek as I had hoped because I found myself working odd hours and even on weekends. This was disheartening and made me question my decision to go there. Having spent two years in Bishkek, I now wonder if even this frustration was justified.

The other issue I started observing was the age of some of the international teachers, including myself. The age groups of international individuals working in the school environment varied between 25 and 65. The age groups are interesting, because the word on the street mostly says that teachers should not be older than 45. However, a significant portion of international teachers are between 50 and 60 years old. This observation forced me to look at myself and be honest in my reflection. What I noticed was that most international teachers had had different professions and wanted to change their careers. When I observed this, it was unsettling because there were people who could not even enter the job market, but here we were changing our careers. This was a privilege that I had never considered before, and to me this privilege was normal. This realisation was uncomfortable and made me feel guilty, and I could not stop drawing parallels with the job inequalities back home in South Africa. I was from a country reported to have a high unemployment rate, but I had always been employed in South Africa. Was this because of privilege?

The third layer of my reflections was on English, the subject that afforded me an opportunity not only to change my career but to travel to the countries I wanted to visit. Even though Bishkek was not the chosen country, it fell within the region of my interest. So, English was an enabler of my continuing privilege. What did this mean? Indeed, the more I reflected honestly on my experiences at Bishkek, the more unsettling the reflections were. The emphasis on English in Bishkek was puzzling. Here they were, next to powerful countries, Russia and China, but obsessed with America and the UK, hence the English. This did not make sense to

me, because Mandarin, for example, in addition to Russian, would make logical sense. Why would people of Kyrgyz be so obsessed with the English language? When I turned the gaze towards myself, it became obvious that English was an economic language, a language interfused with opportunities. Clearly, this manifested the dominance of Western hegemony, which has penetrated all societies with the illusion of progress and freedom.

However, the Western dominance in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan needs to be understood in historical context. The Kyrgyz people see Russia as an oppressor as they were under Russia until 1991. According to Umetbaeva (2015: 71), there are contradictory narratives in Kyrgyzstan about the Soviet past, understood “as a colonial and oppressive power versus the Soviet Union as a nation-and-state building and modernizing state”. These contradictions were observable in people’s attitudes towards Russians. For example, the emphasis on Russian teachers as authoritarian was presented as positive and negative at the same time. Coming from South Africa, I could relate to that, because black South Africans have tended to associate Afrikaners with the former oppressors and English people with those who are more liberal. As such, they tend to lean towards English speaking people as opposed to the Afrikaner as if the two groups are mutually exclusive. In paragraph two of this section, I explained my heritage to show how we are all connected, at least as white people, but the former oppressed people try to differentiate these powerful groups. It is in this context that maybe we can begin to understand the preference for English in Kyrgyzstan in terms of historical aspects not based on the current political landscape.

According to Ahn and Smagulova (2022), global education grew extensively in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan after gaining independence. Because of this, the people of Kyrgyzstan want to sound American or follow an Americanised approach. This means they feel that they are now part of the global community and English has become one of the tools that they can use to access the world. Non-governmental organisations have played a pivotal role in introducing Western progress through the education system and human rights discourse. These are important initiatives. In private and public schools, the use of history as a subject has been used to maintain their affiliation with the past but also to develop a nationalised view of the future. The links with the past and present are contradictory because of the way the history books have created a new identity for the Kyrgyz people and are discussed in the classrooms (Umetbaeva, 2015).

My personal experiences and beliefs are intrinsic to this research. They provide a thread for the thesis and my use of white privilege as a lens to read and interpret the data. This is critical because the formative influences of my life played out when I was not aware of them, because they were embodied. My positionality influenced what the participants would share with me or not. More salient is that participant observation was guided by my positionality even when I did not choose so. This is the tone I am reading of the findings collected in the field. What I need to highlight here is the role of supervisors who directed me to the relevant sources that allowed me to expand on these reflections; hence the change of my initial research interest. This change shifted the focus from solely classroom-related questions to more detailed inquiries about how government actors, school administrators, parents and other stakeholders influence the school system. It also led to additional questions about the role of international bodies linked to UNICEF in influencing school operations and the accreditation systems they depend on.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings arising from the qualitative data collection undertaken. The findings have provided a space for understanding the historical background of English-medium instruction at the international schools and how it fits with the Kyrgyz government's approach towards education as a whole. They have also allowed for the development of an argument about the success of international teaching in the eyes of international teachers, local educators and administrators who take part in this on a daily basis. The findings have provided an opportunity to develop patterns of the topics typically raised by teachers from a positive or negative point of view and an understanding of why international schools attract teachers from across the globe. This chapter concluded by showing how a personal lens is critical in data collection because of the critical questions that one has to ask. More importantly, autoethnography as a research method challenges the mask of objectivity and confronts the underlying agenda of a researcher that serves the status quo knowingly or unknowingly.

Chapter 5: Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the themes developed in the previous chapter to ground them within the theories. It begins by defining the international schools to show their relevance on the global stage and their contribution to education as a whole. The chapter locates the international schools in Kyrgyzstan and interprets them using the globalisation discourse to show their impact in local communities. It shows the influences of international organisations like UNICEF on Kyrgyz education. The chapter argues that the universal approaches to education should be centred on justice to allow all societies to determine a good education for themselves that could serve the public good. The contribution from data collected through autoethnography is used to show the continuities of colonialism that sustain global inequalities. Using personal reflections, the chapter argues that there is a need for rethinking English as a dominant language and thus calls for a world of possible multilingualism as a response to the inequalities.

5.2 International schools in the context of globalisation

There is long history of international schools intended for children of parents from English-speaking countries living in non-English speaking countries. In the main, they offered education to the children of globally mobile parents (Bunnell et al., 2016). These schools gained traction with even local parents because of the international openness in their curriculum and cultural mix. Obviously, this was attractive to parents who wanted their children to be global citizens and open their horizons. However, international schools are taking a new form and, according to Bunnell et al. (2016: 408),

are often operated on a for-profit commercial basis; are usually for children from the local (indigenous), wealthy population; and have been defined as International Schools because they are located in a non-English speaking country and English is the school's medium of communication.

This is the focus of the study, to explore the broader implications for local communities of these new international schools. At the core of international schools is an understanding of the “globe” and what it constitutes, which fuels the emergence of the international schools that

Bunnell et al. (2016) call type C international schools. It is therefore important to explore the implications of the type C international schools and their contributions to local communities. This necessitates locating them within globalisation as a discourse.

The most important point is that globalisation is inescapable because of international communication and trade. The technological advancement has intensified the interconnectedness of different countries. This means globalisation as a theoretical framework is about paying attention to this interconnectedness to harness human relations. However, the sceptics of globalisation raised concerns during its inception. Scholars have highlighted the concerns raised, and Parjanadze (2009: 77) argues “there is strong support to the assumption that globalisation poses a threat to small nations and ensures the dominance of Anglo-Saxon culture over the others”. This has direct implications for education, which is the focus of this study. More important is the dominance of Anglo-Saxon culture, also central to this study, as it can have a devastating impact on small/poor nations. The case of international schools in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan is a nuanced illustration of globalisation.

Education in the context of globalisation is critical as it is responsible for shaping people’s minds. “Decentralisation of education became the main strategy to solve accumulated problems. By devolving the authority to the local bodies, the state sought to meet equality and quality demands” (Parjanadze, 2009: 82). The case of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan supports this argument, and the international schools are a classic example of decentralisation. This was confusing to me because my experience from South Africa was that the government is central in the education sector. But what I was using was the public-school experience, which is not a case for international schools. The OECD report on Kyrgyz education indicates that “the concern with equity is important... [because] equality of opportunity requires reversing inequalities in favour of poorer areas” (OECD, 2010: 64). International schools seem to be contributing to these inequalities because of the high fees they charge.

5.2.1 Impact of globalisation and internationalisation

Without a doubt, globalisation has a direct impact on international schools in general and Bishkek in particular. This is a result of the policy of borrowing and lending, which “has become a common practice through global communication and interconnectedness between

the nations” (Parjanadze, 2009: 83). The privatisation of education is one example that shows the impact of globalisation in the education sector. One of the tasks I would often do as an international teacher was to observe and inspect lessons. Doing so brought to the fore for me the real complexity of maintaining a productive classroom environment. The teaching materials that would assist the teacher and the student came at an expensive price, because the schools did not always purchase all the available support learning materials. This was because the schools had to make a profit while maintaining quality education. The contradictions of globalisation are evident in Bishkek because, among other things, globalisation reinforces “an image of the world as a unified whole and humanity, despite its cultural diversity and continuing differentiation, as a single global society, while also generating resistance and violent opposition from those excluded from this imagined global society” (Parjanadze, 2009: 85 citing Waks, 2006). Indeed, these contradictions were more pronounced in international schools in Bishkek.

Thus, one of the impacts of globalisation in education is the privatisation of education. International schools are typical of this privatisation, which fuels profit making in line with the economic logic of globalisation. Pannilage (2017) defines globalisation as “a process which has been accelerated with attempted interventions of the western world to expand the capitalist economy and as well as the capitalist culture”. As an international teacher in Bishkek, I observed this capitalist culture in the schools with which I interacted. Because of this capitalist culture, students were treated as clients and thus the level of service was heightened, which is normally understood as productivity. This is not unique to Bishkek. Dos Santos (2020) argues that in most circumstances the turnover rate at international schools remains high and influences the institutions’ ability to retain or replace openings with high-quality teachers. The impact of this is the preference of foreign teachers over local teachers, which perpetuates the inequalities. In Bishkek there was animosity between local and foreign teachers. I experienced this animosity mainly through sarcasm. For example, if a foreign teacher were to ask a local teacher for assistance with something occasionally, the local teacher would ask about their “quality”. These were tensions fuelled by presenting education as a product that could be sold and not as education for public good. The argument about “quality” was reflected in diverse classroom management styles. Subsequently, foreign teachers employed relaxed, game-based methods, while local teachers applied a no-talking, teacher focused environment during lessons.

