International students' experience in the peripheries: A case study in Kyrgyzstan

by

Hamid Ali Khan
Student Number: 580019930

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Abstract

Internationalisation is a norm in higher education. A main facet of internationalisation is the mobility of students across borders for higher education. Mobility towards the global North (developed countries) was a dominant trend until recently. This mobility resulted in student experience and a vast amount of research exists on these mobility-related experiences of international students in the context of the global North. However, due to the economic, cultural, political and academic benefits of internationalisation, countries from the global South also started attracting international students. Resultantly, this Southward mobility has become a new and emerging trend in international education and there is a lack of research on mobilities within these peripheral contexts. This study is focused on one such peripheral context. It explored regional international students' experience in Kyrgyzstan using Bourdieusian theoretical lens of thinking tools. This research aimed at finding answers to three important questions related to international student mobility and ensuing experiences in this country. These three questions were about international students' reasons for choosing Kyrgyzstan as a higher education destination, their living experience in the country and how this experience is shaping their future image. This exploratory study adopted an intrinsic case study strategy under the interpretive paradigm. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, group discussion and diary entries from a group of eight international students studying at the site of the research. The findings revealed that the dominant reasons for leaving their home country and choosing Kyrgyzstan as higher education destination were broadly academic and future employment-related. Regarding the living experiences, it was discovered that the students faced personal, social and academic adjustment difficulties due to homesickness, English medium instruction, curriculum, the language barrier in social situations, and social isolation. However, some of the positive experiences of the students were associated with English medium of instruction and curriculum. Additionally, the students expressed higher satisfaction with residential facilities, availability of financial support, diversity on campus and academic support. The study has importance for the researcher, the management of the university which was the site of the research and other stakeholders as it provides information, knowledge and understanding about the context in which this study was conducted.

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List of Acronyms

AKDN	Agha Khan Development Network
AUCA	American University of Central Asia
AUD	Australian Dollar
CA	Central Asia
CAR	Central Asian Republics
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CS	Case Study
ELP	English Language Proficiency
EMI	English Medium Instruction
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GATTS	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IHE	International/Internationalisation of Higher Education
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IS	International Students
ISE	International Student Experience

ISM	International Student Mobility
KGHEI	Kyrgyz Higher Education Institution
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RIS	Regional International Students
SHEI	Soviet Higher Education Institution
SPHERE	Support and Promotion for Higher Education Reform Experts
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UCA	University of Central Asia
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United Stated of America
USD	United Stated Dollar
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organization

Chapter 1
Introduction

This chapter provides a general overview of the current research. First, the background and rationale of the study are presented. This will situate the study in its broader perspective of internationalisation of higher education. Next, details of research questions, research site, participants, and the significance of the research are provided. Finally, an outline of the research paradigm and methodology is introduced. The main objective is the presentation of general information about this study.

1.1 Background and Rationale

Internationalisation, in simplistic sense, means between two or more nations, and by deduction internationalisation of higher education should mean some type of cross-nation activity or cooperation in the field of higher education (HE) (Larsen, 2016). Knight (2012) considers it an umbrella term for cross-border, transnational, borderless or offshore activities in the field of higher education. She itemizes these cross-nation activities as transborder exchange and movement of students and teachers for academic reasons, international networking of HE institutions (HEIs), HEIs engagement in cross-nation partnership and projects, transborder delivery of academic programmes and setting up campuses in other countries. The activities can take different forms and shapes depending on needs, culture, tradition and history of a specific temporal and geographic context (F. Maringe, Foskett, & Woodfield, 2013). These bi/multinational activities lead to expanding the sphere of HEIs management, functioning and service beyond the national borders (Larsen, 2016). These activities also form the essential warp and weft of the practice of internationalisation of higher education (IHE). Philosophically and ideologically, the term has been defined as “a process of integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension” to various aspects of HEIs functioning and services (Knight, 2015, p.2).

The beginning of the internationalisation activities in the HE can be traced back to the medieval ages when students moved across borders in search of education and universities (Lumby & Foskett, 2016). However, compared to the modern form and manifestation of internationalisation, the medieval internationalisation is rudimentary for being limited to the individual mobility and individual drive. Internationalisation, as it is conceptualised and practiced now, appeared towards the end of the 20th century (E Jones & de Wit, 2012) and since then has become the core of the HE functions, service and delivery across the globe (Gao, 2015) to the extent that Rumbley, Altbach, and Reisberg (2012) felt compelled to link the survival of HE in the new 21st century globalised environment, to internationalisation. It has not only become a prevalent concern but has also changed the very fabric of HE (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Traditionally and predominantly, HE has been a purely academic endeavour or knowledge imparting system. The prevalence of internationalisation linked it strategically to politics, culture, economy, trade, foreign relations and many other spheres of national and international transactions and exchanges (Meda & Monnapula-Mapesela, 2016).

The most dominant and conspicuous among all these linkages is the connection of HE to economy and therefore by implication to trade and finance. The essential trait of the 21st century economy has been knowledge. In this new economic paradigm, productivity and economic growth are directly related to the creation and utilization of knowledge and information (1996 OECD). HEIs, being the centres of knowledge production and distribution, have been ascribed a premium in this new paradigm of economy (Meda & Monnapula-Mapesela, 2016). The importance of HE shifted from an academic endeavour to an economic enterprise. It has now been considered as a product or a commodity to be exchanged through trade and commerce (Knight, 2013). HEIs have no longer been regarded as educational systems but as knowledge producing industries and have become zones of investment and revenue generation. This new status of HE and HEIs has been accorded universal recognition and legitimation by including HE in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreement as a tradeable service across national borders to be regulated and governed by General Agreement on Trade in Service (GATS) facilitating the trade and exchange of HE and thereby knowledge across nations on a commercial scale (Warwick & Morgan 2013).

In this backdrop of commercialisation and commodification (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011), internationalisation or international has gained the status of a brand. International education has become associated with quality of programs and curricula (Knight, 2013), and education with international aspect has become a capital both for nations and individuals. The production and consumption of knowledge products in the knowledge-based economy has been through human agents and only international education has been regarded as having the capacity to develop these agents and equip them with requisite skills and competencies suitable for functioning successfully in the new global economic paradigm and the environment of the 21st century (Seeber, Cattaneo, Huisman, & Paleari, 2016). In the sphere of foreign relations, international education has become a means of sharing knowledge-based expertise and resources (Kreber, 2009). Programmes, curricula and brains have been exchanged between countries not only as a component of inter-nation relations strengthening initiatives but also to develop and improve the quality of HE among exchanging nations. These exchanges also resulted in cultural and linguistic diversity, intercultural understanding, peace and stability, global security, economic competition, political dominance and influence (Wit, 1999). These dimensions have made internationalisation of higher education a zone of contact and desire. It has become a zone of contact (S. Marginson, 2014) because within the arena of IHE nations, governments, institutions, individuals and various political, social, cultural and economic elements interacted with each other. Concurrently, it has become a zone of desire (Collins, Sidhu, Lewis, & Yeoh, 2014) because again nations, governments, institutions and individuals desire to be actors, participants and beneficiaries of IHE. This has resulted in moving IHE from the margins to the core of national, governmental and institutional political, economic, cultural and academic strategic agenda and objectives (Ennew, 2012). Nations, both developed and underdeveloped have launched strategies and initiatives to be equal level players and actors in the IHE arena as it not only can develop their human capital but can also provide a substantial opportunity of economic gain and development (Kreber, 2009).

While IHE has been linked to larger political, economic, social and academic interests (Knight, 2004a); for individuals, international education has also been a highly desirable commodity. It has become a capital and an advantageous factor in gaining employment within and beyond national borders (Brooks & Waters 2009). Possession of international education has been synonymous with the possession of skills and competencies needed for success in a global economy. These skills are perceived to be gained only at internationalised institutions as these institutions offer a curriculum which guarantees that the graduates are equipped with the skills compatible with the demands of the new global environment of the 21st century (Meda & Monnapula-Mapesela, 2016).

The result of this individual desire for the possession of international higher education has been students' cross-border mobility generally to the institutions in the western countries as these countries have been considered hubs of international education (Jon, Lee, & Byun, 2014). Due to the tremendous volume of this mobility has been great therefore it is termed as the 'face of internationalisation' (Knight, 2012, p.21). This is evident from the consistent growth in the number of students who moved across borders seeking international higher education. In 2002, this number was 2.1 million, rising to 3.4 million in 2009 (Choudaha & Chang, 2012) and is expected to rise to 7.2 million by 2025 (Knight, 2012b). This scale of mobility is not solely a result of individual motive to gain an international education as a means of 'personal' and 'economic' capital or as a means to maintain 'social advantage'(Brooks & Waters, 2009) only. The causes are also linked to other factors at play globally. Knight (2012) calls it a 'brain race'. In this brain race, student mobility is not only connected to commercial and economic interests of nations and HEIs, but for many countries, it has become an agent of human, economic and innovation development (Stein & de

Andreotti, 2016).

Thus, in addition to being a zone of contact and desire for macro scale economic, financial, political, social and academic interests, IHE is also a zone of contact and desire for individual motives and interests. From an individual student perspective, IHE is a zone of desire because of the higher social, cultural and educational value attached to international education (Collins et al., 2014) and once the student has moved to this zone, the IHE becomes a zone of contact as now the student meets a new language, culture, people, education system and social environment. This zone of contact becomes a site for students' lived experiences.

A substantial amount of research documenting the nature of these lived experiences of international students exists (Renn, Brazelton, & Holmes, 2014). However, most of the research has been conducted in the context of the developed countries. The assignable causes for this volume of research in these contexts, perhaps, can be that these countries are traditional and main hubs of internationalisation activities. They have been the receivers of the largest number of students, and therefore have also been the centres and focus of research in the field of internationalisation and student mobility (Kondakci, 2011). Contrastingly, the newly emerging regional hubs and destinations of international students in developing countries have remained under-investigated (Williams, Ridgman, Shi, & Ferdinand, 2014). Jon et al. (2014) term these neglected contexts as 'peripheral' countries. The current research aims to fill this gap by exploring and understanding the international students lived experience in a peripheral and rather a marginal country, that is, Kyrgyzstan.

1.2 Research Aim and Questions

The current research takes international higher education in Kyrgyzstan as a zone of desire and zone of contact and aims to explore why international students from regional countries desire to join international universities in the country, and once they have joined the universities, and the zone of desire has become the zone of contact, then how they experience this zone and how this experience forms their image of the future which is another zone of desire. International students are defined as students “who have chosen to travel to another country for tertiary study” (Trahar & Hyland, 2011, p.630). As this research intends to focus on international students from the region (Central Asia) only, thus the term regional international students (RIS) is used. For this research RISs are those students who have left their country within Central Asia and have moved to Kyrgyzstan to pursue higher education here. Therefore, the research questions guiding this investigation are:

1) Why RISs choose to study in international universities in Kyrgyzstan?
2) How do the students experience personal, academic, and social life during their study in the country?
3) How is this experience shaping the image of their future?

1.3 Research Site and Participants

The research site for this study will be the University of Central Asia (UCA) Naryn campus in Kyrgyzstan. UCA is one university with three campuses. These fully residential campuses are in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. These campuses are in the isolated, underdeveloped, remote mountainous regions of the three countries. The university has been set up by the Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN), a large non-governmental philanthropic organisation, with a view to provide world-class education to the people of these poor mountainous communities as well as to other underprivileged communities of the developing countries. The university started its academic operation in its first campus in Naryn Kyrgyzstan in 2016 and in its second campus in Khorog Tajikistan in 2017. Bachelor's degrees in computer science and Media & Communication Studies are offered in Naryn campus, and in Earth & Environmental Sciences and Economics in Khorog campus. The university aims to be the future leading university in the region and to attract students from China, Turkey, Russia, and other countries in the Eurasian region. Currently, the university has an enrolment of 209 students. These students come from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Syria to pursue the above-mentioned diverse fields of study.

The research participants were these undergraduate RIS of UCA. Most of these students had completed at least two years of study at UCA campuses. Effort was made to recruit students in equal number and specifically from Central Asian countries.

1.4 Research Significance

The current study is significant for certain reasons. The first significance of this study, in relation to the mainstream internationalisation research, needs to be understood within the IHE world system of center and peripheries. The taxonomy of the system (see Figure 1), elaborated in a research article by Sin, Antonowicz, and Wiers-Jenssen, (2019), places the IHE world in four categories: core, semi-periphery, and periphery. Core countries are globally popular importers of international students. They include developed countries such as USA, UK, Australia, France, Canada, and Germany. These countries are also main exporters of knowledge products. Semi-periphery countries are importers as well as exporters. Capacity-wise, they are not as competitive as the core countries in attracting international students. Norway, Portugal, Japan, China, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea can be regarded as semi-periphery countries. Periphery countries do not have the capacity to attract international students. They are sending countries and importers of knowledge products. While there is robust and extensive body of research in the context of core countries on various aspects of internationalisation and international student experience; research in the context of semi-periphery countries is also emerging and growing (Wen, Hu, & Hao, 2018). However, fewer studies in the peripheral countries, exist and there is a need to conduct more research in these contexts as the dynamics of IHE and the position of the countries in this core-periphery taxonomy is changing (Quy, 2010). Countries at the peripheries have moved to the semi-peripheral position and countries which were once at the core are becoming unpopular due to economic and political reasons and there is a greater possibility of countries in the semi-peripheries or peripheries becoming popular hubs for international student mobility (Kondakci, 2011). Herein lies the significance of this research within the mainstream IHE research. It adds to the existing sketchy body of research on the context of peripheral countries. Kyrgyzstan lies at the margins of IHE. The country, as will be elaborated in the third chapter, has immense potential to become an emerging mobility destination. This research may be useful for the stakeholders in this entire perspective as it develops an understanding of a peripheral context.

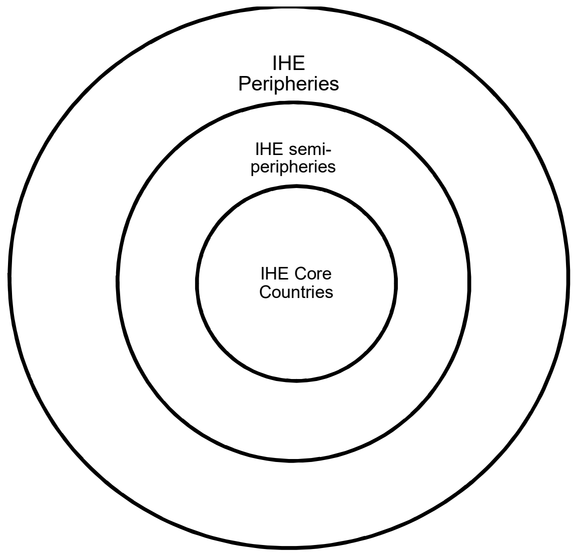

Figure 1: International HE world system

The second significance of the study lies in the choice of research location and context that is Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan is one of the six Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan). Five of these countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) were part of the former Soviet Union and gained independence as sovereign states after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Among these countries, Kyrgyzstan is the only democracy in the region and is also the first of the Commonwealth of Independent States to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The country has also introduced various HE reforms to keep the country apace with the global community (Silova, 2011). Nevertheless, despite all these developments, Kyrgyzstan is still a lower middle-income country with a GDP ranking of 143rd in the world. The country spends 16% of its budget on education of which the portion spent on higher education is only 4%. The country's higher education system is riddled with problems prominent among which are corruption and a lack of academic quality in terms of curriculum, faculty and facilities (Wolanin, 2002a). There is not a single Kyrgyz university in the Times Higher Education World University Ranking. These problems and the inadequacy of financial resources make the Kyrgyz HE heavily dependent on international philanthropic and donor organisation for higher education reforms and for establishing international higher education institutions. Main actors in the field are Turkey, Russia, the Agha Khan Development Network, and the Soros Foundation. However, despite these flaws, the Kyrgyz international HE is paradoxical. Of all the six countries in the region, Kyrgyzstan attracts 40% of all the international students studying in Central Asia (Sabzalieva, 2015). It is more than the neighbouring oil rich Kazakhstan which has better international education opportunities than Kyrgyzstan. This factor makes Kyrgyzstan and its international HE a significant context for research. It merits investigation to find why students choose Kyrgyzstan as an international study destination and what is the nature of their experiences in Kyrgyzstan.

The third significance of the study lies in its contribution to exploring students' desire and experience in the context of horizontal mobility. Rivza and Teichler (2007) distinguish between horizontal mobility and vertical mobility of students. While vertical mobility denoted a movement from developing to developed countries, horizontal mobility occurs when students move from developing countries to developing countries or from South (from a low-income country) to South (to another low-income countries). Vertical mobility can be motivated by individual desire for immigration through education or settlement in the destination country in future or by a purely academic motive of acquiring better higher education as the local higher education does not have equivalent quality (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014). Most of the studies on international students' experience have been conducted in vertical mobility contexts. The current study focuses on a minority context that is horizontal mobility context or developing to developing or South to South mobility context. Lee (2017) also calls it 'shared border mobility' (p.870) and claims that the volume of this type of mobility in all international student mobility is 19%. This percentage may grow in future as the scale of mobility will expectedly increase across the globe. Additionally, with emerging international higher education destinations and hubs in Asia, there is a greater possibility of the developing countries in the South becoming the new zones of international education desire. Therefore, this study can be helpful in adding to the understanding the motives for horizontal mobility.

The fourth reason of the significance of the study lies in its focus on the Central Asian and regional population of students. International students from Central Asian and the regional countries and their experiences in the regional international education institutions have not received much attention in research. The international education opportunities in the region are growing. For example, new international education institutions are being set up in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Also, the region is of significant importance to China's One Belt One Road initiative, and this may result in further economic and higher education development in the region in future. This may also result in an increase in the intra-regional students' mobility. Thus, the current research, by studying the experiences of foreign students in the

Kyrgyz context, may conclude on some useful insights for future scenario in terms of planning for the foreign students' experiences in these new international education institutions or the ones yet to be established.

1.5 Research Paradigm and Methodology

The main aim of the study is to understand, rather than explain, the reasons for horizontal mobility of the regional international students of Central Asia, the nature of their experience and the link of the experience to their future. This understanding is related to the world of humans, that is, the questions leading this research are related to the social world rather than the natural world. Individual perceptions, values, meanings and conscience play an important role in understanding social phenomenon, and the human social world around us cannot be understood without understanding these individual perceptions, values, meanings and conscience (Ernest, 1994). Essentially, this belief points to the elements relativism and subjectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Both terms broadly mean that reality, its understanding and expression, is not outside the individual conscience or social, cultural, ideological and environmental influences (Richards, 2003). These are the ontological and epistemological foundations of the interpretive research paradigm. The research aim of this study cannot be achieved unless individual perceptions, views and meanings are collected through interaction with the research participants, and any understanding of these individual views and meanings will necessarily also be affected by the researcher's perception, values and meanings, and researcher's interpretation. Thus, the research is grounded in the interpretative paradigm.

Interpretive paradigm favours a qualitative methodology. The suitability of the qualitative methodology lies in the fact that it is “flexible and sensitive to social context in which data are produced” (Grix, 2004, p.121) and this flexibility and sensitivity creates a broader scope for interaction between the participants and researcher which allows the participants to share their views, opinion, perceptions and meanings (Dörnyei, 2007). As the research aims to seek an understanding of human action and experience which stems from a certain societal phenomenon, therefore, qualitative methodology is an appropriate option.

Within the spectrum of qualitative methodology, a case study method will be adopted. A case study is a well-established research strategy in the field of education. A case study is a “single instance” of “a bounded system” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p.253). It aims at analysis and understanding of a single instance leading to the understanding of other similar instances or case. The starting point of any case study is the belief that a case under investigation is integrally bound to its context (Cohen et al., 2018). The current study aims to investigate the instance of a specific group of regional international students in a specific international education university with specific characteristics and in a country and region. Thus, it can be termed as a ‘specific instance’ of a ‘bounded system’ clearly separable from other systems in terms of time, geography, and context. The system is also integrally linked to its context of IHE, the country and the region. The research questions are oriented towards understanding rather than generalization or hypothecation. The research questions leading this investigation aim to “catch the close up reality […..] of participants’ lived experience of, thoughts about and feelings for a situation” (ibid). There is a diverse range of case studies. Yin (2003) classifies them as exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Stake (1995) categorises them as intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies. Keeping in view that the current research aims to study a specific case for an in-depth understanding rather than for forming a hypothesis or generalisation, the intrinsic case study type has been identified as the most aligned with the aim of this investigation. Intrinsic case study is “exploratory in nature, and the researcher is guided by his or her interest in the case itself rather than in extending theory or generalizing across cases” (Grandy, 2010, p. 240). The definition by Grandy supplies another justification for the choice of a case study generally and for the intrinsic case study specifically. It is my personal interest in the case. My course of academic and professional life has been positively influenced by the beneficial aspects of IHE. An opportunity to get an international academic qualification changed the whole dynamics of my life. The international academic qualification from the ‘North’ made possible better employment opportunities outside my country and I have been able to join the exclusive club of international faculty as compared to local faculty with a better salary. It changed life for me and my children also. I often feel intrigued about the commonalities and differences in my own and my international students’ life and experiences because I have been a beneficiary of IHE and they are going to be future beneficiaries of IHE; therefore, I am personally interested in this case. Further, I am part of the international faculty in the research site for my current study. The university has been set up by a large philanthropic organisation with a view to provide quality education to underprivileged students. The university and the education imparted there have the exclusive features of an international higher education institution and international education. It has cutting-edge facilities and world-class curriculum developed in the world-class universities in the ‘North’. However, the disadvantages outweigh these features. The university campuses are situated in very remote, isolated, poor, and difficult mountainous regions in countries which are on the ‘margins of globalisation’ and even on the margins of development. Commuting to and from these isolated and difficult regions can be a challenge in winter and the rainy season. Students, faculty, and staff remain bound to the premises of the campus as social and recreational possibilities and opportunities in the locality are scarce. Regardless of these limitations, the number of applicants from the Central Asian countries and other adjacent regions is increasingly rising. These aspects of this specific case and the higher number of regional international students in Kyrgyzstan, as compared to other regional countries, stimulated my interest in understanding the phenomenon. As the study involves a dominant element of personal interest, therefore, the choice of an intrinsic case study seems justified for this investigation.

1.6 Summary

This chapter gave general information about the research study. The focus of the research is on regional international students lived experience in an international university context in a peripheral country. The research is significant because it contributes to the limited body of existing research in peripheral countries context. The research will also help understand regionally mobile students’ experiences and may have important findings for various stakeholders and actors involved in the IHE in Kyrgyzstan and region as well. The next chapter presents the context of the study.

Chapter 2
Context of the Study

This chapter deals with the context of this study that is Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan is situated in the geographical region of Central Asia and without understanding Central Asia, it is difficult to understand Kyrgyzstan (Orosz & Perna, 2016). Therefore, an overview of Central Asia will precede presenting the same for Kyrgyzstan. The specific focus of the overview will be general profile, higher education and internationalisation.

2.1 Central Asia: General, HE, IHE Profile

Central Asia (CA) has always been at the crossroads of history, civilization, economy and politics. Even in today's globalized world, the region maintains great geopolitical significance. It is the converging point of Europe and Asia. Geographically, it borders with Russia (in Kazakhstan), China (in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), and Iran (in Turkmenistan). Two countries of the region (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) border with the landlocked Caspian Sea which has tremendous reserves of gas and oil. Politically, the region is a connecting point for powers like Russia, China, US, Europe and the Islamic world (Stobdan, 1998). It has great economic potential. The region's economic capacity stands at a combined GDP of $114 billion (Tazhin, 2008). The region is an activity hub for regional and global intergovernmental and supra-governmental organizations. Significant among these are the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Custom Union and Common Economic Space, the Eurasian Development Bank, the Asian

Development Bank, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the European Union, various institutes and organisations of the United Nations, the World Bank, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The presence of all these organisations demonstrates the breadth of global interest and the elements of globalization at play in the region. Some of these organisations are Chinese led, some are Russian led, some are Western and others are Islamic.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the four million square kilometres landlocked region of CA was partitioned into five sovereign states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The total population of these states collectively stands at approximately 70 million (Sabzalieva, 2016). After independence, the foremost challenge for these states was to transition from former USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) dependencies to the global space of independent countries with unique national identities, and with internationally acceptable, recognized and mainstream political, social, economic and educational institutions and systems.

Notwithstanding a common soviet political legacy of socialism and communism, the political systems adopted by these transition states vary and range from authoritarianism (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) to democracy (Kyrgyzstan). The same applies to economic systems in the republics. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the socialist economic system – characterized by governmental control, ownership and distribution – was replaced by capitalism which implies free commerce and market activities, consumerism, private ownership, and minimal governmental regulation. Of the five CA states, Kyrgyzstan is the only World Trade Organisation (WTO) member state, joining the organisation in 1998. Uzbekistan is not as much integrated into the global economic community as Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The economic system of Uzbekistan still retains the imprint of the socialist system in terms of governmental control of market, trade and commerce. The economic freedom and reforms are not at the level that can be found in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The Turkmenistan transition in economy is also not much different from Uzbekistan (Bazarbayev & Elmira, 2013).

Despite these intra-regional differences, a common characteristic of the economic transition was the economic standing and development. All CA republics, excluding Kazakhstan, have been on the margins of the global landscape in terms of economic development ranking according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook Database. Of the 179 countries included in the ranking, Tajikistan stands 151st, Kyrgyzstan 143rd, Uzbekistan 140th, and Turkmenistan 97th. Kazakhstan stands 62nd but this better standing of Kazakhstan can be attributed to the wealth that its oil reserves bring it (Tomusk, 2011) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic and economic information of CA states

Country	Population (million)	GDP (US$ billion)	GDP per capita (US$)
Kyrgyzstan	6.2	7.2	1,160
Tajikistan	8.8	7.2	812
Uzbekistan	32.4	48.7	1,504
Turkmenistan	5.7	36.2	6,389
Kazakhstan	18.2	158.2	8,792

Source: (The World Bank, n.d.)

2.1.1 HE in Central Asian Republics

Higher education has been one of the fields where these Central Asian republics (CARs) made a significant transition. HE in the Soviet Union was structured with the instrumental objectives of building and supporting the communist system of politics, economy, culture and society. The system was centralized, and the administrative structure was top-down which was a standard communist style of governance and administration. HE, for the Soviet Union, was an important part of its economic machinery. The mission of the HE institutions was to prepare needed number of graduates in specialized fields. HEIs and education were controlled and managed by various ministries and governmental departments. Therefore, most of the soviet HE institutions (SHEIs), were required to provide trained professionals in the specialisations required by these ministries and departments. As a result, the curricula delivered at those SHEIs had a technical and vocational nature (Smolentseva, Huisman, & Froumin, 2018). This whole approach can be summarized as a system where the central government or its various subsidiary sectors and departments were the funders, planners and consumers of higher education (Merrill, 2011). The political and social objective of the SHEIs was to consolidate and unify the communist empire of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). To achieve this, Russian was introduced as a medium of instruction in all SHEIs across the soviet republics and uniform principles for teaching, learning, admission, governance, finance and curriculum were followed (Heyneman, 2011). The achievement of the soviet empire in the field of education was near-universal access and higher literacy rate (near 100%) and a tremendous expansion of higher education opportunities even in the republics which were on the peripheries of the empire such as the CA republics (DeYoung, Kataeva, & Jonbekova, 2018). At the time of disintegration, in 1991, the USSR had 946 higher education institutes with 5.1 million students in the fifteen soviet republics (Smolentseva et al., 2018).

CARs made a shift from this USSR approach and legacy of higher education after their independence in 1991. Like the diverse and independent trajectories that political and economic transitions took in these countries, transitions in HE were also varied and took dimensions specific to each state (Silova, 2011). However, certain common features can be discerned in all five states. These features were predominantly a response to the forces of globalisation. During this era, no sovereign state was immune to the influences of the strong forces of globalisation and to be part of the global community and to function in the global space, all countries must adjust and align their policies, governance, systems, institutions, politics, foreign relations, and economies to the world order and system altered and reshaped by globalisation. This was the common imperative that all CARs must meet after the independence and this attributed certain common dimension to their transition from the USSR HE system to a national HE system aligned to the global system imperatives. The first dimension was assigning the role of nation, national identity and national culture-building to higher education. The second dimension was the expansion of the HE in terms of both the number of institutions and enrolment of students. The number of higher education institutions (HEIs), in CARs, at the time of soviet disintegration was 129 with an enrolment of nearly 800,000 students. Since then, the number of HEIs across CARs has grown to 317 and the enrolment of students in these HEIs is well beyond 1 million with some republics achieving nearly universal access rates. The third dimension of the transition was a package of reforms. These reforms comprised decentralization of the administration and organization of HEIs, introduction of tuition fees and admission tests, participation in the Bologna process (a reform initiative of 48 European countries with an objective to improve the IHE in the region), and permitting the establishment of private sector HEIs (Merril, 2011).

Table 2: Independence time and current landscape of HE in CARs

Country	# of HEIs	# Students enrolled	# of HEIs	# Students enrolled	% current enrolment	% govt. education spending
	Independence Time Landscape (1991)		Current Landscape			
Kyrgyzstan	12	58,023	52	214,410	45.89	16
Tajikistan	10	69,345	37	157,791	30.87	16
Uzbekistan	43	310,000	78	260,905	9.15	35
Turkmenistan	09	41,800	24	25,600	7.97	20
Kazakhstan	55	287,400	126	506,241	49.57	14

Source: (UNESCO, 2016), (Smolentseva et al., 2018)

The objective of the reforms, in the CARs, was a shift from a soviet HE space to a global HE space. Internationalisation is an important aspect of global higher education and for the HE of a country internationalisation, and some form of it, is indispensable if a country desires to align, connect and function its HE system in the global higher education space. Internationalisation has also been an important aspect of HE transitions in CARs post-independence higher education landscape also (Heyneman, 2011). Internationalisation took different shapes and meanings in these republics (Merril, 2011). However, the common feature of internationalisation in all five republics has been ‘infusing something foreign” (Larsen, 2016, p.

4) into their soviet-inherited systems. This infusion has been affected through reforms from international donors and aid agencies such as the World Bank, the OECD, the European Union, and the Asian Development Bank. These reforms have been in the areas of, but not limited to, structural improvement, introduction of standardized tests, introduction of market and commercial aspect of HE, partnerships, academic exchange, establishment of private institutions by, or in partnership, with international actors and donors and implementation of the Bologna process (Merril, 2011).

2.2 Kyrgyzstan: General and HE Profile

Kyrgyzstan is one of the smallest Central Asian states and also one of the poorest among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Beger, 2016). It has a population of more than 6 million; 25% of which lives below the national poverty line (Asian Development Bank, n.d.). The country shares borders with Kazakhstan (in the north), Tajikistan (in the south), Uzbekistan (in the west), and with China (in the east and southeast). 65% of the land is covered by mountains. The country is classified as a lower-middle-class income country. The GDP of Kyrgyzstan is 7.2 billion USD, of which 10% comes from the goldmines and 30% from the remittances from the Kyrgyz expatriates (World Bank, 2017). The country was termed as an ‘island of democracy’ for its democratic reforms since independence in 1991 (J. Anderson, 1999) though Freedomhouse (2017) scores it 6/7 (1 most democratic, 7 least democratic) in its evaluation.

Nevertheless, the democratic reforms in the country make it distinct from other CARs as most of them have authoritarian regimes. After facing two revolutions (in 2004 and 2010), the country held its second presidential elections in 2017. The country was also termed as a ‘geopolitical pivot’ (Engdahl, 2010) for being at the crossroads of geographical, political and economic interests of the world powers especially Russia, China and USA. The USA has strategic political and military interests in the country (Berger, 2016). Russia is the largest economic partner of the country (Chen, 2018) and a major portion of the country remittances come from the Kyrgyz expatriates working in Russia (Engdhal, 2010). Recently, the country joined the Eurasian Economic Union. The union is dominated by Russia and aims to achieve economic integration in the region (BTI, 2018). China has made significant direct investment in the country’s economy. This investment accounts for 50% of all foreign investments made in the country (Chen, 2018). The European Union is also an active political and economic partner of the country since independence, and has consistently been providing aid for political and economic reforms in the republic (Donors.kg, 2018). Turkey also has vast political, economic, military, educational, and commercial interest in the country. Both countries have signed the ‘Agreement on Eternal Friendship and Cooperation” in 1997. Canada is another actor in the Kyrgyz economy. The country’s only gold mine Kumtor is operated by a Canadian mining company.

2.2.1 Kyrgyz Higher Education Overview

Kyrgyz higher education (KGHE) has been part of the legacy that Kyrgyzstan inherited from the USSR. There were 12 HEIs at the time of independence. The number has expanded since then into 57 HEIs (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018). These include private sector HEIs and branches of foreign (nearly all of them are Russian) universities. These HEIs are mainly of three categories: academies, universities and institutes.

Academies concentrate on applied science education, research and training. Universities are mostly academic in nature offering a wide range of specialisations at all levels of higher education. Institutes work both independently and as branches of universities. They cater to the academic needs of specialists and in-service professionals. As mentioned in the previous section, the enrolment in these HEIs is over 200,000 students. These institutions are autonomously managed which is a diversion from the Soviet model of centralised management. However, the HE policy, financing, licensing and curriculum matters are the prerogative of the central government and the Ministry of Education and Science. The media of instruction in most of the HEIs, particularly in the public sector, are Kyrgyz and Russian. However, a few private institutions use English as a medium of instruction.

2.2.2 Internationalisation of KGHE

Internationalisation in KGHE can be defined as a response to the demands emerging from independence and transition. This response can be summed up as a process of metamorphosing a system with a soviet legacy to one which is aligned to the global economy, compatible to the 'world-class' higher education systems, and oriented towards meeting the labour market needs of a country and an economy in transition. This response has been mainly in the form of reforms, inter-nation activities, donor activities, and student mobility.

