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**Students' and teachers' experiences and
perceptions of studying in 'Bilim-Innovation'
lyceum - boarding schools in Kazakhstan**

By

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Abstract

Since regaining its independence in 1991, the government of Kazakhstan has adopted a number of reforms to the education sector aimed at improving the academic performance of secondary school students. In 1992, Bilim-Innovation Lyceum-boarding schools (BIL) (*formerly Kazakh-Turkish Lyceums*) were established in a number of cities of the country. Since then, BIL schools have demonstrated remarkable performances. Students have received thousands of prizes in various competitions. There is a prevalent opinion that the primary factor that leads these schools to success is a single-sex environment. However, things are complicated by the fact that school features such as student selectiveness, boarding hall, school climate and scope of teachers' roles may also play a significant role.

This research used a qualitative case study strategy to explore students' and teachers' perceptions of studying in BIL schools. The qualitative data were analysed using the method of thematic analysis.

The findings of this study indicate that the primary reason why students like studying in BILs and what encourages their academic achievements is the school climate, specifically the relationship among students and strong friendships. The study also demonstrated that teachers' and tutors' roles are considered main factors in students' achievements. The study revealed that a single-sex environment is seen as one of the many school features, rather than the primary one, that contributed to learners' success. My findings also suggested that the student selection process may have a detrimental influence on students. In addition, this study suggests that selective schools may exacerbate social inequality by 'creaming off' the most able students and preventing them from mixing with the wider population. This situation is then likely to cause divisions between those in society educated at selective schools and those not. In other words, a form of class division, which may promote an issue of 'us' and 'them' relationships.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
BIL	Bilim-Innovation Lyceum-boarding school
KTL	Kazakh-Turkish Lyceum-boarding school
GS	Girls' school
BS	Boys' school
BST	A teacher from boys' school
GST	A teacher from girls' school
NIS	Nazarbayev Intellectual School
RPhMS	Republican Physics and Mathematics School
CoE	Centre of Excellence
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan
BERA	British Education Research Association
UNT	Unified National Test
KSSR	Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UK	The United Kingdom
USA	The United States of America
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations
AAUW	American Association of University Women
CV	Curriculum Vitae
TA	Thematic Analysis
CA	Content Analysis
IQ	Intelligence quotient

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research is a qualitative study of teachers' and students' experiences and perceptions of teaching and studying in Bilim-Innovation Lyceum-boarding schools (BIL) in Kazakhstan. This case study explores perspectives of students and teachers of two single-sex BIL schools (one for boys only and one for girls only) regarding the school features and aspects, which may include the student selection process, boarding experience, school climate and teacher's role among other factors.

The aim of this introductory chapter is to establish the contextual and historical background for the study. In the first subsection of this chapter, the choice of the topic area is discussed by drawing on my personal experiences in single-sex and coeducational settings as a teacher and a student. This will be followed by the rationale for the study, the research questions, and finally the thesis outline. The following section of the chapter provides a context by giving a brief overview of the Kazakhstani educational system with a particular focus on the historical developments and introduces the contemporary system and structure of education in Kazakhstan. Then I will discuss the term 'giftedness', as it is considered to be one of the definitions of schools where my research is set. This discussion will include two subsections where I will describe the two key strategies by which the academic work of children in Kazakhstani secondary schools is assessed. The first form is that of an educational Olympiad whereby children undertake tests in various school subjects, with the aim of identifying the highest performing student in each discipline. The winners of Olympiads receive awards, presents and, sometimes, scholarships to study in higher institutions. The second main form of assessment is the Unified National Test for final-year students, which is conducted to assess them in particular subjects at the end of each academic year. Those students attaining high results in this examination are provided with opportunities to gain governmental scholarships to study in national higher institutions. Lastly, I will introduce the selected case-study schools where my fieldwork was carried out.

Before proceeding to other sections, I would like to briefly introduce the structure of the thesis. This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. **Chapter Two** provides the

literature review with regard to the relevant topics of the study. This chapter also presents the theoretical approaches that helped me to understand and analyse the data. **Chapter Three** discusses the methodological stances of the research. This chapter also explains the individual methods of data collection and data analysis adopted in this study. **Chapter Four** and **Chapter Five** present the data collected from students and teachers in terms of 'Bilim Innovation Lyceum-boarding schools' (BIL). **Chapter Six** discusses the findings of the research and synthesises them under the relevant headings. **Chapter Seven** sets out the conclusions and ponders the implications of the study for further research.

1.2 Choice of research area

My personal interest in two types of education (single-sex and mixed-sex) started when I was one of the students who studied in the Kazakh-Turkish Lyceum (KTL) (*former name of BIL schools*) for boys in 1999 in Shymkent, Kazakhstan. At that time, this school was considered one of the best, if not the best, school in the region for its academic success and high results in educational Olympiads. I went there following in the footsteps of my older brother, who had graduated from that school a year earlier. Having passed the stringent entry examination, at the beginning of my 7th grade, when I started at the KTL I was curious about the things happening in the school. As a matter of fact, everything in the single-sex setting was utterly new to me. Almost all the teachers were from Turkey and they were all male, which was unusual. Teaching styles differed from those used in comprehensive schools. In addition, it was a boarding school, therefore it was very convenient for students from remote localities. Tutors had a range of programmes to engage and entertain students during the weekends (table tennis, chess, cinema, computer games, etc.). While students could go home to their families some of them preferred to spend their weekends at the school.

However, sometimes students became frustrated with the school's firm discipline. Nobody was allowed to leave the premises without the administration's permission. Once we had that permission, we were given a certain length of time, by the end of which we had to return. If we arrived back late, we were not allowed inside. The only possible way to enter the building was by contacting the director or the manager of the dormitory to get his permission and very often by writing a letter of apology and explanation.

The following year, however, my parents – who were both teachers – insisted on changing my school to a ‘Daryn’ boarding school where both boys and girls study together. The features of ‘Daryn’ school were similar to BIL’s in many respects: it was state-funded, boarding, selective in admission and academically oriented. The major reason for my transfer was my parents’ discomfort and suspicion, evinced by the word ‘Turkish’ in the name of school and its likelihood that the school was associated with religious organisations or sects. Due to the uncertainties and tough circumstances caused by The Soviet Union’s collapse in the 1990s, people were anxious, indecisive and cautious in terms of choosing what they considered to be the ‘right’ school for their children. The instability in the country allowed various missionaries and sects to enter the Kazakh society freely, and they certainly tried to seize the opportunity to impose their beliefs (Yerekeshova, 2007). That is why now I can understand their feelings and grave concern expressed at that time. The ‘Daryn’ school, where I transferred the following year, had a similar system of education. All students were examined in different disciplines before their enrolment and only those with the highest marks were admitted. It also had separate dormitories for boys and girls within the same building. The fact that surprised me the most was the discotheque, which was held regularly every Friday evening. I was surprised because, as far as I had known, normally neither comprehensive nor private schools organised discotheques for students within the school. Therefore, learners occasionally went to disco clubs outside the school and this mostly happened during holidays. I am not sure of the appropriateness of organising the disco parties within the school premises, but it was fun for all students to have discos on Friday evenings at school.

After graduation from ‘Daryn,’ I went back to KTL, as a part-time tutor for 7th-grade boys. In the meantime, I was pursuing my bachelor’s degree. Before being recruited, I had never planned to work with students, especially in a boys-only school, as it was not my primary interest. I was interested in back-office work, which usually does not require much interaction with other people. However, it was interesting and challenging to work as a tutor at the KTL school in Kostanay city for almost three years. After successful graduation from the university, I began working as a teacher at the boys-only KTL school in Almaty. All in all, I spent six years in single-sex schools, full of joyful and splendid moments. Recently, KTL schools were rebranded and

renamed Bilim-Innovation Lyceum-boarding schools (I will discuss this in more detail in the section 'BIL'). Hereinafter, I will refer to KTL as BIL.

In February 2013, I changed my workplace to Nazarbayev Intellectual School (NIS), one of the most prestigious and elite schools in Kazakhstan, as a Vice-Principal for pastoral matters. This school is coeducational, where 720 boys and girls study together. Alongside my position in the administration, I had a chance to teach students for 8-9 hours a week. When I started teaching students, I could immediately see the difference of working in single-sex and coeducational schools. In fact, in the beginning, I was sometimes indecisive while working in a mixed-sex environment. I knew that I could not adopt some techniques that I had used before in boys-only schools. For instance, before I could tap on the male-students' shoulder to praise them when they responded to my questions correctly. However, I was not able to do that with female-students in the mixed-sex environment. It was also difficult for me to know how to react when girls would burst into tears because of bad marks or issues in their families. After some time, I became adjusted to the new environment and I was comfortable working with everyone. This helped me to gain more confidence in working with everyone and dealing with any concern that may arise at school. I am proud to have had experience in both types of schools as a student and a teacher. Having seen both types of schools, there were some question marks in my mind about whether the sexes should be separated or not. What are students' and alumni's thoughts about studying in a single-sex environment? Does single-sex schooling affect students' academic performance? Does a single-sex setting enhance or diminish – or have no particular generalised effect upon the educational progress of learners in terms of self-confidence, motivation, deportment, etc.? What other factors might matter in regard to students' academic success and social wellbeing along with a single-sex environment? These questions brought me to this research project. However, as my research progressed, the nature of my question changed, and I became more interested in exploring the systems and methods of organisation in BIL schools to investigate which elements are associated with the best academic outcomes. So, I decided to explore students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of studying in these institutions.

1.3 Aims of the study

As discussed earlier, in Kazakhstan there is some evidence pointing to enhanced academic performance for both sexes in single-sex BIL boarding schools (Zhetpisbayeva & Shelestova, 2015). The majority of them, if not all, are among the top-100 schools of the country based on the Unified National Test (UNT) (i.e. the school-leaving and the university admission examination) results. Initially, learners' academic success in Kazakhstani single-sex secondary schools inspired my interest in how a single-sex environment could affect students' academic progress. This is also because many people in Kazakhstani society think that, as it might seem at first glance, a single-sex milieu is the factor that leads students to success. However, the fact that students in these institutions board – giving schools more control over how they spend their time – and are also more likely to be from families where education is valued, complicates matters. As the research progressed, ideas and objectives have been developed. Consequently, the research trajectory has extended and now, this study aims to explore students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions about studying in BIL schools. This encompasses a wide variety of school aspects such as school climate, staff's role, student selection process etc. This may also entail discussion about single-sex education.

As such, the primary research question is:

- What are students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of studying in BIL schools?

This overarching research question underpins the aim of the study. Based on this fundamental question, further sub-questions helped me to guide my data collection and analysis process:

- a) What are students' and teachers' views about the admission process (student selection process)?
- b) What do teachers and students like most and least about studying in BIL?
- c) What school features, in participants' opinions, have an effect on students' success?

By engaging in this research, I intended to present students' and teachers' views and experiences of the aspects involved in the education process of two BIL schools. My research is also aimed at contributing to a greater understanding of what it is like to be

a student of BIL schools. It is hoped that this research will have the potential to provide some constructive arguments and ideas for policymakers of the gaps and contradictions in policies and practices with regard to secondary schools for gifted students. The next section will briefly introduce the education system of Kazakhstan.

1.4 The context of Kazakhstan and its education system

During his annual state of the nation address in Astana on December 15, 2012, Kazakh President N. Nazarbayev introduced the new “Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy” – a comprehensive state plan aimed at bringing Kazakhstan into the ranks of the world’s 30 most developed countries by the middle of the twenty-first century. Education is acknowledged to be one of the main priorities of the project (Keene, 2013). Particularly, as Nazarbayev highlighted, this strategy primarily seeks human capital improvements through a modernisation and internationalisation of the education system. The common goal of education reforms in Kazakhstan is to adapt the education system to the new socio-economic environment characterised by the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan (MoES). Improvement of the education system plays a significant role in achieving this goal. Investment in human capital, particularly in education – starting from an early age and continuing into adulthood – is generally acknowledged to result in significant benefits for the economy and society (“The strategic plan for development of the Republic of Kazakhstan until the year 2020,” 2010). If we look back to early periods of independent Kazakhstan, the government has introduced a number of reforms of education, which sought to establish our own independent national identity, without neglecting the country’s early history from Soviet traditions. The policy of westernisation was also a part of educational reforms of the 1990s. They were described as unsystematic, poorly regulated and uncoordinated (Yakavets, 2014a). In this section, I will demonstrate some historical background regarding Kazakhstan and its educational development.

1.4.1 Kazakhstan and its educational development during and post the Soviet era

Kazakhstan is the world’s 9th largest country with an area of 2.7 million square km and shares borders with Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. In the south-west, it is bordered by the Caspian Sea. Kazakh and Russian are the major spoken and written languages. With its 17.5 million population and in excess of 100

ethnic groups, the country is considered to be one of the most multinational societies in the world (“Main Socio-Economic Indicators,” 2015). Kissane (2005) acknowledges that:

‘Kazakhstan is unique among the ex-Soviet Central Asian Republics in having a large ethnic Russian presence – a direct result of colonisation, first under the Russian tsars and then under the Soviets. Scores of other ethnic groups, ranging from Germans to Koreans, combined to form an extremely diverse population. Kazakhstan’s distinctive demographic situation continues to be one of the major focal points in recent research on the area. (p. 47)

Prior to independence the country was subjected to a Soviet-style education system that was fairly standardised and was also claimed to be quite effective in ‘delivering universal literacy [...] and a complete secondary education to the population of a far-flung and linguistically diverse country’ (Silova & Eklof, 2013, p. 385). In contemporary Kazakhstan, there are still some educators who hold the belief that the education system of the USSR was the most effective one in the world (Fimyar & Kurakbayev, 2016). The major education policies during the Soviet Union system included: free education for all children; high literacy rates; equal gender enrolment at all levels of education, including tertiary education; highly-qualified teachers; and a solid infrastructure for educational provision and administration (Chapman et al., 2005; Heyneman, 2004; Mynbayeva & Pogosian, 2014; Silova & Eklof, 2013). As Mynbayeva & Pogosian (2014, p. 147) described, ‘the Soviet period of the development of education strengthened the tradition for Kazakhstani peoples’ value of knowledge and education’. Then they further explained that ‘the ideal goal was raising the Soviet human, with Soviet thinking, with priority of Soviet ideology over the national ideology, collectivism over individuality’ (ibid, p. 154).

However, as Yurchak (2006, p. 8) reports, the ambivalent attitudes towards the Soviet past are rooted in the paradoxes of a system which combined ‘tremendous suffering, repression, fear and lack of freedom’ with genuine humane concern for ‘equality, community, selflessness, altruism, friendship, ethical relations, education, work, creativity, and concern for the future’. Despite all the above-mentioned improvements, the education system of the USSR had drawbacks, which still reflect in the

contemporary education system of Kazakhstan. As McLaughlin et al. (2017, p. 88) state, the imperfection of Soviet education is 'an over-emphasis on acquiring encyclopaedic knowledge through memorisation which resulted in an emphasis on the learning of facts and figures, rather than on creative thinking and problem solving'. The legacy of this characteristic is well rooted in the UNT, which will be discussed in later sections.

One of the most appalling after-effects that Kazakh people are still suffering from is the Soviet Union's ideology of language policy, where the Russian language was granted the status of the language of rapprochement for USSR residents of different nationalities (Fierman, 2006). The starting point of the 'russification policy' is believed to be associated with the time when Kazakhstan was forced to switch over to the Cyrillic alphabet from Arabic and Latin alphabets in the 1930s and Russian language became a mandatory language of instruction in all schools (Johnson, 2004). It facilitated the growing authority of Russia imposing Russian values and Russian ideology. Thereby, this policy resulted in a lack of awareness of Kazakh people's mother tongue (Kazakh language). Another reason that yielded this unpleasant phenomenon is the proportion of ethnic groups in what is now Kazakhstan, where Kazakhs were outnumbered significantly. As Asanova (2007) outlines, during the Soviet period, Kazakhstan was reportedly the only Soviet Republic with the indigenous population (Kazakhs) in the minority. Two major historical developments resulted in a rapid decrease of the ethnic Kazakh population: 1) Collectivisation (uniting peasants' farms and animals into one collective farm) during the 1930s, that resulted in the starvation of 25% of the Kazakh population (1.3 million Kazakhs) (Volkava, 2012); 2) Falsely accused of betrayal by Stalin's 'Great Purge', massive deportations of Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Poles, Germans and many other nationalities to Kazakhstan took place between the 1930s and the 1950s (Dinasheva & Egamberdiyev, 2014; Kudritskaya, 2014; Martin, 1998). This caused Kazakhstan to become the only Soviet country whose indigenous population was in the minority at the time of its independence (Silova, 2002). The current position of the Kazakh language is much better than it was in the 20th century. However, 70 years of discrimination of the Kazakh language left wounds so deep that it is still difficult to consider it as the first or the strongest language of Kazakhstan (Mehisto, 2015).

As for the religious domain, Islam is identified as a constitutionally-recognised religion, which is followed by a majority of the country's population. Historically, Islam was deeply embedded in local people's cultural and social life. Our ancestors, famous enlighteners and poets were educated in *Medrese (Islamic religious school)*. In contemporary Kazakhstan, like in other Central Asian states, the predominant religion is Islam. However, today's Kazakhstan represents the case where the majority of Kazakh people are seen as secular and, at the same time, Muslim. In other words, religion has attuned to local people's values and traditions and it differs from Islam practised in the Middle East and South East Asian countries like Malaysia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, etc. This phenomenon can be explained by the profound impact of the Soviet Union system, where religion was vehemently rejected, Soviet atheist ideology was promoted, and people who tried to practise the religion were subject to active persecution. Another reason that may explain the difference in the practice of Islam in Kazakhstan and other Islamic countries is that, historically, Kazakh lifestyle was based on the nomadic culture and practice, which did not allow canonical Islam to be spread throughout the region freely. Commenting on the Islamisation of Kazakhstan, Khalid (2014) argues that:

Power in nomadic societies was imagined in genealogical terms, and to the extent that state structures existed, they derived their moral authority from *âdat*, tribal custom and the traditions of the elders (who were Muslims by definition), rather than through the juridical tradition of the *shariat [Islamic law based on Quran and Hadiths]* as it was developed in urban societies by generations of *ulama [Muslim scholar]*. (p. 33)

It is worth noting that, as Kazakhstan is officially a secular country, the constitution does not restrict practising or not practising any religion and belief. However, the Law of Kazakhstan does not permit religious instruction in schools, colleges and universities. If parents wish their children to receive religious education, they should send their children to institutions officially designated by the Agency of Religious Affairs and permitted by the Ministry of Justice.

1.4.2 Structure of the contemporary education system

The education system in Kazakhstan is overseen by the MoES and administered at a local level. According to the Constitution of Kazakhstan, schooling is mandatory for all students between the ages of 6-7 and 15-16 and is provided free of charge (Spain Exchange Country Guide, n.d.; The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan,

1995). Education in Kazakhstan comprises pre-school, primary, basic (lower) secondary, general (senior) secondary education, as well as post-secondary and tertiary education. Primary and secondary education consists of eleven years of schooling. In some regions, a 12-year education is being piloted in certain designated schools. In general, most schools are state schools, however, private schools have also been established over the years of independence since 1991 (Stateuniversity, n.d.). Despite the widespread belief in the democratisation and decentralisation of the secondary education system in Kazakhstan, the process of transition from the Soviet system seems to be somewhat passive and slow. Thus, it is widely known that a number of study subjects in secondary schools follow the content of the Soviet model. In addition, according to the OECD's (2015) recent reviews, the MoES was described as maintaining a highly centralised top-down system of education governance, allowing little political and administrative management at local levels which is a clear indication of the presence of a rigid hierarchy. These kinds of reflections of the former Soviet system are believed to have negative impacts on implementing student-centred and collaborative practice and preventing students from being creative and thinking critically. Not only does it affect students, but oftentimes, teachers feel intimidated, demoralized and unmotivated because of the power of those hierarchically superior to them.

Nurseries

Pre-school education (state nurseries) provides child care for children from the age of 3 until 5-6. Some of them provide school bus services. At the age of 5-6 children usually attend Class '0', the preparatory class for primary school which is identical to the 'Reception class' in the United Kingdom (UK). These classes reflect some elements of the primary school system. However, the main purpose of the '0' class is to help children to get accustomed to the primary school environment in order that the transition from nursery to primary school is smooth.

As of 2 July 2010, the percentage of children receiving preschool education was about 55% compared to 90-100% in developed countries such as France, Belgium, Italy, Denmark, etc. (UNESCO, 2015). In 2014 this rose to 78.6%, compared with an estimated 73.4% in 2013 (Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015).

General Education

General education curricula normally entail thirty-four weeks of study per academic year. The maximum weekly academic load for students, including all types of classroom and extracurricular academic work, should not exceed 39 hours. The academic year starts on the 1st of September and runs until the beginning of June (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2014). The basic curriculum has compulsory fields of study such as Kazakh language and literature, Russian language and literature, the history of Kazakhstan, mathematics, geometry, geography, physics, chemistry, physical health, arts, music, and a foreign language (Stateuniversity, n.d.).

General education programmes comprise eleven years of study and three stages corresponding to the levels of educational programmes (OECD/The World Bank, 2015):

- Primary education (as a rule, the standard duration is four years);
- Basic secondary education (the standard duration is five years);
- General (senior) secondary education (the standard duration is two years) (see Appendix B, p. 241)

General education programmes are free and compulsory for every resident of the country. The right to free secondary education is guaranteed by the Constitution. Primary education starts at the age of 6-7. After four years of study, children proceed to the basic secondary education, which lasts five years. On completion of the basic secondary education, students take final state examinations – a procedure called *External Assessment of Academic Achievement*. If they pass, they are awarded the Certificate of Basic General Education (*transl. from - Negizgi orta bilimi turaly kualik*). Depending on the result of the *External Assessment of Academic Achievement*, students may or may not be encouraged to continue their education. The certificate entitles its holder to be admitted either to general (senior) secondary education or to technical and vocational education, as well as to non-university-level higher education (college). According to OECD's (2014) report, approximately two-thirds of 9th-grade graduates prefer to be promoted to general (senior) secondary education, while the rest of the 9th graders go into vocational or technical education. Many **vocational schools** provide classes in various subjects such as home economics,

business administration, agriculture, etc. Some of them may provide education with particular emphasis on students' non-academic skills such as music, art, and dance.

Along with **comprehensive schools**, there are different types of secondary schools which all have catchment areas and individual mission statements. They carry different names based on their types: **gymnasiums**, **lyceums**, **boarding schools** and **specialisation schools** which are primarily for academically gifted pupils, where they are provided with extra hours for certain groups of curriculum subjects based on their course orientation. There are a number of networks of schools that can be classified into these groups, such as the 'Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools' (NIS) (*Autonomous*), 'Miras' (*Private*), 'Daryn' (*State*) and 'Bilim-Innovation Lyceums' (BIL) (*State*), which have their branches in different regions of the country; **correctional schools** – schools for children with special needs requiring additional support (i.e. visually and hearing impaired children). In Kazakhstan, the term 'correctional school' is also used for institutions for children with challenging behaviours. These schools are usually regarded as 'correctional' or 'specialised' schools. Their primary function lies in supporting behavioural issues through planned intervention.

1.5 Definitions of 'Giftedness' in relation to Kazakhstani education system

As previously mentioned, 'BIL' stands for Bilim-Innovation Lyceum. This is the most common way to refer to this type of school in Kazakh society. However, the formal name of these schools is considerably longer. For instance, one of the BIL schools is called 'Kyzylorda Bilim-Innovation Lyceum-boarding school for gifted children by №10' (A. Zhuzbayev, personal communication, March 18, 2017). Almost all BIL branches' names include the word 'gifted'. It is worth noting that what many Kazakhstani secondary schools (NIS, BIL, Daryn, Murager, etc.) seem to refer to by using the word 'gifted', is actually referencing academic intellect or intelligence, rather than students' exceptional abilities in non-academic skills such as music, art and dance. So: what is seen to constitute 'giftedness' or 'gifted' and how is it defined in Kazakhstani education?

Yakavets (2014b) notes that the discussion about giftedness begins with Terman (1916), who created the term 'intelligence quotient' (IQ) and defined giftedness as having a high IQ. Researchers (Horowitz, 2009; Yakavets, 2014b) claim that there is

no consensus over any single definition of giftedness. For example, Gagné (2013, p. 193) defines giftedness as ‘the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed superior natural abilities or aptitudes (called gifts) in at least one ability domain, to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of learning peers’. In contrast, Subotnik (2009, p. 155) argues that giftedness is a ‘dynamic construct’ that progresses over time and is different from intelligence. In the same vein, Horowitz (2009, p. 8) claimed that ‘giftedness and talent are expressions of high-end abilities, behaviours, and performances that are not necessarily inherent or enduring characteristics’, thereby suggesting that giftedness can be achieved by nurturing. Children may be gifted in one specific narrow area or in a number of various areas. They can be talented in both academic abilities and non-academic. In addition, giftedness might be inherited, as well as acquired. That is why it is difficult to reach any consensus on definitions of giftedness.

In 1996, President Nazarbayev signed a strategically significant decree called ‘For the state support and development of schools for gifted children’, which specifies important objectives aimed to provide academically gifted children with principal auspicious conditions for education. According to this decree:

A special school for gifted children is a type of comprehensive school, aimed at the teaching and training of children showing a wide range of intellectual abilities and special talents in different school subjects (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1996).

In accordance with this decree, in 1998, the MoES of Kazakhstan established the ‘Republican Research and Practical Centre’ (*in brief*, ‘Daryn Centre’), an organisation which was responsible for monitoring and promoting projects that sought to work with gifted children all over the country. The current primary task of the ‘Daryn Centre’ is to ‘realise the intellectual potential of the Republic of Kazakhstan through establishing mechanisms to identify, select, support, develop and teach talented children and expand international cooperation in the field of innovative technologies for the development of gifted and talented children’ (Yakovets, 2014b, p. 521). Taken together, the recent research evidence point towards the fact that education policy in Kazakhstan attaches high priority to ‘gifted children’ (OECD, 2014). More than 100 schools across the country, including BILs, cater for gifted pupils in Kazakhstan. Having given a brief description of ‘giftedness’ and its relevance to Kazakhstani schools, I will now move on to discuss the main two models of student achievement

assessment in Kazakhstan, which are primary indicators measuring the performance of schools for academically gifted students.

1.5.1 Educational Olympiads

One of the significant long-standing traditions of the Kazakhstani education system is the role of educational Olympiads in distinct school disciplines which operate at various levels. In Kazakhstan, a single State enterprise 'Daryn centre' (as mentioned in the preceding section) of the MoES of Kazakhstan discharges responsibility for organising and regulating the educational Olympiads in school subjects for secondary school students in Kazakhstan. Olympiads have several stages based on the administrative structure of the educational system of Kazakhstan. They are: In-School, District (*Rayon*), City, Regional (*Oblast*), Republican and International competitions. Winners from lower rounds are allowed to go through to the next round. Students from every school grade participate separately. All participants' works are assessed by a committee designated by the Educational Department. Successful participants are awarded diplomas and material prizes (e.g. books, tablets, laptops, etc.). In addition, the winners of republican and international Olympiads have a good chance to receive an internal scholarship to various higher institutions of the country. Increased emphasis on educational Olympiads put by MoES of Kazakhstan demonstrates the high priority placed on academically gifted students. According to OECD (2014) reports, Kazakhstan performs significantly better than many other countries. For instance, in 2010 Kazakhstan held the 51st international mathematical Olympiad at which Kazakh students reached the 5th place among 98 participating countries. Students' results at Olympiads is one of the main criteria for assessing school teachers' performance, where outstanding results may facilitate further upgrades in qualification categories and financial rewards from the government.

The results of educational Olympiads have been one of the key principles to measure the school's performance and to identify the high-achieving talented students in each discipline. The successful winners of Olympiads are awarded certificates and presents. Sometimes Olympiads provide winners with an opportunity to receive a scholarship to study at the prestigious national universities (Yakavets, 2014b).

Competitions in sports and other various sectors are considered to be regular procedures that help to identify the best performers in any particular field. But the

appropriateness of organising competitions like educational Olympiads among schoolchildren, where both participants and non-participants of Olympiads, and both involved and uninvolved teachers, have the potential to be affected by many factors taking place around the process of Olympiads, remains highly controversial. The constant concentration on high-achieving schoolchildren demands both students and teachers to spend much of their time in preparation for competitions and Olympiads. As a result of this practice, less attention is available for lower-achieving students, which meanwhile is likely to increase the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students (OECD/The World Bank, 2015). In addition, there is a potential risk of sensitive students being traumatised if they lose the rigorous contest. For these students, the entire process of Olympiads, including the preparation and participation stages, can create a great amount of stress and anxiety.

While a number of potentially negative influences have been put forward regarding the educational Olympiads, some researchers highlight the benefits of organising such contests. Since the notion of competition is integrated into every part of the culture, and since education should transmit culture, according to Verhoeff (1997, p. 4), ‘it is necessary to incorporate competition into education to help children get used to it in later life’. In their comments on educational Olympiads, Davidovich & Yurkevich (2009, p. 102) note that such ‘competition intensifies the rate of gifted child identification and raises the quality of their learning’. Campbell & Walberg (2010) broaden the scope of influences that Olympiads can have and claim that through Olympiads, children with talents are identified at an early age and once they develop their giftedness, their extraordinary skills and knowledge will contribute to society. Their study revealed that most Olympians go on to hold leading positions that increase their influence. Having discussed the Olympiads and their role in the education system, I will introduce the next assessment model of school effectiveness – Unified National Test.

1.5.2 Unified National Test (UNT)

After completing 11 years of school, students take the UNT, which serves both as a school graduation final exam and, more significantly, as the determinant of which course, if any, they may enter at which higher education institution. It plays a major role in shaping what young people have learned in school and how this was taught

(Winter et al., 2014). Initially, UNT was designed to examine information-retrieval based on the school course books and within the context of the particular school discipline. Since its first introduction in 2004, it has undergone numerous transformations. The current UNT consists of 120 multiple choice questions and lasts three hours fifty minutes. It includes five disciplines split into: three mandatory subjects (The History of Kazakhstan; Mathematical Literacy; Reading Literacy Examination) of 20 question-blocks on each, and two 'profile' subjects (depending on the choice of specialty) of 30 questions on each ("ҰБТ-НЫҢ жаңа форматы [The New Format of UNT]," 2018). For schoolchildren, UNT is of foremost importance as it gives a chance to gain a scholarship to higher education. In fact, UNT is the only chance for all school children (except for NIS students) to receive financial support from the government. Most importantly, UNT results are a significant factor in ranking schools and assessing teachers' performance. Based on this ranking, as a result of the attestation, teachers may receive salary increments and upgrade their 'professional qualification categories'. This caused a number of debates and posed some doubts as to its effectiveness and concerns over its influence on the overall education process, which will be explained next.

Some evidence (OECD, 2014) indicates that the nature of the UNT might draw teachers' attention to the high achievers at the expense of other lower-achieving students, not least because teachers in Kazakhstan receive various kind of rewards for their students' impressive results in testing. Further, it was reported that a good result in the UNT primarily depends on the excellence of students' memory skills. Hence, students are limited to amply demonstrate their knowledge of subjects, where they could solve math problems or show their potential by providing more justification for their responses. In addition to its discriminating character of those with poor memories and slow reactions, UNT was criticised for creating a situation where the high-achieving students may score very low, and the underachieving students may score high by chance (Ayubayeva, 2018). Another notable feature of the UNT is the opportunity provided to students to be exempted from taking a test, who participate in international scientific project competitions or educational Olympiads (see previous section) and receive the first, second and third prizes. This again raises concerns regarding the fairness of the scholarship awarding process, since prize-holders are more privileged in receiving funding compared to ordinary graduate students. In

general, the UNT, along with its potential benefits, has a number of challenges. As this topic is not my immediate interest, and without discussing further details, I will proceed to the next section, which describes the Bilim-Innovation Lyceums where my study is set.

1.6 Bilim-Innovation Lyceums (Kazakh-Turkish Lyceums)

Kazakhstan declared its independence when the economic crisis swept the entire post-Soviet regions, inflicting pain on millions of residents. Thus, the situation in the education sector was terrible. At this tough time, Turkey was one of the countries which offered help in many sectors including education. In 1992, the first BILs were established with the aim of building schools for gifted students following the initiative of the Presidents of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Turkey. Primarily three schools were opened in three cities: Turkistan, Kokshetau and Almaty (Yakavets, 2014b). All three were male-only private schools. Up until recently, these schools have been known by the name of Kazakh-Turkish Lyceums, or KTLs for short. After the failed coup attempt in Turkey in July 15, 2016, the Turkish government started urging other countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Somalia, Hungary and Pakistan to shut the Turkish schools, saying that they might be associated with ‘terrorist organisations’ (Dikmen, 2016; Hashim, 2016; Szakacs & Than, 2016). During the meeting with our President Nazarbayev, the Turkish premier Erdogan handed over the list of schools in Kazakhstan (Gumrukcu & Yackley, 2016; “Kazakhstan Vows To Send Gulen-Linked ‘Terror’ Suspects To Turkey,” 2016; News2night, 2016). Soon after the meeting, the MoES disproved the relations of BILs with any external groups, organisations or individuals and released a statement about the fact that BILs would continue their functioning (Idrisov, 2016; Medelbek, 2016). Afterwards, the board of trustees, school principals and parents came to the decision that the Kazakh-Turkish Lyceums should be rebranded as the Bilim-Innovation Lyceums (Ismetova, 2016). During his interview to the Kazakh national TV, the Chairman of ‘Bilim-Innovation’ International Social Foundation, Mr Darkhan Ote, commented that this decision was based on the long-term discussions with parents, principals and members of trustees of BIL. He also added that the political incident in Turkey in July 2016, has just accelerated the process (Amankulova, 2017).

Nowadays, thirty-four BILs are operating in the different regions across the country and they are all classified as boarding schools. As of March 2017, twenty-six of these schools have been providing an education program on a single-sex basis both for boys (20 schools) and girls (6 schools), in addition they are all funded and governed by both MoES and 'Bilim-Innovation' International Social Foundation (hereinafter 'Bilim-Innovation' Foundation; formerly 'KATEV') (D. Kozhabekov, personal communication, March 15, 2017). Concerning the uneven number of boys' and girls' schools, N. Tolebayev, the Vice-Chairman of 'Bilim-Innovation' Foundation, claimed that there are a number of impediments facing the provision of an equal number of girls' and boys' schools: firstly, it is the local education departments who decide whether to establish schools or not, and often a lack of funding brings projects to a standstill. For instance, the educational department of Aktobe has allocated a premise for a prospective girls' school. However, budgetary constraints of the local government halted the process; secondly, staff insufficiency in both number and quality is another major constraint on the provision of an equal number of schools for both boys and girls (personal communication, February 14, 2016). Despite his explanation, the situation is still not clear as to why girls' schools were not established in the cities where there are only boys' schools so that an overall number of single-sex schools across the country would be balanced. Thus, it raises some concerns about the fairness and equality of delivery of the education to girls and boys.

According to 'Bilim-Innovation' Foundation (2015) the BIL's vision is 'to become one of the best educational institutions in the country for its high quality in education and upbringing' and the main aim of the BILs is 'to educate the younger generation to be civilized, competitive, intelligent, multilingual, patriotic, social-oriented [...] individuals'.

The implementation of the project was administered by the 'Bilim-Innovation' Foundation, providing the finest and latest resources in curriculum development and organising the student selection process. Providing every BIL with well-qualified staff is also one of the key responsibilities of the foundation. The BILs provide the only school network in Kazakhstan where the teaching staff along with the school administration are rotated periodically from one school to another in order to maintain a consistent quality of instruction and keep an adequate balance of staff sufficiency among all schools. The curriculum in BILs focuses on the natural sciences with three

languages of instruction: Kazakh, Russian and English. The Turkish language is taught as an optional foreign language.

A competitive admission process includes examinations testing core subject knowledge (e.g. maths, language) and tests of children's IQ level. Only a certain number of applicants are offered places at the school based on the test results (Yakavets, 2014b). For instance, there were 585 applicants for the 2015/16 entry at the BIL in Oral City. Out of these 585 students, only 45 (7.7%) were accepted (B. Rysbekov, personal communication, November 15, 2015). In the more densely populated city Shymkent, for the 2017/18 entry, 1709 applicants were registered for 70 (4.1%) places, which means approximately 24 applicants competed for one place. Normally, students do not drop out of BILs during their 5-year studies. Dropouts may take place for several reasons, mainly due to a workplace change of the parents and families' other personal issues (B. Rysbekov, personal communication, June 12, 2018).

The academic performances of BIL students is one of the important indicators of success in Kazakhstan (B. Rysbekov, personal communication, November 15, 2015), especially in the UNT where all the graduates of secondary schools from all over the country take the tests to enter the universities (i.e. see Nazarbayev University, 2013). In addition, the results of national and international educational Olympiads show that the majority of students taking part come from BILs ("Daryn" Republican Scientific and Practical Centre, 2015). The average proportion of prize winners from BIL schools at the International Olympiads is 50 per cent of medals received by all participants from Kazakhstan (B. Rysbekov, personal communication, June 6, 2018).

Having worked for more than six years with BIL students, it is possible to say that there are many factors contributing to students' achievements. For instance, the support that students are receiving is not provided only by the school, but parents also play a great role in fostering the academic and social development of children. In this regard, I would like to mention a few examples from my experience: to the best of my knowledge, parents are required to conduct meetings with the whole class. Apart from those parents who live far away or are unable to visit the school for personal reasons, every week, one parent prepares a topic which is important and interesting for children and discusses it with them. Topics are usually arranged after consulting with the class

teacher or tutor. Parents are encouraged to play sports games (i.e. volleyball, football, table tennis) with the students in the school gym or stadium. By doing this, parents prepare for the competitions organised between the parents of BIL schools from other cities; another unusual activity for Kazakhstani schools is that parents have to invite their children's class teacher and tutor to the house where a student lives. By doing this, teachers and tutors are introduced to students' home conditions. This also helps to build a closer relationship between a student and a class teacher, as well as between parents and teachers (parental support and involvement will be discussed more extensively in the next chapter).

There is a strong belief in the Kazakhstani society, in my opinion, that the single-sex education is the main characteristic of the BIL school that leads them to success, although the substance of my case in relation to this assertion is somewhat different to this. However, I find it critical to understand whether the present emphasis on the single-sex secondary boarding school system in Kazakhstan is pertinent or not with regard to academic achievement. In my opinion, by taking into account the modern young students' psychological developmental requirements, and the wide diversity in thinking, understandings and emotions, there could be merit in exploring, analysing and reviewing the thoughts and perceptions of students and teachers of studying in BIL schools, where they could talk about the single-sex environment if they so wish. As Smithers & Robinson (2006) noted, the importance of both pupils' ability and background makes it essential that these are also considered in school comparisons. In the next chapter, I will discuss some of the school features that might be important in gaining a greater insight into the BIL schools' characteristics.

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Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The evidence reported in the Introduction Chapter appears to suggest that students' academic performance at BILs is better than in many other comprehensive and boarding schools. Furthermore, there is a widely shared cultural assumption in Kazakhstan that students perform better in a single-sex setting and this factor is popularly believed to be the primary reason for students' success in BILs. The introduction intimated, however, that the reality may be more complicated since factors other than sex may also play a part in students' success.

In examining the literature related to this study, first of all, I will discuss the theoretical notions informing this research. Particularly, I will review Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theories of social and cultural capital, Goffman's (1961a) concept of the 'total institution', and Festinger's (1957, 1962) cognitive dissonance theory. All these theoretical perspectives were relevant to my research in that they informed the interpretations of the study's findings and helped me to 'see the forest instead of just a single tree' and 'to make sense of data' (Neuman, 2014, p. 86). Secondly, I will discuss the literature on the single-sex environment in secondary schools, since this topic was my initial reason for embarking on my doctoral journey. In this section, I will present a brief historical background of single-sex schooling. Then I will discuss the pros and cons of single-sex schooling. Thirdly, I aim to give context to the facets that are peculiar to BILs along with the single-sex environment. Specifically, I will describe features such as the selective admission process, where I will briefly consider the student selection system of the grammar schools in the UK. This section will be followed by a coverage of the aspects such as family background and parental engagement, which potentially have a considerable effect on students' academic performance. Next, I will discuss the concept of residential education since this is considered to be another distinctive feature of BIL schools. Boarding schools in Kazakhstan are relatively young schools. That is why boarding schools of Kazakhstan will be explained from the historical perspectives of the USSR period. The last section of the chapter will discuss the school climate, which comprises three subsections: peer relationship; teacher's role; teacher's self-efficacy and development. These areas are relevant to my studies and are key to understanding the framework of the research

within the context of Kazakhstan, and particularly BIL boarding schools where my study is set.

It is worth restating that while this research was initially conceived as focusing on the influence of sex segregation in the performance of the BIL secondary schools, as the research has progressed its focus has shifted to include the topic of sex segregation as just one among several issues explored through students' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of studying in BILs. This development was also encouraged by the pilot phase which was carried out after the first year of my PhD programme.

2.2 Theoretical insights into the current study

This section justifies my use of three different theories. First, I will discuss Goffman's theory of the 'total institution'. Next, I will demonstrate an understanding of Bourdieu's concepts of 'social and cultural capital' and its relevance to my research area. Then I will present Festinger's theory of 'cognitive dissonance'.

2.2.1 BILs as 'Total Institutions'

The concept of the 'Total institution' was developed by Goffman (1961a, 2009), who carried out ethnographic research on the lives of inmates in an asylum. A total institution was described as a place in which all parts of a person's life are subordinated and under the control of the organisation in which they live. Boarding schools, along with prisons, army barracks, sanatoriums, mental hospitals and monasteries, were considered as examples of total institutions (Goffman, 1961b).

It is of great value to look at Goffman's research on 'total institutions' when considering the social system of the boarding school environment in schools such as BIL. Cookson Jr & Persell (1985) adapted Goffman's theory and claimed that prestigious boarding schools are places where the system functions as a 'total institution', simply because students in boarding schools spend all of each school day in school. Further, they paraphrased Goffman's definition of a 'total institution' as follows:

- 1) all activities are conducted in the same place under a single authority;
- 2) daily life is carried out in the immediate company of others;
- 3) life is tightly scheduled and fixed by a set of formal rules; and

4) all activities are designed purportedly to fulfil the official aims of the institution. (p. 35)

Goffman (1961a, p. 11) calls these characteristics ‘batch living’, which entails students being kept for an extended period of time with a group of others who possess the same social stance. Looking at these descriptions, it is possible to see how they are consistent with BIL features. Normally, the routine of BIL schools starts from early morning and lasts until they go to bed as scheduled. Days at the boarding school include studying, eating, sleeping and playing with their peers. Even a rest period is scheduled and supervised by teachers and tutors, which is also usually spent together with others. All the social activities, the time for study, work, sports exercises, and mandatory classes are with the same peers. Goffman’s description of the ‘total institution’ was similar to Polish-American sociologist Znaniecki’s (1968) description of a ‘closed system’. Znaniecki (1968) said closed systems comprise:

Systems each of which was composed of a limited number of elements more intimately inter-related with one another than with any objects which do not belong to the system, and each possessing a specific internal structure which isolates it in certain respects from external influences. (p. 12)

In the same work, he noted that it depends on the scientist’s point of view whether any given concrete object or agglomeration of objects form part of a closed system or not.

According to Goffman (1961a, p. xiii), for an institution to be declared ‘total’ the place should be a ‘place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life’. This all-encompassing attribute of total institutions can be a principal peculiarity of BIL boarding schools – that of not being able to leave and having restricted contact with the outside world. While being detached from life beyond the school, there are a number of elements (e.g. constant staff supervision/support, routine hours set aside for homework, involvement in after-school activities, etc.) that help to provide a pleasant environment for learners and which may foster their academic and non-academic development. On the other hand, it might be argued that the control of the school over the learners’ external activities may constrain the non-academic growth of students of boarding schools, with a potential impact on their academic outcomes.