In Bishkek, some parents raised concerns about the high costs of international schools. While many appreciated what they perceived as high-quality education, the costs were unattainable for many local people. These concerns have been raised elsewhere, as Abdoubaetova (2020) argues that most parents are concerned about the costs of international schools. This exacerbates the inequalities; as Ozawa et al. (2024: 1) point out, unequal access to education creates a sense of unevenness in society and leads to levels of conflict. Although international schools have been recommended for supporting the struggling education system (DeYoung, 2006), the high costs seem to yield the opposite results. In the case of Bishkek, the impact of globalisation is marred by contradiction in the education system. The international schools provide education that seems to be much needed by local communities, the education that prepares students for global skills, despite the fact that Bishkek itself could benefit from those skills.

According to Hayden and Thompson (2010), international schools prioritise hiring teachers from specific countries, for example from New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa. However, research at the schools in Bishkek has determined that the United States teachers have generally received first preference and the highest pay. The next tier includes teachers from the United Kingdom and Europe, and thereafter those from developing countries such as in Africa and other parts of Asia. Efforts to recruit teachers from South Asia have resulted in their salaries being classified as local and significantly lower than those offered to teachers from America or the UK. The interviews in the present study determined that teachers from Europe were also categorised differently depending on whether they originated from Eastern or Western Europe. This is an example of how globalisation benefits some countries while excluding others, increasing the global inequalities.

5.2.2 Standardisation of education

In the previous sections, 5.2 and 5.2.1 respectively, I have explained globalisation and its impact on local communities. In the main, globalisation unifies the world by having similar policies for different sectors. Education is one sector that is somewhat standardised globally. For example, Cambridge University Press and Assessment (2026) outlines their work with subject specialists, examiners and educators to develop materials that align with their

syllabuses, while publishing materials focused on English learning and also the achievement of United Kingdom-aligned qualifications. Oxford University Press indicates that they publish resources to support Cambridge syllabuses, and this material remains popular at international schools, although they have not officially endorsed resources since 2015. However, the International Baccalaureate (2025) curriculum supports global citizenship and research skills and focuses on project-based learning. This is reflected in classroom methodologies that require educators to integrate project-based learning into their lesson planning.

Seemingly, the curriculum is aimed at developing global citizens to the detriment of the local. I am making this point because, based on my stay, it was clear that gaining access to the global world, mainly America, was difficult for many Bishkek citizens. Also, maintaining this high standard in poor communities is difficult. In my experience in Bishkek, it was evident instead that schools relied mostly on alternative electronic copies of resources to support their lesson plans. This has had a negative effect, leading teachers to use YouTube to supplement lessons or to pay third-party vendors for downloadable lesson plan examples. The ability to provide teachers with the correct teaching materials has presented a challenge, and teachers indicated they struggled to teach with limited materials and reliance on YouTube videos. During my casual conversation with staff members, the business economics teachers, for example, said, *“teaching is mentally tiring”* and *“a person only realises the complexity of international teaching when a person is exposed to this”*. Another participant, BB, in a separate interview alluded to this and stated, *“teaching remains challenging with students who arrive from different backgrounds and English-speaking levels”*. Bringing a standardised education to the fore ignores multiculturalism, which should be embraced. This is the legacy of the colonial past that Comaroff and Comaroff (2012: 1) allude to:

Western enlightenment thought has [...] posited itself as the wellspring of universal learning, of Science and Philosophy [...], it has regarded the non-West – variously known as the ancient world, the orient, the primitive world, the third world, the underdeveloped world, the developing world, and now the global south – primarily as a place of parochial wisdom, of antiquarian traditions, of exotic ways and means

Clearly, this attitude still persists in the classroom, where local experiences are undermined to advance Western experience as the desired standard in education.

The standardised education must be understood in context. It is not peculiar to Bishkek schools but a universal approach. In the context of Bishkek, this approach shapes the educational philosophy at schools by reflecting what the administration and parents expect from international education, since education remains influenced by the historical Soviet past (DeYoung, 2006). For instance, during informal discussions with parents, some voiced the belief that subjects related to philosophy, research or debate were a waste of time and should not be included, while subjects like maths, science, biology and chemistry also taught in English should be the primary focus. Abdoubaetova (2020) indicates that decisions about what children learn have been mainly influenced by school administrators and parents, based on community beliefs regarding whether philosophical subjects belong in schools. This is also linked to historical background, with maths and science having traditionally been the main subjects during the Soviet era, while the human sciences were seen as topics meant to cause anti-government sentiment (DeYoung, 2005). While education should be universal, there is a space to localise the content. The fact that English has been deemed important in the case of Bishkek should be understood in the light of local realities, where English has been presented as a key to opportunities in the global world.

There is a need to further study how international teaching and curriculums are developed, because according to Ozawa et al. (2024) this area represents a gap in the literature. In addition, the aspects of organisational micropolitics in the schooling system are often neglected (Caffyn, 2010). Much of the literature focuses on English-medium teaching in non-English-speaking countries and on the historical background of former Soviet states. The studies by Ai (2016), Poole (2019, 2023) and DeYoung (2005, 2006) show that the major concern in the international schools has been aligning them with sustainability. The international schools in Bishkek were aligned with the Oxford and Cambridge curriculum with regard to the development of the teaching models and how they aligned with multiculturalism and the formation of identity in the schooling system. In essence, on paper, international schools have followed the international standards.

However, economic challenges that exist in the Kyrgyz Republic have created obstacles to quality education, as explained by Shamatov et al. (2024). What I observed in Bishkek is that schools preferred to register partially, which also gave them more flexibility in managing the schools according to set standards. If schools were fully registered with the assessment

institutions, they would undergo a comprehensive audit. The study determined that both schools in the research had partial registration. However, they would receive audits by the learning institutions, in which the teachers participated during their school year. In practice, the international standards came with a lot of challenges. For example, in Bishkek the inclusion of multiculturalism was a challenge for foreign teachers because they did not speak local languages that carried local cultures. What ended up happening is that the culture that prevailed in the classroom was the Western culture, as the English teachers knew Western culture. English thus brought with it an expansion of Western culture, as is shown in the next section.

5.2.3 *English is education*

It should be noted that English as a medium of instruction is a legacy of the international schools that catered for global parents (Bunnell et al., 2016). According to Hickey (2018), the rapid increase in economic migrants across the globe amplified the need for English-medium instruction. This means international schools have become a global phenomenon resulting from increased mobility in the global population. The ability to work as a highly skilled migrant and the potential to capitalise on the opportunity has continued to develop a worldwide cosmopolitan body of teachers (Hickey, 2018). In Bishkek, although the curriculum covered all subjects, including the human environment, local and foreign teachers expressed their concerns about English-medium instruction of science, mathematics and biology. Teachers believed that students could benefit more if these critical subjects were taught in their mother tongue. This belief has long been argued by scholars such as Kwesi Prah. In advocating for mother tongue education in Africa, Prah (2012: 310), argues that “[f]or as long as Africa remains trapped and bound in the consequences of colonial language usage, there is little chance of advancement either at the scientific and technological levels or the socio-cultural level”. This means real education should take place in languages that students fully understand, their mother tongue. The usage of English as a medium of instruction for non-English speakers undermines the process of education.

What is more dangerous when using English to teach non-English speakers is that in translation the teachers’ judgements and own frames of reference can influence or distort the meaning and, in the process, corrupt the translation, especially when words are taken out of their epistemic framework. Teaching in English involves engaging with another worldview that is different

from that of the non-English speaker. In other words, English shifts the epistemological framework to introduce Western epistemology, which could be a violent process if the epistemological frameworks are fundamentally different. English – like other languages – is not just a language of instruction but a way of knowing. This is the point Adésinà (2002: 106) explains clearly:

The central issue in the development of a new paradigm is not just about the development of concepts. Rather it is the shift in the framework of thought and, more foundationally, the question of how we make sense of things and how we produce knowledge: this is the epistemological aspect.

Thus, English as a medium of instruction is a shift of paradigm at the epistemological level and can disrupt the flow of thinking of a particular society, because the English western thinking introduces different communication concepts that might not be aligned with students' worldviews. New ways of cultural interaction shape classroom dynamics, since students often use short one-word responses that may seem abrupt to Western listeners. These responses reflect language patterns drawn from Russian and Kyrgyz. To foreign teachers' student responses sound rude, although it is not perceived that way in the Kyrgyz worldview.

It is critical to understand that Kyrgyz is the national language, whereas Russian used to be the administrative communication tool, which changed in 2025 to Kyrgyz, but Russian has remained a key second language in the country. English remains a foreign language alongside French and German. Understanding the dynamics between the different languages provides an insight into the need for studying in English and where this may take the students during their study or work careers. Since the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991, the country's education system has remained under pressure in terms of political, financial and accreditation aspects. Many people in Bishkek see the USA and UK as possible avenues for a better life; hence the need to learn English. Participant AA said:

“In the event the student thinks and talks in English, it would assist the learner to apply for bursaries abroad. English-medium teaching helps Kyrgyzstan to upgrade their overall education”.

The flip side to this is that the emphasis could become English itself rather than education, and failing to see that the requirement in these perceived better foreign universities would not just

be English but excellence in other subjects of study as well. So, English is not education but a language of communication.

According to the government official of the Ministry of Education and Science, legislation in Kyrgyzstan focuses on education in general, and English is denoted as a foreign language and labelled as second to the Kyrgyz and Russian languages. Ferrando explains that “Central Asian states have largely inherited the education system from their communist past” (2020: 34). Research indicates it remains critical to understand that English-medium teaching is a choice by the parents and their children and not compulsory. One parent said during an informal classroom discussion, *“I want my child to speak English because I cannot”*. But the overall access to proper schooling had become a concern for the government, and the rise in inequality had resulted in a concern for the communities, according to the parents. Research indicates that the perspective of the schools remains critical to attracting interest, and for this reason they use affiliations with third parties, for example embassies, to highlight their credibility, which is described in more detail below. Therefore, participation in out-of-classroom trips included visits to the US embassy, which sponsored books for the school libraries and other financial support to the institutions. This enhanced the idea of becoming international and living in a globalised world.