2.2.2.1 Reforms

The first important undertaking in this direction has been a series of government-initiated reforms. The basic objective has been to dissociate from the socialist model of HE by setting a national model of HE (Kaldybaev, 2018). The reforms are also focused on revamping and improving quality (Wolanin, 2002b) and earning international credibility and recognition (Heyneman, 2011). The reforms started with the promulgation of a law "On Education" in 1992. This law paved the way for harmonising the USSR inherited HE system to 'the system of nations" (Shadymanova & Amsler, 2018, p. 201). The process of reforms has been in progress since then and, in 2012, has been capped with an Education Development Strategy for 2012-2020 (SPHERE, 2018). Several changes have been affected in KGHE because of these reforms. The system has been decentralised and deregulated. This has been a divergence from the USSR model of HE which was highly centralised. The KG higher education institutions (KGHEIs) now have the autonomy to manage their policy, administration, finance, academic affairs (Shadymanova & Amsler, 2016). The reforms have also introduced mechanisms of accreditation and licensing for quality assurance.

The reforms also focused on linking KGHEIs to market and industry needs. It meant offering labour market-oriented programs and qualifications (Wolanin, 2002b). Massification has been another result of these reforms. HE, during the USSR period, was fundamentally elitist in nature. These reforms made higher education possible for a larger number of the population. Massification has also been a necessity for Kyrgyzstan, which has one-third of its population under the age of 25 (Merrill, 2013). Massification has led to expansion and diversification. The number of universities has grown from 12 (at the time to independence) to 57 (currently) and the number of enrolled students has grown from 58,000 to more than 200,000. The natural offshoot of massification has been diversification. KGHEIs started offering a diverse range of new programmes and specialisations. Marketisation has been another trend. HE, during USSR time, was state funded. However, KGHE introduced fees. Massification, diversification and expansion has made it possible for the students to choose from a wide range of HE options based on their financial capacity, needs and the quality of the programme or specialisation. Marketisation has also made multi-channel funding a possibility for KGHEIs rather than just relying on government funding (Shadymanova & Amsler, 2016).

The reforms have also led to the introduction of a two-tier qualification system (bachelor's and master's) and credit hours in line with the Bologna framework. It has been extended to PhD also and in 2013, as a pilot project, seven universities started offering PhDs in accordance with the framework (Chokusheva & Sirmbard, 2017). A national qualification framework has also been approved by the government in 2016 (Dondi, 2016). The reforms, overall, have helped align the KGHE to the economic, social and political aspirations and targets of the country (Kaldybaev, 2018).

2.2.2.2 Inter-nation activities

Reforms and the economic conditions of the country necessitated international partnership and activities in KGHE. Due to limited government resources, the KGHE relies on international cooperation and collaboration. The main actors in this arena are Russia, Turkey, European nations, USA, Kuwait, the Soros Foundation, and the Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN). The international cooperation activities mainly resulted in joint HEIs or the institutions governed by external actors. Russia, perhaps, has the largest presence in this sector. Apart from several small branch campuses of Russian HEIs (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018), the major presence of Russia is in the form of Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University in the capital

Bishkek. It was established in 1993 under the Warsaw Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation and relies on financial support from Yeltsin (ex-Russian president) foundation. The university has 11,000 students enrolled including 700 foreign students. The medium of instruction is Russian and the university offers degrees according to both traditional (USSR patterned) and Bologna framework of qualifications. The university awards joint degrees and has a partnership with various other Russian universities. The university has exchange study arrangements with HEIs in Germany, UK, USA, and Italy. The international students come from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Republic of Belarus, India, Pakistan, Israel, China, and South Korea (KRSU, n.d.). The university has 80 academic departments, 6 research institutes and 15 research centres.

The second major presence in inter-state universities sector is Turkey. Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University has been established through a charter signed by Kyrgyz and Turkish governments in Izmir in 1995. The university has 6000 students studying in 78 different programmes in 9 faculties, 3 schools and one vocational training school. The university follows the Bologna framework of qualifications offering undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate qualifications. The international students in the university come from 12 different countries and the university also supports an international faculty from 6 countries (KTMU, n.d.).

Turkish presence is also in the form of Ala-Too International University. The university has been established, initially, through a cooperation agreement between the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education and Culture and Sapat Education

Organisation in 1996. The university has four faculties offering 18 programmes and a secondary school. The international faculty come from Turkey, USA, China and India. The university has international cooperation partnerships with universities in Turkey, USA, China and Cyprus. The university follows the Bologna framework of qualifications (AIU, n.d.).

The American University of Central Asia (AUCA), in the capital Bishkek, is another distinct presence on the horizon of KGHE internationalisation. AUCA was established as a private university in 1993. It follows the American liberal arts model of education and has 1300 students. The international faculty come from US, Australia, Egypt, France, Germany, UK, Greece, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Romania, Russia and Turkey. It offers undergraduate and graduate qualifications in 11 majors. The degrees are US accredited. The university is supported by several US government donor agencies and other non-governmental international donors.

Another international university is the University of Central Asia. The university is also the case for this study. Details about the university are provided on page 31.

2.2.2.3 Donor activities.

Donor activities are in the areas of supporting reforms through expertise and funding. For example, SPHERE is a consortium comprising the University of Barcelona and the European University Association. The consortium works in higher education reform capacity building. It facilitated the piloting of three year PhD programmes at 6 KGHEIs. Erasmus plus is another example. Other areas of support by the consortium are accreditation, e-learning, faculty training and development (SPHERE, 2018). The European Union is closely involved in the reform and funding initiatives through the consortium, the Erasmus plus and the Tempus programmes. The Erasmus plus supports staff and student mobility and joint master's degrees, capacity building for higher education, and consultation.

2.2.2.4 Student mobility

Compared to other CARs, Kyrgyzstan is open to diversity in almost all fields of international activities. Student mobility is one such area. Among CARs, it hosts the highest number of international students. This is interesting when compared to the neighbouring country Kazakhstan which is oil-rich and, perhaps, has a better higher education infrastructure than Kyrgyzstan. Some people attribute the presence of this comparatively greater number of foreign students in the country to the 'diploma mill' phenomena (Iakupbaeva, 2015). This, perhaps, may be true in the case of a few medical schools (where a large number of Indian and Pakistani students study); however, the international institutions listed above certainly maintain rigorous quality assurance mechanisms and follow internationally compatible standards in curriculum and learning. Most students in Kyrgyzstan come from regional countries and present an example of horizontal mobility. The number of students hosted by the country is higher than its outbound students number. According to UNESCO statistics of 2016, the number of Kyrgyz outbound students was 11,357.

Table 3: Number of international students in CARs

Country	# of International Students Hosted
Kyrgyzstan	14984
Kazakhstan	13850
Tajikistan	2238
Uzbekistan	603
Turkmenistan	87

Source: (UNESCO, 2016)

Table 4: Origin-wise details of international students in Kyrgyzstan

Country of Origin	# of Students	Country of Origin	# of Students
Kazakhstan	5318	Afghanistan	123
India	3917	Turkmenistan	113
Tajikistan	1963	Azerbaijan	58
Russian Federation	1347	Nepal	17
Turkey	695	Syria	17
Uzbekistan	541	Ukraine	10
Pakistan	418	Mongolia	08
China	188	Iran	07

Source: (UNESCO, 2016)

2.3 Case Context: University of Central Asia

UCA is a new international actor in the KGHE arena. The university was established under an international treaty signed by His Highness the Agha Khan (the founder and the Chairman of AKDN which is an international development and philanthropic organization) and the presidents of the three founding countries of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. The signing of the treaty took place in 2000 and subsequently it was registered with the

United Nations after formalization from the parliaments of the founding states. The secular, not for profit university is a “private, independent, self-governing institution and the world’s first internationally chartered institution of higher education” funded through an endowment grant by the Agha Khan and other donors which include government and non-governmental agencies, corporations, philanthropic organizations and individuals (Nixon, 2012, para. 2).

The university started its academic operations in 2016. The inaugural first cohort included 68 students from Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the host country Kyrgyzstan. However, once it reaches its full capacity, the university will host around 4000 students (Sahadeo, 2011).

2.3.1 Location

The UCA campus in Kyrgyzstan, the case for this study, is in Naryn town which is the administrative capital of a Kyrgyz province of the same name. Geographically, the rural town is in the most mountainous region of central Kyrgyzstan at an elevation of 2000 meters from the sea level. It is situated on the ancient silk road at a distance of 315 kilometres from the capital Bishkek (Brierley, 2016). The population of the town is around 40,000. The economy of the city depends on sheep farming and livestock farming. The region is the poorest in Kyrgyzstan with 37.8% of its population living below the poverty line (Kostenko, 2018). This poverty also has an impact on the city restricting it to “limited infrastructure and utilities” (Brierley, 2016).

The other campus of the university is in Khorog which is also a remote isolated town in the Pamir mountains of the Gorno Badakhshan autonomous region in Tajikistan. Khorog has geographical and economic characteristics like Naryn. The campus in Khorog started academic operations in 2017. The setting up of the third campus will be in the mountainous town of Tekeli in Kazakhstan. Both operational campuses are licensed according to the laws and regulations of the of higher education in their respective countries of location.

2.3.2 Mission

The university has a developmental mission. The mission is focused on serving the mountainous communities of the three founding states particularly and of the Central Asian and neighbouring regions. The mission of the university is to “meet the practical needs of the mountain communities, driving employment and sustainable development, and foster broader liberal art and science education to develop more general skills important in an evolving economy” (Sahadeo, 2011, p.97). It is a mission focused on the social and economic development of the transitioning mountain societies. The predominant aspect of this transition is shifting from a soviet socialist economy and communist political system to a global economy and democratic political system. The university envisages a pivotal role for itself in this process of transition, development, and deriving employment by providing “leadership, ideas, and innovations” through the human capital of “knowledgeable, skilled, and creative graduates” (University of Central Asia, n.d.) produced by international-standard world-class education programmes of the university (University of Central Asia, 2019).

The mission of the university explains the location of the campuses in the remote isolated mountainous regions. Such a location makes the campuses accessible to the economically underprivileged, isolated, rural mountainous communities that the university intends to serve. Further, the access to the individual of the target communities is also made possible through the principle of “no qualified student is denied entry for financial reasons” and this is ensured through offering qualified and deserving students various options of grants, loans and scholarships (Nixon, 2012, para. 1).

The mission enables the university to serve as a link between these isolated, rural communities and the larger global world by bringing a world-class international education with a global outlook, and by merging local and global in its campuses (Sahadeo, 2011). This linking and merging of the local and global is realised through the internationalisation activities of the university, and these activities attribute the university an international university status.

2.3.3 Internationalisation Characteristics

Though situated in isolated, remote, rural surroundings; the university has the essential attributes of an international university. The establishment of the university was a result of an international transborder international collaboration between AKDN (with the headquarter in Geneva) and the three founding states. While the AKDN provided monetary and administrative support, the founding states provided land and other essential logistics support (Nixon, 2012). The university, therefore, has the characteristics of Knight's (2015) three models of international universities: classic, satellite, and co-founded. A classic model supports collaboration and partnership activities for academic and status gains. A satellite model is focused on transborder initiatives, and a co-founded model represents universities established through cross-border partnerships. Following are the details of the international characteristics of UCA embedded in the “goals, functions and delivery“ (Knight, 2015, p.108) of education at UCA.

2.3.4 Global partnerships

The university has a wide range of collaborative partnerships with various organisations and educational institutions in the region and across the globe. The partnerships are in the areas of academic, research, and development.

The university has collaboration with global partners for the university undergraduate curriculum development and faculty development. The university collaborated with the Seneca College Canada for the preparation of the preparatory year programme. The University of Toronto prepared the Computer Science major curriculum. For Communications and Media major, such partnership was established with the University of Technology Sydney. The curriculum for Economics major was designed by the Higher College of Economics Moscow and Stockholm School of Economics, Latvia. The University of British Columbia prepared the undergraduate curriculum for the Earth and Environmental Sciences major. For designing the co-operative education programme, the university collaborated with the University of Victoria.

Additionally, the university has an extensive faculty development programme called the Central Asian Faculty Development Programme. The programme is aligned to the mission of the university and, therefore, is focused on developing the local and regional faculty as a means of developing human capital for the development and uplift of the mountain societies. The development programme is run in collaboration and support of the Asian Institute of Technology, Carleton University, German Academic Exchange Services, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, Michigan State University, University of Alberta, University of Bern, University of Cambridge, University of Exeter, and the Cambridge

Trust. So far, the programme has resulted in 36 doctoral and 7 master's graduates.

In the areas of research and development, the university research institutions are in collaboration with internal international organisations of the AKDN as well as with other global organisations. Some examples of these sundry organisations are the Agha Khan Foundation, the Agha Khan Agency for Habitat, the World Agroforestry Center, the International Mountain Society, the Eurasian Pacific Network, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and various universities in the UK and Germany.

2.3.5 Transborder presence

As mentioned, the university has two operational campuses in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan while construction of a third campus is planned to start in Kazakhstan in 2022. These campuses host the School of Arts and Sciences of the university which is mandated with offering undergraduate programme. Additionally, the School of Professional and Continuing Education of the university has 11 branches spread across Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. The main concern of this entity is continuous and professional non-tertiary education. The central administration office of the university is Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan.

2.3.6 International student body and faculty

The university has an international student body coming mainly from the founding states of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. However, students from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Syria have also joined the university (see Table 6 for the current composition of the student body on campus). The range of these sending countries is expected to expand to other countries like China, Turkey, India and countries from Africa. The university conducts enrolment tests before the beginning of each academic year at the locations in the founding countries, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kenya and USA to recruit students. The tests determine the enrolment qualification of the students for entrance to the university. The size of the enrolled cohort varies from 70 to 80 students per year.

Due to its mission, the university has a policy of developing and hiring local faculty; however, 30% of the faculty positions are to be filled by international faculty. Currently, the international faculty comes from the USA, Canada, Greece, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Latvia, Australia, Philippines, and Tunisia.

2.3.7 Curriculum

The university follows a liberal arts model of curriculum. The medium of instruction is English. The contents and the delivery of the curriculum at the university are designed to promote critical thinking and global outlook which are the essential elements of social and economic development in the modern globalised world (Sahadeo, 2011). The elements of “international, intercultural, and global“ are integrated into both the contents and the delivery aspects (learning outcomes, assessment, teaching and support) (Leask, 2009, p. 209). This helps the mission of the university by developing human capital with skills aligned to the needs and demands of a global world, and by being equipped with these skills, this kind of human capital is able to stimulate social and economic uplift of their communities.

2.4 Summary

This chapter provided details about the historical, geographical, political, economic and educational background of the context of this research study. This included general, geographical and educational infromation of the region and Kyrgyzsta. It was followed by the information about the institution which is the case for this research. The following chapter presents the literature review for this study.

Chapter 3
Literature Review

This chapter presents the literature review for this study. Essentially, this investigation is related to the field of internationalisation of higher education and focused on the international students' reasons for choosing Kyrgyzstan and their susequent experience in this country, therefore, the literature review is focused on these three areas.Thus, the first section in this chapter provides an overview of internationalisation of higher education (called internationalisation and IHE alternately henceforth) followed by the second section which focuses on the choice of destination literature. The third section presents a review of the international students' experience literature. The general aim of this review is to position the current study in the existing field of internationalisation of HE, international students' choice making and international studnets' expereince in the destination. The final section of the chapter presents an overview of the Bourdieusian thinking tools of field, capital and habitus which were used as an interpretive lens in this study.

3.1 Parameters of Literature Review

The main aim of the literature review in this study was to set the conceptual and theoretical foundations for the research, to identify "how it relates to [….] the existing research in the field" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 181) and give a direction to the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The literature review was guided by the following considerations:

- provide a background of the broader areas of internationalisation of higher education and students mobility in terms of concepts, trends and significance
- provide a review of the literature related to the three guiding questions of this study.

For the purpose of providing an overview on IHE and student mobility, the literature search was conducted using key words combinations of (a) “internationalisation” with “higher education” and “universities” (search was conducted using both American and British spellings of internationalisation) (b) “international student” and “mobility”.

The search for the literature related to the research questions was conducted using relevant keywords for each research question. Since the first research question was related to the students’ reasons for choosing Kyrgyzstan, the search terms used for literature relevant to this topic were a combination of “international students’ mobility” and “reasons or causes or factors or motives or motivations”. The second research question was focused on personal, academic and social experiences of the students, thus the literature search for this topic involved the combination of the key terms of “international students”, “experience”, “adjustment”, “acculturation”, “adaptation”. The literature search for the third research question was conducted by a combination of the key words “international students” and “aspirations or hopes or desires”.

The search was carried out to retrieve articles from the following databases available on the University of Exeter library resources online:

- Education Research Complete

- Emerald Insight
- ERIC
- Sage Journals
- ScienceDirect
- Taylor & Francis Online
- Wiley Online Library

For review, the selection of the articles was based on the guidelines provided by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008). Based on these guidelines, articles were selected if they were:

- theoretical and empirical work
- classic or landmark studies
- representative of the state-of-the-art work
- as latest as possible

In addition to the works matching these criteria, articles related to or representing the peripheral context in the sense of IHE world system taxonomy (mentioned in the section 1.4 of chapter 1) presented by Sin, Antonowicz and Wiers-Jenssen (2019) or related to the emerging hubs and destinations were also included in the review. The book chapters known to the researcher and articles from the University World News (www.universityworldnews.com) website were also consulted.

3.2 Internationalisation of Higher Education

This section presents an overview of the phenomenon of IHE. First, the importance of IHE is discussed. Then an effort is made to establish a conceptualisation of the phenomenon by discussing various forms of IHE.

This conceptualisation also covers IHE relation with globalisation and knowledge-based economy. Next, an explanation of the economic value that higher education (HE) gained in the backdrop of internationalisation is presented followed the highlights of the student mobility trends and the impotance of this mobility for nations and individuals. The main aim of this section is to set the broader perspective for the current study.

3.2.1 Significance of IHE

Internationalisation is an umbrella term for cross-national activities (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2015) in the sphere of "higher education system" (de Wit & Merkx, 2012). The origin of these activities can be traced to medieval times (Altbach, 1998; Guri-Rosenblit, 2015). de Wit and Merkx (2012) opine that internationalisation, in its true sense of inter-nation activities, started in the 18th century. These activities were mainly in the areas of research, individual mobility for scholarly pursuits and exchange of higher education expertise. However, internationalisation, in its modern manifestation and shape, appeared towards the end of the 20th century (Larsen, 2016; Jones & Wit, 2012). Modern internationalisation has a strategic orientation (Larsen, 2016) as compared to the scholarly orientation of the internationalisation in the 18th and the 19th centuries. As a current trend, it has been a collective concern involving individuals, institutions, governments, and supra-governmental actors (Rumbley et al., 2012) and is driven not only by scholarly interests but also by a wide range of economic, political, social, and cultural motives (Knight, 2012, p. 29). In its modern manifestation, it has been a "transformative phenomenon" (Rumbley et al., 2012, p. 13) with tremendous impact on nearly all aspects of the higher education systems and institutions across the globe (Egron-Polak, 2012). Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009) called it a “global academic revolution”, whereas (Kearney & Lincoln, 2017, p. 283) terms the phenomenon a “driving force” that “reaches to the heart of the very meaning of university and into every facet of its operation, from teaching and education to research and scholarship, to enterprise and innovation and to the culture and ethos of institution” (Foskett, 2010, p. 37). It has become a symbol of presitige (Maringe et al., 2013), an essential condition to function in the globalised 21st century environment, and, therefore, a “central concern” of HEIs (Gao, 2015, p. 183).

3.2.2 The Concept of IHE

Despite the phenomenal prevalence, tremendous importance and widespread impact of IHE on the global higher education and knowledge system, there is marginal clarity and precision in what exactly the term means (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012) and how it should be interpreted. There seems to be unanimity among scholars on the contested nature of the term (Garson, 2016; Guo & Guo, 2017). This contested nature of the term has also been supported by various research evidence. For example, in a study conducted in the Dutch context, de Haan (2014) discovered that 14 different interpretations and approaches existed among the universities which participated in the research. This makes the problematic nature of the concept evident, as even institutions within the same national HE system show a broad divergence in the understanding and interpretation of the term. The problem also exists in the cross-nation context. In an article in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Layton (2012) mentions her discussion with academicians from different European countries, United States, China and Australia which led to the discovery that the concept is understood differently in all these countries. Similarly, Maringe et al. (2013) analysed results of a survey from 200 universities in six major geographical regions (South America, North America, Middle East nations, Asian nations, Australia and New Zealand and sub-Saharan Africa) of the globe and found a broad range of variation in the understanding of the concept. These three examples sufficiently highlight the “conceptually blurred” (Egron-Polak, 2012, p. 58) nature and divergence in the meanings of internationalisation as practice.

Various reasons for the vague nature of the term have been offered. Jones (2013) attributes the ambiguity in interpretation and understanding to diversity and variation in the drives for internationalisation. She believes there are locational, geographical and contextual variations in these drives and hence the variation in definitions and understanding. Rumbley et al. (2012) attribute this ambiguity to the ‘multifaceted nature’ (p.6) of the phenomenon itself. They opine that internationalisation is of a complex nature and takes different shapes, dimensions and forms in its practical implementation. It is a response of the higher education systems to external elements. The response evolves as the external elements evolve or emerge (Lumby & Foskett, 2016). Thus, the dynamic, evolutionary and adaptable nature of the phenomenon forestalls any fixed and unanimous conceptualisation.

Nonetheless, to understand internationalisation as a practice and a concept, one helpful approach can be to analyse the *what* (what it is), *how* (how it is done: activities; strategies; dimensions; aspects) and *why* (why it is required: reasons; rationales; motives) of the practice from the available literature. A search for answering the ‘what’ of internationalisation yields different action nouns. These include *process* (Knight, 2003), *change* (Teichler, 2004), *undertaking* (Altbach, 2006), *response* (Altbach et al., 2009) and these various action nouns can be assumed as various forms of internationalisation. These actions, though denotatively different, are executed with the same aim, that is, to transform HE from an existing state to a desired sate. Simplistically, the existing state is a HE system which is non-international, and the desired state is an internationalised HE system (Larsen, 2016).

But what makes an internationalised HE system? The ‘what’ aspect solves the problem of nomenclature only. The ‘how’ of these forms of IHE needs to be unpacked to complement the partial understanding of IHE evolving from these nomenclatures. The next parts of this section aim at this unpacking with an objective to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the IHE.

3.2.2.1 IHE as a process

The ‘how’ of the *process* form of IHE comprises “integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2003, p. 2). However, this explanation neither operationalises the element of ‘integration’ nor explains the specifics of ‘global dimension’ (Maringe et al., 2013). Thus, any activities, steps or measures which fall into the broader categories of integration and are associated with cross-nation and cross-cultural relations, understanding of other cultures and broadening of cultural outlook, and having a worldwide scope will amount to the internationalisation of a HE system (Knight, 2003). This integration being a process implies a continuity and circularity of a series of activities, steps and measures rather than a linear movement from a beginning to an end. The *process* form of IHE takes an idealistic and puristic approach of viewing IHE as an "exchange and sharing of ideas, culture, knowledge and values" (Knight, 2012, p. 29).

3.2.2.2 IHE as a change

The 'how' of the *change* form of IHE includes cross-border activities in a way as to introduce foreign elements (Larsen, 2016) in the national HE system: "the totality of substantial changes in the context and inner life of higher education relative to an increasing frequency of border-crossing activities amidst a persistence of national systems, even though some sign of 'denationalisation' might be observed" (Teichler, 2004, p. 22). The implication is that these activities should be inwardly directed, that is, from outside the borders to the HE system inside the borders with an aim of denationalising some aspects of the system. The increase in the cross-border activities and limited denationalisation amounts to internationalisation of the indigenous HE. Tiechler (2004) details these cross-border activities as "knowledge transfer, physical mobility, cooperation and international education and research" (p. 23).

3.2.2.3 IHE as an undertaking

The 'how' of the *undertaking* form of IHE (Altbach, 2006) takes the form of governments and HE systems implementing "policies and programmes [….....] to support student or faculty exchanges, encourage collaborative research overseas, set up joint teaching programmes in other countries or myriad of other initiatives" (Altbach, 2006, p. 123). The 'how', in this case, includes cross-border exchange of students, faculty and research. Unlike the understanding of internationalisation presented by Tiechler (2004), this exchange is bidirectional, that is, both inward and outward (directed into and out of a HE system). Additionally, the dimensions of IHE, both in terms of actors and activities, are broader here. The implementation of the policies and programmes is the responsibility of the governments, academic systems and institutions (Tiechler, 2004). Thus, HE institutions (in this form of IHE) are not the only actors in the arena of IHE. Internationalisation, in this approach, is a concern of both government and HE sectors, and it is to be implemented through a systematic, organised and concerted venture.

In terms of activities, the scope of activities widens in this form of IHE. Activities are not restricted only to exchange and mobility of students, faculty and research collaboration. It includes setting up joint academic programmes across the borders or 'program mobility' (Ennew, 2012, p. 81). These programmes can be joint degree, double degree, or consecutive degree programmes (Knight, 2011). Finally, in this approach, Altbach (2006) does not limit IHE to these dimensions only. He adds an element of dynamism and adaptability to the approach by adding the dimension of a 'myriad of other initiatives' to the activities enlisted above which implies any kind of activities by the governments and institutions depending on the contextual and topical imperatives.

3.2.2.4 IHE as a response

The next form of internationalisation is being a *response* system (Altbach et al., 2009): "Internationalization is defined as the variety of policies and programmes that universities and governments implement to respond to globalization" (p.7). Compared to the *undertaking* form, the policies and programmes mentioned under *response* form are not of purely academic nature and the outcomes are not restricted to the sphere of HE only. These policies and programmes, and the actions or strategies ensuing thereby, are a reaction to the forces of globalisation (Rumbley et al., 2012). These actions and strategies constitute the ‘how’ of the *response* form of IHE. Here it merits mention that the relationship between globalisation and internationalisation is very complex and of tremendous importance (Leask & Bridge, 2013). Globalisation is considered as a driving force of internationalisation whereas internationalisation is regarded as a sustaining element of globalisation (Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012). Ryan (2016) uses the metaphor of ‘mirror’ and ‘motor’ to explain this relationship. Both globalisation and internationalisation reflect the nature of each other and drive each other. Hudson (2016) considers internationalisation as a replication of globalisation. Based on these dynamics of relationship between internationalisation and globalisation, it can be concluded that *internationalisation as a response to globalisation* encapsulates the entire essence of the IHE as it exists across the globe (Maringe & Foskett, 2012). Additionally, it will not, perhaps, be misplaced to say that internationalisation as a *response to globalisation* subsumes the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of all other forms (*process, change*, and *undertaking* forms) of internationalisation. This will be explained later after a brief description of globalisation.

3.2.2.4.1 Globalisation

Globalisation, a prevalent and complex phenomenon of the 20th and the 21st century, has irreversibly changed the world. It has affected individuals, societies, cultures, organisations, economies and nations (Ryan, 2016). Altbach (2007) views globalisation as “broad economic, technological, and scientific trends” (p.123). Beck (2012) considers it “about movement – the movement of people, ideas, things across borders” (p.140). Maringe and Foskett (2012) comprehensively explicate the concept as “opening up and coming together of business, trade and economic activities between nations, necessitating the need for greater homogenization of fundamental political, ideological, cultural and social aspects of life across different countries of the world" (p.2). These different views can be synthesised in three broader aspects of globalisation. The first aspect is the knowledge-based economy. The trends in technology and science resulted in a new economic paradigm. In this paradigm, human capital with the capacity of knowledge, knowledge-based services, creativity and innovation gains precedence over other forms of capital (Findlay, 2011). In this paradigm; instead of raw material, transportation, labour and product manufacturing; innovation, creativity, ICT-based products and services (their production, distribution, and use) become the core of economic and developmental competitiveness (Green, Marmolejo, & Egron-Polak, 2012). The second characteristic is the increased movement beyond borders. This includes the movement of human beings, trade, commerce and concrete products and also the movement of abstract social, cultural, political, and ideological elements through media and information technology which means that this later kind of movement needs not to be essentially physical. The third characteristic is greater homogenisation of societies, cultures, ideologies, politics, systems and institutions (Maringe et al., 2013). The second and third aspects imply greater interlinking, networking and interdependence of nations, people, societies, businesses, systems and institutions. These aspects profoundly affected all walks of individual and national life and societies. HE systems, being an integral part of a society could not remain impervious to these trends and must adjust to them (Knight, 2004; Garson, 2016). This adjustment resulted in a broad range of responses (Rumbley et al., 2012) to these core aspects of globalisation (knowledge-based economy, movement, homogenisation) by HEIs and governments (Lumby & Foskett, 2016), and it forms the core of 'how' of *response* form of IHE, which, perhaps, is the most prevalent form of internationalisation.

3.2.2.4.2 IHE activities under the response form

The activities under the *response* form of IHE places HE at the core of national economic infrastructure. These activities have a broad range, but being linked to globalisation, are interconnected, perhaps, because they complement the core aspects (knowledge-based economy, movement, homogenisation) of globalisation. In this form, the mission of HE has been redefined to "build intellectual capacity" (Abd Aziz & Abdullah, 2014, p. 494) of the nations and individuals for knowledge-based economy. It has been done through curriculum. Curriculum has been aligned to equip graduates with the skills and competencies needed for an interconnected and interdependent economic environment of a globalised world (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The aim of such alignment has been to "promote cross-cultural understanding and facilitate the development of the knowledge, skills, and values that will enable students, both domestic and international, to successfully engage with others in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world" (Van Gyn, Schuerholz-Lehr, Caws, & Preece, 2009, p. 27). Another demand of the new global environment has been greater access to higher education. This demand for access rises from the needs of the knowledge-based economy. The knowledge-based economy needs human resources with sophisticated intellectual skills. Training such individuals has been possible only through HE. Possession of such training and skills also ensures employment for individuals in the new economy (Altbach, 2015). This resulted in the massification of HE. Massification guarantees global access to HE as, according to Altbach, governments are faced with “the necessity of providing postsecondary education for large numbers of students” to meet “the increasingly sophisticated needs of the [knowledge-based] economy” (p.4).

Curriculum alignment and massification are connected to the strategies of cross-border movement and marketisation of higher education. HE systems, in certain contexts and locations, lack the capacity to meet the demand of greater access. Therefore, either students move to the HE systems which can absorb them or the HE systems, which have the resources and the capacity, move across borders to bring opportunities of HE to students in their home country (Knight, 2004). This has been developed into a full-fledged internationalisation strategy of cross-border branch campuses and HEIs and joint programmes and degrees (Knight, 2013).

For students, acquisition of intercultural skills and competencies aligned to the demands of knowledge-based economy, becomes an imperative because it ensures employability and upward progress in life. It is valued in society as cultural capital (Findlay, 2011). This leads to the greater demand of the curriculum and education which can develop these skills (Ozoglu, Gur, & Coskun, 2015). The universities offering such education start marketing themselves as the destinations of choice for potential students through branding and differentiating themselves as hubs of international education (Hanover Research, 2014). University and governments frame marketing policies and strategies and enter in branding competition with other institutions and countries (Chen, 2008). This has led to the significant trend of student mobility. Students, whose countries do not have universities with the capacity of offering such education or who want to acquire an international brand of education to improve their chances of better employment in the global economy, move to other countries where these universities are located. The factors of international brand of education, marketisation and students paying to acquire the international brand education results in a trend of trade and commercialism in HE. Due to these elements, HE “has moved from being a model of providing public goods to a marketable service industry model” (Chen, 2008, p. 2).

Mobility is also linked to HE status as knowledge industry and knowledge production. For the success of this industry, human resources with requisite intellectual capacity are needed. Thus, universities started attracting students with potential to contribute to knowledge-production, and faculty with intellectual capacity for research, innovation and creativity (Sharma, 2011). Further, to benefit from knowledge existing in another institution, universities established partnerships and collaboration with other universities which also led to the exchange of students and faculty. These actions and strategies are linked to cross-border movement of humans, ideas, culture and knowledge.

Another aspect of knowledge-based economy has been its transnationality. It operated beyond borders and needed homogenised systems to support it. HEIs, being the engines of knowledge-based economies, provided these homogenised systems through internationalisation. HE systems and institutions, aligned with knowledge-based economy, had an element of universality in their ‘purpose, function and delivery [of curriculum]” (Knight, 2003, p. 2). This also led to pressure on the HEIs which traditionally function in their national and local context and they needed to adopt internationalisation actions and strategies to stay competitive for the students. The internationalisation actions and strategies adopted by such HEIs has been termed as ‘internationalisation at home’ (Knight, 2004, p. 11).

3.2.2.4.3 Response form of IHE: comprehensive, inclusive and prevalent

The connections, higlighted above, not only explain the complexity of relations between the two phenomena of internationalisation and globalisation, but also support the claim, made earlier, that this form of internationalisation subsumes activities done under all other forms of internationalisation named *process*, *change*, and *undertaking*. Though, the activities in the *process* form of internationalisation are not specific and clearly defined, yet it is an established fact that the quality and elements of internationality, interculturality and globality cannot be integrated without some type of inter-nation, inter-cultural and cross-border exchanges. Therefore, it can be assumed that any kind of integration of these three elements in the purpose, function and delivery of any higher education system must have exchanges across borders, communities or cultures. Therefore, the nature of activities falling under these three forms of internationalisation can be summed in terms of inter-nation cross-border exchanges of students, faculty, curriculum, programmes, and research. For the *response* form of internationalisation, due to being related to globalisation, these activities are central and essential. The only difference is that whereas the other three forms exclude reference to relation or reaction to any force external to HE, the *response* form makes this reference and relation to the forces of globalisation explicit. This aspect — of linking the actions or strategies of internationalisation to the external forces affecting and changing the society, and internationalisation helping the society to adjust and cope with these external forces by “preparing [a] workforce [having the capacity to function in the global knowledge-driven economy], fuelling innovation through basic and applied research, disseminating knowledge, and educating the responsible citizenship” (Green et al., 2012, p. 439) —makes it more comprehensive and inclusive of other forms. Based on this analysis, IHE can be understood as a relational phenomenon of the prevalent forces of globalisation. As a practice, it is translated into a wide range of policy-supported strategies of international and intercultural exchanges of knowledge, research, academic programmes, policies, projects, providers, faculty, and students. These practices support and complement the main trends of globalisation such as knowledge-based economy, cross-border mobility and the homogenisation of economic, political, social, cultural, ideological and academic systems.