‘Closed system’ and ‘total institution’, however, differ from the system of BIL schools in the fact that the BIL students are allowed to leave the school premises during

weekends. Albeit, students are required to return to school before 6-7pm on Sundays. As Znaniecki's (1968, p. 17) claims, 'no system is totally cut off from outside reality, because none of them determines completely and exclusively the nature and relations of all its elements'. Although Goffman's descriptions primarily focus on examples of prisons and asylums, I believe that the characteristics of BIL boarding schools conform closely to his notion of the total institution and that therefore this theoretical approach is relevant to this study and can help reveal the distinct aspects that boarding institutions embrace.

2.2.2 Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'Social and Cultural Capital'

As a term, 'capital' refers to a financial investment made for profit. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, however, broadened the use of the term beyond the purely financial. He described the notion of capital as accumulated labour, '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 labour' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). In other words, capital is a form of 'power' that individuals possess. Bourdieu's revolutionary work on the impact of capitals on educational success, '*Outline of a Theory of Practice*' (1977), drew educators' attention to its importance. He found a strong and direct correlation between student academic experience and outcomes and the social and cultural capital they possessed (Bourdieu, 1977). He also highlighted the interaction of three sources of capital that can be interrelated or transformed into one another: cultural (knowledge, skills), social ('connections', 'old-boy/girl networks'), and economic (wealth or money) (ibid.). Of these three, since my research study does not relate to any financial or economic aspect of the school or participants, I will focus on the first two.

Cultural capital can refer to high-status cultural indicators, such as knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and ideas, which can be passed on from parents to their children and influence their academic performance at school and their success in their life thereafter. Cultural capital is considered to be a potentially significant determinant for BIL students, in the sense that these children are from education-conscious families. By way of explanation, some parents convert their cultural capital into educational capital by supporting their children to get into these prestigious schools such as BILs. While studying in BIL schools, students get a chance to accrue their own cultural

capital, which gives them more advantage in moving to a higher 'class' and promoting other states of capitals, that is in line with the concept of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977; DiMaggio, 1982; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). An important aspect that needs mentioning is that, not only must learners be exposed to cultural reproduction, they also need to learn what is considered valuable. In this regard, teachers play a significant role in filtering values as to what forms of cultural capital should be transmitted. The role of teachers will be discussed in later sections.

Education can also enable those who have the low cultural capital to improve their capital. DiMaggio (1982, p. 190) conducted a study in which he measured and evaluated the impact of cultural capital on school success and concluded that: '[...] active participation in prestigious status cultures may be a practical and useful strategy for low-status students who aspire towards upward mobility'. Bourdieu & Passeron (1990), however, were more concerned about how the education system supported the system of stratification. In particular, Bourdieu (1974) is keen to take a critical stance about how the education system perpetuates social inequality. According to Bourdieu (1974), education:

is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one. (p. 32)

Bourdieu (1974) highlights that school systems are designed to favour and facilitate the continued success of students who are rich in cultural capital. He writes that schools have built-in systems of reward that cater to students who come from higher-status families that have higher levels of cultural capital, making it difficult for students who lack such capital to succeed in the educational system, which may result in a social inequality (ibid.). Bourdieu & Boltanski (2000, p. 917), indicating this issue as being central, suggested that 'the education market has become one of the most important loci of class struggle, which, [...] gives rise to a general and constant growth in the demand for education [...]'. Sullivan (2002, p. 142) also argued that, although the students of the lower-class category are explicitly disadvantaged in competing with higher-class students for educational credentials, the results of this inequitable competition are considered meritocratic. What is worse is that this process, as Bourdieu (1974) claims, legitimated by the educational credentials. This allows

upper-class people to go on to hold their dominant positions and legitimates the dominant status that they often endeavour to maintain.

Bourdieu (1986) categorised cultural capital into three: *embodied*, *objectified*, and *institutionalised* states:

[...] in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.). [...] and in the *institutionalised* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee. (p. 243)

To the best of my knowledge, there is an increased likelihood that all three forms of cultural capital are possessed by many BIL students. The transition of these capitals from parents to children happens either subconsciously, by exposing them to embodied and objectified cultural capital, or purposefully, by putting all their efforts to transmit their cultural capital to children (Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017). Sullivan (2001) in her study, concluded that cultural capital is associated with social class, and is transmitted from parents to children. She also argued that schools do not provide cultural capital (*ibid.*). She notes:

Neither social class nor educational credentials are significant once parental cultural capital has been included. This shows the effect of these background variables on pupils' cultural activities is mediated by parents' cultural capital [...]. (p. 902)

According to Sullivan's (2001) research, students who do not have that chance to inherit their parents' social or cultural capital, happen to be among the lower-achieving children. Although Sullivan's statement is valid in terms of indicating the importance of parents' capital, I would argue that schools, and boarding schools in particular perhaps, may also play a significant role in accumulating an individual's cultural capital (*ibid.*). Here, I agree with Bourdieu's (1990) idea that attaining cultural capital is a long-term process and cannot be limited to parents. Parents can 'plant' the notion of 'learning' which may later be significantly developed in a school environment. Cultural capital can also be acquired in places through activities, school classes, teachers and peer relationships (Kisida et al., 2014). In that sense, schools that set it as one of their goals, and are truly capable of developing their students' cultural capital, are theoretically setting themselves up to be more successful than those that

only concentrate on examination scores or university admission statistics. This notion can also be applied to the institutionalised state of cultural capital. This aspect is another crucial element in conducting an in-depth study into BIL schools.

Bourdieu's concept of *social capital* stands for the social networks that individuals have/build among friends, classmates, colleagues, and any network that can bring benefits from having a relationship. Referring to the importance of social networks, Bourdieu (1986) reports that:

The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilise, and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected. (p. 248)

The underlying message is that social capital expands by consolidating the resources from various sources. In education, social capital can be formed through school classes, extracurricular activities and friendships, etc. Through these stages, BIL students build their current and future social networks, which may have a profound influence in helping them achieve goals in academic, professional and other spheres. The amount of social capital possessed by individuals depends on the number of people that s/he can mobilise, and the amount of capital possessed by those thus mobilised. Here, based on my personal experience, I would also like to claim that the majority of BIL graduates maintain close 'old-boy/girl-network' relationships in the long term, both in social media and in real life. Relationships from school-years usually continue into later life and students continue to support each other – helping with jobs and introductions. The 'old boys/girls' network' of elite schools is extremely significant in the top echelons of politics and big business (McDonald, 2011). The 'old boys/girls' network' among BIL students continues to operate during the 'university' years'. For instance, the statistics of BIL schools indicate that graduates of these schools set the goals as high as possible to enter the most prestigious universities (Nazarbayev University, 2013; Seidimbek, 2013; Zuyeva & Olenchuk, 2017). Once they finish those universities, there is a greater likelihood that BIL students maintain the 'old boys/girls' network' through their professional life.

Coleman's (1988) research looks at how students' educational performance can be influenced by social capital in the family and society. He describes social capital as a significant structure that fosters educational attainment. His work highlights the

importance of having a social network; contributors of social capital that promote characteristics such as networking, trust, manners and so on.

Living in residential halls is believed to be an essential feature that brings people together and helps them to build a strong social network since they have to spend all their weekdays (sometimes weekends) together with their friends and their tutors. Students, therefore, cannot avoid the daily interaction with peers. All these circumstances allow students to build a social capital network. As previously mentioned in the Introduction chapter, BIL boarding schools have fewer students than comprehensive schools, which means BIL students have more chances to build close friendships with their groupmates. Moreover, a smaller number of students allows teachers to maintain more effective constant communication, which usually leads students and staff members of boarding schools become like family members, making the social capital richer and deeper (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991).

Habitus. In Bourdieu's (1977) view, individuals and their sociocultural positions are closely linked to each other. Bourdieu (1977) used the term '*habitus*' to describe this interaction between a person and the culture they live within, a word encompassing the habits, attitudes, and skills learnt from one's environment. The habitus suggests a notion of how people's attitudes learnt from the experience of the social context become 'implanted' in individual's personality and then become principal as to how he or she views the community and improves a sense of affinity (ibid., 1977).

A few questions arise when considering Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital alongside the status of BILs in Kazakhstani society: Are BILs just 'skimming the cream off the top' by picking academically gifted students and offloading underachieving students to avoid negative results? While trying to provide quality education, isn't BIL producing/reproducing and evolving social inequality and simply preparing students to take up or continue doing what their parents/relatives were doing?

Taken together, Bourdieu's theory can offer a useful lens to understand why students at BIL schools are more successful in the educational system than many others. Of particular relevance to this study is the use of social and cultural capital to assess and explore the BIL students' stratification and the reproduction of that stratification by

the educational system. It can also expand our perceptions of the practices and procedures related to the potential class reproduction both in and outside BIL boarding schools.

2.2.3 Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance was described by American social psychologist Leon Festinger as an ‘antecedent condition which leads to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction’ (Festinger, 1957, p. 3). In the same work, he first introduced the notions of cognitive consistency and cognitive dissonance. In short, cognitive consistency is when individuals want their views and thoughts to be consistent with their behaviours. If one’s behaviour is inconsistent with one of his or her views or thoughts, then cognitive dissonance occurs. In other words, it is a discomfort experienced by someone when holding contradictory views. This causes a person to become negatively aroused, and this arousal may prevail until dissonance decreases. Dissonance reduction can occur by modifying either the cognition or the behaviour, so the two are more consistent. Festinger (1957) goes further, saying that because of the discomfort, the person attempts to make a conscious endeavour to avoid cases that have a potential to increase the experienced dissonance and also seek ways to reduce it.

Dozens of research experiments have examined how cognitive dissonance influences people in various situations. For instance, a student for whom academic honesty is very important, but also keeps cheating from a friend’s work, will have a psychological discomfort as a result of the two opposite thoughts. In this case, a student tries to resolve it directly by changing his/her views on copying (‘That’s not a big issue, it doesn’t make that much difference’) or indirectly (‘I’m not the only student cheating, I’m much better than others’).

Indirect solutions, meanwhile, come in various forms. Self-affirmation is a frequently practised technique, in which an individual keeps focusing on positive aspects (Steele & Liu, 1983). This indirect method can take the form of the expression of positive affect (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). Another frequent method is a distraction, whereby one directs one’s attention to something other than the self (Zanna & Aziza, 1976). Stone et al. (1997) revealed that, given the chance to do so, people would prefer the direct technique in order to preserve their self-concept.

According to Festinger (2008), people try to decrease the influence of the discomfort caused by cognitive dissonance or eliminate it by any or all of the following three forms:

[a]the person may try to change one or more of the beliefs, opinions, or behaviours involved in the dissonance; [b] to acquire new information or beliefs that will increase the existing consonance and thus cause the total dissonance to be reduced; [c] or to forget or reduce the importance of those cognitions that are in a dissonant relationship. (p. 36)

In this research, the idea of adopting the cognitive dissonance theory first emerged after the pilot study. While analysing the students' responses with my supervisor, we found out that their views about studying at BILs seemed overwhelmingly positive. At some point, however, the students' responses began to seem as if they might conflict with their other views, which was an indication of the cognitive dissonance that students were experiencing. In this regard, I believe Festinger's (1957, 1962) cognitive dissonance theory is applicable for understanding the context, finding the potential reason for these conflicting views and assisting with interrogating the findings in the data presentation chapters.

2.3 Sex-segregation

The argument of whether sex segregation is beneficial for boys and girls or if its impact is rather limited, or even an impediment to the students' social development and academic achievement, is disputed. In Kazakhstan, there seems to be a common belief that a single-sex environment helps students to improve their academic skills without being distracted by the opposite sex. Meanwhile, there is some evidence that a single-sex environment negatively affects students' social development and self-concept. However, there appears to be no consensus regarding these and other implications of sex segregation.

In this section, before going into the discussion of the sex-related arguments, I will review some of the literature related to an overview of sex-segregation in secondary schools. First, I will briefly describe the concept of sex and segregation. Second, I will review the literature regarding single-sex schooling from a historical perspective. Third, I will discuss the arguments in favour of and those against single-sex education.

2.3.1 A brief overview

‘Sex’ and ‘gender’ are controversial terms. Stoller (1984, p. 9) defined ‘gender’ as ‘a term that has psychological and cultural rather than biological connotations’, while ‘sex’ is often referred to a biological category that is used for differentiating males from females. Some people use these terms interchangeably as if they are two sides of a coin. These discrepancies usually occur because of the absence of clear boundaries between two terms. For the purpose of maintaining the clarity and consistency, in this thesis, I use the term ‘sex’ to refer to physical differences between males and females. It is important to note, however, by preferring to use the word ‘sex’ rather than ‘gender’, I do not imply any assertion about the origins of differences found here.

The Collins English dictionary describes ‘segregation’ as ‘the official practice of keeping people apart, usually people of different sexes, races, or religions’ (“Segregation,” n.d.). For many people, the word ‘segregation’ normally has a negative connotation. It is seen as divisive for individuals, households, neighbourhoods and societies and is even more problematic when such segregation takes place involuntarily (Ham & Tammaru, 2016). When it refers to a community, the meaning of this word is almost always pejorative and humiliating. Peach (1996, p. 379) writes that social segregation has a ‘whiff of apartheid’ and is a completely adverse situation. He also stated that segregation is an obstacle to mutual understanding and has deleterious effects on the interrelationship between different individuals or societies. While it is commonly thought to be a source of unfairness, Peach (Peach, 1996) suggests that this is not always the case. One reason he puts forward is that the segregated environment allows for the preservation of the cultural values and identities of specific groups (language, religions, specific interests, etc). He also mentioned the protective role of segregation, comparing it with a herd of buffalos, trying to shield themselves from wolves’ attack.

With regard to schools, segregation may take place depending on various characteristics and abilities of students. ‘Segregation, whether racially or by religion or social class, may have alarming and dangerous consequences for the school system and for society more widely in the longer term’ (Gorard & Siddiqui, 2018, p. 5). As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, although the student selection process appears

to be widely criticised, the most distinctive feature of BIL schools, in my opinion, is its sex-segregated environment, which will be discussed in further paragraphs.

Research findings from a range of countries provide conflicting evidence as to the social and educational consequences of single-sex schooling (Cherney & Campbell, 2011; Lee & Lockheed, 1990). The controversy over whether single-sex schools are more effective than co-educational schools has been long-standing and seems likely to continue (Halpern et al., 2011). In Kazakhstan, single-sex schooling has been actively practised only since 1992 (Gaipov et al., 2013), whereas single-sex education has existed in many other parts of the world for centuries. Although there now seems to be a global trend for co-educational schools as opposed to single-sex ones, in Kazakhstan the reverse is the case. For example: in 2015 two new single-sex schools were established in the cities Zhanaozen and Kulsary (B. Rysbekov, personal communication, November 15, 2015); and in 2016 a school for girls was opened in Atyrau (B. Rysbekov, personal communication, February 18, 2018). Despite the increasing number of single-sex schools in Kazakhstan, the overall number of such schools (26) is 'a drop in the ocean' compared to those in the United States of America (USA) and the European countries. It is equally important to note that, historically, the very first secular schools in Kazakh land, established in 1864 by a great educator and ethnographer, Ybyrai Altynsarin, were single-sex schools (National Digital History, 2017). Unfortunately, later chronological notes after their establishment were not documented. What is evident about those schools is they are now mixed-sex schools. Up until the 1990s, during the Soviet period, the clear majority of schools in Kazakhstan functioned as co-educational; therefore, to understand the debate about single-sex schools, I intend to review the literature using sources from countries such as the UK, the USA, New Zealand and South Korea, since they have had a long tradition of single-sex education and continue to do so in modern society.

In the above-mentioned countries, single-sex schooling and/or sex-differentiated curricula was previously the norm (Anfara Jr. & Mertens, 2008; Smyth, 2010), as it was deemed appropriate for girls and boys to be taught separately, due to the differing roles they would fill in later life. Women were expected to take on the roles of mothers and housewives, while men were prepared for their role as husbands and future professionals. In other words, women's work was associated with domestic

labour and professional paid work was presupposed to be done by males. As noted by Albisetti et al. (2010, p. 5), in many south-eastern European countries, girls' schools were established in order to create the 'patriotic mother', who would consolidate the values of motherhood. As echoed in several chapters of the same work, the religious thinking was another reason for promoting girls' schools, which deemed it inappropriate for the sexes to mix after puberty. Despite the influence of the Soviet atheist legacy, given the fact that Kazakhstan has a Muslim heritage, there might be an interest from society in single-sex education. In other words, where there is demand, there is a supply. However, since Kazakhstan is a secular state, religion has no dominant position in any sector, including the educational institutions. It is strictly forbidden to explain any teachings within schools. In addition, it is also worth noting that due to the religious and cultural beliefs of the majority of the population of Kazakhstan, homosexuality is very rarely discussed and almost never socially accepted as a sexual choice. Consequently, I acknowledge that my participants' views might be influenced by heteronormative interpretation.

Transition from single-sex to co-educational. During the second half of the 20th century, mixed education was seen as a more progressive type of secondary schooling (Dale, 1971, p. 300). Up until that time, in the UK, there had been a prevalent tradition of same-sex schooling at the secondary school education, with mixed-sex schools being less common (Cocklin, 1982). Along with the UK (Delamont, 1989), many single-sex schools in countries such as Sweden (Brandell et al., 1997), the USA (Gajitos, 2010) and Australia (Campbell, 2003) transformed into co-educational schools. In the UK, this trend was also a part of a move to comprehensive education (Wakeling, 2010), which aimed to provide the same opportunities for all students, without dividing them into divergent classes and groups based on their academic ability and their sex from an early period in life (Brown, 2018; Walford, 2006).

In some of these countries, the transition from single-sex to co-educational was not implemented as the result of education-based studies (Scioli, 2015). Educating boys and girls together was simply more economical than keeping them separate. In his book 'Co-education: Sex differences and the schools', Kolesnik (1969) talked about the transition from single-sex to co-educational schooling in the USA and claimed that this practice was promoted for financial reasons:

Co-education at the high school level was not adopted as a consequence of any careful consideration of the inherent values such a system might have, and certainly not because of any research evidence pointing to its benefits. Nor was it introduced or accepted or defended, to any great extent, on the basis of any such principle as equality of the sexes. Rather, coeducation came into being rather unobtrusively as the more economical [...]. (p. 90)

He also noted:

The question of whether they [girl students] should be educated together with, or apart from, boys at the elementary level was resolved not so much on the basis of any principle so much as it was by economic necessity. (p. 86)

The idea that many schools were driven to move to a co-educational format on economic grounds is supported by Mael (1998) and Riordan (1990). Although the government's financial interest is important in investments, I would argue that significant decisions related to the education sector should not be primarily based on financial benefits. Instead, the decisions should be the result of thorough investigation and research focused on a particular aspect or issue of education. As Slavin (2002, p. 15) puts it, 'our children deserve the best educational programs, based on the most rigorous evidence we can provide'.

Marsh et al. (1989), in a longitudinal research project on Australian single-sex schools' shift to co-educational, revealed that there were social benefits from co-educational schooling that could be achieved without sacrificing academic attainment for either girls or boys. However, Marsh et al. (1989) concluded that social benefits received by boys might be stronger than those received by girls. While, according to Marsh et al.'s (1989) research, the transition from single-sex to co-educational schooling was supported mainly by teachers, the same process in the UK was supported by many parents who wanted their daughters to attend co-ed schools – assuming that studying alongside boys was a better preparation for life (West & Hunter, 1993). A study conducted by Elwood (1999), however, demonstrates that parents of children attending both sex-segregated and mixed institutions were of the same mind that at same-sex schools there are more favourable exemplary female role models in respect of leadership and opportunities to study in traditional 'male' subjects. Similar suggestions are provided by Measor & Sikes (1992), who state that '[s]ingle-sex schools provide a freer environment for girls to learn alternative and stronger roles' (p. 144). As Woodward et al. (1999) argued, however, findings advocating/disapproving the superiority of either single-sex or co-education over one

another often do not take sufficient account of the fact that academic and social differences exist between students prior to attending these schools; a position that is clearly informed by Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory.

It is usually believed that, in pursuit of the application of equal opportunities policies, the 'gender order' (Connell, 1987) has been converted and, to some extent, superseded by a preoccupation with women, and men are left with little but a 'crisis of masculinity' (Jackson et al., 2010). In the UK and most of the Anglo-Saxon world, the 'male underachievement' discourse has been particularly strong in the context of schooling, where this shift has been associated with views of schools as 'feminised' (Moreau, 2011). Younger et al. (2005) state that during the second half of the 20th century in the UK, female students' job aspirations and their selection of subjects were a matter of concern. This situation led to the development of various projects, some of which sought to involve more female candidates into various disciplines such as technology, science, engineering and maths. However, since the 1990s, policy-makers' considerations in education sector have switched from the educational practices of female-students to the underachievement of male-students (Moreau, 2011). In Australia, as an attempt to deal with 'male underachievement', more emphasis was placed on male role models and single-sex classes were promoted (Martino & Meyenn, 2002). Furthermore, in the UK, the 'Raising Boys' Achievement Project' was established in 2000 (four-year project) to cope with male underachievement in primary and secondary schools: one of the measures introduced was the use of single-sex classrooms in co-educational schools (Smyth, 2010). Although the dispute regarding single-sex schooling has been reiterated within the boys' underachievement discourse, Herr & Arms (2004) suggest that such form of educational practice can be at least as favourable for girls as for boys.

In the following two subsections, I will review some literature regarding the pros and cons of single-sex instruction.

2.3.2 Arguments in favour of single-sex schooling

Although co-ed schooling is currently dominant in most Western countries (DfES, 2004; Sax, 2006; Slingerland, 2014), researchers suggest that single-sex education has the potential to be more beneficial in some particular aspects, such as: university entrance performance, academic attainment in certain disciplines, and girls'

performance in 'male' subjects among many others (Cherney & Campbell, 2011; Crombie et al., 2002; Jackson & Smith, 2000; Kombe et al., 2016; Park et al., 2012; Shaw, 1995). In addition, there has been an interest in the potential advantages of single-sex groupings within mixed schools in order to reap the perceived benefits of both systems (Jackson & Smith, 2000; Kombe et al., 2016; Smithers & Robinson, 2006; Stables, 1996).

While presenting arguments in favour of single-sex schooling, many researchers controversially refer to the inherent biological and physiological differences of males and females (Halpern et al., 2011; Smithers & Robinson, 2006). Since my study is not oriented to biological or physical differences of students, I will not focus on these aspects of single-sex education in detail.

A comprehensive study conducted by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) (Morse, 1998) has critically examined the effects of co-educational schooling on girls' achievements, suggesting that boys' and girls' schooling needs to be reconsidered, particularly in the USA, where most schools are co-educational (Elwood & Gipps, 1999; Vail, 2002). The AAUW, however, suggested that the judgements about *success* or *failure* of single-sex schooling depend on stakeholders' goals (Morse, 1998, p. 12). AAUW also summarised that it was not clear 'whether the benefits derive from factors *unique* to single-sex programs, or whether these factors also exist or can be reproduced in co-educational settings' (Morse, 1998, p. 2). The claims made by AAUW are significant because they clearly emphasise the importance of the researcher's stance and approach while conducting research on single-sex schools.

Mael et al. (2005) called into question the superiority of co-educational secondary schooling over single-sex schooling and encouraged a closer empirical investigation of this question. The findings of that research, in general, reported positive effects for single-sex schooling on all-subject achievement examinations. They also found some benefits of a single-sex environment regarding self-concept and locus of control. Classroom dynamics that affect the students' learning process were referred to as an important strength of single-sex schooling. In line with this, Mogari (2017) cites the problem of domineering boys in co-educational classrooms as providing a valid reason for sex-based division. In regard to the same aspect of the co-educational

environment, Park et al. (2013), for example, have suggested that boys attempt to lead and dominate in-class activities and tend to perform more actively than girls, who would then step back and become reserved and silent. Furthermore, in mixed-sex environments, male students attempt to 'hunt for' and gain the teachers' attention, particularly in sciences, technology and maths, which, to some extent, may affect girls' academic achievement (Lee et al., 1994; Vail, 2002).

The view is widespread that eliminating distractions in respect to the opposite sex helps students to receive a quality education. Some scholars have claimed that youth subculture conflicts with academic attainment. An American sociologist-theorist, Coleman (1961), argues that students in American secondary schools are much more concerned about social interactions than with intellectual principles. This work has a number of limitations. The main weakness is that this research is outdated as data was obtained more than a half-century ago. Another problem with this study is that beliefs and values that this research is grounded in, belong to totally different worlds and eras. As for the above-mentioned statements, if we look at the present-day situation, in Kazakhstani context, there are some youth cultures which are supportive of academic achievement. The students who attend schools such as BIL and NIS, do care about intellectual principles and academic achievements. Mael's (1998, p. 104) discussion about social interaction stresses that a single-sex environment is the better place to avoid the 'rating and dating' culture and 'jungles of dating and social manoeuvre'. Some girls in co-educational schools – and some girls in single-sex schools tend to be more concerned about the way they look rather than the way they perform in the classroom (Hamer, 2011). Lichtenstein (1996) reported that, during adolescence, the peer pressure urging girls to focus on social success is more effective than the one that encourages them to reach academic success. He added that perceived 'social success' can have the deleterious effect on both academic achievement and self-confidence. What is worse is that girls are occasionally subjected to sexual harassment in coeducational environments (Guarisco, 2010). Recently, sexual distractions and teenage pregnancies have attracted attention in the Kazakh society. I find it important to note that in 2016, in the region, with more than 2,5 million population, where my research was set, 751 school-girls of age 14-16 became pregnant (TVK-UKO channel, 2017). While the risk may exist in single-sex environments, it has been suggested by Jackson (2017) that single-sex schools system could be safer for girls. He claimed that

usually, parents send their children to single-sex schools hoping that it is less likely for girls to get pregnant and less likely for boys to become involved in crime and misbehaviour. While I acknowledge that Jackson examines some essential elements of single-sex and coeducational schooling, I believe his discussion regarding the teen pregnancies remains a one-sided view, which characterises girls as weak and vulnerable. It should not be assumed that a male's physical power over females is being ignored. However, I would like to draw attention to the fact that it is equally important to consider males' mis/behaviour towards females. It is widely known that during adolescence, boys tend to acquire some masculine sex roles with some attitudes about their treatment towards girls. Primarily, boys are expected to behave in certain ways and enact forms of masculinity that are culturally and ethically appropriate. However, some boys want to impress girls and they behave in ways that are antithetical to academic achievement. If we look at teenage pregnancies from this perspective, it is possible to see that the issue is far more nuanced and complex. Thereby, separating boys and girls might not be the immediate solution to tackle the issue. Aspects like positive school climate, teachers' role and parental involvement might be of a greater significance than simply splitting boys and girls.

Proponents of single-sex schools believed that without the opposite sex at school, distractions would reduce and students would become more academically focused (Thiers, 2006). Warrington & Younger (2001) claim in this regard that some girls support all-girls' school because they believe that there are fewer distractions compared to co-educational schools. Their research suggested that the females can show enhanced confidence levels in single-sex schools, because of not having to worry about how their response/performance would be perceived by the opposite sex in the classroom (Warrington & Younger, 2001).

2.3.3 Arguments against single-sex schooling

Despite a large number of studies considering single-sex education advantageous, there is no clear consensus on the effectiveness of single-sex environment by virtue of many factors, including the student selection process (Morse, 1998; Park et al., 2013).

Significant research in the UK on gender and schooling was carried out by Dale (1969, 1971, 1974), providing a body of evidence to suggest that mixed settings are more beneficial for boys and girls in terms of student satisfaction and happiness,

school atmosphere, adaptability for married life and social adjustment. He also supported co-education for boys' academic achievement and proposed that girls' academic progress was not harmed by co-educational schooling. However, it is worth noting that his work did not deny the fact that girls in girls' schools often attained higher marks in certain subjects than they did in mixed institutions (Dale, 1971, p. 49). Dale (1974, p. 273) concluded that 'the average co-educational grammar school is a happier community for both staff and pupils than the average single-sex school'. Later, the belief that "coeducational schools are 'bad' for girls and 'good' for boys" was discussed by Jackson & Smith (2000, p. 410). Similarly, their research based on perceptions of students and teachers in England and Australia found that girls were disadvantaged in certain ways in mixed-sex school compared to single-sex ones, whereas boys seemed to benefit from studying in co-educational setting (ibid.).

Datnow et al. (2001) carried out a longitudinal case study of single-sex schools in six districts of California, USA. This research focused more on the problems experienced in implementing single-sex education in the public sector than the effects of single-sex education on the academic performance of individual categories of students. The monograph describing their research was conducted in twelve single-sex schools (six boys' and six girls' schools). The authors concluded that situational concerns of state funding, additional resources, tracking low academic achievement, socioeconomic status of parents and isolation from external negative impacts played more of a role of 'motive power' to establish single-sex schools than did attitudes about the importance of single-sex education.

The National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education (similarly, a USA-based organisation) also expressed opposition to single-sex education and wrote:

Single-sex education does not guarantee improved schools. Rather, the elements that enable children to succeed in single-sex education can be replicated in co-educational settings. These elements include a focus on core academics, small class size, qualified teachers, sufficient funding, and parental involvement. (2002, online)

Likewise, Brandes (2012, p. 242) stated that the outperformance exhibited by some single-sex schools may be 'a result of the special attention and resources devoted to the advancement' of students in those schools. She also mentioned that similar performance could be obtained if the identical resources were invested in co-ed

schools. In this regard, Halpern et al. (2011) asserted that any potential academic advantage of the single-sex institution can be attributed to students' initial pre-existing cultural capital.

Another aspect that needs to be highlighted is a difference in the selection process between co-ed and single-sex schools. Depending on the various peculiarities of the education systems of countries, single-sex schools that are academically oriented, as similar to BILs, often appear to be highly selective. This may have a negative effect on students as they are deprived of being socially mixed (Gorard & Siddiqui, 2018), which results in an increase in the gap between the academically advanced and underachieving students (Gorard, 2000, p. 105). This particular feature is questioned by Smyth (2010) while discussing the effectiveness of single-sex schools:

It is difficult to systematically compare single-sex and coeducational schools or classes. In many countries, single-sex schools are highly selective in their social and ability profile; even in countries with a larger number of single-sex schools, the two school sectors differ in their intake. How then do we 'control' for these differences in assessing the impact of single-sex education. (p. 53)

She also underlined that no technique can be helpful to solve the problem of comparison when two types of schools differ widely. A weakness of this argument, however, is that it fails to offer other techniques that might investigate the effectiveness of the particular institution. As 'one size does not fit all', every school is unique. The comparison might not be the best applicable approach in this regard.

All in all, arguments mentioned thus far point to the significance of consideration of sex-segregation as *one* of the features of the school among many others, not the *key one*. These reviews about single-sex schools provided me with a basis for exploring the perceptions regarding secondary schools in Kazakhstan. It has to be noted, however, that the academic debate on these issues has mostly been undertaken in European countries or the USA. Those studies were conducted on particular types of schools (e.g. British grammar schools) and during a particular time period, which cannot be generalised to Kazakhstani settings. That is why it is tempting to dismiss some of those works on the grounds that times have changed, and life is now different. In addition to some differences in education systems, a variety of other aspects (i.e. regional, historical, cultural and social) should be taken into account when conducting research into Kazakhstani schools. It is probably worth restating that sex-segregation

should not be the key variable to determine the effectiveness of schools or, at least, it should not be the only consideration when investigating the provision of quality education (Morse, 1998).

Taken together, I would argue that there is little research evidence, if any, to reinforce the views that distinctions between single-sex and co-educational institutions make a significant difference to student performance when ‘sex’ is considered in isolation. The key implication drawn from this is the idea that the ultimate goal, which encompasses the students’ academic success and their well-being, may only be achieved when all these factors work collaboratively, cooperatively, collectively in harmony.

2.4 Student selection on the basis of academic ability, and its implications

In single-sex schools, children are also differentiated by many factors, of which academic ability is believed to be an important indicator. According to a definition provided by Esposito (1973), ‘homogeneous grouping’ refers to the organisation of instructional lessons on the basis of students’ resemblance to one another, in one or more particular features, and this term has also been used by various later publications (Bygren, 2016; Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2015; LeTendre et al., 2003). The principles of this classification can be age, gender, social and physical maturity, I.Q., academic and other achievements, particular learning styles or a combination of many other aspects. Selection on the basis of academic ability can also be a subject of this section. This phenomenon is called ‘setting’ or ‘streaming’ or ‘banding’ in the UK, and ‘tracking’ or ‘ability grouping’ in the United States (Gamoran, 2002). Ability grouping can refer to a range of organisational arrangements *within* and *between* classes, while sometimes *entire* schools might have the streaming features (DeSena & Ansalone, 2009). Similar definitions can be found in the works of many other researchers (see Benn, 2011; Houghton, 2013; Loveless, 2013).

As mentioned in earlier sections, children in Kazakhstan are selected after 6th grade through examinations to study at BIL schools. This practice misleads people who think that students’ high academic performance in BIL schools is largely due to school teachers, classes and activities rather than the nature of the children selected (Gorard & Siddiqui, 2018). Although the learners’ separation by ability into different school

types is a widespread phenomenon, it is a highly debatable policy (Clark, 2007; Guyon et al., 2012). The current debates in the literature about segregation by ability will be discussed next.

Arguments for and against ability grouping have been substantially similar since the beginning of the 20th century (Slavin, 1993). Early examples of research into ability grouping found that grouping by academic ability improves the performance and aspirational principles of the students at the top end of the achievement distribution, however, it had a negative influence on students at the lower end (Alexander et al., 1978; Gamoran, 1987; Kerckhoff, 1986).

There is another reason for not viewing 'separating by ability' in a favourable manner. A number of theorists (Alexander & Cook, 1982; Gorski & Zenkov, 2014; Sax, 2002) argue that this system blatantly denies equality of educational opportunity to many students. In this regard, one of the extensive investigations of streaming and student selection was carried out by Hanushek & Wößmann (2006). They examine the effects of streamed secondary school systems across about twenty countries by comparing student performances between primary and secondary schools across streamed and non-streamed schooling systems. They reveal that streaming tends to raise educational inequality and, to some extent, has a negative effect on average performance. These findings have been disputed by Waldinger (2007) who finds that results from using different streaming measures are not robust and the sample is restricted to OECD countries.

Moreover, research by Singer (2008) vehemently argues against the idea of homogeneous grouping. Firstly, ability grouping creates academic and social streaming, with students feeling segregated and stigmatised. Secondly, if students are labelled as less able it may damage their self-esteem and make them unwilling to study. A further disadvantage is that students who are placed in the higher-performing homogeneous groups may develop an exaggerated self-opinion about their abilities and begin to dislike their 'other' classmates.

Separating students by ability is often questioned by educationalists and parents. It has been the topic of constant research and discussion for more than half a century (Ansalone, 2010). Those in favour consider it to be imperative for high-ability groups,

believing that it improves self-concept and self-development in the overall learning process (Belfi et al., 2012; Kessels & Hannover, 2008), while lower-streamed students are more likely to become less optimistic about their academic ability (DeSena & Ansalone, 2009; Hallam & Parsons, 2013). It is also argued, however, that through segregation, pupils placed in higher levels are allowed to advance at an appropriate pace with students of similar ability, and that by not having to make detracting comparisons with more able peers, less able students develop more positive self-concept and motivation. According to the self-development perspective (DeSena & Ansalone, 2009), the essential contribution of segregation is the improved self-concept and affective development that results from this educational practice. Advocates of this idea also claim that ability streaming allows educators to adjust teaching to the particular group of learners rather than to teach those students who have been considered 'average' and miss those who have been characterised 'slow' and 'gifted' (Ansalone, 2000, p. 112).

Clark (2007) has applied a different method to explore the impact of attending grammar schools in England during the 1970s. He adopts a logistic regression design, comparing students who reached just below the entrance test threshold with those scoring just above. Clark's research reveals the influence of attending grammar school for the marginal student. He identifies positive impacts on academic course-taking and on university enrolment, but minor effects on test results.

In line with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital, attending selective secondary schools is often believed to lead to an admission to a prestigious university, higher status, higher income and more opportunities for employment in later life. The benefits of admission to elite secondary schools include the school's prestige and elite graduates' further academic and professional success. It is believed that the most prestigious higher institutions are populated with students from elite secondary schools. For instance, Golden (2007) highlights the systemic formation of applicants from American elite secondary schools to gain admission into prestigious higher institutions. I acknowledge that the features of above-mentioned elite schools by Bourdieu (1986) and Golden (2007) might not necessarily correspond to those elite schools in Kazakhstan by many means. The common feature, however, is that students are academically successful. According to the latest statistics, more than twenty per cent of graduates of all Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools were accepted to the most

prestigious Kazakhstani higher institution, Nazarbayev University (Mustafin, 2018). This evidence shows how selective schools may affect students' overall success during and after the secondary education.

Another important aspect that will help us to expand our understanding of the selective system of BIL boarding schools is a discussion of grammar schools from the UK perspective, which will take place in the next sub-section.

2.4.1 BILs as grammar schools

The school system in the UK that is closest to BIL boarding schools is the system of grammar schools. Before discussing the grammar schools, I would like to present a brief historical information about these institutions.

In the UK, grammar schools, as the fully state-funded national education system, emerged after The Education Act of 1944, with the introduction of the 'Tripartite system' (Gorard & Siddiqui, 2018). The main feature of these schools was their selective admission process of all or most of their students based on their academic results. According to Wright (1956), grammar schools were for 'the pupil who is interested in learning for its own sake'¹ and sought to provide the type of education that was thought suitable for learners of diverse abilities and interests. The Ministry of Education made an announcement² in 1965, which encouraged local authorities to move to comprehensive education. The number of grammar schools nearly halved in the following decade. In the 1980s, grammar schools in Wales and Scotland were terminated, but in England and Northern Ireland, they are retained (Gorard & Siddiqui, 2018). According to statistics of the House of Commons of the year 2017, there are 163 grammar schools in England, compared to a number of almost 1,300 schools in the mid-1960s (Gorard & Siddiqui, 2018). As some researchers suggest, grammar schools are academically more successful than other types of schools (Andrews et al., 2016; Daly, 1991). However, Yang & Woodhouse (2001) claimed that if the prior attainment of students was considered, then grammar and comprehensive schools would not have any significant difference. A quite recent

¹ Norwood Report 'Curriculum and examinations in secondary schools' (1943), Chapter 1

² Circular 10/65, 'The Organisation of Secondary Education', was produced by the Department of Education and Science (DES) in Britain on 12 July 1965, and was sent to all local education authorities (LEAs) and the governors of direct grant, voluntary aided and special agreement schools. (McCulloch, 2016, p. 225)

investigation on this subject revealed that grammar schools did not produce any effect on GCSE results (Delvin, 2018). In 1998, after long-standing debates, Tony Blair's government put a complete ban on further promotions of grammar schools. However, recently, there has been an interest in supporting English grammar schools and the Department of Education has announced financial support of £50 million for 163 grammar schools (Adams, 2018b; Rochelle, 2018). Supporters of grammar schools claimed that these schools could primarily foster social mobility. As reported by 'The Guardian' (Mason & Ross, 2016), Downing Street made a statement saying that: 'Every child should be allowed to rise as far as their talents will take them and birth should never be a barrier' (online). The government's decision was met by a number of critiques stating that grammar school pupils are deprived of social and emotional advantages (Siddique, 2018). Moreover, the selective system of grammar schools was another subject to criticisms for its reinforcing inequality in access to better quality education (Adams, 2018a; Benn, 2018; Delvin, 2018).

The above-mentioned arguments have been raised for many years. The advocates of grammar schools suggest that they boost social mobility by allowing bright children from deprived families to attend the high-performing schools, although research reveals that children from an underprivileged family background are less likely to pass an admission test and attend a grammar school (Cribb et al., 2013). Similarly, Gorard & Siddiqui (2018) criticised grammar schools for impeding social mobility, especially in working-class communities, questioning if there is *any* systematic 'effect' at all. A study carried out by Prince's Trust (2016) argued that it was family's 'inherited opportunities' that played a great role than anything else in gaining access to grammar schools. Commenting on this point, the executive chief of Prince's Trust, Martina Milburn stated:

There is a social bank of mum and dad which can open as many doors as the financial bank of mum and dad. Sadly, not all young people have the same access to it, and all too often young people are locked out of jobs and other opportunities simply because of where they've started in life. ("The social bank of mum and dad," 2016)

According to Gorard & Siddiqui (2018), not only selective admission leads to inequality. Inequality in gaining access to high-quality schools causes concerns from both an equity and efficiency point of view. Differentiated learning opportunities, better instructions of subjects by more qualified teachers, the

affluence of higher standard resources in selective schools broaden the gap between socially, culturally and financially privileged students and those who have fewer chances to possess these advantages. Burgess et al. (2014) claim that inequality is exacerbated by bringing the bright students together with the best teachers. Based on these and other considerations, Gorard & Siddique (2018) conclude that separating students by their academic ability does not seem to lead to better outcomes for both privileged and less-privileged students.

Taken together, these historical perspectives have shed some important light on experiences of student selection processes. As such, it remains a matter of discussion as to whether the system provided by selective schools has a positive or a negative effect on youth's education: some may argue that if higher salaries represent efficiency and if this measure is growing at the top of the distribution then this may demonstrate some positive effects on economic improvement of the government. Although grammar schools have an immense potential to promote what Bourdieu (1986) calls cultural, social and educational capital, on the other hand, as mentioned earlier, there might be adverse influence of inequality reinforced by selective schools.

2.5 Family background characterised by the relative social advantage

As mentioned previously, learners' academic success might be influenced by a variety of factors. Two major aspects of BILs (*single-sex setting and student selection (ability grouping)*) have already been briefly discussed. There is, however, a strong likelihood that some other factors may contribute to students' academic attainment. There is a substantial body of literature that suggests that learning outcomes (academic achievement and performance) are determined by factors such as family, school, society and motivation (Bass, 2014; Khajehpour & Ghazvini, 2011) and clearly this implies quite a complicated set of interacting influences on the learner's achievement. This section aims to develop further insights into other aspects of BILs so as to be able to approach and analyse them from different perspectives.

Most societies have been, and many of them still persist in being, stratified by belief, race, age and other various characteristics. Among these aspects, the social status and economic background of families, their occupational status and their relationship to educational experiences are very important in terms of influencing students' effective

learning. This statement is consistent with the theory of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). It is important to discuss parents' social and cultural capital since the evidence shows that, in many cases, as mentioned in the earlier section (see p. 41), applicants with lower social and cultural capital have less chance of passing the admission process of selective institutions, which as a result are populated by upper-class students, thereby reproducing social class inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This notion of inequality can also be traced to selective admission process which was explained in earlier sections.

In this context, previous research findings have noted that social and economic status, particularly in selective schools, is predictive of students' academic performance (Asikhia, 2010; Stewart, 2006), for which the notion of capital can offer an explanation. Morgan et al. (2009) investigated the effects of factors such as socioeconomic status, race, and mixed/single-sex environment on children's learning-related behaviour problems and found that students from lower socioeconomic communities developed academic skills more slowly than those from higher socioeconomic households. As Bass (2014) notes, parents with cultural capital know how to monitor their children's progress and they know a repertoire of methods to help their children when necessary and make informed decisions in their favour. This means young people from groups with smaller amounts of resources and limited social and cultural capital often do not have access to top-class educational opportunities (Diamond, 2006). Moreover, it has been suggested that parents with higher education degrees tend to be more concerned about their children's academic careers, thereby laying more emphasis upon academia than those parents with lower educational achievement and less involvement in their children's education – thus leading to higher academic attainment among the children of the former (Stewart, 2006).

Despite this view being predominant in the literature, it is possible to argue that parents from all socioeconomic groups have an awareness of the significance of knowledge and education – and in some cultural and ethnic groups this is particularly strong (Kipnis, 2011; Sharma, 2013). What parents are more likely to lack is the social and cultural capital that enables them to know what needs to be done to access education and also to support their children's learning in a range of ways – by passing on their own knowledge and habitus (Bourdieu, 1989). Together, this section indicates that the very first stage where parents' social and cultural capital interferes is on

admission to the school. There is no doubt that this stage is important for thousands of applicants who want to receive a place at BIL schools. However, parents' role does not end in supporting their children to win a place at school, but rather, it appears to be the beginning of a journey, where students might be in need of their parents' engagement. This aspect will be discussed in the next subsection.