This issue relates to students’ language proficiency prior to entering the classroom, which ideally should be assessed before they are admitted to international schools. Participant observations showed that some students do not meet these basic language requirements and may speak only their native language during lessons. When these cases were raised, school administrators explained that parents had insisted on their children’s admission and had agreed to take responsibility should their children struggle to adapt to an English-medium environment.

In Bishkek, English is more than just a medium of instruction, but English language fluency is seen as a gateway to economically developed countries in the global north, especially the United States. The proficiency in English is perceived for education because the ultimate goal is to go to America. The aspiration to go to America is influenced by media that glamorise the life in America and Western societies in general. In the casual conversations I had with the youth, they expressed how they would like to go to North America or any other country in

Europe. It was not clear in most cases which profession they would pursue when they got there. This meant any job would suffice as long as they were in North America or Europe. The impact of globalisation was observable and its devastating effect on inequalities.

Indeed, we were all living in one world, but our experiences could differ drastically, and one might well wonder if indeed ours was the united world. For those with this obsession to go to North America, the international schools had ceased to be an avenue for quality education and become an avenue to leave the home country, with English proficiency being the benchmark for that aspiration. While the international schools focused on benchmarking the curriculum with the Harvard and Oxford standards, for the students (and parents to some extent) English was the measure of a quality education. The views of teachers who would encourage the use of local languages when teaching other subjects were ignored. For the school, profits were more important, and therefore making parents and students happy was the primary focus. It is not surprising that foreign teachers were preferred over local teachers because they were understood as coming with proper English.

The aspiration to study, live and work in the United States emerged strongly in the data provided by the school administration, who track students' university registration preferences. The United States consistently appeared as the first choice. Only when students were unable to gain admission to their preferred American institutions did they begin exploring alternatives in Europe and lastly, in Central Asia.

This desire to pursue opportunities in the United States extended beyond students interests to migrate out of their country. Many local teachers and parents openly expressed their own interest in applying for U.S. permanent residency, reflecting a broader community motivation to obtain a green card. During field observations, I asked local residents why long queues formed daily outside the American embassy regardless of extreme weather conditions. I was told that people were waiting for the chance to submit green card applications. It was striking to see individuals standing outside in temperatures as low as -40°C because the embassy could only admit a limited number of applicants at a time. This strong drive to migrate to the United States was closely tied to the motivation to learn English. For many, English proficiency was viewed not only as a pathway to education but as a gateway to living and working in an English-speaking country.

A linked pattern was observed among students who were unable to secure entry into universities in the Americas. These students increasingly redirected their applications toward institutions in South Asia and South Korea, which became prominent alternative destinations. Although China was geographically the most accessible option given its shared border with Kyrgyzstan, data from interviews and classroom observations indicated that it was not regarded as a preferred location for long-term study or employment.

The fieldwork discovered an underlying sense of mistrust between Kyrgyz students and their Chinese counterparts, a dynamic that significantly shaped students' educational preferences. Local teachers further contextualised this sentiment by explaining that historical relations between Kyrgyzstan and China continue to influence contemporary perceptions. These longstanding geopolitical and cultural tensions appear to inform how many Kyrgyz learners evaluate China as a potential site for academic or professional mobility.

Another layer of the absurdities of English is that it did not replace education but was used to “discipline and punish” (Foucault, 1977) because of the power that language poses. Foucault (1977), using the idea of the panopticon, eloquently describes how systems control people without their even noticing. Similarly, for the people of Bishkek, as for others in many poor nations, English has been used to discipline and punish them. My experience in Bishkek showed me how difficult it was for students to learn the language. They would agonise when asked to speak. Writing it was also very difficult for them. Somehow it made them feel as if they lacked something, even though they had other languages that they were fluent in. But all these languages seemed useless because they could not take them to the wider world, where there were endless opportunities. What this study has done is to show that English as a language of instruction conceals the continuity of colonialism by preserving it as an economic language. English therefore becomes a language to become wealthy or reach good financial status. It is not a universal language but is brutal to those who must learn it. The harshness did not stem from English proficiency itself, but from the systemic pressure to replace a person's native language with English as the gateway to global mobility.

Ultimately, students need the freedom to draw on their native language as a foundation for preparing for future careers, whether pursuing university studies or continuing their families'

businesses. When the education system pushes learners away from their local languages and cultural identities, it weakens their capacity to contribute to national development in contextually relevant ways. This shift creates a widening knowledge gap that the country struggles to bridge. However, this does not imply that students should rely solely on their native language for learning, communication, or development. They should rather complement it with the ability to speak English which adds to a multicultural approach of working in a globalised environment.

This comes back to the sense of European colonialism which cannot be excluded from the study since the Soviet past and the role of oppression during the time continued to play a role in the education system of the country. Interview data indicated that in the past freedom of decision making was not available and decisions of a person's career was made by the state. These memories were reflected in the responses received from the older teachers and parents who attempt to prevent a similar outcome for their children.

Although the legacy of the Soviet era continued to shape contemporary school education systems, a segment of the local teaching community still actively supported these inherited practices. The norms and collective memories associated with the Soviet past foster a shared sense of understanding among local teachers, influencing how they conceptualised and implemented their teaching methodologies.

A persistent tension emerges between the aspiration to speak English symbolising mobility and modernity, and the realities of a local environment still influenced by Soviet-era philosophies. This clash reflects a broader desire to overcome forms of oppression that continue to surface in government and the schooling system.

5.3 Education for justice

The diversity of learners should be taken into account to ensure inclusivity and that no learner would be left behind. Inclusion is not just about the special needs of students but is also about including the knowledge that learners already have as well. In other words, education for social justice should incorporate cultures and languages for all students. This becomes critical in international schools because they have students from different cultures, whose education must

be forged in the classroom. Important to note is that the focus on enhancing learners' experience is not just about their success but also that of society at large, because the educated citizens contribute to the development of nations. This is what is called education for public good (Makoe, 2023).

However, it should be noted that in Bishkek the international schools that are the focus of the study were not meant for the development of the country but to provide learners with opportunities outside Kyrgyzstan. It is not surprising that the focus in these schools is English. For example, the international registration body grants licences to various teacher support services but at limited English-speaking levels, making it harder for students to understand the teachers' instructions, according to participant I. Consequently, additional services paid for by parents include professional development courses for teachers, additional resources for students, or administrative tools that help support the teaching models. For schools to maintain their international licence, they must adhere to specific rules and rigorous assessment criteria that apply to education institutions (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2026). To understand the focus of English in relation to social justice necessitates an understanding of the history of Kyrgyz.

5.3.1 Historicising the Kyrgyz experience

It is important to read these findings in context before we attempt any generalisations. The post-Soviet Kyrgyz state and the construction of its Soviet past remain evident in the way the schools approach the school curriculum and decide on the subjects they want to offer at the private schools. Understanding the national past provides insights into the new identity created after independence, and this is shown in the manner of the schools' approach to subjects related to history, literature and culture (Umetbaeva, 2015). The Turkish government greatly influenced the views of the local government, school administrators and teachers. The subject questions became increasingly influenced by the political arena and how political factors had placed international relations on the edge. Newspaper articles about the threat of international teaching appeared in local papers, changing the way foreign and local teachers viewed their daily lives. This has led to people becoming increasingly fearful of potentially losing their jobs in education (BBC Monitoring, 2016). However, it is important to pay attention to people's urgency that shapes the making of history, as articulated by Comaroff and Comaroff (1987: 193):

Of course, this kind of historical reckoning is at odds with the conventional Western view of history as an account of “real” events and processes. At the heart of that view lies a distinction between reality, the actual making **of** history, and representation, the terms in which its story is told and acted on.

Although I encountered protests in Bishkek, I could not help noticing how people defied the mega narrative of the state. It was apparent that the Soviet colonial history was at loggerheads with modernity, when people have to choose between two oppressive systems and believe that the other one is better. Schools were especially sensitive to excluding local culture, which could include the Kyrgyz language and history or Russia's historical influence that has shaped the country's past. According to Fierman (2009: 1214), “terminology in all Central Asian languages grew exponentially with the expansion of education, political mobilisation and economic development”. Therefore, the study affirmed that international schools should demonstrate their appreciation for local culture, whether through Kyrgyz language classes or cultural days at school, to highlight the importance of cultural practices, as explained by Tajik and Makoele (2024: 222): “Kyrgyz societies and cultures have distinct characteristics, values, norms and expectations of leadership.”

Learners in the international schools arrive from international, regional and local destinations, which makes the representation more complex than expected. This experience in the classroom gives an insight into the divergent country representation in the schools, which may include Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Türkiye and others. Children's behaviour during classes could be influenced by their situations at home and cultural identities, leading to clashes, and teachers should be aware of these background factors in order to understand the tensions that may arise. For example, students arriving from Russia do not speak Kyrgyz, and learners from Kyrgyzstan may speak Russian but with an accent. In addition, other learners speak Turkish only. Nonetheless, research indicates that the schools' public image influences both international and local teachers' decisions to accept positions at these schools. For local teachers, international teaching is often seen as a step up from teaching at a public school, whereas international teachers tend to view it as an adventure or a chance to live and work in a different country, according to Hayden and Thompson (2010). However, according to the interviews, teachers from Africa and South Asia usually experience the appointments as a career move, but their pay rates remain lower compared to those of American international teachers.

The irony remains that teachers from America often see the opportunity as a gap year or a short-term travel experience, despite earning significantly higher pay, according to the interviews. An aspect of further irony is that according to Pae (2017: 163), "an ideal speaker of a language is a native speaker of that language", whereas the research indicates that native speakers' regional accents influence the clarity of their spoken word in the classrooms, hampering the students' comprehension. My informal conversations with parents suggested that, in Kyrgyzstan, they paid for English instruction from teachers who had an American English accent and adopted American speech patterns. Parents indicated they wanted their children to develop a specific accent if they wanted to travel to the United States for a holiday or live there permanently. Nevertheless, the expectation conflicts with the Cambridge and Oxford Assessment methodology discussed earlier in the chapter, which the schools have registered to follow, which adheres to British English in writing and speaking. This causes a clash between what is presented and what is expected.