3.2.3 Status of HE in the Backdrop of IHE

The relationship between internationalisation and globalisation shifted the value of HE in the society from an academic welfare-oriented status to a status of dynamic change force (K. Beck, 2012). HE, now, has the “responsibility to respond to the requirements and challenges associated with the globalisation of societies, economy and labour markets” (Leask & Bridge, 2013, p. 80). Thus, HE assumes a position of centrality in the new knowledge driven economic paradigm. This shift springs from the reason that knowledge driven economies rely on education, research, innovation for knowledge-based products and services. HEIs are not only the hub of education, research and innovation but also a source of providing qualified workforce which can participate in knowledge production and delivering knowledge-based services through engaging in the processes of education, research and innovation. HEIs and HE systems with well-entrenched internationalisation strategies have better capacity to contribute in this new role of value as these strategies allow these systems to “align their operations more closely with knowledge-based industries [by] attracting foreign talent, establish research-intensive profiles and international reputation, and transform themselves into entrepreneurial entities” (Collins, Sidhu, Lewis, & Yeoh, 2014, p. 666). The shift, in the role of HE from margins to the centrality of an economy, has two important effects. The first effect has been a growing interest of governments, organisations and individuals in internationalisation activities (Begalla, 2013). The second effect has been a considerable expansion in the capacity and range of internationalisation activities (Altbach & Knight, 2007) resulting in the movement of “just students and scholars, programmes, providers, projects and policies” (Knight, 2014). This growing interest is evident in the results of the International Association of Universities 4th Global Survey on IHE. The survey collected responses from 1,336 HEIs in 131 different countries across the globe. The results indicated that 75% of the participants were engaging or were preparing to engage with some form of internationalisation strategies (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014). The benefits, that internationalisation brought to its actors, have been a cause of this increased interest, participation and expansion of it. These benefits are not just academic but also economic, political, social and cultural (Hudson, 2016) though acknowledging that there are also some negative effects of internationalisation (Knight, 2015). The main academic benefit of internationalisation is brain gain. HEIs get students and faculty with superior intellectual capabilities. Such brain gain contributes to the quality enhancement in teaching, learning and research (Knight, 2015). The cultural and social benefits are international citizenship, diversity, and intercultural understanding. It is also a source of fostering solidarity and cooperation among people which ultimately results in peacebuilding (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). Politically, internationalisation activities resulted in greater collaboration and cooperation among nations leading to better geopolitical relations (Knight, 2004). However, the prime benefits of internationalisation have been economic. Due to these benefits Bols (2013) asserts, “internationalisation is not justified only by altruistic motives – there are economic grounds for going international, and going full steam with it”.

HE sectors, generally, are linked to the economic development of a country (Bergerhoff, Borghans, Seegers, & Veen, 2013). The economic benefits of HE, accrued to the economy of a nation, are manifold. HEIs impact the economic growth of a country or region. Valero and Van Reenen (2016) reports a data analysis of 15,000 universities, in 1500 regions, across 78 countries for the period from 1950 to 2010. Their analysis revealed that doubling universities in a region increases the GDP per capita of that region by 4%. Further, HE supplies both human and technological capital for an economy. Human capital is supplied in the form of qualified and competitive graduates and technological capital through research and innovation activities (Pastor, Peraita, Serrano, & Soler, 2018). Apart from the impact on GDP, HE also plays a vital role in economic development through providing financial capital. Bothwell (2017) reports that HE added £95 billion to the UK economy for the year 2014-15. This is 1.2% of the GDP and four times more than the contribution made by the agricultural sector. For Australia, in 2013, these figures were AU$25 billion. It was 1.5% of the GDP and equivalent to 160,000 full time jobs (Deloitte Access Economics, 2015). For a small country like New Zealand, Hensen and Pambudi (2016) reported an income of NZ$3.2 billion from the domestic students for the year 2014. This amounts to one percent of the GDP for the year.

In the context of IHE, international student recruitment and the foreign exchange gained thereby, become the main source of financial capital (Maringe et al., 2013) not only to the national economies but to HEIs revenue also. Such contribution to the US$32 billion for the year 2014-15 (Dennis, 2018). The benefit, that Australian economy gained from international students (IS), was AU$24 billion in the year 2017 (Maslen, 2018). In the case of UK economy, international students are contributing 10 times more to the economy than the cost of hosting them (O'Malley, 2018). The total economic gain, to the UK GDP, from these students has been £13.8 billion (Universities UK, 2017). These examples sufficiently highlight the economic contribution of HE to the economy not only from home-based activities but also from importing international students and exporting knowledge products through these students.

Though, here it also needs to be acknowledged that linking IHE to financial gain has the negative effects of commercialism and marketisation. IHE is dominantly becoming an "edubusiness" with financial priorities rather than altruistic academic motives (Guo & Guo, 2017, p. 852). The business and entrepreneurial aspects of cross-border activities, which form the warp and weft of IHE, are altering the 'purpose, role and value' of HE generally and of these activities specifically (Knight, 2013, p. 88). The trend of commercialism and marketisation has been duly supported by international treaties like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in Services (GATTS). The GATTS recognises education as “a tradable good and service” and provides mechanism for regulating “the export and import of knowledge” (Maringe et al., 2013, p. 18). Maringe et al. also opine that commodified status is eroding “the inner goodness [of education and according it] a more profit-oriented status” (p.18). van der Wende (2017) considers commercialism in IHE as “an elite cosmopolitan project” and a form of “academic capitalism”. Commercial aspect of IHE is increasingly turning internationalisation into an engine of globalisation and its negative forces rather than purely a drive of international development, quality, cooperation, knowledge sharing, solidarity and equality and Brandenburg and de Wit (2011) lament it as the “end of internationalisation”.

3.2.4 Student Mobility Trends and Importance

The “end of internationalisation” claim has recently been refuted by de Wit (2018). His opposing opinion is that “internationalisation is not dead, but more alive than ever” (para 9). He rests his opinion on the fact that the number of students interested in or moving to study abroad is on the rise globally. He refers to several surveys and trends to substantiate his claim. First, he mentions a survey initiative ‘mapping generation Z’ carried out by American Field Service (an international youth exchange organisation). A total of 5200 students of age 13-18 participated in the survey. These respondents were from 27 countries and spread across 16 language groups. The predominant trend in the survey was eagerness to study abroad. Second, he refers to the trend in the Erasmus+ programme (a European union programme for study and train abroad). The number of activities and participants (both students and faculty) in the programme has increased. Third, he mentions the fact that countries like Germany, Russia and China are successfully achieving their targets in international students' population in their countries. Fourth, he indicates research conducted by the Campus France (a national agency of France for promoting the French higher education). The findings show that inter-regional mobility of students in Asia, Africa and Latin America is on the rise. All these student mobility trends show that "internationalisation [is] still alive and kicking" (de Wit, 2018). However, the question arises as to why de Wit grounds his claim about the speeding and increasing importance of internationalisation only on student mobility factor though admittedly internationalisation is a multidimensional phenomenon. The answer lies in Knight's (2012b) claim that student mobility is "the 'face' of internationalization" (p.19). The real value of internationalisation lies in students. It, perhaps, will not be misplaced to say that internationalisation relies more on students than any other factor at both ends: receiving end and giving end. Knight (2013) terms the mobility aspect of internationalisation as the "great brain race of the twenty-first century" (p. 85). Therefore, student mobility figures prominently in any discussion of internationalisation (both trend-wise and importance-wise) and is linked to the success, expansion, and outcomes of several dimensions of IHE.

Trend-wise discussing, there has been a tremendous expansion in the number of mobile students in the 21st century (Ding, 2016). According to Dennis (2018), currently, five million students are mobile, and this number is projected to reach around eight million by the year 2025. This is a considerable growth compared to the year 2000 when this number was just 1.2 million (Knight, 2013). Choudaha (2017) analysed student mobility trends from 1999 to 2020. His analysis revealed that the trend of mobility had been growing consistently during these two decades. It also shows that the direction of mobility has been from the global South to the countries in the global North (USA, UK, Australia, Germany, France, Canada) and that this mobility trend has closely been related to economic and political events of both the destination and sending countries. However, the recent economic and political development in both the global North and the global South are affecting this trend. According to the statistics presented by Choudaha, the number of students moving to the global North, particularly to the USA and the UK, has declined. For example, Dennis (2018) reports that the USA has already lost 10% of its international student share among its competitors. She attributes this decline in mobility trend, towards these traditional Big Two, to the political events like Brexit and Trumpism. Heng (2017) thinks that decrease in mobility to these traditional destination countries is also due to other factors. These include visa issues, students' dissatisfaction with the social, financial, cultural and academic aspects of their stay in the host country and their negative feedback about these destinations to aspiring future-mobile students.

These developments are affecting the dynamics and trends of student mobility. According to de Wit (2018), competition for international student recruitment is globally intensifying and new actors are entering in the competition with explicit international student recruitment strategies and policies. These countries are China, Egypt, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, Colombia, India, Latin America, and Caribbean. de Wit (2018) thinks that this trend is indicative of sending countries repositioning themselves as receiving countries and regionalism in IHE. Dennis (2018) predicts that “regional mobility will grow in importance over global mobility”. Rather, the growth in regional mobility is already evident in certain regions. For example, among the Organisation of Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) countries, 20% of the international students are mobile within the region (Jon et al., 2014). The conclusion and implication of these statistical indicators and projections are that student mobility will remain a reality of IHE with unabated intensity but mostly redirected to new regional destinations. This will also increase the global competition for student recruitment and aspiring actors need to develop student-oriented policies, support and a conducive environment to attract students to their HEIs.

These trends highlight that student mobility is the most defining and exponentially growing aspect of IHE. The future projection, in this activity of IHE, is of an intensive competition for attracting more international students. The growth is a result of not only students demand for international brand education but also because of the interest of governments and HEIs. The demand and interest is due to the advantages attached to student mobility for HEIs, governments and individual students. Some of these advantages have already been detailed above, however, a delineation is repeated here to establish their multidimensional relationship and value in the specific context of student mobility. The academic, economic and social value of student mobility can be understood through the example of Japan. An article in the Times Higher Education by Ross (2018) mentions several advantages of importing foreign students to Japanese HEIs, society and economy. First, for HEIs, the flow of international students helped top ranking HEIs to maintain their position and competitiveness in the regional ranking despite being challenged by Chinese initiatives and strategies of internationalisation.

Second, foreign students offset the dropping enrollment rate of the domestic students in Japanese HEIs. Foreign students make up for 50% of the total enrollment in the country. Third, economically and socially, these students also compensate for declining workforce and demographic imbalances in the society. Japan has globally the lowest birth rate and higher number of ageing population and smaller Japanese cities are faced with a shortage of workers. These foreign students counteract these imbalances in Japanese economy and demography by filling in for the shortage of workforce. This example accentuates the multifaceted value that internationally mobile students can bring to a country. They are a potential source of social and economic transformation and uplift not only for the destination country but also for the sender country (Gopinath, 2015). Students, equipped with international education or the skills learned thereby, ultimately contribute to the economy and development of their countries and communities through higher chances of employability, better remuneration, and contribution to the intellectual and technological capital of their societies and hence the importance of student mobility (Guo & Guo, 2017). This importance has led many countries to assign high priority to international education sector as it has multiple benefits: monetarily bringing revenue to the economy and intellectually a source of intellectual capital through brain gain, brain adaptation and brain circulation (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016).

Additionally, mobility for IHE also brings significant individual advantages to mobile students. Student mobility can be a result of economic, social or cultural reasons (Waters, 2006) or for purely academic reasons, but there is no denying that mobility and the experience gained thereby opens a path for adaptation and entrance to the global environment for the students (Rienties, Johan, & Jindal-Snape, 2015). It is through mobility that students become members of global knowledge-based economy (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014). Mobility increases their employability within and across borders, opens new career vistas to them and places them at a better position than those peers who could not gain such experience (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014). Brooks and Waters (2011) affirm that “there is substantial evidence that, in certain countries at least, an overseas qualification does often lead to substantial labour market rewards” (p.11). The greatest reward of mobility is international experiences. These experiences lead to the development of intercultural competence or a cosmopolitan outlook which is considered an asset for successfully functioning in a globalized world (Caruana, 2014). Therefore, mobility is not only a source of material benefit for the individuals but also results in personal growth and change by leading to the ‘modernity’ and ‘reconstruction’ of personalities (Gopinath, 2015, p. 290). King, Findlay, and Ahrens (2010) summarize change in personality, resulting from mobility experience, in terms of capitals: mobility capital, human capital, social capital and cultural capital (p.32). Marginson (2014) links mobility to self-formation whereby a mobile student assumes the role of “a strong agent piloting the course of her/his life”. The implication is that mobility results in shifting an individual from a position of deficit agency to a position of active agency with the capacity of steering the course of life according to personal choices and priorities. Kim (2011) discovered that international experience is a way of gathering global cultural capital and a position of cosmopolitan eliteness. Zhang and Zhang (2017) found mobility for education was a way of realising intrinsic goals for the students. Similar were the findings of Pham (2018) who described these intrinsic goals in terms of aspiration and the Bourdieusian conceopt of habitus. In a nutshell, mobility and the associated experiences, for students, lead to “producing new conditions and possibility for the transformation of themselves and identity re-construction in divergent manners” (Tran, 2016, p.1269).

3.3 International Students’ Choice of Destiantion Research

The preceding section presented a discussion on the importance of student mobility. A mention was made to the economic and financial value of student mobility for countries and institutions. This revenue generating aspect of mobility has become a source of competition for attracting international students among the actors in the field of IHE. To have an edge in the competition, the stakeholders devise a multitude of marketing strategies and invest in finding out what, why and how of international students’ reasons, motivation and deciding factors of the destination and university choice. Among the academia, this interest developed into a research area (Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cervio, 2006) and the research activities in the area culminated in a vast range of literature which focuses on understanding and explaining the dimensions of students’ reasons for choosing a foreign destination for international education. This body of literature diverges into two strands. One of the strands deals with theoretical models which explain the choice and decision making process of the students and the other strand deals with the array of factors which play a role in influencing the students’ choice making process (Obermeit, 2012). The following is an overview of the two strands of the literature.

3.3.1 Theoretical Models of Choice Making

Vrontis,Thrassou and Melanthiou (2007) categorises the theoretical models of students' choice making in three groups: economic models, status-attainment models and combined models. Maringe (2006) adds structural models to this list. These models were developed to understand various kinds of influences affecting students' choice making (Chapman, 1981). The models explicate the choice criteria of individuals, information sources used, the role of contextual and background elements, the characteristics of these elements, and the process of choice making itself (Obermeit, 2012). The following are details of these theoretical models.

3.3.1.1 Structural Models

The structural models view individual choices as constrained by external elements which leave limited scope for the individual to act independent of these constraints. These constraints may be educational, financial, cultural and social. Gambetta (1987), one of the proponents of the theory, summarises the main assumption of the theory saying, "educational behaviour is predominantly the result of constraints" (p. 169). To put in other words, the postulation is that "people are pushed into certain educational positions" (Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998, p. 446). Gambetta further says that preferences and choices are shaped by an individual's conditions. Individual intentions play but only a restricted role in the choice making process. This limitation is because only a restricted number of options are available to an individual and a choice must be made from these options which may further be constrained by external elements such as culture and finance. However, Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) are of the opinion that this minimalistic role of individual intentionality in choice making does not mean that individual intentionality is totally inactive and passive; it responds to a context according to the structures of the context and can redefine these structures by functioning within a collective agency.

3.3.1.2 Economic Models

While structuralist approach allows for a minimal role for the human will in choice making, the economic models offer a contrarian view in terms of the link between human will and action. These models regard choice and decision making as a rational process founded on calculations (Felix Maringe, 2006). The core postulation of these models is that students' choice making is based on a rational comparison of the benefits gained against the value invested. Their decision making is led by the principle of maximum benefit at a minimal value and risk (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). A typical example of the economic models is a model by Kotler and Fox (1985). Based on the consumer of goods behaviour, their model represents a multi-staged process led by the consideration of risk reduction. These stages are need recognition, searching for information to satisfy the need, evaluation of options, taking and implementing a decision about the options, and post decision evaluation.

3.3.1.3 Status-attainment Models

Status-attainment models are based on the sociological perspective. These models focus on the role of socialisation processes, family, social networks and academic achievement in the choice or decision making process (Raposo & Alves, 2007). These models are helpful in describing "the contributions of social inheritance and individual effort" in individual aspirations for educational and occupational attainment by taking into account the interplay of psychological and socio-psychological variables such as “mental ability, academic performance, [and] the influence of significant others” (Andres, 2016, p. 33). The underlying idea of the models is that the choice making is a matter of free will and free individual action and it depends on the individual characteristics, and what an individual does and attain within a social system (Kerckhoff, 1976). The four C’s model of Hemsley-Brown and Foskett (2002) is an example of the sociological models. The underlying postulation of the model is that choice making is “under the influence of economic, cultural and structural forces, [decisions and choices] are filtered through layers of preconceptions emanating from family influence, culture, life history and personality”(Maringe & Carter, 2007, p.462). According to this model choice making involves three elements. First is the element of context (the first C). Choices are made in a context. A context includes factors like society, culture, economy and policy. These factors shape choices of an individual in any given context. The second element is the choice influencers (the second C). These influencers are schools, teachers, the media, and home and parents. The third element is the choosers themselves (the third C). This element involves individual characteristics like self-image, perceptions about the alternatives and options, estimation about the personal gains and ambitions. The fourth element is choice (the fourth C). This element stands for the set of alternatives or options available. These options can be institutions, career options, or pathways. According to this model choice making is a dynamic complex, and reflexive process. It is never completely rational or irrational and is always made under the influence of the four elements detailed above.

3.3.1.4 Combined Models

The combined models merge the elements of economic models and social-attainment models. They, thus, afford a possibility of approaching choice making process from both sociological and economic perspective (Vrontis et al., 2007). Therefore, by combining both perspectives, the combined models explicate the interplay of social, individual, geographic, economic and academic factors in the process of choice making (Jackson, 1982). According to Jackson, the combined models divide the choice making into three stages. In the first stage, aspirations develop as explained in the sociological models. It means a role of socio-psychological variables including individual characteristics in aspiration formation. These variables are family background, social context and academic background. In the second stage, the individual, the aspirations and the resources available combine to shape an evaluation criterion for available alternatives. The evaluation criterial includes variables like cost, benefit, requirements, and geographical location. In the third stage, judgements are made by excluding unfeasible options and collecting further information about the options still in consideration. This stage is led by consumer behaviour. The alternatives in the set of choices is rated by an individual and her or his preferences are guided by this rating. Another example of the combined models is Chapman's (1984) model. This model has two stages: pre-search and search. In the first stage, a family's financial status and a student's academic ability directly influence the choice of the alternatives considered. At the second stage of the model the available information about the options is considered. Litten (1982) mentions Hanson and Litten model which is another example of the combined models. Hanson and Litten model has three stages: the first stage involves a decision to participate in education; the second stage involves investigating the institutions and creating a set of options of the institutions; the third stage involves applying and enrolling. During these three stages, multiple variables affect the choice making process. Some of these variables are race and family culture, quality and social structure of school, significant others, self-image and individual characteristics, economic situation, availability of financial aid, recruitment activities of the institutions, size and programmes of a college. According to Vrontis et al.(2007), Hanson and Litten model is a cross of the student-based model of Jackson and the institution-based model of Chapman.

3.3.2 International Students' Choice Making Model

The models detailed in the earlier section give an understanding of various elements influencing students' choice making. However, these models have a limitation. Most of them have been devised for home country and home education context. The literature on international students' choice making is scarce compared to the need and importance of understanding the dynamics of choice making from these students' perspective (Cubillo et al., 2006). Nevertheless, the literature in the area yields the details of some models focused on the international students' choice making.

McMahon (1992) presented two models. These models were based on the choice making pattern of the international students coming from 18 developing countries to the US during 1960s and 1970s. The first model explained what pushes these students from the home country into the destination country. These home country-based 'push' factors were the availability of higher education at home and the economic strength of the home country. The second model explained the pull forces attracting them to the destination country. The ‘pull’ factors were economic, political, and social elements at the destination country. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) later confirmed McMahon hypothesis that the choice making of international students can be explained by using the push and pull dichotomy. Some critics have expressed their dissatisfaction with this apparently simple dichotomy of push and pull factors. They argue that mobility decision making is a complex process involving an interplay and connection of multiple factors. The dichotomy of push-pull fails to capture this intricacy of interplay and the interaction of these factors. However, despite this criticism, these critics failed to offer an alternate approach and have relied on the model for their own research (Chen, 2017).

Another notable model of international students’ choice making is that of Cubillo et al. (2006). This model was formed by integrating choice factors drawn from the existing literature. The model looks at international education choice making as purchase intention dependent on the five factors of personal reasons, country image, city image, institution image, and programme evaluation.

Vrontis et al. (2007) proposed a model of students’ higher education choice for developed countries using contingency methodological approach. They used existing models to create a preliminary generic higher education students’ choice model. The preliminary model was subsequently refined into a final model consisting of five stages of consumer behaviour. These five stages were: need recognition, information search, alternatives evaluation, purchase and consumption, post consumption evaluation. These five stages are encircled by several factors which influence choices at each stage. These influencing factors are grouped into individual determinants, environmental determinants, institutional determinants, and school characteristics.

3.3.2.1 Empirical Research in IS Choice of Destination

A plethora of empirical research exists in the international students' choice of destination. This literature explores and explains students' reasons for the choice of a destination country for higher education. These reasons are mostly explained through the push-pull model (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). The 'push' in the model represents motivational factor which stimulate the decision to become mobile and to think 'whether to go" and the 'pull' in the model indicates the elements shaping the choice of destination or answering the question 'where to go' (Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010).

Regarding the body of literature in the push-pull model tradition, a classic example is that of McMahon (1992). He conducted a large-scale investigation of the outward human flow from 18 countries to the US in the 1960s and 1970s. The 'push' aspect in the model represents those factors which are instrumental for the outbound mobility and the 'pull' aspect is related to inbound mobility and the factors associated with this aspect encourages flow to a country of choice. In the study, the 'push' aspects were economic conditions and prospects, economic standing in the global economy and general situation of the education opportunities in the home country of the IS. The 'pull' factors included the economic status of the destination country vis-a-vis the home country, the economic and political relations between the destination and the home country and the support offered by the destination country for the students.

Another example in the push-pull tradition is that of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). They studied the motivation of 2485 students from four countries (Indonesia, Taiwan, India and China) during a period from 1996 to 2000. The push factors for these students were academic, cultural and future migration prospects. The academic aspect of the push included students' perception of a better quality of overseas study programme, access challenges in the home country education institutions, and the unavailability of the study programme of choice in the home country. The cultural aspects of the push were the students' desire to increase their contact and understanding of the destination country culture. The pull factors included the host country reputation, the students' knowledge of the host country, parental influence, social links in the destination country, cost, weather and climate of the host country.

Maringe and Carter (2007) conducted a similar study on the African students' choice of the UK as a destination country. They discovered the economic and political uncertainty in the home country and the lack of capacity in the local HE system as important push factors. The pull factors were the quality of HE system in terms of learning environment, the international recognition of the academic credentials, and the possibility of part-time work to support one's study. Wilkins and Huisman (2011) reported another study in the UK context and reported similar pull factors.

James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) conducted a research in a Canadian context. They collected data from international undergraduate students to ascertain pull factors for studying at a small-sized university. The conclusion was that the institutional reputation, availability of academic programmes, cost of study, post-study opportunities, process of application, environmental information, campus facilities, value at home country and recreational opportunities were the attraction of a small university for the students. The push factors were family and the recruitment agents at the home country.

The above studies were in the context of mobility from the developing to the developed countries. Research in this context is mainstream. However, as the trend of internationalisation is expanding to the emerging economies and regions, thus a body of research exploring students' choice of destinations or HEIs in these emerging contexts is also growing. Lee (2013) reports such a study in Taiwanese context. The aim of the study was to determine the most important factors affecting students' choice of Taiwan as a destination. The three most important factors were: friendly and supportive learning environment, quality of education in the host country, and recognition of qualifications. Ahmad and Hussain (2017) studied African students studying in the UAE. The determinant factors for these students were learning environment and the proximity of the UAE to their home country. Jiani (2017), and Ahmad and Shah (2018) explored the push and pull factors for a group of international students studying in China. Both studies discovered China's global economic status, political relations with the home country, quality of learning environment, possibility of better prospects, scholarship opportunities, possibility of learning Mandarin, cost of living and culture as the main pull factors. Ahmad and Buchanan (2016) reported their findings for international students in a branch campus in Malaysia. The factors influencing pullin the students to the country were the institutional reputation, cost of living, safety, similarity between home country and host country education system and cultural proximity. Lee (2017) reported push-pull factors of Chinese students' choice for Korea as a destination. One of the main pull factors for these students' was their interest in Korean culture. Students were attracted to come to the country because of the popularity of Korean movies, music and drama at the home country. Other pull factors were easy entry requirements and the recruitment agency.

The general tendency, in the research reported here, is to explore and confirm the motivational factors for leaving the home country and attracting factors in the host country within the framework of the push-pull model. The aim of some of the reported research was to establish a hierarchy of pull factors for various destination countries. A mix of approaches were used: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method. The pull factors, reported in these studies, can be grouped as academic, economic, social, and cultural. Similarly, most of the push factors were academic, political or economic deficiencies in the home country. These deficiencies worked as a catalyst for the desire or need to move. The nature of both the push factors and the pull factors does not vary from the main destination countries to the emerging destination countries. However, in some contexts the pull factors are more distinct than the push factors; for example, in the case of mobility from China to Korea.

One problem with choice of destination literature is a lack of research on the countries in the peripheries of IHE (Chen, 2017). Most of the research is either in the context of North or in the context of the education hubs in the economically better countries of the South. For example, countries like China, Malaysia, the UAE, Singapore, or Taiwan have better economic standing than countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka or Kyrgyzstan and have thus attracted more research than these economically worse countries.

3.4 International Students' Experience

International student experience (ISE) is a phenomenon of transition. This experience involves making a transition from a home country and its educational, social, and cultural environment to a destination country. In the destination country, IS find themselves living in and facing a new educational, social, cultural, behavioural, organisational and interpersonal environment (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016). The transition results in psychological, sociocultural and educational experiences (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). These experiences land international students at the meeting point of two cultures, that is, students home country culture and the destination country culture. The experiences, in their totality, are also laden with potential adaptation challenges dealing and facing which are not without a change in the person of an international student. Therefore, the entire phenomenon of the ISE can be conceptualised as a process of adjustment and acculturation (Smith & Khawaja, 2011)

3.4.1 Theoretical Approaches to Adjustment and Acculturation

ISE as a process of adjustment and acculturation is a dynamic phenomenon resulting in psychological and educational learning for the IS and contemporary theoretical approaches try to explain them from this perspective (Zhou et al., 2008). These contemporary theoretical approaches are culture learning theory; stress, coping and adjustment theory; and social identification theories (Zhou et al., 2008). The following is a brief description of these theoretical approaches.

3.4.1.1 Culture Learning Theory

Culture learning theory takes a socio-psychological approach to intercultural contact. The theory focuses on the behavioural dimension of such contacts (Zhou et al., 2008). The main premise of the theory is that intercultural contact is characterised by challenges for an actor who is new to a culture. These challenges arise from the newcomers lacking prerequisite cultural skills for such contacts. However, these challenges can be overcome by learning these skills. In other words cultural learning is fundamental to adaptation in a new cultural context (Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013). Culture learning has been defined as “ the process whereby sojourners acquire culturally relevant social knowledge and skills in order to survive and thrive in their new society” (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005, p. 51). Zhou et al. (2008) enlist variables, from diverse research sources, influencing the process of adaption. These variables include knowledge about a new culture, period of stay in a host culture, linguistic and communicative competence, nature of contact with the members of a host society, social networks, earlier experience of stay abroad, cultural distance and identity, and intercultural training.

3.4.1.2 Stress, Coping and Adjustment Theory

While cultural learning theory emphasises the behavioural aspect of intercultural communication during transition from one culture to another, the stress, coping and adjustment theory focuses on the affective dimensions of intercultural communication (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005c). The main premise of the theory is that crossing cultural boundaries is a kind of life change. All life changes are essentially stressful. To deal with this stress, people in transition need to develop coping strategies to adjust to these changes. The adjustment factors are normally contingent on personal and situation characteristics of an individual and situation (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016).

3.4.1.3 Social Identification Theories

Social identification theories consider the cognitive dimensions of adaptation and adjustment process (Zhou et al., 2008). Therefore, the theories focus on internal processes of the mind rather than external observable manifestations of these processes (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005b). The main assumption of the theory is that "cross-cultural transition might involve changes in one's identity and intergroup relations and [that] adjustment is affected by the knowledge of the host culture, mutual attitudes of host and sojourners, cultural similarity, and cultural identity" (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016, p. 6).

3.4.1.4 Usefulness of Acculturation Theories

Zhou et al. (2008) considered the acculturation theories, mentioned above, as the most useful contemporary theories. They based their postulation on three reasons. First, these theories are broader and deal with all aspects of adjustment and adaptation which include affective, behavioural and cognitive aspects of acculturation. The theories also consider both individual and situational elements and their interaction in the adjustment and adaptation process. Second, the theories take a process view of adjustment and adaptation which means adjustment and adaptation process has an element of continuity and development. Third, the theories consider adjustment and adaptation as a process of active learning rather a process of passive reaction to challenges arising from intercultural events and contacts.

3.4.2 Models of Adjustment and Adaptation

The theories of acculturation were developed into a number of models to explain the central factors involved in the adjustment and adaptation process. Smith and Khawaja (2011) mentions seven such models. These models are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Models of adjustment and adaptation

Model	Key Aspects
Berry (1992, 1997)	Stress and coping model of acculturation; four acculturation attitudes (integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation); cognitive appraisal of change as opportunity or challenge factor in acculturation stress; focus on migrant with host country a peripheral factor
Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, and Senecal (1997)	Interactive acculturation model (IAM); emphasises the acculturation attitudes of the migrant and their interaction with the acculturation attitudes of the host country; at macro-system level, government immigration policies are seen to have a strong impact on acculturation attitudes of migrant and host
Ward et al. (2001)	Expanded on stress and coping model; affective behavioural-cognitive (ABC) model of acculturation; stress and coping, cultural learning, and social identification; distinguishing psychological and socio-cultural adaptation; cultural and social identities as predictor variables; perceived or subjective cultural distance can predict differences in acculturation processes; focus on migrant with host country a peripheral factor
Piontkowski,	Expanded on the IAM to develop the concordance model of

Rohmann, and Florack (2002)	acculturation (CMA); four concordance outcomes (consensual, culture-problematic, contact-problematic, and conflictual) based on different possibilities of match or mismatch between the migrant and host acculturation attitudes
Safdar, Lay, and Struthers (2003)	Expanded on stress and coping and ABC model; multi-dimensional individual difference acculturation (MIDA) model; individual characteristics, characteristics of the larger society, hassles or stressors are seen to be predictor variables; focus on migrant with interaction of attitudes with that of host country a peripheral factor
Navas et al. (2005)	Based on Berry's taxonomy of acculturation attitudes, IAM, and CMA; relative acculturation extended model (RAEM), acknowledgment of several socio-cultural domains across which the preferred and adopted acculturation attitudes of the migrant and host can interact
Arends-Toth and van de Vijver (2006)	Expanded on stress and coping and ABC model; individual characteristics, characteristics of the larger society, and hassles or stressors as predictor variables; and predictor variable of characteristics of the society of origin; focus on migrant with interaction of attitudes with that of host country a peripheral factor

Note: This table has been reproduced from Jindal-Snape and Rienties (2016, p.5)

3.4.3 Personal, Academic, and Social Experience of IS

As mentioned earlier, ISE is a process of transition and the resultant adjustment and adaptation. Personal aspects of acculturation include psychological experiences of "homesickness, loneliness, depression, frustration, or feeling alienation, isolation, the loss of status or identity, and feelings of worthlessness" (Tseng & Newton, 2002, p. 592).

In addition to personal adjustment, IS also face academic adjustment challenges. However, compared to domestic students, the ratio and effect of these challenges is higher among international students. Academic challenges mainly result from a misfit between the students and the academic context in terms of “learning styles, study habits, educational background, culture and language proficiency” (Andrade, 2006, p.134). Academic challenges also result from coping with various other academic demands like motivation and academic performance (Wang & Hannes, 2014). Ability or inability to deal with these challenges affects (both positively and negatively) students’ academic achievement and their social adjustment within and outside of the academic environment (Mittelmeier, Rienties, Rogaten, Gunter, & Raghuram, 2019). Research discusses a diverse range of academic adjustment challenges and adjustment enablers of international students. However, most of these challenges can be grouped under learning culture differences and English language proficiency.