2.5.1 Parental engagement

This section addresses an overview of the parental engagement as it intersects with the present study's findings and themes. Before discussing the topic, I believe it will be useful to briefly clarify the terminology used for the heading of this section. 'Parent' in 'Parental' does not necessarily mean a student's mother and/or father. 'Parent' implies the adult who has a responsibility to take care of the student. It may be parents, grandparents, elder siblings as well as carers who are involved in decision-making for a child. As for the second half of the term, there are various views over what connotes 'parental engagement' and 'parental involvement'. It is possible to perceive the terms in a very limited meaning of 'parental involvement in the education process', compared to the more comprehensive and wide-ranging notion of 'parental engagement in the education process'. 'Engagement' implies a more far-reaching concept than its counterpart 'involvement' (Goodall, 2013). The term 'parental involvement' has usually been perceived as a focus on an interaction of parents *with the school* in school-initiated activities, rather than a concept that should aim to reinforce children's academic and social development. The interaction of parents with the school may be considered as a small part of the entire process of parental engagement with student's learning. Therefore, instead of 'parental involvement', I prefer to use 'parental engagement' in this thesis.

Students' success and adjustment might be influenced by many people surrounding them. As I will explain in the section 'Teacher's role' (p. 61), different communities are also involved in contributing to learners' academic achievement (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). In addition to those communities, there are various extracurricular activities such as dancing, singing, sports clubs and youth groups, which are often organised outside of the school premises. They also contribute to building children's capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). However, as noted by McCoy & Cole (2011) and the Department for Children Schools and Families (2008), parents are the first

educators and role models in a child's life, and therefore have a stronger influence than any other communities on children's early years, as well as throughout their school years. A staggering amount of research has documented the importance of parental engagement in explaining children's academic motivation and performance (Asikhia, 2010; Hill & Chao, 2009; Kaplan Toren & Seginer, 2015; Toren, 2013; Weathers & Goodale, 2011). As Flynn (2007) stated, the significance of parental engagement is an unarguable aspect in children's academic outcomes, whereby the majority of students who were accepted to school through a selection process have extensive support from parents and relatives. The influence of parental involvement will be discussed from different perspectives here.

Researchers have found that typical parents with higher cultural and educational capital are more involved in the education of their children than those with lower socioeconomic status (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; DiMaggio, 1982; Neufeld, 2011). Benson & Martin (2003) argued, however, that parents with no/less cultural and educational capital can also be involved in the education process and be encouraged to contribute to their children's success through clear, deliberate actions of teachers, without emphasising the socioeconomic and educational status of parents. In other words, a lack of cultural and educational capital of parents can be bypassed to focus on the further involvement of those parents in the educational process. An additional responsibility in attracting parents with low capital lies with the school.

According to Desforges & Abouchaar (2003, p. 4), parental involvement can take various forms including 'good parenting in the home, [...] parent-child discussion, [...] contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance'. Jeynes (2005) supported the notion that, regardless of the type of engagement or the period of engagement, children become more successful learners when parents are engaged in their children's education. Otherwise, as Petrovic (2009) noted, the lack of congruence within student-parent-school coordination may negatively influence the learners' academic achievement.

Adolescence is a crucial developmental life phase that requires intense parental engagement. Normally, as children grow older, parents' active engagement in school activities reduces, but the relationship between parents and adolescents continues to

play a great role for academic development (Singh et al., 1995). Adolescents go through various (physical, mental and intellectual) changes, including revising their roles and relationships with their parents (Casey et al., 2008). Parents, meanwhile, might be in need of more practical information as to what strategies would be helpful and are relevant in leading their children towards positive academic attainment.

There are some aspects that might seem elementary, but to some extent, must be practised during the parental engagement process. Before involving parents in the educational process, schools should ensure that parents feel that they are always welcome in the school and that they carry certain responsibilities (Benson & Martin, 2003). These responsibilities (assisting with a child's learning, social problems, inappropriate behaviour, etc.) should be identified and introduced to parents (ibid.) so that the importance of their participation could be clearly recognised. Another aspect that deserves attention is the manner and culture of communication and interaction of teachers with parents. Sometimes, parents might not receive proper respect or they might be intimidated by school members and administration (Flynn, 2007). What makes the communication productive is when parents are treated equally by employing good listening skills, and when conversations start and finish on a positive, pleasant note (Coleman, 1991). Disregarding these actions may keep parents reluctant to be involved in school life, which may have an impact on students' performance. Let us discuss, therefore, the potential reason for parents' reluctance to be engaged in school life.

All parents' attended schools as students at one time. Some parents remember their school years as a pleasant experience, while for others, their childhood might remind them of only negative memories. They might have experienced various failures, encountered serious problems, some might even have been expelled from their schools before graduation (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Accordingly, these unpleasant memories might reflect negatively on their own children and, consequently, may cause both the parents and their children to feel defensive about school. Another well-known reason for parents' reluctance to communicate with teachers is that the fact that, very often, parents are contacted only when there is a need to report a particular problem with their child (Henderson et al., 1986). These basic aspects may impede teachers in attracting parents to participate in the educational process and overcoming

these obstacles can have a noteworthy influence on children's performance and productivity.

While trying to engage parents in their children's learning process in an effort to enhance the academic performance, parental involvement may be superseded by parental pressure, which may lead to different outcomes. Predominantly parents of Asian cultures, aiming to secure places in prestigious institutions, tend to show expectations which are usually seen as pressure over their children (Shen et al., 2014). It is important for parental pressure and parental support not to be mixed. Therefore, it is equally important to deal with parental engagement and support very carefully. Overlooking this situation may generate stress and anxiety, which may result in decreased self-efficacy (Shen et al., 2014).

Having been involved in the education process of BIL school in different cities of Kazakhstan for almost six-and-a-half years, it is safe to say that BIL schools have a particular strategy that makes parental engagement important in achieving higher results. As mentioned in Chapter One, parents occupy a significant role in students' school life. Therefore, it is of a significant importance to mention parental engagement while discussing school factors.

In this section, I have reviewed some literature regarding the importance of parental engagement in their children's school life. The next section will discuss the BIL schools as boarding schools.

2.6 BILs as boarding schools

This section discusses BILs as 'boarding schools', as it relates to one of the primary features of BILs. 'Boarding school' can be broadly defined as education provided at a location where students live and learn outside of their home environment. The tendency of sending children far from their families to study is one going back over centuries (Papworth, 2014). In Goffman's (1961a) definition, boarding schools are 'total institutions' where an individual does not have any barrier between the place of sleep, work and play (this theory was discussed in section 2.2.1). A dormitory can also be defined as a controlled residential environment where learners often follow the fixed schedule of educational, social and physical activities, under the constant supervision of their tutors/teachers/mentors, from the morning until the end of the day.

Although staying in a dormitory may seem to be limiting in regard to some aspects, such as freedom and choice, it has a potential to provide other opportunities. By design, boarding school students have to interact constantly. In a review of a British boarding school, one student, Fiammetta states: 'My friends have become like my extended family; and I have learnt to adapt to people who I might not have chosen to get close to' (Wenkert, 2015). More recently, Behaghel et al. (2015) highlighted various points that boarders benefit from and some of the positive effects on students' cognitive outcomes:

Living together in the boarding school increases solidarity and cooperation among students [...] boarders are more likely to report that their teachers keep explaining until all students have understood, that they give them the opportunity to express their opinions, and that they care about students' academic progress. (p. 12)

Furthermore, a number of studies (Austin, 1995; Bass, 2014; Clothey, 2001; Hansen, 2012) have shown that the majority of boarding schools have far more control over students' time than in a day school, allowing schools to more-fully implement practices proven successful. Thus, it is a widely held view that a disciplined (supervised) environment is usually highly effective for students' academic progress. Earlier studies (Austin, 1995; Bass, 2007) show that the structure of boarding schools creates more favourable circumstances for school staff to spend more time with students and provide a stable, supportive, protective and nurturing environment that facilitates students performing to their full potential. As Bass (2014) points out, when schools have charge of pupils in evening hours, it creates a greater chance for teachers to ensure that students are receiving the structure they need for their success, and this is probably one of the most significant factors that may affect children's academic outcomes.

Critics have questioned the experience of boarding schools, however (Bass, 2014; Duffell, 2000, 2010, 2012, Partridge, 2007, 2012, Schaverien, 2004, 2011). Schaverien (2011) classified as 'boarding school syndrome' the symptoms and behaviours that she identified as a result of her research. Her studies revealed that boarding schools had a potential to lead to some patterns of trauma on school boarders, which might have been caused by pressures of homesickness, limited freedom and the monotonous routine of school life. The term 'boarding school syndrome' was coined by the Canadian psychiatrist, Charles Brasfield (2001).

Similarly, Elias et al. (2012) and Duffell (2000, 2012) claimed that some former boarders had benefitted from boarding school, while others had had some traumatic experiences and suffered from poor mental health.

Very few studies have been conducted, however, that evaluate the effectiveness of Kazakhstani boarding schools for their ability to increase knowledge, social or cultural capital in students (OECD, 2014; Yakavets, 2014b). Given that Kazakhstan's boarding education system is only a few decades old, it is necessary to first understand the cultural milieu of boarding schools from historical perspectives. The next subsections, therefore, consider the history of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) boarding schooling and outline the establishment of boarding schools in Kazakhstan.

2.6.1 Boarding schools in the USSR

The present study proposes that, given that Kazakhstani boarding was a derivative of a Soviet structure, it was appropriate that the history of USSR residential education be considered to establish a definition of Kazakhstani boarding schools.

The term '*mektep-internat*' [transl. from Kazakh – 'boarding school'], apart from its interpretation as a boarding school, has been used diversely and may have had multiple meanings: '*Mektep-internat*' has referred to the system and process of involving children with special educational needs; children of large families; and children with certain developed abilities (or skills) and knowledge (i.e. artistic, sporting, musical, etc.). In some boarding schools, priority admission was given to children of widows, unmarried mothers, parents with special assistance, orphans, and others in need of care (Ambler, 1961; Kaser, 1968). It is worth stressing that the schools that I am/have been focusing on are the 'special' boarding schools for academically gifted or talented children (Kaser, 1968, p. 102).

A famous Soviet educator A. Makarenko (1888-1939) is believed to be the first person to have established boarding schools in the territory of the former USSR in order to support the 'wild children' of Russia with education, following the anarchy of the First World War (White, 2004). Another significant purpose of establishing boarding schools was to 'assimilate indigenous peoples into the dominant society' (Smith, 2009, p. 2), under the policy of '*korenizatsiia*' [indigenisation] (Fierman, 2006;

Ubiria, 2016, p. 148). Several authors have considered the negative effects and experiences of residential education settings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Armitage, 1995; Cardinal, 1999; Glenn, 2011; Goffman, 1961a). The point they make is extremely important in understanding the initial purpose of some of these residential schools of the Soviet regime, where the main purpose of their establishment was to 're-socialise' a particular group of students. For instance, educated in those boarding schools, students who used to have a nomadic lifestyle, would become acculturated to customs of what Soviet regime impelled them. In other words, boarders would be stripped of their cultural heritage. The consequences of the 'acculturation' process would primarily have an influence on the identity of the nation, which involves its native language, tradition, religion and lifestyle. It is fact that those who established boarding schools did not care about cultural values, which is well-reflected on the level of Kazakh (native) language in contemporary society. Some studies (Barton et al., 2005; Elias et al., 2012; Hirshberg, 2008) showed that some former boarders' psychological trauma had an effect on indigenous families and communities, causing 'intergenerational trauma' (Bombay et al., 2009, 2011) – a type of post-traumatic stress disorder inherited by later generations of indigenous people who went through the trauma of studying at boarding schools. Along with Soviet countries, schools of similar type with similar aims were in various countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Smith, 2009).

In the 1920s, the Committee of the North (1924-1935), which was organised to administer the affairs of a group of minority nationalities, launched a three-pronged educational initiative. One of the objectives was the development of a school system that included 62 boarding schools (Vakhtin, 1992). In the case of Kazakhstan, considering its large territory with steppes, an abundance of small settlements scattered at a great distance from each other, and a relatively low population density, the implementation of a new educational system had a great effect on people's nomadic lifestyle (Abdrakhmanova, 2017). Despite various difficulties caused to Kazakh families, this reform was a breakthrough in promoting people's literacy, which had been only 2% before the Russian Revolution in 1917 (Tursynova & Utemuratova, 2011).

A massive establishment of boarding schools throughout the territory of the USSR took place after the Soviet leader, Nikita S. Khrushchev's, speech³ at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR in 1956 (Ambler, 1961; Lenoir, 1968). Initially, the number of boarding schools opened in Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (KSSR) was eight, and this increased to eighteen in the following year with the number of students being 4,624 (Abdrakhmanova, 2017). By 1971, 174 boarding institutions had been built in KSSR (ibid.). One of the purposes of Soviet boarding schools was to educate children in a collective environment eradicating egoism and individualism (Lenoir, 1968). In doing so, the Soviet government hoped to reduce the parental influence and foster the collectivist influence. According to an official publication, a boarding school created 'an excellent environment for the training [education] of the rising generation, for socially influencing the development of the child's personality and for all-round harmonious education' (cited in Harris, 1964, p. 431). Many parents believed that the boarding schools promoted independence and instilled responsibility in their children (Moore, 1998). All students received financial support from the Soviet government; including the provision of food, clothing, textbooks and even shoes (Ambler, 1961). The provision of boarding schools was so important, and to some extent excessive, that by 1961 one-third of central and local government funds were channelled to support boarding schools (Kaser, 1968).

From 1963, the Soviet government started to open types of boarding schools that specialised in mathematics and physics (known as *fiziko-matematicheskie shkoly-internaty* or *RPhMSh* for short) (Dunstan, 1983). Their main aim was to develop the creative abilities of the learners and produce scientific and technological leaders (ibid.). Following this practice, the first⁴ boarding school – Republican Physics and Mathematics School (RPhMS) – in Almaty, KSSR, was established in 1971 (Dunstan, 1975), which still functions in providing a quality education.

According to Romanova (2016), two main views were formed regarding these boarding schools: one was the commentary of the famous Soviet educationalist

³ The 20th Congress was considered an important political event of worldwide significance. The organisation of the Congress served as the major forum through which the central leadership in Moscow, roughly every four years, informed communists from all over the world about the party's policies and ideology. The 20th Congress was unique for its incisive criticism of Stalin (Office of the Historian, n.d.; Shen & Xia, 2015).

⁴ Little evidence has been found indicating the first establishment of Kazakh boarding schools dating back to the 1920s (Tursynova & Utemuratova, 2011).

Skatkin (1966, p. 180) on boarding schools: 'these boarding schools retain the features of the 'schools of the future'. The second view was conveyed by Sukhomlinskii (1965, p. 11): 'A "full-fledged" education of the individual is the one which is carried out by the family and the school. Life experience has denied the far-fetched idea that the boarding schools are so-called "schools of the future". No educational institution, no matter how ideal it is, can foster the moral values of the people so carefully and thoroughly, embodying them in human relations, as the family can'. While Skatkin (1966) was trying to demonstrate the education at boarding schools as the key variable for learners' success, Sukhomlinskii (1965) placed the primary responsibility, first, on parents, then on other factors. In doing so, Sukhomlinskii reinforced the significance of education by parents from an early age. His claim is consistent with Bourdieu's (1986, p. 246) concept of cultural capital: 'the precondition for fast, easy accumulation of every kind of useful cultural capital, starts at the outset, without delay, without wasted time, only for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital'.

The Soviet system was an integral part of the improvement of the education system in KSSR. Introducing boarding schools into KSSR was one of the major contributions of the USSR system. The same system, however, has left various disastrous legacies in spheres such as politics, social problems, demographic crises, etc. (Silova, 2002). Although to nurture talent with various skills and abilities (i.e. industrial, military, agricultural) was seen as part of the Soviet plan (Burkhalter & Shegebayev, 2012), some researchers reported that its negative legacy is still reflected in Kazakhstan's contemporary education system (McLaughlin et al., 2017; Sahadeo & Zanca, 2007; Silova, 2011), thus the term 'Soviet' is often associated with negative connotations (Fimyar & Kurakbayev, 2016). For instance, it was forbidden to teach about Kazakh heroes and ancestors-*biys* [*tribal chieftains*] from history, which is an extremely important part of Kazakh culture, and the use and education of the local language were massively restricted; schools with Kazakh language instruction were terminated (Kissane, 2005). As a result, some Kazakh people are still 'suffering' from its consequences, as there are many people, predominantly in northern areas, who do not speak their mother tongue (Matuszkiewicz, 2010). Moreover, the values and beliefs of the Soviet collectivist system still exist among teachers and students, which makes them feel reluctant to adopt any new changes and face new challenges (Ayubayeva,

2018, p. 107). In my opinion, that reluctance is rooted in a fear that was embedded through the course of the seventy years of the Soviet system (Yurchak, 2006). Despite these unpleasant inheritances/experiences, the contemporary education system of Kazakhstan is making considerable progress towards educational attainment by implementing various reforms and novelties. For instance, the establishment of twenty NIS schools, with the aim of disseminating the experience gained through these to the mainstream comprehensive schools (Ramazanova & Kerimkhanova, 2017), is considered to be a breakthrough and at the 'forefront of innovation' in the Kazakhstani education arena (McLaughlin et al., 2014). However, it is still a matter of debate whether the current policy related to boarding schools for academically gifted students is contributing to raising youth's academic attainment if it is helping to create an academic elite who will in future dominate and play certain roles in ruling the country.

2.7 School climate

One of the reasons why parents prefer boarding schools to day-schools is the fact that in boarding institutions their children are provided with a safer and academically better educational climate than in comprehensive schools, where students may have more chances to be immersed in the constant learning process. While selective boarding schools normally comprise homogeneous population, some students may find it difficult to acclimate to the environment of boarding school. Stress caused by distance from home and lack of communication skills may generate serious mental health issues. That is why it is important for boarding schools to provide a positive environment in which teachers impart a high level of knowledge to its students, whilst minimising exposure to negative influences by creating a secure, nurturing environment.

The school climate can be defined as the tone of the school atmosphere or the first thoughts of school visitors about the institution upon their first arrival (Howard et al., 1987; Loukas, 2007). 'Practitioners and researchers use a range of terms, such as atmosphere, feelings, tone, setting, culture or milieu of the school' (Goldenberg & Klavir, 2017, p. 137). It is considered an integral part of a comprehensive approach to school wellbeing that can have a great impact on the quality and character of school life (Gase et al., 2017). Gase et al. (2017) also noted that it may involve various

educational experiences, such as a positive relationship with other peers and school staff, student safety, parental involvement in school activities and any factor that may have an influence on the teaching and learning process. Let us look at literature for broader definitions: school climate was defined by Phillips (1993) as the 'beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that characterise a school in terms of: how people treat and feel about each other; the extent to which people feel included and appreciated; and rituals and traditions reflecting collaboration and collegiality' (online). Likewise, Kutsyuruba et al. (2015, p. 136) described it as a feeling that reflects 'interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organisational structures'. According to Gonder & Hymes (1994), a school climate is often considered to be the subjective sense that students, teachers, parents and other school staff members have about a school. Among these settings, according to Kasen et al. (1998, p. 50), '[o]utside of the family, the school is the most proximal socialising agent available to convey societal norms and prohibitions'. In the same work, the authors have highlighted the role of the school setting as an important context, especially during adolescence, since this period is the time when youngsters look outside of the family setting and get affected by others' behaviour and standards (Kasen et al., 1998). A positive school climate can be associated with a range of factors and characteristics. As Keeley et al. (1995) stress, an important reason to provide students with a positive atmosphere is that students should be able to feel safe to dispute, to debate and to question critically. Moreover, they highlight that not being able to respond or articulate their queries often derives from learners' fear to do so. Unfortunately, this is one of the legacies from the Soviet system.

When we talk about school climate of BIL schools, it is important to stress a number of factors which contribute to building and maintaining a pleasant school environment. Firstly, having spent nearly six-and-a-half years dealing with BIL students, I found it very important for students to build a good relationship, since this may influence their mood and feeling. In addition, students of BIL schools spend most of their time within the school premises, which makes it almost inevitable for them to use and develop their communication skills. That is why the relationship with other students and other school members has a significant impact on the education process. Secondly, as I mention at various points throughout the thesis, the teachers of BIL schools are considered by many students and alumni as key forces to the overall

success of BIL schools. The reason for that can be unambiguously ascribed to the fact that not only are students selected, but teachers are also recruited through a rigorous selection process. As I experienced it in my employment years in BIL schools, the importance of teachers' role can be explained by the responsibility laid by a school administration. Teachers are expected to manage their students' learning process by adopting various methods and techniques, rather than teach in the traditional way. Accordingly, teachers strive to put as much effort as they can into their work. Therefore, I found it important to discuss the **peer relationship** and discussion of **teacher's role** and their **self-efficacy** in the following subsections.

2.7.1 Peer relationship / Friendship

As noted earlier, the climate of the school is modified by a number of factors, some of which are of vital importance for BILs. BIL boarding schools as 'total institutions', separate children from family and external community and displace them in a segregated and self-contained environment, where students have limited range of people with whom they can establish a communication. The relationship among teenagers is a significant factor as it may become a foundation for students' inspiration and confidence in the education process. As such, this section will discuss relationships among students.

The literature on the social relationships of secondary school students considers 'friends' and 'peers' to be two conceptually different terms (Dunn, 2004; Epstein, 1983). Friends are voluntary individuals who establish a primary group. Peers are the larger, often involuntary people or secondary group from which friends are chosen (Epstein, 1983). Ladd (1989, p. 5) provided similar definitions saying that 'peers' are those 'individuals who are similar to the child in age and/or developmental level [...] who do not share kinship or reside within the same family', while a 'friend' implies an interpersonal relationship between the student and another individual that both enter into voluntarily (Ladd & Kochenderfer, 1996).

According to Dunn (2004), there are several reasons for considering friendship to be one of the major factors for students' success: **First**, friendship means a lot to children. Depending on the peculiarities of local cultures and customs, friends may become more exciting companions than parents, as they grow up and start having a

close relationship with other peers. Being accepted or rejected may affect their future development and adjustment.

Second, friends may play a greater role as 'emotional supports' (Dunn, 2004, p. 3). Transitions from one place to another may make a difference in how they manage this period. In this particular period, the support that children receive from other friends is likely to change their emotional conditions as they grow up.

Third, usually, the time spent with friends outside their families is relatively more than the time spent at home. In order to understand what influences these social relationships have on children's development, it is of significant importance to study what kinds of relationships children have and what their perceptions and experiences of those relationships are.

Research has highlighted that interpersonal relationships between peers allow them to build their own culture – through maintaining emotional support, assisting in dealing with various problems, togetherness and entertainment, and helping identity growth (Wentzel, 1999, 2005). Dehuff (2013) suggests that during the education process it is essential for students to be in a pleasant environment with cooperation among all of their peers. A pleasant environment promotes the positive relationships with their schoolmates, which is considered to be one of the predictors of their academic achievement (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). In his research, Dehuff (2013) concluded that students have better expectations when a positive atmosphere is maintained in a school:

When close relationships at school were fostered, the school was perceived as an extended family for students', [and] 'when the school became an extended family, students' expectations for positive interpersonal interactions and support at school were greater. (p. vi)

When the topic of peer relationships is discussed, this usually refers to peer pressure or, more generally, 'peer influence' (Brown, 2004, p. 375). This is believed to be an important issue among adolescents, as this period (adolescence) plays an increasingly crucial role in children's lives (de Guzman, 2009) and at the same time, is believed to be the time of their greatest vulnerability to external impact (Brown, 2004). The friendships of adolescents are likely to be more complex and more consistent than those of younger children (de Guzman, 2009). Clasen & Brown (1985, p. 452)

described this phenomenon as the ‘pressure to think or behave along certain peer-prescribed guidelines’. According to some researchers, peer pressure is an inevitable aspect among children and adolescents (Savage, 2009), and it is usually a reciprocal process (Brown, 2004), which means adolescents may ‘produce’ and ‘receive’ influences from their cohorts. Similarly, Hartup (1999) emphasised that pressure in friendship pairs (or larger groups) can be reciprocal, and some students may be more influential than their companions.

Peer pressure has been discussed as a negative feature and has hardly been considered in a favourable context (Brechtwald & Prinstein, 2011). That is why it might be difficult to perceive it as potentially positive. Just as negative peer pressure implies the promotion of anti-social behaviour, similarly, positive peer pressure can be a description of how the development of healthy and pro-social behaviour is practised among young people (Wentzel, 2014). Brown et al. (1986) revealed that reports about peer pressure from adolescents tend to be positive rather than negative, and some findings have identified negative peer influence as being more powerful than positive peer pressure (Haselager et al., 1998), which means that there is a likelihood that negative peer pressure is more dominant (Quimby, 2015).

As such, it is possible to conclude that, students’ friendships and positive relationships with their peers appear to be a predictor of academic achievement (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). However, there is also a likelihood that peer relationship may have a negative effect on students. Creating and maintaining a positive atmosphere and intervening when there are issues demand an adult’s support and supervision. And thereupon, the teacher’s role cannot be neglected nor undervalued. Therefore, I find it important to discuss the teacher’s role in the following section.

2.7.2 Teachers’ role

This section explores the literature regarding the teacher’s role, for its significant importance in understanding both the experiences between teachers and students and its particular role in maintaining the pleasant atmosphere in BIL schools. Teachers occupy many roles in relation to students. Students often see the teacher as an adult, parent-figure, mentor, friend, disciplinarian and keeper of academic attainment. In boarding schools such as BILs, teachers and tutors replace the role of parents. Teachers and tutors are the people whom students have to meet every day at school.

Parsley & Corcoran (2003) reported that, of all the variables affecting academic success, school teachers have the most significant influence on their students' school experiences. According to Benard (2004), teachers can be one of the child's most positive role models, who are not seen as just instructors, but as people who influence children socially and emotionally (Alkan, 2013). Similarly, Kline & Silver (2004) define the school as the only place outside the home environment where children are provided an opportunity to receive social support, which makes the school teacher a significant resource in that respect. Here, I would argue that the school is not the 'only place'. Parents, the broader family, school peers, neighbours, people from other local bodies (e.g. mosques, churches, clubs) are all involved in contributing to learners' academic progress towards their self-fulfilment and citizenship (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Teachers' role as motivators is usually expected to be helpful in providing conditions in which students can be active and enthusiastic about learning. Olander (1993) claims that even when students have outstanding abilities if they are not motivated to learn, they will probably do poorly in their studies. Inspiring them to reach their ultimate goals and fulfil their potential, through different methods including verbal interactions and by giving feedback on student work, may help them to achieve academic success (Capern & Hammond, 2014). Positive motivation may foster students to reach their full potential as active participants (Beutel, 2010). Dumitru Georgiana (2015), a Romanian researcher, claims that teachers have considerable responsibility in counselling and orientation given the fact that they spend extended periods of time in the presence of students, observe them in different contexts, and supervise students if any difficulties occur with the progress of their studies. The same characteristics can be attributed to class teachers in Kazakhstani secondary schools. I believe, however, that it also depends on how schools are organised and how clearly teachers' roles are defined. They should be instructed, for instance, on whether or not they get involved in counselling and pastoral work. I would also argue that teachers' support might not always be beneficial if their methods are not regulated carefully (Ramazanova & Kerimkhanova, 2017). Teachers are therefore the significant potential factors that might have an effect on learners' success. In this regard, establishing/maintaining a positive relationship between a teacher and a student has been claimed to be a major factor in the success of a student in the classroom (Beutel, 2010).

2.7.3 Teachers' self-efficacy and development

This section discusses the literature concerning the teacher's self-efficacy and development in the education process. As mentioned earlier, teacher effectiveness is a crucial factor in students' academic and cognitive achievement (Ayubayeva, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). As a profession, teaching is a highly intellectual and caring job (Fullan, 2006). Bandura's (1977) definition of self-efficacy entails the understanding of academic self-efficacy which can be described as an individual's confidence in his or her belief to be able to meet the requirements of his academic challenges. According to some researchers, students' academic achievement can be influenced by teachers' self-efficacy (Liggins, 2014).

Bandura (1997) reported that school teachers with a high sense of instructional efficacy perform from the idea that by adopting efficient instructional practices, such as particular exertions and relevant techniques, it is possible to support lower-achieving children to improve their performance and thus to have a positive effect on their further lives. Conversely, school educators with a lower sense of instructional efficacy think that teachers cannot show due performance to support children with learning difficulties. Similar descriptions have been stated in Craig's (2006) research paper:

[...] people with a high sense of efficacy who persevere and succeed will realize a strengthening sense of efficacy, while those who already suffer from low efficacy and who avoid difficult situations will reinforce their low self-efficacy resulting in continuing to avoid demanding situations. (p. 54)

Research on teacher's efficiency that I find interesting is that of Ashton & Webb (1986), who revealed the features of efficient and inefficient educators. Efficient ones are explained as ones that treat their work with students very seriously and with great responsibility without questioning and complaining if there are students with various backgrounds. It was also described that effective teachers had specific purposes and detailed plans for their work with students. In addition, they were very enthusiastic about their work and had a deep sense of confidence which allowed them to have a more profound effect on their students.

In opposition to the above descriptions, ineffective teachers often had discouraged, disappointed and pessimistic characteristics, especially when they had to work with lower-achieving students. It was hard for them to accept responsibility for students'

failure and attempt to overcome those obstacles to achieve certain goals. Thus, pupils from Ashton & Webb's (1986) research admitted that teachers' efficacy is crucially important for students' achievements.

One of the important practices for improving teachers' self-efficacy is professional development. Elmore (2004, p. 73) described the teachers' professional development as follows: 'Improvement is more a function of learning to do the right things in the settings where you work'. While I accept Elmore's views, I would suggest that 'right things' should always be cleared up by the school administration and, if necessary, guided and assisted to improve their professional skills. In his report of investigations into relationships between teacher features and students' academic outcomes, Wenglinsky (2000) highlighted the teacher's professional development as one of the measures of teacher quality. He also noted that if teachers are provided with professional development support, it may help them to become more effective in engaging students.

Since 1991, the Kazakhstani education system has undergone many reforms and state programs oriented towards the development of teachers' professional skills (Mclaughlin et al., 2017). Some researchers do not believe that those reforms have been successful in improving teachers' effectiveness (Kusainov, 2017). Kusainov's analysis, however, does not take account of and nor does he examine the improvements observed over the past decade. For instance, the Centre of Excellence (CoE) in collaboration with the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education has undertaken various programmes for local teachers (Nurmukhanbetova, 2016), where teachers have a great opportunity to enhance their teaching skills. Namely, between 2011 and 2015 over 50,000 teachers attended the courses organised by CoE (Mclaughlin et al., 2017). Teachers who successfully accomplish the courses will receive salary increments. Only recently, the President of State addressed Kazakhstan's nation with "Five Social Initiatives of the President", where he declared that starting from next academic year the salary of teachers would increase by 30% (Nazarbayev, 2018). In addition to that, those teachers who pass particular qualification tests will receive a 50% increase to their monthly allowance. While this looks inspiring for teachers' self-development, it will be hard to achieve, unless school administrations are actively involved and interested in teachers' professional

development. In addition, as mentioned in the Introduction chapter, corruption in the Kazakhstani education system can be a major obstacle to accomplish this task.

In this study, while exploring my participants' experiences and perceptions of studying in BILs, I intend to assess the relationship between the students' academic success and other potential factors that are expected to have an effect on it. It is difficult to identify all variables influencing the success in one paper, however. Accordingly, it is intended to examine primarily the factors that are peculiar to the educational system of BILs, through eliciting students' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of studying and teaching in BILs.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a literature review of school factors including sex-segregation, residential halls, school climate, peer and teacher relationships and so on, that may have an effect on students' performance. It has attempted to present a brief historical survey of boarding schools in the USSR and has discussed some key theories that provide a framework for understanding the issues raised in this research.

The next chapter will present the methodology of the research study in detail, followed by chapters that present the data of the research study, before a discussion chapter.

Chapter 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Prior to undertaking any research, Wellington et al. (2005) suggest that:

researchers need to be sure that the methodologies and methods they use are in line with their ontological position. They also have to be able to argue that the methods they use collect the sort of data that legitimately and validly answers the questions they have posed. [...] To fail to do so would be to lay themselves open to criticisms of unacknowledged bias. (p. 101)

According to Sikes (2004, p. 16), 'methodology refers to the theory of getting knowledge, to the consideration of the best ways, methods or procedures, by which data that will provide the evidence basis for the construction of knowledge about whatever it is that is being researched, is obtained'. This thesis seeks to explore the students' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of studying in BIL boarding schools. My choice of methodology was informed by the aim of the research, namely to examine the various factors related to the education process in two BIL schools in terms of the BIL students' and teachers' perspectives.

This chapter presents the methodological foundation of the study. It provides an explanation and a justification for the qualitative research approach and methods that are adopted in this research study. In the following sections, I also discuss the piloting phase that was conducted in September 2015, which is followed by the introduction of the data collection process and its analysis. The ethical considerations are also discussed. I conclude with a couple of limitations to the scope of this study.

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 Research paradigm

In this study research, I have employed the qualitative interpretive paradigm as my platform, as my study is aimed at exploring students' and teachers' views and experiences around studying in BIL schools and this paradigm is reflective of my thinking, viewing and interpreting the phenomenon presented in this study. If I look back to the earlier stages of this journey, before embarking on my PhD, I was always curious about how some schools could attain superior results, while others with similar features were way behind. The first thing that attracted my attention and

interest in successful schools is their ‘numbers’ in terms of results, prizes received in various competitions and examinations. I was initially impressed by the statistics and was happy to delve into an exploration of numbers, surveys and statistics. My thoughts were on conducting quantitative research. However, just before I started my research, I sat and asked myself, ‘How in-depth would that research be? How would I be able to know the participants’ experiences, feelings, thoughts? How would I use my own experience?’ While my thoughts to that point had focused on quantitative inquiry, my interests slowly shifted, and I became more curious about knowing and exploring peoples’ experience and understanding. Having consulted my supervisor, I realised that to truly capture the participants’ subjective experiences and perceptions, I needed to take a qualitative approach; a quantitative approach would not allow me to achieve my goals.

Qualitative inquiry is focused on understanding the subjective world of human experience (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2014), in other words, it is ‘concerned with the meaning people attach to things in their lives’ (Taylor et al., 2016, p. 7). As Silverman (2009, p. 6) states, ‘interest in subjectivity and the authenticity of human experience is a strong feature of some qualitative research’. In providing a definition of qualitative research, Sandelowski (2004, p. 893) describes it as ‘an umbrella term for an array of attitudes towards and strategies for conducting inquiry that are aimed at discovering how human beings understand, experience, interpret, and produce the social world’. I do acknowledge that a quantitative approach would provide me with statistical data related to students’ participation in educational Olympiads or university enrolment data. However, a quantitative approach would not allow me to achieve my goal, which sought to explore the subjective perceptions of my participants. To reiterate, as explained in the introductory section, since the aim of the study is to explore students’ and teachers’ perceptions and experiences of studying in BIL boarding schools, qualitative inquiry was best suited as a means to acquire, explore deeply, interpret and produce knowledge from insider perspectives of students’ and teachers’ experiences of BIL schools. From an epistemological perspective, the qualitative researcher, as a result of his/her research, ‘can only offer his or her interpretation [of the collected data] (based on their social and values, personal interests, and purposes) of the interpretations of others (based on their social and cultural values, personal interests, and purposes)’ (Slevitch, 2011, p. 77). In other

words, from qualitative epistemological perspectives, data cannot always be described as they really are, this is only achievable through how we perceive and interpret them. Thereby, collecting rich and thick data on the interpretations of the students' and teachers' responses in BIL schools brings the research into the interpretative epistemological position of research (Creswell, 2013). Methodology is a related set of assumptions that reflect how a researcher sees reality. How this reality is attributed through research is dependent on the choice of the method; selection of the relevant method is reflective of what the researcher aims to achieve (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 21). Since my research intended to gain an in-depth understanding about studying in BIL schools through participants' views and experiences, relativism was considered as an applicable ontological position of my study. Relativism is the knowledge that considers reality as subjective, which depends on both individuals' and society's perceptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As Sikes (2004, p. 20) suggests, reality or knowledge is viewed as 'socially constructed, subjectively experienced and the result of human thought as expressed through language'. In other words, relativism allows the researcher to explore the participants' views and interpretations within their historical, cultural and societal context, which means there is no undisputed consensus, but rather arguments and beliefs that are subject to debate (Wellington, 2015). Consequently, students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of studying in BIL schools reflect their individual understanding of the school they work/study at and its environment/society.

The selection of research method adopted by qualitative researchers is determined by the subject of interest. Creswell (2013) highlights five qualitative approaches: narrative research; phenomenology; grounded theory; case study; ethnography. Of these five approaches, my research uses case study. As my research focuses on students' and school teachers' experiences and perceptions of studying in BIL schools, using this approach was well suited for my exploration, which is located in case study literature.

3.2.2 Qualitative case study strategy

Since my study aimed to explore students' and participants' subjective views and experiences about studying in BIL schools, the procedures and techniques of my research were based on principles and approaches of case study.

As mentioned earlier, the current study focuses on a particular chain of schools in Kazakhstan, focusing on two BIL schools (one for boys, the other for girls). The reason for choosing two schools was based on my initial purpose, which sought to explore participants' views about single-sex education. Although the purpose of the study later changed, I decided not to make any changes regarding the field sites that I used for my piloting. Contextual meaning of the case is important as BIL schools are considered unique in the Kazakhstani education system, as they differ from other comprehensive, private and grammar schools, mainly in terms of their academic performance. A case study methodology was applied due to the nature of the research question which seeks to explore students' and teachers' views and experiences about studying in BILs. As presented in Yin's (2009, p. 18) description, 'case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident'. In Yin's definition, two key aspects can be highlighted as the main criteria for employing the case study strategy. First, it is contemporary phenomena in a real-life context that form the main focus of the case study. Second, it is a complexity between phenomenon and context, which requires the 'sense-making' process. Further, it was highlighted that the strength of case study lies in its ability to cover various types of evidence including formal/informal interviews, observations, documents, etc. (Yin, 2009, p. 11). He also suggests that 'how' and 'why' questions can find their answers in the case study.

According to some suggestions proposed by Merriam (1998), case study can be classified into three categories:

- a) A ***descriptive*** case study in education is one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study, [which is] useful, though, in presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted [...];
- b) ***Interpretive*** case studies, too, contain rich, thick description. These descriptive data, however, are used to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering [...];
- c) ***Evaluative*** case studies involve description, explanation, and judgement. (p. 38)

From these three categories, my research primarily focuses on interpretive case studies, as this study explores the views and experiences of learners and teachers in BIL schools. In accordance with Merriam's description of 'Interpretive' character, my study looks at a considerable amount of data related to BIL schools, which was provided by the research participants. In addition, as explained in Chapter Two, the proposed set of theoretical assumptions best fit the school features and the evidence at hand. Those theoretical lenses were adopted as a means to achieve a better understanding of the research context and interpret the findings rationally.

While there are numerous advocating claims for adopting the case study strategy, some scholars pointed out the limitations of the case study. In studies such as laboratory-based tests and experiments, generalisation is a significant and major purpose where outcomes of research are expected to be generalised and applied to related research areas, samples and populations. According to Krathwohl (2004), the generalisation in a qualitative study implies the possibility of applying the findings to previously unexplored problems and populations. In general, qualitative methodology does not seek to deal with objectivity and generalisability, as both these conditions are believed to be 'unachievable from ontological and epistemological perspectives' (Slevitch, 2011, p. 78). However, the main disadvantage which is asserted against the case study is its limited ability to generalise because of the subjective nature of its data (Gomm et al., 2000; Yin, 2009). Generalisation is not a primary goal for case study researchers. Normally, they look forward to discovering the uniqueness of each case by examining them hoping to reveal new and unusual practices, phenomena and events (Hays, 2004). Similarly, Stake (1995) points out the challenges researchers may face while trying to generalise. Generalisations can only be applied for the cases presented in the research, for which further refinement may be possible. In other words, conclusions drawn from the data of the specific case can be presented as true or applicable under 'such and such' conditions and circumstances and generalised to other cases and may eventually, modify old generalisations. Stake (1995, p. 85) describes this practice as 'naturalistic generalisations' and argues that these are 'conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs'. That is, generalisations are drawn from an individual's first-hand experiences or from those of others. A researcher can enable readers to make a naturalistic generalisation by giving more descriptions of time, place and person (Stake, 1995). In response to the

inapplicability of generalisation in qualitative case studies, Guba & Lincoln (1989) suggested replacing it with the notion of ‘transferability’ and ‘fittingness’. In their further description, they claimed that the extent to which the knowledge or/and experience of the phenomenon can be transferred from one setting to another depends on how similar the context of two cases and how vivid the descriptions are. For methodologists such as Stake (1978), what is really essential is how other researchers employ the published ethnographies: either as ‘naturalistic generalisation’ and/or as working hypotheses that might relate certain ethnographies to other research studies and/or applications to policy-making, within the frame of ‘fittingness’ or/and ‘transferability’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Bassey (1999, p. 44), in his work about case studies in educational research, claims that it should not be expected for educational research, including that which takes a case study approach, to provide statistical and scientific generalisations. Instead of those two types of generalisations, he sees ‘fuzzy generalisation’ as more applicable for case studies, which usually arises from empirical studies. He describes ‘fuzzy generalisation’ as a ‘prediction [...] that says that something may happen, but without any measure of its probability. It is a qualified generalization, carrying the idea of possibility but no certainty’ (ibid., p. 46). In the same publication, Bassey (1999) defined ‘fuzzy generalisation’ stating that it:

[...] carries an element of uncertainty. It reports that something has happened in one place and that it may also happen elsewhere. There is a possibility but no surety. There is an invitation to ‘try it and see if the same happens for you’.
(p. 52)

I recognise the plausibility of the above-mentioned arguments regarding generalisation in qualitative case studies. My research did not intend to seek for generalisations. While there are many aspects of BIL schools that cannot be reproduced in other schools, however, due to the fact that BILs are state-run schools, there are some institutions with similar features. Following the concept of Bassey (1999), I believe my research may be used to explore other Kazakhstani secondary boarding schools, where students are selected and schools are funded by government. Particularly, I think that some results of my research can be utilised in circumstances where cognitive dissonance and social/cultural reproductions take place. A more detailed discussion of this aspect appears in Chapter Seven, under the heading of ‘Contributions’.

All in all, the characteristics of case study presented in this section were deemed the most applicable strategy for this inquiry and conform with those adopted in this research. Based on Yin's (2009) description of the case study, the contemporary phenomenon that my research focuses on is two BIL schools in Kazakhstan.

3.3 Research sample

Sampling is an important component of any research design and 'refers to situations in which one approach is used to facilitate the sampling of respondents or cases' (Bryman, 2012, p. 634). As mentioned in this quote, sampling is not only the choice of participants to interview or observe but it also concerns decisions about fieldwork sites, events and activities where participants are involved. It is an important task to make a careful, thoroughly grounded and well-founded decision, as this decision can influence the quality of collected data and may facilitate to determine the quality of inferences drawn from the findings (Bryman, 2012; Collins et al., 2006). While preparing my sampling plans, I considered the following questions suggested by Miles et al. (2014):

- Is the sampling *relevant* to your conceptual frame and research questions?
- Will the phenomena you are interested in *appear*? In principle, *can* they appear?
- Can *believable* descriptions and explanations be produced, ones that are true to real life?
- Is the sampling plan *feasible* in terms of time, money, access to people, and your own work style?
- Is the sampling plan *ethical*, in terms of issues such as informed consent, the potential benefits and risks, and the relationship with participants (see the next chapter)? (p. 37)

There are a number of methods of sampling defined by various researchers (Bryman, 2012; Collins et al., 2006; Wellington, 2015). In this research, I adopted *non-probability purposive convenience* sampling as this was the most relevant to my study. As Wellington (2015, p. 117) described, non-probability sampling is 'more feasible and more informative' than its counterpart, probability sampling. As I initially intended to conduct a case-study, I did not consider the probability of any other units being included in the sample. I chose *purposive* sampling because it informs 'an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study' (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). Adopting purposive sampling was relevant to my study as I did not intend to sample my participants randomly. I selected my participants based on

the research question, which clearly addresses a particular group of teachers and students. Moreover, I wanted my participants to reflect the following criterion: both teachers and students had to have multiple years of teaching/studying experience in single-sex BIL schools. A *convenience* sampling, on the other hand, was utilised because of its accessibility and availability to me. The localities of schools had to be close to the place where I could stay for the duration of my fieldwork. I also had a very limited time for my fieldwork (a month), as the school year was about to end. Along with the facilities provided by convenience sampling (i.e. accessibility, easy-to-contact former/current colleagues, familiar settings), it was important for me in terms of the solving the issues with the potential timescale constraints and extra financial expenses. I should note that I ensured that these advantages would not be gained at the expense of the quality of collected data and its credibility (Creswell, 2013, p. 158). That is why it was important for me to choose the school where I could gain easier access to the research field. Eventually, I selected two schools which met the research goals and criteria. I will provide more details about my research participants in the following sections.