5.3.2 *External influences in local education*

Foreign policy, diplomatic relations, and embassy connections shape the credibility of international schools in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan by having direct and indirect influences on the daily operations. As mentioned by Ozawa et al. (2024: 7), “education sectors in Central Asia have undergone a wide range of reforms to reflect new national visions following political and economic independence”. DeYoung (2006) mentions these influences with regard to providing funding to the schools to purchase books, or visiting the schools on a regular basis to show support. Participant observation activities provided insights into the wider community and how additional funding was being sourced by third parties, such as parent groups or affiliated universities. These affiliations were deliberately established to influence perceptions of the schools and enhance their credibility. However, the marketing of the schools relied significantly on the use of social media, for example WhatsApp groups, to share information about the institutions and create a network with external stakeholders, as explained by Jailobaeva et al. (2023).

When I attended the parents’ meeting it was evident that there was a reliance on the hope of receiving an allowance to travel abroad, to capitalise on English-speaking proficiency, for example to the United States and start a new career. The promise of learning to speak English was aligned with foreign and local teachers’ understanding of children becoming equipped to adapt to a global or international world. However, official communication from the government had indicated that they also preferred students to look at studying closer to home, in the Russian-speaking countries, which opposed the drive of the international schools to equip students for English-speaking countries. Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic, is host to several embassies that have shaped the city’s educational landscape by providing major academic funding and support, especially for libraries and English-language materials. Embassies have also connected schools to universities and other academic institutions, such as language schools identified during the research study. Many parents involved in school decision-making are diplomats, university professors or government officials, and they influence key operational choices like teacher hiring, salaries and curriculum selection.

Apart from the challenges associated with the diverse countries of origin experienced in the classroom, other difficulties were associated with in-country differences, with children coming

from different provinces or oblasts within the country. Teacher practices had led to a belief that children from the city areas performed better than learners from the villages. Participant AB said: “*quality of student learning relies on the education of parents and the areas they originate from*”. In Bishkek, the government’s strict policies on ensuring a local focus at international schools served as a reminder to foreign teachers and students that Kyrgyz culture should take precedence. My experience as a teacher and observation of the attention given by the administration to Kyrgyz literature and history led to the understanding that local culture continued to play a critical role in the schools and that this was also checked up on by the Ministry of Education and Science. This was in opposition to the schools’ marketing, giving prominence to internationalisation and globalisation in the school curriculum while seeking the appointment of native English-speaking teachers from certain countries.

Despite the adoption of a “Western-style democracy” and friendly advances towards the traditional West, Kyrgyzstan’s political climate still exercised significant influence over the education system. The increasing interest in and demand for English-medium teaching reflected a desire to study and work abroad. Prominent destinations mentioned by the parents (at the time of writing) included North America, United Kingdom, Western Europe, South Korea and Japan. Economic potential and the declining influence (and perceived value) of the English language contributed to The Chinese People’s Republic and The Russian Federation being seen as favourable and worthwhile destinations. DeYoung, Reeves and Valyayeva (2006) mention the focus on educational philosophy and policy discussed in the Soviet Union transformational plans, and the Kyrgyz education remained an outcome of these events.

This created a certain paradox, however, as the ruling elite did not want to be seen as overly dependent on the West and wanted to demonstrate its willingness to maintain a unique “Kyrgyz Way”. Also, Central Asia quickly became the base for Western countries to relocate to (DeYoung et al., 2006). The result became a tightrope of logic, practicality and outside perception. The recent hostile situation between The Russian Federation and The Ukraine, experienced when in-country, led to the seeming unpopularity of maintaining positive and constructive Russian relations. The origin of this could be the “political attitudes” of Western leadership and policies of the NATO alliance coming into play.

Based on my interaction with different stakeholders during my fieldwork, it was clear that the historical progression of education in Kyrgyzstan, post-Soviet Union, highlighted the tension between Western and Eastern educational philosophies. Western funding often emphasised “soft” subjects, while Eastern philosophies focused on “hard” sciences. This divide shaped curriculum choices and teaching methodologies at international schools, where teachers experienced political pressures regarding content delivery and adherence to cultural sensitivities. Gül (2024: 414) explains that the “Soviet Administration provided the names of people known as revolutionary leaders to the older schools and newly built schools in the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region”. In the interviews and focus group discussions with the local teachers, when we were discussing government policies regarding education, they remained vague, with many teachers being hesitant to probe politically sensitive issues. The interviews indicated that political dynamics shaped decisions at international schools, and international schools relied on Russian-speaking colleagues to navigate bureaucratic complexities. The interplay between the government’s stance on education and the influence of different embassies determined the availability of English-language education at the international schools.

The exposure experienced with major embassies visiting the schools, particularly those of the US, the UK and Türkiye, displayed their influence and the crucial roles in shaping educational standards. The US Embassy, in particular, emphasised support for English language learning, providing resources and cultural exchanges that had helped to bolster international schools’ credibility in the view of parents. Conversely, the Turkish Embassy supported Turkish cultural ties and educational standards that reflected a similar approach as the Soviet era backing for “hard” sciences.

However, the structured and unstructured interviews raised concerns about the sustainability of international teaching emphasising the value of learning English. Informants indicated that although the schools used the English medium to attract learner registration, students struggled to obtain visas to allow them the opportunity to work and live in an English-speaking country. Research and informal discussions with parents indicated that a significant portion of learners expected to travel to and work in the United States because of their parents, mostly fathers, working abroad. However, the Google questionnaire indicated foreign teachers’ concern about the students’ ability to converse in English and develop a clear accent when moving to an

English-speaking country. Participant observation identified issues experienced by the learners who had undertaken visits to the United States and disappointingly reported they were mistreated there because of their non-native accents.

5.3.3 Education for public good

Education is one of the key elements in the Sustainable Development Goals that are aimed at the transformation of society. According to Sachs, Schmidt-Traub, Mazzucato, Messner, Nakicenovic and Rockström (2019: 806), “Education builds human capital, which in turn promotes economic growth, the elimination of extreme poverty, decent work, and overcoming gender and other inequalities”. Clearly education plays a critical role in transforming the livelihood of citizens. The quality of education is thus pivotal for education for public good. In the case of Bishkek, English was one of the avenues to escape extreme poverty by providing employment possibilities in the developed countries. As such, there was a lot of emphasis on the ability to speak English. However, the experiences in some of these developed countries were not always rosy. As Administrator AA said, explaining they had a school visit with the aim of allowing children to practise their English, *“I will never, never return to the US because they treated us poorly”*. This is indicative of the importance of education that provides opportunities in the home country rather than abroad.

The outlook of schools and their perceived reputation was being given far more significance than the activity of teaching and the conveyance of a suitable curriculum. The credibility of a school often aligned with its location in the city, noteworthy students, particular and often frequent visitors, individuals or entities registering certain children at the school, and those holding key positions within the parent body. This study took on the human side of international teaching and not the theory of education. It focused on how international teachers collaborated with local educators, administrators and parents. It had become a requirement to have students learning to speak and study in English, with English-speaking teachers, but it arrived with various expectations, for example a specific accent, worldview or approach to teaching. These perceptions of English-speaking teachers had influenced the international schools, because decisions were made based on these ideas about how English-speaking teachers should look, speak and act.

The classroom experience showed that general student performance depended on various factors, including their understanding of English, the teachers' ability to communicate clearly, and the local teachers' skill in translating messages from the international teacher, especially with younger learners and students interested in participating in class activities. Methods of communication had sometimes been problematic, as students showed a decline in interest in learning and speaking English. Participant I explained that *"the biggest concern of English-medium teaching relates to the students' ability to concentrate and stay disciplined"*. The classroom experiences could affect the perception of the general public and the government and influence the attitude towards foreign teachers, which could change quickly in the event of a country conflict. DeYoung et al. (2006) indicate that local teachers could lose their employment if they shared information about difficulties in the classroom, even if it impacted their lives. However, during the research, a small number of teachers spoke about the problems they experienced as local teachers, which drove them to improve their education and look for foreign career opportunities.

The organisational structure depended on the educational philosophy regarding accreditation, third-party support, preferred curriculum and teacher origins. Participant H also indicated that *"English-medium teaching is challenging with students who studied in the Russian schools before"*. This aligns with how the parent organisation and school administration had promoted the international school and marketed the concept of an English-medium programme to Kyrgyz citizens. Therefore, my discussions with administration officials and experience as an international teacher showed that selling private school education stretched beyond English-medium instruction; it aimed to attract attention from other international organisations, such as UNICEF, to help the schools stay relevant. The organisational structure relied on the expectation of the parents, supported by the philosophy of the international schools in the Kyrgyz Republic.

The Ministry of Education and Science had played a critical role in providing legislative support to educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, although the focus had not been specifically on English-medium teaching but rather on supporting education in general. DeYoung (2006: 500) mentions that "universal schooling as a right and duty of citizenship was a revolutionary concept introduced in the early years of the USSR". Since gaining independence in 1991, the Kyrgyz government had attempted to improve the quality of teaching at schools, mainly

focusing on public schools, which had experienced a decline in funding (OECD, 2010). This decline impacted schools' ability to buy study materials and build schools with enough space for all children. The study aimed to define English-medium teaching at private schools, but the dynamics could not be fully understood without gaining insight into the status of public schools. According to international teacher Participant A during the structured interviews, *“English assists students to study abroad and improve their overall education”*.

Efforts to improve education had remained a priority for the Kyrgyz government, especially with the international community criticising the state of education in the country. Negative comment was also made about political leadership that had resulted in the “decentralisation of educational governance” (Tajik & Makoele, 2024: 224). Various workshops, meetings and conferences, such as those with the World Trade Organisation (CountryWatch, 2025), supported the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education and Science in identifying more effective teaching methods and pinpointing gaps in the education system. School administration officials explained that the Kyrgyz government connected with external bodies, for example UNICEF, to enhance the credibility of teaching. During the teaching year UNICEF and UNESCO representatives would visit the schools in Bishkek to assess the education standards, and the visits required teachers to show their best efforts in the classrooms.