IS also deal with societies in which they live in the destination countries which result in social experiences. Social experiences are related to “how well students deal with the interpersonal-societal demands of a study, such as making friends, being part of social activities or being able to work in groups” (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012, p.687). Searle and Ward (1990) define social adjustment as the ability to “fit in” and “negotiate interactive aspects of new culture” (p. 450). The factors associated with international student social experience are language barrier in social situations, sociocultural integration with host community, social support and involvement and inclusion in extracurricular activities (Wang & Hannes, 2014; Mittelmeier et al., 2019). The following are the details of the relevant literature on various adjustment issues related to these three facets of ISE.

3.4.2.1 Homesickness

Homesickness is defined as “an emotional reaction to a loss of reinforcements from the original culture” (Brown & Holloway, 2008, p. 241). Homesickness is associated with anxiety, depression, and loneliness. It may be indicative of grief for the loss of a students’ support social network, and of maladjustment and maladaptation also (R. Beck, Taylor, & Robbins, 2003). Ying (2005) discovered homesickness as one of the five most important stressors among Taiwanese IS studying in America, regardless of their gender, in a longitudinal study conducted over a period of two years. The study also discovered that homesickness was more intense at the beginning of the transition and mellowed down towards the second semester of the stay in the destination country; however, the effects persisted as far as the third year of the study. One of the effects of homesickness on this group of students was social isolation. Another longitudinal study was reported by Götz, Stieger, and Reips (2019) for German exchange students studying in various countries. The study focused on determining predictors of homesickness. The study made surprising discoveries in terms of these predictors. It found that being male, emotional instability, agreeableness, tendency of social maladaptation, and being at the early stages of international stay were the strongest predictors of homesickness. Brown and Holloway (2008) reported an ethnographic research on postgraduate students in a British university context. They found that the initial positive feelings of being initiated into an international study sojourn are strongly marred by the intense emotional distress and loneliness caused by homesickness. The study also found that these negative feelings varied in intensity and effect across individuals which led to the conclusion that the experiences of transition and sojourn are dynamic and fluctuate across individuals. The study reported that friendship networks at the host country were the mitigating factor of the negative adjustment feelings caused by homesickness. However, while social contacts at the host country can mitigate the negative feelings of homesickness, maintaining similar contacts with home country can exacerbate these negative feelings and may hinder adjustment and adaptation to the destination country culture and environment (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Hofhuis, Hanke, & Rutten, 2019).

The studies reported above were from the center countries. Research conducted in emerging contexts also report similar findings. For example, Liu et al. (2016) found homesickness as one of the three most significant predictors of depression among international students in China. Similarly, Vergara, Smith, and Keele (2010) found homesickness as the most defining feature of IS acculturative stress in seven Thai universities. In a Malaysian context, Saravanan, Mohamad, and Alias, (2019) reported coping strategies "such as talking about […..] problems with others, engaging […..] in useful activities, indulging in physical exercises, facing the situation courageously, thinking positively and taking part in religious activities" (p. 84) used by IS to deal with homesickness.

3.4.2.2 Depression

Apart from being an outcome of homesickness, depression is also a standalone negative psychological aspect of the acculturation process. Compared to local students, the level of depression is 60% higher among international students (Zheng, McClay, Wilson, & Williams, 2015). Depression has adverse effects on learning and academic performance of students and is also related to anxiety (Redfern, 2016). Depression can be caused by various other factors rather by the very process of acculturation itself. In a study in an American context, Jung, Hecht, and Wadsworth (2007) reached a conclusion that personal-enacted identity gap has strong influence on depression. Personal-enacted identity is the difference between a person's self-view and the identity presented to others in communication. The reason for this may be because the person wants to 'fit-in' in a given situation or community. Thus there is an element of suppressing one's actual self for a projected self and this suppression causes depression (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Emotional instability is another predictor of depression. In a study involving international medicine studying in Romania, Popescu, and Buzoianu (2017) found that students with low levels of emotional instability have higher level of depression. Perfectionism (Rice, Choi, Zhang, Morero, & Anderson, 2012), poor health and poor relation with academic advisor (Han, Han, Luo, Jacobs, & Jean-Baptiste, 2013) gender identity and role expectations (Oliffe, Robertson, Kelly, Roy, & Ogrodniczuk, 2010), pressure of academic success (Redfern, 2016) and inability to integrate in host culture due to a lack of intercultural competence (Lewthwaite, 1996) were found to be other causes of depression among IS.

3.4.2.3 Loneliness and Isolation

Loneliness or isolation are defined as "a feeling and realization of a lack of meaningful contacts with others and/or an unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship" (Berg, Mellstrom, Persson, & Svanborg, 1981). Loneliness negatively influences an individual's performance, wellbeing and feeling of satisfaction (Janta, Lugosi, & Brown, 2014). Loneliness can be a result of multiple factors in terms of IS experience. Liu, Wong, and Tsai (2016), in their research on Asian female IS in the USA, discovered that gender, racial and nationality discrimination can cause heightened levels of loneliness among IS. They also discovered a reduced life satisfaction among this group of students due to the feeling of isolation. However, in another study in the same context, conducted by Zhou and Cole (2017), indicated that loneliness is not particularly associated with IS gender, racial or ethnic background and also that the feeling of loneliness greatly varied at individual level. In other contexts, Park and Noh (2018) discovered loneliness as an acculturative stressor for IS in a Korean context and the same discovery was made by Rębisz and Grygiel (2018) among a group of Ukrainian students studying in Poland. In the polish context, insufficient knowledge of local language was also a source of loneliness. Both studies discovered that support from social networks in the host country and contact with home country social networks through social network sites can help cope with the feelings of isolation. These studies generally echo the earlier findings by Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, and Ramia (2008) who categorised loneliness in three types: personal loneliness which results from the loss of connection with family, social loneliness which results from the loss of the social networks, cultural loneliness which is caused by the absence of the preferred cultural and linguistic environment. Sawir et al. also suggested a strong bonding and contact between local and international students as a potent coping strategy for dealing with loneliness.

3.4.2.4 Learning Culture Difference

A plethora of literature exists on IS challenges due to learning culture and norms differences between the students' earlier home country-based experiences (and the learning habits developed thereby) and the host country learning culture and norms. These differences appear in literature as an "East-West" dichotomy of learning cultures. Eastern learning culture norms are characterised by teacher-centredness, didactic patterns of classroom interaction, memorisation, and lopsided power relations between teachers and learners. Western learning culture norms are characterised by student-centredness, ownership of learning by the students, equal power relations, less informal and democratic classroom patterns of conversation, value for expression of ideas, argument and debate by learners and critical thinking (Ma & Wen, 2018).

The literature in this area suggests that this meeting of home country and host country learning culture norms result in adjustment challenges for IS. Campbell and Li (2008) reported their findings for Asian students studying in New Zealand. They discovered that learning experiences for the students in the host country learning culture were a major concern. Their findings revealed that these students faced academic challenges due to unfamiliar classroom interaction and the academic norms of the host country. Campbell and Li suggested that universities adapt their pedagogical approaches and practices to facilitate the students' transition into the host country academic culture. Findings with similar implications were reported by Wang, Singh, Bird, and Ives (2008) for Taiwanese nursing students studying in Australia, Kukatlapalli, Doyle, and Bandyopadhyay (2019) for Indian students studying in New Zealand, Ma and Wen (2018) for international students studying in the Chinese universities, Wang and Greenwood (2015) for a group of Chinese nursing students in Australia, Zhou, Liu, and Rideout (2017) for Chinese students in a Canadian context.

However, a growing body of research is developing which considers this framing of IS learning culture adjustment challenges into the East-West dichotomy as stereotyping. The take is that such dichotomising contributes to a deficient view of IS. The exponents of this view advocate an understanding of the interaction between contextual factors and students' learning experiences in shaping these learning culture challenges and also how these challenges contribute to change and development in a student (Ma & Wen, 2018). Notable among this body of research is Heng (2018), Wu (2015), Kimmel and Volet (2012), Rienties, Nanclares, Jindal-Snape, and Alcott (2013) and Anderson (2014).

3.4.2.5 English Language Proficiency

Lack of English language proficiency has been an academic adjustment barrier for IS. This lack has been found to negatively affect their academic life (Andrade, 2009). In a study involving 31 international students from 20 countries and conducted across two universities located in the UK and New Zealand, Wette and Furneaux (2018) found that IS were underprepared for writing in academic settings when they joined an international university. The students lacked skills required for "adjusting to a writer-responsible and reader-oriented approach, and learning to write in the clear, concise, direct, non-repetitive style valued in Anglo-western contexts" (p. 196). In another study, involving Indian students studying in New Zealand, Kukatlapalli et al. (2019) found that the new academic writing genres prevalent in the host country universities was a stressor for the students though they had a better

English language competence than the students from South and East Asian countries. Heng (2017) reported Chinese students studying in the USA facing challenges when authoring long academic essays in English despite having met the requisite TOEFL standards requirements.

Apart from difficulties related to academic writing, Campbell and Li (2008), in a USA context, reported that English language proficiency also pose communication challenges for Asian international students in a classroom setting. The ELP issue affected students' ability in several ways. Students faced barriers in "communicating with lecturers and other students, listening to lectures, following instructions, understanding assessment criteria and procedures, completing assignments [and] doing exams and tests" (p.381). Campbell and Li also reported that the issue added to students' stress as they spent more time on their study to make up for the problems caused by ELP. Outside the anglophone context, similar findings were reported by Yu and Wright (2017) for Chinese and international students studying in Hong Kong universities.

Additionally, a considerable number of research studies explore the relationship of ELP to academic performance. These studies are of importance in the backdrop of English medium instruction (EMI) becoming a norm and a face of internationalisation of HE (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018). These studies aim to find the relationship of English language proficiency and academic success in an EMI context. Rose, Curle, Aizawa, and Thompson (2019) reported one such study in a Japanese context. Their conclusion was that English language and academic English language skills were significant predictors of academic performance. Similar findings were reported earlier by Oliver, Vanderford, and Grote, (2012) for an Australian context. Their conclusion was that students who submitted the requisite standardised English language proficiency tests results for entry into the university academically performed better than those who submitted forms of non-standardised tests results.

3.4.2.6 Other Forms of Academic Stressors

Apart from the broader themes of academic challenges presented above, research in the academic experience of adjustment present a diverse range of context-specific stressors also.

Yu and Wright (2017) studied adjustment problems of international students studying at the Hong Kong universities. The students participating in the study reported difficulties while working in group projects. They felt excluded when local students switched to local languages in these group conversations because these IS were not competent in these languages. The students also reported doing the bulk of the work in finalising these group projects as the local students were not capable of contributing due to their poor English language competence. These international students also reported difficulties with teacher-centred classroom dynamics prevailing in these universities.

In another study, by Amblee and Calikoglu (2018), involving IS studying in a Finish university, the findings indicated that the students faced academic stressors due to a lack of sufficient EMI courses, deficient teaching quality and academic supervision.

Li (2019) reported a study on Chinese students studying in Germany and Finland. The students in Germany faced difficulties due to German language proficiency and many even failed courses because of this factor. A problem, reported in both countries, was the curriculum and its contents. The curriculum was far above the previous knowledge level of the students which they had acquired in their home country and to deal with this deficiency, the students needed to work more.

Jian, Marion, and Wang (2019) reported study on the differences between home and host country academic integrity concepts, standards and practices, and the adjustment difficulties that international students faced due to this difference. The study was conducted in a USA context and involved Chinese students. The academic integrity ethics of these students had influences from their home country culture, ethics and value system and the host country university did not orient them to the host country academic integrity culture, ethics and the value system. This clash of two disparate cultures affected the academic acculturation of these students.

Wang and Hannes (2014) reported academic acculturation difficulties of the IS in a Belgian university. Curriculum with its medium of instruction and contents in terms of comprehension difficulty and the extensive reading that was needed were discovered to be stressors for the students. Another stressor for these students was time management. The participants found it difficult to achieve a balance in their study and life.

3.4.2.7 Language Barrier in Social Settings

Lack of competence in the host community lingua franca can cause anxiety, insecurity, communication and interaction barriers with peers as well as with the host community members. The deficiency can also negatively impact developing social relations (Park, Lee, Choi, & Zepernick, 2017). Pham and

Tran, (2015) reported findings of a study involving international students in Australia. The findings supported the role of linguistic competence in social and cultural integration. Majority of the participants in the study considered language competence as instrumental in developing social and cultural relationship. Similar findings were reported about Chinese students studying in a UK university by Yu and Moskal (2018) and for a group of East Asian music students studying in the US universities by Choi (2013). In another study in a British context, Young, Sercombe, Sachdev, Naeb, and Schartner (2013) discovered a relationship between proficiency in the host community lingua franca and the psychological wellbeing. In the non-Anglophone context, Rhein (2018) reported the social adjustment and integration difficulties of African American students in Thailand due to a lack of linguistic competence in the host country lingua franca.

3.4.2.8 Discrimination

Discrimination is related to a range of negative personal, emotional and psychological issues such as feelings of worthlessness, stress, anxiety, alienation, depression, loss of identity and health problems (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Poyrazli and Lopez also discovered that international students experienced higher level of discrimination than domestic students. Wadsworth, Hecht, and Jung (2008) found a link between academic satisfaction and discrimination. Duru and Poyrazli (2011) reported discrimination being correlated to adjustment difficulties of Turkish students studying in the USA. Similar findings were reported earlier in the same context in another study involving 670 international students by Karuppan and Barari (2010). Their findings indicated that perceived discrimination negatively affects students’ learning, learning outcomes and the quality of educational experience. Wall, Tran, and Soejatminah (2017) found Saudi female students reporting experience of discrimination while studying in the USA. In a recent study, conducted in a non-anglophone context of a Norwegian university, Jamaludin, Sam, Sandal, and Adam (2018) found that perceived discrimination can negatively affect attitude towards the local culture. Yu, Bodycott, and Mak, (2019) reported identical findings for international students studying in the Hong Kong universities.

3.4.2.9 Friendship and Social Networks

Friendship is a key factor in international students' adaptation. Literature on friendship of international students deals with the patterns of friendship formation and how friendship influence or shape the experience of studying in a foreign country. Though mostly IS friend with students of their own nationalities and communities but friendship with host country students and members is connected to foreign students' satisfaction, mental well-being, and success (Hendrickson et al., 2011). In a study involving 304 international students in a Norwegian university, Sam (2001) found that among the students from collective cultures background (Asian and African), the number of friends was associated with the level of satisfaction with life in a foreign culture. For these students, their friends were the social support against the negative effects of acculturation. However, this study did not find any link of these positive influence of friendship on IS acculturation with host country friends. Rather, the participants reported experiencing difficulty in forming friendship with the host nation students. Similar findings were reported by Brown (2009) in a UK context. Brown discovered that international students preferred friendship with conational students and people for ease of communication, shared cultural background and for utilitarian assistance. Brown terms this pattern of friendship “ghettoization” but considered it essential for dealing with the feelings of “disorientation” in a new culture. More recent studies echoing similar themes are by Byrne, Brugha, and McGarvey (2019); Meng, Li, and Zhu, (2019); and Robinson, Somerville, and Walsworth (2020). However, in a study Taha and Cox (2016) discovered that the element of ghettoization is strong at the early stages of international sojourn and it dissipates as students progress into their stay in the host country. In the context of this dominant tendency of friendship formation with conational people among international students and understanding the reasons behind it, an interesting study is that of McKenzie and Baldassar (2017). The study was conducted in Australia and the researchers approached the friendship formation with international students from the perspective of local students. They discovered that even local students “never imagined such friendships and that, furthermore, they saw them as unnecessary” (p.712). The researchers discovered that cultural, ethnic and linguistic differences are the possible barriers to such relationships.

3.4.2.10 Social Support

Social support is defined as the interactions which result in the feelings of care, love, esteem, value and belonging in an individual receiving this support. Research on IS social adjustment experience shows that social support is vital for psychological and physical well-being of an individual as it mitigates acculturation stress (Li & Peng, 2019). Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, and Al-Timimi (2004), in their study involving international students studying in the US colleges, found that students with higher level of social support experience lower level of acculturation stress. Similar findings were reported by Ra and Trusty (2017) for East Asian international students studying in the USA and by Yu et al. (2019) for international students studying in the Hong Kong universities. Social support can come from various sources. Cao, Zhu, and Meng (2018) reported that the Chinese IS studying in Belgium gain social support from four sources: “(a) peer support from co-national students, (b) peer support from other international students, (c) support from tutors/university, and (d) peer support from host students” (p.7). Literature in the area also discuss various ways of improving and developing social support for IS. Lee, Sung, Zhou, and Lee (2018) reported that engaging in leisure activities with peers is positively associated with gaining social support from friends. Hendrickson (2018) discovered the role of extracurricular activities in developing these connections.

3.5 Outcome of Literature Review

As mentioned in the section 3.1 of this study, the aim of this literature review was to link the current study to the existing research in the field and give direction to the study. The available theoretical models and research related to the three research questions was explored and presented. The related concepts of IHE and ISM were also discussed. During the review, the main discovery was that most of the literature related to the questions of the research had been focused on the core or emerging countries and IHE contexts. The peripheral contexts did not draw much attention and had not been the focus of research activities in the field. This deficiency, therefore, justifies the necessity of conducting this research.

3.6 Theoretical Framework

This section presents the theoretical framework for this research. Bourdieu's thinking tools of field, capital, and habitus formed the theoretical perspective to answer the research questions guiding this study. These thinking tools are credited with the ability to provide "conceptual frameworks that theoretically explore individual-context interrelationship" (Joy, Game, & Toshniwal, 2018, p.4). As experiences are of individual nature and yet they occur in a context, therefore, the thinking tools framework is considered appropriate to study them.

3.6.1 Field

Field is the first of the Bourdieusian thinking tools. It is in field that the concepts of habitus and capital come into interaction not only with each other but also with field. Therefore, all three concepts (capital, habitus, field) interrelate and define the social world and the individuals there through this tripartite interaction and connection.

Field is termed as an "autonomous social microcosm"(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97) "having its own laws of functioning" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 162). Thomson (2008) likens field to a football pitch where the game takes place according to a set of rules and the players have their own positions. The game has an element of contestation, competition and struggle and the resultant gains depend on the skills and strategies of the players. In the same way field (which represents a social place, situation or context) is rules governed and competitive. It is occupied by various agents (which can be institutions or individuals) who struggle and contest for the gains (capital) that exist in the field. To secure these gains, the agents use different strategies. However, the difference in the rules and competition of the actual game of football and the contestation in field is that of fairness. The game of football affords level playing field to the competitors but in the social field the competition is characterised by positional advantage. Those who contest for and achieve gains can do so because they are already in an advantageous position and are in the contest to maintain and reproduce this advantage.

Based on the analogy presented above certain salient attributes of field can be deuced. First, while field is a structured and rules-bound space, these rules are in favour of and are dominated by those who are already in possession of advantage and the value of advantage is also determined by these rules. The advantage here represents capital. Therefore, field becomes a sphere of monopolisation and dominance for the reason that those, who are favoured by the rules and influence the rules, use the very rules to monopolise not only the control of capital but limit its access to others as this control and possession brings them power or further capital (Joy et al., 2018). Second, the rules and structures in a field are shared by all members of that field. Those who want to gain membership of the field need to conform to these rules and need to possess the same amount of capital as other members to be at parity with them. To do so, they will face resistance from the established members and this makes the field a zone of struggle (Bourdieu, 1993b). If the new contestants cannot gain the required amount of capital, they will be subjected to marginalisation and have to be content with their deficit capital (Joy et al., 2018). Third, this struggle will result in readjustments within the field. Some agents will lose capital while some will gain it. It also means a change in hierarchical and structural positions. This means field accommodates displacements (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2018).

Capital and field are interrelated. Field, perhaps, draws for its identity and uniqueness on the capitals associated with it. In return, capital depends for its value on a field. In this way, capital is field-specific implying that each field has its own forms of capital and a capital may not carry or denote the same value once it crosses a field (Tran, 2016). Capital's relation to field lies in that dispositions are motivated by the value of the capital into launching action and strategies for the reproduction or possession of capital or its forms within the possibilities and opportunities of field. Swartz (2002, p. 66) expresses this relation stating, "the driving forces of habitus is mediated by fields, and the constraints and opportunities imposed by fields are mediated through the dispositions of habitus".

3.6.2 Capital

Bourdieu delineates capital as "accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor". He further describes capital as something that "makes the game of the society", "produce[s] profit", has the capacity to "reproduce itself in identical and extended form", and "is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible" (Bourdieu, 1986, pp.241-242). In simple terms, the concept of capital can be stated as "the specific cultural or social [….] assets that are invested with value in the field which, when possessed, enables membership to the field" (Naidoo, 2004, p.458).

Bourdieu categorises four further forms of capital. These forms are economic, social, symbolic and cultural capitals (Sidhu & Dall'Alba, 2017). Economic capital is understood as material and financial wealth or resources (Tran, 2016). Social capital, as the name suggests, are social relations in the form of social networks, social relationships, memberships of social groups and communities which may take the form of either a family, class, tribe or school (Bourdieu, 1986). Symbolic capital takes the form of privilege and prestige which arises from the advantages accrued through other forms of capital (Sidhu & Dall'Alba, 2017). Cultural capital, perhaps, is the most comprehensive of all forms. It is conceptualised as "the skills, knowledge, titles, and sensibilities people possess" (Tran, 2016, p.1273). Bourdieu states that cultural capital exists in three further sub-forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. The embodied form is the intellectual and physical selves of an individual and they are manifested through an individual's knowledge, skills, language, attitude and behaviour. It, therefore, can be termed as an abstract and internalised aspect of cultural capital which an individual or a group carries in their personality. It takes time to accumulate as personalities develop over a sustainable period. The objectified form takes the shape of some type of artefacts. Bourdieu exemplifies them as pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, and machines. Their being artefacts suggest that they are the concrete manifestation of cultural capital and, therefore, can be acquired through economic capital. The third sub-form of cultural capital is termed institutionalised form by Bourdieu. This form includes educational or academic qualifications which "confers to its owner legitimised recognition in a given societal context at a given point in time" (Joy et al., 2018, p.4). One connection between the three sub-forms is that while embodied capital is acquirable through social capital, the acquisition of objectified and institutionalised capitals will need economic capital and as economic capital and social capitals are interlinked (wealth and material resources may determine an individual's group and community position), therefore, economic and social capitals will determine the acquisition of cultural capital (Azaola, 2012).

3.6.3 Habitus

Habitus is the third of the Bourdieusian thinking tools. Bourdieu defines it as:

> *systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively regulated and regular without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapt to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at the ends or an express mastery to attain them* (1977, p. 72)

To develop a full understanding of the conceptual tool, it is necessary to unpack this definition. The adjective durable suggests the attribute of permanency, deep-rootedness and stability. The adjective transposable suggests transferability and repositioning. Both attributes suggest that the dispositions, which form habitus, "lasts over time" and are capable of "becoming active within a wide variety of theatres of social action" (Maton, 2008, p. 50). Dispositions are defined by Swartz (2002, p. 62) as "forms of know-how and competence, both mental and corporeal". Soong, Stahl, and Shan (2018, p.245)) tersely decodes dispositions as "elements of consciousness". In simple terms, the concept of habitus can be understood as a person's usual and persisting cognitive tendencies and structures of sense making which permeate across contexts as the person shifts along them.

Habitus is also ‘structured structures’ and ‘structuring structures’. The word ‘structures’ implies ordered and systematic. Thus, habitus is a systematic structure with regularities. The words ‘structured’ and ‘structuring’ suggest more aspects of habitus. First, the embodied dispositions of habitus are recipients of external influences. These influences come from the social elements which form the context in which a person grows and lives. These elements can be family, community, school or tribe or experiences that a person goes through. The dispositions embodied in habitus evolve and are internalised over a sustained period. This also suggests the accumulative and developmental nature of habitus (Naidoo, 2015) and therefore, for being a result of a person’s past and being rooted in social milieu of a person, can be termed as the historical product of a person’s “socialised subjectivity” (Soong et al., 2018, p. 245). Second, habitus being ‘structuring’ implies outward influence and effect. The effects are that “it shapes one’s present and future practices” and “generate perceptions [and] appreciations” (Naidoo, 2015, p. 343). In these two dimensions of habits is embedded the dual nature of the dispositions (which aggregate into habitus) — deterministic and agentive nature. Deterministic attribute lies in the form of the social influences which shape habitus, and the agentive attribute lies in the generative nature of habitus (Joy et al., 2018).

However, habitus cumulatively is agentive in ‘generating and structuring practices and representations’. Habitus, as an agentive element, constitutes “schemas of action” affording an individual “practical sense for what is to be done in a …..situation" which in sports terms can be understood as "a feel for the game" and the ability to "anticipate the future of the game" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 25). In this way habitus is linked to ascertaining and determining possibilities vis-à-vis a person's social position and context and prompting action to realise these possibilities (Roksa & Robinson, 2017) and this explains the attribute of habitus embedded in the "objectively adapt to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at the ends or an express mastery to attain them" part of Bourdieu's definition quoted above.

3.6.4 Situating this Study in Bourdieusian Framework

Internationalisation of higher education is a distinctive, 'bounded' and 'relational environment' with 'global, national and local' actors and agents (Marginson, 2008, p. 303). Therefore, it can be considered a field in Bourdieusian terms. Within this field, "states, institutions and individuals seek to reinvent themselves into knowledge societies, world class universities, flexible citizens and global talent" (Sidhu & Dall'Alba, 2017, p. 468). This implies that the field of IHE has its own game, rules, hierarchies, dispositions, capital, members and agents, and struggles for the capital, positions and relations. Further, according to Bourdieusian concept "multiple fields coexist…… which may be nested in others" and "each …..subfield or nested sub-fields have their own rules" (Joy et al., 2018, p. 5). Applied to the context of IHE, it means that IHE as a field exists in relation to other fields in society and, also as a nested or subfield of other main fields. Additionally, IHE as an independent field can itself have its own sub and nested fields. For example, economy and IHE can be two independent fields or IHE can be a nested field of the economy.

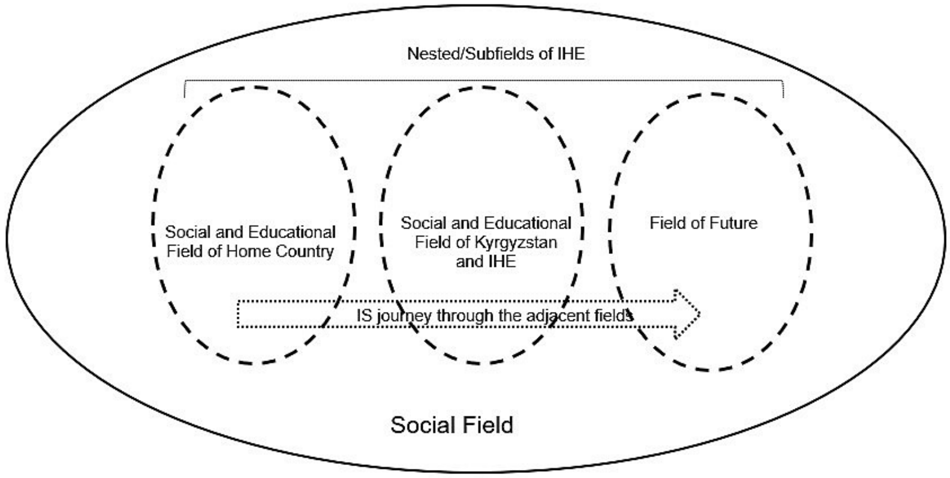

Figure 2: Situating the research in Bourdieusian Framework

The current research is situated in this field of IHE. Placed within the Bourdieusian framework, the current research can be perceived as the students' journey within the larger field of IHE (see Figure 2). However, while making this journey, the students shift across adjacent fields. Initially, the students were situated in their own home country social and educational field. After the students have joined the IHEI in Kyrgyzstan, they shifted to a new social and educational field where they not only form new set of experiences through their interaction with the context of the IHEI and the destination country but the experiences in this field are expected to shape their image of the future. This journey through the adjacent fields has implications for the students' capital and habitus in Bourdieusian terms. It will be interesting to know what happens to the students' position and membership in the home country field. What 'feel for the game' triggers their desire and the subsequent decision of moving to an IHEI abroad? What dispositions are involved in this desire and decision. In the backdrop of IHE, what capital in the home country context devalues and affects students' position and habitus in the home country social and educational field. Additionally, once in the field of the destination country and the IHEI there, how capital and habitus brought from the home country interacts with the new context? How capital changes value or gain values and how the students align their habitus to the new context? How all this affect their membership in the new field of the destination IHEI and the country in terms of capital and habitus? In terms of the development of the future image of the students, how the experiences in the context of the destination field interact with the development of a future-oriented habitus and capital? In the field of future, what capital gain is seen as valuable and what future-oriented habitus is forming? Expressed precisely, the study when placed within Bourdieusian framework, is expected to help understand how contextual elements embedded in the social and educational field of the home country , the destination country and IHE interact with individual structures and inform the students' experiences and future possibilities during their journey of IHE in a peripheral country.

3.7 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to situate the current study in the broader perspective of IHE and ISE. Internationalisation has become the central concern of countries and HEIs due to its economic, social, cultural and political concern. It brings definite advantages to nations, institutions and individuals. The phenomenon is taking over the HE sector across the globe. In this background ISE takes the centre stage as students probably are the largest consumers of internationalisation. However, it has been discovered that most of the research in the field has been conducted in the mainstream receiving countries. The contexts existing on the peripheries remain under-researched despite their potential for being regional and emergent IS destinations. The chapter culminated on providing an overview of the theoretical lens for this stuy. The next chapter provides an overview of the methodology.

Chapter 4
Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology adopted for this study. The study was conducted within the interpretivist paradigm using the research strategy of the intrinsic case study. The chapter starts with introducing the contending positivist and interpretivist paradigms followed by details of the choice of the research strategy and its pros and cons. Next, the research design is presented followed by the details of rigour in the study.

4.1 Research Questions

The aim of this research is to explore the living experience of regional international students (RIS) in the context of international higher education in Kyrgyzstan. The three focal aspects of this study are: reasons for students coming to study in Kyrgyzstan; the nature of their personal, academic and social experience in the country; the effect of this experience on their image of the future. These focal aspects have been translated into the following three research questions:

1) Why do RISs choose to study in international universities in Kyrgyzstan?
2) How do the students experience personal, academic and social life during their study in the country?
3) How is this experience shaping the image of the future for them?

4.2 Research Paradigm

Research, essentially, is a systematic endeavour of knowing and expanding what is already known (Ernest, 1994). Nevertheless, this systematic endeavour, in qualitative research is founded on a researcher's subjectivity. The foundational subjectivity is the world view of the researcher (J Creswell, 2009). This worldview is known as a research paradigm. Bogdan and Biklen (2003, p. 22) define a research paradigm as "a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research". Guba (1990, p. 17) defines it as a "basic set of beliefs that guide action". The definitions confirm the factor of subjectivity underlying any research endeavour in the form of certain beliefs and worldviews.

However, to have systematicity in any research practice, this subjectivity must be rule-governed. A paradigm provides a framework of these rules. Structurally, a research paradigm has three tiers: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology and epistemology are the philosophical aspects, and methodology relates to the praxis aspect of a paradigm (Leavy, 2014). Ontology is the orientation of subjectivity towards the nature of reality. Epistemology is the relationship of this subjectivity with reality. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 201) explain these two elements through two simple questions. According to them, ontology is asking, "What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?"; and epistemology is asking, "What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?". The third element, methodology, is the actual "doing of research" (Leavy, 2014, p. 3). Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p.56) define methodology as "How do we know the world or gain knowledge of it?". These three tiers are the building blocks of a researcher's subjectivity which shape any research practice.

Research paradigms, and the dichotomy existing in their ontological and epistemological foundations, place research approaches in contrast to each other. Ontological dichotomy about the nature of reality places us in paradigmatic opposites of whether reality is independent of an individual or bound to the individual. Simplistically, it is a dichotomy of objectivity or subjectivity related to the nature of reality and explains if reality exists outside and independent of the consciousness or inside and as part of the consciousness. Ontological positions inform epistemological dichotomy (Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, the epistemological dichotomy related to “Who can be a knower?” and the nature of knowledge or reality (Leavy, 2014, p. 3) also hinges on the two opposing positions. One position views the knower as an uninvolved ‘observer’ and reality as ‘hard’, ‘objective’ and ‘tangible’. The other position perceives the knower as an involved participant and reality as ‘personal’, ‘subjective’, and ‘unique’. This dichotomy further permeates to the tier of methodology. It bifurcates it into quantitative strategies on one end and qualitative strategies on the other end (Cohen et al., 2018). These two poles of the dichotomy render two main approaches to research: the positivist approach and the interpretivist approach. The positivist approach is founded on the former position of the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge and quantitative strategies whereas the interpretivist approach favours the later position.

4.2.1 Positivist Approach

The positivist approach in social science research favours the principles of natural sciences research (Cohen et al., 2018). Its ontological position stems from realism. Crotty (1998) clarifies this with an analogy of a tree in a forest.

> *A tree in the forest is a tree, regardless of whether anyone is aware of*

> *its existence or not. As an object of that kind, it carries the intrinsic meaning of treeness. When human beings recognize it as a tree, they are simply discovering a meaning that has been lying in wait for them all along. (p. 8)*

The implication here is the immutability of reality and meanings. They are to be discovered. Each discovery, regardless of the subjectivity of the discoverer, will result in the same reality and meanings. Guba and Lincoln (1998) sum it as objectivism. Objectivism informs the epistemological position of the positivist approach. The philosophical underpinning of the approach implies a tendency of discovering causal relationships in the social world (Creswell, 2009) and making “scientific generalisations or laws” (Ernest, 1994, p. 22). This process of discovery and generalisation is accomplished by using quantitative methodology.