3.4 Piloting

Jairath et al. (2000) describe a piloting as a small-scale methodological study undertaken to prepare for the further actual study, aimed to confirm that techniques and/or plans would successfully work in later fieldwork. It is also an excellent opportunity to test the research questions before the actual fieldwork starts. As described by Kim (2010, p. 191), piloting is ‘miniature versions of the anticipated research in order to answer a methodological question(s) and to guide the development of the research plan’. Together, these studies indicate that through piloting a researcher is able to have a chance to refine, narrow or expand their research topic or research question, and can also clarify the focus of the study.

As Gray (2004, p. 214) suggests, ‘whether an interview is successful in eliciting the range and depth of answers required will depend on large part on the skills of the interviewer’. That is why I felt the need to ‘polish up’ my approach and skills prior to my main fieldwork. Having discussed the pilot study with my supervisor thoroughly and hoping that it would provide an opportunity to make some adjustments, corrections and revisions in my study, I decided to conduct the pilot work in

September 2015 and to choose my potential participants from the 11th-grade students of two BIL schools. These schools were expected to be the actual fieldwork site. By carrying out the pilot study, I intended to:

- a) gain a primary experience of undertaking interviews;
- b) test the approach to data collection;
- c) identify any potential technical or contextual problems or factors that might impact the data collection process;
- d) modify the research questions based on the results of the piloting stage.

The study was conducted after ethical clearance was obtained (see Appendix A, p. 240) from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC). The permission to conduct my piloting in two particular BIL schools was sought from the administrations of those two schools. All students interested in participating in the study were briefed by myself, in some detail, as to the purpose of the study and given a clear outline of the procedures that I would be following. I imparted to them the huge importance to myself of their participation and involvement and how central they were to its success; indeed, the contribution of the selected BIL teachers and students was an integral part of the thesis, their contribution at its core.

Voluntary informed consent was the condition under which participants understood and agreed to take part in the study (see Appendix D, p. 243). As mentioned earlier, a pilot study was carried out in two BILs – one for boys and the other for girls. The participants consisted of three students from the boys' school and four students from the girls' school, who voluntarily displayed an interest in taking part in an interview. All seven participants gave informed consent before becoming involved in the study. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw at any point from the research if they so wished.

An unstructured interview was used to explore the learners' experiences in and perceptions of studying in BIL boarding schools. All the questions were translated into Kazakh. Learners were asked to describe their enrolment in the BIL and the factors that caused them to choose that particular school as a place to study. They were also asked to speak about the things they enjoyed most/least about studying in that school. Two more questions were addressed to discern what, if any, impact school features such as residential hall, single-sex environment and/or any other had had on

their academic achievements and on their social lives. The interviews lasted approx. 45-60 minutes and were audio-recorded. All the interviewees seemed to be open about their experiences at the school and felt comfortable amongst their peers.

As mentioned in the previous section, my pilot study schools were chosen based on their close location to my house so that I would not be struggling with accommodation. I also probed these settings for my actual fieldwork. Originally, I had planned to conduct the interviews in a one-to-one setting. However, participants stated they would prefer to have a group interview. Therefore, I arranged two interviews – one in the boys' school, and the other in the girls' school. Immediately after each interview, I found it useful to make some field notes, in which I recorded my participants' thoughts, ideas, questions and suggestions about the interview. After the interview, I also asked their opinion of whether my interview questions and techniques were effective and clear. All my participants approved that questions were easily understood and that the duration of the interviews was not lengthy.

I would like to outline the main benefits I derived from the pilot work. I believe, it was a broad experience in terms of improving my skills in maintaining the moderate pace of the interview. The piloting stage allowed me to have a much greater awareness of the time that I had to spend on each interview and to work out my plan regarding this. Particularly, I became more comfortable in keeping discussions going, when necessary, guiding and following the natural flow of the conversation, while at the same time maintaining their focused interest. It also allowed me to test my technical devices and arrangements, so that I could collect good-quality recorded data. The pilot enabled me to check my transcription procedures. I became more confident in utilising electronic devices, particularly in transferring/converting different types of formats of documents during the transcription process and I used the data from pilot study to improve my coding and analysing skills and practices.

Most importantly, through conducting the pilot study I was able to identify some topical themes on which I had to do some literature review, as I had not mentioned them in my preliminary plans. Moreover, the piloting helped me to see if my research could arouse my participants' interest, so that their participation in my project would be absolutely voluntary, without any, even mild, coercion from the school administration and teachers (this happens very often with school children in

Kazakhstan). The result was even more encouraging than I had expected. All the interviews were in-depth and generative. It is then – on the basis of what people said – that I decided to change the idea of exploring the topic of single-sex education and I expanded the scope of research, leaving more opportunities for participants to choose the topic they wanted to talk about. I made some amendments to research questions as well. Having spoken to some teachers and having noticed their interest in taking part in the research area, I decided to enhance the range of my participants by including school teachers in it.

The pilot study considerably reformed my expectations of the research fieldwork. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, I had anticipated organising in-depth interviews on a one-to-one basis, so that each participant could have enough time to express their opinion. However, group interviews were the majority of the participants' choice. I noted that students' preference for group interviews could be the case during the main fieldwork. Moreover, it became apparent that the request of participants from both boys' and girls' schools to change individual interviews to focus groups was not a random request. This situation made me think over the school climate, particularly the friendship among students as a crucial factor for their academic success. Initially, this aspect was not included in my confirmation review paper.

Secondly, although I had prepared unstructured interview questions to allow my participants to 'travel' wherever they preferred, I had a rough checklist of ideas in my mind that I had expected to be discussed by my participants. However, after the interview, I realised that I had to revise that checklist substantially. It became obvious that I had to be ready for the fact that interviews might lead in different directions, even to off-topic discussions and I would have to increase my awareness of any potential topics that BIL students could speak on. This also justifies the fact that students' perceptions and experiences could be significantly distinct compared to those of teachers and/or researchers for distinct reasons.

A minor issue that occurred during the pilot work was arranging an appropriate time for interviewing the students. Sometimes, I had to postpone the meeting time when unforeseen matters arose. This was because of the school routine which was full of activities and the students' decision to be interviewed in group. It was not easy for them to be brought together at one time and in one place.

The pilot study was advantageous in the following ways:

- a) I gained experience with setting up the research study and dealing with different situations in the fieldwork, such as obtaining permission from the school administration, ensuring access to the participants, receiving their consent, etc.
- b) I became more familiar with the procedures involved in conducting a research interview as it was the first time I had arranged this type of fieldwork.
- c) It gave me the opportunity to understand the significance of using appropriate questions and being able to address them properly. Furthermore, I learned that in order to obtain clear, honest and overt responses, it is vital that careful consideration be paid to the information provided to participants on the nature of the research. Failure to do so might bias their responses.

All in all, piloting my interviews was found to be a favourable practice and experience for my research in many respects. It became clear that there would be participants with varying characters and with different preferences; that is why I became more aware of adjusting my questioning to avoid any potential dissatisfaction from my participants. I learnt to be perceptive to non-verbal signs and more capable at identifying the right time to rephrase questions for clarity. This helped me to learn how to make my participants valued and central in my research study. The pilot study made me aware of the limitations concerning the number of interviews, so I could make my plans neatly before the main fieldwork. Most importantly, I gained huge experience and confidence, which made me feel more excited about the further stages of my studies as a researcher and an interviewer. I should note that, I did not conduct any observational study in my piloting phase. My primary aim was, as mentioned earlier, to gain some experience in conducting interviews effectively and to familiarise myself with the research site, as I had been planning to use these schools for my actual fieldwork phase. I also believed that conducting observations in a piloting phase would not be sufficiently reliable and trustworthy because of the limited time constraints. It would be difficult to build a sufficiently close relationship with participants in that short period of time in order to obtain accurate observational data. That is why I left the observation stage for the main fieldwork phase.

3.5 Data collection procedures

'Method' and 'methodology' are not the same thing. While discussing the distinction between methodology and methods, Sikes (2004, p. 16) describes methods as 'the specific research techniques that are used in order to collect and then analyse data'. Describing the data collection methods in detail is an important process. With regard to this aspect, Wellington & Szczerbinski (2007) suggest the following procedure:

Describe the data collection methods and procedures in sufficient detail to enable the reader to replicate your study. Provide references to all research instruments. If you use an original, as yet unpublished instrument (e.g. your own questionnaire) consider reproducing it in its entirety in an appendix to your report. (p. 175)

I would also agree with the idea that 'none of the possible methods for data collection can be regarded as perfect and none can be regarded as utterly useless' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 154). That is, any methodological technique or procedure is subject to limitations caused by a range of factors and apt to be criticised and debated. This section describes the data gathering methods adopted in my study.

3.5.1 Unstructured interviews

In accordance with the qualitative paradigm, I (as a researcher) was the primary data collection instrument (Pezalla et al., 2012). As a researcher and interviewer, I kept in mind Wellington's (2015, p. 139) description of the qualitative research interviewer as 'a sponge; a sounding board; a prober; a listener; a counsellor; a recorder ('tabula rasa'); a challenger; a prompter; a sharer', which points to the great responsibility of the interviewer in research. Since interviewing was the primary technique of the data gathering, I aimed to elicit the maximum amount of information through interviews. In consideration of the research aims, the data gathering processes involved interviews and participant observations. Both of these methods are explained next.

Interviewing is one of the techniques adopted in case studies to gain an insight into the experiences, the social practices and the people within the researched community. It can also be an exploratory practice for both the researcher and respondent. There are several forms of research interviews, which can be characterised formal and informal as well as structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The main difference between structured and unstructured interviews is that the first seeks to

collect a specific range of data within pre-established categories, whereas the second aims to explore the complex behaviour of individuals without imposing any initial categorisation that may limit the range of the research area. That is to say, a researcher initially may have a general idea of interest, which is later developed by participants during the interview. Hannabuss (1996, p. 22) notes that ‘each approach has strengths and weaknesses, and each may be more or less suitable for particular types and areas of research’. As mentioned, unstructured interviews do not follow prearranged ideas. Such ‘interviews may simply start with an opening question [...] and will then progress based, primarily, upon the initial response’ (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). As the primary purpose of this study is to inductively explore students’ and teachers’ experiences and perceptions of studying in BIL schools, I believe conducting unstructured interviews would be appropriate for collecting a great deal of information regarding studying in BIL schools.

As Wellington (2015, p. 149) states, interviewer-to-interviewee situations might avoid potential situations that could occur in focus group work with leader-participants who may monopolize the interview and/or ‘imperceptibly’ pressure the other participants by their attendance. Following this statement, I had hoped that in this research one-to-one interviews would offer more potential to obtain clearer and more detailed data from interviewees. However, the vast majority of my participants preferred group interviews. I anticipated this to be the case, as I had already experienced the same situation during the piloting phase. But I was still interested in conducting one-to-one interviews as I had thought that students in group interviews would have felt inhibited in the presence of their classmates if they had to talk on sensitive matters. After all, thanks to my piloting phase, it was not difficult to make some changes. I was ready for both preferences of students. According to Wellington (2015), group interviews have many advantages. For instance, group interviews provide a safer and more relaxed atmosphere. By acting as a group, participants may feel more secure and confident. While answering questions, friends may jog each other’s stories and memories. Moreover, as Eder & Fingerson (2003, p. 35) point out, a group interview is ‘important for minimizing the power differential between the researcher and those being studied’. In that sense, I believe interviewing them in groups was beneficial and insightful for my study.

Initially, the potential interviewees were students and alumni of BIL schools, for the reason that their viewpoints, as insiders, would be most likely to play a leading role in gaining insight into studying in BIL schools. However, due to the alumni's strong inclinations to support the BIL school, I decided to replace them with existing teachers of the schools where my participants studied. I came to this decision having revised and reviewed the responses of my alumni-participants. This decision was also discussed with and agreed by my supervisor. Students were from two single-sex schools, one group from the boys' school (18 students) and the other from the girls' (22 students) school. All the students were in their final year with 4 years of experience in BIL. 8 interviews were conducted with girls: 2 individual and 6 group interviews. All boys preferred to have group interviews. I carried out 3 group interviews in the boys' school. 6 teachers volunteered to be interviewed: 3 from the boys' school; 3 from the girls' school. One of the teacher-participants had an extra responsibility in administration.

All the interviews were arranged at mutually convenient locations and times, which for some participants was during school hours and for others after the day classes. In all my interviews I began with a general opening question (along the lines of, '*please, introduce yourself, and tell me about your experience...*') and the interviews flowed. Surprisingly, interviews with girl-participants appeared to be more informative and more insightful in comparison with boys' interviews. Girls treated the process of my fieldwork with utmost responsibility and seemed more enthusiastic in participating in the interviews. I say 'surprisingly' because I had expected to have easier communication with boys since I believed I would establish same-sex conversations more easily than cross-sex conversations. But it was not the case in my study. Some boys were continuously looking at their watches waiting for the end of interviews, showing less interest than did students in girls' school. I acknowledged that the time I conducted my fieldwork (end of academic year) might have influenced their interest in being involved in formal interviews. Almost all the interviews lasted from sixty to ninety minutes. During the interviews, I made sure to take notes regarding the place and time of the interview. I also kept a record of particular characteristics of the interviewee, before, during and after the interview. For instance, one student from the boys' school kept looking at his watch, implying that he was in a rush or was not interested very much in being interviewed. In group interviews, I had to write some

additional notes (i.e. by putting ordering numbers) to identify the speakers, while they were answering for the first question.

Despite my endeavours to prevent any failure or difficulties, nevertheless some did arise, and I had to find ways to manage these. A major challenge with one of the schools was finding a silent place to organise my interviews. The first problem is the location of the school in a busy neighbourhood, compounded by the restricted size of the school and thus the limited availability of free classrooms. The small size of the school induced children to spend their time outside the building more. Therefore, after the classes, it was impossible to carry out any interview outside the building. While conducting interviews in the classroom, as anticipated, although the doors were shut, sometimes the noise from the corridor caused inconvenience. However, it did not have any effect on students' behaviour, and we did not have to take any action. The second school, on the contrary, is located away from the busy neighbourhood and the main road, in a quiet milieu. In addition, the building itself was more than twice as large, and the playground was far larger in comparison with the previous one. This provided me with more options to arrange interview-conducive environments. The decisions to arrange the locations for all interviews were agreed between me and my participants. I always kept in my mind the option of conducting interviews outside the school premises, if needed. However, this would require some additional steps to accomplish, such as obtaining official permission from the school administration as well as from students' parents. As this would lead to unwelcome complications, I kept it as a last alternative.

3.5.2 Focus group

Focus group is a form of interview where the researcher holds a discussion with a small group of people, usually with common characteristics, on a certain topic (Wellington, 2015). Undertaking a focus group was more the choice of my student-participants rather than my expectation or decision. Only a few students preferred being interviewed one-to-one. As mentioned in the preceding section, I was anticipating having a focus group in the actual fieldwork. According to Wellington (2015), a focus group differs from a group interview in some respects. It 'sets up a situation where the synergy of the group, the interaction of its members, adds value over and above the depth or insight of either an interview or a survey' (ibid., p. 242).

Participants of the particular group brought together in an appropriate, favourable environment can generate a more productive conversation and spark some interesting ideas in one another.

Using a focus group method offered many benefits for my research. It gave me an 'opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time' (Morgan, 1997, p. 8). The number of students in each group did not exceed six, which allowed each participant to be heard by the others. I assume, with a larger group of people, it would have been difficult for me to maintain the focus of the topic. The nature of the focus group method was useful to involve shy and reserved participants in the discussion process. I also hope that this method was useful in terms of avoiding any unpleasant circumstances where those BIL students who potentially had serious issues in expressing their opinions, or were possibly hampered by other specific learning difficulties, would not feel singled out. As Kitzinger (1995, p. 299) claims, focus group interviews 'encourage participation from people reluctant to be interviewed on their own or feel like they have nothing to say'. That is why I felt that the format of a focus group would provide a comfortable environment and best encourage my participants to share their views and experiences about BIL schools.

3.5.3 Translation and transcription of the data

One of the important stages of data collection is a data translating and transcribing process. According to Esin et al. (2014, p. 208), the researcher's role in translating from one language to another is not limited to a good command of those languages, but it includes the 'understanding of the full lived and spoken contexts of those two languages'. The process of translation from Kazakh and Russian to English was quite challenging. Esin et al. (2014) stress that some peculiarities of one language may not be translated into other languages at all. Those peculiarities may include colloquial phrases, jargon, idiomatic expressions, and so forth. Dealing with such issues requires the 'intimate' awareness of the culture (Birbili, 2000). Along with cultural considerations, the researcher may encounter another difficulty when a term or expression of one language does not have an equivalent meaning in another language. Therefore, it was suggested that the key objective of the data translation process is to convey the meaning of the context (Crane et al., 2009). I followed the same strategy and used all possible sources (e.g. online translator, bilingual dictionary, consulting

colleagues) to find the best equivalent that conveys the closest meaning. I took full responsibility to accomplish this task myself. For the expressions that were impossible to translate, I gave the explanation in brackets. I was in constant contact with my supervisor, to have my translations reviewed and confirmed. Very often, I discussed with my supervisor moments where not everything was clear enough for a reader. I was absolutely sure that a professional translator would not be able to see the 'picture' of what was said in the interviews better than I could myself. The most important thing about being involved in the translation process is the opportunity to become thoroughly familiarised with the content.

Cohen et al. (2007, p. 365) regarded the transcribing procedure as a crucial step, saying that there is a potential risk of 'massive data loss, distortion and the reduction of complexity'. It is difficult to transcribe without losing data from the original encounter. As Cohen et al. (2007, p. 367) suggested, there cannot be one particular correct transcription: 'rather the issue becomes whether, to what extent, and how a transcription is useful for the research'. With regard to my research, the interviews principally sought to draw out the important aspects of studying in BIL schools. For that reason, having discussed it with my supervisor, I simultaneously translated interview recordings from Kazakh and Russian into English and transcribed everything, so that I would not miss any key data while revising it again. The amount of data was very large, so I needed to spend extensive amount of time (three months) until I could be satisfied with what I had done. Another reason for translating and transcribing simultaneously was to save my time from transcribing two times: one in Kazakh or Russian; the other in English. Once I had finished, I had all my interviews transcribed in English. In order to strengthen the credibility of the research data, having transcribed the interviews I sent all the transcripts to the interviewees individually for authentication (see Appendix C, p 242). I wanted the data to be an accurate representation of the responses shared by the participants. By having the opportunity to review the transcripts, the research participants were able to approve and if necessary, to modify the information they may have overlooked during the interview session. I believe, this helped to generate credible data.

Carrying out an interview is not only a data collection process, it is also a social interaction. The potential issue in transcribing is that it makes the interview simply a huge amount of data rather than a record of a social encounter. Therefore, the

interview process requires the full attention of the interviewer. To minimise this problem as much as possible, as I mentioned earlier, after each interview, I took notes that could allow me to characterise the interview process. Particularly, I tried not to miss any visual and non-verbal aspects of the interview that seemed important for my data. Nisbet (2006, p. 13), highlighting the importance of non-verbal nuances, states that “we have to beware of assuming words are a mirror of reality, of ‘treating language as a transparent window on the world ... a direct channel to some real thing in the social world’”. He also underlined that the researcher needs to pay attention to the speakers’ intonation, eye contact, body movement and all the non-verbal aspects which people use to express themselves, often subconsciously (Nisbet, 2006). Although video-recording is an option to deal with such a situation, it would cause extra time-consuming work (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 367). It would also jeopardise the trustworthiness of the data, as participants might not feel comfortable in front of the camera.

One other thing that is regarded as significant by Nisbet (2006) is a researcher’s reflexivity during the transcription process. He claims that it is not possible to have an accurate transcription. It is difficult for researchers to maintain the neutral stance, as they are not a robot or a blank sheet on which participants could record their views. Thus Nisbet (2006, p. 12) argues that ‘interviewing is an art, not a method – and transcribing is a bit of an art too’.

3.5.4 Participant observation

As my study adopted qualitative case study, using an observational method was relevant to my study. Participant observation engages the researcher in the daily-based actions of a research field, describing and evaluating a person(s), project, or process (Emerson et al., 2001). Van Maanen (2011) has maintained that observation creates an opportunity to share an environment to provide an account of the field explored. Researchers observe and document what they observe in order to identify the problem at the very centre of their study by exploring and interpreting social aspects in a particular context. Becker (1958, p. 652) defined participant observation as an action in a real-life fieldwork where ‘he watches the people he is studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them’. By communicating with

participants in a social setting, one can gain insight through observations, informal talks or interviews, and interpretations of events with the group being studied.

Observation method can be characterised into various types, of which Angrosino & Rosenberg (2011; as cited in Brodowicz, 2013) considered four:

1. **Form of participation.** It can be a participatory or non-participatory process, depending on whether the researcher takes part in the study's situation.
2. **Disguised or non-disguised** observation indicating whether research participants are aware of being observed or not.
3. **Structure.** It can be a structured or non-structured procedure with a checklist of steps and tasks to be covered or not.
4. **Setting.** Observation can be applied in natural or contrived settings.

In this study, I adopt a non-participant observer role. However, at the request of the school administration and my participants, I was involved in school activities and occasionally I had to switch to a 'participant observer's' role. As for the second characteristic, Pring (2003, p. 13) uses the term 'toilet ethnographer', while describing the researcher's role who tries to 'maintain secrecy and obtrusiveness'. Considering the controversial aspects of this method in regard to ethical considerations, it is totally inapplicable in my study. Regarding the third feature, as my research is purely qualitative, by all means, non-structured observation is the technique I adopted. Lastly, the setting of my observation was natural.

The main purpose of adopting the observational method was that the data collected from observations complemented the information I received during the interviews. I intended to see if teachers and students did what they explained to me in the interviews (Robson & McCartan, 2016). I did not necessarily focus on specific actions or details as 'structured observers' do; I took notes about things that seemed to be unusual for me, but for participants, they were conventional behaviour (Pole & Morrison, 2003).

There is a strong possibility that people may behave quite differently when aware that they are under observation. Therefore, many researchers may conceal the true purpose of their research from the participants. However, the ethical considerations of this

need to be closely examined (Denscombe, 2010). In my case, students were always curious about what I was writing in my blue notebook. I gave them a general idea of my research, without providing any detail of what I write and comment during the observation process. What I liked from the students' behaviour is that they treated every action with utmost discretion and confidentiality. For example, once their teacher wanted to know what topics we were discussing with students, but none of them agreed to answer. Even the teachers were very impressed by their students' behaviour. When I asked teachers if the students' behaviour had changed because of my presence, they said this happened only on the first day of my observation process. Although this may sound like a weak and subjective statement, later on, having got used to my attendance students acted naturally, as if I had always been there. That is what I felt.

3.6 Data analysis

The data of my research were analysed using the, Thematic Analysis (TA) method and the themes were grounded in the data. Due to their similarities in many respects TA is believed to be rooted in the features and functions of Content Analysis (CA) (Joffe, 2012, p. 210). CA is criticised for generating results primarily and extensively based on the method 'trite' (ibid.), which means that CA mainly focuses on the frequency of the statements. TA seeks to surpass this stage to explore more implicit, tacit themes and thematic structures' (ibid., p. 211). TA has been actively used by many researchers of social sciences (Clarke & Braun, 2014), and is described as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). I found TA suitable for my research analysis as this enables the researcher to 'see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences' (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). In addition, accessibility and flexibility are regarded as key reasons for adopting this method (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 58). Through these features, TA generates themes of immense importance in relation to research and the outcomes that were produced by salient data. A theme is described as a pattern of meaning that is derived from data, where arising themes turn into categories for further analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Joffe (2012, p. 209) characterised a 'theme' in two forms by its content: (a) A theme that contains a manifest content – 'something directly observable such as mentions of stigma across a series of interview transcripts'; (b) a theme with latent content – 'such as references in the transcripts,

which refer to stigma implicitly, via mentions of maintaining social distance from a particular group, such as certain mental health professionals’.

Researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Joffe, 2012) divide the TA process into two divisions in terms of the demarcation of the theme: inductive – which is when themes are drawn from the raw data; and deductive – which is when a theme derives from a theoretical idea which is brought by a researcher. In this sense, my research study adopted an inductive approach to extract the findings from the raw data. I also found inductive thematic analysis applicable for its feature of allowing the findings to be generated independently from researcher’s pre-established opinions and prejudices. It is equally important to admit that, as Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 84) note, for researchers, it is impossible to ‘free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments’; their epistemological perspectives have an impact on the process in which the themes emerge.

While reviewing the guidelines of TA, I primarily consulted the following references: Joffe (2012), Braun & Clarke (2006), Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006). Although there are many similar stages in their instructions, Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 79) claim that ‘there is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how you go about doing it’. Some descriptions used in instructions for using TA are more straightforward than their analogues. For instance, Joffe’s (2012) description of the process of initial coding is clear but stages following the initial coding are obscure and it is difficult to follow the in-between steps.

All three (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Joffe, 2012) are in agreement that the following step, once data is collected, should be the process of reading, re-reading and coding frame. This will help a researcher to examine the data thoroughly and classify them.

Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 82) highlight the importance of themes in relation to the research question within the data and argue that it ‘represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set’. The other two references (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Joffe, 2012) agree with this statement. Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 82) further explain that “the ‘keyness’ of a theme is not necessarily dependent on

quantifiable measures – but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question.”

Due to the clarity in the demonstration and the applicability to my own research, I preferred Braun & Clarke's (2006, p. 87) model of thematic analysis, which is summarised below:

1. **Familiarizing yourself:** Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas with your data.
2. **Generating initial codes:** Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. **Searching for themes:** Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. **Reviewing themes:** Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. **Defining and naming:** Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the theme's analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. **Producing the report:** The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis back to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Further, Joffe (2012) and Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006) underline the importance of determining the reliability and applicability of the coding frame. In this study, the data analysis contained several phases. Following the theme categories described by Joffe (2012, p. 209), in the first phase of the coding process, the **manifest** components of the collected data were selected. The next coding stage focused on more **latent** elements which were identified, assigning an analytical context to participants' interpretations, which is called, according to Saldaña (2013, p. 175), 'Themeing the Data'. 'Themeing the data' was applicable to my research because unstructured interview responses often implied themes which were not explicitly explained. During the process of coding, I constantly kept consulting my supervisor to examine the

reliability of themes to my research area. All data were recorded and coded manually, using the Excel spreadsheet.

Initially, I was thinking of adopting some qualitative data analysis/coding computer programmes such as N-Vivo, hoping that it would allow me to organise my data effectively and speed up the process. I had a chance to attend some courses provided by our university. Although I am not resistant to using modern technology and anything related to it, I personally did not find it practical for my research. I was uncomfortable using computer programmes as it simply did not fit in with what I expected to do with my data. Since the vast majority of interviews were conducted in Kazakh and the analysis/coding programmes did not support Kazakh-language scripts, employing software programmes such as N-Vivo was impractical to work with the data. Thus, I made a decision to accomplish my task manually, without involving any particular software. Although not everything went smoothly until I reached the certain point. I was particularly concerned that I spent too much time on the overall analysis process. Until I produced something as a 'data presentation' chapter, I was uncertain that I was doing the right thing. However, when I received my supervisor's positive report regarding the data, that was the time I felt relief after long-lasting ambiguity and self-doubt. I can confidently say that the analysis process of my research was an invaluable learning experience for me.

Since my research seeks to explore students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions about studying in BIL schools, the flexibility of the analysis technique was important. Therefore, I decided to adopt TA for its suitability and applicability to my research. It is worth remembering that the impetus for conducting this research stems from my studying and teaching experiences in BIL schools. Thus, I would like to state that in the data analysis, discussion and interpretation processes, in addition to the collected data and the reviewed literature, I drew on my own real-life experience. As the literature suggests 'case studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience' (Stake, 1978, p. 5).

3.7 Role of the researcher

It is of great importance to identify the researcher's position, especially while conducting a qualitative project in social sciences, as it influences the credibility of the research. In Chapter One, I presented some information regarding the choice of research area, where I introduced my background related to BIL schools. My experience in BIL schools as a teacher and student is pivotal in undertaking this research study. As Sikes & Goodson (2003, p. 34) highlight, 'it is impossible to take the researcher out of any type of research or any stage of the research process. The person of the researcher is always there'. That is, the researcher's professional and life experience, academic background, gender and many other identifiers play a significant role in delineating his/her position in regard to the research study. That being said, it is important to outline and recognise my own position so that readers understand my stance and its potential impact on this study.

The role of the researcher as an insider or/and an outsider is a significant aspect in relation to the process of research study. Taking into account my past experience in BIL schools and current professional career and a researcher stance outside the BIL schools, I position myself both as an insider and an outsider in the context of my research domain. As Hellowell (2006, p. 487) states, 'ideally the researcher should be both inside and outside the perceptions of the "researched"'. In this regard, I characterise myself as an 'insider' since I have spent almost six-and-a-half years holding different positions and responsibilities: working as a tutor, a teacher and a vice-principal. During these six-and-a-half years, I built a good positive relationship with many teachers and members of the administration, with whom I still communicate. On the other hand, I identify myself an 'outsider researcher' as I have not been working in BIL schools since March 2013. In addition to this, I represent the 'Bolashak' scholarship programme, which portrays me as an independent researcher. I believe that being able to adopt the standpoint of both insider and outsider favoured me in many stages of my research process. Let me reflect on some of those moments.

In their analysis of insider-outsider perspectives, Bonner & Tolhurst (2002) highlight three favourable aspects of an insider researcher:

1. Having a greater understanding of the culture being studied;
2. Not altering the flow of social interaction unnaturally;

3. Having an established intimacy between the researcher and participants which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth. (pp. 8-9)

In addition to the above considerations, being an insider researcher is advantageous in being aware of how superfluous the institution works, what rules are to be followed, how to approach people of that institution and so on. From these perspectives, I believe, my position as an insider was beneficial for my research. Particularly, I was well-informed about the schools and the managers of those schools, which made my work much easier in terms of getting access to the field and contacting my potential participants. I am aware of the fact that it is not practically feasible to become sufficiently sophisticated about the culture and people in the fieldwork (Hinterberger, 2007). My positive relationship with school administration saved me from being a 'toilet ethnographer' (undercover ethnographer) (Pring, 2003, p. 53). I also acknowledge the fact that being 'over-familiar' and 'over-confident' may cause a loss of trustworthiness, particularly while subconsciously making erroneous beliefs and assumptions based on the researcher's personal views and prior experiences (Unluer, 2012). As Dwyer & Buckle (2009, p. 59) state, 'disciplined bracketing and detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of one's own personal biases and perspectives, might well reduce the potential concerns associated with insider membership'. I truly believe that the knowledge I possessed about the fieldwork site, combined with my awareness about the above-mentioned potential drawback of being an insider researcher, enabled me to be 'good-enough' for my data collection process. Furthermore, it helped me to prevent any potential unexpected issues and difficulties regarding the fieldwork process.

As mentioned above, along with the insider's role, my position also consisted of the outsider researcher role, primarily because I am not a regular member of BIL's staff and I do not represent any organisation that is linked to BIL schools. However, at some point, I could feel that some of my participants wanted to see me as one of their teachers at school. At first glance, it might seem beneficial to have close communication in terms of building a trustworthy relationship with participants. Conversely, it may affect the credibility of the collected data and may harm the trustworthiness of the study. In similar situations, I preferred staying in an outsider's role in order not to lose the significance and the solemnity of the research tone. To sum up the section, in representing both the outsider's and insider's role, the process

of data collection and interpretation may present particular challenges requiring the researcher's intense concentration and careful consideration. Therefore, whether the researcher holds an insider's or outsider's position, 'it is important to demonstrate an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59).

3.8 Ethical considerations

The conduct of my paper was guided by the research ethical principles of the University of Sheffield's Code of Practice which conform with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011). As these ethical guidelines suggest, all education-related studies need to be undertaken within an ethic of respect for the people, data, specific values related to the research field, the quality of educational inquiry and academic freedom.

As mentioned in the previous section, I viewed my position in the study as past insider researcher: being a past student, teacher, a freelance vice-principal of BIL schools and current outsider (teacher and vice-principal of NIS). Accordingly, I had to anticipate any ethical issues that could arise due to my insider/outsider position during my fieldwork and during the overall research process (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). As an insider researcher, I was privileged in having had the experience of working in this environment, which allowed me to have a great deal of insight and confidence about the research setting (Unluer, 2012). However, my supervisor kept reminding me of the importance of distancing myself from the research setting and participants in order to obtain as trustworthy and credible data as possible. My outsider position as a 'Bolashak' scholar helped me to keep the balance and avoid the potential ethical issues derived from my insider perspectives.

In their discussion of the insider/outsider dichotomy, McNess et al. (2015, p. 311) suggest that researchers are 'neither complete observers nor complete participants, but often working in that "third space" in between'. During the research fieldwork, I acted as a non-participant observer. Nonetheless, because of my work experience in BIL schools outlined in Chapter One, and at the request of school administration and my

participants themselves, I was involved in school activities where I was a participant observer.

I was aware of the potential issue of power relations that could arise between me and my participants (Mercer, 2007). My participants, especially the students, could feel inhibited by the fact that I used to be a BIL staff member and, at the time of my research fieldwork, I was personally acquainted with some of the current staff members. In addition, I could be regarded as having a higher-status position, because of my study-abroad scholarship. As a doctoral student, I could also be considered as possessing superior academic qualifications. That is why, from the very beginning, I treated my participants as my co-researchers and as significant contributors to my research studies. By being flexible with regard to the requests of my participants (place/time of interview; individual/group interview choices), I ensured that I did not exclude anyone by any means (Sikes & Potts, 2008, p. 8).

We (researchers), as sense-making human beings, who are involved in interpreting and ascribing meanings to particular practices or phenomena, should acknowledge that our own bias may creep into our research process. It is believed that any research, conducted by either internal or external researchers, is influenced by the researcher (Smyth & Holian, 2008). I am convinced the bias cannot be entirely eliminated as the research itself is a researcher's interpretation of participants' subjective opinions and experiences. It should be noted that any analysis is the researcher's interpretation of data. In their latest edition of *Qualitative Data Analysis*, Miles et al. (2014, p. 293) demonstrated some tactics of testing and confirming the trustworthiness and validity of the data. In this research, such techniques as 'Checking the Meaning of Outliers', 'Using Extreme Cases' and 'Triangulating' were employed to minimise researcher bias.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the research design and methods adopted throughout this research. The study is of a qualitative nature and it has interpretivist roots. Discussion of the pilot study process was also provided, which was followed by an explanation of the data collection process. Then I presented TA method for the analysis process. The role of the researcher was discussed. I concluded this chapter with the explanation of

ethical considerations, where I touched upon the insider/outsider positions and the potential issues such as 'power relation' that could arise during the research process.

The next two chapters will focus on the presentation of the collected data. Chapter Five includes the presentation of the findings obtained from students. Chapter Six will present the data received from BIL teachers.

Chapter 4 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS 1

4.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I presented the methodology adopted in this research. This chapter aims to present and analyse the data collected through conducting unstructured interviews and observations in relation to exploring students' and teachers' perceptions and experiences about BILs.

The study used a qualitative case study approach to explore participants' views and experiences about studying in BIL. This approach was selected as the most effective way to answer the research questions:

- 1) What are BIL students' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of studying at BIL?
 - a) What do students and teachers enjoy most/least about studying at BIL?
 - b) What factors do students think contribute to academic success?

The data collection process was flexible and unstructured, without having pre-arranged fixed schedules. I could not plan the interviews or observations beforehand. My programmes relied upon the participants' availability and school timetable. Despite my earlier acquaintances with the study field, the piloting stage was the first time that I had looked at the BIL schools from the researcher's point of view. Therefore, I already had some knowledge about the research site when I started my data collection process.

In this chapter, I will attempt to present the quotes of my participants from the collected data and intersperse them with my interpretations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I analysed the data using a theme method adapted from Creswell (2013) and Bryman (2012) as well as my intuition. The first part of the chapter comprises the data from the interviews. Following that, I will discuss the process of observation.

4.2 Observation

Although interviewing was the primary method of the data collection process, non-participant observation was a significant component of this study since it aimed to

provide a background understanding for the events and characteristics of BIL schools, mentioned during the interviews. In other words, observations were adopted to support interviews, since interview responses may have 'discrepancies between what people say that they have done, or will do, and what they actually did or will do' (Robson & McCartan, 2016). In addition, observations allowed me to access the immediate area where my participants spent most of their school time and to record some interactional data regarding their experiences.

In order to record the field notes instantly and in detail, I acted as a non-participant observer. My observations took place primarily in classrooms of BIL schools when students were attending their day-classes. Before starting each observation process, I always asked class teachers if they did not mind me staying in the classroom during the lesson. All the school teachers were happy for me to observe their lessons, except for those who had final exams with students. I was told that both the girls and boys were not comfortable during the first week of my observation. They behaved more reserved than they were before my arrival. In the beginning, I quickly noticed that the school functioned as a 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961b). I could feel that students and even teachers were not used to seeing unfamiliar faces. I realised that when one of the staff members approached me and asked whether I was a new teacher or a guest, they added that they did not see strangers very often. However, after the first week, I could feel the warm and pleasant atmosphere.

In addition to day-classes, I also had an opportunity to observe their afternoon preparatory classes. As noted by student-participants, compulsory preparatory classes were significant in maintaining the high academic performance. During the observation, I was able to see how students worked collaboratively in groups, trying to help each other with homework. For instance, in all-girls preparatory hours, I observed an interesting situation. Students knew each other's strengths very well, in terms of their academic knowledge. As such, depending on what subjects are in the next day's schedule, students who are good at those subjects explained the solutions to their classmates. Increased participation in group discussion made the atmosphere positive. Seeing this picture of this classroom atmosphere, it was possible to say that peer support and peer pressure were explicit in the students' behaviour. In addition, I also noticed that the tutors were also actively involved in those group discussions. On one of the observations, I noticed that the girls' tutor was helping with mathematics.

On another day, in an all-boys school, I observed how the tutor was helping with the English language. Then I found out that, these subjects were those tutors' specialities at the university.

Residential halls of students were usually inaccessible to strangers. The doors to the buildings were watched by the specifically designated porter. It was suggested that I did not go in to the girls' dormitory, as they would not be comfortable seeing a stranger male in a girls-only area, but I could meet boys in their residential halls. I had an informal meeting with all students in their 'common room' where we discussed different topics. A similar informal meeting took place in the girls' school. It was even more entertaining and unusual. On the day of the meeting, students asked me not to leave after my observations and interviews. So, I did not plan to go anywhere. I thought the girls also wanted to ask some questions like the students did in the boys' school. But the girls did something that the boys did not or maybe could not do. They asked for permission to use the school's kitchen and baked a delicious cake specifically for this meeting. I was very surprised because I had known them for only two weeks. We had a very relaxed and pleasant atmosphere at both meetings in boys' school and girls' school. Students had so many questions, starting from my childhood experiences in BIL and ending in studies abroad and IELTS examinations. They were participating in my research with ambition and endeavour. Therefore, I felt indebted to them and tried to be helpful with their queries as much as I could. After the meeting, I wanted to thank them and asked the tutor if it was her idea to organise this meeting. She said, it was all the students who initiated, baked, and prepared everything. Her job was to help them to get a permission from school administration.

All in all, I spent nine hours in the BIL for girls, seven hours in the boys' school. Whilst acknowledging that this was a very short time to conduct extensive observations, these sixteen hours were the discrete times when I carried out intensive, formal observations during the day-classes and the preparatory afternoon classes. However, outside of these formal observations, I was taking part in school activities; I was meeting students during their breaks; I was doing my paperwork in the 'teacher's assembly room' and, at the same time, I was talking to other teachers to build a relationship and invite them to take part in my interviews. My daily time between 9 am to 5 pm, for 4 weeks was spent in either the boys' school or the girls' school. The informal observations were an integral part of the fieldwork without which I would

not have been able to effectuate such productive in-depth interviews. During all these formal and informal observations, students and teachers were simultaneously enthusiastic and curious. Students wanted to know what I was writing in my field notes. One of the positive sides was that they realised how important it was to keep the data confidential. So, during the data collection process, students did not share any information that was mentioned at any stage of the research fieldwork. Even the teachers could not extract any information from students (I was told by one of the tutors). The entire process went very smoothly with no issues. I am sure all my observations and informal meetings helped me to build a positive relationship and earn my participants' trust and sincerity. Thus, the integrity of my study was aided by the close relationships and trust that had been established. I believe that observations and informal talks made my interview responses more trustworthy and credible. I also feel that observations contributed to my own auto/biographical knowledge.

4.3 Interviews

As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, interviews played a key role in my research fieldwork, as the main source of information for getting insight into my research topic. Interviews were carried out using open-ended questions so that the students were able to provide their personal views about their perceptions and experiences, rather than an experience that may align with any theoretical and pedagogical leanings I may have regarding the effects of single-sex education on students' performance. The opening question was "Tell me about your experience of being in BIL?". If they could not comment on this, prompts were given or the question rephrased, and it happened with some of the participants where I had to reframe the question. The aim of the opening question was to gain a good understanding of the various perspectives of my participants. It would also allow my participants to provide as much information as they wanted. Furthermore, four questions had been pre-written for the interviews and an additional one or two questions were asked in each, according to the responses of the participants:

1. Tell me about your experience of being in BIL, what is it like to be a student in BIL?
2. Can you tell me about the process whereby you came to be a student at this school?

3. What do you enjoy most/least about studying in this school?
4. What factors could you point out (if any) that have an influence (positive/negative) on students' achievements?

Having given a brief introduction to the interview process, I now present the data collected from the fieldwork. Verbatim quotes will be used to support the analysis I make. My intention was purely to present everything the participants had said or written; their nonverbal language such as gestures, facial expressions and intonation seemingly bore significant meanings. However, I will attempt to convey the respondents' voices as accurately as possible.

The sources of data for this section are interviews with students from all-boys and all-girls schools. As students were asked open-ended questions about their views and experiences in BILs, they discussed diverse topics that might be related to them in any way. Having read and reread and discussed the students' responses with my supervisor, I decided to present their views and experiences starting from the moment when the decision to apply to BIL was made. Then, under subsections, I continue talking about the themes I identified, which seem to point to shared experiences and views. However, as this is a subjective study, I will also be interested in representing all of my participants' voices. Those who have different views can also provide important things about the school and the system.

4.3.1 How did they become students of BIL?

Studying in a highly competitive school like BIL is many children's dream in Kazakhstan. The BIL admission's selectivity/competitiveness makes this school unachievable for a large number of applicants. As my participant, Tanat (BS) stated, when they applied to study in 2012, there were approximately 1500 applicants (for boys BIL) and only 60 were given a place to study (4% of applications). According to the school principal, Rysbekov, the number of applicants for the girls' school in 2017 was 2148. Only 46 were given a place to study (2.1% of applicants). That is why, perhaps, the student enrolment process to elite schools such as BIL is one of the most widely discussed topics in Kazakhstan. Applicants spend months, if not years, preparing for admission tests individually or attending private test-prep centres after the compulsory day-classes.