However, my observation during the fieldwork shows that the schools hosted visits from these organisations, with attention being given not only to classroom conditions but also to other safety measures, such as regular fire drills. The classroom experience extended beyond teaching to ensure that the health and safety measures would comply with international standards when the organisational representatives arrived. This involved test fire drills, checking entrances to the schools during the day and checking if any aftercare facilities existed. This is indicative of the understanding that education was key in the development of any society; hence the investment by the government to ensure that the global standards were met.

5.4 Beyond the politics of representation

The people of Bishkek were confronted by the changing state of global politics. The fact that they had only come out of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s did not mean that they had lost the ability to resist. The Americanisation was not blindly followed but was part of resistance. The government was treated with suspicion. They were creating their own avenues to becoming part of the globe.

Indeed, as we have seen, a people may not express their historical consciousness as conventional history at all. Hence, if we seek a narrative of events, or an account of past relations, we may be led to conclude that they lack all such consciousness; we may even be tempted to speak of theirs as a “cold” society. But the conclusion would be false. There is every reason to expect people caught up in processes of change to use the poetics of contrast to impose meaning on their world. (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1987: 205)

These are poetics that I have been grappling with as an effort to understand the realities of the people in Bishkek. While the international schools represented a society of the outside world that many aspired to join, there were many who did not see the outside world as a solution to their problems. In the everyday activities of people I met in the streets, they were alive and making ends meet in every possible way without even thinking about escaping the country. In contrast, most people in the international schools were so obsessed with the outside world that they did not see any possibilities in the home country.

The paradox is that there was a visible desire to escape the country. Every day when I was going to work, I saw a long line of visa candidates hoping that their departure would afford them limitless opportunities. Based on my personal experiences, language has currency; if it were not for my knowledge of English, I would not have had the privilege of travelling the world and at the same time changing my career. A dream that the people of Bishkek would pay a fortune to realise came naturally to me. My parents did not pay a fortune for me to learn English, yet there I was living the dream of people of Bishkek. Yes, my experiences were not important when we imagine a world anew, a world characterised by equity where people should not migrate to escape but migrate to explore because we are all the global citizens. If we are to achieve a unified world, it must be founded on true diversity, a diversity of languages which will allow a diversity of cultures, because cultures are embedded in languages.

5.4.1 Understanding privilege

Understanding societal inequalities necessitates understanding power and how it interplays at different levels. Foucault (1977) analyses systemic power using the panopticon as a metaphor of how power is pervasive and is experienced by citizens. Among other things, power disciplines and punishes (Foucault, 1977). I was taught Foucault in my first year of university

and found the content very abstract and could not relate to his analysis of power. It was not applicable to me, as I had never felt myself to be disciplined and punished by the system. If anything, as white person in South Africa, the government protected us. What was intriguing in Bishkek is that it was not the institutions per se that monitored individuals' choices but the very idea of being in a certain part of the world. This meant globalisation supervised and controlled the people of Bishkek efficiently. An indication of this is their belief that their prosperity would be determined by English. More pervasive is the fact that their inability to speak English was equivalent to punishment, because no other skills were taken into account as a realistic means of access to the global world. That is why parents insisted on taking their children to international schools to learn English. In defining his study, Foucault (1977: 23–24) argued that it was “the metamorphosis of punitive methods on the basis of a political technology of the body in which might be read a common history of power relations and object relations”. The experiences of the people of Bishkek to me seemed to epitomise this situation. However, in my view Foucault's thesis is not true for everyone, as I feel that my own experiences are different.

After two years in Bishkek, I realised that in the bigger scheme of things my experiences were not that important and did not deserve to be a focal point. The experiences of foreign teachers were not more important than those of the local teachers, who were paid less than foreign teachers, or more important than the experiences of children who were expected to adapt to a foreign culture in their country, or more important than those of parents who had to spend their last penny in efforts to provide a better future for their children. My personal experience was indeed like a drop in an ocean. With this realisation I changed the focus of the study from the experiences of foreign teachers to understanding how English had become a tool to “discipline and punish”, using Foucault's sentiments. More importantly, I sought to reveal the inequalities perpetuated by English viewed as a language to access opportunities. It is in this context that I have tried to unpack privilege in the context of globalisation. Having spent time in Bishkek, I realised that there must be another voice that would show the negative impact of globalisation in local communities. English thus became a focus point to show the inequalities in the global world and how these inequalities are being perpetuated.

The inequalities of languages in Bishkek are a result of the Soviet thinking that hierarchised languages. According to Liddicoat (2019: 457), “in Soviet thinking, languages were never considered as equal... Soviet language policy predicated merging of languages and cultures into one common international language”. This means local languages were deemed irrelevant,

which contributed to the inequalities that privilege the English-speaking people. The interviews revealed that some teachers came from corporate backgrounds, choosing to become international educators after 10 to 20 years in their previous careers. The change from corporate positions to education had remained challenging; as Participant G explained, “*teaching is more challenging than I thought, and salaries are not enough*”. Following Kyrgyzstan’s independence, there was a significant push towards high-quality education, which led to a rise in private schooling, particularly schools offering English-medium education. Seemingly, high-quality education was English-medium education; hence there has been an increase in private schooling “in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, [however it is] not accessible to all students” (Silova, 2010: 332). Obviously, English-speaking people gained the privilege of teaching English even if they did not have a qualification in education. Merely by virtue of being English speakers, they had these opportunities available to them.

One of the key discussions aligned with understanding why teachers had decided to pursue a career in international teaching, often arriving after following a corporate career path. These responses provided critical input, because the teachers had come into the education environment without a formal education degree and based their knowledge of teaching on what they thought it should be. However, the information collected from the Ministry of Education and Science provided critical insights into their involvement in the international schools and the levels of effort they had been prepared to give. Although the Ministry remained the guardian of the language policies in the Kyrgyz Republic, the methods used in the classrooms stayed the responsibility of the schools. These schools were not told they could not operate without input from external bodies, for example UNICEF, or international accreditation bodies, for example the Cambridge Assessment, which acts as the method to promote the schools’ internationalisation, and as an effort to present a globalisation approach. External factors also took other forms, such as schools being influenced by historical political affiliations, for example by Türkiye or Russia.

More worrying is the fact that English was somehow inscribed in policies because, according to Balci and Liles (2018: 11), “post-Soviet Central Asia garnered equally strong interest among Turkish policymakers”. These historical ties had influenced how these schools made decisions about school management, parent involvement, and other external organisations, such as the Turkish-founded Sapat network. These impacts also had a political aspect that created

challenging government relations for the schools to handle. Because Turkish communities would invite international teachers to their homes to show appreciation, conversations could take place about their experiences and the role of government in education. Turkish communities set up international schools with the hope of enhancing education and receiving freedom, according to members of the community. Participant Z said:

“The Turkish and Kyrgyz governments work closely together because they see themselves from the same origins, [but] we are scared because our freedom is being questioned, because we want to know too much”.

Apparently, English had become tied to freedom for people in the Soviet bloc and remained part of global politics. As such, the ability to speak English was seen as part of gaining freedom to access opportunities. As I was observing all these conversations about freedom, I could not but wonder about the fact that I did not have to do much for freedom, since English gave it to me, and that was a privilege. I do not think that I would have realised that I was privileged if I had not come to Bishkek. For me, privilege had been about the inheritance of something tangible that I did not have. I had not realised that inheritance could also be intangible, like language and by extension culture. These, too, are things that may give you privilege.

5.4.2 Teachers' experiences in international schools

While foreign teachers would receive certain privileges, their experiences included negative ones indicating areas for improvement in international schools. Critical information on teachers' experiences was sourced from the structured interviews to determine not only teachers' understanding of international schools but also how they affiliated themselves with the environment. Classroom management experiences could show how educators managed their teaching responsibilities versus administration expectations. The governmental interpretation of education gives insight into their thinking. Government involvement was evident on different levels and formed part of the daily classroom operations. For example, I observed that the teacher and school administrator reacted with a sense of fear when the government officials arrived unexpectedly. However, government communications explained that schools had the freedom to choose the curriculum they saw fit. This comes back to the approach where schools receive approval to teach in English, but their classroom methodologies are decided upon by the school administration and parents. In the event the

school decides to register as a Cambridge Learning Assessment school it is for them to decide how it should be applied in the classrooms. For example, an email received from a government official, dated 20.11.2023, said that according to Article 21, Clause 2, “*educators have the right to freely choose educational program forms and methods of teaching, textbooks, and teaching aids, provided they comply with state educational standards*”. This returns to the broader pattern in which schools are granted permission to teach in English, while decisions about classroom methodologies are shaped largely by school administrators and parents. It thus remains responsible for determining how that education framework will be implemented in classroom practice. Apart from the teaching handbooks, educators receive no additional guidance and therefore rely heavily on their own creativity to design lesson plans and manage classroom activities.

Informal conversations with local teachers showed that a heavy hand lay on Kyrgyz and Russian history as well as on literature teachers, in comparison to the English-medium subjects. Discussions in the teacher rooms revealed that the schools chose older Kyrgyz educators to represent the schools because they carried respect with the government officials. This respect made the engagement with the Department of Education and Science easier, while teacher meeting observations showed administration’s concern about government audits. This translated to fear concerning the legal status of foreigners and whether any issues could result in the deportation of international teachers. Often, senior local teachers only mentioned the school’s concerns after a visit to the government offices. Photos of the government visits normally circulated on the international schools’ websites to show their connection with or approval from the officials. Officials generally received a gift from the school in the shape of flowers or chocolates.