4.2.2 Interpretivist Approach

The interpretivist approach evolved as a reaction to positivism. It is founded on the philosophy of Max Weber which encourages ‘understanding’ rather than ‘explaining’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). It is also known as constructivism, anti-positivism, naturalism and qualitative research. This approach differentiates social world from the natural world. Social world is the world of human beings and they cannot be understood through the lens of natural world or in terms of causal relationship. Further, any social phenomenon involves human values and conscience and as, generally, the aim of any social research endeavour is understanding these social phenomena, therefore, social science researchers “need to consider human beings’ subjective interpretations, their perceptions of the world (their life-worlds) as our starting point in understanding social phenomena” (Ernest, 1994, p. 25). Richards (2003) supports this point by saying, “…..reality is socially constructed, so the focus of research should be on an understanding of this construction and multiple perspectives" (p. 8). This also represents the ontological and epistemological parameters of the approach.

4.2.2.1 Interpretivist ontology and epistemology

Ontologically, interpretivism subscribes to relativism (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Relativism acknowledges the relationships of subjectivities and reality. Reality is not fixed and immutable. It is shaped by individual subjectivities and, therefore, varies from individual to individual. This leads us to the epistemological position of the approach which is subjectivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Subjectivism propounds that "the world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it" (Grix, 2004, p. 83). The implication is that to understand reality, one must become a part of the reality as it does not exist outside our conscience and subjectivities. This assumes an element of participation and involvement. Hence, from the angle of praxis, interpretive paradigm admits subjective and participatory role of a researcher with a view to "understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 19). This can be achieved by employing a qualitative methodology which is "flexible and sensitive to social context in which data are produced" (Grix, 2004, p.121) and accommodates participants to open their "mind" to a researcher (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 147).

4.2.3 Paradigmatic Position in Current Research

My position, for this research, falls within the interpretivist paradigm. It is evident from the aim and questions which are leading this study. The aim is to understand and explore international students' experience. I want "to study social life as it presents itself to the members of a society under ordinary, everyday circumstances" (Beuving & de Vries, 2015, p.37). The interest in this area stems from my own experience as an international student and a teacher working in the zone of IHE. I have been through the experience of international education in a foreign country. My experience was unique and different from many others who were in the same situation. Now, I want to explore how others experience it. My experience will affect the understanding that I form and the discoveries that I make (Bunniss & Kelly, 2010). Therefore, I cannot remain a mere observer of a phenomenon. I am already a participant in the phenomenon by being a part of it and now want to participate in it from the standpoint of others. I want them to share their 'mind' with me while going through this experience (Ponterotto, 2005). Additionally, I believe that the element of 'experience' is very subjective. It needs to be understood from the perspective of those who experience it (Bunniss & Kelly, 2010). To understand an individual experience, if it is reduced to the dichotomy of cause and effect relations, the essence of the whole perspective is lost. The interpretivist paradigm provides me a pedestal to achieve this objective.

4.3 Research Methodology

As mentioned earlier, the parameters for this research are: first, to "investigate [the topic] in all [its] complexity [within its] context"; second, to understand experience from "the informants' own frame of reference…..through sustained contact with [them] in settings where [they] normally spend their time" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003); and third, my own person, subjectivity, conscience and experiences will be "an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon" (Clandinin &

Johnson, 2015, p. 563). The research strategy, which is in cohesion with these parameters, is the case study.

4.3.1 Case Study

A case study (CS) strategy, according to Stake (1995), is “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). The definition clearly delimits the purpose of a case study to understand a case in context rather than to “study[ing] a case primarily to understand other cases” (p. 4). Thus, the case study approach necessarily does not aim at comparison but studying a case for its own value. Yin (2003) connects the option of the case study approach to the nature of questions, the position of a researcher vis-à-vis the phenomenon under study, and the temporality of the phenomenon. He says that case study is a “preferred research strategy when how and why questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p.1).

Approached from these combined perspectives, the choice of a case study strategy for this current research endeavour is well justified. I want to explore and understand the case of a group of regional international students experience in a specific HEI in the IHE context of Kyrgyzstan. Further, the questions guiding this study are ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions. These questions are focused on understanding the ongoing phenomenon of foreign student experience in the contemporary context of IHE. Therefore, my investigation has all the vital elements to warrant the use of the case study approach. Gillham (2000), p.1) defines these elements as:

- a unit of human activity embedded in the real world;
- which can only be studied or understood in context;
- which exists in the here and now;
- that merges in with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw.

The unit of human activity in my study is the international student experience and its relation to the real world lies in its being lived in an international HEI in the IHE context of Kyrgyzstan. Second, the experience has been studied in the context in which it takes place and is not replicated in a controlled environment. Further, contextual elements and connections of various aspects of the experience with the context have been considered when exploring and understanding the phenomenon thus each (contextual elements and the aspects of experience) merge and contribute to developing the overall understanding.

4.3.2 Types of Case Studies

Various types of case study approaches have been suggested. Stake (2005) proposes intrinsic, instrumental and collective case study types. The intrinsic case study focuses on understanding a case, the instrumental type is conducted to draw generalisation, and collective case study type is undertaken to study multiple cases to understand a phenomenon or an issue. Yin (2003) categorises them as exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case study types. The exploratory case study serves as a preliminary hypothesis forming study in an earlier unexplored field (Streb, 2010). The descriptive case study can be regarded as the equivalent of Stake's instrumental type. Descriptive case studies "assess a sample in detail and in-depth, based on an articulation of a descriptive theory" (Tobin, 2010, p.288). Explanatory case study is more scientific in nature. Experimental research is one example of such study. The aim of an explanatory case study can be developing a theory (Yin 2003). According to Thomas (2011), epistemological foundations differentiate one case study taxonomy from another. He elaborates that fields like sociology, education, and psychology are predominantly grounded in interpretivist epistemology whereas other technical fields like economics favour a positivist epistemology. Epistemology is also the difference between Stake's and Yin's taxonomies of the case study types. Yazan (2015) believes that Yin's taxonomy has a positivist disposition. This is also evident from Yin's (2014) explication of case study as a “form of empirical inquiry” (p.16). On the contrary, Stake's taxonomy has interpretivist or constructivist leaning (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017).

As the research aim, the research questions, and my position in this investigation are aligned to interpretivist paradigm; therefore, the design of this case study was based on Stake's (2005) intrinsic case study type.

4.3.3 Deficiencies in Case Study Research

Before proceeding further with rationalising and detailing the methodological design, it needs to be mentioned that the choice of case study as a research strategy, at the outset, enmeshes a researcher in a quandary. The dilemma arises from the existing debate on the status of the case study as a research approach. The debate portrays the approach as a “methodological second best” (Thomas, 2010, p. 575) suitable for an initial hypothesis building research only.

Certain characteristics of the CS are the reasons for this purportedly inferior position. Schwandt and Gates (2018) attribute it to the absence of a unanimous conceptualisation of the approach. The understanding that what the CS is and what structures it varies from field to field. They also note inconsistencies in the CS methods. The CS favours adoption of both qualitative and quantitative methods and this duality and inconsistency in methods makes the CS design ambiguous. Gerring, (2004) termed it as a "methodological limbo" as practitioners of the CS "have difficulty articulating what it is that they are doing methodologically speaking" (p. 341).

Leavy (2014) refers to the validity issues of the CS. According to her, the CS deals with a 'sample of one' and inferences, based on one instance only, cannot be valid. A research needs a large sample for the inferences to be valid. Thomas (2010) delineates this issue tersely through a German proverb *Einmal ist keinmal* which means "one doesn't count". Even if arguments are forwarded for drawing inferences from a single instance, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) are of the stance that these inferences are not generalisable to other cases or contexts. Ruddin (2006) summarises these issues in terms of theory-generation, reliability and validity and opines that these three aspects make the CS approach inferior to a positivist or scientific methodology.

Fundamentally, these aspects, emanating from the epistemological and methodological debate about the CS make a researcher, deciding to adopt the CS research strategy, sceptical of the choice of research approach and thereby the entire endeavour of inquiry.

4.3.4 Defence of Case Study Research

However, there are stronger arguments favouring the adoption of the CS approach which effectively counterbalances the criticism. Regarding the status of the approach, Hyett, Kenny, Dickson-Swift, & Dickson-Swift (2014) opine that it is a ‘stand-alone’ approach of the qualitative tradition. Exponents of the approach also laud it for its flexibility and multidisciplinary nature. Gall et al. (2003) think “virtually any phenomenon can be studied by means of the case study” (p.435). Yin (2014) informs that the use of case study approach is a norm across diverse fields like psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing and community planning and even economics. Gerring (2004) thinks that, notwithstanding the criticism, the approach is “solidly ensconced” and is “thriving” (p. 341). Cohen et al. (2007) support the use of the approach for several other key reasons also. First, they think the approach is “down-to-earth”, “attention-holding” and the data generated through a case study research is “strong in reality” (p.256). Second, the case study approach is particularly attentive to case and contextual complexities; and finally, a case study has greater scope of practical application and utility.

Redressing the issue of inconsistencies in methods, Stake (2005) says that “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 443). The implication of Stake’s statement can be summed in the cliché *end justifies means*. The starting point in case study methods-related decisions is the problem, issue or topic under investigation rather than the choice of methods. The interest, according to Stake, remains in “What can be learned about the single case?” (p. 443) and this factor must guide any inquiry design. Regarding the issues of validity and generalisation, Hyett et al. (2014) dismiss the criticism as statistical-bias. Their explanation is that “case study has been unnecessarily devalued by comparison with statistical methods”. They opine that research is not always statistical and the aim is not always generalisation. They take exception to comparing case study research with statistical research and opine that it created the kind of myopic vision which hinders seeing the value of case study research. The most potent defence of the approach comes from Flyvbjerg (2006). He dismisses all criticism outright as “grossly misleading” (p.220) and mere “conventional wisdom”, and asserts that “the case study is a necessary and sufficient method for certain important research tasks in the social sciences, and [the] method ….holds up well when compared to other methods in the gamut of social science research methodology” (p.241). He furnishes a comprehensive argument advocating the use of case study, and dismissing the criticism, using a framework of five misunderstandings (Table 5).

Table 6: Five misunderstandings about case study research

Misunderstanding #	Description
Misunderstanding 1	General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge.
Misunderstanding 2	One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.
Misunderstanding 3	The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building.
Misunderstanding 4	The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions.
Misunderstanding 5	It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.

Source: (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.221)

These above-mentioned arguments justify the choice of the case study research strategy for this study. The main justification lies in the argument of end justifies means. My end was to understand a context and situation— the situation of international student experience in a peripheral country. My interest in the situation was stimulated by being myself a part of the situation, the context and the experience. I wanted to explore the

context and the situation to fundamentally develop my understanding of the situation. This was my end. It involved my own and other people's experience and I wanted to build an understanding of the situation through understanding these experiences in their entirety with the help of those who experienced them. This is fundamentally a social situation. It was not to detach myself from the phenomenon. Being part and being involved, it was not possible to engage in the process of understanding and exploration without my biases. This emphasis on subjective understanding, compared to generalization, justifies the use of case study research strategy.

4.3.5 Multimethod Research Design

Case study research, as explained in the section 4.3.4, allows a researcher to make methodological choices. Thus, taking advantage of this flexibility, a multimethod data collection was opted for this study. Multimethod design is defined as "the practice of employing two or more different methods [….] within the same study or research program rather than confining the research to the use of a single method" (Hunter & Brewer, 2015, p.187). Bryman (2004) terms this type of design mixed method design but Creswell (2012) clearly distinguishes a mixed method from a multimethod. According to him a mixed method design uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and therefore does not subscribe to a single ontological and epistemological position. However, Hunter and Brewer

(2015) considers multimethod as an umbrella term for a research design which allows for mixing any methods in any combination. They are of the opinion that mixed method design (which combines qualitative and quantitative methods) is a subtype of multimethod research design. Hesse-Biber, Rodriguez, and Frost (2015) support this view by defining multimethod design as an approach which necessarily utilises two or more qualitative methods for data collection. This research subscribes to this view of multimethod design. This qualitative-driven view is aligned and in accordance with the ontological and epistemological foundations of this study. Chamberlain, Cain, Sheridan, and Dupuis (2011) considers such alignment essential for avoiding any inconsistency and clash in the researcher's worldview and the choice of methods.

The use of multimethod design has been ascribed with certain advantages. Bryman (2004) thinks that the use of multimethod design and the data collected thereby increases "confidence in findings" as opposed to data collected from a single method which is "vulnerable to the accusation that [such a data] may lead to incorrect inferences and conclusions" (p. 678). Hesse-Biber et al. (2015) opine that data collected from multimethod design develop a rich, complete and broader understanding of the research problem. Chamberlain et al. (2011) favour multimethod design for its ability to unravel the complexity of research problem and help develop multidimensional insights and positions. According to Moran-Ellis et al.(2006, p. 11), if the goal is to "know more" about the issue or phenomenon understudy, then multimethod design is an effective way to achieve it. As the aim of this research is to develop a rounded, comprehensive and rich understanding of the complex phenomenon of ISE in a peripheral country from a single case and with a few participants, therefore, in addition to meeting the worldview considerations, the multimethod design aligns with this aim also.

Various ways and views of using more than one method in a qualitatively-driven multimethod design has been suggested. Hesse-Biber et al. (2015) suggests two ways: concurrent design and sequential design. In a concurrent design two or more qualitative methods of data collection are launched simultaneously and in a sequential design, the methods are launched one after the other at different points of time. In both designs, methods are hierarchically related, that is, one method is the core of data collection while the other is in an auxiliary or a supplementary position serving the core method. In another approach, Moran-Ellis et al.(2006) distinguishes between combining methods and integrating methods. The hierarchical positioning of methods described above is an example of combining methods. In this hierarchical or combined methods design, the methods are employed with an aim of “improving depth or quality” and do not make “an equal contribution to knowledge about the phenomenon” (p. 51). Contrastingly, in an integrative multimethod research design two or more methods are launched to support single and unified interpretations (Seawright, 2016). In essence, these multiple methods may have their own singular attributes but when integrated and used in unison “comprise a coherent whole”; the integration makes them “inter-mesh with each other in pursuit of ‘knowing more’” (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006, pp. 50,51). Delineating further features of an integrative multimethod design, Moran-Ellis and his companions say that each method may be launched at a different point of time and the integration which starts at the beginning of the research process must be sustained during the process of data analysis and interpretation.

Within this framework of multimethod design, this research employed multi-methods of data collection. These methods were interviews, diary entry and focus group discussion. All these methods are aligned with the ontological and epistemological position of this research. They were operationalised as an integrative approach. While interviews and diary entries were launched simultaneously, focus group discussion was conducted three months apart at a later stage of data collection.

4.4 Research Design

According to Yin (2014), manuals detailing standards and principles for case study research design have yet to appear. Therefore, in the absence of any such standardisation, the design of the current investigation has been led by the general principle of “fitness of purpose” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 262), that is, “how well it [the design] allows full investigation of a particular research question[s]” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p.31). Decisions about the selection of site, participants, and data collection were based on three recommendations of Bleijenbergh (2010). The first recommendation that he gives is strategic selection. It means selecting a case which can afford maximum information. The second recommendation is average case selection, that is, selecting a case which is representative of the phenomenon. The third recommendation was selection of single case because a single case allows intensive and in-depth data collection. The following details elaborate how these recommendations were used in the methodological choices in this study.

4.4.1 Site Selection

The site for this research was the University of Central Asia (UCA), Naryn Campus, Kyrgyzstan (details about the university were provided in the section 2.3). The university at this stage supports a small population of students as it has a strategy of phase-wise growth. The total number of students on both campuses (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) is 209. At the site of this research, that is the campus in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan (called Naryn campus henceforth), the total number of students for the academic year of 2018-19 was 116 (Table 6). The international students makeup 63% of the total student population on Naryn campus. These international students come from regional countries of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Iran and Syria.

Table 7: Student demographics at UCA Naryn campus

		Country of Origin							
Cohort	Gender	Kyrgyzstan	Kazakhstan	Tajikistan	Pakistan	Afghanistan	Iran	Syria	Total
Preparatory Year	Male	8	2	8	1	0	0	1	20
	Female	9	3	4	0	0	0	0	16
Freshmen	Male	5	1	5	7	0	1	0	19
	Female	7	5	9	0	1	0	0	22
Sophomore	Male	7	0	9	2	2	0	0	20
	Female	6	1	9	3	0	0	0	19

Source: The university registrar’s office (August, 2018)

The site was selected as being a representative of the phenomenon and thus having the potential for maximum information. Naryn campus is an example of a characteristic international university operating in Kyrgyzstan. It offers a world-class education to a predominantly international population of students coming from regional countries. Additionally, the site contains the ‘appropriate people’ that this research is targeting and affords easy access (B. L. Berg, 2001) as, I, the researcher, am a faculty member at the campus.

However, the consideration of having a target population was more important than the possibility of easy access to the site. The site fulfils the condition of fitness of purpose and strategic selection.

4.4.2 Research Participants

The choice of the research participants was led by certain considerations. The first consideration was the aim of the study. The aim was to explore the living experience of regional international students in the IHE in Kyrgyzstan. It mandated that the students must be from a regional country, enrolled in an undergraduate program at the site of the research (UCA) and must have lived for a few years in the country. The second consideration was to select participants who could provide maximum information. Based on these considerations, the purposive sampling technique was used. To determine such a sample, a researcher has the prerogative to use personal knowledge about a group that is linked to the aim of the study, the research questions and the information needed to answer these questions (Berg, 2001).

Purposive sampling is recommended for in-depth understanding of an issue (Hatch, 2002). A subsidiary technique of purposive sampling is homogeneity. Homogeneity in sampling means selecting participants who have similar characteristics. The homogeneity in sampling for this research was achieved by choosing the participants who met the conditions mentioned at the outset of this paragraph, that is, they must be foreign students from regional countries enrolled in the research site university and must be able to provide maximum information. This consideration was met by selecting the sophomore year student group from the student body studying at the university as they were the very first cohort to join the university and had lived longer than other student cohorts on the campus and in the country.

Thus, they had more experience in the country and the campus than other cohorts.

As mentioned earlier, the Naryn campus hosted a total number of 116 students at the time of the research and data collection. Thirty-nine of these students were in the sophomore cohort including 26 sophomore students from regional countries. Eleven females and fifteen males comprised this number of 26 foreign students. These students study in computer science and communication and media disciplines. Most of these students came from underprivileged families in the mountain societies and their study at the university was subsidized through the financial support scheme of the university and the AKDN for their international study. Their ages ranged from 20 to 23. Five of these participants had spent one to two years in their home country HE before joining UCA. They were therefore in a position to compare both systems fo HE, that is home system and the system at UCA. Sharipove and Rahima spent two years in a home university before joining UCA, while Danish, Nadina and Sametaya spent one year each (all names used here are pseudonyms).

These international students were sent an email invitation for voluntary participation in the research. The email clearly enunciated the purpose of the study and the nature of their participation. Only eight students agreed to participate in the research. Five of the respondents were females and three were males. This gender division had not been part of the research design. Table 4 presents the demographic details of the participants. Though this is a small number of research participants, yet, according to Yin’s (2009) standards, such a number is sufficient for collecting exhaustive data to explore the case as he recommends six to ten units of analysis for a single case study. Further, the current research being a qualitative case study, the sample size is also in line with the conventions of the qualitative methodology. Patton (2002) supports this tendency in qualitative research stating, “There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 242-243). As the purpose is depth, therefore, a small number of the participants affords the space and time to deal with the data in depth:

> *For this depth to be achieved, it is much more important for the research to be intensive, and thus persuasive at the conceptual level, rather than aim to be extensive with intent to be convincing, at least in part, through enumeration. (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006, p.494)*

Table 8: Demographic details of research participants

Pseudonym	Country	Gender	Age
Ahmed	Afghanistan	male	22
Sadullaieva	Kazakhstan	female	22
Sametaya	Kazakhstan	female	21
Danish	Pakistan	male	22
Rahima	Pakistan	female	23
Muzafra	Tajikistan	female	20
Nadina	Tajikistan	female	21
Sharipov	Tajikistan	male	23

4.4.3 Data Collection Method

Following are the details of data collection methods.

4.4.3.1 Interviews

Stake (1995) states that the main objective of a case study is to discover multiple realities of others and “interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p.64). Cohen et al. (2007) also hold interviews as a research method in high esteem stating that “interview is a powerful implement for researchers” (p.349). The reasons they furnish for their endorsement of the method is their belief that human interaction is fundamental to knowledge production and interviews capacitate this interaction. They further assert that interviews are “intersubjective” as opposed to only subjective or objective and the method enable both the participants and the researchers “to discuss their interpretations of world in which they live” (p.349). Seidman (2006) affirms that humans can make sense of their experiences only by telling stories of these experiences. Therefore, when a researcher adopts the method of interviewing, it is because of “an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p.9). Consequently, the main method opted for data collection for the current research has been interviews with the participants. The choice of this method is aligned both with the paradigmatic position and the aim of the investigation also. The aim of the research is not just to explore the experiences of the students but “to understand the meaning [the students] make of their experiences” (Seidman, 2006, p. 11).

Interviews are of multiple types. Cohen et al. (2007) listed 10 different types of interviews. O’Reilly and Dogra (2017) limited them to four main types: structured, semi-structured, unstructured and naturally occurring interviews. The semi-structured interview type was chosen for this case study. This type of interview relies on a list of pre-determined open-ended questions and is an established qualitative data collection method. The pre-determined nature of questions helps the researcher and the participant to collaboratively construct meanings (Given, 2008). Further, semi-structured interviews, by virtue of having a preset structure, allow the interviewer to focus on the issues focal to the issue or phenomenon under study (Brinkmann, 2014). These are particularly useful in the context “when the researcher knows enough about the topic or phenomenon to identify the domain” (Morse, 2012, p. 197). These positive aspects influenced the choice of semi-structured interviews for this research. The first aspect supports the paradigmatic position of this study. The position entails that the researcher and the participants construct the meanings together. Semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with this advantage as these allow for dialogue or conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee and the mutual construction of the meaning (Given, 2008). The second aspect supports the aim of the study. The study aimed to investigate student experience in a new context. The nature of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to focus on the issues that the researcher considered central and important to achieving the aims of the study and in this way focused and relevant data was collected. Further, the choice was also appropriate due to my own experience and knowledge of the context and the field of IHE. The experience came from my being an international student myself, being a teacher in an international university and dealing with international students in this capacity and also from the extensive literature review that I conducted for this study. This made me familiar with the phenomenon under study and enabled me to “identify the domain[s]” (Morse, 2012, p.197) to be explored through the list of the questions prepared for the semi-structured interviews.

Based on the method guidelines elaborated in the previous paragraph, a list of 31 open-ended questions was prepared for collecting data for this research (Appendix A). The questions were designed around four themes.

The first group of the questions was to gain personal background information. It included questions related to information about name, age, gender, country of origin, and previous education.

The second group of the interview questions was related to the first research question. The first research question focuses on the reasons for studying in an IHE in Kyrgyzstan. In the literature review, it was discovered that student choice of destination was explored through push-pull model. Thus, interview questions for this group were formulated with the aim to gather information related to the factors and experiences which pushed these students out of their country for acquiring higher education. The questions were also related to the factors which pulled them to an IHEI in Kyrgyzstan.

The third set of interview questions was themed on the second research question. These interview questions were developed to gather information about participants' personal, social and academic experiences. The formulation of the fourth group of interview questions was based on the third research question. These questions were related to the participants' image of the future (please see appendix A for the interview protocol).

Before using the interview questions with the actual participants, the questions were initially presented to two colleagues for their feedback. Their opinion was sought on the wording and effectiveness of the questions. Based on their feedback, certain questions were removed and wordings for a few other questions were improved. Following this, piloting was done with two volunteer students from the same cohort but outside of the list of the participants. This procedure was necessary "because the questions cannot be changed once the data collection begins, pretesting of the questions is important. This ensures that the questions are adequately covering the topic and that the expected responses are being obtained" (Morse, 2012, p. 197). The piloting confirmed the effectiveness of the questions and also if the wording was appropriate and understandable by the participants. The piloting also helped the researcher to confirm that the questions elicited the information that they were intended to gain.

4.4.3.2 Diary writing and focus group discussion

Exponents of case study research advocate using multiple sources and methods for data collection to achieve intensity and depth (Gall et al., 2003). Therefore, it was decided to adopt a diary writing and focus group discussion as secondary data collection methods.

Bolger, Davis, and Rafaeli (2003) consider diary writing an effective way of knowing about individuals' "experiences in their natural, spontaneous context, providing information complementary to that obtainable by more traditional designs" (p. 580). Further, Coxon (2004) favours the use of the method for being a "natural method of data collection" which is "more reliable" because it provides "freedom from interview effects" (para. 1).Therefore, to complement data collected from the interviews, diary writing method was used.

Focus group discussion is instrumental in "generating collective views and the meaning that lie behind these views" (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008, p.293). The objective of opting for group discussion in this research was complementation for the purpose of intensity and depth.

More details regarding both methods are furnished in the next section.

4.4.4 Data Collection Procedure

The following section details data collection procedures for the three methods used.

4.4.4.1 Interviews

Interviews were conducted using the guidelines provided by Cohen et al. (2007). Participants were met in person to decide on an interview timetable. A mutually convenient time was agreed. It was followed by an email which was sent a day earlier than the stipulated time to remind the participants of the interview appointment.

All interviews were conducted in an office on campus. Participants were informed of the location during the in-person meeting and in the follow-up email. Before the start of the interview, the participants were told about the purpose of the interview. They were also informed that their interviews would be recorded. The most important aspect of this introductory information was reassuring the participants of their anonymity and confidentiality. They were told about the method of protecting the recording of the interview and personal information of the participants. As they and the researcher were part of the same university and they previously knew the researcher as their course teacher, thus special emphasis was placed on telling the participants that the interviews had no ulterior official motives and were not conducted on behalf of any official of the university or the university itself. They were clearly and emphatically informed of the purely academic purpose of the interviews and the mechanism of data recording and security. They were also told that they can withdraw their data any moment and that their participation or withdrawal would have no academic or disciplinary consequences of any nature. Each participant was requested to sign a consent form before the start of the interview.

Though the participants had different first languages but the interviews were conducted in English as it was the commonly understood language between the interviewer and the interviewees. The use of English for the interviews was facilitated by the proficiency of the participants in the language.

During the interviews, the researcher assumed a minimally directive stance, maintained a feeling of interest and engagement through facial expressions, and motivated the participants to speak more through verbal and vocal expressions of encouragement. After the interview, the researcher asked the participants if they would like to add, remove or change anything in the interview; informed them that the researcher would contact them again if needed and thanked them for their cooperation and participation in the research. The shortest interview lasted for 23 minutes while the longest interview took 48 minutes to complete. An application on the researcher's smartphone was used to record the interviews. Immediately after an interview was complete, the recording was transferred to the password-protected folder in the researcher’s external storage drive and saved under a code name. The original file from the smartphone was deleted. The interviews were transcribed using a website which provides the basic transcription tools like pausing, slowing down, fast playing and repeat.

4.4.4.2 Diary entries

To collect data through diary writing, a Google document was created for each participant (Krishnamurty, 2008). Editing the page required email and password. Thus, only the researcher and the particular participant (to whom that particular page belonged as a diary) had access to the page to maintain confidentiality. Further, using a digital medium for diary entries was chosen because all the participants had computing devices and were proficient in the use of Google document and prefered using this medium instead of writing in a notebook or paper-based diaries. Each page had five similar sentence stems. Stem one was “I strongly recommend students from my country to study in Kyrgyzstan because…..”. Stem two was “My personal life in Kyrgyzstan, as a foreign student, is….”; Stem three was “My social life in Kyrgyzstan, as a foreign student is, ……..; and Stem four was, “My academic experiences, as a foreign student in my university, are…..”. Stem five was, “After my education in Kyrgyzstan, my future…..”. The participants were requested to use these stems as prompts and respond to them spontaneously. The stems provided a structure to the diaries and the entries made thereby. This type of diaries is called semi-structured solicited diaries. These diaries have a “specific form or schema imposed by the researcher, and they are usually solicited. This format allows diaries to be directly compared, but also allows the diarists to state [their responses] in their own words and expand on them” (Coxon, 2004, para. 2). The principle of responding to the stem prompts was salience, that is, the responses expanding on the prompts should cover “more distinctive, important or personally relevant experiences” (Nezlek, 2012, para. 14).

The participants were requested to make at least one entry of not less than 75 words for each stem over a period of five weeks to which they consented. The minimal limit of one entry was set due to the problematic aspect of diary entry method. This method requires “ a large time commitment” and due to these factors “response rates can be very low” (Krishnamurty, 2008, para. 7). To deal with this problem, this minimal response expectation was set for the participants. The participants met the minimal expectation except two who made three entries for two of the stems. They were sent reminders at regular intervals to coax them into making an entry (Nezlek, 2012).

4.4.4.3 Focus group discussion

To reveal collective views and meanings, one focus group discussion was conducted. All eight participants were involved. A group of eight is an “optimum size for a focus group” because “small groups risk limited discussion” (Gill et al., 2008, p.293). The discussion was guided by sentence stems which were thematically aligned to the research aim and questions of this study. These stems were:

- Students from my country decided to come to Kyrgyzstan because in my country…..
- More students from my country should study in Kyrgyzstan because….
- Students’ life in Kyrgyzstan is……
- According to students, study in our university is……
- Students living in Kyrgyzstan are……
- Students’ experience of living and studying in Kyrgyzstan will make their future……
- The future for foreign students studying in Kyrgyzstan is ……….

A quiet and spacious meeting room on campus was used for the focus group discussion. The session started with a small chat to make the participants comfortable. Then, the participants were briefed about the objectives of the focus group and were also reminded of the purpose of research before the start of the discussion. They were also told to take turns and wait for a member to finish before they initiate their turn. The role of the researcher, as a moderator of the group discussion, was also highlighted. They were told that the moderator would guide the discussion without participating in it. They were also informed that the discussion was audio-recorded. They were asked to speak for at least two minutes to each prompt. Then the turn would be taken by the next participant. If they remembered something or wanted to add something, they would wait for other participants to finish their turn and then they could speak. They were provided pens and paper to make notes of their thoughts, so they could easily remember. Once the prompt was said by the moderator, they were given two minutes to think about it, and then the first initiator could speak. At the end of the group discussion, participants were asked, if they wanted to add something which was followed by a debrief. The discussion was closed by the researcher with a word of thanks to all participants. English was the language of communication during the entire group discussion.

The idea of using sentence stems sprang from the projective techniques used in psychology. They are used to counter the tendency of the interviewees offering socially acceptable responses in interviews. They are tools for stimulating truthful responses and thoughts. Sentence stems trigger participants thoughts and these thoughts when analysed together with or compared with other responses of the participants can provide a complete perspective of the participants on an issue (Clow & James, 2014). The need for using this projective technique in this research also resulted from the concern related to the researcher's and the participants' position in the university. The researcher being the faculty member and the participants being the students in the same university, it was feared that the participants' responses to the interview question may not represent their true experiences. They might be providing answers to please the researcher. It was hoped that through the use of projective technique, the researcher would know and confirm the real thoughts of the participants. Additionally, the use of sentence stem, for group discussion particularly, was inspired by the idea of Barbour (2007) who advocates that each researcher, rather following a beaten track, should make their own choices as "using a different method may allow [a researcher] to make an original contribution to the knowledge base of [a] discipline" (para. 5).

4.4.5 Data Analysis

Creswell (2009) defines data analysis as meaning-making and describes the process as "preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analysis, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data……., representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data" (p.183). Data analysis, perhaps, is the bridge between the point of problem formulation and the point of knowledge production. The following details explain how the data analysis was conducted in this study.

4.4.5.1 Interviews data analysis

As an initial step to the interviews data analysis, notes were taken during the interview. After the interview was completed, each recording was played multiple times to become familiar with the contents. This was followed by transcribing each interview. An online transcription tool was used. Transcription is an important step to convert the verbal data to a text document for analysis. During this process all parts of each interview were transcribed verbatim.

The next step was sense making. First all transcripts were exploratively read to develop a general sense of the interviews. Each transcript was read multiple times and a sense of the whole was developed. While doing so notes related to this general sense making were jotted down in a notebook. These notes were “short phrases, ideas, concepts” (Creswell, 2012, p.243) occurring to me during the readings.

The sense making was followed by the process of coding. The next step in the data analysis was coding. Creswell defines coding as “the process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (p.243). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) term coding as “simply a name or label that researcher gives to a piece of text which contains an idea or a piece of information” (p.668). They further define the process of coding as “breaking down segments of text data into smaller units” (p.668). They, talking about the source of these names or labels, mentions two sources: first, created by a researcher; second, derived from the transcriptions or the words of the research participants. The coding for analysing the interview data for this research was led by the former source. This is in line with Barbour (2014) who said that “all attempts at making sense of a qualitative dataset begin with developing a provisional coding frame” (para 18). This provisional frame of a priori codes was based on the interview questions and the ideas gathered from the existing studies.

The coding process started by reading the interview transcripts multiple times and line by line. During the reading units of meaning were delineated in the transcripts having some relation to the research questions. These units of meaning were collected together. The entire process of coding was completed manually.

The process of coding was followed by clustering codes into themes. Braun et al. (2019, p.845) define themes as “shared meaning-based patterns” which are “organized around a core concept or idea” and it is under these themes that “similar codes are collated [………] into a coherent cluster of meaning” (p.855). This part of the data analysis was realised by reducing the codes into themes. In other words, it was to collate multiple segments of meanings into manageable collations for easier conceptualisation. The codes which were “substantial enough” for containing “a central organising idea that capture[d] a meaningful pattern across the dataset “ (Braun et al., 2019, p. 855) were elevated to become themes. The thematic analysis was done deductively. The process of collating and assigning themes was followed by reviewing the themes for their relation to the research questions.

4.4.5.2 Diaries and focus group discussion data analysis

For the diary entries, the first step was to organise the files for identification and referencing. For the diary entries, transcribing was not needed as the data was already in a written form. However, the focus group discussion was first transcribed in a manner similar to the interviews. The next step, after organising and transcribing the data from both methods, was coding the data according to the framework developed for the interviews and organising the codes into themes.