Asiya (GS):

My brother has graduated from boys' BIL. When he entered this school, I was in Year 5. I had been regularly attending courses at the 'Dostyk Educational Centre' for two years. Then I successfully passed [smiling]. Many children of my parents' friends had attended the BIL. They all were inspired by my brother's education. Later on, I had a chance to apply to this school.

Kairat (BS):

I and my family learned about BIL when I was in primary school in Year 4. The following year, I started preparing for tests. Eventually, successfully passed.

Zarina (GS):

I attempted to take the test a year before, after the 5th grade. I had a chance to see what type of questions were there and how the test went on. Apparently, I could pass that time. Then I attended some extra math tutorials. Then I passed. I still remember I was jumping for joy when I saw the results that I had passed the tests.

Bagdat (BS):

My mom's colleague's son was studying here. He is still here, in the 11th grade. My mom saw the school before taking the test. She enjoyed this place very much. I prepared for one year. I remember it was raining on the exam day. I took the test. During the second stage of the admission, I saw the students from older grades. Although there was only 2-3 years' difference between us and them, they looked much older.

Some of my participants noted that they had known very little about BILs. They just kept preparing only because they were told to do so. According to the students' responses, most of them were from education-conscious families. Respondents referred to the fact that their siblings or close relatives had an experience of studying in BIL before. For instance, Zarina's (GS) uncle, her mother's brother, is a graduate of BIL of Kentau city and her sister had also studied here. It was her uncle who motivated her to apply to BIL. Another participant, Zhaniya (GS), stated that since her childhood, all her relatives had been urging her to study there. Then she prepared and passed the exam. Here are some other stories of how students get acquainted with BILs for the first time.

Galiya (GS):

Before entering this school, my brother had studied at this school (boys' school) for two years, I was observing the way he studied, and how he was involved in his studies. It was interesting; however, I didn't have any notion of what would happen at the BIL [...] I didn't make any additional effort, it seemed to me as if somebody was inspiring me, encouraging me and I was just following. Even after starting at the BIL, for about one year, I was not confident enough. Afterwards, I started realising that I was in a good place to study.

Mariya (GS):

To be honest, I absolutely didn't know that there was a school like this. I was studying in Year 6. One of my classmates, who is studying here in my group, at that time, transferred to my previous school from her previous school. Every Friday, she was leaving somewhere. Once I asked where she was going. She said she was attending preparation courses at the 'Dostyk Educational Centre' to enter the BIL. Then I decided to discuss it with my parents. I learned that one of my relatives was also planning to apply. I live far from this city [the city where the BIL is located], that's why I didn't know about the application. Then I, with my father, came to this place. I bought a small book with similar exam tasks to get prepared. I think I was very lucky to pass the admission exam, as I was the last one of the listed students. I also knew that after each prayer (five times a day), my father had been asking Allah for help 700 times! That is why I can't say I'm here because of my high intelligence.

Amina (GS):

A relative of mine has graduated from this school. Another relative is studying in the 11th grade at the moment. I have always been told that every family among our relatives should have a representative in the BIL, so I was that person from our family. In fact, my father was against my idea to study here. He didn't want to let me stay far from him. Before coming here, I had been studying in a well-respected school, where knowledge was more valued than in many institutions. But I had never wanted to go to that school. My parents are now happy that I'm here.

Madina (GS):

[...] The story of my enrolment is very interesting. My mother was looking for a job for her sister [as a teacher]. She was pregnant with me at that time. She came to this school [BIL]. One of the teachers showed and introduced the school to her. She liked it very much. Since then, she had been planning to send me to this school. From my early age, she had kept motivating me so much that I could pass the admission test. That's why I had never had any stress before taking the exam. I managed to pass it easily.

Madina's story is indeed interesting. Next, I would like to share Nailya's (GS) story about her experiences of how she had started being curious about BIL and what had made her excited before coming to BIL.

Nailya (GS):

When I was in Nursery school I was always dreaming about going to school, assuming that it's cool to be there. Unfortunately, I was wrong [laughing]. While I was in Reception class, my brother was studying in Year 6. For some unknown reasons, I always wanted to be with my brother. Maybe it's because he'd spent most of his time with me. When I started attending the Primary school, my brother passed the exam and transferred to the BIL. It was disappointing and sad.

I naively believed that I could follow him wherever he goes. Later, I learnt that only boys are allowed to study at that BIL. After some time, and in complete contrast, I started feeling happy that he had left, as the computer now belonged only to me [laughing].

My brother has always been an Honours student. All my relatives loved him for that. Of course, I was feeling jealous about it. I also wanted the attention my brother had. When he was admitted to the BIL, my parents organised a party to celebrate it. Then I thought, I should also study at the BIL. As time passed, we started visiting him at the school. We were delivering some food. I liked the way he socialised with other students. While he was at home, he was depicting the events which they had organised at the school, how they had studied hard and prepared for the [educational] Olympiads. However, now I understand that, no matter how hard he tried to describe all that, he couldn't

deliver it with words. It was my brother who led me to this place. Unfortunately, my parents did not celebrate when I was offered a place to study here [laughing].

Nailya (GS) was not the only student whom BIL attracted by its various features and not by its knowledge or academic achievements.

Tanat (BS):

It's my father who wanted me to study. I rarely travelled to this city. Personally, I didn't want to come. Maybe because of the school name [former name: Kazakh-Turkish Lyceum]. I said to my father that I didn't want to stay [have any relationship] with Turks. Nevertheless, my parents kept persuading me to try. Moreover, I didn't wish to leave my friends from that [previous] school. I didn't even write the admission test to BIL seriously. At that time, the only thing that kept me curious about this school was the talk about BIL's artificial football pitch. I used to play football in my village a lot. Later on, I decided to take on my studies seriously. It took some time to understand the importance of studying here.

When I listened to Tanat's (BS) story, it reminded me of my story, when he said that the word 'Turkish' made him feel inhibited. In my case, after my admission to the school, a year and a half later, my parents took me from the boys' school for similar reasons. My next participant had an unusual explanation for her choice to study in the BIL for girls.

Saniya (GS):

When I was in my Year 6, my mother told me about BIL: about activities, knowledge and the uniform. I was interested in wearing the school uniform, that all students' appearances looked the same. Then I decided to try just because of its uniform [laughing]. Then I went to tutoring courses. Eventually, I passed the exam, thanks to the school uniform [smiling].

Some students from the boys' school had related stories:

Rakhat (BS):

I have three relatives, brothers, who graduated from this school. They used to tell my parents to send me to this school. I spent one year of preparation and

successfully passed. It was very hard for me to get used to this environment. To be honest, I sometimes cried [laughing].

Askhat (BS):

Since my childhood, my parents have motivated me to study hard. Then, after the 4th grade, my mom told me about BIL. I took it very seriously and I was very ambitious to study here. Finally, I passed 7th among all applicants.

Unlike the stories above, there were students who did not do any (or had very little) preparation for the entrance exam, but successfully passed.

Farida (GS):

On the test day, I was ill at home. A friend of mine came and took me to the school, saying that there is an important examination. I didn't know that it was an exam for BIL. Then after some time, I received the positive results. I didn't have time to prepare.

Adiya (GS):

My brother graduated from BIL two years ago. I didn't know about BIL before. To be honest, I was not eager to enter this school. I just came and took the exam. Some time later, I began realising what is it to be a student here.

Nazira (GS):

The son of my mom's colleague had studied at the boys' BIL. Having had observed her son's success at that school, my mom decided to send my brother to that school. Unfortunately, he couldn't pass the admission test. Then she has urged me to take a test and try. I have prepared for it for three days. I successfully passed the 1st stage. It had always been interesting for me how only girls might study in an entire school. Another fact that motivated me to study here is to learn the Turkish language in order to be able to watch the Turkish soap operas without translation [laughing]. Then I successfully passed the 2nd stage as well. Normally, I am a quiet person, like Robinson Crusoe. When I first entered the classroom, everyone was chatting. I used to sit alone, quietly. It took a considerable amount of time to get used to the unfamiliar environment: almost three years.

Several participants noted that their class teachers from their previous schools did not want them to transfer to BIL. Some of those teachers deliberately tried to stop them. Zarina (GS) said the only thing that made her feel sorry was leaving her friends from her previous school. Before taking the admission test, her former class teacher reminded Zarina (GS) that she could fail the exam deliberately if she did not want to study there very much. My next participant Naziya (GS) might simply have failed the exam because of her teacher's ardent desire to keep her.

Naziya (GS):

When BIL teachers came to our previous school to announce about the admission, I was in a concert rehearsal where I performed as a narrator/leader. I came back from rehearsal and my classmates told me about the admission and asked if I wanted to go to study at BIL. I said, "Nooo, I will never leave you, no way!" [laughing]. I didn't tell my parents about this [admission to BIL]. On one of the Sundays, my classmates came to my house and said: "Let's go Naziya, let's try our luck!". There were almost 20 out of all 30 students from our group. We went to the exam venue. We were told that our class teacher would bring the copies of all our birth certificates (ID) to the exam (which was one of the requirements of the exam process). When we arrived, there wasn't our class teacher. She had handed over all our documents to someone, except for mine. It was raining outside, I cried so hard. I returned home and asked my grandmother for my birth certificate. We brought the original of the certificate and I took the exam. Then my class teacher said she didn't want me to leave, that's why she had kept my certificate. I was terribly angry with her. Finally, I passed the exam successfully. My grandmother also didn't want me to leave. I was the eldest in my family, my parents were in Almaty, and so I was supposed to look after my younger siblings. I said "ok". Then my granny asked some of our relatives about the BIL, and they were very mad with my granny saying that the BIL was one the best schools. After much thought and careful consideration, she decided to let me study here.

If I were their class teacher, perhaps I would do my best to retain them. As we have noticed so far, the applicants appeared to be 'nerds' of their previous schools and it is absolutely normal for someone to transfer to an elite school to enhance his or her

knowledge. However, not all pupils experience a similar process; things might go in quite different directions. What made me very surprised is students who resisted until the last minute not to go to these schools, or who were, to some extent, forced (mostly by parents) to take the entrance exams. Further, I would like to share their experiences.

Raziya (GS):

My brother had prepared a lot to pass the admission test, but he couldn't. Then he began persuading me to take a test and enter this school. I didn't have any desire to study here. Then they sent me to tutorials to get prepared for admission tests. I felt deeply reluctant to go there. Although I didn't write properly, I passed the entrance test of the first stage. Then we had the second stage, where we had to attend the lessons and do various activities. It lasted for five days. I enjoyed it very much and from that moment I started loving this school.

Daniya (GS):

From my early age, I was 'programmed' by my parents to dream about BIL. When I made a wish, although I couldn't imagine what BIL was like, I still used to say, "If only I could study at the BIL". As I said before, I didn't want to study, I was denying everything. But later on, I realised and started feeling happy to be here.

Kamila (GS):

As I said before, my brother graduated from BIL, so my parents didn't ask my opinion if I wanted to study here or not. In fact, I was bad at maths. After the 1st stage of the admission test, I was sure that I failed the test. I don't know why I somehow could pass it. I was lucky. At the very beginning, it was very difficult to get used to this environment.

Zhanat (BS):

My mom inspired me to take the test. Personally, I didn't want to apply because I liked my previous school. Before going to the exam, I had planned to fail them on purpose. But somehow, it totally slipped my mind. I only realised that when I came to the question 40. There were only ten questions

left. I picked wrong answers for those 10, hoping that I will fail. However, I was the 10th on the list of accepted students.

While listening to their stories, it sometimes seemed to me that these children's childhoods were taken away. They were under a lot of stress before coming to BIL. Some of the students were trying to fulfil their parents' ambitions and expectations. Layla's story was one of those:

Layla (GS):

I don't know the exact reason, but it was very stressful for me. I have an older sister. My mother wanted her to study here. But my sister didn't want to study, so she failed the admission test on purpose. Then my mother was very disappointed with her. From that moment, she started to urge me to pass the test to enter the BIL. I was in Year 4. I absolutely didn't know anything about the BIL. But I kept in my mind the fact that I have to pass the admission test to BIL, to satisfy my mother. I was also upset with my sister for dashing my mom's hope, for letting her down. I kept studying hard and in Year 6, I attended extra classes. I remember, sometimes I didn't have time for lunch. I was having my lunch on my way from school to 'Dostyk Educational Centre' for tutorials. Can you imagine, sometimes I fell asleep while trying to solve math problems. When somebody at home was watching a soap opera, I convinced myself saying that if I pass I will watch. There was one unforgettable moment while taking the admission test. The girl sitting next to me unintentionally nudged my hand and I struck out some of my answers on the answer sheet. After that I shed my tears, thinking that I'd fail because of that. Despite that fact, I passed. Moreover, the day when they announced the results was my birthday. It was the best present ever for my birthday.

Rakhat (BS):

I have three relatives, brothers, who graduated from this school. They used to tell my parents to send me to this school. I spent one year in preparation and successfully passed. It was very hard for me to get used to this environment. To be honest, I sometimes cried [laughing].

Sanat (BS):

I had one friend in my previous school. She said she was going to apply to BIL. By that time, I had already changed three schools. My father suggested trying. Just for my father's sake, I wanted to try and prove that I can do that.

One of the unique stories I had during my interviews was Lidiya's (GS). As discussed in earlier chapters, one of the potential reasons for BIL's successfulness is the incorruptibility of the admission process. Lidiya (GS) told me the story that I had never heard from any other such person before. It was brave of her to tell that. If the school staff or her classmates knew, it could potentially affect their relationship. In addition, she was the only participant who was not willing to study in BIL.

Lidiya (GS):

I also didn't want to study here. My mom's friend's daughter graduated from this school. Now she's at the Eurasian University (Astana). Having seen her achievement, my mom decided for me to study here. She helped me to pass the first stage, it's a secret. The exam was held in Tulkibas [regional city], as an invigilator, my mom was responsible in our classroom. She helped me there. I was the second on the list of admitted students, with my mom's help of course. Then I passed the second stage. To be honest, I'm still not eager to study here. Sometimes I want to stay here, sometimes not. Depends on my mood.

Generally speaking, it was clear that most of the students came from education-conscious families. In this subsection, I discussed the students' pre-BIL stage. The next subsection presents students' general thoughts about BILs.

4.3.2 Students' thoughts on how they found BIL

For the question 'What is it like to be a student in BIL?' nearly all of the students shared their views and impressions in a positive sense. Most of them felt the considerable difference between the pre- and post-transition stages to BIL.

Nazira (GS):

My transfer to the BIL was like moving from a small boat into a big ship or liner. BIL has broadened my vision much better than my previous school.

Amina (GS):

Before coming to BIL, I didn't know why I was studying. I was doing it just because I was told to do so. Now I understand the essence of learning. If my parents tell me to do something, I try to do in a way that will please them.

Nailya (GS):

I would only say, it's awesome, it's cool to be a student of the BIL. Unlike some other comprehensive schools, it gives me more perspectives, more motivations to study hard. I often think, what would happen if I hadn't entered this school. I'm sure I'm in the higher position here academically than my former school.

Daniya (GS):

I am extremely happy that I am studying here, particularly in this group. If I was given a chance, I would study from the 7th grade again.

I might be wrong, however, to my mind, the boys' responses appeared to be stuck up. It seemed to me that they confused being proud with being prideful by considering themselves superior to others.

Rakhat (BS):

It is a great privilege for me to be a student of BIL. In order to study here, I had prepared very hard. By passing the test and I made my parents happy. I was very happy as well. By being here, I am not wasting my time. There so many activities in BIL. I am very happy.

Kairat (BS):

First of all, I am proud of being a part of this school. Undoubtedly, this school is 'producing' profound knowledge and graduating many intelligent people. Everyone is aware of it. You do not perceive as if you're studying in one of the ordinary schools. You understand that you're in one of the best schools, where the cleverest children of your area come together. In order to reach our goals, we pass the stringent admission tests and go through the five years of hard work.

I found Kairat's (BS) further comparison very interesting, but it still seemed stuck up:

The name 'BIL' has become a brand. It is like, if you take an old car, for example, 'Lada 05' [*an old model of car of the Soviet times*], and stick the

'Rolls-Royce' logo emblem on it, that will have an effect on this car's reputation. And just imagine, students of BIL are not like 'Lada 05', they are all clever students. In addition, you get this brand and become even better than that.

However, a number of students from the all-girls school stated that there is no difference between them and their former classmates. Although they are very intelligent and clever, they tried to remain humble while comparing themselves with other students from comprehensive schools.

Raziya (GS):

People assume that we are academically gifted students. I don't think we are here because of our extraordinary capabilities. We are only fortunate to be here. Because I know some students in comprehensive school, who are really gifted and intelligent.

Saniya confirmed Raziya's (GS) words: "So, many people call our school 'Hogwarts School' [laughing] and correlate us with them."

Lidiya (GS):

Strangers treat us with tremendous admiration. We are doing the same thing, nothing extra-ordinary. The only thing that makes this school special is its education and the people's support.

Galiya (GS) admitted that the BIL is not flawless: "Studying at the BIL is awesome; however, there might be some drawbacks, but they don't have any effect on students' lives. They wouldn't cause any significant problem to students' performance." I will present the students' critiques in a separate section.

The clear majority of my participants said the school environment makes them feel very comfortable and they compared it with their home. There are numerous proverbs about schools embedded in Kazakh speeches. 'School is the second home' is one of them, which is used broadly.

Tanat (BS):

In a nutshell, BIL is like our second home. Or maybe better than our first home. Sometimes we don't want to go home. This atmosphere is quite different.

Nailya (GS):

I like my school. I'm aware that I'm not alone. I always know that I have two homes. When I argue with my parents, I collect my goods and 'dramatically' leave home and come to the BIL. I also like the relationship between teachers and students.

Madina (GS):

There is a famous saying that 'the school is a second home'. In fact, this is exactly about our school.

Layla (GS):

When I think about BIL, the first thing that comes to my mind, to my surprise, is not its knowledge, but its atmosphere. [...] when I am in the BIL, I take pleasure from everything, even just from walking in the school corridor. I feel as if everything is warm and pleasant around me. There's a Kazakh saying that goes 'School is our golden nest'. I could understand the true meaning of this saying thanks to the BIL. I feel the same comfort that I do at home.

Among my participants' responses Dania's answer attracted my attention, as she was one of the students whose experiences were negative:

Initially, I didn't want to study here. I passed the first stage of the admission. I had another stage of admission, where I had to take some more exams. During those exams, I chose the answers to all questions at random, on purpose. However, I was the last, the 50th in the list of admitted students. I think it's my destiny to be here. When we began studying, I didn't put any effort to study hard. I was even rude to teachers while responding, so that they would complain, discipline and eventually expel me from the school. Once, I even tried to commit a suicide. Now I understand that I was wrong. I'm so grateful that my parents forced me to study, despite my bitter confrontation. Having observed and compared my previous school [former classmates], now I can see the difference between me and my former classmates.

As mentioned earlier, students outlined the school environment and pleasant atmosphere very often. After these statements, I tried to talk about aspects that make

the BILs atmosphere pleasant, in detail. My participants pointed to a range of factors such as a strong friendship and staff support among other factors. I will attempt to present these under specific themes in further sections.

4.3.3 Relationship

Strong friendship. Almost all the respondents reported having a strong friendship with peers. Marat (BS) indicated the friendship as a significant feature of the BIL climate: “Studying in BIL is different than in any other schools. We have a good relationship with our friends here.” Mariya (GS) also emphasised the friendship as a significant factor: “My friends in BIL have become very close, like my siblings.” My participant from the girls’ BIL, Nailya, has stated that the school had taught her to understand what the real friendship is:

One of the things I have learned in this school is the importance of friendship. Because you are aware of the fact that there is nobody except for your classmates. Parents are at home, you’re alone here. You have only your friends and tutors.

Some of my participants described the friendship in comprehensive schools and reported a predominance of the friendship of BIL students. Madina (GS) described the friendship as follows:

I can’t describe it with words. First of all, I’d highlight the friendship in the BIL. For example, when I left my previous school, I didn’t feel sorry; I didn’t miss my friends from there. But here, I can’t imagine myself being without my friends. I’ve become so accustomed to my classmates.

Naziya (GS):

For instance, my former classmates from my previous school have been studying together for ten years; however, their relationship is still very difficult. But we have been together for only four years. Despite this, we got used to each other so much.

Raziya (GS) highlighted the faithfulness and purity of their relationship in BIL and told one story with her sister:

To my mind, the relationship among us is more sincere than anywhere else. Some days ago, I, with my sister, were watching a soap opera. There was a

scene that demonstrated the friendship between two girls. And she was intrigued by this scene and said: “Does this kind of sincere friendship exist?” I was sitting and feeling the pleasure of having this friendship in my school. We have even become like siblings. [...] I’d also add more about the girls in our group. Some of them didn’t want to enter this school. Even after entering, they didn’t want to study here. While we were in the 8th grade, I asked one of them if she still wanted to leave the school. She said she wants to leave, but was so accustomed to other girls, that she didn’t want to leave them.

Bagdat (BS) highlighted the shortage of time in comprehensive schools to make strong friendships and the extensive time opportunity in BILs to spend together with classmates. He underlined the importance of staying in the school residential hall in terms of building the strong relationship:

In comprehensive schools, students go home after school every day. [In my previous school,] we didn’t even know each other’s date of birth. There is not enough communication among students. You only see your friends during the day at the lesson, that’s it. But students of BIL live in the same building for four years. We learn so many things from each other. If you get ill your friends definitely will visit you wherever you are. Our friendship is very strong.

Galiya (GS) reported that being together with peers most of the time, helps them to overcome many issues they had, “When we are together at our dormitory, girls share their problems with each other. If one has a serious problem, everybody tries to help her with advice, tries to support her.”

Similarly, Zhanatbek (BS) explained how strong their friendship is in the boys’ BIL:

Our brotherhood is also very strong. In ordinary comprehensive schools, boys fight very often, and they might not talk to each other for weeks. In BIL, even after having a little argument, in about half-an-hour-ish, something inside you will prick and urge you to go and say ‘sorry’. You subconsciously start regretting and blaming yourself for what you have done.

Kairat (BS) had a similar view. He identified the arguments among BIL boys as the least joyful aspect they experienced. He also added that the good thing was a few days

later, they could become good friends again. Furthermore, he stated that his peers' influences were mostly supportive and encouraging:

I agree with my friend's point. The best thing we have at the BIL is a brotherhood. We have very close relationships. If there is any problem, with any of us, we are always there to help.

Kairat (BS), like the other boys in his group, revered his friend's success in the classroom and claimed that he was always ready to help them with anything. Kairat (BS) expressed it directly, "Another positive aspect about this school is the [academic] support among us. It's difficult to see your friend lagging behind, you help him, motivate him." Similarly, Adiya (GS) reported that her classmates also try to urge other girls who do not do anything to study hard. Raziya (GS) described this aspect very well, "The popular saying 'We rise by lifting others' is well spread in our school." She added that they would support in any situation, even if it is not ethical, "[...] when one of us is absent at the lesson, even if we don't know the reason, we try to cover up for each other, making up different excuses."

My next participant, Nazira (GS), reported that her friends are friendly and respectful. She told her story to support her idea:

[...] when we felt homesick we used to cry. If someone in the classroom starts crying, someone comes up and tries to calm her down. But mostly, she also joined her in crying after seeing her. Eventually, we all were crying because of one person. I'd like to tell one story that describes how friendly we are. Once, one girl from our group brought some samosas to the school. We all were aware of its strong smell. They knew that I was a vegetarian. After some time later, when I went out of the classroom, I saw them eating in the corridor thinking that I might feel bad sitting near to them. I felt so happy to have them.

She added that their class teacher and tutor organised different activities to strengthen their friendship and told another interesting story regarding this:

[...] I remember one story from 7th grade. Our tutor and teacher called us to the room. The light was off. We made a circle. Our tutor brought a big round metal plate with water and a coin in it. The teacher said, "You should touch the bottom of the plate and make a wish, then say Amin and wipe your face

with your hands. Do not open your eyes, otherwise, your wishes will not come true.” Then some students wiped their faces several times to make sure that their wishes will come true. Then when we turned on the light, all our faces were as if we have applied coal on our faces. We hadn’t noticed that the bottom of the plate was covered black after the fire.

Lidiya’s (GS) view was different than other students:

At the moment, if I wish, I can leave the school. Nothing holds me back from doing so. The only reason I’m here is my group, my friends, not my tutor or class teacher or the education.

From Lidiya’s point, I could understand that she was ignoring everything except for the friendship. She was the only student who did not want to study in BIL. Throughout my fieldwork time, no one complained about the relationship among students.

Peer pressure. Peer pressure can influence positively as well as negatively. It can guide students right as well as wrong. According to my participants’ responses, the influences of strong relationships on their academic striving and achievement appeared to be positive. The effects of this positive academic dimension may be related to the pressure brought subconsciously by hardworking students in the classroom.

According to Amina (GS), hardworking students helped her to become more concentrated: “Sometimes, you just see people around you studying. I don’t think anybody would like to lag behind others.” Layla (GS) supported her friend’s views, “In order to ‘stay’ in the BIL, in order not to lag behind, you constantly have to study hard.”

Galiya (GS) had a certain student by whom she became inspired:

There is one girl in my group. When I see her studying, I feel eager to study at that time. Only that girl motivates me, others don’t. Sometimes sloppy students from other groups make me inspired [smiles]. When I am alone, I can’t motivate myself, that’s the reason why I don’t do my homework at home.

Mariya (GS) also mentioned the competitive atmosphere of the school and described as follows:

[...] there is an intense competition among the BIL students, in other words, you can't be lazy while other students are studying hard. It does not necessarily mean one should outperform the others and leave them behind. We do that for the sake of our group's and BIL's reputation.

Raziya (GS):

[...] sometimes you sit and do nothing. Then suddenly realise that everyone is working in the classroom and you start doing something.

My participant Murat (BS) was not of that character to work individually with strong self-confidence. He shared his experience:

I wish I could turn back the time and study in the 7th grade. I would have done those things that I couldn't do. When the topic was not clear, I sometimes felt embarrassed to ask again. It seemed to me that if I asked something again, others would have thought that I was stupid. Now I understand that if I did something wrong, I had to ask, nothing would happen. I would benefit from teachers more.

What I could see from Murat's (BS) words clearly was the pressure that he felt. He seemed to be more concerned about what his peers would have thought about him rather than letting the teachers know that he did not understand.

Bagdat (BS) also articulated his dependence with regards to peer pressure:

Once I received '3' ('C') on one subject for the final term exam. I had never had '3' before. I was very depressed, didn't know what to do. It was hard to 'get up' and 'collect myself again'. All my friends had better scores, they were working very hard. Then my father became very angry. I felt very embarrassed by the words he said and started studying hard again. Now I am ok.

To conclude this section, for BIL students, having a strong social network with classmates, teachers and tutors is very important. These relationships are considered by students as one of the primary facilitators of BILs' competitive environment. Although none of the participants reported any peer pressure for negative outcomes, students might experience psychological and emotional trauma as a consequence of having an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope. All in all,

in this section I discussed my participants' views on student friendship. I also tried to add my experience where I felt it corresponded with the topic of discussion.

In the next section, I will discuss the students' views regarding the staff support.

4.3.4 School climate / Staff support

A positive school climate has various benefits. When school personnel exert efforts to establish a pleasant atmosphere, this leads to the fact that students feel that they matter and belong to the school community, which may eventually result in the better educational outcomes. In this section, I will attempt to present my participants' views and thoughts about school climate and their teachers' and tutors' role establishing positive school climate.

4.3.4.1 Teachers' role

It is widely accepted that one of the major components of the education process is a teacher, simply because of the active interaction between the students and the teacher in the classroom. Extensive evidence suggests that, in all societies, teacher effectiveness is a significant indicator driving student achievement (Klassen & Tze, 2014). It might even be more influential than any other factors such as classroom size, school climate, etc. Therefore, it is generally acknowledged that teachers carry this crucial responsibility by working with pupils. There are numbers of factors such as teachers' pedagogical caring, classroom motivation, and social support, that can have a significant impact on students' performance and even their entire future life. The way teachers talk or behave can affect a student's attitude towards that subject. For that reason, the atmosphere in the classroom created by teachers, and the instructional and teaching methods, might be contributing factors in a teaching and a learning process. It is worth mentioning that creating a pleasant atmosphere may greatly depend on a student's private social life, their self-motivation in the classroom, personal beliefs and values, and so on.

As was mentioned earlier, students were asked open-ended questions. The teacher's role was the common theme that emerged from the student interviews. One of the commonalities in their responses was a comparison with teachers from their previous schools. Saniya (GS) was one of those participants who expressed her thoughts by comparing the BIL schools with her previous school:

If we compare the BIL with other schools, I'd point out the considerable differences in relationships between the teachers and the students. Teachers there were usually rude to students, whereas teachers in BIL try to give more prominence to student motivation. Accordingly, students help each other with the studies. We are all friends, like a big family.

Considering the fact that the majority of BIL students transferred from comprehensive, non-boarding, non-selective schools with a large number of students in a classroom, I believed that comparing BIL with their precedent institutions was not the ideal approach to describe the BIL. However, students did not have many alternative ways to express their ideas about BIL. That is why I committed myself to be as accurate as possible while analysing my participants' views.

Fear and Support. According to most of my participants' views, the school staff strives to provide students with dedicated support in any way that they can. In her further responses, Saniya (GS) discussed the teacher's role in building students' confidence and encouraging them to enhance their academic performance:

There are many factors that affect gaining profound knowledge. I'd like to point out the role of teachers. Once, we had a physics teacher. She used to say during the classes "When you don't understand the topic, just ask! Even if you ask me thousand times, I'll explain to you thousand times." You would never see this action in any comprehensive state schools. What happens there is, if the topic is not clear, you hesitate to ask the teacher about it. They [teachers] get angry very quickly. Then your knowledge keeps deteriorating subconsciously.

Saniya (GS) is clearly maintaining that one of the reasons for comprehensive school students' failure is fear or/and reluctance to ask a question. This view was also shared by Nailya (GS):

It is not that difficult to approach a teacher and ask any question you want to know. You know that no one will send you away for asking those questions, this usually happens in comprehensive schools.

It is worth noting that these are only students' views which are limited to one or two schools. Therefore, it would be quite ungrounded to claim that all comprehensive school teachers are the same.

I would like to share my own experience from my secondary school years. I used to be 'the blue-eyed boy' of many teachers. Even some strict teachers were nice to me. That is why my friends used to benefit from my relationship with teachers. One of the language teachers was very determined and demanding when it came to asking the students to hand the homework in or narrate it orally. When narrating something (i.e. story, poem), nervousness could cause some students to make errors or forget what they were saying and eventually fail. Every single student could be asked to respond during the lesson. The only solution to bypass this stressful moment was to delay the time by making her busy doing something else. In order to do so, my classmates wanted me to ask her various questions at the beginning of the lesson. Questions might be of a political or economic nature or at least something from the news. I would pick one question and addressed it to our teacher at the beginning of the lesson. Consequently, our teacher could speak for up to 10-15 minutes of the lesson. This is almost one-third of the lesson. Eventually, those students who were unprepared for the lesson were able to 'save' themselves from being insulted and humiliated in front of their classmates. For those who were prepared for the lesson, it was fear that stimulated them to do the work. I do not think my action was fair with regard to those teachers. Perhaps it was my instinct to help my peers in a difficult situation. The idea that I would like to convey is the fear in classroom that put many of my classmates in stress.

Generally speaking, my participants' positive views about teachers at the BIL was not surprising or unique. In fact, it is the teachers' responsibility to educate students by encouraging them, not by neglecting. In my opinion, what made BIL teachers special in students' eyes is the situation in their previous schools, and again, it is the students' individual cases. That does not necessarily mean that all comprehensive school teachers ignore students when they do not understand the topic.

Teacher-Student Relationship. Relationship-building or relational capacity is the level of trust and safety between a student and teacher and refers to a developed relationship between them. The impact an educator has on their learners is usually

related to their attitude towards the students. The teacher's opinions, beliefs, and directives will carry more weight if the student feels safe with and trusts the teacher. The students spoke of teachers as another potential key responsibility to students' success. This responsibility was to build, handle and strengthen positive relationships with pupils.

Both girls and boys stated that, in their experience, BIL teachers had more informal relationships with students compared to comprehensive school teachers. Participants also described this aspect as one of the elements that make teachers more reliable. Some teachers might use school's strict discipline in favour of establishing pleasant relationships with students. For instance, my next participant stated that in order to receive a permission from school administration for particular activity, student must be accompanied with or supervised by someone from staff members.

Raziya (GS):

It's forbidden to go outside the school premises on your own without the administration's permission. If there is someone from the staff to come with you, it's ok. So, when we want to go to the market to buy something, if one of the teachers is free, they accompany us every time. The relationship between the BIL teacher and the student is quite different.

Bagdat, from the all-boys school, told how teachers were involved in informal activities:

The most memorable thing is probably a 'tea-drinking hour' with our teachers and tutors. It is something other schools do not practice. It is very strange for them [for students from comprehensive schools] to meet weekly, to have some tea together with their classmates.

As Bagdat (BS) mentioned, usually communication style in a comprehensive school is very formal. Because of the formal and hierarchical system of relationships in many Kazakhstani schools, an idea of approaching teachers to speak about matters outside school may cause pupils to feel discomfort. By establishing informal circumstances or being involved in informal events, teachers may have an opportunity to foster a strong relationship. However, it is necessary to preserve the boundaries with students.

Crossing the boundaries is likely to undermine a teacher's authority and create a troublesome zone for both teacher and student.

Teacher's attitude in awkward situations. School teachers carry out responsibilities of preparing lesson plans, providing quality teaching and learning experiences, and evaluating student progress. In order to enable all children to achieve the highest results possible, they may use various methods during the education process. The education process may encompass moments where teachers have to make an immediate crucial decision. They have to think about methods that could be practical and would not harm a student's reputation and his/her desire to study. Normally, when teachers catch the student cheating, they send him/her to the school disciplinary committee or the school administration member, either deputy principal or the head of the department, which is considered the appropriate educational disciplinary method. Unfortunately, it happens frequently. My participant Zhanat (BS) shared his views about how BIL teachers react in similar incidents:

In ordinary schools, students tend to cheat very often. In our school, teachers spot it immediately if you copy from someone. It happens during the exams as well. If teachers from comprehensive school spot you're cheating, they make every effort to fail you. But teachers of BIL react differently in this regard. They give you another chance to finish your exam. They do not judge and punish you immediately. You will have it on your consciences. You start feeling embarrassed and guilty for your action. That is why you never do it again.

Furthermore, Zhanat (BS) described another situation when an awkward moment happened outside the classroom:

The atmosphere of BIL and the relationship between the staff and the students is unique. In comprehensive schools, teachers are not always valued and treated with due respect by children. The reason for that is they are considered too strict. If an insignificant incident takes place in comprehensive schools, parents are called to the school immediately. But what our (BIL) teachers do is they try to warn you several times until you understand that what you are doing is wrong. They try to help you to understand and rectify it yourself. Even if parents unexpectedly turn up at that moment, – where students feel

scared of being told about the incident – teachers still try cover up. They say “Everything is ok” to your parents, as if nothing happened. This provides students with trust towards the teachers and a motivation and an opportunity to improve themselves. But the same issue in comprehensive schools would happen the other way round.

In line with this, I concur with Zhanat (BS) about his views regarding his teacher's attitude. It is like in a sports competition. Many people debate whether the outcome is more important than the process. For example, in chess, in order to beat the opponent, players use different techniques, tactics and tricks. During the game, sometimes players ignore their opponents' attacks and sometimes sacrifice pieces to achieve their ultimate target – which is check and mate. This example was given to analyse the teacher's action in a broader perspective. What we understood from Zhanat's (BS) experience is that teachers use 'different' techniques – even if it is not publicly acceptable – to achieve their ultimate goals (building a strong relationship and providing good education).

One of the limitations of this practice is that the ethical considerations might be vulnerable or even dangerous. Not all the students might react equally to teachers' forgiving attitudes. If someone (parent or students) decides to complain about this teacher's actions, the consequences might be unpleasant for teacher him/herself. It cannot be justified in any context. Therefore, I think this area needs further careful research and extensive investigation.

Teacher Competence. As mentioned previously, a range of factors operates to enhance learners' performance in education, including: teacher's role, peer support, family's SES, social environment and so forth. Among the school-associated factors, a teacher's influence matters greatly. Particularly in this research, participants commented on the importance of teachers' contributions to students' achievements. Zarina (GS) explained that “usually teachers have a significant effect on a student's success. In terms of inspiring students, making them interested in their subjects, teachers play a significant role.” Regarding the teachers' academic level, both boys and girls outlined that BIL teachers are highly competent.

Bagdat (BS):

I would also highlight the teachers. They are really strong. Not like someone who bought the certificates from universities. Some of them are graduates of popular institutions. It is obvious that they are specialists in their field.

As I already passed the recruitment process to become a teacher in BIL in 2009, I am pretty familiar with its details. I would like to share my first unforgettable experience of getting a job. All applicants have to take a test: that's the first step. If necessary, a demonstration lesson may be requested from applicants who were successful in written examinations. I remember the principal of the school gathered several teachers and asked me to conduct a 15-20 minutes' lesson with them. I still remember, I explained 'conditional sentences', successfully; my 'teacher-students' enjoyed my lesson. Later, I was interviewed by the school principal before I started my job. As we can see, a teacher's position is highly competitive, and the selection process is stringent not only for students, as teachers also undergo this tough 'filtration' process. In his response, Bagdat (BS) has touched upon the sensitive aspect of the educational system, which is an all-pervasive corruption in the country. As mentioned in Chapter One, this might seem something unusual or strange for Kazakhstani schools – unfortunately – if there is no bribery in the school recruitment procedure. A similar talk took place during an interview with a school teacher. It will be discussed in section 5.6 and section 6.4.2.

Murat (BS):

Another thing is, the scores we get at the BIL are real. I confess that some of my '5's ('A's) from my previous school were fake. Almost all our current classmates in BIL, about 95% of them, used to be excellent students at their previous schools. But now only 2-3 [out of 20] of them managed to keep that performance.

I experienced exactly the same situation when I started studying at a same-sex school. Up until the 6th grade, I used to be an A-grade student. From the first term in BIL, I started receiving 'B's. My classmates were far stronger in maths and sciences than me. It certainly exerted a pressure on me. It was especially hard to admit that, having been a leader of my group for 5-6 years, all of a sudden, I became 'one of many'.

Another fact Murat (BS) wanted to underline is that teachers might not always be fair in grading. On the other hand, it might not be that hard to receive those high marks in

rural areas where schools do not have a sufficient number of teachers. That is why, for example, a maths teacher could replace a physics teacher. I do not believe that if there were well-qualified teachers in comprehensive schools, they could easily give 'fake' marks.

4.3.4.2 Tutors' role

One of the emergent themes of my study is a tutor's role in BILs. The reason for dedicating a separate section is that the tutor's position is only available in boarding schools in Kazakhstan. I, as a student at a 'Daryn' institution where both boys and girls study together, had a class tutor at the dormitory. However, if I was asked, in the same way as my participants were, the same questions about my school experiences and views, I would not talk that much about my tutor from school. I even cannot remember her name. It shouldn't be perceived as if I am underestimating my tutor's role. Maybe she was doing what was required in work assignments. Notwithstanding, personally, it didn't have much impact on me and my educational performance.

Almost all participants had similar experiences and perceptions of the school staff – particularly about their tutors. For instance, Saniya (GS) said: "I like the people in the BIL: tutors, teachers, students, all staff members and the friendly relationship among them. Despite their status and positions, all the people in our school are very friendly." Students from the boys' school supported Saniya's view. Sanat (BS): "Another significant factor of our school is tutors. They take care about our behaviour." Tanat (BS): "I had never had or met a tutor before coming here. Although he was older than us by only 2-3 years, he looked much older by his attitude and manner. He has helped with everything."

They were mostly seen as helpful, responsive and respectful. From my respondents' viewpoint, it seemed that the tutors contribute enormously to students' formation as an independent individual. Students from both boys' and girls' schools outline how their tutors treated students in different situations.

Mariya (GS):

The relationship in BIL motivates students to study hard, to do what we are told to do. Just imagine, how would you react to someone (tutors, teachers) who says, 'Do it!' and to another person who says, 'Let's do it together!?' My

character has been considerably changed by the influence of society. If people always treat you nicely, you won't necessarily respond in the same way. My manner was not as nice as it is now. I learned to be polite, to approach every person individually, differently, with due respect.

Zarina (GS):

It's quite different... Here (in BIL) you're treated differently, individually. For instance, now we're about to graduate, so we have many questions regarding our future speciality, how to prepare for it and so on. Whoever [among BIL staff members] you ask any question of, they are always ready to help. Comprehensive schools do not have this feature. Talking to the BIL teachers and tutors is the same as discussing something with your brothers and sisters.

Bagdat (BS):

While talking to tutors, we share anything with them. Sometimes when we struggle financially, we go to the tutors. He lends some money, but he never asks for it back. Sometimes they do not take back. They are always helpful.

Stories from participants. Students told many stories about their tutors and events where tutors were involved. I would like to share some of them.

Boys' stories were about how tutors reacted in critical moments.

Rakhat (BS):

I want to tell one story. When we were in our first year, I and some of my friends slipped away to a computer club. We spent about seven hours there. When we came back, one of our classmates said that my parents had been looking for me. They had called my mobile phone. Since I didn't answer, they asked my teacher and my tutor. I didn't believe in what my friends said. I thought it was a prank. When I came into the dormitory, I saw my tutor being angry with me. Of course, he punished me because of it. We didn't get offended. On the same day, after this incident, we played football with our tutor as if nothing serious had happened. What I wanted to say with it, our arguments, in general, last five minutes, maybe ten minutes maximum.

Tanat (BS):

I like that we have tutors. If they are being angry and shout at us, then it's because of their responsibility. They want to explain the right way. But mostly 7th graders (freshmen) do not understand. They are not old enough to analyse. That's why it makes them angry. They [tutors] are responsible for children's lives. It's not easy. Actually, I was among those who had run away to computer club. At that time, we didn't even realise what we were doing, just kept playing. In Rakhat's situation, it was only his parents looking for him. His parents could have caused school staff too much trouble. But they didn't say anything and left. I can imagine how the tutor was worried at that moment. Now I can totally understand why he shouted at us. Anything could happen to us. Our life was in danger.

There was another story. One day, it was very late, we were hungry and wanted to run to the supermarket to fetch something. We asked for permission from our tutor, of course, he didn't give it at once. We kept begging. After some time he agreed and let us go. We bought everything we wanted and came back to the dormitory. Then we decided to play a prank on him. We were on the ground floor of the dormitory. We called him and said that we were in trouble. We said that policemen had caught us and were taking us to the police station [they do it when children are outside very late without elders' supervision]. He straightaway became very anxious for our situation and said he would come to take us. He took it very seriously and was about to come immediately. A few minutes later we called him back and stopped him. We were really convinced that he was sincerely worried about us. He was ready to do anything for us. Comprehensive schools do not have tutors. Lower grade students do not respect older graders there, whereas our tutor's word is a law for us.

I would also like to share an interesting story from one of the girls' experiences.

Raziya (GS):

Our group has a nickname 'Bandit class' or briefly 'Band'. Now, I'll tell you about the history of this term. We were studying in the 7th grade. One of the girls in our class got '4' ['B'] in Biology. As it turned out, her mother used to get angry when her daughter got any score except for '5' ['A']. Then this girl promised the four girls of our class to destroy the class journal. Later on, she

bet with those girls that if she could do so, they'd buy her a 'snickers'. Those four girls thought she was joking. One day, the girl who promised to destroy the journal, called one of the four girls to show something. She was holding a big bag. She led her to the rubbish bin and showed what was in the bag. There was a box in her bag, inside the box – a plastic bag, in that plastic bag – our class journal. She was shocked. Then they threw the journal. Afterwards, chaos broke out all over the school. All the teachers were looking for this journal. Trying to find out when exactly it disappeared. 'What lesson was that?' – all the girls were misleading teachers, saying different things. As if someone saw the journal with one teacher, others said differently. There were only four girls who knew the truth. Some days later, we told our tutor and a class teacher everything. It was a bin collection day. We went outside, removed everything from the bin. It was a lunchtime, so all the teachers and administration were outside the school. After that situation one of the Kazakh teachers came to our class and said, "There is a gang in this class." Since then, all the people at the school have been calling us 'Band'. It has become so popular that we started using the word 'Band' instead of the name of our class.