According to DeYoung et al. (2006), the concern about local teachers’ fear of sharing information they perceive may impact their careers is genuine and should be understood in historical context. Local teachers explained the importance of their culture and the drive towards protecting their freedom from the Soviet regime. The government had mandated that private schools integrate Kyrgyz cultural subjects into their teaching, which created challenges for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Despite the limited stated influence of the government, regular audits and compliance checks demonstrated a firm adherence to national educational standards. However, achieving these standards was not compensated

proportionately. Participant BG said, *“The biggest challenge is the low teacher salaries and struggle for them to adapt to the city environment”*. For local teachers, it had been difficult to cope with all the expectation and remain motivated. There was low morale amongst the local teachers.

Structured interviews with Kyrgyz-speaking teachers showed that, after graduation, universities placed them in village schools, where they lived full-time with students and taught them at the campus. In contrast, international schools in the city allowed teachers to live independently but expected them to work extra hours for student trips and holidays. Administrator BB explained that *“this requirement forms part of character education and is expected by the Ministry of Education”*. Therefore, different identities formed between the local and the foreign teachers, aligned with a variety of teacher experiences and expectations about the success rate of English-medium teaching. This comes back to expectation versus the real world and how the international schools managed their operations, which influenced educators’ daily work lives. Educators expressed their challenges among themselves with the hope of receiving advice or insight into methods of improving their teaching skills. Educators who arrived from a non-teaching background focused on students not listening, while traditional teachers’ concern was that the accepted students could not speak English at all.

The influence of parents’ expectation also added another layer of frustration for the teachers. Parents wielded considerable power in determining school operations, with parental organisations acting similarly with regard to an executive board. The meetings that took place often excluded broader participation by all stakeholders, for example foreign teachers, fostering an air of secrecy and speculation among staff. Participant E, a foreign teacher, mentioned *“the need for new teaching methodologies, and the lack of experience by new educators”*. The discussions with parents and teachers who originated from Türkiye revealed that they believed that the government connected with international bodies for example UNESCO to show their drive towards improved education. However, tight control was in place about the philosophy of teaching and the political approach taken in the international schools. Searching for international partnerships allowed the government and the international schools to display a democratic front, but this came with a cost.

Additionally, in informal discussions with parents, they expressed the concern that the costs of school registration had remained high, and even earning a higher salary in Kyrgyzstan would still leave a gap in parents' annual income. Interviews with school administration officials revealed that aligning with international standards was essential for schools to access external funding. However, Türkiye had had success in establishing various schools funded by its government to generate "political elites" (Balci & Liles, 2018: 18) in Central Asia. These political factors had had a direct impact on how teachers were expected to teach to maintain the high international standards while adhering to the government's expectation to infuse cultural knowledge into the curriculum, and also to satisfy parents who had paid a lot of money towards ensuring their children's proficiency in English. All these expectations were hard to balance for teachers and created a lot of anxiety among them.

5.4.3 *Researcher as a tool*

My experiences in Bishkek exposed me to local and foreign teachers' challenges. For example, local teachers born in the village but teaching in the city had experienced different internal cultural identity challenges from those of the teachers born in the city. Informal conversations over a cup of coffee in the teachers' room allowed local educators to talk about their education careers and explain the dynamics that outsiders did not see. One of the things I observed was that the local teacher arriving from a rural area would speak mostly Kyrgyz and little Russian. Teachers living in the city would speak mostly Russian and very little Kyrgyz. This resulted in an identity clash between the educators. However, local teachers working at the international schools received their education training in English, and this enabled them to instruct learners in this language.

This unique perspective allowed me to engage meaningfully with interviewees in the Kyrgyz Republic, who recounted experiences of familial origins in Eastern Europe, Russia or Mongolia and shared accounts of financial hardship during periods of conflict. My basic command of German and Russian languages proved valuable in translating interviews and facilitating communication with local educators. Ultimately, my family background and sustained interest in the region significantly shaped my research approach. My personal experiences shaped the research, especially in that this was an ethnographic study. According to Mattarelli, Bertolotti and Macri (2013), an ethnographic approach aims to participate, observe and integrate with the participants who form part of the research study. Therefore, using ethnography provided a logic that allowed for the analytical understanding of the research data collected and the interaction with the interviewees (Skukauskaitė & Green, 2023). I remained true to this approach to make sure that I understood what was going on in the field.

What became clearer in my research was the fact that I had influenced the data because I was part of the tool, even though I used cultural relativism as a framework to ensure that the perception of other people's cultural beliefs, values and practices should not fit a typical matrix of outsiders (Österman, 2021). But I could not avoid using my experiences to make sense of the data I was collecting. I also noticed that what I found interesting and fascinating was not necessarily interesting for the local people. This at face value could be explained in terms of familiarity. But there is a deeper side to it, I believe. As a teacher in Bishkek, I made regular

visits with learners to the museum, libraries or parks—forming a typical part of the educator’s day—which revealed teacher-versus-child behaviour in an out-of-classroom setting. These outings not only formed part of character education but also an opportunity for children to speak English outside of the classroom. In a country where most people speak Kyrgyz or Russian in public places, opportunities remain scarce. The administration had requested teachers to motivate children to speak English during the school days, and because the levels of children’s language ability vary, this created a sense of fear among less equipped learners. Travelling with children in a school bus gave an insight into how they reacted, and Russian remained the preferred language for engagement outside of the school environment. It was apparent that only foreign students who spoke English at home would engage in the language outside of the classroom. Yet it was a general expectation that children should be enabled to speak English fluently and become ready for foreign travel, study and work opportunities.

These experiences were awkward for me, because I could see how difficult it was for the students to speak English. It was easier to understand their anxiety because even though I have a basic understanding of Russian, I do not speak it fluently. So, I struggle to express what I want to say and end up saying only what I can say, not what I want to say. It is in this context that I changed the focus of the study, because I realised that the main problem for the learners was English. In as much as this was “good” for them, I kept on wondering if it would not be better for them to learn English when in the English-speaking countries. Even though my Russian is still at the basic level, it is improving because I have to speak it out of necessity. Learning the language without having a space to practise it becomes a futile exercise. My ability to make these observations comes from understanding that I was a tool and therefore paid attention to, or was drawn to, things that were affecting me personally. As such, the contributions of the study are personal.

5.5 Towards the liberation of languages

In the previous section I have shown how language is intertwined with privilege and oppression. This feeds into the politics of identity and how the historical multicultural dynamics had influenced the outlook of the classrooms and created identities within the teachers as well as the students. The ability of teachers to adapt to classroom environments where students did not speak English had remained a challenge and was observed during the

interviews with the participants. There seemed to be a sense of multiculturalism in the classroom but with dynamics that had arrived from the Soviet regime, representing populations from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Guillot, Gavrilova & Pudrovska, 2011). This was in addition to the cultures visible in the classroom that arrived from Ukraine and Russia (Moscow and St Petersburg) as well as communities from East Germany and Poland. Added to this were children arriving from the Middle East, whose parents were posted to Kyrgyzstan as diplomats, creating a pot of diverse cultures and complexities. Language thus becomes integral in the understanding of multiculturalism.

Scholars such as Printsipalova (2024) have argued that acquiring a foreign language introduces one to the worldview that shaped that language. Clearly, language is not just about communication but how one interprets the world. It follows, therefore, that introducing someone into a new language is introducing a new culture. This could be a good thing because opening oneself to different worldviews does open one's horizons. It is in this context that many parents in Bishkek, when they could afford it, put their children into English schools to expand their horizon. However, it becomes unfair when not all languages are understood in the same vein, especially if the emphasis on a language contradicts the principles of education. For example, in Bishkek the government's expectations for student engagement in extracurricular activities often clashed with the realities of exam preparation, resulting in friction between foreign teachers and school administration. The tension arose from differing priorities regarding educational outcomes versus holistic development. It was a challenge to be in the environment of preparing high school students for exams and also experiencing regular requests to make students available for extracurricular activities. For teachers this was added pressure because of the complexity of managing expectations from the school, government and parents. Clearly, it was difficult for them to balance teaching and the teaching of the foreign language. This was emphasised by older foreign teachers, who often expressed concern that students' English-speaking capabilities from the beginning created difficulties in the classroom because they did not understand the teacher's instructions. However, older-generation local teachers felt English-medium instruction gave the children from Kyrgyzstan a way out of depression and financial poverty, while younger foreign teachers saw the opportunity to enter a globalised world.

Given the frustrations that come with teaching English to both teachers and learners, it is clear that there must be another way. Having spent more than two years in Bishkek, I wondered what was wrong with their own languages. I wondered why they would not take their own languages out into the wider world. Here I was taking English out to the world, so why was this not possible for the Bishkek people to do with their languages? There are no easy answers to these questions, but they are worth asking, especially because they speak to the inequalities on a global stage. There are languages that belong on the global stage, but what we often do not pay attention to is the anxieties they cause to those who do not speak them. This research suggests that giving the non-native speakers access to learn English is even more oppressive, because it would leave the burden with them. The speakers of dominant languages are immune from the torture of learning a foreign language for survival. Coming to this realisation was difficult for me, as I had to confront the privilege of speaking the dominant language. The question that haunts me is: what will it take to end the inequalities? The answer to this will definitely liberate the people of Bishkek, who will remain the prisoners of English as long as it holds a key to their prosperity.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the themes developed, grounding them within the theoretical framework. The main theme is the micropolitical environment evident in the schools, made up of the parent and guardians, the head of school, administration, non-teaching staff and the teachers. However, the teacher concept presents a contested format, with a divide between foreign and local teachers. The differences between foreign and local orientations influence the worldview of English-medium teaching and the worldview regarding the success rate of the education approach. Consequently, teacher profiles, background and beliefs shape their classroom experiences and their perceptions about the sustainability of the international schools. However, the education background of the foreign and local teachers varies, which influences their views of their classroom experiences and perceptions about teaching models adopted in the international schools. This is indicative of the logic of globalisation and internationalisation that is informed by the logic of “free markets”. The findings suggest that the experiences of teachers are determined by their countries of origin, which carry power such that educators from the Americas are treated better as compared to educators from less

“popular” destinations. However, the experiences of learners who are expected to be proficient in English remains difficult.