4.4.6 Rigour and Trustworthiness

Houghton et al. (2017) opine that qualitative and quantitative research have fundamental methodological differences and cannot be judged from the same criteria of validity and reliability. Qualitative research has specific standards of rigour and can be assessed through these standards. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability to determine the rigour of qualitative research. The definitions of these four criterions are presented in Table 8.

Table 9: Rigour and trustworthiness criteria

Criteria	Definition
Credibility	The confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views
Transferability	The degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents. The researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through thick description.
Dependability	The stability of findings over time. Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study.
Confirmability	The degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data.

Source: (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p.121)

4.4.6.1 Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the strategies of prolonged engagement, triangulation and member check to achieve credibility in research. Prolonged engagement is explained as sufficient time spent to become familiar with the setting and context as to avoid misinformation and to acquire rich data. Triangulation relates to utilizing multiple data collection methods, collecting data in different times, on different sites and from different people. Member check is “returning an interview or analysed data to a participant” for checking and confirming the interpretation to reduce the researcher’s subjectivity and bias (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p.1802). Gall et al. (2003) consider it an important technique for confirming the ‘emic’ aspect of data.

For the current research, several factors contributed to the credibility of the research. The element of prolonged engagement comes from the researcher’s association and presence at the site of research for nearly two years. In a broader context, the researcher has been working in Kyrgyz HE context for more than two years, and for the same length of time, the researcher had also been a faculty member at the HEI, which was the site for data collection. Another aspect which can be interpreted as a prolonged engagement is the researcher’s role initially as a student in the zone of IHE and subsequently as a teacher also. All this helped the researcher to become familiar with the setting and context and make important decisions about data collection.

Triangulation standard was met by collecting data from multiple sources. Data was collected through interviews, diary entries and focus group discussion. Triangulation verified that the data collected was consistent and complete by discovering similarities in the data collected through these three sources (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Further credibility was achieved by a member check. The participants were given the transcripts of their interviews and asked to check the accuracy of the contents of the data provided by them. They were asked to share with the researcher any concerns that they might have. All participants were satisfied with the accuracy of the contents.

4.4.6.2 Transferability

The issue of transferability for case study research was discussed in detail at the outset of this chapter. Qualitative case study, specifically the intrinsic case study does not aim at generalization and transferability. Flyvbjerg (2006) defends this aspect by emphasizing that a case study has the "force of example" (p. 228) and the scope of acquiring 'context-dependent knowledge" (p. 223). Context-dependent knowledge, according to him, is essential for gaining the level of virtuoso or true expert in any field of knowledge.

Yet, he emphatically asserts that "the strategic choice of case may greatly add to the generalizability of a case study" (p. 226). Here, in this assertion, due to methodological prejudice *generalizability* can be replaced with *transferability* as necessarily the former is associated with positivist tradition and the later with interpretivist tradition. Transferability is extending or recontextualising the findings of a study to other contexts, individuals or settings (Morse, 2015). If we apply the criteria of the strategic choice to this research, then this research can be considered transferable. The case chosen for this research is a representative site of the phenomenon under study—international student experience in the peripheries.

However, I, as a researcher do not make any claim to the transferability of the findings of this study to any other context. I agree with Guba and Lincoln (1989, referred to in Morse, 2015) that transferability is "the prerogative of a third party" (p.1213). For me as a researcher, the standing ground vis-à-vis transferability is the assertion of Flyvbjerg (2006) that "formal generalization is *only one of many ways* [emphasis added] by which people gain and accumulate knowledge. That knowledge cannot be formally generalized does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society” (p. 227).

4.4.6.3 Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability can be achieved through the strategy of audit trail which has been defined as “transparently describing the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of the findings” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p.121). The reporting of this research describes the entire process of inception, planning and implementation. The researcher’s role, biases in paradigmatic and methodological preferences, relationship with the participants, association with the research context, choice of participants, data collection methods, and procedure adopted for analysis have been described in detail.

4.4.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is an important aspect of any research endeavour. However, ethical issues may vary from one research problem to another or from one research type to another. Ethics dimension in research basically controls the conduct of the researcher and this results from the researcher’s following certain principles (Cohen et al., 2018). Following are the principles followed for this research.

4.4.7.1 University ethics approval

Ethics approval certificate was acquired from the Gradaute School of Education through my research supervisor. The committee was provided details of all aspects of this research project through a prescribed form. The main objective of the approval was to assess if the research project follows research ethics guidelines of the university.

4.4.7.2 Informed consent and access to the site

As the participants in the research were the researcher's students at one stage, and even at the time of data collection they were studying in the same university where the researcher was a faculty member, thus informed consent was of the highest importance.

Informed consent ensured that the students participate in the research without any pressure or obligation. For this, a consent form available on the website of the Graduate School of Education was adapted. The participants were given the form, with information sheet, 24 hours prior to the interview to read the contents and understand the nature of their participation. Each participant was asked to sign the form before the start of the interview. A copy was provided to them.

To formalise access to the site, an email request was sent to the dean of the campus. She approved the request through an email.

4.4.7.3 Data protection, privacy and confidentiality

To protect participants' privacy necessary measures were adopted. They were allocated pseudonyms and data was recorded and saved with pseudonyms and password. Access to the entire data is restricted and only available to the researcher. The data will be destroyed in the due course of time after the completion of the research.

4.5 Limitations

This study has the inherent limitations of qualitative and case study research. These limitations are detailed at the beginning of this chapter. These are mainly issues of validity, acceptability and transferability. Some other limitations are small sample size, singular research site with a small number of foreign students, and the relation of the participants and the researcher. Further details of the limitations of the research are provided in chapter 7.

4.6 Summary

This chapter detailed the methodology and the research design for this case study. It positioned the research in the interpretive paradigm. The pros and cons of the CS design were also discussed and the details of the research design and the research limitations were also provided. The following chapter presents the findings of the study.

Chapter 5
Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the data analysis. The chapter has three main sections. The students' reasons for choosing Kyrgyzstan as a destination country are presented in the first section. The data analysis led to the discovery that the reasons can be divided in two distinct sets of home-based and destination-based reasons. Thus, the first section is divided in two parts: the first part is about the reasons serving as a drive from the home country and the second part detailing the reasons serving as attractions in the destination country. Together both parts address the first research question. The next section deals with the personal, academic, and social experiences of the students. This section responds to the second research question. The section presents both the details of the adjustment stressors experienced by the students and of the satisfying aspects of the experience. This section responds to the second research question. The concluding section is related to the third research question. It presents the students image of the future as it continued to develop because of their IHE experience.

5.1 Reasons for Choosing Kyrgyzstan: Pre-Mobility Home Country Field

This section presents the findings addressing the first research question which was "Why do regional international students choose to study in international universities in Kyrgyzstan?". The focus of the question was to explore the reasons for choosing Kyrgyzstan as an IHE destination. The findings in this section present these reasons. Within the Bourdieusian framework of thinking tools, the students' choice of studying in an international university can be understood as their desire to gain membership of the IHE field. The objective for this membership is to gain certain forms of capitals as the former forms of capitals that they possessed or are available in the home country HE field are delegitimised and devalued as a result of competition between home country HE and the destination country IHE. Thus, within the framework of thinking tools, the desire and the decision making of the students can be understood as an enactment of their habitus as habitus "explain[s] individual's disposition to action" (Joy, Game, & Toshniwal, 2018, p. 6) in "structured social context" (Swartz, 2002, p. 65). This disposition shows the students' "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66). Since dispositions are formed as well as motivated into action by "forms of capital" (Swartz, 2002, p. 65), therefore, the factors playing a role in the students' decision making or the reasons behind their choice of Kyrgyzstan can be understood as the forms of capital or expected gains actuating the participants' dispositions for study mobility to Kyrgyzstan.

5.1.1 Deficient Gains at Home

The data analysis revealed the participants' perceptions of the limitations of the home country HE. These perceptions drove the students away from the HE opportunities available at the home countries. These limitations appeared as the students' home-country based reasons for choosing to study abroad. The following are the details of these home country related reasons.

5.1.1.1 Foreign Education Value

The value associated in the participants' home country to international educational credentials was another influencer in the destination choice. The participants expressed the belief that international educational qualification ensures competitive advantage to a holder in the home country employment market. An illustrative remark of the theme follows:

> *Back in my country if you got a degree or a certificate from abroad that values really much as compared to the national certificate so most of the people try to study abroad, as employers prefer people with foreign degree, so when this opportunity came, I decided to come to UCA.* (Danish, interview comment)

The remark is indicative of the value attached to foreign educational credentials in the participants' home country. It highlights the perception of the students that possession of foreign education credentials would provide them with a distinctive position in the employment market vis-à-vis graduates from the local universities.

5.1.1.2 Quality of Home HE

The students' perception of a lack of quality at home country HEIs had an influence on their decision to study abroad. The following excerpt is indicative of this perception:

> *For me the real challenge of studying in my country is the quality of education itself. Universities in my country are not good like this international university.* (Rahima, group discussion comment)

The comment shows the perceived lack of quality at home country universities deterred them from studying in these universities. They wanted to avoid it by choosing to study abroad. The data analysis revealed that this idea of *quality* was associated with two other factors. These factors were curriculum at home HEIs and English as a medium of instruction (EMI).

5.1.1.2.1 Curriculum

Curriculum at home HEIs was a major concern influencing the participants' opinion about the quality of education at home HEIs. The participants perceived two deficiencies in the curriculum: first, it was outdated and second, it did not prepare them for a global and wider world.

Regarding the issue of a dated curriculum, they perceived that that such a curriculum did not focus on the applied aspect of knowledge and, therefore, did not contribute to preparing them for the practical life. The following comment is representative of this attitude:

> *Universities, the curriculum that they have is old, like it is not so improved as it is here. In the whole Tajikistan, the education system is mainly from the Soviet Union and it is mainly about theories and not practice. What I need if I don't know how to use it in life.* (Muzafra, group discussion comment)

The participants also reported that the curriculum at the home HEIs lacked the ability to equip them with skills relevant to a career in international contexts beyond their home country and the region. This realisation influenced their decision to study in an international university:

> *I wanted to study in good universities aboard rather than in Tajikistan because they [local universities] don't provide good curriculum, high quality curriculum. I don't learn for my country or Russian region. I want to learn education which is really helpful for me in future not only*

> *in Central Asia, maybe I can also work [in] other countries because good curriculum give[s] skills, so it will be good for my future career.* (Nadina, interview comment)

The overall situation is indicative of the students' awareness that an international curriculum can better prepare them for their future career. It also shows their cognizance of the fact that a curriculum with a narrow scope and little relevance to the world beyond their country and region in the home HEIs cannot provide them a necessary bridge to their future and will not develop their competence to be globally and internationally relevant.

5.1.1.2.2 English Medium of Instruction

Lack of English medium instruction (EMI) was also associated with the lack of quality of HE at home universities by the participants. The participants mentioned that the home country universities offered education in national or Russian languages. However, they aspired to study in an EMI environment and this became another reason for their choice of studying abroad. Compared to national language or Russian medium HEIs at the home country, an international university abroad offered the prospects of education through EMI and drove their decision to choose studying there instead studying at home country HEIs:

> *In Tajikistan, there is no any university that is in English language so there is only Tajik, and only some universities, two or three universities, that offer course[s] in Russian. I wanted to study in a university with English language. So, I wanted to study in good universities abroad rather than in Tajikistan because they [local*

> *universities] don't provide high quality education, it's just in Russian or in Tajik. (Nadina, interview comment)*

Similar idea was also expressed by another participant:

> *For me the challenge [of studying in Kazakhstan] would be the quality of education itself because in Kazakhstan education is in Russian or in Kazakh language so we don't really use English and as we know most of international education is in English so like the language of instruction is important to me.* (Sametaya, interview comment)

These findings show the participants' attitude towards English language proficiency (ELP). ELP is preferred and valued by the students and the prevailing medium of instruction at home HEIs (which is Russian or national language) is unhelpful for their development of ELP.

The students' desire to study in an EMI institution was predicated on their idea of the future advantages that degree in an EMI university could afford. Therefore, English language, or the learning of it, were not the reasons for seeking higher education abroad; these were the advantages and privileges which could come through an English medium education. This idea pushed the students to leave their home country for Kyrgyzstan where it was possible to acquire English medium higher education. The advantages which such education could bring were future employment and further mobility. The following representative comment reflects this belief:

> *If I study in Russian, it'll be like only in the Russian federation or Central Asian countries. Then, in Central Asia, there [are] also many international organisations that accept people like if people want to*

> *have good jobs then the first requirements now-a-days for a good job is English language, so it is like accepted everywhere in the world. It helped to find good job for some people. It gave chance to participate in different international programs.* (Nadine, group discussion comment)

Clearly, the English medium education was considered instrumental to improving job and further mobility prospects, but the local higher education system did not afford this possibility due to the lack of EMI. Here the desire to expand the boundaries of possibilities for future wider and beyond the home countries and the region is evident. EMI, and the ELP developed thereby, is considered instrumental in fulfilling this desire. The objective is to connect to the global rather than the regional. This can be construed as a desire of the students for a cosmopolitan self for which IHE and the advantages associated with it are considered instrumental.

5.1.1.3 Corruption

Corruption at home country HEIs was another drive for the students to seek education abroad. The students reported that the local higher education system was corrupt, and it forced them to seek corruption-free universities elsewhere:

> *I can study in a university in Kazakhstan, but I did not want to study in Kazakhstan because of this corruption [……] all like government workers their children studying there and they are not studying, actually, they just give money and that's it. I don't want to do this. Someone else just gives money and they [get] same marks [as me] so I preferred to go to UCA.* (Sametaya, group discussion comment)

The comment highlights the prevailing malaise of using influence and money to manipulate grades in the home country universities. The existence of corrupt practices in the home country universities generates a deprecated image of local higher education for these students and they seek systems and institutions which carry credibility and integrity and does not have the stigma of malfeasance. The choice for studying abroad is made not only to avert unfairness existing in the home country HEI but to gain educational credentials from an institution which holds a reputation for the stamp of fairness. Though, the higher education system in the destination country Kyrgyzstan also suffers from the same malaise (the claim is based on the researcher's knowledge as an insider of the system and the information gathered from Kyrgyz colleagues), however, international universities in Kyrgyzstan serve as islands of fairness and integrity and this factor and the students' perception of fairness associated with these universities push students to prefer international universities in the region over their home country universities.

5.1.1.4 Cost at Home Country

The participants reported higher cost of HE at home country as a factor motivating them into mobility. An interview response by Sametaya highlights this factor as a reason for choosing UCA.

> *In my country, compared to Naryn, if I study, let's say Almaty because Almaty has like you know better universities in Kazakhstan, I think that I would be spending more money in Almaty because it's a really expensive city but here at UCA, I live in Naryn and UCA gives me everything. I don't need to, you know, spend anything here. I think*

> *money would be big a problem there [Kazakhstan]. I feel like the education in Kyrgyzstan is cheaper than in Kazakhstan, yea so that's why many people from Kazakhstan are coming to Kyrgyzstan.* (Sametaya, interview comment)

The comment is illustrative of the fact that the cost of living and education is an important consideration for the students. The cost issue can be a driving force as well as a factor of attraction. The home country universities may offer comparable quality of education and locational advantage (Almaty is a big city compared to semirural Naryn) but a higher cost offsets these home country situated attractions and forces the students to choose a university with a locational disadvantage but with educational comparability and the possibility of lower cost of living and studying.

5.1.1.5 Security

Security and safety were another reason for destination choice. Lack of these at home and surety of these at the destination country was a decisive factor in the destination choice particularly for the Afghan participant.

> *So, the reason why I decided to study outside of my country is because due to some safety reasons I couldn't study in Afghanistan. It's unsafe to live and study in Afghanistan as your life is no guarantee that's why I have chosen a foreign country then like I couldn't find any better country rather than Kyrgyzstan and that's why I'm studying here.* (Ahmed, interview comment)

The comment is indicative of a situation where security situation at home country affects and limits an individual’s options of higher education access and leads to a search for alternatives.

5.1.2 Promising Gains at Destination

The data analysis revealed a set of attractions of the destination country and the university contributing to mobility decision of the students. Indirectly, these reasons stood for the strengths and advantages of IHE which attracted the students to the destination country. These strengths and advantages, compared with the deficiencies in the home country HE, were expected by the students to bring the gains necessary for realising their aspirations for the future. The following are the details of this set of the destination-based attractions.

5.1.2.1 Ease of Access to HEIs

The participants mentioned ease of access to universities in the destination country as a reason for choosing Kyrgyzstan. The following statement is an instance of this belief:

> *In my country as far as my personal experience is concerned so they have a lot of competition back in Pakistan even though we have a lot of universities but the competition in those universities is really high because a lot of people apply, so you need to work hard a lot, as compared you can easily get admission in any universities here in Kyrgyzstan.* (Danish, group discussion comment)

The comment shows an obvious example of supply and demand issue at the home country. The home country has universities, but the number of applicants is higher, and this creates a stiff competition for entrance resulting in a tough admission criterion. Compared to the home country, the destination country universities offer less competition and relaxed admission criterion thus increasing the potential of access. This draws the students to the destination country.

5.1.2.2 Ease of Access to an Academic Major

The participants also talked about the greater possibility to a major of choice at the destination HEI. Sadullaieva said:

> *I liked the major I chose, because in Kazakhstan I did not have the chance to choose Computer Science as my major because I did not study certain subjects in my school but here [at UCA] I have a chance. The choice of major is just your choice. They do not ask if you have this or that.* (Sadullaieva, interview comment)

The comment highlights the restrictions and difficulties involved in access to a desired academic major in home country universities for not having certain prerequisites. However, this is not the case in the destination country HEI which is UCA. UCA takes students based on an entrance criterion. There are no prerequisites involved for choosing a major. The institution offers four majors and the students, after completing their preparatory year, can opt for any major of their choice. However, at home country, entrance into an academic major was based on meeting certain prerequisites. The situation shows that certain restrictions in home country HEIs on the choice of an academic major can drive students to destinations where they do not face such restrictions. This attraction may offset certain limitations of the destination country and HEI. For example, in this case Sadullaieva is from a major city of Kazakhstan. Her city and country have many superior attractions and characteristics compared to the destination city and country. However, these home country attractions are outweighed by her academic desire and aspirations. She is determined on an academic pathway to realise her future and the rules prevailing in the home country universities hinder following this pathway. This home country limitation drives her to find a university elsewhere abroad so that she can follow her desired pathway to her future proving that the students are ready to barter certain non-academic advantages for academic advantages.

5.1.2.3 Quality of Education

One of the attractions at the destination country was the quality of education at the international university. This motivated the students to join the university:

> *I can say that the students who come to UCA….. the only thing that the quality of education that they can get is better than there [in the home countries]. It is international world level not like universities there only for country. (Ahmed, Afghanistan, group discussion comment)*

This comment highlights the lure of educational quality for the students. The university, per se, is not the sole mobility factor; certain imaginaries are associated with it by the participants, and in a way, these imaginaries also explain the students' vision of international standard or quality. Availability of quality education is one of the imaginaries.

However, what the students understand by the generic and broad term of *quality education* requires unpacking. The data analysis revealed certain aspects of the students' understanding of quality education in an international university. These aspects were the international faculty, the international curriculum, and an international environment. The following representative excerpt verifies this understanding:

> *In summer camp when we got the chance to know about […..] like the professors all of them from different countries, so then like international environment and new curriculum and high quality of education made me just dream of UCA.* (Sametaya, interview comment)

The excerpt reveals the students understanding of quality education and the three essential elements that they associated with quality education and indirectly with an IHEI. It also shows the key aspects that these students attach greater value and significant importance to when they think of an international university in a peripheral context and what informs the lure of such a university for them. To understand the real value of these aspects for these students, the presence of these three aspects needs to be juxtaposed with the absence of these aspects in the local higher education. The absence magnifies the the value and status of the institution in the whole choice making process. Further, these factors also become a criterion for differentiating the international university from the local and regional traditional universities and this differentiation is also used as a justification for mobility:

> *I think that those reasons were because this university is kind of different from other universities that we have in Central Asia. I think that UCA is kind of like Oxford, may be, but only for Central Asia.* (Sametaya, interview comment)

5.1.2.4 Intercultural Experience

The desire to experience diversity was another attraction for the students:

> *I hoped get people from different countries and different cultures. I wanted to meet and see different people and learn from them, their culture, their language. This is not possible in my country, all are same. All students from Pakistan. No other people. It gives you a different and improved idea of world.* (Rahima, group discussion comment)

The expectations of diversity—knowing other people, other cultures, other countries—shows the social aspect of the participants' choice making. It shows that the students not only value an international university for the academic experience but also for the social experience which is embodied in an exposure to diverse people, cultures, languages, and perspectives. The students believed that such exposure was important for developing their understanding of the world. The underlying idea is to know beyond one's country and social context and have a cosmopolitan outlook.

5.1.2.5 Campus Facilities

Availability of the residential and other facilities at the university also played a role in persuading the students to leave their home country and come to the university:

> *Thinking to come here, I thought…it [the university] provides the high level of education which satisfies the worldwide standards and I would say the second strong point about the UCA is that it provides with shelter [residence], we have dorms here, we are provided with food and .... it's good like we do not need to think about our food, we do*

> *not need to think about our shelter [residence] like we have the conditions which are satisfying all our needs, the only thing that we need to do is that we need to concentrate on our studies.* (Nadina, interview comment)

The comment shows that the residential and other facilities on campus was a consideration for international students and played a role in their choice making. However, the comment indicates that this consideration was subservient to the main concern and attraction which were educational gains. These attractors gain their value as these facilitate the students' focus on their education. It reduces the time that the students would need to spend on daily life concerns. It also shows the purpose focus of the destination country attractions for these students. The main purpose remains academic gains and all other destination country attractions gain their value if they are supportive on realising the aim of achieving this main focus.

5.1.2.6 Financial Aid

Financial aid, available to the students at UCA, was another mobility motive for the students.

> *The primary reason that when I got like scholarship to UCA, it was a good option. The fee included in it everything: dormitory, food, laptop everything. I had chance to go to another university but no money support in that place. It was difficult for me and my father. I was really worried. But when I enrolled and when UCA offered this fee support, I left and came here.* (Sharipov, interview comment)

Finance is an important aspect of study abroad for any international student. It was even more important for the research participants of this study due to their personal situation. They belonged to economically underprivileged families characterized by low income and limited financial resources. The availability of financial support made it possible for them not only to realise their dream of acquiring higher education but of entrance into an international university also. This was made possible by the humanitarian and development mission of the UCA. It offers financial assistance to students on merit and this aspect played an important part in pulling many students from regional countries to realise their ambition of studying in an international university.

5.2 Personal, Academic and Social Experiences: Destination Country Field

This section reports findings addressing the second research question of this study. The second research question was “How do the students experience personal, academic and social life during their study in the country?”. The findings revealed adjustment and adaptation issues of the students in the destination country and university. In terms of Bourdieusian framework, the findings are related to the social and education field of Kyrgyz IHEI and will reveal how the habitus and capital from the home country and the previous education field interacts with this new field and how this new field further shapes students’ habitus and what new capitals gain value in this new field.

The findings are divided in two parts for presentation here. The first part deals with the adjustment stressors that the students experienced in the new field and the second part deals with satisfying or positive aspects of their experience.

5.2.1 Adjustment Stressors: Struggle of Old Habitus and Devalued Capital in a New Field

The Bourdieusian concept of field is attributed with struggle. The struggle results from the actors in the field competing for various gains and, also, must find a niche for themselves in the new field among the existing members. This struggle can be characterised as resulting from external and contextual structures and configurations which exist in a field and the actors must find their place within these structures and configurations. Another source of struggle in a field is because of habitus clash. Habitus clash occurs when existing habitus or dispositions lead to a feeling of not belonging in a field and a new or modified habitus is required. Habitus clash leads to the feelings of being a “fish out of water” (Bourdieu cited in Burnell, 2015). Additionally, another source of struggle can be when capital becomes devalued in a new field and jeopardises the member’s legitimation and membership of that field. The adjustment stressors that the participants experienced in the destination country, society and university can be viewed as one of these Bourdieusian struggles and clashes. These stressors can be a manifestation of a struggle for gains in field, habitus clash or devaluation of capital and the resultant delegitimization of membership in field—the destination country field.

The data analysis led to the discovery of the following personal academic and social stressors which jointly represent one of the various aspects of field, capital, habitus clash and delegitimization of membership in the new field of destination country and university.

5.2.1.1 Homesickness

Homesickness is related to the feelings of unhappiness caused by a prolonged period of absence from home or staying disconnected from individuals and objects associated with home. The students in this study experienced homesickness for two reasons: first because of missing their friends and family members which is an example of homesickness caused by missing the significant others, and second because of missing the familiar environment of their hometown.

The following excerpt is representative of missing family members and the discomfort that it caused.

> *In the beginning, I always face that is I'm a little stressed because I get used to being in Kazakhstan with my family when I suddenly go to UCA where I have almost no one. I feel uncomfortable but I guess but then I am ok. I miss my parents, my sweet sister but you know its ok because when you leave home you miss them. I miss them a lot sometime and it makes me sad.* (Sadullaieva, interview comment)

This comment is indicative of the stress caused by the absence of the family members. However, absence of the family members was not the only reasons for the stress of homesickness emerging in this study, absence of the social connections and friends was another cause of distress. This is evident from the following representative comment:

> *Back there, I was completely involved with my friends, involved in too many things, daily life was like being at home, friends and family relatives but here it's mostly study. I miss them all. I am not sure when I'll see them but it'll be a long time.* (Ahmed, interview comment)

The third most common cause for homesickness was the absence of the familiar environment of one’s hometown or city.

> *It was really hard to adjust, coming from a busy city to the one that sounded so quiet and you would get homesick very often. I felt like going back. It was so disturbing, all the quiet, no noise, no people, street are so few people, only in the city center is a little OK, this is not like my city. I felt so lonely at time. I wanted to go back, hear the noise of my city, be there on those roads and coffeeshops.* (Rahima, interview comment)

This excerpt shows an example of the nostalgia caused by change of one’s locale and the absence of the sights and sounds associated with that locale. The new place did not offer what was familiar in the home city and the result was homesickness. However, the contributory factor in this case of homesickness is not the human element but the absence of a milieu—the familiar environment and surroundings and how the person was related to these elements. Thus, whereas the first two causes of homesickness were the absence of human relations (missing parents, immediate family members, relatives and friends) and the cause here is related to non-human elements, however, the emotional toll (distress) appears to be of similar nature.

5.2.1.2 Loneliness and Isolation

The participants also reported loneliness and social isolation. The data analysis revealed that the two main reasons for these stressors were a lack of interpersonal connections and the location attributes.

The first reason of loneliness and isolation was a lack of human and social contacts outside and within the campus community. The following excerpts highlight this aspect of the participants’ experience. The first excerpt indicates isolation because of a lack of social contact with people outside the campus community and the second excerpt reveals the lack of or limited social contact within the campus:

> *I would not say that social life is really rich. We face the same people every day on campus. Like, we don't have chance to go outside and meet other people. People outside are not used to us. They consider us outsiders. It’s difficult to find friends. I want some friends from locals to know them more, but difficult* (Nadina, interview comment)

> *This is a kind of limited community here at UCA. We see the same faces every day. Most of my free time goes to the assignments which we do over the weekend. If I have free time, I usually read books and watch movies and some time I go to hiking and I play sport. It's just once in a week that's all. Few people and not very open. I keep to myself. Sometime I feel like talking, sitting with someone but everyone have their own way.* (Danish, interview comment)

These two excerpts show the students experience of isolation due to a lack of social contact inside and outside the campus. However, there is a clear indication of the participants’ lack desire to have social contacts within the campus community. Both excerpts show that other fellow students are not considered worth friendship. This indicates a lack of cohesion within the campus community and fellow students. In the instance of the first instance, the isolation seems to be self-imposed as Nadine looks for social network beyond the campus community and is not successful; however, in the instance of the second excerpt, it is a lack of interest by individuals in Danish as he expresses his desire of talking to others but cannot find anyone as all appear to be busy. The second excerpt also reveal the coping strategies that Danish use to deal with the feelings of isolation. Thus, isolation can be due to inward feelings projected outwardly on the community around (Nadine's case) or the attitude of people around affecting the inwardly feelings (the case of Danish).

The second reason for causing the feelings of loneliness and isolation lies in the very location.

> *Naryn itself is like really small and in here there is no night life. It feels like it's too quiet and you are isolated out here. You don't have like lot of social life, especially like if I talk about Naryn, because there like at maximum [of] three cafes where you can go as a foreigner. So, it's sometimes, it's just so hard because you feel like you are in a golden cage and you are stuck in here and everything is inside and there is no world outside of it.* (Rahima, interview comment)

While the first two excerpts were instances of isolation and loneliness caused by lack of human social network, this excerpt shows how the overall attributes of the surrounds and place can also cause similar feelings. It also shows that a great campus building and facilities (to which Rahima refers as golden cage) cannot compensate for the social isolation caused by limitations of the surroundings and place. This reason can further be understood by knowing the context in which UCA is found and in which these students live. The UCA campus is situated in a remote small semirural town. The town has limited recreational and social interaction opportunities. The campus is 13 kilometres away from the town centre and is situated in virtual geographical isolation. Therefore, the campus community lives in social and cultural isolation within the microcosm of the campus. The social and cultural ties between the campus and the city still need to develop. These factors collectively contribute to the feelings of limited social life among the students. Though the university tries to mitigate these contextual and circumstantial limitations through on-campus student life activities, yet it seems that they are not successful in making the campus social life vibrant and dynamic, and encouraging greater social networking.

5.2.1.3 EMI Issues

UCA is an EMI university. Successful functioning, of students, in an EMI environment, requires a specific level of English language proficiency (ELP). Inadequate proficiency can cause a diverse range of problems for students. The data analysis revealed certain EMI related issues faced by the participants. They reported difficulties in understanding course contents and daily lectures due to their ELP problems. The students reported that these problems affected their progress with their assignments and slowed them down. The following comment is indicative of the problem:

> *It was at the beginning like hard time and it took me long time to complete those assignments because I have to translate everything into Russian and understand all those things [contents, concepts and vocabulary which were in English] that I didn't know before. I have to learn like those things from myself and I didn't know many things like I used to go to YouTube and watch it in Russian and understand throughout first semester.* (Sharipov, interview comment)

The above situation is symptomatic of the comprehension and performance problems faced by the participants in an EMI environment. However, the use of internet and of Russian language translation as a scaffolding for developing this comprehension were the coping strategies of the students. However, it appears that the problem was more acute at the initial stages of the study.

Furthermore, the data analysis also revealed the communication difficulties because faced by the students in an EMI environment. The students found it difficult to communicate and express their thoughts and ideas during the lessons and this handicap affected their grades:

> *You know when I came first, like I remember, I couldn’t express my thought in English in class very well. I had problems with it. That was really my level of English and the level that I had in the beginning, that, yea, that was a problem for me. When I came to UCA and I got my first marks in English, it wasn't even bad, it was horrible.* (Muzafra, interview comment).

Here EMI appears linked to communicative limitations of the students and the limitations linked to academic performance. Oral medium is not the only channel involved in communication; reading and writing also involves communication. While reading involves passive communication with a text, writing becomes an instance of active communication for students where they express their thoughts through a text in an academic setting. A failure to express these thoughts or express them properly for an audience can affect the academic performance of the students negatively and the excerpt mentions one such occurrence.

5.2.1.4 Learning Culture Issues

The participants reported a few issues related to learning culture. The following are the details.

5.2.1.4.1 Lesson Hours

The participants reported adjustment issue with class hours. The issue was related to lessons and class time. Following are the representative comments indicating the problem:

> *At the beginning it was very hard because I didn't (sic) used to study from like from 8 to 7, in Tajikistan we study like from 8 to 12. our classes were like from 45 minutes and when I came here it's very different, 2 hours class, and like a lot of pressure and like it was very hard to study.* (Nadina, group discussion comment)

It seems that the adjustment problem with the class hours resulted from making a transition from the school routine to a university routine. The students attended a shorter school day and shorter lessons in their earlier academic routine in schools. However, at UCA they needed to attend classes for the entire length of a day and the duration of each lesson was much longer then the duration that they were used to in their schools. Due to this situation, the participants felt overworked and this affected their well-being:

> *Our schedule is really hard and we don't have free time for practice and to do another thing, such us read another book out of our curriculum. We have no time to relax, whole day in class then outside class we spend whole time on studying, doing our assignments.*

> *Sometime even weekend is spent on this.* (Danish, interview comment)

The excerpt is an example of the obvious issue of workload and its effect on the students' sense of wellbeing. Though they connected this workload issue to the classes schedule but the whole spectrum of the aggravation can be understood when this schedule related workload issue is combined with the increased work caused by EMI related issues. Both issues compound in stress and tiredness.

5.2.1.4.2 Teaching and Lesson Patterns

The participants reported adjustment problems coping with the teaching and lessons patterns. The participants reported experiencing a teaching approach in the university that differed from the one that they experienced in their schools. They reported that teachers in schools were more 'direct': school teachers gave them information about the topics in the syllabus and the students only listened and did as the teachers directed them. Contrarily, at UCA, teachers expected students to be more active and to discover their (students') own way around the lessons/curriculum topics. They provide the students with the basic information and left the rest to the students. The issue was detailed in the following way:

> *Comparing UCA experience to overall experience in regular Kazakhstan universities, so there are differences, the way of instructor and students. The way lectures go, in regular universities of Kazakhstan, there is just lecture, lecture, and lecture; no discussion, no group work, no project work; but in here, you feel that you are more contributing to something. You are discussing something, you*

> *are making group work, you are involved in something, and whoever you are, you are contributing. But in Kazakhstan, you don't feel this. You come to the lecture, you listen if you want, if you don't want, you don't listen to and then you just leave, and no one cares. Changing from that to UCA study was really difficult for me. I did not know how to do. (Sametaya, interview comment)*

The programmes at UCA follow an active-learning pedagogical philosophy and practice. The faculty closely follow this philosophy in the classroom. Although, the preparatory year curriculum exposes the students to an active-learning environment and aims at building sufficient capacity of the students to transition from a teacher-centred learning environment to function effectively in a student-centred active-learning environment, yet, the learning habits and the conditioning which the students acquired from the eleven years of their local schooling were difficult to disaffect in the initial years of the university study and this factor resulted in certain challenges for these students.