Students didn't receive serious punishment for this act. By telling this story, the girls seemed to be asserting that, despite whatever conflict or unpleasant situations happened, tutors and teachers were always lenient and tolerant to students. This story also describes how decisive girls were, regardless of the potential negative outcomes. Taken together, it is clear that the school climate is considered by BIL teachers and students to be one of the significant indicators of students' behavioural and academic success.

Having discussed the students' thoughts about the staff of the BIL, I will continue presenting students' views about the moral education of the BIL.

4.3.5 Focus on moral education (*tárbiye*)

Moral education has various approaches and descriptions depending on the cultural, historical and regional peculiarities of the society. According to Mintz (2014), moral education refers to supporting students to obtain moral habits that will help them individually live good lives and at the same time become productive, contributing

members of the society. Students defined the term moral education (*tárbiye*) as the ability to distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, based on values and norms that are agreed upon by society. This theme was one of the frequently mentioned aspects in the interviews. For some students, it was the main factor that made the BIL unique, different than other schools. For instance, Asiya (GS) said: “For me, the first priority about BIL is its moral education.” She also mentioned it again in another place “The aspect that I enjoy most about BIL is its moral education [...]” Mariya (GS) had a similar view: “I assume, everything starts with a moral education. Of course, we won’t limit ourselves on that.”

Kanat’s (BS) view about moral education was interesting: “A moral education and an academic knowledge are the same – like a bird’s two wings. Birds cannot fly with only one wing. It’s impossible to be successful without one of them.”

Nazira (GS) stated the importance of moral education in the BIL as follows:

We know that BIL is not the only place that educates knowledgeable, intelligent learners. We know that the inventors of the atomic bomb are also very intelligent people. As one of the famous enlighteners said, “Knowledge without [moral] education is the enemy of humanity.” I believe the BILs are contributing significantly to bring up our future patriots.

From students’ responses, it was clear that almost all the school activities involved moral education. In her responses, Saniya (GS) highlighted the moral education given in the classes.

Saniya (GS):

Not only do BIL teachers explain their subjects, they always add moral values to their lessons, too. For example, some of them ask to remind them 10-15 minutes before the lesson finishes. They devote this part of the lesson to talk about moral topics. I believe they are very useful for us.

My next participant from the girls’ school told of what themes teachers and tutors teach to students by moral education.

Zarina (GS):

The main aspect that makes BIL unique is the fact that teachers and tutors pay attention to topics which seem to be minor (not very important). For example, time management, the relationship among friends, how to behave in society and many others. Over the five years spent in this school, students have been formed by listening to these useful lectures. Comprehensive schools do not have such an approach.

Kairat (BS) tried to explain as follows:

We all understand that not all the world is a piece of dirt. There will be something good if you become good. A well-known story: when one person tried to change the world, he eventually understood that he had to start from himself. Then to move on to do something with the world. All our tutors teach us with the same strategy. The strategy is to improve yourself to become the best. Once you become the best then the country starts developing.

As Naziya (GS) said, the reason for the successfulness of these lectures and talks is the repetition: “[...] tutors always keep saying useful things, and eventually, we start feeling a bit embarrassing to not improve ourselves.”

From Zhaniya’s (GS) point of view, it is the high-intensity of the daily routine that helps them stay away from misbehaving:

Here in this BIL, from 9 am to 5 pm we have our classes, from 5 pm to 6 pm we work on Olympiad preparation, then comes activity, dinner time, so on and so forth. We even don’t have enough time to think or do something unpleasant, to gossip. Everything is organised for us conveniently. From an early age, they try to provide an opportunity to spend your time on good, useful things.

Some students pointed out that they are very cautious when they talk or behave outside the school. According to their responses, what makes them feel cautious is the schools’ reputation and the teachers’ belief in them. Here are some extracts from students’ responses:

Mariya (GS):

You know, sometimes, students use a periscope to shoot and share some videos. When I think to have a similar fun, I feel very concerned, as if it might damage the BIL's reputation. That's why we always try to be an exemplary pupil, as we have been students of this school for four years.

Naziya (GS):

Beyond the school premises, we think over and over before saying something straight out, to avoid damaging the school's reputation.

Saniya (GS):

If you have some habits which are not acceptable, you rectify them, you improve yourself.

One of the activities that BIL tutors and teachers conduct regularly is 'moral hours'. It is an informal class meeting with their tutor, teacher or their parents. Usually, the speaker and the students talk about certain topics in each 'moral hour' time. This activity was mentioned very often by my participants.

Madina (GS):

I like 'moral hours' very much. We have open, heart-to-heart talks with our tutors. They listen to us.

Naziya (GS):

I also like the 'moral hours' very much. These activities help me to get spiritually wealthy.

Zarina (GS):

I would point out the activities. As an activity, we have 'moral hours', where we learn so many useful things for us. As an activity, we organise parties with our group, where we improve our friendship among us. These are the most unforgettable moments.

While discussing moral education, participants from the boys' school compared BIL students with their previous schools.

Rakhat (BS):

Once I went to my previous school. The first thing I noticed there was that all my ex-classmates smoked. Most of them are already depraved. I can

confidently say BIL has saved me. If I had kept studying there, I might have been one of them. I think the moral education of the BIL is very good.

Murat (BS):

I am very happy that my parents sent me to study here. I visited my previous school. What I noticed there is if someone attends the classes and studies hard, then he is a chump. I am sure, if I'd stayed there, I wouldn't have studied. [...] All my former classmates are spoilt. There is no common topic to talk about with them. Their every single word is followed by a swear word. I have only one friend with whom I keep in touch.

Bagdat (BS):

I also visited my school. I saw a similar picture. There were only two people left who studied hard. But they are now 'outcasts' of the group. Almost all the boys smoke. They have already given up the cigarette and transferred to 'naswai'⁵. Once I happened to be in my village on the 31st of December. My former classmates invited me to the party. I was very happy for that. Then when we came together, I started noticing that many of them had something bulky in their pockets. Later, I realised that it was a cigarette pack. After some time, hot drinks started appearing. I detested that environment.

When Bagdat (BS) was comparing his previous school, he told the next experience:

Something interesting happened to my brother. Years ago, his teacher came to my mom and said, if you want to save your child, keep him away from this village, transfer him to another school. That was the school's condition.

In this subsection, I presented students' views about the moral education, which, from the students' point of view, was one of the major factors that might have an impact on learners' achievements.

4.3.6 Religion

Single-sex education is a universal phenomenon. Historically, single-sex education used to be in the form of all-boys schools. One of the motivations for establishing single-sex schools stems from religious ideas. That is why I was ready to receive some

⁵ 'Naswai' is the mix of the tobacco or plant named nas, alkalies (calcium hydroxide), the ash of plants, oil, spices, chicken's brood, camel's excrements or marihuana (brosaem.info, n.d.).

thoughts about religion from my participants. Only a few students mentioned religion. In their responses, participants conveyed their thoughts regarding the rumours that BILs provide religious education.

Kamila (GS):

There is a widespread stereotype [rumour] in our society, that BILs propagandise the religion. [...] I don't know what exactly made them think so. Probably it's because the access to our school is restricted to the local community. In addition, our school uniform is relatively more 'closed' compared to other schools. May be this was the reason to think so.

Adiya (GS):

Usually, when people from outside ask similar questions, they try to know about teachers, their attitude. They ask if we wear hijab or pray five times a day. Of course, we don't do any of those. We are open to everyone. We tell everything they want to know.

Similarly, students from the boys' school refuted those suppositions.

Askhat (BS):

I don't like the rumours about BILs which are absolutely not true. Once my mom's relatives were telling me that these schools attract students to Syria and agitate to take part in the war. It is funny, indeed.

Sanat (BS):

Some people say teachers teach us praying five times a day. Some say you can 'buy' a place to study at BILs. I think these are all idle talks of people who couldn't get a place to study here. In fact, they have never been inside the school.

It is worth mentioning that according to The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "About Education", "Creation and activity of organisational structures of political parties and religious organisations (associations) in organisations of education shall be prohibited" (The Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2007).

4.3.7 Single-sex environment

Although single-sex education was the main feature of the BIL schools that stimulated me to conduct this research, it was not as topical as the other themes discussed in this chapter (i.e. friendship, atmosphere, staff support). Most of my participants did not even touch upon the single-sex education at all. Those who mentioned it mainly supported the idea of separating the students by sex. For instance, Nailya (GS) thought it would be a good idea to spread it across all public schools: “My personal opinion about these schools: I’d like all schools to be like BIL – I mean, sex-segregated. It has an enormous influence on students’ academic performance.” Her peers supported the single-sex education for providing an opportunity for students to be more focused on their studies without being distracted.

Raziya (GS):

The fact that we study separately from boys is also good for us. We never feel shy in the classroom. When I see my friends from the previous school, it is obvious that they try to behave like undergraduate students: love affairs, dating. Most students have already given up on their studies. No clear concentration on the subject. They are busier with mobile phones rather than with studying. But here in the BIL, we don’t feel like we are in the 10th grade. It seems like we are still 6th-7th graders, whom it is early to think about ‘love affairs’.

Adiya (GS):

Certainly, I can’t tar all the girls with the same brush. However, I know some of them [girls from CE schools], who spend hours in the morning doing makeup before going to school. After the school, they come back and again go out to meet someone. For me, it is just a waste of time. Instead of these useless things, they could sit and read a book, talk to teachers, discuss something useful with their classmates.

Nazira (GS):

I’m sure, if you take our girls and put them into a boys’ school, they’d never study. They’d mostly be busy with their makeup. Various factors would certainly distract us from getting knowledge. We wouldn’t be feeling as free as I am here, in the BIL.

Layla (GS):

I'd like to tell few things about sex-segregation in these schools. As you know, not all BILs are single-sex schools. There are some BIL schools in Talgar (city), Astana (Nurorda BIL) and Petropavl, where girls and boys study together. During our Olympiad preparation camps and seminars, we travel a lot to those schools. Personally, I have been to Astana Nurorda school many times. When I saw the girls of that school, I understood that being separate from boys at the school is one of our advantages. Getting knowledge is not the first priority in their mind. The age when we start at the BIL is the age when students get distracted by various factors. At the age of 12-13, students are not old enough to understand what is right and what is wrong. They do not realise if they are wasting their time or not. Here in the BIL, we don't have time to think about something different other than the studying. If we discuss the boys' school, we only talk about their level of knowledge and the ways to leave them behind in reaching better results.

As a researcher, I do acknowledge the importance of each answer of my participants. However, I must underline that it is only the students' individual opinions.

Towards the end of one of my interviews with the girls, it turned out that one student was expecting me to ask about the sex-segregation directly.

Galiya (GS):

Before the interview, I thought you were going to ask what the reasons are for students' success in single-sex schools [laughing].

To my mind, [in single-sex schools] either boys or girls do not waste their time. In my previous school, there are some students who get prepared for the school as if they are going to the party. It takes so much time. Moreover, when boys and girls study together, they feel shy to simply respond in front of the teacher.

Participants from the boys' school also thought that it was advantageous for them to be separate from girls.

Zhanat (BS):

Boys get spoilt after the 6th-7th grades – usually because of girls. Boys get distracted by girls. I don't say that here boys never look at girls, they do look. But they also have friends here, who remind them about our studies. Eventually, boys try to control their behaviour.

In comprehensive schools, dating with girls has become something to be proud of. But here, it's something embarrassing if you do that very often. It degrades you a lot if you keep dating with many girls.

Bagdat (BS):

Another thing is we are separate from girls. I am 90 per cent sure that we wouldn't have had this result if we had studied together with girls. The distraction would be the major problem.

Some boys say that they are strong enough to control their feelings and keep the balance with studies. But we shouldn't forget that we were at the 'awkward age' when we arrived here.

My next participant admitted that single-sex education might be unfavourable to some extent.

Askhat (BS):

I think studying separately from girls, in general, is advantageous. However, each side [single-sex and coeducational schooling] has its own drawbacks. Although, it helps boys to receive a good moral education, start feeling reserved while in the girls' presence.

There were some students who did not agree with these boys and did not see any reason for having issues about studying together with girls.

Murat (BS):

In our previous school, my classmates had girlfriends but from other schools or at least other classes. The girls in our group did not affect us much. So, I think if we studied together with girls they would be our good friends, not more than that.

I noticed that Murat (BS) did not have any concerns about communicating with girls and at the same time he was happy with his studies.

Sanat (BS):

I think we should have some communication with the girls' BIL, in terms of competitions and activities. It will help us avoid complexity in the university life. In addition, I would suggest our boys doing some sport. As we are boys, we must know, at least, the self-defence. I think it's very necessary.

4.3.8 Critiques

In this section, I will present students' responses regarding the things that students enjoy least about studying in BIL. There were only a few things students were seemed dissatisfied with. They are: strict discipline, relationship difficulties outside the school and monotonous routine. The first two were spoken of very often by students. I will discuss them in separate subsections.

4.3.8.1 Strict rules

A school's discipline policies might play an influential role in pupils' educational performances and experiences. Normally, school's rules and disciplinary policies contain guidelines for student behaviour, including freedoms and restrictions, that tell students how to behave, and what protections and consequences to expect if they break the rules. In this way, school's rules define students' rights pertaining to that particular school and are consistent with students' rights in a broader sense. Similarly, the way a school enforces discipline policies indicates how students' rights are negotiated in that school. This may range from a strict interpretation and enforcement of the rules to a looser or more flexible interpretation of rules depending on circumstances. The forms of punishments that schools practise to deal with misbehaviour are principally important when considering students' educational performances. Here I would like to present some extracts from students' responses regarding the school discipline. As Zarina (GS) said: "There are some rules, which are not quite pleasant. Sometimes it's too much."

Nailya (GS):

I have never liked, and I still hate, the rule with getting permission to go outside the school territory. You have to see 10-ish people to get that 'bloody' piece of paper. But I admit that this is only for our safety. It's a part of the education procedure.

Daniya (GS):

I also didn't like the rules with permission. Another thing that I'd like to be different is the routine. Instead of having a 10-minute break, they could make it 5-minute and finish the classes earlier. Then we would have some time for a hobby, sport, etc.

Additionally, I hate when our teachers take our mobile phones away. I heard that in some other BILs teachers allow 10th – 11th-grade students to use mobile phones. For example, I'm very addicted to my phone. I always want to keep it with me, even if I don't have to use it. I can also control myself with mobile phones. For instance, if it's not allowed to use, I can stop myself. But our tutors and teachers don't trust us. Probably, it's because of girls who previously disappointed teachers and let them down.

Nailya (GS) told a story regarding mobile phones. It really seemed offensive to me:

I remember one unpleasant situation took place when I was in the assembly hall, and my brother suddenly called to my mobile phone. I went out to talk to him. Some tutors came up and started questioning me. Presumably, they thought it was my boyfriend or someone else, but not my brother. Then one of the tutors took my phone away from my grip. It was very rude. This drives me crazy.

Similarly, my next participants stated that the rules are too strict. However, they also admitted that those rules function for students' benefits.

Kamila (GS):

The thing that I enjoy least is the discipline – they are sometimes very strict. Sometimes it seems to be very tough. Maybe it's good for us. However, some restrictions are pointless.

Galiya (GS):

I also didn't like the strict discipline at the very beginning. But now I try to compose myself saying "You need this. This is only for your benefit!". It also does not have any effect on me.

4.3.8.2 Relationship outside the school

Schooling is an important part of life. Not only does school help learners to receive knowledge, but it also teaches how to integrate into society and how to progress in

life. It is an essential place where students have interactions with their cohorts, build friendships, and participate in social groups with other children. By learning all these features, students build their character which will 'accompany' them in their social life. Students shared their thoughts in regard to this aspect. For students such as Saniya (GS), it was hard for them to communicate with other people beyond the BIL. She stated: "[...] personally, it can be challenging for me to get accustomed to a new place, new people." Asiya (GS) also had the same opinion in this regard: "I find difficult when I communicate with other people. But I can easily find a common language with people from BIL." Naziya (GS) pointed out that she struggles to keep up a conversation with her siblings and relatives:

[...] it is much easier for me to understand someone from BIL. When I go home and talk to my little sister or somebody else, they simply can't figure out what exactly I'm talking about. If I say the same thing here in the BIL, people immediately grasp what is being said. [...] when I visit my relatives, it's hard for me to keep a conversation going with them. It is nothing to do with BIL. That's me who has been accustomed to this school [smiling].

[...] As soon as we [BIL students] step away from BIL premises, we feel desolate. When we come back it seems like we find out soul mates.

Mariya (GS) attempted to give the reason to what her friends said:

If you take me and a student of my age from another school, you will see that we think about different things, that's why it's a bit difficult to find a common topic of conversation in which we could talk.

People always say that we 'see things through rose-tinted spectacles'. They also say that we would 'get lost' when we are outside the BIL. The reason for that, we've got accustomed to each other's sympathetic treatment. If somebody says something gruffly we can easily burst into tears and take offence.

Tanat from the BIL for boys had similar thoughts to her:

When we are in the school, everything around us seems to be perfect. But we know that, beyond the BIL premises, the life is quite distinct from what we have here. If you are not ready for that life, there is a likelihood that you get

depraved during the university years. You have to be strong with your character.

From Daniya's (GS) point of view, the reason for being unsociable with boys is the atmosphere created in BIL and the rules which BIL teachers enforce:

Here in the BIL, it's officially not forbidden to socialise with boys. But if you ask teachers and tutors, they're all against having a boyfriend. If they spot you walking with boys in the street, they will put you on a blacklist [laughing]. I agree that sometimes our girls find it hard to approach or even respond to boys' initiative to socialise. Maybe boys just want to talk to you, socialise without negative intentions. But our girls turn around and walk away. It's very impolite, offensive and just horrible.

Asiya's (GS) view was different from her peers'. In her opinion, the fact that all BIL students are from distinct areas can help them to be ready for any challenging circumstances in the future:

It appears to me that it wouldn't be that difficult for me to find a common language with other people after finishing this school. Because there are twenty-two different girls (in our group), then you learn to talk to twenty-two different girls. That's why I assume it will be much easier for me to get on well with others when I go to a different place. Here we sometimes experience arguments among girls, as well as cheerful moments. In order to reach an understanding with other girls, you do your best.

4.3.8.3 Monotonous atmosphere

One of the aspects that some students disliked was the monotonous routine of the school. As mentioned earlier, a pleasant environment created by school staff plays a key contributing role in students' success. On the contrary, not doing that may result in the loss of an interest to study or the decreased motivation to be involved in the educational process. Students mentioned several times that doing things repeatedly every day makes them feel frustrated. There was only Sanat from the boys' school who talked about it: "The least enjoyable thing is overloaded tasks and monotonous routine."

Raziya (GS):

As for the drawbacks, sometimes it gets annoying when you keep doing the same thing every single day. Sometimes it seems that all teachers agree among themselves to give lots of homework at the same time. Every teacher thinks that his or her subject is the most important one, that all students should know the topic. For example, biology might not be necessary for my future profession.

Along with the monotonous routine, both Raziya (GS) and Sanat (BS) spoke about extensive homework/tasks. It was fairly clear that they were overloaded by the redundancy of the daily tasks. Accordingly, their daily routine has become frustrating. In the same vein, my next participants asserted that sitting at the desk for an extended time without moving is unhealthy.

Layla (GS):

Apart from sleeping in the dormitory, we spend most of our daytime sitting at the same desk every day. I think, because of less activity, our brain might not have sufficient oxygen.

Galiya (GS):

The only thing that I dislike is when something goes on happening every single day. In this situation, I try to leave this place and come back later. Then everything is fine. I like changes.

What Layla (GS) is saying is important; this may lead to serious problems with their health.

4.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the students' viewpoints from the interviews. Themes that emerged from the data, together with sub-themes, have all been presented with supporting quotes from the recorded interviews. It is clear from the excerpts that students' stories about how they became BIL students demonstrate the stressful moments they had experienced. Students' thoughts regarding their academic success suggested the idea that primarily the strong friendship and the pleasant atmosphere played the greatest role in becoming successful. Creating a pleasant atmosphere might not be possible to realise without the support of staff. That

is why they highlighted the teachers'/tutors' role very much. They also emphasised the moral education very often. I will discuss and synthesise all these findings in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five continues the data presentation from the interviews with BIL teachers.

Chapter 5 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS 2

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I presented the students' responses regarding their thoughts about the BIL. In this chapter, I will discuss teachers' views on different aspects of the BIL including the sex-segregation. All the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, with one exception. One teacher and her tutor decided to be interviewed together. I will begin by sharing the teachers' thoughts on the students' admission process –particularly about selectiveness.

5.2 Selective process

Streaming pupils according to academic ability as assessed in an examination has been a common practice in many countries such as France, Italy, Germany and the UK (Clark, 2007). Kazakhstan has also been practising this with particular schools such as 'Daryn', 'Miras', 'NIS' and 'BIL'. Before discussing other factors, teachers highlighted the students' selection.

Ms Anisa (BST):

The fact that they are selected [students] is very important [...]. Additionally, the thing that all intelligent students are together and there are people who guide them in making right decisions. This also is one of the principal factors of their success.

By highlighting the selective process, Mr Ali (BST) identifies the BIL as a platform where students have an opportunity to compete and enhance their knowledge:

The fact that they are selected is very important in becoming an [educational] Olympiad prize winner. There are some students who entered the BIL 'accidentally'. They can be noticed easily. But the majority of the applicants are their schools' honours students. Up until the 7th grade, they had been top-of-the-class students. However, after grade 7, they usually don't have anybody to compete with, which could motivate them to keep the same pace. It's a great chance for them to pursue their knowledge and achieve higher goals.

Ms Aliya (GST) pointed out that in comparison with comprehensive school students, BIL children are already more sophisticated in terms of having ambitious goals and clear objectives to improve their self-development and self-formation. She also underlined that these students were the leaders in academic performance of their previous institutions:

The reason why they are successful is that they are ‘selected’ students. They are school leaders of their hometown. That’s why they are already aware of their purpose for being here. Students at comprehensive schools may not have a deep sense of their future objectives, plans about their future speciality and so on. They are more dependent on their environment and their parents. Here, students might not know their future profession, but they are definitely aware of their position in society. They simply know that they have come here for a specific reason. They treat all subjects very seriously. And thereupon, it becomes easy for teachers to teach their subjects. I think that’s the main factor. They are already ready to acquire (the knowledge) when they arrive. They carry the responsibility of studying here. For certain, they don’t want to let their parents down.

Ms Adele (GST), a former BIL student, had a slightly different opinion to her colleagues. She argued that not all students are academically gifted when they come to the school. Some students might have passed the test ‘by luck’ or, in other words, with the help of other people (relatives, parents, etc.). However, the fact that they are guided by teachers and peers might play a greater role in becoming academically excellent:

When I was a student there was a girl in my group who passed the admission tests to the BIL “accidentally”. That is why she didn’t have any wish to study. So, there are not always A-level students in the classroom. The fact that all the students are selected, and they are all excellent is not always true. It’s because those students who passed that exam are directed and given further guidance.

5.3 School environment

As we have already noticed from pupils' responses, the school environment played a substantial role in students' success. Similarly, teachers described the school environment as a key aspect in students' academic achievement. They described it from different perspectives. Some teachers pointed out the competitive atmosphere, whereas other teachers focused on dormitory conditions with constant supervision over students as significant. For instance, Ms Anisa (BST), a teacher from the all-boys school, highlighted the supportive environment of the BIL. She also touched upon the organised daily routine, saying that BIL students devote most of their time to studying while comprehensive schools dismiss students after the lessons and normally no supervision is maintained.

Ms Anisa (BST):

First of all, I'd say, the school environment helps them to keep up with other students. Then the competitiveness, educational rivalry among students motivates them to study hard. The academic staff are very well-qualified.

One of the primary factors that is affecting them to be successful is routine. In comprehensive state schools, students study until midday, and then they are free. They do what they want to do. Here in the BIL, students have sufficient time for their studies. Students spend their entire time within the school premises, together with their classmates. They can always find someone to ask if they have questions. And definitely, there is someone, who will always guide them. The tutors' role is very important in this regard.

Ms Anisa (BST) noted that the time spent in the BIL is programmed and works in favour of students:

BIL has many advantages. Firstly, there are only boys. They are always together. Students don't waste their time; they even don't have time to wander outside the school. Various extracurricular activities are organised, including sports programmes. Every moment is scheduled and programmed for them. The fact that all intelligent students are together and there are people who guide them on the right way is also one of the crucial factors of their success.

She also mentioned the educational Olympiads, and the competitive atmosphere they may foster, as a factor that motivates students to study hard:

We have different competitions among students, such as educational Olympiads, contests between schools in our city, as well as from other regions. I believe students get inspired by competing against their peers.

Her colleague, Mr Ali (BST), stated that it was inevitable not to be affected by the environment:

As I spend most of my time at the school, my lifestyle gets adapted to the school's routine. In other words, the environment guides you. Simply you have two choices: either you get adjusted to this environment or find yourself out of this setting.

Mr Ali (BST) added that someone who stays here with other BIL students, in any case, receives something useful. Even if someone is not successful when competing against other peers, he will still do much better than those in comprehensive schools:

As I said, our students were the top-of-the-class students in their previous schools. The students who perform unsatisfactorily ('C' or 'D') at the BIL can easily be an excellent student at a comprehensive school. I can give you an example: There was a student who left the BIL after 10th grade. The school teachers from his new school were surprised that he couldn't keep up with the other BIL students and so had left the school. I'm not saying that the school where he transferred to is doing badly. I just assume his new classmates perform comparably at a lower level than him.

In his further responses, Mr Ali (BST) continued discussing the impact of the environment. He added that students, being within the BIL, can find someone (teachers, tutors, students from senior grades etc.) to help them, if required. He also highlighted the importance of being under supervision, especially after the classes:

Could I add one more factor to what I said before: Students here are required to stay in the dormitory. Every day, after the lessons, they come together for two hours and study for the next day. What other students from comprehensive do is they leave the school after the lessons, and probably they don't even open their bags to study. Moreover, while studying at home, if they don't understand any topic, parents can't usually help with what 10th graders study at the lessons. Ultimately, those students do nothing to solve the

problem and come to the school unprepared. But here students are always under the constant supervision.

Mr Ali (BST) described the constant supervision as follows:

Another essential role is the Deputy Principals' quick responsiveness and reaction to the issues arising in the school. For instance, if somebody is missing at the morning briefings, parents are informed immediately. Here I would highlight the constant supervision, and cooperation among the parents, teachers and the administration of the school.

Mr Ayzat (GST) from the girls' school paid more attention to the things that might distract from studying. Having said that he referred to the BIL as a place that could shield students from unwanted distractions, he gave an example of an appropriate use of a mobile phone in the school.

Mr Ayzat (GST):

Today, I'd say there are too many things that distract students' focus from their studies. It might be TV, soap operas, the latest IT technologies, these are many examples of things which distract students' attention. One of the elements that make BIL different is, for example, they have limitations on the use of mobile phones while they are at the school. During the lesson, it's strictly forbidden to use the phones. But it's useless to 'swim against the tide', that is why they are allowed to use them in their free time. It's also one of the necessities of this generation. It's absolutely impossible to destroy this system. But you can set some limits. From 8:30 am to 4:30 pm students cannot use mobile phones. Moreover, they are required to stay in the dormitory during the weekdays. Accordingly, instead of doing useless things such as watching soap operas, hanging out with friends every day, they spend this time studying.

In her responses, Ms Sophia (GST) highlighted the pleasant, supportive environment of the BIL:

BIL is a unique world, in comparison with other schools. You can see only the harmonious relationships among all the people in the BIL. You feel freer here. The aura is different. You always feel support. Here, you are confident that you can receive any help needed. Collaborative work is more developed

than anywhere else. The “One for all and all for one” system works very well here.

Ms Sophia (GST) stated that some people understand the disciplined and programmed routine as a pressure on BIL students:

I’d say that they are under strict supervision. They are not under pressure. If they want to go outside the school, they get permission and leave. If they want to buy something, the school-provided canteen is in service. They are always given alternative ways of solving their problems and queries. [...] What we have here, I would describe it as a routine. Everything is scheduled, that’s it.

But in comprehensive schools, they (students) are under pressure during the daytime for 5-6 hours. Then they can be on the verge of ‘explosion’ and do whatever they want to do after the lessons. I think that’s called stressed atmosphere. Most of the teachers will not sit and go easy on students. Teachers punish you if you do something wrong.

It is worth being reminded that this is just Ms Sophia’s personal opinion. It should not be assumed that all comprehensive school teachers behave in the same way.

My next teacher-participant was a graduate of one of the BILs. Then he decided to work as a tutor at the BIL. At the same time, he was in his last year at the university. He was planning to work as a BIL teacher after his graduation. Mr Abat (BST) pointed out the pleasant atmosphere of the BIL as a factor that convinced him to work as a tutor:

When I was offered this position (tutoring), I vehemently objected. Because I didn’t want to take the responsibility. I saw it [hardships of the responsibility] from my tutor. I was trying to run away from responsibility. But I eventually agreed. Time passed. After the first term, I still was doubting if I was doing the right thing. Then I simply got used to children and decided to stay with them. Organising activities together with children, explaining something useful to them, playing football, sharing their emotions, having picnics altogether; these things made me adjusted to this society. Sometimes they share their highly confidential topics with me. It meant they accepted me as a very close person. Eventually, I was convinced.

Mr Abat (BST) shared some memories from his school years. He highlighted the friendship and the time spent with his friends as the most memorable moments about the BIL:

Probably, it is our dormitory, it left so many pleasant memories. The major fact that makes BIL unique is that students board. Daytime classes may have some similarities with other schools, in terms of the academic side of the education. But its dormitory is different. The most exciting moments were spent with our friends. When I miss my school, I think about the time spent together with them. We were wrestling, fighting, playing and so on.

He also underlined the importance of the close supervision of the students' performance in their academic success:

In addition, a regular reminding to study hard makes them work consistently. It's not only from the teachers' side; their parents ask them to study at home, tutors supervise their performance during the 2-hour preparation time. All sides push them to study hard. Moreover, all sides work collectively, by informing each other immediately if a student starts having an issue with his academic performance. Ultimately, he has no choice apart from studying.

One of the teachers of the group that I was working with during my fieldwork, Ms Adele (GST), referred to their respect among the group as a factor that led them to be successful: "They treat each other's views with respect. I have been with this group for four years. They are very supportive."

5.4 Staff support

There is no doubt that teachers are the crucial figures in the education system. It is they who exert a considerable impact on a learner's achievements or failures at school. It is a teacher who often becomes a role model for students and guides the learning process to make it motivating and stimulating. For school-children of early adolescence, the period of secondary education is a time of change and transition (Wentzel, 1998).

In this section, I would like to discuss teachers' thoughts about the role of staff in BIL, particularly, teachers' and tutors' roles.

5.4.1 Teachers' role

Teachers were in total agreement that the teachers' role was one of the principal factors that led students to success. Some teachers believed that the truly successful teachers' job requires great dedication and self-sacrifice. According to Mr Ali (BST), teachers would be more effective if they spent more time than is officially required and do so without any financial expectation.

Mr Ali (BST):

I would also point out the teachers' role. Here at the BIL, far more attention is paid by teachers than in many other schools. I believe those schools could have had much better performance if they had done the same. There is a number of teachers who are graduates of BILs. The fact that inspired them to become a teacher is [their] teachers' sincere dedication to the work. Here, I'd emphasize teachers' individual approach to students. That is, if a student has a problem, they just spend some extra time with this student, organise an extra lesson and at the next class, you'll definitely see the result. If it's not successful, talking to parents, trying to identify the factors affecting his studies. And discussing it together with his tutor and the class teacher. There might be various reasons for that: maybe the student slept badly the day before the class; perhaps he was watching a football match, and so on and so forth. On the top of that, we have to tackle the issue immediately when it occurs.

Mr Ali (BST) also indicated that the collaborative work between the teacher and the parents is likely to result in increased motivation or, at least, prevent the student failures.

It is difficult to identify the problem when a student continuously misses the classes. Especially when an issue derives from his family. Sometimes, we cannot interfere in his private life. That also might cause his performance at school.

A few days ago, I had a similar situation with one of the 9th graders, who had my lesson on Wednesday morning. The day before that day, there was a championship match. The only feasible way to watch the match is going home or having internet access through electronic devices and watch. During

my lesson, I could easily see who had a bad sleep. I immediately gave the names to his tutor, so he could tackle this issue quickly.

Mr Abat (BST) had a similar view to his colleague:

Students are successful, when all the factors function collectively, synchronously. On the top of them, the teacher's role is very important. Teachers constantly supervise their students. If anything happens to student, a teacher starts worrying about that, calling him, calling his parents, doing everything just to bring him back to the studying atmosphere. When a student sees that, he subconsciously starts feeling embarrassed if he is being lazy and begins working hard. You rarely see teachers who leave the school straight after his classes finish. Students start wondering "Why are these teachers still hanging around the school, why don't they go home?" the answer is simple, they are here because of students. That's it.

In his further responses, Mr Abat (BST) remembered some moments of his student life in BIL:

To be honest, I wasn't capricious; I was satisfied with everything. I liked our teachers very much. I would highlight the relationship with students, their attitude. In comprehensive school, teachers are more official than here; they only talk about their own subject. Nothing else. BIL teachers are different. We had so many informal talks with different teachers. If they explained something, they did it with all their sincerity. They used to tell their stories of their life. It was cool to spend time with them.

Mr Abat (BST) also supported Mr Ali's (BST) views about teachers' principal goals; implying that they should not be focused on material wealth:

[...] most people perceive it as one of the workplaces, where you can spend some time and earn money. But as a teacher, your primary concern should be your students. Not the financial benefits of the job. My mom works at the comprehensive school. And I hear very often when she talks to her colleagues about salary, how to get more and so on. But here, you never hear teachers talking about money. For example, I don't know how much teachers are paid here. And it's absolutely not interesting for me, not at all. Additionally, teachers at BIL care about students more than teachers in comprehensive

schools. I am quite sure, if you stopped paying money to some of these teachers, they will still keep working for free. Because they are doing this with all their heart.

My next participant agreed with Ms Sophia (GST) who said: “What you plant is what you harvest” and told his own story of his experience.

Mr Ayzat (GST):

A few years ago, I was transferred to another school as a teacher, that school was coeducational. The tutor who was designated for my class was a newly graduated student of that institution. I'd like to add that I had already worked there for two years but, due to some family issues, I had to leave that city. So, that was the second time for me to work at that school. Accordingly, I had known that tutor since he was a student. While we were setting our annual plan, I tried to give some instruction about how to establish a communication with new students. I said: “If any of the students get ill, take 50 tenges [apprx. 10 pence], go to the market and buy a lemon. Cut it into halves and put them in two cups. One for him and one for yourself. Put in some sugar and boiled water and drink it together. He will remember this forever. Then after, whenever you ask him to do something, he will do that with pleasure. It will help you to educate your students rightly.” After saying it, he suddenly started laughing. Then he said, “Do you remember five years ago, you did the same thing to me when I was lying in my bed, with high temperature”. But I forgot. Then I remembered the conversation that we had there. He didn't have a father. He had said: “People think that boys who don't have a father are always bad-tempered, rude. I will prove that it's not true.” And that time he was sitting in front of me, as a tutor of a class. This is the most pleasant moment that I kept in my mind.

He also commented on his story as follows:

Whenever you do something good to others, you'll definitely see the same thing in your life. Your deeds will never be wasted. Even if you forget that moment, there will be someone who will remind you. That's why I think we should do many honourable deeds for our students.

5.4.2 Tutors' role

A tutor, as a member of the pedagogical staff, carries a great responsibility. The reason for that is that students spend most of their out-of-class time with their tutors. Most of their extra-curricular activities are organised by them. That is why some teachers decided to mention the significance of the tutors' role.

Mr Ali (BST) underlined the academic support provided by BIL tutors:

I would say... a tutors' role is significant. One of the requirements for a tutor's position is to be able to speak English, sometimes additional Turkish language is preferable. Moreover, tutors have to be able to help with all school disciplines.

What my next participant, Ms Sophia (GST), wanted to emphasise is the teachers' constant supervision over the students. Although students had very little free time, they are not left without supervision – in other words, their free time is also controlled.

Ms Sophia (GST):

Students have all the support they need. Tutors - during their spare time, teachers - during the daytime classes. They have very little free time. Students' daily routine is filled. One principal factor is there is always someone who could guide them.

My next participant shared his own experience from his school years when he was studying at the BIL. He stated that tutors treated him as a friend and whenever he needed any help, they were by his side.

Mr Abat (BST):

We also had tutors, we could tell them anything, any problem. After sharing your problems, you either receive his suggestions what to do next or at least you get support from him. Eventually, you get pleasure from this talk and feel a huge relief.

5.5 Single-sex environment

Unlike BIL students, teachers had more to say about the single-sex environment. Almost all of them spoke in favour of the sex-segregation. They pointed out the

students' distraction from studies as a major disadvantage that coeducational schools experience.

Mr Ali (BST):

I had a few opportunities to teach in the coeducational setting. What I noticed there is usually boys try to show off their capabilities, especially in front of girls. Those who are shy, they always keep being shy, and usually cannot speak out. If somebody is not confident in their response, they often don't speak. Here, I'm talking about the disadvantages of the coeducational system. I could say the same about girls. There are certainly intelligent girls, but most girls' attention is on fashion, mobile phones. Of course, there is a rivalry between them, but this rivalry is not education-based. This trend starts in early grades. Here in the BIL, you can't notice such tendency until 10th-11th grade. I think the first reason for that is there is nobody, I mean girls, to boast about their knowledge in front of them. If boys compete, they do it in studying, in sport or in educational Olympiads. As you have seen today, they are organising a football tournament. I think the competing feature in boys' character works very well here.

Mr Ali (BST) also added what he did not like about single-sex school students:

When they are next to girls, they behave as if they have never seen girls in their entire life. They make a 180-degree turn and everything around them changes their focus; the topic of their conversation, their behaviour and so on. However, if the same situation happened in coeducational school, the consequences wouldn't be like this. The appearance of a girl would not affect the boys in a co-ed school as much as it does in a single-sex school. Sometimes it looks ridiculous as if they are coming across girls for the first time. In this regard, a single-sex environment sometimes is not that advantageous.

However, later in his response, Mr Ali (BST) outlined how, in his view, a sex-segregated environment helps teachers to conduct their lessons.

But during the lesson, the absence of girls allows them to be successful. Usually, girls are not good at maths and physics. It's hard for them to compete with boys. Likewise, in arts and humanities, boys are not able to

compete with girls. For example, teachers might find it difficult to teach the English language to girls and boys together. The same with science. While girls are trying to understand the task and discussing it with each other, boys surpass them quickly. Girls need more detailed explanation, with more extra lessons. As a proof, I'd point out the UNT results, where girls' maths results are not satisfying, only a few girls show a satisfactory performance, whereas boys' performance on humanity disciplines leaves much to be desired. Most of our (boys' school's) prize holders are in science, while the girls' school is better at humanities. To some extent, I believe that girls' educational and learning abilities might play an essential role.

Another teacher from a boys' school also supported the single-sex setting, meaning that this would help prevent boys from being distracted by girls. She also suggested comprehensive schools might try having a separate classroom to split students by sex within one building, at least during the day-classes.

Ms Anisa (BST):

Another aspect that might affect their performance is their segregation from girls. I support this idea to some extent. Boys are not distracted by the opposite sex. I would suggest comprehensive schools have separate rooms for girls and boys. They can be in the same building, however, during the lessons, they should be separate from each other. There are some topics that should be discussed in only boys' or girls' presence during the lesson. That does not necessarily mean that boys are going to be completely separate from girls. In any case, they will communicate with each other. They are in the same building. I wouldn't say our students become reserved or different than other students from the ordinary comprehensive schools [in terms of communicating with the opposite sex]. However, in terms of the moral education of the BIL, students' behaviour is quite different than there [comprehensive schools]. Some parents feel very anxious about their children's character, that they might become reserved, unsociable. For some parents, it [sex-segregation] is the only reason not to send their children to BIL. Those parents whose sons study here, after a few months, come and say that their children have changed, that they have become more respectful to

their parents. I even remember one parent who came up right after one month to thank us.

Similarly, her colleague Mr Abat (BST) agreed with the idea that students should be separate from the opposite sex:

Another significant factor is students' opportunity to study in a single-sex environment. I am afraid, without it, there wouldn't be as much success as we have today. Boys wouldn't feel that free like they are today. For instance, imagine all the girls and boys sitting in the same room in English lessons. Will boys, who have problems with their pronunciation, speak confidently in front of girls? Sometimes, they even feel shy in front of their male friends. Boys' concentration will be distracted from the education process. If one has an argument with his girlfriend, it will certainly affect their performance. And I think it's absolutely normal. Therefore, it's better to keep them separate during the education process.

Mr Ayzat from the girls' school noted that a single-sex setting was a historical phenomenon and it was not something new for the Kazakh culture. He also admitted that a single-sex setting has both good and bad sides.

Mr Ayzat (GST):

It's exciting to work at school. However, our schools are distinctive. What makes BILs distinctive is its sex-segregation. Only BILs have this characteristic. Even though it's something new for contemporary Kazakhstan, historically, boys and girls had always been studying separately. For this reason, I don't see this as something strange for human nature. Certainly, there are some advantages of the separate education, as well as the disadvantages.

In his further discussion he stated that he would prefer single-sex schools and gave some reasons for that:

Personally, I would send my children to a single-sex school. And that's what I'm doing now. I have two sons; they both attend a boys-only school. I have a daughter in a primary school. When she finishes that, I will send her to the girls-only school. The reason for that, nowadays, it's hard to control students after the 6th and the 7th grades. And teachers also cannot control them. It's not

the teachers' fault. It's the system made it so. If you say something wrong to a student, it's likely for teachers to be prosecuted. Parents cannot stand that as well. That's why there are many problems occurring in the mixed environment. In this case, we would guarantee our children [not to be involved in an adverse situation].

My next participant disagreed with the fact that girls become reserved and shy in front of boys. She noted that it totally depended on the girls themselves.

Ms Adele (GST):

We work with male teachers in BIL. What we teach students is to respect everyone including males. What we try to highlight is we should not cross a boundary in communication with males. But in general, we teach them to be open-minded, sociable and communicative. That's why I don't see any reason for them to become reserved. I have studied with boys (undergraduate degree), there were eight boys and seven girls. I didn't feel any unpleasant feeling while studying together with boys. It might also depend on a person's own characteristics.

Ms Aliya (GST) had a slightly different opinion about single-sex education than her colleagues who supported the single-sex education:

It's good that they feel free in the classroom. They also behave impeccably. However, studying separately has some drawbacks. For instance, the way they control the hairstyle. When I started working with girls, I thought I had to be very exemplary in front of girls and try to look nice. But when I entered the classroom, I was surprised [laughing]. One of the girls was sitting with her hair just piled on the top of her head. It seems to me that, as long as her hair is not disturbing her study, then it is absolutely fine. No need for a proper hairdo. I have seen many students doing this. [For students,] knowledge is much more important than anything. I think it is a serious disadvantage of single-sex education. They don't care if there are people looking at them or not. I have also noticed that many graduates of this school don't get married. There is no doubt about their level of knowledge. They don't try to be attractive. I am sure teachers and tutors tell them to take care of their hair. But if there were one boy in the classroom, they would [try to] look differently. Same happens in the boys' schools. Apart from that, being separate from boys

is beneficial for them. They are very intelligent, open-minded, sophisticated students. Many students improve themselves, become leaders and orators of their group.