Chapter 6: Conclusion



Don't just tell a different version of the same story.
Change The Story!

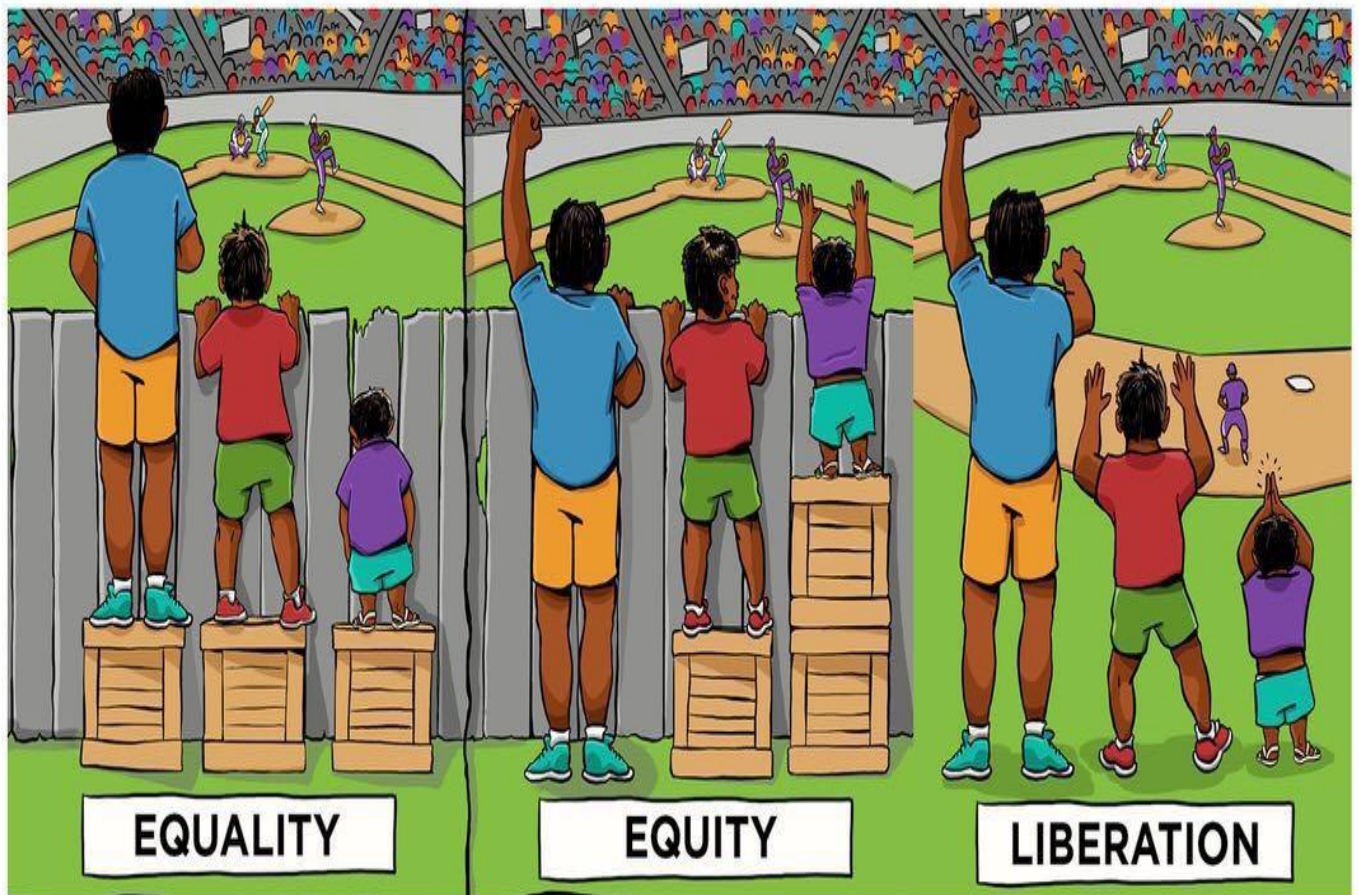


Figure 11: Summary of the thesis

(Image by the Center for Story-based Strategy, <https://www.storybasedstrategy.org/the4thbox>, with the Interaction Institute for Social Change, <http://interactioninstitute.org/>)

6.1 Concluding statement

The picture presented in Figure 11 summarises the conclusion for the thesis. When I was trying to articulate the contribution of the thesis to my supervisor, she showed me this picture, which she had used in her PhD thesis. I was intrigued, as the picture captured what I was trying to explain but struggling to express based on my experiences in the field. The picture summed up my argument very well. Based on my background, I believed in equity as a noble thing to strive for where people should be supported. In fact, I believed that in my job I was contributing to this noble cause of equity by teaching children to speak English so that they could access opportunities. The more I stayed in Bishkek, the more the emphasis on English started to trouble me. The more I saw how young people would agonise when struggling with English, the more I felt uncomfortable teaching English. My other discomfort was the fact that learning English did not guarantee that they would access the expected opportunities, especially with geopolitics that changes at a rapid rate. I could not explain this until my supervisor showed me this picture.

So, the main argument of the thesis is that we need to consider liberation over equity. The barriers to opportunities should be removed. In the present case, English as a barrier should be removed so that all languages become the languages of economy. While my preoccupation was equity, I thought that English speaking ability would bring about justice. While learning to speak English is a good thing when this is tied to opportunities, it places a greater burden on the poorer individual to work harder in order to access opportunities. More salient is the fact that when English is tied to the economy, it perpetuates inequalities rather than eliminating them. For example, I did not have to struggle to learn English, but I was born into it. The call for liberation is the call to remove all the barriers, in this instance the barrier posed by English as a global language. This is the call of this thesis. When educational systems prioritise globally privileged languages at the expense of local knowledge, they limit learners' holistic learning capacities. This limitation contributes to long-term developmental gaps that are reflected in the country's economic trajectory.

6.2 Summary of the thesis

This chapter summarises the contents of the thesis and highlights the core data, findings and analysis made while developing the main argument. Consequently, the purpose of this section is to give an overview of the main debate, the conclusions drawn and the recommendations made. The chapter therefore outlines key points made in each chapter to show the thread that goes through all the chapters in formulating the main argument while responding to the research questions.

Chapter 1 introduced the study by starting with a narration of the personal account to set the tone for the thesis. This personal account was critical as it informed the methodological trajectory but also prepared the reader on the approach to reading the thesis. The chapter moved on to present the main question of the study, derived from the background of the study. This was followed by the research objectives. Key to this chapter were the theories identified to frame the study. These theories were critical in delaminating unwarranted data and maintaining a focus on the main objectives. However, this does not suggest that there were deviations; rather, everything was still framed by the theories used. This chapter concluded by providing an outline of the thesis, where key arguments made in each chapter were presented.

Chapter 2 was the literature review, which began by engaging with the Kyrgyz language policies and the changes since independence from the Soviet regime. Therefore, education in Central Asia links with the Soviet past, and the historical background gives an insight into past education philosophies, especially because they remain evident in the education system of the Kyrgyz Republic. Also, international teaching attracts a variety of debates that align with the question about the role of English in the curriculum, the success expectations and the sustainability of the teaching models that form part of international schools. Additionally, the literature focuses on the core of these arguments and gives insight into the reasons why an interest in international schooling specifically has developed in Central Asia. This chapter revealed the dominance of English resulting from globalisation. It therefore put a spotlight on English, not just as a subject at school but also as a language of the economy. The main contribution of this chapter is in locating the study within the broader discussions on international teaching and its challenges.

Chapter 3 dealt with the methodology, which played an integral part in the research. This chapter showed how the chosen methods assisted in collecting relevant data for the study. This

was a qualitative study, so I needed to understand the experiences of the people of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in context. To help the reader to understand the site for the study, I discussed the area in detail. Participant observation afforded me an opportunity to learn about the experiences without being evasive. Critical to data collection was the autoethnographic method that I utilised. In this chapter I discussed the role of this method and its significance to the study as a whole. Key to the methods employed was the ethical consideration. I therefore discussed ethical considerations that this study observed to ensure that no harm was caused by the study. The importance of the chapter in the thesis is that it proved the legitimacy of the findings and thus the conclusions made.

Chapter 4 presented the findings drawn from the collected data. It described the insights arising from the structured and unstructured interviews, the focus group sessions and the informal discussions with participants affiliated with the schools. The core of the interviews and discussions aligned with teachers' experiences, challenges and expectations in a foreign country, in addition to the development of an individual identity in a non-English speaking country. Using the grounded theory to analyse data, themes were developed, and the findings were therefore presented in terms of themes from the data. In this chapter, I let the participants speak so that their views were not diluted with my personal views. This was important because part of my research method was autoethnography, which allowed my voice its place. However, balancing my voice and the voices of the participants was crucial. This chapter therefore comprised mainly participants' voices coming from the field.

Chapter 5 analysed the findings to formulate the argument of the thesis based on data collected. Using the themes developed in chapter 4, the chapter provided four main arguments. The first argument was based on the impact of globalisation and internationalisation. While globalisation offers great promise, its impact on poor countries widens the global inequalities. Second is the role of education for public good. The thesis has argued that English as a language of economy reduces the role of education to individual benefits instead of public good. This is contrary to the Sustainable Development Goals, which identified education as critical to development of countries. Lastly, I argued that international schools are at the centre of global politics because they are a response to global inequalities. The chapter thus brought together all the arguments made in the different chapters, bounded by the theories that framed the study.

6.3 Conclusions drawn

In conclusion, international schools play a pivotal role in the educational sector, alleviating the educational burden on overly stretched governments but also providing a much-needed education that centres on English. International schools structure their education based on the expectations of parents and administrators rather than strictly following Cambridge, Oxford, or IB guidelines. Their reputation depends largely on external perceptions, including those of local communities and international organisations like UNICEF. Government involvement in these schools is minimal, with oversight mainly focused on public education; international schools have been largely responsible for their own teaching methods, as there is little legislation governing their management. As a result, international schools operate with flexible formats shaped by global perspectives and are able to adjust their educational approaches, partially through accreditations like Cambridge. Conclusions are as follows:

i. Globalisation and internationalisation are entangled in the colonial legacy.