5.2.1.4.3 Curriculum Contents

The participants also reported adjustment difficulties with the contents of the curriculum. Following is a representative description of the nature of these difficulties:

> *It [curriculum] is very different because here we study like in our curriculum, we study like Western aspects of economics and other things. But in Tajikistan, it is like you study Central Asia and Russia. You don't study like other places, and also, we study a lot about environment here, about energy, and we don't have these things in*

> *Tajikistan, global warming and other things. We never did this in school. It is difficult. I didn't know many things.* (Sharipov, interview comment)

The situation depicted in the comment is symptomatic of the challenge caused by grafting Western topics in a curriculum for a group of students who had no prior familiarity with these topics and nor could relate them to their context. This grafting though extends the scope from the local to the global, but it results in a clash of the previous educational experience of the students and the new and current experience. The previous experience did not build enough support for dealing with the new experience and this leads to the students' frustration.

5.2.1.5 Language Barrier in Social Situations

While EMI and ELP was a barrier to academic functionalities, proficiency in local language (Kyrgyz) was a barrier to social functionalities. The students faced difficulties for their lack of proficiency in this language. Kyrgyz has been adopted as a national language by the Kyrgyzstan government as part of the post-independence nation and national identity building process. English is still a foreign language and is not widely spoken or comprehended in Kyrgyzstan generally and in a smaller place like Naryn (where the university is located) particularly. Very few people speak English or can communicate in English in this remote, small, mountainous city. For foreign students in the city, it obviously caused difficulties in communication:

> *I have struggled a lot with commonly spoken language here in Naryn. Whenever I go to Naryn market, it becomes really hard for me to convey what I want to say. This always becomes an uncomfortable*

> *situation to communicate with any of the person outside the campus. For instance, to go to any shop and start the conversation with the person, we know some basic words but after that we always tries (sic) to end the conversation to leave because that becomes very awkward situation when someone wants to talk but never gets a single word what the other is talking about.* (Danish, interview comment)

Evidently, inability to communicate in the local language was a problematic aspect of the social experience of the international students in this case. The problem lies in the linguistic dichotomy of the overall context. The international institution and the international education imparted there is an EMI context. Additionally, the lingua franca on campus is also English. Both situations require an ability in English language communication which the students have. However, the lingua franca in the community beyond the boundaries of the campus is Kyrgyz or Russian. The foreign students, with no knowledge of Kyrgyz or Russian are ill-prepared to deal with the linguistic situations which require communication in local languages. This linguistic dichotomy also creates more challenges than just communication breakdown, particularly for the students who have knowledge of neither Kyrgyz nor Russian. The following are the details of the these challenges.

5.2.1.5.1 Reliance on Interpreters

The life of the students was not limited to the campus. They needed to contact and communicate with the local community and people outside the campus for certain needs. However, the lack of knowledge of the local languages rendered the students dependent on the help of an interpreter even in every day routine contact situations with the locals:

> *Whenever we go outside, and we interact with people, we couldn't like talk with them. So, that's the biggest challenge and we, like every time we had to, like, take someone else with us as our, like, translator who talks for us. This is problem. Every time you look for someone to go with you and speak for you.* (Ahmed, group discussion comment)

Clearly, inadequate knowledge and communicative ability in the local languages created a communication handicap for these students and they must rely on an interpreter which was inconvenient. This created a social challenge for the students and was a troublesome part of their social experience.

5.2.1.5.2 Mobility Restriction

The language barrier also restricted the mobility of the students beyond the campus. The students did not find it convenient to move around the city due to this barrier:

> *Talking about going outside and coming from a non-USSR country and not knowing the language, it's really difficult to move around the city and town. It's a whole different story and language is totally one of the barriers. I cannot read or talk. If I am lost or need to find way, no help, no reading or asking. So I stay or take someone with me to bazzar to show me way.* (Rahima, interview comment)

The restrictions were because of the transport information system, the road signs, and directions all being in Kyrgyz. Comprehending them needed a basic knowledge of the local languages which the students lacked, and this drastically reduces their opportunities of free movement. It meant that the students had to restrict themselves to the campus most of the time. Such restrictions hinder the students' direct experience of the local community and the destination country.

5.2.1.5.3 Discrimination and Mistreatment

The linguistic barrier also led to unpleasant situations with the local community members on certain occasions. The participants reported discrimination and mistreatment by the local inhabitants because of their inability to communicate in one of the local languages:

> *When I with [my] friends go to Naryn [the city center], we feel a lot of strange looks looking to us. We always try to have a friendly conversation with them but often they do not respond even, and sometimes we hear gossiping in the Kyrgyz language behind us. It is weird. Moreover, once we needed to buy something, [the] seller ask (sic) us about knowing of Kyrgyz language. When we said that it is one first [time] in Kyrgyzstan and in future we will, they told that it is shame for us living here and not knowing their language.* (Muzafra, diary entry)

This unsavoury situation that Muzafra reported occurred due to their lack of Kyrgyz language knowledge even though they were fluent in Russian (the lingua franca of the region). The Kyrgyz seller, due to ultra-nationalistic sentiments, did not appreciate of her being in Kyrgyzstan and yet not knowing the national language of the country. Further, being a small remote area, the local population is still adjusting to the presence of the foreigners in their city and have discriminatory attitude towards them.

5.2.2 Satisfactory Aspects of Experience: Gains at the Destination

The data analysis also revealed satisfactory aspects of the students' adaptation and transition process. These aspects compensated the deficient capital of the home country higher education field. Their absence and deficiency in the home country prompted the students' decision to study in Kyrgyzstan. However, the possibility of gaining the capital, which was missing in the home country HE, in the international university results in an attitude of satisfaction. An example of this is the element of curriculum. The deficiencies in the curriculum prevailing in the home country HE field played a role in the students' decision to seek education opportunity abroad. The deficiencies were taken as a hindrance to gaining capital which might be helpful in securing membership of a future field of desire for oneself. However, the realisation of a compensation of these deficiencies through an international education in an international university develops a habitus characterised by satisfaction, and, also a compensation for the adjustment problems faced during a transition to the field on IHE in the university abroad. This satisfaction is also due to the reason that these gains fit into the students' feel for the game of future. The entire scenario also fits into the Bourdieusian notion that "habituses are formed with particular types and amounts of capital" (Swartz, 2002, p. 65). Thus, the prospects of gaining and accumulating capital for the game of future in the destination university develops the habitus helpful in transition and adaptation. The following elements played a role in the development of this habitus.

5.2.2.1 EMI: Accumulation of Linguistic Gain

The findings show that the students' membership in the EMI field in the international university is helping them by improving their English language skills:

> *I think I have changed in many aspects. I have improved a lot in writing in first place. I learned a number of vocabulary as well as I learned different structure and patterns of writing, the example is all the writings [that] I submitted during my academic year.* (Nadina, interview comment)

It is evident that EMI, though causing some academic challenges, yet had a positive effect in terms of expanding the language-related skills of the students. They particularly valued improvement in their writing skills. Moreover, the enhanced English language skills, because of the EMI environment, led to an enhanced satisfaction with the ELP aspect of the academic experience at UCA.

> *The experience of writing which we got here is very big. When I was studying in Kazakhstan, I thought I was not writing good enough, because in our group I always had bad writing. But when I came to UCA, after writing through two semesters different types of writings, I have somehow a bit of experience in writing and now I am very better from previous.* (Sametaya, interview comment)

The comment is indicative of the students' satisfaction with their EMI experience and the resultant ELP improvement which is mentioned here as an improvement in writing skills. Here, an obvious link can be seen between the gain of the desired ELP and the attitude of satisfaction resulting thereby.

5.2.2.2 Curriculum: Accumulation of Skills and Knowledge Gains

The participants expressed their satisfaction with curriculum. The findings revealed that they considered it as a source of gaining skills and knowledge required for future. The following are the details of the ways the curriculum was instrumental in these future-oriented gains.

5.2.2.2.1 Curriculum: a source of broadening knowledge

The data analysis revealed that the participants perceived the curriculum as a source of positive outcomes for their future because it gave them a broader foundation in knowledge that they considered important for success in their future career:

> *So far it has been good because the curriculum is very developed, and it's implemented well. So, we are getting a lot of knowledge. Secondly, it's like liberal arts; so, you study about a lot [of] other things which will be helpful to you in your future so if I want to switch my career at any point of life it will be easier for me to switch.*(Rahima, interview comment)

Liberal arts curriculum exposes students to diversity of knowledge and skills. Clearly, the students connect the diversity of themes and contents in the curriculum to the positive outcomes for the future life. It was obvious that the students viewed this diversity as a source of broadening their outlook and they linked this change in their outlook to their preparation for future employment in multiple fields. They thought that such diversity would equip them with the knowledge and skills usable in various contexts and situations in future and, thus, they would be successful in a diverse range of jobs.

5.2.2.2.2 Curriculum: a source of personal development

The students also reported the role of the curriculum in developing skills and abilities related to the areas beyond the academic sphere. These skills and abilities were related to the personal development of the students:

> *It's not only contributing towards my academic life, but it's also contributing towards improvement of my soft skills, like my confidence, my presentation skills. So, it's like really good that I am holistically developing.* (Rahima, group discussion comment)

The representative comment highlights the participants' cognizance of the fact that the curriculum was helping them with their personal development. They attributed such development to the holistic nature of the curriculum which was contributing to their personal development. This view shows the fulfilment of an important expectation of the participants from the study abroad which is personal development, learning of life skills and social attributes, and the participants' awareness of the development of these aspects of personality was a factor of their satisfaction with the curriculum. In a way, the satisfaction is attributable to the strengths of a liberal arts curriculum implemented in UCA. Such a curriculum aims at "imparting general knowledge and developing general intellectual capacities" and is characterised by producing graduates who are "global citizens" with "broadly based" skills rather than being "monodisciplinary" with "narrower" skills (van der Wende, 2011, p. 233, p. 242).

5.2.2.2.3 Curriculum: preparation for further study

Whereas the above reasons for satisfaction were related to employment and personal development, the participants also expressed their satisfaction with the curriculum for academic reasons. One such reason was the participants' idea that the curriculum was preparing them for further studies in the Western universities and was enabling them to deal better with the demands of the study in such universities:

The curriculum which is international because if I graduate from UCA and I go to Harvard University, I don't know, I think I can handle things there; but if I go from a regular Kazakhstan university to any university of USA, you know any university; it'll be challenging for me because it doesn't satisfy the international standards and not just because of the language, language will be perfect but I am talking about the notions, yea, …, it's very unique if we compare it to Central Asia it's very unique and it satisfy (sic) the international standard and this is the strongest point.(Sadullaieva, interview comment)

The comment is suggestive of the satisfaction with the curriculum and its being useful in building the abilities required for further higher education in the West. The curriculum is valued for its uniqueness and for being geared towards achieving the future ambitions of entry into a western university and successful academic performance there. The value, in this case, is not attributable to the EMI factor alone but to the contents and the competencies that the curriculum holds. These are considered internationally aligned and this becomes a guarantee for realising future ambitions. This aspect also evinces the value of a broad-based curriculum for the students which affords them a learning experience beyond their local context. The following representative comment is indicative of this aspect of the curriculum, and of the students' general satisfaction with the curriculum:

Study in our university is very good in a way that the curriculum that is designed for us is from well-known universities in Canada or others. So, that's what make it more diverse and different. So that way it's a help also for students coming from different countries, learning new

> *things that hasn't been taught them from their own countries. So, the way the curriculum is designed and the way that the students are like engaged better for them to understand new concepts.* (Ahmed, group discussion comment)

5.2.2.3 Social Gains

Social capital on the campus was also a source of satisfaction for these students. Social capital is interpersonal and communal relations and membership of social groups and the support available thereby. Social capital plays a key role in habitus development. In the case of these participants, the source of satisfaction was the faculty support available to them and the cultural diversity on campus.

5.2.2.3.1 Faculty Support

The faculty support was a positive gain of the participants' academic adjustment:

> *When I am having difficulties in studies, I ask for help mainly from faculty. In UCA there [are] different types of supports to help you in studies. For instance, faculty members, classmates, library. Of course, through all this [academic experience] our faculty were taking our hands and helping us through all these semesters.* (Ahmed, interview comment)

UCA has a small student body. Average class size is 9 to 15. This small size helps the faculty to focus on all students equally and offer frequent extensive individual support. In the context of UCA, where students face several academic and curriculum adjustment issues due to the contact of two cultures (the students' background in local schooling and education culture vis-à-vis international university and education culture and the transition that the students need to make to this new culture), such support becomes of fundamental importance and also instrumental in mitigating the adjustment issues.

5.2.2.3.2 Campus Cultural Diversity

The participants expressed their satisfaction with cultural diversity on the campus. The campus student community is multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual and the students considered it a source of personal development:

> *It's a diverse campus again and it's like you learn a lot. I can look at things from a different perspective. So, I would say it's an interesting thing as well as its improving me. You are living in Kyrgyzstan, but you are able to learn about three more countries and experience three more different cultures so it's really good.* (Rahima, interview comment)

Obviously, the participants associated diversity to the enhancement and development of their cultural outlook and expanding their knowledge of other cultures. Further, an exposure to diversity had positive personal, social, and academic outcomes for the students. It affected changes in behaviour and attitude as reported by the participants:

> *I had like stereotypes before, but you know they are like our people. Like the stereotype that I had before like about the people I just broke them here.* (Nadina, interview comment)

5.3 Future Image: Future Oriented Disposition

This section reports findings related to the third research question which was "How is this experience (international education experience in Kyrgyzstan/UCA) shaping the image of future for them (the participants)?". The phrase 'image of future', in the context of this research, is basically understood as aspirations of an individual for the future. These are defined as "what an individual hopes will happen in future" (Gorard, See, & Davies, 2012, p. 6). Therefore, the findings responding to the research question are related to the aspirations of the participants. The data analysis revealed five main themes related to these aspirations: further education aspirations, employment aspirations, further mobility aspirations, entrepreneurship aspirations and civic aspirations. Within Bourdieusian terms, aspirations are a form of habitus (Pham & Tran, 2015) and habitus is an expression of capital (Moore, 2012). Additionally, "habitus predisposes actors to select forms of conduct that are most likely to succeed in the light of their resources and past experiences" (Pham, 2018, p. 180); thus, the findings of this research question are expected to reveal how the gains (or capital) from the international experience that the students have accumulated so far are shaping their dispositions and attitudes to future. The findings are presented next.

5.3.1 Further Education Aspirations

The data analysis revealed further education aspirations as a salient theme expressing future aspirations of the participants. Danish made this representative comment:

> *As far as future is concerned, I am just thinking of doing my master's*

> *before going towards a job. So, I would go back to Pakistan and I would definitely pursue my further education.* (interview comment)

The comment shows the participants' intention to pursue their education to the next level in their home countries. The participants were of the view that by achieving a next level in education, they will have better job prospects.

The intention to return to the home country for further education could be because UCA, at its current stage of academic operations, does not offer graduate studies. Additionally, it shows that the participants' intention of choosing Kyrgyzstan as a destination country was purely academic and once that aim had been achieved and the scope of furthering their academic pursuits in the country or in the destination institution finished, they wanted to return to their home country to achieve their further education aspirations. Therefore, the current stay and study in Kyrgyzstan is a sojourn in the academic journey of these international students and not a destination by itself.

5.3.2 Employment Aspirations

Future employment aspiration was the second salient theme in the findings responding to the third research question. The participants considered the current education and experience at the UCA as a surety for a job in their home countries. This attitude is clear in the following illustrative excerpt:

> *I'll become a better specialist in my major and after [that] I really think that I have like good opportunities. I want to know everything about my major and use it for future, to be better. I won't probably have problems with finding a job in Tajikistan.* (Muzafra, interview comment)

It shows that the participants valued their regionally gained international academic credentials and knowledge as a perceived guarantee for prime employment opportunities in their home countries. The foundation for this perception is the embedded belief (evident in the *'become a better specialist'* segment of the excerpt) that the knowledge and credentials gained through an international study experience will gain them distinction in the home country vis-à-vis knowledge and credentials gained at local institutions. The belief in this acquired ability and distinction, through international education, was explicitly stated by Danish in the following words:

> *It's kind of world institution. So, once we graduate from this university then we have more opportunities to do what we want; not only for our employment but also our education. We'll have the knowledge we need in our major.* (interview comment)

5.3.3 Further Mobility Aspirations

Further mobility, especially towards the North, was another emergent theme related to the future image of the students. They hoped that the current international experience would be a springboard for launching them into mobility to the global North. This is illustrated by the comment made by Sadullaieva in her interview:

> *UCA (education and experience) will provide me opportunities to go to another country and I am planning to do my master's degree in Canada. I see my future abroad. It's like five years from graduating. Yea. I see myself abroad, done my master's, working for an international organisation.*

The excerpt above not only evinces a clear vision but also a well-planned and time-framed path to an objective-to-be-achieved in future and all this is grounded in the initial regional international experience of undergraduate study in a regional country with a low economic profile. The objective, embedded in this further mobility, has dual dimensions: to further academic development and then acquire a job. The current experience serves as a springboard for this further mobility and the objectives lying ahead.

5.3.4 Entrepreneurship Aspirations

The theme of entrepreneurship aspirations was not common across all data sets and across all participants, but it foregrounded an aspect of the individual international study experience that was at the core of the future image formations. The theme emerged in the data provided by Sharipov's in his interview, group discussion and diary entries. Sharipov hoped to be an entrepreneur in future. In his interview he commented:

> *Before coming here, I've always thought of becoming a professor or I wanted to become a scientist. But, I started to think after (studying) economics and I started to think like is it worth to become a professor and get money. I'll get a good knowledge by studying economics. I started to become interested in business. I have read many books about it and like when I graduate, I don't wanna work. I wanna make an investment and run a business. I have already visited Africa to explore.* (interview comment)

Sharapova's experience could be interpreted as a life-course changing aspect of international experience and the curriculum studied thereby, and, also how such a curriculum could provide a foundation for choosing an altered course. Sharipov had different aspirations before the initiation of the experience but once through the experience and through the contact with the curriculum, he could perceive the existence of other possibilities and potential for himself, and herein lies the significance of this individual instance of aspiration in formation.

5.3.5 Civic Aspirations

The theme of civic aspirations, like the theme of entrepreneurship aspirations, was another individual theme emerging from the data collected from a single participant. The aspiration was enunciated by Samataya. She hoped to be a writer and a journalist in future, and in this way aspired to make a difference to the lives of people. She said that her future status as a writer and her job as a journalist would have a mission of changing people's lives:

> *I think I have two ways one of them that I'll be a writer and that I'll be a great writer and that I'll write not only in Russian, but I'll also write in English. I am still working on it actually and I'll be a famous writer. I'll be a writer who will change people, who will make them, maybe, better, who will give them hope. Another way is also connected to people. I'm gonna be like some kind of working in communication and media may be (a) journalist or (a) photographer and I wanna make people better. I wanna change their life for better.* (interview comment)

Samataya's civic aspirations are again linked to the same value of international experience and curriculum that was discussed in the case of the theme of entrepreneurialship aspirations. The future image of the participants was shaped by the curriculum they studied. In the case of

Samataya, similar to the case of Sharipov, the future course of life was determined by her major of study. Samataya had a major of communications and media studies and this was instrumental in shaping the course of her future. She was determined to use her gains from her major of study for fulfilling her responsibilities to her community and society. She hoped to gain skills in writing and journalism, which she would use for making a difference to the lives of people later.

5.4 Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the data analysis. The findings were organised in three main sections; each section representing one of the three research questions. The first section of the findings reported the reasons for the international students' choice of Kyrgyzstan as a destination for higher education. The second section reported the personal, academic and social experiences of the students. The adjustment stressors and the satisfactory aspects of the experience were dealt in the two main parts of this section. The third and the concluding section presented the participants' image of the future. These images were presented in the form of their aspirations. The next chapter follows and discusses these findings.

Chapter 6
Discussion

This study was related to international students experience in a peripheral country with the broader context of the internationalisation of higher education. It is an example of reasons, experiences and aspirations resulting from educational mobility within developing countries. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, such mobility constitutes 19% of the total volume of the international students' mobility (Lee, 2017). The study had three major objectives. The first objective was to explore regional international students' reasons for choosing international universities in Kyrgyzstan as a study abroad destination. The second objective was to understand the nature of the personal, academic and social experience of the students during their study in the country. The third objective was to understand how these experiences contribute to shaping the students' vision of their future. To achieve these objectives, three research questions were formulated. Each question embedded one of these objectives. The first question was, "Why RISs choose to study in international university in Kyrgyzstan?". The question was related to the first objective of the study. The second question was, "How do the students experience personal, academic and social life during their study in the country?". This question was linked to the second objective of the study. The third research question was, "How is this experience shaping the image of their future?". This question was connected to the third objective of the study.

To achieve these objectives, a case study research methodology, within the overarching paradigm of interpretivism, was adopted. The data was collected through the instruments of the semi-structured interview, focus group discussion and diary entries. This data was thematically analysed. The findings from the data analysis are discussed in this chapter.

This discussion is organized in two sections. The first section reviews the key findings in the light of the literature. The second section presents a discussion of the findings through the theoretical lens of the Bourdieusian thinking tools.

6.1 Connecting Key Findings to Literature

This section discusses the key findings of the three research questions of this study to establish congruence or incongruence of these findings to the literature reviewed earlier.

6.1.1 Reasons for Choosing Kyrgyzstan

There is a clear bifurcation of the reasons for choosing Kyrgyzstan in two sets. One set of the reasons was grounded in the home country, while the second set was associated with the destination country and the institution there. The former set of reasons included higher value of education qualification in the employment market, perception of inferior quality at home country HE in terms of a lack of modern and international curriculum and EMI, prevailing corruption in the home HE system, higher cost of living and education and security issues. The later set of reasons comprised mainly attractors in the destination country such as ease of access to universities and academic major, quality of education, possibility of intercultural experience, campus facilities and financial aid. These two sets of elements generally represent the participants' perceptions and attitude to the constraints associated with the home country HE and the gains attached to education at the international university in the destination country. Thus, the former set mainly represents the perceived deficiencies existing in the home country HE while the later set represents the strengths of the international university. Eder, Smith and Pitts (2010) called later set “motivational factors” (p.234) leading to the choice making. In terms of the students’ choice making models, the home country HE constraints and limitations can be related to the external elements and conditions in Gambetta’s (1987) structural model. The home country constraints push these students into making a choice to study abroad. However, in Gambetta’s limited role is assigned to individual intentionality in choice making, this does not appear to be a case in this research. The choice making in this research is a result of the students’ intentionality (in the forms of their future aspirations) acting on the home country HE elements by assigning a lower value to these elements and a higher value to the IHE in the destination country.

In terms of the students’ choice models, the themes discovered in this study can be placed within the binary of push factors at the home country and pull factors at the destination institution (McMahon, 1992). However, the findings of this research are different from the findings of McMahon as national characteristics do not figure prominent in the choice of the students in this research. In McMahon findings, hierarchies between the nations play an important role in the students’ choice making. This phenomenon is manifest in McMahon’s research through the students from low economic status countries choosing HE institutions in the countries with a better economic status. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) had similar findings. They reported environmental factors such as host country culture, climate and other attractions as an attraction of a host country. However, in this research, most of the reasons discovered are specific to the academic field (for example, quality, curriculum, EMI), personal circumstances (for example financial aid) and campus features (for example facilities on campus) and are not linked to the broader environment and characteristics of the destination country. Jiani (2017) termed these person-specific factors as micro level elements influencing students’ choice of destination.

The interpretation for the absence of a vast or dominant range of geographical, environmental and country-related elements from the set of reasons can, perhaps, be attributed to this type of developing to developing country mobility choice. In this type of mobility choice, both the home country and the destination country are at parity in terms of country characteristics and do not offer any country related advantage. In the case of this research, the destination country (which is Kyrgyzstan) and the home countries of the participants (Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Pakistan) share similar economic and political profiles and have no distinct geographical, political or economic hierarchical differences and, therefore, such nation related characteristics were not a point of consideration in the choice making of the participants.

The desire and possibility of learning and experiencing culture of the destination country also appeared as a main attraction for international students in most of the studies related to the push-pull elements in IS choice (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Kondakci, 2011; Jon, Lee, & Byun, 2014; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011; Eder et al., 2010). The findings of this research also diverge from these preceding studies on this point. The participants of this study though expressed their interest in the intercultural learning and experience, but this interest was limited to the culture of the campus community only. The findings did not indicate any inclination of the participants towards learning and experiencing the culture of the host country or the larger community outside the campus. This may be construed as a feature of the regional mobility choice. The central Asian countries, and Pakistan also, share the Islamic heritage and therefore similar culture. Additionally, the two central Asian countries of Tajikistan and Kazakhstan share the Soviet heritage with the destination country Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, the participants had certain similarities in their cultural background, and this can be interpreted as a contributing reason of the missing element of interest in the host country culture among the set of the reasons associated with the host country.

Another difference of the findings of this study, from the ones reviewed in Chapter 3, is in terms of security and cost issues. These two elements were associated with the destination country. The studies of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); and Ahmad, Buchanan, and Ahmad (2016) reported security concern as linked to the destination country. Similar were the findings in Ahmad et al. study about the cost element. However, in the current study it was discovered that security and cost were the elements which drove students from home country to look for study opportunities abroad. Probably, the element of higher cost at home country leading to study mobility to the destination country (where the cost is low) can be interpreted as the financial egalitarianism embedded in the IHE in the peripheries. The emerging and peripheral IHE countries require lower cost (Jon et al., 2014). This low cost contributes to increasing the opportunities of participation for the students from financially underprivileged classes.

As mentioned above, majority of the reasons behind the students' choice in this study are related to the participants' personal development. For example, the curriculum was associated with developing applied skills; EMI was desired for improving English language skills; intercultural environment was considered a way to developing a global outlook; and residential facilities were valued for facilitating focus on studies. Thus, most of the reasons are directly or indirectly expressive of a strong intrinsic personal development orientation which the participants expect to be an outcome of the quality education that an IHEI will impart, and this becomes a major drive in the choice making. This revelation is a confirmation of Cubillo, Sánchez, and Cervio (2006) who suggested that students do not desire and gain international education per se but for the benefits which such education may bring in terms of certain advantages. Similar were the findings of Eder, Smith, and Pitts (2010) for international students choosing USA as a destination. Expressed differently, international university and the education available there is perceived as a venue and a path of personal development regardless of its location. Rather, it can be said that, perhaps, if an international university is in a geographical periphery, the students' decision and choice making is more focused and converged on personal development and growth elements rather on the peripheral elements such as the attraction of the location or immigration possibilities. This focus confirms the element of rationality and calculation in the students' choice making. The students know that only education can be of maximum benefit to them in a peripheral and developing to developing IHE mobility context and they focus only on these benefits when making a choice. This tendency closely reflects the principle underlying choice making in the economic models.

The reasons involved in the choice making also reveal the students' desire to gain a membership of the global community and extend their zone of employment, mobility and contact beyond immediate home country and regional space. The desire is evident in the students' use of expressions such as "work [in] other countries", "international organisations accept people [with good English]", "participate in different international programmes" when talking about future possibilities. The desire is also expressed through the students' rationale for studying in an international university with an international faculty, with a curriculum which can prepare them for life and work in the international arena beyond the region and with EMI as it will give them English language skills to enable them to work in international organisations. All these rationales express the underlying desire of the participants to be a member of a global field transcending the local and regional sphere and the personal development resulting from study abroad is seen as a way of developing competence for this membership. This desire could be linked to the utilitarian benefits that such membership brings. These benefits are mainly of employment and thereby a better life. Similar tendency was also reported by Sehoole and de Wit (2014) among the foreign students coming to South Africa for study.

6.1.2 Personal Academic and Social Adjustment

The findings revealed two personal adjustment stressors of homesickness and loneliness. The discovery of these two personal adjustment issues is consistent with the findings of the previous studies conducted in various contexts (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2016; Vergara et al., 2010; Sawir et al., 2008).

The main reasons for homesickness in this study were missing the significant others and the familiar environment. Basically, it can be interpreted as a feeling of distress caused by loss of contact with human and environmental elements in home country. It appears that some of these feelings still exist while others have mellowed over the time from arrival of the students till the conduct of this study (a period of two years). The evidence for this postulation exists in the participants' use of the tense while talking about their experience of missing the significant others and the familiar environment. The present tense was used while talking about family, friends and social network. However, the past tense was used while making mention to the familiar surroundings of the hometown and place. This can be interpreted as an indication of a stronger influence of human element in the feelings of homesickness.

Regarding loneliness, social loneliness was more evident in the findings than personal and cultural loneliness (Sawir et al., 2008). The participants' complained about the lack of friendship, social contact with local community and scope of social activities outside the campus. Further, intra-student bonding which can alleviate the feelings of loneliness and isolation also appears to be lacking. This lack is evident from the participants' complaint of seeing the same faces on campus every day. It shows that the social undesirability attribute of the potential human company and contact on campus for the students. This leads to the proposition that the causes of loneliness and isolation reported by these students are both objective and situational (Saravanan et al., 2019). The objective causes lie in the person of the students in the form of their perception and attitude towards other humans around them and the situational causes lie in the overall social milieu of the community around and the city which does not offer much to socialise. Further, it can be surmised that the students' feelings of loneliness and isolation persist even when they have already spent two years in the destination university as they used present tense in most of their comments about loneliness and isolation.

The findings related to personal adjustment issues of homesickness and loneliness also reveal certain coping and well-being strategies adopted by the participants. These strategies are diverting attention towards study, engaging in entertainment and recreational activities like reading books and watching movies and participating in outdoor activities like hiking and playing sports. The discovery of these coping strategies is in line with the similar discoveries int other contexts (Saravanan et al., 2019)

The main academic stressors reported by the participants were EMI and learning culture related issues like teaching hours, teaching style and curriculum contents. The academic stressors discovered in this study are a confirmation of the findings of the various studies reported in the literature review (Ma & Wen, 2018; Andrade, 2006).

EMI related issues mainly resulted from lacking the English language proficiency required for successfully functioning in an EMI environment and cognitive, academic, and communicative challenges resulting thereby. These challenges influenced the students' academic performance and well-being in the sense that they must spend additional time on their studies. The general indication in the findings is that EMI related issues were during the initial phases of their academic sojourn. As they cumulatively gained proficiency, the challenges subsided.

Among the learning culture related stressors, the long lesson hours added to the workload of the students and thus could be construed as a well-being issue. Teaching pattern and curriculum patterns caused problems due to the element of unfamiliarity for the students. They did not experience a student-centred teaching approach and a curriculum with a global and western outlook. The adjustment difficulties resulting from these dichotomies of eastern and western or local and global were also reported by earlier studies (Ma & Wen, 2018). However, the same elements which were a source of academic maladjustment were also reported as a source of academic experience satisfaction-- particularly EMI and curriculum. Thus, EMI and curriculum are simultaneously a cause of academic adjustment stress and a source of academic satisfaction. The reason for this dualism can be understood if the EMI and curriculum related findings from the first and second research questions are juxtaposed. According to the findings of the first research question, the EMI and curriculum were the two deficiencies in the home country HE which pushed students to study abroad. These two factors also figured prominently as the perceived instruments of the personal development of the students for a global membership. Therefore, the interpretation can perhaps be that once the students realise that they have access to and are gaining what was missing in the home country HE, this realisation leads to satisfaction. This also applies to the participants' satisfaction with faculty support and cultural diversity on campus. While the later element could be construed as value adding aspect of international experience for developing intercultural competence and outlook, the former element of faculty support is the facilitative factor helping with adjustment to various aspects of academic life. The satisfaction could also be interpreted as the acculturation and adaptation resulting from the improved English language proficiency and a growing familiarity with the curriculum following an initial shock with EMI environment and a curriculum with global outlook.

The social adjustment issues resulting from language barrier in social situations reflect similar problems discovered in other research conducted in multiple contexts. However, in the case of this study, there are two layers attached to these issues. The first layer of issues is related to every day superficial practical and communication situations and the second layer is issues related at a deeper level. The lingua franca in Central Asia is Russian and the republics also have their national languages (in the case of Kyrgyzstan, it is Kyrgyz). The participants from Pakistan and Afghanistan had no knowledge of either and this defined their interaction and contact with the local community which was at a superficial and restricted level. The issues they faced could be categorised as the first layer of issues. However, the participants from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan shared a lingua franca with the local community and could engage with the community members at a deeper level of interaction and contacts, and their reports had a tinge of a feeling of being discriminated against by the local community. This could also be due to interregional rivalries which exist among the CAR due to various issues (such as border disputes) and could affect the interpersonal attitude of actors towards each other. This finding contradicts the findings of Jamaludin, Sam, Sandal, nad Adam (2018) who reported that cultural proximity deters discrimination. In this case the local Kyrgyz community and the participants from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan are at a greater cultural proximity than the participants from Pakistan and Afghanistan; however, the feeling of discrimination was more visible among the Tajik and Kazakh participants than Pakistani and Afghan participants. Thus, it can perhaps be surmised that if the foreign students stay on the peripheries of interpersonal and social contacts, they may face only superficial practical and communication related problems but as the distance to the social center decreases, they may experience deeper level of emotional and psychological problems.