Her views appeared to be stereotyped to some extent and might have been reinforced by the fact that she was working in a single-sex environment for a considerable amount of time. During my observations, I did not notice any student with tousled hair. On the contrary, one of my participants said that she dreamt to be a fashion model. Another student had ambitions of becoming an actress.

Then Ms Aliya (GST) suggested that comprehensive schools might have had similar achievements if the school characteristics were the same:

If the conditions and features of both single-sex and coeducational schools were the same, except for the sex-segregation, then results of the mixed school would be similar to the BIL. But there is one important aspect. For example, any male who has served in the army looks different than one who has not. Similarly, the girl who has spent some time, even one month, at the camp will return from there with some changes. Anyone who spends some time in the same-sex society will undergo the competition. Say, if you were my colleague, I wouldn't compete with you [because of sex differences]. Even if we teach the same subject. Maybe it's because of distinct characteristics of men and women?! You sometimes feel shy or reserved, maybe sometimes respect the opposite sex. But with the same-sex peer, you compete directly with no problem. It is the same with students. If there are 20 girls only, a student strives to be the best among all 20 girls. If there are ten boys and ten girls in the classroom, then it is not as interesting as it is in the single-sex setting.

5.6 Corruption

Unfortunately, data from several sources have reported the Kazakhstani education system as being corrupt (Isa, 2016; OECD/The World Bank, 2015; OECD, 2014). The lack of transparency and accountability and prevailing impunity had an effect on the overall education process. A questionable recruitment process might be the foundation of all education-related issues.

Although it is a highly sensitive topic in schools, some of my participants decided to share their views on this matter. They pointed out the absence of corruption in the BILs as an indicator of success.

Ms Anisa (BST):

We undergo various inspections like other comprehensive schools do. We have successfully passed the attestation [authentication check] last year. The comprehensive schools have the same system of attestation. All the attestations are mainly focused on the inspection of the school documentation. However, the way comprehensives approach this attestation is different. Hosting the members of inspection, looking for hotels are the responsibilities of teachers. Doing anything to make them feel comfortable is the first priority, rather than the documentation. Teachers are afraid of failing the attestation.

The attestation in BILs is different. Thank God, we passed the last one. Even if we hadn't passed this attestation, we wouldn't have been dejected because of it.

There is too much oppression in comprehensive schools by the school administration. I have never seen any sort of authoritarianism here; every teacher is busy with his/her own lesson. Whereas, teachers at comprehensive might be humiliated, intimidated just because of one student's absence. And it's done in front of all students and teachers of the school. It still exists. I don't know when they are going to stop doing that.

Ms Aliya (GST) explained, this aspect of the BIL made her feel delighted and motivated in her work:

I think I found the place that is for me. Before, I wanted to attend different seminars, conferences. Sometimes our students were not at the required level to participate. As you may know, at comprehensive schools you should 'go through' bribery if you want to do something like that. Since I transferred to this school, I have been given many opportunities, 'for free', without paying anything to anyone. Students are intelligent. I have all chances to realise my ideas and ambitions. Specifically, I am interested in scientific projects. In my previous school, I had very few chances to discuss my project, present it

somewhere and so on. if we wanted to be successful, even if it was a topical project, we had to bribe. The project's content was not even considered if you do not pay that money. Here, in BIL, I could make great progress. In comprehensive schools, students only memorise the 'ready-made' material. They do not contribute anything to the project. Everything is prepared by teachers. Consequently, pupils assume that teachers do this job in order to upgrade their academic level. But here, students are only given an idea, and they improve this idea on their own. In addition, students of BILs are involved in accomplishing the task with their all sincerity, as if they are about to make a global change/discovery. Therefore, I like the BIL.

5.7 Critiques

As for the school drawbacks, teachers did not have much to say. Some of them refrained from expressing any opinion in this regard. Ms Adele (GST) agreed that BIL students could express their thoughts more openly than those in comprehensives. However, she outlined that when students go outside the school, they become very silent. My next participant from the boys' BIL had a similar view about students' character outside the school premises.

Mr Ali (BST):

As for the disadvantage of single-sex education, our boys cannot express themselves in front of other people (outside the BIL). Moreover, they might feel shy to perform on stages or they might feel a lack of oratory skills. It might be good in terms of having a good character [modest]. But sometimes, they really 'trail behind'.

Ms Aliya (GST) complained that students of BILs were not involved in physical labour. She was very anxious about their health and future. She thought students might become reserved and in the future, they might turn into individuals which are incapable of taking care of themselves.

Ms Aliya (GST):

They never labour, [they are busy with] only studying, reading. It's also something negative for children. Just imagine, if I always choose the clothes for my daughter and bring them from the supermarket myself, will she be able to do it individually in the future?! To choose the proper colour?! But if you

let them work individually, they will improve this character. To be honest, I don't think the knowledge is the most crucial element that we should consider. We should bring children up as individuals with a good character. When you keep saying 'You have to be a leader, you have to be the best students', then one day that person may become selfish and may lose everything he had as a human.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the data gathered by articulating the thoughts, experiences and suggestions of the BIL teachers. The data was presented under the common themes derived from the participants' words. In general, a number of teachers identified students' selectiveness and school atmosphere as significant factors that contributed to their academic success. They also highlighted the importance of the staff role in delivering quality knowledge and upbringing. As for the limitations of the single-sex environment, participants pointed out the likelihood that a single-sex setting might cause students to become reserved and too shy to speak in front of an audience. At some point, however, some of the teachers seemed to have stereotyped opinions about boys and girls (e.g. *girls aren't any good at maths... girls don't bother about their hair...*). While I accept the possibility that some of the issues mentioned by teachers may remain in BIL schools, I would like to point out that this might be the reflection of how enduring employment in single-sex environment reinforces such views.

The particular themes identified in Chapter Four and Five will be subsumed under wider umbrella headings in the interest of in-depth analysis in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four and Chapter Five, I have presented the outcome of the thematic analyses in the form of the BIL students' and teachers' opinions without interpreting or making any reference to the literature.

In this chapter, I will synthesise the findings from the preceding chapters through a discussion which brings together the literature review in Chapter Two.

Interpreting and contextualising the fieldwork data requires a thorough understanding of the participants' voices. It is also necessary to consider the characteristics and the context of the field in which they were collected, as well as the existing body of literature. Burbules et al. (2015) describe certain aspects of interpretation that the analysis process may involve:

Another way in which interpretation enters the research process is in our attempts to analyse, to make sense of, or to give meaning to the data, evidence, argument, scholarly work, and other material that we collect in the process of inquiry. (p. 11)

Making sense of the data and discovering what BIL students' and teachers' voices could tell us about their thoughts and experiences about studying in BIL schools required an attempt to interpret, contextualise and give meaning to the evidence collected. As such, I endeavoured to recognise and fathom the circumstances and local factors which might have shaped and influenced the participants. To aid and enrich this analysis, I needed to reflect upon my own background experience, my previous role as a student at a single-sex school and as a teacher in a school similar to those in which I studied. In doing so (as was explained in the Methodology section), I acknowledged the potential implications of being an insider researcher for the research results, which helped me not only to manage negative impacts but also to take advantage of being an insider researcher (some benefits of which have been mentioned in the Methodology Chapter on p. 90). Moreover, as students were encouraged to describe their experiences and express their views freely, whatever they were, treating their opinions with the utmost transparency and confidentiality was the primary ethical concern I had towards my participants. Gibbs (2007) highlights the researcher's ethical commitment to maintaining to the varied perspectives held by

various research participants as well as the potential conflict and contradictions between those conducting the exploration and those being explored.

Additionally, the cultural, historical and social context in which the data was obtained could have an influence on the way the findings can be interpreted, contextualised and understood. Despite all the potential factors that might affect the interpretation, I will commit myself to adopting an accurate and transparent approach to this process by minimising any chance for potential misunderstanding, misrepresentation or misinterpretation of the contexts that research participants made of their experiences. Before embarking on the discussion and interpreting the research findings, I would like to restate the research goals and aims.

Initially, before beginning data collection, the aim of this study had been to explore the students' and alumni's perceptions and experiences with regard to single-sex education in BILs and its impact on students' academic performance. However, during my fieldwork, it became more apparent that students did not regard the single-sex environment as a major factor for BIL students' performance nor see it as a primary consideration. Instead, they considered this factor as just one aspect among many others. As mentioned in Chapter Three, while analysing the participants' responses, I noticed the alumni's strong inclinations to support the BIL school. I acknowledge the possibility that the experience that alumni had during their school years might have been entirely positive. However, it is also possible that – as we normally look back on our school days through a golden glow – they tried to see only positive memories as though they were halcyon days from their childhood and remembered their good old days with nostalgia. Having discussed these circumstances with my supervisor, I decided to look at students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of studying in 'BIL'-boarding schools and leave out the alumni since they did not seem to offer a critical and dispassionate view. Thereby, this study attempted to respond to the research question: What are *students'* and *teachers'* experiences and perceptions of studying in BILs?

As I began to analyse the wide-ranging topics discussed in the conversations, it became evident that there were three main themes under which I should organise my discussion chapter. The first section focuses on school selectiveness. In this section, I will discuss the process of how children became BIL students. The second part discusses the strong relationship among BIL students. This aspect was perceived as

highly important by the vast majority of my participants. The last section looks at the teacher's role as one of the major factors that contributes to students' attainment. All the themes and subthemes that emerged through the analysis of the responses are presented, focusing primarily on how students and teachers conceptualise their perceptions and experiences of studying and working in BILs.

6.2 School selectiveness

Student selection is a widespread practice among elite boarding schools (Contreras et al., 2010). A number of Kazakhstani boarding schools, in both private and state sectors, have been using this practice for more than half a century (Yakavets, 2014b). At the beginning of their interviews, my participants were asked to tell me about their perceptions and experiences of the student selection process. The following two sections provide an exploration of participants' responses related to the student selection process. Students' and teachers' views will be discussed separately.

6.2.1 BIL's student selection process: experiences from students' perspectives

BILs are state schools that foster successful academic results and that aim to provide high-achieving students a competitive atmosphere and ample opportunity to acquire decent education. They offer entry based on applicants' academic performance, with the excellent and most intelligent competing for places in each school through a school admission test. A number of student-participants commented on this process in relation to their experiences. Students were asked open-ended questions and they talked about different stories, moments and feelings that the process involved.

One of the main points that the research findings indicated is that, in the majority of cases, students were guided or advised to apply to BIL by their relatives, which points to the fact that the students were from education-conscious families. In addition, a few students' siblings and other relatives were graduates of these schools. Their experience helped students and their parents in making the decision to apply to BIL. There were only a few students who reported that it was their own personal decision to study in BIL. These findings indicated that BIL students were likely to be from families with higher social and cultural capital, who could exploit different kinds of social resources.

Several reports have shown that school choice has been one of the highly-discussed topics in many countries (Burgess & Mckenna, 2014; Exley, 2011; Schneider et al.,

1997). According to students' responses, the parents' role in school choice was important. Research findings suggest that students attending high-performing schools have better-educated parents, and there is greater parental involvement in school activities. The possibility of receiving a quality education by children from privileged backgrounds is much higher than those who are less education-conscious (Cullen et al., 2005). As such, students' family background can be seen as a greater predictor of students' and schools' overall success.

Another aspect that students' responses revealed, is that the preparation time for the entrance exam was very stressful. What made students feel that anxious is their parents' fervent desire for and belief in their children's likely success. It is understandable that parents want the best for their children. Parents work and earn to take care of their children. Some parents' ultimate goal for their children is to send them to the best quality schools and then secure a place of study in one of the prestigious national or international universities. It is not an over-exaggeration to say that most parents of BIL students live for their children's prosperity. For instance, Nailya's (GS) parents moved to the city where BIL was located to be near to their child. Madina's (GS) mother started planning to send her to BIL before she was born. It was the parents' care that drove them to start preparing their children for the BIL entrance examination from an early age. Having been told by parents that they were expected to pass the test, children started worrying about that more than anything else.

In the literature, it has been suggested that within Asian families, a high value is placed on parental deference, such that children may desire to live up to parental expectations (Kim et al., 1999; Leong & Chou, 1994; Wang & Heppner, 2002). For some of my participants, fulfilling their parents' expectations was the primary reason to apply for a place at BIL. In doing so, some of those students fell into a depression, which was dangerous to their health and psychological well-being, as adolescents are perhaps more vulnerable than adults (Ortuño-Sierra et al., 2015; Sharma & Maqbool, 2015).

It has been suggested that the control over the boundary between 'caring' and 'caring too much' should be maintained to prevent the depression or suicide that the pressure can lead to (Fay, 2012; Sinha, 2016). By placing mountains of responsibility on children, parents may cause stress and anxiety, which then likely to result in more

serious self-doubt (Saw et al., 2013). The evidence from several Eastern-Asian countries supports this idea.

For example, South Korea is famous for its high ranks on various international education testing statistics, such as; Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Anderson, 2016; BBC News, 2015; OECD, 2016). Dr Koo, a former fellow and lecturer in Korean studies at Yale, criticised the ‘dark side’ of these statistics and described the entrance exams that caused the student stress as an ‘assault upon our [Korean] children’. He raised the point that those astounding rankings came at the cost of ‘a stiff price in health and happiness’ to students. In addition, he noted the fact that South Korean students assume the far lower positions when it comes to student happiness rankings (Koo, 2014).

The former Minister of Education of the Republic of Korea, Professor Lee, in his interview to ‘Today’, commented on how statistical results of international student assessment organisations were affecting students: ‘[...] we really think we need to make a change. But PISA somehow is telling [people] that Korea is the best, like Singapore. This is kind of hiding our problems’ (Yng, 2015).

Exam results are considered extremely important in East Asian countries like China and South Korea (Honoré, 2008). Although Kazakhstan is not as highly-populated as those Far-East Asian countries, where competitiveness is far more intense, this tendency is not unusual anymore in the Kazakhstani educational arena. Over the past two-and-a-half decades since independence from the USSR, more and more state and private schools have been practising the student selection policy. This may require further in-depth research to determine if practising the selection policy in the Kazakhstani context is pertinent to the country’s education system.

In my view, similarly, BIL students’ spectacular success in ‘numbers’ should not make school teachers, administration and parents blind to the threats that children might experience if not treated seriously (Honoré, 2008). Forcing a child to attend the selective school by undergoing all its intense procedures may cause unexpected consequences. Looking at my findings from an interpretivist perspective will enable me to summarise that the present course of the selective schools may take us towards similar crises to those which South Korea and other countries have experienced.

Taken together, these results would seem to suggest that the current selective policy to BILs, as well as other Kazakhstani selective boarding schools, cause secondary school children stress and anxiety. These findings may help us to understand the fact that providing support and encouragement, rather than forcing, is more likely to be pertinent to engage children in the learning process. This part of the study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of what students' experiences were before coming to BIL and selective schools like BIL. It also adds to the growing literature on the processes through which authoritative parenting affects students' mental health in Kazakhstani selective schools.

6.2.2 Students' thoughts about BILs

Student-participants expressed their views as to how they found BIL. All the participants believed that BILs were doing better than their previous schools, with regard to academic and moral education. Students also highlighted the motivational support of the BIL staff. It is noteworthy to mention that all the responses regarding the BIL were predominantly positive. Most participants expressed their views by comparing BILs with their previous schools. For instance, Nazira (GS) described her transfer to BIL as moving from a small craft to a ship. One participant from boys' schools used makes of cars ('Lada' and 'Rolls-Royce') to convey his opinion of BILs. As mentioned in the previous chapter, boys' responses appeared to be arrogant. The students of elite schools usually think of themselves as belonging to a meritocracy (Deresiewicz, 2008). This feeling of superiority often inculcates "a false sense of self-worth" (ibid., 2008, p. 22). This also has a potential to convert into a sense of "nobility" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 79). Only a few students from girls' school highlighted that there was not much difference between them and their classmates from previous schools. They explained that the difference is in the way the education system of the school and the staff support in this school.

I believe that participants' consistency in positive views was strongly influenced, at least, by the school climate and its staff members. As mentioned in students' responses, they experienced various challenges during the preparation. Some of the participants kept struggling after being accepted to the school. It was hard for them to cope with the stress and adapt to BIL. Daniya's (GS) attempt to commit suicide allows us to elucidate how stressful the adaptation period might be for students. However, the same student in her later responses stated the following: "Now I understand that I was

wrong. I'm so grateful that my parents forced me to study, despite my bitter confrontation". She was not the only person who found it difficult to become accustomed to the BIL's environment, and she was not the only student who at the same time felt happy to be a student of this school. One of the participants felt concerned that someone had behaved negatively, saying that it could damage the BIL's reputation.

Students' responses can exemplify Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory. Commenting on this theory, Festinger & Carlsmith (1959, p. 121) note: 'If a person is induced to do or say something which is contrary to his private opinion, there will be a tendency for him to change his opinion so as to bring it into correspondence with what he has done or said'. Jones & Mills (1999) suggest that for dissonance to be reduced, these issues must be understood by policymakers and school administration members, and be given due consideration as this can cause psychological discomfort in adolescents.

6.2.3 Selection process as a factor of academic success: teachers' perceptions

As mentioned earlier, students are allocated to BILs on the basis of entrance exam results. The findings indicate that all of the teacher-participants believed that students' selection was one of the main factors along with gender, friendship and others that led learners to academic success. Teachers put forward a number of arguments to support their opinion.

Firstly, the student selection process brings academically-gifted students together and creates a competitive atmosphere for children, where they can broaden their knowledge more effectively and quickly. Gorard et al. (2010, p. 33) describe this idea as follows: '[...] each pupil is then taught with their similar peers, and provided with an appropriate education, such as academic, technical or vocational pathways'.

Secondly, teachers stated that student selection is beneficial, particularly for students who want to achieve high results in educational Olympiads. Students mentioned that all the students upon their arrival are allocated to Olympiad preparation groups based on their disciplines. All students with similar skills, interests and knowledge are brought together and taught/instructed by supervisors to focus on the particular goal. It is worth mentioning that the role of constant supervision and strict discipline is of no small importance in achieving high results in Olympiads.

According to one of my teacher-participants, the atmosphere created by the selection process is beneficial for students who are, compared to his/her new classmates, 'underachieving'. When students are accepted to the BIL, they are not of the same level in school disciplines. Some students might be good at maths, while others are better at humanities. However, as time passes, 'lower achieving' students of particular subjects could reach their peers' level or at least improve their knowledge. As one boys' school teacher noted, students who are not as academically gifted as their friends, or whose performance falls below average, eventually drop out. But those students who then go on to study in comprehensive schools, there they are considered as honours students.

Although teachers' views were in complete agreement that selective schools could be beneficial for students' further academic advancement, some researchers found that there was a very slight relationship between students' academic level on entry to the school and their later performance (Gibbons & Telhaj, 2006; Gorard et al., 2010; Luyten et al., 2009).

Dr Sullivan (2017a), Professor of Sociology at the University College London, argued that, when grammar schools use the selective entrance exam, it is difficult to give everyone the chance to attend those schools. She commented that it was more beneficial for parents who have more resources, saying that they would do everything they could to receive a place in that school (Sullivan, 2017a). In her interview to the BBC News, Dr Sullivan referred to parents with higher financial status and criticised grammar schools by saying that working-class applicants were far less likely than the financially more able applicants to attend grammar schools (Richardson, 2017). Here, it is worth restating that BILs, the same as grammar schools in the UK, are state schools, governed by the MoES and local government. I would agree with Dr Sullivan in terms of the fact that education-conscious parents would have more chance to send their children to selective schools than those whose background is less related to the education sphere. In terms of my own experience, both my parents were teachers. Although we, similarly to some of my classmates, were not financially able to afford the tuition fee, my parents were very anxious about my studies. Thus, they were instrumental in my academic success. Further studies on parents' socio-economic status would be likely to provide an insight into the role of wealth in the outcomes of students in single-sex BIL schools.

6.3 Friendship

In this section, I discuss the findings in relation to friendship and its role in BILs from my participants' perspectives. The main remarkable result to emerge from the data is that strong friendship was the dominant factor that students enjoyed most about studying in BILs. For some students, it was the only reason to stay in the BIL. In addition, I noticed the importance of this aspect during my non-participant observations. I noted that students, especially girls, preferred to do everything collectively: studying, playing, cooking, organising an event, even doing things that are regarded as unacceptable by students, such as; 'throwing the class journal into a bin' from the girls' story, or 'escaping from classes' from the boys' stories.

Friendship in adolescence plays an important role in the lives of individuals (Ojanen et al., 2010; Okada, 2007). De Guzman (2009) highlighted friendship as an essential component of children's development. Extending this view, researchers reported influences of friendship on individuals' well-being and psychological adjustment (Ojanen et al., 2010; Parker & Asher, 1993). De Guzman (2009) claimed that children start making friendships that are more intimate, exclusive, and constant from the age of adolescence and which are an essential component of development. She also believes that peers who become friends tend to already have a lot of things in common. In terms of academic performance, Kuh (1993, 1995) states friendship can have a positive influence on overall improvement in education; analytical, critical and problem-solving skills; self-motivation and self-esteem.

The analysis of my data indicates that there were some other contributory factors that build the strong peer relationship. The reason why I came to this point is that most of the students emphasised friendship as a major factor that led to students' academic attainment, whereas other factors were mentioned far less frequently. While talking about friendship, students mentioned some aspects that contributed to a pleasant atmosphere and stimulated them to have a strong friendship. Judging by their responses and comments, I would like to indicate the four most important aspects:

1. BIL as a boarding school;
2. Tutors as role models;
3. Extracurricular activities with strong moral foundation;
4. Single-sex environment.

These will be discussed in the following sections.

6.3.1 BIL as a boarding school

Boarding schools have been an integral part of many countries' education systems for centuries. Currently, 33 boarding schools are functioning under the management of MoES and 'Bilim-Innovation' Foundation, seven of which are co-educational, while six cater exclusively to girls, and 20 exclusively to boys. Those boarding schools are predominantly based in urban areas, making resources of urban life accessible for children, while rural boarders reside in regional environments with less access. Most BILs do not have an option for children to study without staying in the halls of residence.

Before discussing the findings derived from my participant responses, I would like to point out one aspect that has drawn my attention. It is a difference between the numbers of boys' [20] and girls' [6] schools. According to the s.47 the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Education (2007), citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan have the right to choose educational organisations and types of education in accordance with entrance conditions. Although I am not expert on law, it is not particularly difficult to ascertain that, in order for parents or children to choose the school of their preference, there should be an equal choice of opportunities. Accordingly, in some regions of Kazakhstan, unequal numbers of local single-sex places as between boys and girls are restricting parents' right to access education in the girls-only school. When I addressed this concern to the Vice-Chairman of BIL, I was told that there are a number of impediments facing the provision of an equal number of girls' and boys' schools: 1) usually, it is local educational departments who decide whether to establish schools or not, and often a lack of funding brings projects to a standstill. For instance, the educational department of the city Aktobe has allocated a premise for a prospective girls' school. However, budgetary constraints of the local government halted the process; 2) staff insufficiency in both number and quality is another major argument that restrains the opportunity to provide an equal number of schools for both boys and girls. Although these seem to be reasonable explanations for the situation, the predominance of boys' schools in number raises the question as to why particularly boys' schools were the first preference when it came to establishing only one school in a region. Unfortunately, I did not receive any valid argument in this regard.

In my opinion, the shape of any education-related mechanism running on parental preferences needs to be settled by the market (Smithers & Robinson, 2006). This could be organised by conducting surveys and circulating various questionnaires. Eventually, it would allow educators and policy-makers to clearly ascertain which particular type of school is necessary to establish. Further research is needed to explore these factors and see to what extent this (*the apparent advantage of boys-only schools*) conforms to the principles of provision of equal opportunities to receive a quality education for all children.

Mr Ali (BST) stated that one of the benefits of staying in the halls of residence is that students have friends to ask if they have any queries regarding their classes. In addition, they have to spend two hours daily solely doing their homework together with their peers, which allows them to spend more time with friends and thus strengthen their friendship. While observing students' 2-hour self-preparation afternoon classes, I witnessed how girls allocated responsibilities among themselves to explain the difficult topics to the whole group. If there is someone who is strong on maths, for instance, she could clarify the home task and the ways to solve it. That means everyone accomplishes that task. Additionally, sometimes it is easier to understand when the topic is explained by your peers. As a result of this observation, it was possible to identify how the dormitory helps them build a strong relationship through various activities.

Mr Ali's (BST) colleague Ms Anisa (BST) fully supported his view. She also added that boarding schools have a fixed routine that is organised to allow them to actively and effectively spend time with their friends. Following the daily routine, students have to support their peers. In addition, all the activities are guided and supervised, which makes the education process more productive.

These positions correspond with research which claims that the environment of the boarding school provides a different ecological context in the socialisation process in comparison with day schools (Martin et al., 2014). Further, they described that residential halls allow students to be involved in various activities with cohorts and staff. Anisa's (BST) opinion regarding the students daytime routine is in line with Bronfenbrenner's (1970) findings, where he proposed that children raised primarily in a setting, such as residence halls, had different outcomes of socialisation than those educated in pluralistic settings. He added that students raised in a single socialisation

environment have more potential to integrate to the social pressures in their immediate milieu, and that is why the environment of boarding schools had a distinct role in having an academic and non-academic influence on these students when compared with day students. His theory was supported by a number of researchers such as Damon (2004), Lerner (2005), Theokas & Lerner (2006) and Witt (2002). By referring to my participants' responses, I would like to suggest potential reasons why parents choose the BIL boarding schools:

Firstly, life in the boarding school involves a complex system of regulation and constant supervision (Martin et al., 2014). School's strict discipline guides students in all aspects of their lives: having their meals; participating in recreational activities; appointing how, when and where they need to do their homework; when students are allowed to use telephones or computers, etc. In addition to these, boarding schools promote independence (Moore, 1998). A lack of parental supervision, and their absence as a whole allow their children to take greater individual responsibilities for their actions. It also helps them to manage their time for studies and their social life. Everyday school activities – starting from making their own bed and ending in taking their own decisions and dealing with the daily routines – help students become more independent from a younger age.

Secondly, BILs provide an holistic education. My findings indicated that BIL schools placed a greater emphasis on students' personal development, given they play a greater role in setting the environment in which the students set their goals and develop a worldview. This was realised by various extracurricular activities (meetings with parents, sports sessions, etc.) and individual approaches (tutor's assistance, supervision on Olympiad preparations, etc.). However, holistic education may lead to unpleasant implications in students' life after graduation. Staying at a residential hall for an extensive period of time, and being immersed in a holistic boarding environment, can deform expectations of the real world for some children (Schaverien, 2011). This can be hard for students when adjusting to life outside of the structured support network of a boarding school (ibid.).

Lastly, but certainly not least, boarding schools develop social, educational, and cultural capital (Bass, 2014). The relationships among BIL students were exceptionally strong due to them spending extensive amount of time together. Students, both in boys' and girls' BILs, stated this over and over in their interviews.

BIL students face similar challenges to their peers and get to know each other on a deeper level by participating in various activities and programmes.

There might be more reasons for choosing boarding schools. Some people might benefit from the competitive atmosphere and some children from troubled family can benefit from stability. For some parents, the academic results of the school might be the primary the reason for their choice. My statements were based on students' and teachers' responses and my non-participant observations. Ultimately, boarding school is not for everyone, however, supervision can work for many (Bass, 2014).

6.3.2 Extracurricular activities with strong moral foundation

In the literature, according to Damon (2004), moral identity formation begins in late childhood, when the child becomes capable of analysing the surrounding people and self, in terms of stable character traits. At this age, children's self-identifying features usually consist of action-related skills and interests. Damon (2004) also claims that the best time for behaviour formation is when the young person begins adopting moral beliefs as a central part of his/her personal identity. Since BIL students spend most of their time in the school, the fundamental and constituent characteristic of every activity and its content is essential. As reported by Zaff et al. (2003) occupying students' time with constructive activities under adults' supervision in safe settings decreases youth violence and enhances learners' social skills and academic achievement. Power et al. (2008) pointed out that one of the important things in students' moral development is providing them with opportunities to act on moral principles. Then the student can integrate moral ideas into their identities.

The findings show that integrating moral principles in every activity was very important for BILs. Students could clearly identify the teachers' and tutors' purpose for conducting any kind of program with them. With regard to the organisation of lessons, some student-participants mentioned that teachers dedicated a certain part of their classes to moral education. Some teachers asked students to remind them, usually 5-10 min before the lesson finished, to switch to the final part of the lesson, whereby related moral content was imparted by the teacher. That indicates the extent to which teachers were committed (or required) to organise the lesson in that particular way. Ms Aliya (GST) noted that primarily, she wanted students to become individuals with a good character. She did not think that knowledge was as important as a moral education. For some students, this was the main difference between comprehensives

and BILs. Students also believed that this was the reason for students finding the time they spent in BIL very crucial in terms of shaping their moral identity and preparing them for adulthood (Erikson, 1959). It is worth remembering that the features of comprehensive schools and BILs are not entirely similar. Teachers in comprehensive schools do not go through the stages that BIL teachers practice, while being recruited. BIL teachers' characteristics will be discussed in further sections.

6.3.3 Pleasant atmosphere - supervision - tutor's role

The findings indicate that one of the advantages for the BIL students is that they are under constant supervision by either teachers or tutors. Teachers are responsible for supervision during the daytime classes, whereas tutors undertake this duty when classes finish. Comprehensive schools do not provide staff members as 'tutors'. It is only teachers or class lead teachers who take on the role of an immediate supervisor. Zaff et al. (2003) outlined that adolescents had a huge amount of spare time in which they spent doing various types of activities. They added that it becomes productive when activities are structured. My findings and observations indicated that BIL tutors' supervision – rather than simply appearing as a strict security measure – fostered positive relations among students, facilitated in creating a pleasant atmosphere for students, and played a significant role in a student's formation as an individual.

Witt (2002) described the role of the adult in schools as follows:

The youth development paradigm also recognizes the primacy of adults in supporting youth efforts to navigate the pathways to adulthood, while still enabling youth to have a real voice and power in planning, organizing, and leading programs and activities. (p. 56)

In my view, that is exactly what the tutors were doing in BILs. In many cases, I noticed where students were treating their tutors as their supportive friends rather than 'supervisors'. The superiority of tutors over the students was not evident because of their attitude. I admit the likelihood that students were overawed by my presence. However, participants' responses also supported the idea that a tutor's role was more than a supervisor. As Davis (2003) noted, students want to have positive relationships with staff that promote caring and support, hoping that it will foster higher levels of academic attainment. Jacobson (2000) stated that students' academic success could be attributed to a positive atmosphere where caring and a sense of belonging were supported. BILs cannot be regarded as 'effective', if they do not provide a 'safe and caring environment' for children (Chitty, 2002, p. 119). In my opinion, one of the

contributing roles of tutors was to maintain the positive atmosphere for BIL students (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

6.3.4 Single-sex environment

Sex-segregation was one of my initial reasons to pursue the research about BIL schools. As described in the introduction, BILs are the only schools in Kazakhstan where single-sex education is practised. In addition, it is believed by many people (parents, students, etc.) that gender is the major factor for students' academic success. As a former student and a teacher of this school, I was very curious to do some research on sex-segregation. However, over the course of time in pursuit of my research, the findings of this study show that participants did not perceive sex-segregation to be a major contributing factor to the students' academic success. This factor was predominantly mentioned by teachers, rather than by students. The vast majority of all participants' responses advocated the single-sex environment.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, despite the large body of literature on single-sex education, there is no clear consensus about the rationale for providing single-sex education or its superiority over co-ed schooling. The arguments put forward by researchers derive from different perspectives such as physiological, psychological, sociological, classroom contextual and so forth (Gurian et al., 2011; Pahlke & Hyde, 2016; Stanfors, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2012).

The argument that my participants mentioned frequently is distraction. The students involved in the BIL single-sex academies defined distractions primarily in terms of sexual interest, claiming that the secondary school years were a time of 'active hormones' for both girls and boys. The prevalent belief among participants was that adolescents are often distracted by the pressures of romantic communications. 'By far, the advantage most often associated with schooling boys and girls separately is that it eliminates distraction. Freed from the worries of impressing the opposite sex, boys and girls can focus on their books' (Vail, 2002, p. 35). It is clear from the information presented earlier that some evidence exists that there are differences between single-sex and co-ed schools, in terms of, for instance, distinctions in boys' and girls' style of work in the classroom, their interest in social and technical sciences, etc. I certainly found this to be true in many cases that boys and girls can be distracted by the opposite sex. However, despite the fact that a large number of participants supported the single-sex environment, it is worth noting that student-participants had been

spending much of their time in single-sex settings. In line with the theory of cognitive dissonance, students might have been affected by the extended amount of time spent within these schools. As a result, while discussing the differences of coeducational and sex-segregated schools, they predominantly supported the latter. It is worth mentioning that participants' arguments regarding the issue of 'distraction' between males and females are derived from their heteronormative interpretations, in that they might have assumed that attraction can only be between male and female. Since Kazakhstani society is completely intolerant of homosexuality, I believe it should be acknowledged that participants' responses regarding the single-sex environment were based on their heteronormative beliefs. All in all, whether these differences have a significant impact on educational outcomes is less clear.

During the fieldwork, teachers expressed their opinion as to the influence of a single-sex setting on students' performance. None of them denied the possibility of the positive impact of gender segregation. It is interesting to note that one teacher suggested having single-sex classes, rather than separating the whole school, highlighting that the process of receiving knowledge was important. However, participants also indicated its potential drawbacks. Disadvantages were mostly related to the psychological and sociological challenges of students in communicating with the opposite sex.

As for the students' views, some participants from the boys' school did not notice much difference between studying in mixed and single-sex settings. Some noted that they had many friends of the opposite sex. That is why they thought it would not have had much effect on their academic performance if they had studied together with girls. However, most girl-students' opinions were different from the boys'. They supported the single-sex environment and believed that it had a major influence on their attainment. At the same time, they also admitted that some girls experience an unpleasant situation when they meet boys. For instance, some girls felt discomfort (not anxious or nervous) when some boys wanted to talk to them and to get acquainted with them. This might be derived from the fact that; girls did not want to be seen or labelled as 'bad girls' in their teachers' or friends' eyes. In my opinion, although girls' and boys' knowledge acquisition styles vary from each other in many respects, students within each group are even more unique, and, as a teacher, it is important to

approach every student based on their knowledge capacity and learning style (Campbell & Sanders, 2002).

The findings show that sex is only one of the many factors that could have an effect on students' academic performance. My findings also indicate that the role of single-sex environment reinforced strong friendships, while friendship – according to students' views – was considered a major contributing factor in achieving high results. At the very least, further research with more focus on students' academic performances will need to be undertaken thoroughly to investigate whether the education in single-sex settings in the Kazakhstani context is beneficial or not. There are a number of aspects of single-sex in education that need further research (Bracey, 2007; Cable & Spradlin, 2008; Thiers, 2006).

6.4 Teacher's role

In this section, I discuss the teacher's role, which is also an important feature of BILs, along with the strong friendship and the student selection process. Participants in my study perceived that a teacher's role was one of the core elements of students' success. They described this aspect from various perspectives. Based on the collected data, I have identified some aspects that contributed to the BIL teacher's role and its importance in BIL students' achievement. These are as follows:

1. Altruism/self-devotion;
2. Corruption;
3. Competitive recruitment/constant professional development;
4. Teachers' attitude in different situations: open-mindedness

6.4.1 Altruism / Self-devotion

'Altruism' is defined as a principle or practice of unselfish and other-oriented behaviour to the welfare of others (Milton, 2012). A number of researchers have commented on functions of altruism. In the literature, Bar-Tal (1986) classified altruism into five categories, which provide a broader definition of altruism:

[...] altruistic behaviour (a) must benefit another person, (b) must be performed voluntarily, (c) must be performed intentionally, (d) the benefit must be the goal by itself, and (e) must be performed without expecting any external reward. (p. 5)

As the great Kazakh educator Altynsarin claimed, a teacher is the 'heart of the school' (Altynsarin, 2014). Teaching is a profession that carries a great responsibility for a

student's formation as an individual. People might want to teach for several reasons. One of them is a desire to educate, to make some positive differences in pupils' lives and to gain pleasure and self-satisfaction from students' success. In this regard, altruism is an important, integral part of the teaching profession.

However, many Kazakhstani students choose a teaching profession primarily for its lower test scores, compared to other disciplines, in the university entrance exams (Ayubayeva, 2018). Accordingly, newly-employed teachers tend to show a far lower performance in teaching than those who have years of experience in teaching (ibid). Unfortunately, this perception is still prevalent among Kazakhstani students. My participants were well aware of this unpleasant situation. This is the reason for students regarding comprehensive school teachers' approach to their work as something that needed to be improved. Some of them admitted the possibility that if comprehensives had teachers who devoted themselves to teaching and students with all their heart, those schools also could be successful. My participants did not use the word 'altruism' to describe teachers' behaviour. However, it was clear from their stories that BIL teachers' attitudes concurred well with Bar-Tal's (1986) definition.

I would also like to discuss one unique feature of BILs that helps teachers to some extent to dedicate themselves to teaching. This is staff rotation among the BIL schools. As was mentioned in Chapter One, BILs are the only places where teachers are rotated among its branches in different cities of Kazakhstan. A teacher usually works for about 3-4 years in one school. Wherever they are transferred, it is unlikely that they will have relatives or friends in that new city. Another advantage of rotation, according to Adiya (GS), is that teachers share their experiences and different stories from other schools. Another participant from a boys' school, Murat (BS), gave his opinion as follows:

We have seen different teachers over the past four years. I like the system of how 'Bilim-Innovation' Foundation rotates the teachers among the BILs. I think the purpose of that is to keep the [academic] balance of education of all schools.

Adiya (GS) pointed out that teachers who worked at other BILs may share their experiences with new students in a new place. A rotation might be favourable, as Murat (BS) has mentioned, for maintaining the sufficient number of qualified teachers at school. This also helps teachers to stop practising a monotonous teaching style and

refresh his/her teaching techniques according to the new workplace. One more plausible reason for applying the rotation is preventing corruption. By changing teachers' workplaces, an opportunity to establish kinship relations decrease. For people from outside the school, it will also be difficult to approach someone who is new and even from a different city, whose understanding might be distinct as compared to local mentality.

This practice is used in several countries such as South Korea and China. For instance, the South Korean government decided to implement this novel approach in order to promote equality in access to quality education (Sorensen, 1994). Teachers are recruited at the provincial level and appointed to positions in schools in the city or province. Every five years they are rotated among different schools within the city or province. Thereby, the Korean government attempts to maintain the equal probability of teaching in any given school within the city or province (Kang & Hong, 2008).

While it is considered an opportunity for a teacher to devote more time for students, there are some drawbacks that should be taken into consideration, such as a teacher's accommodation, the teacher's own children's education, impact on the career of their partner, challenges in adapting to a new climate and so on. On the other hand, since it is a new place, new city, limited opportunities might be an obstacle to socialising and having a private life. As Kian (2013) noted, the rotation system should be revised thoroughly to make it as practical and systematic as possible. If disadvantages of the rotation process are to be minimised, and advantages maximised, then it might be possible to tackle several issues in the Kazakhstani educational system, such as: inequity in access to highly-qualified teachers; corruption in recruitment process which includes hiring of a close friends or/and relatives; and development of a quality of public education (*comprehensive schools*). It is worth noting that only teachers who are affiliated with 'Bilim-Innovation' Foundation are allowed/required to transfer.

6.4.2 Corruption

Kazakhstan is considered to be a country which has experienced relatively steady economic progress since 2000 (Ayubayeva, 2018). However, according to the latest statistics of the Transparency International (2016), Kazakhstan is listed as the 131st least corrupt nation out of 176 countries. As noted by Hallak & Poisson (2002), the education sector of many nations occupies the major part of public expenditures; the Kazakhstani education sector is not an exception to it, which took 17-18% of the

overall budget in the years 2015-2017 (Shaikhina, 2017). A longitudinal study on the Kazakhstani education system of Heyneman (2004) reported that corruption in education was a prevalent and pervasive concern of the country, and it can be of various types and forms (Heyneman, 2010; Johnson, 2008).

The findings indicate that one of the components of BIL teachers' successfulness was the corruption-free workplace atmosphere. This aspect was highlighted both by teachers and students. Participants stated that, in schools where bribery is prevalent, teachers start being involved in corruption right from the recruitment process. That means it is almost impossible to be employed without paying the school principal. It is hard to imagine someone who got the job through unfair ways, to dedicate his/her life to educating students with passion. It is very likely that dishonest actions will take place again through his/her employment. I remember from one of my relative's experience, who is a Kazakh language teacher in one of the regional schools, how she and her colleagues used to bribe the school administration, for 'hosting' the 'Attestation Committee' who came to inspect their school. 'Hosting' could include anything, including providing the accommodation, transport, daily subsistence in restaurants, presents, etc. Without these conditions, it was not possible to pass the inspection. I am not only blaming teachers and employers. Probably, teachers were forced to pay a bribe or they did not have any other choices; perhaps school principals had to receive those bribes from teachers, so they could pay that money to people 'higher' than them. Yet those who ultimately suffer from this practice are Kazakhstani children and the education system as a whole. That is why my participants emphasised this factor as an important aspect of the BIL in making any high progress in education. To my mind, teachers would not be as effective if the school was corrupt. As such, hiring teachers fairly, giving them a chance to apply their knowledge and experience they had previously acquired, and encouraging their hard work and diligence makes the teacher's role a key factor in the school's overall achievements.

Corruption is a highly sensitive topic to discuss in Kazakhstan. Usually, teachers do not take a risk to criticise the school administration, to avoid any unpleasant consequences that may affect their career or, at least, not to spoil their relationship with the school manager. I believe my participants were honest when claiming that BILs were not corrupt like some other comprehensive schools. As a former BIL

teacher, I can also confirm that during my six-and-a-half-year employment in BIL, I was not involved in any single dishonest act.

6.4.3 Competitive recruitment and constant professional development

A number of researchers noted that, along with others factors such as class size and the social economic status of families, a quality teacher is one of the core elements of the students' success (Ferguson, 1991; Klassen & Tze, 2014; Rivkin et al., 2014). This is supported by various organisations (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, n.d.; OECD, 2005). In their widely-cited report, Barber & Mourshed (2007, p. 16) conclude that 'the quality of an educational system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' and then they highlight that 'the top-performing systems we studied recruit their teachers from the top third of each cohort graduate from their school system...' whereas 'lower-performing school systems rarely attract the right people into teaching'. As Fullan (2006) stated, schools make progress when quality teachers are recruited. As reported in the above-mentioned literature, the evidence my research found points to the fact that this practice was followed as part of the principles of the school in providing BIL students with quality education.

The findings indicate that an effective recruitment process can ensure creative work and productive results. According to my participants' responses, BILs are not only competitive for learners, it is also difficult to become a BIL teacher. The requirements for potential teachers are not simple. For instance, technical science teachers must know English, as those disciplines are taught in that language. In addition, they have to demonstrate their knowledge in the form of a test and during the interview. As one of the effective ways to evaluate teachers' effectiveness is to observe the on-the-job performance (Yusuf & Dada, 2016), if necessary, school administration may request a demonstration lesson. All these stages ensure the students receive knowledge effectively. I agree that academically gifted children should be provided with opportunities to enhance their knowledge in a competitive environment. However, rural schools and comprehensives should not be forfeited to elite schools. Every child deserves a quality education with highly qualified teachers, not just selective boarding schools. If we look at this process globally, a similar practice is being used by United Nations (United Nations News Centre, 2013): teachers are recruited and sent to areas where people are facing a serious teacher shortage. A similar strategy could be used to provide rural comprehensive schools with qualified teachers. That is why, in my

opinion, the teacher must be motivated morally and financially to work in any type of school. In addition, those teachers who work in comprehensives and show high performance should be rewarded and supported. As Fullan (2006, p. 6) emphasised, educational institutions should serve as 'major societal vehicles for reducing the social inequality'. From this perspective, the recruitment process should be analysed thoroughly.