The dream of globalisation and internationalisation aligns with the vision of becoming “American” although the teaching models mostly rely on British English grammar, reading, writing and listening. Consequently, expectations from parents, the school administration and government officials form a different pattern than expected, and this comes from the colonial legacy of being part of the past Soviet regime. Parents, local teachers and administration strive to give learners a sense of freedom that presents independence from the Soviet style of living. However, freedom does not arrive from being non-Soviet but rather from living in a foreign country that speaks American English and then “other” Englishes evident in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

In contrast, the Kyrgyz government’s idea of globalisation focuses on joining peer Central Asian countries to protect the Kyrgyz language while working together with international organisations, for example UNICEF, to improve quality education. This approach contrasts with the international schools’ philosophy focusing on developing generations of school children to study abroad instead of in their home country.

ii. English is an expression of capitalism.

English becomes the dominant language reflecting freedom, financial strength and a decent career. For this reason, the core drive and measure of success is to have a student ready for successful registration at an English teaching university in the United States or United Kingdom. English becomes the language that will provide the student with access to a successful career, freedom and safety. However, the opportunity to study in English asks extensive financial support and is not in alignment with the average Kyrgyz income. This aligns with the role of capitalism in the international schools. Primarily, the drive to speak English comes with a financial impact. However, low Kyrgyz salaries do not align with this expectation and create a sense of unease with the Kyrgyz communities. Therefore, inequality becomes an issue of language and not only the financial status of an individual.

Capitalism determines the importance of an individual and the ability to gain English-speaking capabilities. This aligns with the perception that quality teaching is only offered in the typical English-speaking countries, for example the United States. Also, capitalism drives the meaning of success for the international schools and the expected outcomes by the administration, parents, teachers and students. It is not about origin, cultural background, family or sense of belonging; it is about a method to reach financial freedom. This removes the students' sense of patriotism towards their country or the ability to contribute towards the development of their society while building the blocks for a better future. Generations influenced by the Soviet regime and the heaviness that comes with it see capitalism as freedom even if this requires living in a country with different cultural viewpoints from those of the students.

iii. There is a need to advance education for public good.

The Kyrgyz Republic remains committed to the protection of their culture and language, which opposes the international schools' core message. This becomes a conflict between English speaking and local politics. Although a small portion of the country supports English-medium education, it is mostly evident in the capital city and to a lesser degree in the other cities in the country. Therefore, English becomes the language of the enemy and does not represent freedom to all citizens in the country. In other words, internationalisation becomes the opposite of interculturalism and the idea of living and working in your own country. It becomes the reverse of building your country and investing knowledge in enhancing the freedom that an individual's country is looking for. Internationalism becomes the new freedom away from your country, while culturalism connotes a sense of underdevelopment.

6.4 Contributions of the study

The study contributes to understanding the debate of international English-medium teaching versus internationalisation or globalisation. It also contributes to an understanding of the sustainability of education in the English-medium regime. It exposes the limitations of English-medium schools in failing to balance skills-based subjects with English. Additionally, the study attempts to provide insight into the contradictions between government policies and what the international schools expect and promote to the parents or guardians. The main contribution, however, draws from the autoethnographic approach, which became a window through which I began to understand the interplay between local and global politics. One of the major contributions is the understanding that our role as researchers is not to shy away from politics but to confront them. This is not a new contribution to the body of knowledge, but in terms of using autoethnography, I provide a new lens for speaking about the impact of global politics in local communities. Autoethnography allows for honest reflections such that we are able to talk about politics from the vantage point of the researcher.

6.5 Recommendations

- i. Develop education teaching for the Kyrgyz Republic.*

It becomes critical for government to define the meaning of international teaching in the Kyrgyz context and how this option would build the country without causing a brain drain. The challenge is to foster English-speaking abilities for the local environment and the ability to link with international organisations without leaving one's country of origin.

- ii. Maintain cultural understanding.*

Government involvement in the international schools should maintain the importance of their cultural and historical background with the aim of convincing students to remain in their countries, while still giving them the opportunity to explore the global world and expand their knowledge. The philosophy of being a local with global knowledge should be promoted in the schools instead of convincing learners to move to another country.

- iii. Develop a means of quality education in a variety of languages.*

Quality education should not be language based but focused on providing access to all individuals from Kyrgyzstan to obtain a qualification aligned with international and local standards. Also, education should not be about speaking English but developing a career in an ever-changing world.

iv. Develop quality local teaching models.

Teaching models should integrate the local knowledge with English experiences and provide a multicultural opportunity to individuals in the Kyrgyz schools. Inequality cannot be ignored, but with government support and coordination with international institutions, the idea of international schools should change to preparing students to become ready for living and working in their own country.

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APPENDIX A: TURNITIN REPORT

Similarity Report	
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APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

19 May 2023

Dear Ms Elize Becker

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
31698182_CRECHS_2023

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 19 May 2023 to 19 May 2024

Researcher(s): Name: Ms. E. Becker
Contact details: 31698182@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Dr. S. van Wyk
Contact details: vawykjs@unisa.ac.za

Title: English-Medium Teaching at an International School: Ethnography on Facilitating Learning for Pupils Towards Joining The Global World In Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Degree Purpose: PHD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The low risk application was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.



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4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (19 May 2024). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number 31698182_CRECHS_2023 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Signature: 

Prof. KB Khan
CHS Research Ethics Committee Chairperson
Email: khankb@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature: PP 

Prof ZZ Nkosi
Acting-Executive Dean: CHS
E-mail: nkosizz@unisa.ac.za
Tel: 012 429 6758



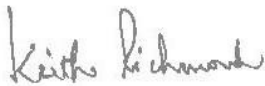
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APPENDIX C: PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING

Editing of this thesis

This is to certify that I, Keith Richmond, have edited this thesis, “An exploration of English-medium teaching at an international school towards joining the global world: An autoethnographic account from Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan”, by Elize Becker.

I did not alter its substantive content in any material way but focused on elements of expression, formatting, layout and referencing. My changes in the text were tracked electronically for the author’s noting, and queries were made in the margin for her consideration.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Keith Richmond". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Keith Richmond, Editor
Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
February 2026

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Appendix 4: Request to participate in the study

**Research title: English-medium Teaching at an International School:
Ethnography on Facilitating Learning for Pupils Towards Joining the Global
World in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**

**Researcher:
Elize Becker**

Ethics clearance reference number:

23 February 2023

Title: English-medium Teaching at an International School: Ethnography on Facilitating Learning for Pupils Towards Joining the Global World in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Elize Becker and I am doing research with Stephan Van Wyk, a lecturer in Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology towards a PhD Degree in Anthropology at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled English-medium Teaching at an International School: Ethnography on Facilitating Learning for Pupils Towards Joining the Global World in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to find out about English-medium teaching in Kyrgyzstan. I propose to research the role of English-medium teaching at an international school in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, to equip students with the ability to transfer to universities that fall outside of the Kyrgyz Republic. In doing this I seek to investigate the degree to which my interlocutors believe that the school is achieving success in this regard. I will do this through ethnographic research, where I will combine participant observation at the school with in-depth interviews with a variety of role-players in the education system.

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WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

I am requesting the educators and administrators of the Oxford International School to participate because of their exposure towards English-speaking teaching since 2019.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves the undertaking of questionnaire surveys related to teachers' exposure towards English-medium teaching and administrators' involvement in the coordination of the English teaching programmes. Typical questions refer to when English teaching commenced, methods of influencing the classroom environment and expectations set out by the Department of Science and Education.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The benefits related to the research align with the in-depth understanding of the progress achieved in terms of English medium teaching and if the process achieved the goals set out by the international teaching environment as well as governmental authorities.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

The potential level of inconvenience may relate to the request for available time to undertake the questionnaires and the use of a translator during interviews with non-English speaking teachers or administrators.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Research will be undertaken in full confidentiality and only anonymous names will be used during the recording, reporting and publication stages of the research. Data will be kept with the researcher and archived in a protected environment.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a minimum period of five years in a locked cupboard at the researcher's location and presented to the university for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. If necessary sensitive data will permanently be destroyed.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

The participation will be on a voluntary basis and no payment provided for the activity.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

N/A

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Elize Becker at +996 550 408 042 or 31698182@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible for two years. Please do not use home telephone numbers. Departmental and/or mobile phone numbers are acceptable.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Elize Becker at +996 550 408 042 or 31698182@mylife.unisa.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact <insert supervisor's contact details here, including email, internal phone number and fax number>. Contact the research ethics chairperson of the <insert name of the committee, the name of the research ethics chairperson and contact details here, including email, internal phone number and fax number> if you have any ethical concerns.

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Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elize Becker'.

Elize Becker

PhD researcher

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research interview schedule:

The research interview schedule aims to provide insight into the proposed participant questionnaire and areas of significance. Questions align with the research objectives identified during the proposal development.

The research proposes to use the following Interview schedule:

Teachers:

- Do local teachers receive training in terms of working at international English-medium schools?
- How are foreign teachers monitoring and experiencing English-medium teaching at international schools?
- Do foreign and local teachers receive opportunities to give feedback about their experiences in English-medium teaching?
- If foreign and local teachers provide feedback, are the data recorded systematically and reports provided?
- Are local and foreign teachers provided with the ability to make changes to the education system?

School administrators:

- Are administrators required to use Kyrgyz or Russian during the completion of formal documentation?
- In which manner is the use of English implemented in an official manner at international schools?
- Do administrators receive opportunities to suggest changes to the education system?

Department of Science and Education officials:

- When did English teaching commence in Kyrgyzstan?
- What is the relation between Kyrgyz and Russian language usage in the education department?
- Are English legally declared as a foreign or official language medium at international schools?
- How is the use of English-medium teaching monitored at international schools?
- Is Russian or Kyrgyz used as the main communication language on an official level?