6.1.3 Aspirations for Future

The findings for the third research question revealed the participants aspirations for future. These aspirations were manifest as a range of goals. These goals were further education and mobility, employment and entrepreneurship and undertaking responsibility related to society. These themes are aligned to the findings of earlier research (Pham, 2018).

These aspirations can be interpreted as the students' desired outcomes of their international education experience, and, therefore, have a 'goal-oriented focus' (Pham, 2018, p.178). Further, the themes in the current research also reveal a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic goals. Intrinsic goas are related to personal growth and extrinsic goals represent benefits like employment and the resultant financial benefits (Zhang & Zhang, 2017). The findings here show that the intrinsic goals of self-growth through international education become a means of achieving extrinsic goals. Thus, the role of the continuing international education experience is perceived by these participants as an enabler for achieving material or extrinsic goal of employment, business and fame as a writer with civic responsibility. This enabling happens by affecting an extension and expansion of the "space of possibilities" (Marginson, 2014, p.13) for these students. Therefore, from this perspective the international education experience is contributory to developing the students' sense of self-direction and self-trajectories for future (Pham, 2018).

6.2 Findings through the Bourdieusian Lens

This section extends the discussion by placing the findings of the three research questions within Bourdieusian framework of the thinking tools of filed, habitus and capital. Viewed from the lens of this framework, the experience can be perceived as a journey across the field of international education and its subfields. The journey starts at home country field and the findings of the first question reveal the interplay of habitus and capital this field. The second research question deals with the experiences of the students in the international university in the destination country subfield and the third research question present the students' dispositions towards future formed in the second subfield. The following is a discussion of the findings through the Bourdieusian lens of field, capital and habitus.

6.2.1 Field

As described in the third chapter, the Bourdieusian notion of field is defined as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). It was also likened to a field of game where actors engage in the game from their respective positions and under a common set of implicit rules. To successfully engage in this game, the actors are endowed with a "feel for the game" which is the "practical mastery of the logic or of immanent necessity of a game" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.61). An attribute of this *feel for the game* is that it is not equally distributed implying that some players in the game may have a higher degree of the *feel for the game* than others and this variation determines the players position in the field.

Additionally, each field is characterised by its "cards" which are essentially the "species of capital". Each actor's "relative force in the game", "position in the space of play" and "strategic orientation towards the game" depend on the possession of different types and number of cards. In other words, feel for the game and the gains in the game for an actor depend on the possession of the type and volume of capital. This possession becomes "a stake of struggle" in the filed as actors not only try to maintain the possession of the cards already held by them but also struggle to improve their position in the field by increasing this possession (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp.98-99). Finally, it is also reminded that multiple fields coexist either independent of each other or in a nested form and the game in one field may affect the game in other field either through reinforcement of contradiction (Joy et al., 2018).

Looked through this lens of field, the IS experience can be interpreted as a journey across the field of IHE and the findings of the three research questions broadly show how the game of the students' experience unfolds in this field. The following is a discussion of the findings through the Bourdieusian lens of the thinking tools.

6.2.1.1 Home Country Field

The beginning point of the journey is the home country. The first research question dealt with this beginning. The focus of the question was on the reasons for choosing Kyrgyzstan as a study destination. The findings revealed that certain deficiencies at home country HE and comparable strengths of the IHE in the destination international university were the reasons for choosing the country. However, underlying all these reasons is the students' aspirations for a better future and the perception that the gains from the international education at the destination country can advance the realisation of the aspirations while the deficiencies at home can thwart this realisation. The goal of the international education is to be in possession of certain competencies for realizing future related aspirations, and for the achievement of this possession the strengths of HE at the destination country are perceived instrumental. Therefore, the home country HE deficiencies assume the role of the driving force and the strengths of international higher education at the destination country become the attracting force.

The entire scenario in the home country field can be understood as a configuration of the students' position vis-à-vis their aspirations, the home country HE, the IHE at the destination country and the relation of the two systems of HE (home and destination) to the realisation of the students' aspirations. The deficiencies and the strengths of the two systems are interpretable as the cards or species of capital. The students' perception of the value of this capital in relation to the realisation of their aspiration, their attitude towards the deficiencies and strengths of the two HE systems and the role that this perception and attitude plays in their choice making are interpretable as their feel for the game. The perception of the value of capital and the attitude towards the home country deficiencies and destination country IHE strengths also demonstrate the students' strategic orientation towards the game. The stake of struggle in the field is to realise the aspiration for better future through certain aspects of personal development for which international education qualification becomes a means.

The emerging understanding here is that the game in the home country field, the rules involved, the position of the students in this game, their feel for the game, and the cards in the field are affected by the game in the destination country and the future field. It is a backward effect resulting in a future-oriented decision making. Thus, the positional possibilities, the logic of game and the cards of the destination country and the future field affect similar elements in the home country field. The strengths of IHE in the destination country field and their force in the future game diminishes the value of the species of capital existing in home country HE. The positional aspirations in the future field render the current position of the students' irrelevant as the species of capital required for the aspired position in the future field cannot be mobilised and launched from their current position in their home country. Collectively, all these influences from the destination country and future fields devalue the students' participation in the home country HE field and they decide to move to the destination country to possess the species of capital available there in the international university as this capital can guarantee the positional advantages in the future space.

6.2.1.2 Destination Country Field

The second research question deals with the findings related to the students' personal, academic and social experiences in the destination country field that is Kyrgyzstan. The findings revealed adjustment issues faced by the students. Concurrently, satisfactory aspects of the experience in the destination country field were also discovered. The adjustment stressors represent the struggle in the field. This struggle ensued due to two factors. First, the students lost certain species of capital as they changed their field. This loss of the species of capital was due to the change in the field as they moved from the home country field to the destination country field (for example, the loss of family and friends network resulted in homesickness and loneliness). Second, the students did not possess the species of capital associated with positional advantage in this new field (for example, lacking English language proficiency, familiarity with learning culture, local language). As the species of capital and position in a field are interrelated, thus the two factors (loss and lack of capital) affected the students' position in the field which appeared as adjustment stress. However, as the students progressed with the journey in the new field and started accumulating the species of capital (ELP, personal development, social network) that they lacked but was perceived essential for their position in the future field, this led to a realignment and reconfiguration of their position in the destination country field. This was manifested as the satisfactory aspect of their experience.

In the scenario of the destination country field, the future field still maintains the backward effect through the species of capital associated with it. However, while this effect was negative in the home country field (as it diminished the value of the species of capital associated with the home country field and created positional disadvantage there), it was positive in the destination country field. The species of capital (ELP, personal development, social network) available and accumulated in the destination country field gained value as these were perceived as guarantors of a position of advantage in the future field.

6.2.2 Capital

The interplay and interconnection of capital, and its various species, in the international education journey of the students emerged in two ways in this research. First, the entire journey is driven by symbolic capital associated with the field of future (Swartz, 2002). Symbolic capital is " the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability that are easily converted into [a] position" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.291). As indicated in the section 3.6.2 of this dissertation, symbolic capital takes the form of privileges and prestige which arise from other forms of capital. In the case of this research, the students aspire for certain privileges and prestige to gain positional advantage or respectability and honourability in the future field. It was mentioned earlier that these privileges and prestige were enunciated through expressions such as "work [in] other countries", "international organisations accept people [with good English]" and "participate in different international programmes". In other words, these expressions indicate the kind of honourability or positional advantage that the students aim to accrue. These privileges and prestige have collectively been termed as global membership earlier in this chapter. Kim (2011, p. 120) terms global membership as becoming "cosmopolitan elite". Thus, becoming a cosmopolitan elite for accruing the privileges and prestige associated with this symbolic capital drives the strategic orientations of the students in the home country and leads to the destination choice and the mobility decision.

Second, cultural capital which will be accrued through international education qualification will become a means of accruing the symbolic capital. Cultural capital has three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalised. Embodied form represents intellectual and physical selves and other individual attributes such as knowledge, skills and language, while the institutionalised form is represented by educational qualifications. In the case of this research, the findings indicate that the students' direct investment in the embodied form of capital is an indirect investment for accruing the symbolic capital of becoming a cosmopolitan elite in the future field. This form of capital and the investment in it appears in the findings related to the benefits accruing from the curriculum that the students are pursuing in the destination institution and the resulting knowledge and personal development— EMI and the resulting ELP, the faculty support and the resulting academic gains, and diversity and the resulting intercultural outlook. However, as the embodied form of the capital is an "integral part of the person" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.107) and thus abstract, therefore to gain a "legitimised recognition" in the future field the students' need an institutionalised form of capital to becoming a proof of possessing the abstract and intangible form of cultural capital. This is realised by seeking entrance to an international university in the destination country because the home country universities might possibly have endowed them with the embodied form of cultural capital but without the institutional form of cultural capital, the home gained embodied form would perhaps have remained valueless in the field of future.

To summarise, symbolic capital from the future field drives the students' action (Swartz, 2002) across the two fields of home and destination countries and mainly it is the symbolic capital in the future field which affects the value and legitimacy of cultural capital in the home country field and subsequently in the destination country field.

6.2.3 Habitus

Habitus defines "way of acting, feeling thinking and being" and affects the way "individual make choice to act in certain ways" (Maton, 2008, p.51). Further, habitus "reflects external social structures and shapes how individual perceives the world and acts in it" (Power, 1999, p.48). In other words, habitus represents the "relation between the objective and the subjective" (Maton, 2008, p. 52).

In this research the students' choice and decision making can be understood as a reflection of their habitus and the influence of external circumstances on this choice making. This choice is led by their perceptions and attitude to the structures and shapes existing around them. Conversely, these external elements also shape these perceptions and attitudes. Thus, the realities of the world around them appear to affect the students' perception of and attitude towards their home country and destination country education. These realities are manifest in the forms of capital. The symbolic capital of the future field and the cultural capital (which is a means of accruing the symbolic capital for future) available in the destination country shapes the students' attitude towards the cultural capital available in the home country.

The home country deficient cultural capital (which appears deficient due to lack of value in the employment market, lack of EMI, lack of global curriculum) develops a habitus of avoidance for home country cultural capital and a habitus of desire for the destination country cultural capital. However, the future-oriented habitus of aspiration for a cosmopolitan elite position indirectly affects the development of both habitus. Thus, the objective situation of the external world (mainly the realities of the global world which favours certain kind of competencies, and the reality of home country and destination country HE) shapes the subjective world of the students which shows itself in their reasons of choice making.

The element of rationality is quite evident in this whole process of shaping and the habitus of avoidance and the habitus of desire show the underlying practical understanding of the students for the game. Thus, it is due to this rationale understanding that the students' choice making is led by those reasons only which can bring them advantage in the game. For example, the destination country characteristics do not figure in the reasons because a peripheral developing country cannot afford students any advantages of residence in that country. In comparison, the elements related to the international university and the international education advantages available in the university are prominent among the reasons. This shows the "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.61) aspect of habitus.

The Bourdieusian notion of habitus is also attributed with a quality of transformation. Bourdieu said, " [habitus] is endlessly transformed [……….] when embodied structures of expectation encounter structures of objective chances in harmony with these expectations" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 116). This attribute is visible in the destination country stage of the experience. Initially, the students face adjustment difficulties but then the adjustment stressors changes into satisfaction. This is a transformation from a disposition of stress to a disposition of satisfaction. However, the durability attribute of habitus is also visible in this case. The expectations factors (curriculum related expectations, intercultural experience and EMI specifically) which led to the destination choice and the subsequent mobility become the habitus of satisfaction once these expectations are perceived being realised in the destination country.

The developmental and transformative aspect of habitus is also visible in the future aspirations of the students. The experience thus far at the destination university has developed a habitus of aspiration with a clear future goal (in the form of future image aspirations). This habitus represents a clear perception of future position (as students for further education, entrepreneurs, civic workers, job in home country and abroad). Thus, while the habitus at the home country is focused on a broader aim for future, the experience in the IHEI at the destination country develops focus in this habitus by orienting it towards specific and clearly defined goals as compared to a broader aim.

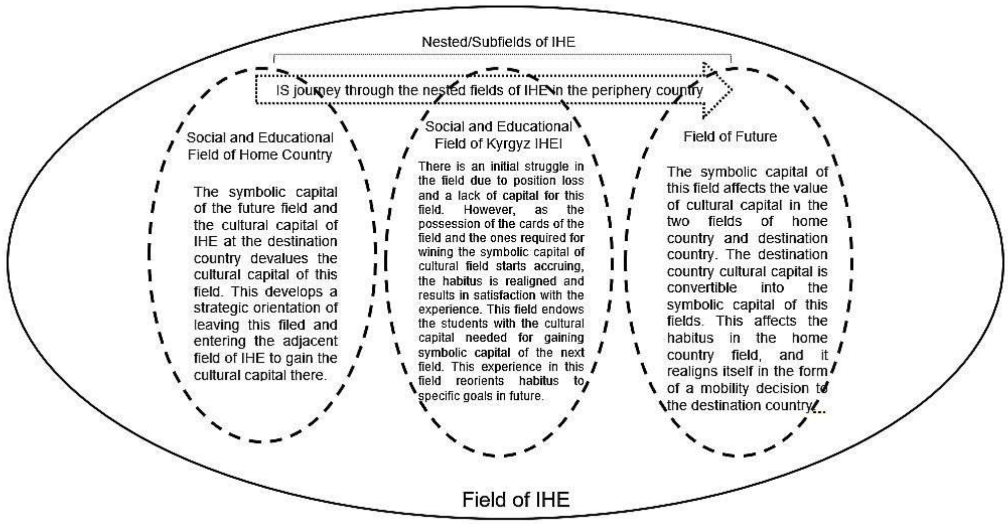

Figure 3: Field, capital and habitus in the students' choice, experience, and aspirations

6.3 Summary

This chapter discussed the findings from two perspectives. The first perspective was through their connection to the existing literature. This helped establishing the congruence or incongruence of the findings to this body of literature. The second perspective was the Bourdieusian framework of thinking tools. The discussion within this perspective establish how the students' choice making, their experience in the destination country and their aspirations for future can understood as an interaction of field, capital, and habitus. The Figure 3 summarised this interaction. The next chapter presents a conclusion for this research.

Chapter 7
Conclusion

This chapter concludes this study. The first section of the chapter presents an overview of the research contributions to the field of knowledge. Then implications of the study are discussed and suggestions for further research are made. Next, limitations of the research are discussed. The chapter concludes on a brief section of final remarks.

7.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This exploratory study focused on the international students experience in a peripheral context. The study focused on three important aspects of the experience: reasons for destination choice, experience in the destination country and influence of the experience on the students' image of future. The following are the main contributions of the study to the field of knowledge.

There is a plethora of literature on the students' experience in the IHE core destination countries like USA, UK, Australia, Canada, and Germany and a growing body of literature on the semi -periphery core countries like China, Malaysia, Singapore and Korea. However, very few studies exist on the periphery countries and particularly there are no studies on the international students' experience in a peripheral country like Kyrgyzstan. This research added to the body of existing knowledge on ISE by studying a peripheral country. This gains further importance within the perspective of changing trends in the IS mobility and the emergence of new hubs (Choudaha & Chang, 2012; Knight, 2013). The countries are changing their positions in the world system of IHE and students are converging on new destinations. Thus, there is a greater need of studying contexts which remained ignored so far. This study was an important contribution in this perspective as it explored a context which has potential to be a future destination hub but remained understudied.

The second contribution of the study is in the context of horizontal mobility literature. As mentioned in the first chapter, horizontal mobility occurs from developing to developing countries as opposed to vertical mobility which is characterised by mobility from developing to developed countries. Most of the existing studies on ISE are in the context of vertical mobility. The horizontal mobility context and the experiences occurring therein is understudied even though such mobility forms 19% of the total IS mobility across the globe. This study contributed by studying the ISE resulting from horizontal mobility for IHE.

Finally, this study combined three important aspects of international students experience in a single theoretical framework of Bourdieusian thinking tools. As, it has been seen in the literature review that the two important aspects of international students' reasons for choosing a destination country and their subsequent adjustment experiences and development have separate models and bodies of literature. This study combined these disparate aspects of experience into a single lens and thus developed a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the overall phenomenon of the IS experience. In doing so the study also discovered certain differences from other studies. For example, the study discovered that the country characteristics did not figure prominent in the students' choice making in the peripheral context. Security and cost issues also appeared to be a home country related concern rather than destination country concern. Then, the entire experience was strongly converged on academic and personal development goals and had a strong futuristic orientation.

7.2 Implications of the Study

Though the nature of the current study was exploratory, and generalisation is not an aim and a possibility for a study of this nature and scope, however, certain implications can be inferred from the findings for teachers and the university management.

There are implications for teachers in terms of student support, EMI, curriculum and teaching and learning in the classrooms. As noted in the findings chapter, the participants face difficulties in making a transition from their previous learning environment to a new learning environment in an international university. They particularly mentioned difficulties due to EMI environment in terms of understanding curriculum content, engaging in discussion in their classes and understanding lectures and lessons delivered by the teachers. The implication here is that the teachers in the university need to be cognizant of these adjustment issues and should have a repertoire of remedial strategies and intervention plans to help students deal with these difficulties. The findings reveal one such strategy of the faculty support that helped students in the face of these difficulties. However, the teacher needs to take a systematic and methodological approach in helping students deal with these difficulties inside the classroom during the lesson and outside the classroom after the lesson when they are dealing with course material and assignments on their own. The teachers in the university can take advantage of small class size and focus on the learning and adjustment difficulties of individual students. They may help and support students with devising individualized strategies and plans of overcoming these curricula, learning transition and EMI related difficulties. The teachers need to be cognizant that they are functioning in an environment where hybridization of local, regional, and foreign/international learning cultures and approaches is taking place, and this may necessitate playing their academic role differently than they played in their own country or in a previous workplace. With these students they may not only need to teach but also go beyond this by scaffolding the students' learning by helping them transition and adjust to a new and foreign/international learning environment.

The implications for university management are multiple. These implications fall in the areas of recruitment, academic experience, and campus life. The findings revealed that the main pull factors for the students to choose the university are the 'international university' image which embodies quality of education, diversity, residential facilities and the financial support. It implies that to offset the unattractiveness of the country of destination, the university management needs to focus on these areas in their recruitment and the university projection campaigns to attract international students from the region and beyond. While the three areas of quality education, residential facilities and financial support are the strength of the university, there is a need to improve the diversity factor. As can be seen in the demographics (provided in the fourth chapter) of the student population on the campus, there is a narrow range of diversity. The university needs to recruit from a wide range of countries to enhance the diversity on campus.

Regarding the academic experience, the management needs to take certain measure in helping the students overcome their difficulties and challenges in adjustment to the long class days, EMI, new approaches in curriculum and teaching. The long class days can be reduced in length by making an adjustment to the daily class schedule. This will give students more time for study and recreation outside the classroom. The difficulties associated with EMI and new curriculum and teaching approaches can be alleviated by establishing learning support and English language support centres.

The management of the university also needs to take measures to further improve the social experience of the students. The management cannot remedy the geographic and locational limitations but can offset these limitations by improving the quality of social life on campus by introducing more diversity in student life activities. Further, the university also needs to introduce local language support for students by giving them local language learning classes at their arrival in the country. This will help the students gain more freedom and autonomy outside the campus in their daily social activities. Ability to communicate in social language will also help the students integrate with the local community and may help overcome the social isolation that the students mentioned that they face.

7.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Kyrgyzstan as a site of IHE and as a destination country for international students is under-researched. There is a dearth of literature on international student experience in the country. This problem becomes magnified in the backdrop of the regional and global importance of Kyrgyzstan. The country is important because it hosts the highest number of IS in the region. The country holds a great promise to be a potential regional IHE hub for a number of reasons: First, Kyrgyzstan has a “ flourishing higher education (HE) sector, with more universities……per head than countries with similar populations, such as Denmark, Finland and (although not….. an independent country) Scotland”; second, the country’s “HE policy is oriented towards improving quality. Until the most recent assessment in 2012, it was the only Central Asian country to have participated in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) led Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), demonstrating a commitment by the government to assessing educational levels and development at international standards. The government has increased investment in HE, for example, beginning the process – like in Kazakhstan – of making the system more compatible with the Bologna Process”; third, the country “is the most open country in Central Asia in political term” (Sabzalieva, 2015, p.49-50). Additionally, the country, being a member of WTO, is also a signatory of The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and education is one of the tradeable services in GATS. These reasons, the presence of a considerable number of IS, and the great interest of the international political and economic actors in the country highlight the great potential of Kyrgyzstan to be a future IHE destination in the region. This is evident from recent development of India and Kyrgyzstan signing a memorandum of understanding to establish an education hub in the country aimed at hosting 60,000 international students (AKI Press, 2019). There is a need to conduct extensive and large-scale studies on the aspect IS in the country to achieve success in such ventures and develop such hubs in the country. Such research endeavours need to be large scale involving substantial number of participants from multiple international education sites in the country. Such research endeavours will develop further understanding of the context for the HEIs hosting international students (IS), for the recruiters and various service providers and for the government in terms of policy and decision making.

7.4 Limitations of Research

The study was conducted within the parameters of the interpretive paradigm using a qualitative approach. It has the inherent limitations of the qualitative research approach. Following are the details of these limitations.

7.4.1 Generalisability

The findings of the current research cannot be generalised to other contexts and groups of students. Generalisability, as a term and as a concept of quality in research, is traditionally associated with quantitative research approach and proponents of qualitative research advocate using the term transferability (Dick, 2014). Transferability means applying the findings of research to a similar population or contexts (Jensen, 2008). I believe that the very foundations on which this research is based, do not fulfil this criterion of transferability. The starting point of the research was to explore and understand and this understanding was to be achieved through a process of mutual meanings making between the researcher and the participants. This meaning making process can vary from one individual to another and also from one context to another (Dick, 2014). Therefore, in the strict sense of generalisability or transferability as a measure of quality in research, this research is lacking on this criterion. It is about the particular: the particular group of the participants and the particular context. Therefore, any transferability is to be framed within this particularity.

7.4.2 Single Site

The study was conducted on a single site. It made the study limited in scope. A single site means limited representation and a lack of cross-site analysis, synthesis and comparison. This implies the study developed a limited site-related understanding of the phenomenon under study (Bishop, 2010). Though this limitations can be defended on the grounds that studying multiple sites was beyond the scope of this research since this study was grounded in the type of case study called ‘intrinsic case study’ and it is the ‘collective case study’ type which has the scope of studying multiple sites (Bishop, 2010), yet this defence cannot void the limitations of the research in terms of developing a limited a single site-based understanding of the phenomenon. This limitation, probably, also explains the limitation of transferability. Studying multiple sites could, perhaps, have developed a “rich and deeper” (Bishop, 2010) understanding of the phenomenon of RIS experience in Kyrgyzstan and the findings could have wider applicability and acceptability.

7.4.3 Limited Research Participation

The data was collected from eight participants from a single research site. This is a small number. Though this small number facilitated collection and interpretation of data, however, it also reduced the range and scope of the understanding developed from this research. A bigger number of participants from multiple sites could have increased the representative element of the study.

7.4.4 Researcher-Participants Relationship

The researcher and the research participants relationship, perhaps, also influenced the data and the findings of the study to some degree. The participants were my students at one stage, and we belonged to the same site. I worked on the site as a faculty member and they were there as students at the time of the data collection. I believe this relationship had an effect particularly on the data related to the personal experiences of the students. Probably, due to this relationship they were not eager to share their personal experiences with me for the reasons of personal privacy and face keeping. This, perhaps, explains the limited range of themes around personal experiences in this study. This problem could have been overcome by involving participants from other sites and who were not directly related to the researcher in any capacity.

7.4.5 Subjectivity

"Subjectivity refers to an individual's feelings, opinions, or preferences" (Siegesmund, 2008, para 1). Gough and Madill (2012) think that the element of subjectivity creates a problem for the replicability of research. Evaluated from this measure of quality, this research had a dominant element of subjectivity pervading almost all methodological and data interpretation decisions. This was due to the paradigmatic choice made for this research which supports greater subjectivity of the researcher in the research process. The main effect of this subjectivity is on the interpretation of data which was shaded by the individual understanding of the researcher. Though (Gough & Madill, 2012) dismiss, in relation to qualitative research, the problem of subjectivity as conventional wisdom and think that subjectivity "contextualize[s] and enrich[es] the research process" (p. 375), yet, I believe, that subjectivity can drastically decrease the wider acceptability and applicability of any research and this research suffers from this flaw.

7.5 Final Remarks

Despite the limitations detailed above, I feel, the research has great value for my personal growth and knowledge though it may not meet the traditional standards of rigour and quality in research, and therefore may not be transferable, applicable and acceptable to other contexts. This was my maiden research endeavour of this scale. It expanded the horizon of my personal knowledge and expertise as well as producing context-dependent knowledge for those interested in knowing about the context and the problem. At the end of this research, I understand my situation and context (as an international student and teacher) in more depth, and also that of my international students as well. It discovered an answer to certain questions which I personally wondered about and needed an answer. These questions were mainly about why students decide to study in the peripheral international HEIs, what value this experience carries for them and how they experience their HE sojourns in these institutions. Therefore, in a way, I started with a problem rather than a methodology and Flyvbjerg (2006) considers it a necessary quality of any social science research. The problem was related to my own and other stakeholders' lack of understanding of the context. The context was not explored previously. I started as a beginner with little and unconfirmed knowledge of the particular context and at the completion of this research process, I developed my expertise as a case study researcher and an in-depth understanding of the problem and the context also (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Before Interview

- Greet
- Small talk
- Start with thanking for agreeing to participate in the interview
- Inform about the purpose of the interview and research
- Inform about the role of the interviewer in the research and vis-à-vis participants, the voluntary nature of participation, emphasize the non-binding non-obligatory nature of the participation
- Discuss data protection, privacy, and confidentiality
- Request signing the consent form

Date:

Start Time: *End Time:*

Interviewee (code name):

Group One (personal information)

- Would you like to introduce yourself please?
- What is your major?
- Where are you from?
- Do you have any previous experience of studying outside your country?

Group Two (reasons for choosing Kyrgyzstan)

- Why did you decide to study in Kyrgyzstan?
- Were there challenges involved in studying in your home country that you did not see in Kyrgyzstan and you decided to come here? Would you like to tell about these challenges?

Group Three (Academic, social, personal experience)

(academic aspect)

- How would you describe your experience of studying in Kyrgyzstan so far?
- What have been the interesting aspects of your study here in Kyrgyzstan?
- How is studying here different from your study in your country?
- Have you faced any difficulties studying here in this university? (If the answer is 'yes' then ask then ask the next question)
- Can you tell me about these difficulties?
- What are the strong points of study at your university?

(social aspect)

- How is your social life in Kyrgyzstan?
- Tell me about your experience of social life in Kyrgyzstan?
- What type of social activities you have here in Kyrgyzstan?

- How is your social life in Kyrgyzstan different from the one you lived in your country?
- How do you spend your free time? What kind of activities you engage in?
- What kind of social events you participate in outside your studies and university?
- What social life challenges you face here?
- What are the challenges in living in Kyrgyz society?

(personal aspect)

- Have you faced any personal challenges after coming here? (If the answer is ‘yes’ then ask the next question)
- What are some of these personal challenges that you faced after coming here?
- How is your personal life here different from the one that you lived before coming here in your home country?
- Tell me about your personal life here. Was there any change after coming here? (If the answer is ‘yes’ then ask the next question)
- How has it changed after you started studying here?

Group Four (future image)

- How completing your study here will change your life?
- What kind of future you see for yourself after graduating from UCA?
- Was there any change in your dreams for future after you came here? (If the answer is ‘yes’ then ask the next question)
- How your dreams for future have changed after you started studying in Kyrgyzstan?
- Tell me what kind of future you see for yourself now?
- How your plans for future changed since you have come to Kyrgyzstan?

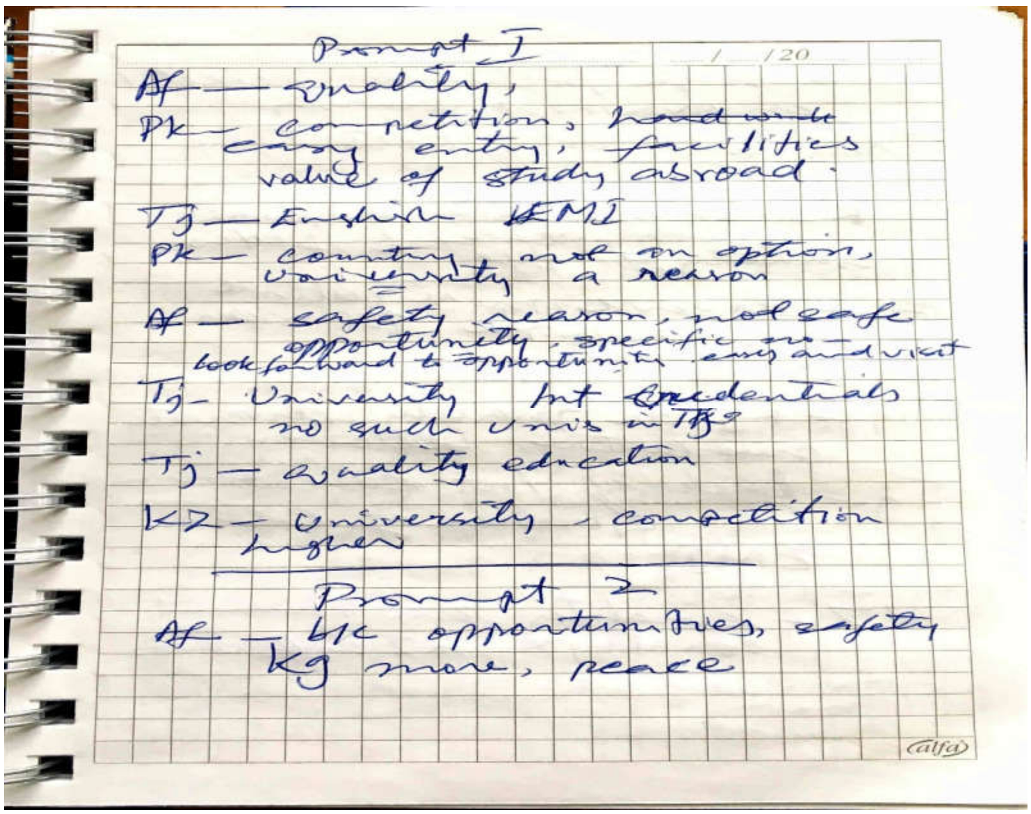
After Interview

- Tell the participant that this ends their interview
- Ask if they would add or remove anything
- Inform that the researcher will contact them again if any clarifications are needed
- Tell them that they will be provided a transcript of their interview, they should read it for accuracy and if they have any concerns they should contact the researcher.
- Thank them for their participation.

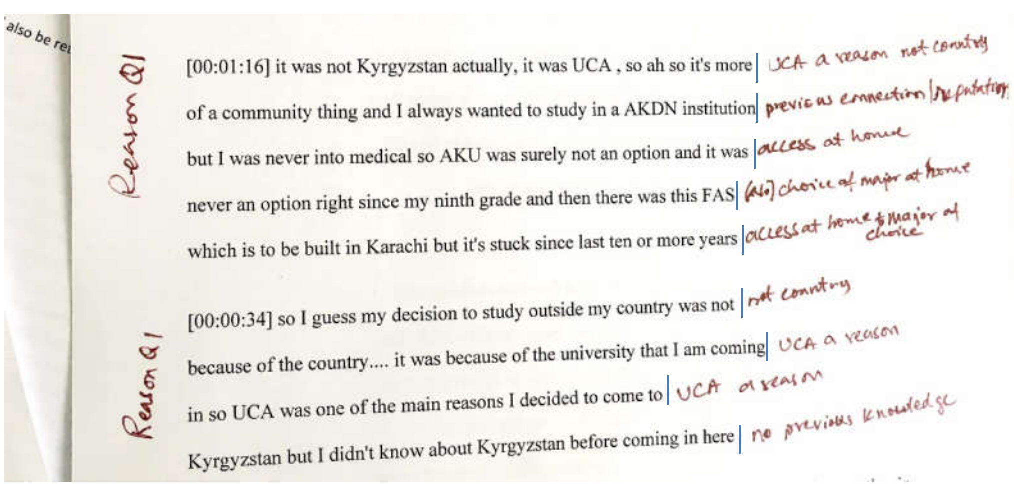
Appendix B

Notes Taking and Manual Coding during Data Analysis

a) An example visual of notes taking during the interviews/group discussion and the readings of the transcripts



b) An example visual of transcript coding



Reason Q1

[00:01:16] it was not Kyrgyzstan actually, it was UCA , so ah so it's more | UCA a reason not country
of a community thing and I always wanted to study in a AKDN institution | previous connection / reputation
but I was never into medical so AKU was surely not an option and it was | access at home
never an option right since my ninth grade and then there was this FAS | (AKU) choice of major at home
which is to be built in Karachi but it's stuck since last ten or more years | access at home & major of choice

Reason Q1

[00:00:34] so I guess my decision to study outside my country was not | not country
because of the country.... it was because of the university that I am coming | UCA a reason
in so UCA was one of the main reasons I decided to come to | UCA a reason
Kyrgyzstan but I didn't know about Kyrgyzstan before coming in here | no previous knowledge

Appendix C
Certificate of Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: **International Students' Experience in the Peripheries: A Case Study in Kyrgyzstan**

Researcher(s) name: Hamid Ali Khan

Supervisor(s): **Dr. Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh**

This project has been approved for the period

From: 11/10/2018
To: 31/12/2019

Ethics Committee approval reference: D1819-003

Signature: Dongbo Zhang Date: 11/10/2018
(Professor Dongbo Zhang, Graduate School of Education Ethics Officer)