Another point that the findings indicated in terms of BIL teachers' effectiveness is constant professional development. As research has shown, teacher quality is one of the most important factors in determining gains in student achievement (Ferguson, 1991; Guerriero, 2013; Kang & Hong, 2008). Some studies suggest that highly qualified teachers may have a positive impact on student learning at the classroom, school, and district levels (Darling-Hammond, 2000). There is a suggestion that the effects of teacher qualification on success may be related to and associated with investment policies and institutional experiences that have an influence on the overall level of teachers' performance and professional skills. Sullivan (2017b) pointed out that the effect of teacher quality on students' achievement is more important than any other school aspects:

All the evidence suggests that teacher quality, rather than school structures, is what makes the biggest difference for children's learning. ... I would argue that it would make sense to invest in making the teaching profession attractive rather than putting funds into creating new selective schools.
(*online publication*)

I would partially agree with her statement that investments should be in teacher's productivity and promotion. I also think that the school structure should constantly be under investigation, as life is not standing still. As an educator, we should always be open and ready for new challenges and changes of life. Therefore, I would suggest keeping the balance while spreading the investment over the educational areas (Ferguson, 1991).

Education is a lifelong process (Blossfeld & von Maurice, 2011). It is believed that no matter how intelligent and educated you are, there is always something more to learn and discover. For someone who is carrying a responsibility for others' education, it is more important to upgrade his/her knowledge periodically. When teachers were asked about their thoughts on BIL, the majority commented that teachers are given opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and upgrade their skills and familiarise

themselves with the latest technological and methodological updates. Teachers of disciplines with English language instruction are suggested to check their level of English by taking various tests (i.e. IELTS, Aptis Test) and, if necessary, attend some relevant courses. Some of those courses and seminars are organised by the school administration and ‘Bilim-Innovation’ Foundation. It is worth noting that there are some courses which are run by various organisations just ‘to check the box’ or for the record on their Curriculum Vitae (CV). However, as the BIL administration is deeply concerned about the quality of education, courses seemed to be reviewed thoroughly, to assess whether they bring any particular benefit for teachers’ professional development. The findings also highlighted that the reason for comprehensive school teachers’ reluctance to improve their professionalism is mainly rooted in corruption. Teacher-participants from both boys’ and girls’ schools explained and shared their experiences and views in this regard. There are several ways of improving the teacher rating [*category*] (Ayubayeva, 2018): attending the professional development courses once every five years; and receiving as many certificates and diplomas as possible from seminars and educational Olympiads as a proof their achievement. Teachers may also be required to provide their published articles and books. According to the teachers’ answers, every step of this process involves corruption. Teachers are required to pay their own administration in order to receive permission to attend external seminars and courses. The same strategy is practised for sending students to educational Olympiads. Finally, while submitting their documents to receive a higher category, again they have to pay a bribe to the authority that is involved in this procedure (i.e. local education department members, school principal).

That is also one of the potential reasons why highly qualified teachers refrain from working in comprehensive schools.

6.4.4 Teachers’ attitudes in different situations: open-mindedness

In the literature, one of the eminent educators of the 20th century, Dewey (1933), identified three characteristics in order to be a reflective teacher: open-mindedness, wholeheartedness and responsibility. Having analysed the responses of my participants regarding the teachers’ role in BIL, I could confidently assert that these are must-have features of every single person who wants to contribute something positive to children. Of these three characteristics, open-mindedness was defined by Dewey (1933) as ‘[...] hospitality to new themes, facts, ideas, questions’ and:

an active desire to listen to more sides than one; to give heed to the facts from whatever source they come; to give full attention to alternative possibilities; to recognize the possibility of error in the beliefs that are dearest to us. (p. 30)

Building on Dewey's ideas, Zeichner & Liston (1996, p. 11) stated that 'open-mindedness and responsibility must be central components in the professional life of the reflective teacher'. They say that being open-minded means teachers accept the advantages and weaknesses of numerous ways of looking at learners, viewing and tackling the issues from different perspectives and being open in dealing with schooling as a whole (ibid). I find it crucial that all school teachers understand this quality and put the accent on its implementation in practice. According to the data, the open-mindedness of BIL teachers was reflected in different situations: when students felt unwell; when they broke the rules; when they had troubles with studies.

For example, let us take the situation with punishment. As my participants reported, BIL teachers and tutors often tended to treat students leniently when they did something wrong (cheated in the exam, escaped from school, attempted to destroy the class journal and so on). The author of the book 'Moral Education', Wringe (2006) noted:

Relevant moral issues here, however, do not concern the child's or young person's knowledge of right and wrong but the proper use of punishment in an educational or formative context, appropriate levels of restriction and liberty appropriate to the young, the proper balance between the convenience of the mature and the exploratory needs of children and empirical questions about the most effective ways of socialising the young without producing obsessive conformity or resentful rebellion. (p. 13)

With that being said, I would like to highlight the teachers' open-mindedness in a situation when a student is anxious and to some extent frightened about how bad the consequences would be. At this critical moment a teacher either, follows the regulations, reports the situation to the disciplinary committee, or tries to 'use' this moment to earn credit to teach that student to behave properly. However, to anticipate if the technique the teacher used would lead to positive results, he/she should be able to analyse the situation, know the student very well and, at the same time, understand the ethical principles, in order not to put himself/herself or a student in unpleasant situations. According to students' views, BIL teachers were able to deal with distinct circumstances in distinct ways. I think it requires open-mindedness.

Another aspect that may help prevent any potential negative confrontations with students or even with parents is an emphasis on maintaining contact with parents. Here, I would like to explain how I personally would have acted in identical situations based on my experience. First, it is important to start a new academic school year with a message of greeting, congratulation, or the like. This would serve as a foundation for having a positive relationship throughout the year. Another important moment that I found necessary is visiting parents in their houses, conveying that you are passionately concerned about their child's education and well-being. When the very first step is made from the teacher's side, it is highly likely that parents will make all their efforts to be involved in their children's education as actively as possible. When these elements are practised, calling parents with particular issues will not cause many troubles for parents, as both the sides understand that this call is for 'solution', not only for 'reporting'. It is also worth mentioning that while calling parents because of problems, some suggestions to solve the problem should be offered, as nobody would like to visit a doctor and hear about a problem without the doctor offering a solution (Flynn, 2007). These practices would help to develop a good rapport with parents. Personally, I have received great benefits from the practices mentioned above.

During the research, most of my student-participants were of the perception that their relationships with teachers were based on rapport. During my fieldwork, I did not notice any unpleasant interactions between staff and school children. Likewise, none of my participants reported that they had a serious interpersonal communication issue with their teachers. Psychologists from Bowling Green State University (Keeley et al., 1995) claimed that rapport is the key element of effective teaching. Further, they listed three key characteristics as follows:

empathy – teacher accurately and sensitively communicates an understanding of students' experiences and feelings; respect – teacher communicates a deep and genuine caring for students as persons with human potentialities; genuineness – teacher tries to be herself or himself, avoiding being "phony," playing a role, or being defensive. (p. 141)

Quite evidently, the atmosphere of BILs was built upon these elements. Teachers believed that peaceful milieu in the school enhances learning and reduces the occurrence of unpleasant events (Wilson & Hackney, 2006). I must admit though, that my fieldwork lasted just over a month – it would require a more extensive observation to collect larger amount of data.

My findings also indicated that most of what teachers and tutors do and organise are aimed at achieving the ultimate results: students' moral and academic success. By being open-minded and creative, they try to adopt different methods and find unusual ways to make the best decisions. In addition, this points to the strength of the school climate which is allowing students and teachers to practise self-regulated learning. Zimmerman (2010, p. 5) distinguished self-regulated learners by: '(a) their awareness of strategic relations between regulatory processes or responses and learning outcomes and (b) their use of these strategies to achieve their academic goals'. Extending this view, he noted that self-regulated learners are different in selecting, organising, and creating a favourable learning atmosphere for themselves. Regarding the use of unusual methods and focus on results, a Spanish philosopher of the 17th century, Gracián (1904), claims that the process is not as important as the final outcome. As such, he supports the idea of 'transgressing the rules' if it is the only way to reach a good result.

What I conclude from this discussion is that the final result is more important than how you reach that result. Therefore, being open to using different methods and techniques are essential for educators to achieve the ultimate goal.

6.5 Conclusion

In Chapters Five and Six, I have presented the data collected in my fieldwork study. The primary concern of the chapters was to discuss the analysis of my data which involved presenting the responses of my participants and my field notes under the specific themes. I also attempted to draw and relate these participants' voices to the suitable literature. I will conclude this with the following three main points based on the theoretical core concepts outlined in the Literature review chapter:

Firstly, in terms of social and mental influences of the selection process, the majority of respondents felt that it was very stressful. They also indicated that the overall education process in BIL schools causes a lot of stress. Despite these negative aspects of the school selectiveness, the majority of students kept supporting the system that BIL provided. As mentioned in Chapter Two (see p.29) if somebody's behaviour is inconsistent with one of his or her views or thoughts, then cognitive dissonance occurs. The discrepant statements refer to the cognitive dissonance evoked by a range of factors. For instance, the overall belief among the Kazakh society that BILs are better than many schools may have conflicted with the experience which students had

had. Students might have been influenced by their teachers' and peers' positive perceptions about BIL schools. Therefore, consideration of the Festinger's concept of cognitive dissonance was useful to understand the complexities in participants' responses.

In terms of the impact of school selectiveness on students' future academic performance, all of the responses were in complete agreement. In other words, in participants' view, selected students had more opportunities and chances to enhance their knowledge while studying together. Although participants did not mention about the possible social issues that may be raised as a result of student selection, the aspects and notions that are considered by Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social capital greatly contributed to better understanding the participants views and experiences. Namely, it was possible to notice that some student-participants intuitively already considered themselves as a part of an elite society. In addition, most of the student-participants' parents were education-conscious, which pointed the fact that parents who possessed cultural, social and economic capital had more chances to send their children to selective schools than those who did not have them.

Secondly, concerning the students' thoughts about BILs and its role in learners' overall life, the vast majority of my participants highlighted the strong friendships among peers. In doing so, they underlined some other aspects of the school, which, in my mind, helped to build that relationship. Factors such as a dormitory, constant supervision, extracurricular activities and a same-sex environment contributed to making close friendships. Teachers also indicated that friendship had a distinguished role in supporting the academic performance of BIL students. All these factors were the basis of the concept of total institution. To restate briefly, However, earlier studies on total institutions have considered almost exclusively patients of psychiatric asylums and inmates. That is why, this study new insights into the complexities of the total institutions from the perspectives of BIL schools.

Thirdly, teachers were mentioned frequently as a factor that students thought essential in their education process. Teacher-participants indicated this factor from their own perspectives. Therefore, I explained this theme under four subthemes which, I believe, contributed to the importance of the teacher's role in BILs.

In the following closing chapter, Chapter Seven, I will conclude the research and discuss the contributions of my study.

Chapter 7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapters of this thesis have set the background, laid the groundwork and presented and discussed the participants' views and experiences about studying in BIL schools. This chapter will set out the conclusions and recommendations of this thesis by reflecting on the following headings: a) a brief overview of the research; b) summary of the main findings; c) potential limitations of the study; d) contributions to knowledge that my study could make; e) recommendations for future research and f) my personal reflection on my PhD journey.

To reiterate briefly, this was a qualitative case study which employed interviews and observations to answer the research question '**What are students' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of studying in BIL boarding schools?**'. From this main research question, I was able to address some secondary questions to support the primary question and to clarify participants' responses. For instance, I asked them to tell me about their experience of the preadmission process. Then they were asked to talk about school features that they enjoyed most and least. My participants' responses allowed me to establish the themes and subthemes that were believed to be very important for participants in regard to BILs and BILs' education process. To the best of my knowledge, my research work is the first study of its kind of a BIL school. As such, it therefore provides new information about these institutions. The research findings are discussed below after a brief review of the chapters of this thesis.

7.2 Summary of the main findings and their implications

Chapter One described the general background and introduced the scope of the research area. It also included a description of BIL boarding schools. **Chapter Two** presented the literature review, including a discussion of the theoretical notions applied in this study. Further, this chapter provided a comprehensive description of the school features relevant to BIL schools with some historical background. **Chapter Three** was concerned with the explanation of methodology adopted in this study, including a description of the data collection process. This was followed by a discussion of the method of data analysis employed in this research. **Chapters Four**

and **Five** presented the findings generated from interviews with students and teachers. I presented the responses of my participants and my field notes. **Chapter Six** drew attention to the discussion, laid out the final analysis and evaluation of the data presented in the previous two chapters. The main findings of this research will now be set out below.

A detailed review of BIL schools – in terms of strengths and weaknesses - is beyond the scope of this research. The main aim was to explore participants' views about studying in BILs. Returning to the question posed in the preceding section, it is now possible to state that the prevailing perceptions of studying in BIL schools were of a positive nature. Both teachers and students expressed their opinions regarding the BIL school features and aspects which were of concern to them. They also shared their views about the school aspects that they thought, should be taken into consideration. It should be noted, though, that this study did not aim to give the 'final word' on the effectiveness of studying in BIL schools. Nor did it attempt to work towards providing a comparison with other school systems (for example, coeducational/comprehensive schools). Rather, it discussed, analysed and explored participants' views and experiences of BIL schools.

As mentioned in the Chapter One (Introduction), due to the high rate of success in BIL students attaining successful university enrolment and results in national/international Olympiads, BILs are seen by many as one of the most successful types of schools in Kazakhstan. Besides, the success achieved by BIL students is often believed to be due to the single-sex environment. Students and teachers were well-aware of these points and reflected these aspects in their interviews. However, participants' comprehensive responses to open-ended questions revealed some important school features. Subsequent sections in this chapter will outline the key research findings (**highlighted in bold**).

While discussing their enrolment experiences, students were particularly concerned about the **stress** that they went through before the admission examination. For some of them, this process started in their early childhood. Interestingly, for some participants passing the examination was a way to please their parents or, at least, satisfy their expectations. This was the moment when some students experienced a cognitive dissonance, while unwillingly trying to please their parents. From this perspective, it

was possible to assume that some parents might have put pressure on their children's school preferences. Parents attempted to use all their opportunities and chances, including social and financial, to see their children studying in BIL schools. As suggested by one of the participating students, some parents were even ready to be involved in unfair practice to achieve their goals. Some parents moved to the city where the school was located. Children, observing all these constant efforts from their parents, felt the pressure which was applied to them. For some students, the pressure from their parents did not stop after passing the admission tests. The first few years of study were stressful, as they found it difficult to get used to the BIL environment. One respondent's thoughts about committing suicide serve as a dire warning to all parents and educators of the danger that pressure on a child can cause. These experiences indicate the importance for parents and educators to be alert to children's psychological conditions during the preadmission preparation time, which sometimes may cause anxiety and stress.

Discussions with participants about school features revealed that **friendship** among school children was one of the most significant factors that could lead to academic success. The majority of student-participants compared their previous schools with the BIL school, claiming that the latter fostered friendship, trust and reliability more than the former. For some students, friendship was the only reason to study at the BIL school. My observations in various locations and circumstances (classroom, gym, dormitory, social gatherings) were consistent with both girls' and boys' responses. Both academic and social support that students of BIL schools provide to their classmates was overwhelming. Similar views were also suggested by participating school teachers, highlighting that social skills such as leadership, communication and close relationship were well-developed among BIL students. In addition, teachers outlined the students' unity and determination in organising and accomplishing tasks in both out-of-class and in-class activities. Students preference to be interviewed with their peers was another indicator of their strong friendship. All my non-participant and participant observations of their school activities affirmed students' strong relationships, exhibiting a high level of reliability.

Further discussion with students indicated that building a strong friendship was achievable when the **school environment** is perceived as safe and positive. Following this, the study participants provided more information that helped to explain how a

pleasant school atmosphere could be established. From the students' perspectives, **teachers' and tutors' roles** were considered essential in fostering a relaxed friendly atmosphere. According to the students' experiences, in addition to the academic content that they received, the social and emotional support of staff members was tremendous. Both boys and girls shared their positive impressions with regard to teachers' altruistic approach in providing students with all kinds of support both in and outside the classroom. Students also stressed the tutors' utmost care and help that they provide to support students socially and emotionally. It is worth noting that, while interviewing the teachers, it was clear that they were satisfied with how the administration of the BIL schools treated them and supported their professional development. Participating teachers were also very happy to point out that BIL schools were not involved in corruption as some of their previous schools were. All these factors are important in building teachers' self-concept and motivation. Findings from teachers' responses showed that without receiving support from the school administration, it would be difficult for teachers to motivate learners. In other words, a positive atmosphere is not only a key factor for students' academic and social development, but it is also important to the success of the teacher self-assessment and staff development processes. As mentioned in the 'School climate' section of Chapter Two, teachers and tutors are recruited through the stringent admission process, which indicates that the expected level of performance from teachers and tutors is very high.

One of the themes to emerge from my analysis of participants' responses was the focus by teachers and tutors on **moral education** (*tárbiye*) (*some use it as 'pastoral care or counselling'*). According to student responses, some teachers endeavoured to integrate moral teaching into their lessons and conveyed some useful messages to students in their classes. For instance, a geography or a chemistry teacher, while explaining the topic 'water' as in textbooks or in accordance with the curriculum, may explain the importance of saving water by providing real examples from places where people struggle with water scarcity. Since this was mentioned by several students, it was clear that teachers were encouraged to consider alternative approaches to teach students to think critically. Some participants believed that students' moral education is equally as important as the academic knowledge they received. Therefore, they believed that controlling students' behaviour and maintaining good discipline among schoolchildren may contribute significantly to their academic and social success. That

is also important for creating and maintaining the pleasant and positive environment at school.

In general, both teachers and students felt that the **single-sex environment** had a considerable role in building a positive atmosphere. They believed that distractions from the opposite sex would have impeded their process of education. It was clear from participants' responses that girls preferred single-sex education more than boys. While overall views appeared to be supportive, a few responses highlighted opposing concerns. Some boys indicated that the single-sex school did not prevent them from having relationships with girls in their neighbourhood during the weekends. Therefore, they did not see any problem in studying together with girls. In addition, both teachers and students admitted the possibility of issues that may arise when individuals are deprived of communication with the opposite sex for a lengthy period of time. Particularly, some students thought that it might be difficult to communicate with the opposite sex when they start university. Participating teachers of this study acknowledged the issues that girls of single-sex schools may experience with regard to marriage, which most of the time is a result of girls' reluctance to communicate with boys. Although this view seems one-sided, what the teacher meant is that in the Kazakh community, it is usually unacceptable for girls to show initiative in having a committed relationship with boys. In other words, in Kazakhstan, it is much easier for boys to build up a relationship than for girls. In addition, this situation may also imply an impression that, as argued by many scholars, the single-sex environment may promote homosexuality, which is seen as problematic in societies of many countries. However, the belief that single-sex schools promote homosexuality is highly unthinkable in the Kazakhstani context due to traditional values and religious beliefs. Should any fact or a rumour be brought to light regarding any potential cases of homosexual acts, that would categorically be confronted by parents and students and other members of the community. It is worth noting that single-sex education was not mentioned by respondents as frequently as friendship, school climate and staff role.

Student-participants expressed their **concerns** about some situations that take place in BIL schools. Students from girls' school called for more lenient discipline in BIL schools. Most of them were not happy with the process of gaining permission from the

school administration to leave the building for short periods of time. Girls⁶ also believed that some tutors were too strict about the use of mobile phones. As the students were in their final year, some of them felt that students of the superior classes were mature enough to manage the time they spent studying and socialising. Considering their age and mentality, and the modern society where technology is becoming increasingly ingrained in every aspect of life, it is prudent to take a critical look at the tutor's attitudes and acknowledge students to be right in some respects. This phenomenon was consistent with Goffman's (1961b) theory of 'total institution'. To reiterate, as a total institution, one of the main characteristics of the closed systems is to ensure student subordination by imposing strict school regulations and restrictions with harsh disciplinary action for noncompliance. Despite the majority agreeing that strict discipline was a negative feature of BIL schools, some students admitted that students would also benefit from this.

Both boys and girls thought that BIL students became used to the BIL school's atmosphere and found it **difficult to communicate** with other people outside the school premises. Some students found it challenging to talk to their relatives, saying that they could not keep the conversation as they did not find a common language. This affirms the idea that selective schooling can be divisive and can increase the social distance *between* and *within* communities. These findings have significant implications for understanding how social reproduction is generated. As Bourdieu & Passeron (1990) suggest, attendance at elite schools provides both social and cultural capital, and if this is true for secondary schooling, then those students who attended a prestige secondary school might differ in their life experiences from those who attended comprehensive secondary schools. If we look at students' views, it can clearly be seen that Bourdieu's notion of social and cultural reproduction is actively taking place in BIL schools. While some students from the girls' school claimed that students from mainstream schools are by no means different than selective school students, some students from the boys' school 'othered' themselves against mainstream schools, comparing BILs against comprehensive schools as 'Rolls-Royce' cars against 'Lada' cars. Moreover, they made it clear that for them, BIL is a 'brand' and they would always be careful in order not to inflict any harm to the reputation.

⁶ Although this aspect was not mentioned by students of boys'-school, there is a likelihood that all BIL schools have similar disciplinary regulations and this aspect may be applied to boys' school as well.

Participants statements showed their strong loyalty to BILs. However, it is also possible to see that BIL schools may lead students to having strong 'us and them' perspectives vis-à-vis other learners in mainstream schools. These findings are broadly in line with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social and cultural reproduction. In particular, this research revealed that cultural capital was a resource which enabled parents of BIL students, who in all probability had advantaged socioeconomic status, to reproduce their capital and have an impact on their children's educational success. Eventually, as mentioned in Chapter Two, it is reasonably prudent to claim that selective boarding schools with their highly selective admission process and segregated environment are reinforcing the social and cultural capital reproduction.

Prior to this study, it was difficult to make predictions about the school features which would be considered essential by teachers and students. As mentioned in Chapter One, I had a strong belief that single-sex environment had a dominant role among other factors. However, my research findings suggested that this is not the case. My findings also showed that all the elements of a school system work in cooperation with each other. Exploring any of them in isolation would be to fail to grasp the complexity of the situation.

7.3 Theoretical contributions

This research has primarily focused on interpretive case studies, as this study has explored the views and experiences of learners and teachers in two single-sex BIL schools. In doing so, as explained in the previous section, this extensive work provided some significant findings in relation to BIL schools and schools with similar characteristics. In this section, the articulation of the contribution based on the three theoretical concepts ("Total institution", "Social and cultural capital", "Cognitive dissonance") is presented.

The application of Goffman's concept of "total institution" was useful in many respects and made several contributions to this research paper. First, by putting the explanations and literatures on diverse types of schools including the selective schools and total institution into conversation with one another, the areas that I intended to explore were bolstered. This paper has gained a lot from the use of Goffman's concept as the selective schools in Kazakhstan have much in common with Goffman's definition of a total institution. In regard to prior research on total institutions, most of

them have focused almost exclusively on psychiatric asylums and prisons; far fewer have examined employment-based organizations. For that reason, Kazakhstani selective schools in this study provide new insights into the complexities of total institutions where members are students (as compared to committed patients or incarcerated inmates). In particular, by focusing on dormitories, this study has fleshed out Goffman's (1961) coverage of the circumstances and features embedded in total institution life. In other words, this theory has foregrounded the interaction between total institutions and the selective schools in Kazakhstan. By looking at selective schools as key sites for creating total institution, we could notice how social strata are (re)produced. The focal contribution of applying the Goffman's theory has been its significance in understanding the research site and in the interpretation of my findings. Application of Bourdieu's concept of capital had a significant contribution throughout the research process. To the best of my knowledge, there are no other works and dissertations in Kazakhstan with the application of Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital, particularly in the educational sphere. Next, the findings of this research demonstrate the diverse features of the selective schools in Kazakhstan, which have not been previously noted, explored and reported elsewhere. What most people usually believed regarding the BIL schools, particularly the outstanding achievements of BIL students, has been potentially double-edged in their consequences. Notably, selective schools were more likely to act as a fundamental institution in the reproduction of social inequality and creating a dominance of elite society over other social strata. With that being said, the findings provided warning that school choice may not always be equitable, and the differences between those who choose and those who do not have that possibility to do so could be another source of the reproduction of social stratification. In addition, by adopting Bourdieu's theory of capital, I could find out that the economic and cultural factors are strongly interrelated to making school choice decisions. Applying Bourdieu's theory allowed me to understand and develop a deeper understanding of the notion of capital.

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance made a significant mark on the analysis of participants' response. This theory was adopted primarily to explain the student's behaviour particularly on understanding the students' psychology while providing some unconvincing or inconsistent responses. The findings are in line with earlier research (Burnes & James, 1995; Jermias, 2001) that people tend to focus on the knowledge context that is supportive of their view or the one that they have a greater

use for. My participants have been more likely to turn away from what is inconsistent with their prior belief. If the information makes the people uncomfortable, they are less likely to admit the context of what has been learned and make such organisational learning into an achievable practice. Their embedded routines may prevent them from identifying the root causes and constraints and then distort the genuine interactions. It would have been difficult for me to understand my student-participants' views without applying the Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance.

All in all, exploring participants' views and experiences regarding the education process in two BIL schools by utilizing three theories ("Total institution", "Social and cultural capital", "Cognitive dissonance") allowed me to come to an understanding that the students' academic achievement is dependent on number of factors outside and inside of the school settings and there is no specific concept that any particular school with particular characteristics would be successful. The case-study approach to the study allowed for an appreciation of the richness of the context of each-case study school; and an appreciation of the differences and similarities across all perspectives.

The next section will now outline the limitations of this research.

7.4 Limitations of the study

This section will review some aspects that potentially limit the current study. As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, my insider position as a former-teacher in a BIL school gave me more power, through my relationships with some school teachers and administrative staff. Having noticed my close communication with staff members, my participants might have been inhibited by my position. Since teachers are worried that it might put their income at risk, they appeared to be cautious in their responses. I should note that, in contrast, student-participants seemed to be more confident to talk about topics. In addition, participants' awareness of my previous experiences at BIL schools might have influenced their interpretations as well, although I asked them to treat me as an outsider-researcher and explain anything that they thought an outsider should know.

A further potential source of limitation is the subjectivity of my interpretations. Since the interpretive inquiry is a value-laden process, both research and participants can be influenced by a number of elements such as context, social position, emotions (Dervin, 2016). As Denzin & Lincoln (2005, p. 6) put it 'the interpretive *bricoleur*

understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting'. In other words, interpretation is itself a subjective practice. I acknowledge that my own perceptions and experiences about studying in BIL schools may have influenced my interpretations. Since I had to work with participants from single-sex institutions, I had anticipated that my gender role might have had an impact on my communications with my participants. In other words, my position as a male researcher might have had an influence on the way in which I established and developed a rapport with the research participants or upon the nature of the data I was collecting. Reinharz & Chase (2003) suggested that females can be more apprehensive about being interviewed by male researchers. Therefore, I expected to experience potential difficulties in communication with female participants. However, much to my surprise things happened the other way around. While working with girl-students I was more relaxed and comfortable. Girls tried to be involved in the research with a lot of enthusiasm, whereas it was sometimes difficult to arrange interviews with male students, due to distinct reasons. For instance, the lack of free time was one of the reasons for not attending the interviews. Some boys did not stay at the school dormitory, so it was difficult to catch them after the classes. Moreover, I noticed greater interest and eagerness to participate in research (see Chapter Three). With teacher-participants, both male and female, I did not experience any issues related to the sex perspective. They were all highly professional and responsive. At some point, interestingly, some teachers continued seeking reassurance as to whether their answers were right or wrong, or how they could be helpful for my research. I kept reminding them that there was no right or wrong answer and that all I needed was their perceptions.

Another limitation was my inability to use the alumni's responses in my research study. Initially, I intended to interview some BIL alumni as they could have more experience of studying and providing post-graduation reflections. For overall data collection process for each alumnus, I could spend only a maximum of two days: the first day for the interview arrangements; the second for conducting the interview. I did not have more opportunities to talk to them and develop positive relationships. I believe that a lack of time to establish closer relationships influenced the interviews. Despite all my efforts to make my alumni participants aware of the importance of

unbiased statements, I did not receive any critical stance from any of them. Again, it might be my insider position that led them to respond in that way. Although it is difficult to accept, it is also possible that none of them had any issue during their school years and that they did not have any critical points regarding the BIL schools.

The time constraint is another aspect that could be considered as a limitation in my study. Due to a number of factors (for example, upgrade VIVA, ethical approval, flight date) that did not directly depend on me, I had to start my fieldwork in the beginning of April, when the academic year in Kazakhstan approached its end. I had only 6-7 weeks to complete the tasks. The fact that fieldwork took place towards the end of academic year in Kazakhstan was another matter, since it is usually difficult to encourage and involve students in formal activities such as interviews. Although I had enough time for conducting interviews, I believe a lengthier period of time would have allowed me to observe students and teachers in order to see and capture more of the actual communications. Moreover, additional time would have given me a chance to build a connection with alumni and conduct more informal interviews. Some might argue that it could have been better organised. However, as mentioned above, some factors were out of my control.

Some sources criticise the use of interpretive case studies for not being applicable to generalise due to the nature of the inquiry (Gerring, 2009). As Smith (1975, p. 88) claims, 'the goal of science is to be able to generalize findings to diverse populations and times'. As such, some researchers might feel that normally the purpose of research is to offer generalisations. Admittedly, since my research adopted the case study approach, it was limited by some particular features of the study: first, it is a certain chain of schools that differ from other schools in a number of respects, and yet to some extent, BILs might differ from each other because of their distant location in various cities, which means it cannot be generalised to all BIL schools. As Wellington (2015, p. 177) claimed, 'in some ways all schools are the same, in other respects they are all different; similarly for colleges, universities and employers'. Secondly, a unique feature of the case study is the particular time at which the fieldwork and overall research was conducted; to some extent, it limits the possibilities of the research findings being applied to other cases. Thus, research conducted at different times may yield different results and findings. However, since it was not my intention to generalise the research findings to other institutions, I do not consider the inability

of my study to be generalised as a limitation or weakness of my case study. Nonetheless, there might be some useful elements (i.e. students' stress in admission process; focus on school climate in boarding schools; moral education) of my findings that, should anybody wish to do so, these elements could be applied to other institutions of Kazakhstan depending on school characteristics⁷ (i.e. selective boarding schools). I will discuss it in further chapters.

7.5 Contributions to knowledge

To the best of my knowledge, this study appears to be the first study to explore the experiences and perceptions of BIL school students and teachers and uniquely provides comprehensive first-hand data and in-depth analysis about studying in BIL schools. Thus, my study offers an original contribution and expects to extend the knowledge about BIL schools. In this regard, I am planning to make my dissertation available for Kazakhstani libraries for future use by educators and researchers. I will also make it accessible on the 'White Rose online e-thesis repository'.

Despite the inability for the research findings presented here to be generalised, due to the detailed description of the case and the research site and transparency of the data collection and data analysis procedures, this case study raises a number of questions regarding some aspects of educational policy and practice with regard to the Kazakhstani education system. Should policy-makers find it useful, they could apply them to similar types of schools. For instance, the research findings revealed the pressure school children experienced during their preadmission preparation period. It has also shown that not all students get used to a competitive atmosphere easily, which may cause additional stress. I believe that these findings possibly apply to all the selective schools in Kazakhstan. As stated by the participating students, a lack of free time as a consequence of study overload is another potential issue that BIL students may experience. This issue might be relevant to the majority of selective boarding schools in Kazakhstan, rather than comprehensive schools, since the time in selective boarding schools is kept on a tight rein by supervisors. The time provided for student rest in the daily routine should be regulated and followed rigidly. This research demonstrated the importance of teacher's and tutor's roles in students'

⁷ The features of BIL schools are explained in detail in Chapter One

achievements. As seen in many Central Asian countries, teachers' roles are not held in the highly respected position that many would like to see. In a BIL school, as described by the participating teachers, the school administration facilitates and encourages teachers in their professional development and provides different types of support (i.e. financial, emotional, academic) in achieving high results. Most importantly, BIL teachers several times highlighted the fact that BIL schools were not involved in any type of corrupt activities. It is widely known that in every level (i.e. primary, secondary, tertiary) of the Kazakhstani education sector, the issue of corruption is extremely prevalent. In the same manner, as student-participants did, teachers compared the BIL schools with comprehensive schools in explaining education-related corruption and its influence on teachers' development and students' academic success. Some teachers stated that corruption was the reason for them not to work in comprehensive schools.

Taken together, it is hoped that this study will serve as a springboard for further research on educational and social challenges and school aspects that require further attention. Through this research, school stakeholders had an opportunity to make their voices heard. It is also expected that this study will provide policy-makers with insights that can be considered to make better-informed decisions while dealing with selective boarding schools in Kazakhstan.

7.6 Recommendations for future research

As explained in the Methodology Chapter, this research employed unstructured interviews with open-ended questions. It was important for the purpose of this research not to ask any specific direct questions. In giving responses, participants were not imposed upon in any way, which left the results open to interpretation. As a result of those unstructured interviews, participant responses revealed that the social life of BIL boarding schools was essential from the perspectives of both students and teachers. School aspects such as friendship, relationship, school climate and teacher support were considered important in discussing the BIL schools with research participants. From their point of view, these aspects made BIL schools distinctive, successful and special. Thus, this research predominantly focused on the social life of BIL schools. So, this thesis does not cover all aspects of BIL schools that need to be covered, nor have I been able – due to a lack of time and resources – to include a

sufficient analysis of the more in-depth evidence – which might include academic outcomes and student happiness among other factors. Further, certain topics encountered in this study have not been described in detail. For instance, current research has only to a limited degree analysed parental involvement and its role in education. Having worked for several years in BIL schools, I would suggest that parental involvement is more important than many other school aspects. As such, this is an area of potential future research.

Considering the limitations of this study, the following recommendations are made for future research:

1. Undertake a comparative study of Kazakhstani selective schools with analysis factors such as students' socioeconomic background, gender, academic results in specific disciplines, parental involvement in the educational process, etc. It would also be possible to conduct a comparative study between BILs and mainstream comprehensive schools to determine whether some of the aspects that contribute to the success of the BIL schools could be put in place in comprehensive schools. In other words, to examine the possibility of transferability of some school features to comprehensive schools.
2. Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods would enable researchers to embrace both the subjective and objective aspects of knowledge (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). It is suggested here that employing questionnaires would enable capturing the specificity of a particular site. Wellington (2015, p. 197) claimed that 'data [...] collected by a questionnaire may even be richer and more honest than data collected in a face-to-face interview'. Moreover, quantitative inquiry would allow the researcher to increase the number of institutions and involve more participants, allowing researchers to look at the research area from different perspectives. This would also improve the generalisability of the research findings.
3. Conduct in-depth research on the family 'capital' of BIL students and its role in the formation of adolescents' aspirations and self-concept from educational perspectives. It would be interesting to meet parents and family members and interview them. My current research work covered the topic of family 'capital', but not in detail. Regarding the capital reproduction aspects, some people may argue that selective school are good for social mobility and deny

or overlook the existence of capital reproduction in selective schools. That is why a study solely focused on family 'capital' would allow the researcher to obtain in-depth data regarding BIL students' social origin, their happiness, and satisfaction, and family roles in reproducing inequality in society. This work would help researchers to better understand the implications of family cultural and social capital.

7.7 My personal reflection on the PhD journey

As a qualitative researcher, I would like to seize the chance to share my experience gained during the PhD process. I came to this research without having any prior research experience in my current area. All my previous studies were related to English language teaching practices. Pursuing doctoral studies has been one of the most exciting parts of my life. First and foremost, I had my first true experience in dealing with in-depth research. Although I did my master's degree five years ago, I realised that my level of knowledge about research left a lot to be desired. I am far from blaming either the Kazakhstani education system or my previous teachers. Maybe it was because I did not pay that much attention to my studies as I was working at the same time. However, this journey revealed many things to me. By conducting this research, I obtained a great deal of insight into the nature of research. It has created significant growth, development and confidence in my understanding of and ability to undertake educational research. Secondly, I significantly developed my knowledge about how to be an open-minded and independent researcher. Thanks to many seminars, workshops and conferences, I gained a greater insight into the researcher's role in education studies. In particular, I learned some crucial aspects of being a proficient researcher in education. As I went through the various stages of my research, I began to understand more how important it was to interpret the participants' views and experiences as accurately and honestly as possible. In doing so, I also began to feel the responsibility inherent in undertaking my research. Moreover, the various stages of my research process taught me how to look critically and at the same time, objectively at the research. Last but not least, I acquired a substantial knowledge of the area in which my study was set. The data collection process left on me an indelible impression of the significance of conducting research fieldwork and of spending a particular amount of time with participants. I enjoyed working with open-minded students and teachers and enjoyed reading their responses

several times. Because, this process allowed me to look at BIL schools and my research area from different perspectives. I enjoyed, because the information I collected from my participants were invaluable and I received satisfying responses to many of the questions I had at the beginning of my PhD journey.

I would like to emphasise again that one of the significant skills I learned (and am still learning) through my PhD is to be critical to everything related to my research (e.g. fieldwork, participants' responses, literature). In Kazakhstan, being critical has a negative connotation. As mentioned in Chapter One and Chapter Two, one of the legacies left by Soviet ideology was the understanding that anything decreed by governmental bodies must be accomplished without question. Hence, criticisms were totally unacceptable. The same regulations were applicable to students. Unfortunately, it is still reflected in the contemporary education system of Kazakhstan. That is why the experience of my PhD journey helped me to gain a level of confidence to look at processes through the lens of critical thinking and analytical reasoning.

I cannot honestly state here that I have enjoyed all the moments of the research process. Although I had anticipated that it would be a 'solo journey', there were times when I wanted to give up. I encountered many difficulties during the writing process. As my research progressed, I had to change the aim of my study, reconsider the research question and finally, I had to make some changes to the topic of my thesis. As I have already explained in earlier chapters, my initial thoughts were to conduct a quantitative study about single-sex schools. Subsequently, as a focus of my research, I considered focusing on the single-sex environment of BIL schools, assuming that this would be the major and important factor to undertake research in this area. As research progressed, however, my focus shifted again and I started exploring students' and teachers' thoughts about studying in BIL schools, which also covered my initial focus. Although a natural process of the research study, I found complications hard to deal with. Despite many challenges, I never lost interest in what I wanted to achieve. Despite moments when I questioned myself as to why I had decided to pursue a doctoral study, I never lost my hope for a better future. The support from my family and my supervisor helped me to stay the course. Now I can confidently confirm that this was a wonderful journey, and I made the right decision to pursue my doctoral degree.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Ethical approval letter



Downloaded: 11/10/2015
Approved: 10/09/2015

Talgat Zhussipbek
Registration number: 140255973
School of Education
Programme: PhD in Education

Dear Talgat

PROJECT TITLE: Co-educational or gender-segregated: students' and alumni perceptions and experiences.

APPLICATION: Reference Number 003086

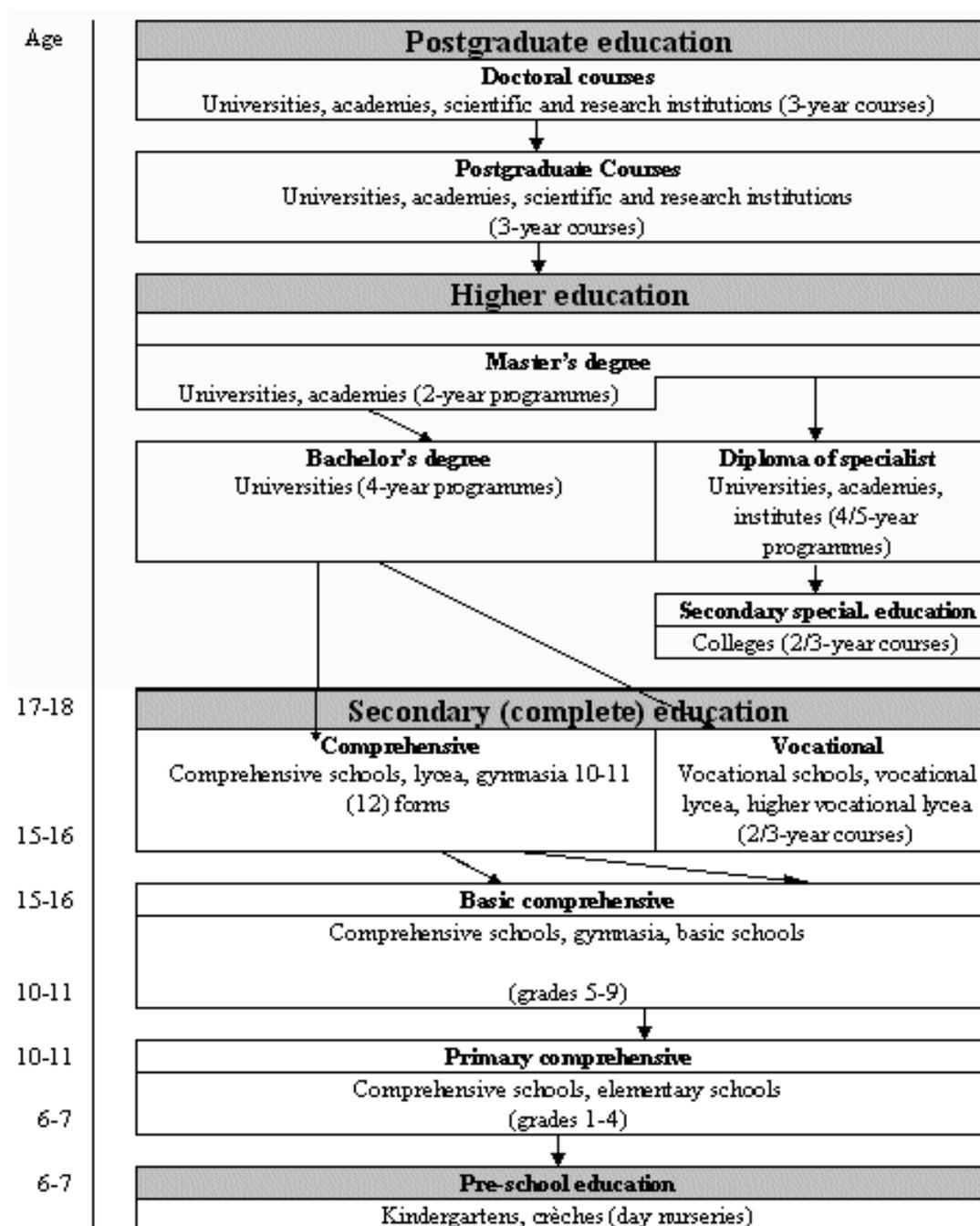
On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 10/09/2015 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 003086 (dated 17/08/2015).
- Participant information sheet 1011502 version 3 (17/08/2015).
- Participant consent form 1011501 version 2 (17/08/2015).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Professor Daniel Goodley
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Appendix B. Structure of Kazakhstani Education system


(UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2011)

Appendix C. Letter of Transcript to Participant Validation



Talgat Zhussipbek <tzhussipbek1@sheffield.ac.uk>

Transcript

Talgat Zhussipbek <tzhussipbek1@sheffield.ac.uk>

3 August 2017 at 01:56

To: [REDACTED]

Bcc: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]!

I would like to thank You again for your time and the information you provided during our interview. Please find attached a copy of the transcript of the interview. As part of my efforts to validate and ensure the quality reliability of my data, I would be grateful if you have some time to look at the transcript and feel free to make any amendments (adjust, delete, add to, rectify, comment) if you wish. Can I also remind that your responses are strictly confidential, and your names have been changed to maintain the anonymity.

Your contributions to this research are highly appreciated.

If you need any clarification, please feel free to contact me

--

Your sincerely

Talgat Zhussipbek
PhD Candidate
School of Education
The University of Sheffield

 Interview [REDACTED].docx
20K

Appendix D. Participant's Consent Form

University of Sheffield

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: "Co-educational or gender-segregated: students' and alumni perceptions and experiences."

Name of Researcher: Talgat Zhussipbek

Participant Identification Number for this project: **Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet/letter (delete as applicable) dated *[insert date]* explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. *Insert contact number here of lead researcher/member of research team (as appropriate).*
3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential (only if true). I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research
5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant Date Signature
(or legal representative)

Name of person taking consent Date Signature
(if different from lead researcher)
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Lead Researcher Date Signature
To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.

